

Enhancing Interfaith Tolerance in PAI Learning: The Role of Interactive Digital Image Media in Multicultural Elementary Schools

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Abstract: This study examines the implementation of interactive digital image media to enhance interfaith tolerance in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at multicultural elementary schools. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis from 15 fifth-grade students and one PAI teacher at SD Negeri Pulau Tembang. Findings revealed significant improvements in students' understanding of tolerance and their attitudes toward religious diversity after eight sessions using interactive visuals (e.g., infographics, quizzes). The media fostered engagement, inclusive behavior, and reflective discussions. The study underscores the effectiveness of interactive digital tools in promoting tolerance and suggests their integration into PAI curricula. Limitations include the single-site design, warranting further research with broader samples.

Keywords: Interactive Digital Image Media, Interfaith Tolerance, Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Multicultural Elementary Education

A. Introduction

In increasingly diverse societies, fostering interreligious tolerance from an early age is a vital educational priority. Elementary education plays a decisive role in shaping students' moral and social character, as these formative years influence long-term attitudes and behaviors (Harini et al., 2023; Latifah et al., 2021). In Indonesia, one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world, multicultural elementary schools reflect the broader complexities of society. In such settings, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) must extend beyond teaching ritual and doctrinal aspects to include universal Islamic values such as compassion, justice, peace, and tolerance (Setiawan, 2023). By integrating these values into the curriculum, PAI can contribute significantly to building harmonious social relations. However, the successful implementation of such values requires innovative and context-sensitive pedagogical strategies tailored to the realities of multicultural classrooms.

Despite its potential, PAI in multicultural schools often struggles to foster genuine tolerance. Lessons are frequently delivered in textual and abstract formats, making it difficult for students to connect concepts to their everyday lives. Traditional

methods—dominated by lectures and rote memorization—discourage active participation, critical thinking, and emotional engagement (Parhan, 2023). Some parents also express concerns that PAI does not sufficiently acknowledge the diversity of beliefs present in the classroom, potentially limiting inclusivity. This situation undermines the potential of PAI to develop mutual respect and understanding across faiths. To address these limitations, it is necessary to adopt learning approaches that make tolerance education more interactive, contextual, and relevant to students lived experiences, especially in culturally and religiously diverse school environments.

Addressing these challenges requires innovative methods that link theoretical knowledge with the lived practice of religious values. One promising approach is the use of interactive digital image media, which combines visual appeal with interactive elements to make abstract concepts more tangible and accessible (Utomo, 2023). In PAI instruction, such media can depict real-life interfaith cooperation, examples of tolerance in school settings, and Islamic narratives with universal moral lessons. This approach has the potential to stimulate curiosity, empathy, and critical thinking among students. By leveraging technology, educators can create dynamic, engaging, and socially relevant learning environments that connect Islamic teachings to the realities of pluralistic societies, thus bridging the gap between doctrine and practice in tolerance education.

Research demonstrates that digital media can enhance both student engagement and conceptual understanding. Visual and interactive formats stimulate imagination, emotional connection, and higher-order thinking skills more effectively than conventional methods (Batubara & Ariani, 2019; Evandri, 2024). For today's digital-native learners, interactive digital tools offer a familiar and engaging mode of instruction. Their flexibility allows adaptation to local contexts and diverse student backgrounds, making lessons more inclusive and culturally relevant. In PAI, this opens opportunities to present tolerance not only as a religious obligation but also as a universal human value. The combination of visual stimulation and active participation fosters deeper learning, transforming tolerance from a theoretical idea into a practiced social skill embedded in students' daily interactions.

Although previous studies highlight the positive effects of digital media on academic achievement and character formation, few have specifically examined interreligious tolerance in PAI within multicultural elementary schools. Most research focuses on general academic outcomes or broad moral values, overlooking the practical skills needed to live harmoniously in religiously diverse settings (Mulyati et al., 2021; Mulyosari & Khosiyono, 2023). This gap is critical in light of rising polarization and intolerance in Indonesia. Without empirical evidence on the effectiveness of interactive digital image media for teaching tolerance, educators lack tested guidance for implementation. Therefore, targeted research is urgently needed to evaluate and demonstrate how such media can advance inclusive, context-based

PAI practices that respond to contemporary social challenges.

This study aims to explore the implementation and impact of interactive digital image media in PAI instruction in multicultural elementary schools, focusing on enhancing students' understanding of interreligious tolerance. Specifically, it seeks to (1) describe how the media are applied in practice, (2) assess their influence on students' comprehension and attitudes toward tolerance, and (3) identify challenges encountered by teachers and students. The study intends to contribute both theoretical and practical insights for developing more inclusive, engaging, and context-responsive PAI strategies. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers in creating learning media that nurture peaceful coexistence and character development from an early age.

B. Methods

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of interactive digital image media in fostering religious tolerance among students in a multicultural elementary school. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to explore the learning process in depth and holistically by examining participants' experiences and perceptions in a natural setting. According to Creswell (2020), this approach is highly appropriate for understanding learning processes that involve values, attitudes, and students' and teachers' perceptions toward interactive media. Furthermore, the qualitative design allows for the discovery of social and emotional dynamics that cannot be fully captured using quantitative methods. Thus, the study aims to generate rich, meaningful data about the effectiveness of this instructional innovation.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri Pulau Tembang, an elementary school situated in a coastal region of Sumatra with a diverse student body representing various religious and cultural backgrounds. The participants consisted of one experienced Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher and fifteen fifth-grade students selected through purposive sampling to reflect diverse religious affiliations and active engagement in learning. This sampling technique ensured that the data collected were relevant, rich, and representative of the study's purpose (Patton, 2015). By selecting students with diverse religious and cultural profiles, the study sought to examine how interactive digital images could facilitate an inclusive learning process and support the development of mutual understanding and tolerance among students with different beliefs and cultural traditions. Demographic details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant Type	N	Age Range	Gender (M/F)	Religious Affiliation
PAI Teacher	1	38	F	Islam
Students	15	10-11	8M/7F	Islam (10), Christian (3), Buddhist (2)

Data were gathered using three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with the PAI teacher and selected students to explore their perceptions of the interactive media, their learning experiences, and its impact on their understanding of tolerance. Observations took place during eight PAI lessons to document classroom interactions, students' engagement with the digital media, and their emotional and cognitive responses to the learning content. According to Sugiyono (2021), the combination of interviews and observations is effective for capturing both explicit and implicit dimensions of educational practice. Additionally, document analysis included photographs, teacher's journals, evaluation rubrics, and students' work. These multiple data sources enabled a rich, triangulated understanding of the implementation process and its outcomes.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. Throughout this process, thematic coding was conducted iteratively and continuously to identify key themes, relationships, and patterns emerging from the interviews, observations, and documents. The researcher compared new data with previous findings to achieve data saturation and ensure credibility. To enhance the validity of the findings, the study employed triangulation of data sources, member checking to verify interpretations with participants, an audit trail to document the entire research process systematically, and peer debriefing with colleagues to examine the rigor of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These techniques ensured that the conclusions were trustworthy and reflected participants' authentic experiences.

Ethical considerations were also carefully upheld throughout the research process in accordance with established ethical guidelines for educational research. Prior to the data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, including parents or legal guardians, acknowledging their voluntary involvement and understanding their rights. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained to protect participants' identities and prevent any potential misuse of data. Furthermore, all participants were assured of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any consequences. Given the involvement of children as primary participants, adherence to ethical standards was treated as a top priority, ensuring that the study's procedures aligned with the principles of respect, care, and integrity as emphasized by Bryman (2016). This commitment to ethics supported the overall quality and credibility of the research findings.

C. Results and Discussion

Result

This study aims to examine how the implementation of interactive digital image media can improve students' understanding of religious tolerance values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SD Negeri Pulau Tembang, a school characterized by its multicultural environment. Data were collected through classroom observations over eight sessions with Grade V students, in-depth interviews with the PAI teacher and 15 students, as well as documentation of learning activities and student work. This qualitative approach enabled the researcher to comprehensively explore how the media was integrated into the teaching and learning process and how it impacted students' understanding and attitudes towards tolerance in a religiously diverse setting.

Initial Conditions: Limited Understanding of Tolerance

Before implementing the interactive digital image media, initial observations and interviews were conducted to map students' baseline understanding of religious tolerance. The results revealed that most students had a shallow understanding of the concept of tolerance. They struggled to connect tolerance values with their everyday experiences and social interactions within the multicultural school environment. This condition emphasized the need for a more contextual and interactive learning approach to help students better grasp and internalize the value of tolerance. These initial findings served as an important foundation for the subsequent implementation of the digital image media as an innovative PAI teaching tool. The following table summarizes the findings from early observations and interviews, highlighting students' initial understanding and attitudes toward religious tolerance:

**Table 2. Observation and Interview Results
Before Using Interactive Digital Image Media**

Observed Aspect	Findings	Remarks
Understanding of Tolerance	Most students lacked a deep understanding	Students had difficulty explaining the meaning of tolerance or relating it to daily life
Attitude Towards Religious Diversity	Some students showed passive attitudes and low appreciation	Students tended to avoid discussions about religious differences
Participation in Discussions	Low student engagement in diversity and tolerance topics	Students were not actively asking questions or expressing opinions
Peer Interaction Across Religions	Limited interactions among students of different faiths	Social interactions were dominated by same-faith peer groups

These findings illustrate that students had not yet internalized the concept of tolerance. Their limited ability to connect tolerance with real-life situations, along with low engagement and social segregation, suggested an urgent need for learning

media that could enhance their understanding, foster positive attitudes, and support inclusive interactions in a multicultural classroom.

Implementation of Interactive Digital Image Media

The interactive digital image media was implemented over eight PAI lessons, focusing on instilling values of religious tolerance. The teacher used various interactive visual materials, including illustrations of harmonious interfaith communities, images of different houses of worship, and story-based images depicting the Prophet Muhammad’s respectful attitudes toward people of different beliefs. Interactive digital quizzes and infographics highlighting Islamic tolerance values further strengthened the learning process. The media was developed using accessible digital tools—Canva for visual design, Live worksheet for interactive worksheets, and PowerPoint with interactive features for presentations. The teacher integrated these materials into a participatory learning strategy that encouraged students to observe, discuss, reason, and conclude. The table below summarizes findings from the observation and interviews during the media implementation phase:

Table 3. Observation and Interview Results During Implementation

Learning Aspect	Indicators	Frequency	Remarks
Student Interest and Enthusiasm	Students showed interest in images and quizzes	13 out of 15 students	Students were focused, asked spontaneous questions, and eagerly participated in quizzes
Understanding of Tolerance	Could explain tolerance with real-life examples	12 out of 15 students	Examples: “not disturbing others’ worship” and “respecting differences”
Class Discussion Participation	Actively responded to images and stories	11 out of 15 students	Increased discussion, with students responding to each other’s views
Peer Collaboration	Helped each other during quizzes or group tasks	Nearly all students	Some students explained the images or quiz answers to others
Attitudes Toward Diversity	Showed respect for religious differences	All students	Some expressed that “all religions teach goodness” and stressed mutual respect
Teacher’s Response	Media helped convey abstract values concretely	PAI teacher	Teacher noted students “understood better with visual examples”
Technical Challenges	Time constraints during content delivery	1–2 sessions	Some content couldn’t be covered; students requested continuation later

The data show a clear shift in student behavior. Students became more engaged, eager to discuss, and demonstrated empathy and interest in religious diversity. The use of interactive digital image media enhanced students’ cognitive understanding, affective attitudes, and psychomotor involvement. It fostered not only knowledge acquisition but also behavioral change and interfaith cooperation in the classroom—marking it as an effective tool in a multicultural PAI learning context.

Changes in Student Understanding After Implementation

Following the eight sessions, final observations and interviews indicated significant improvements in students' understanding and attitudes toward religious tolerance. Cognitively, students were able to explain the concept of Islamic tolerance more thoroughly and contextually. They did not simply memorize definitions but offered real-life examples, such as respecting friends' religious celebrations and avoiding mocking others' worship practices. In terms of affective and social dimensions, students showed more respectful behavior, greeted peers of different faiths, and refrained from discriminatory actions. Classroom participation also improved – nearly all students contributed actively to discussions, either by sharing opinions, asking questions, or responding to classmates' thoughts. The teacher reported a livelier, more reflective, and open classroom atmosphere. Interactive digital visuals helped bridge abstract religious values with students' developmental levels, making lessons more relevant and engaging. The table below presents post-implementation findings:

Table 4. Post-Implementation Changes in Student Understanding and Attitudes

Aspect	Indicators	Frequency	Remarks
Tolerance Concept (Cognitive)	Explained Islamic tolerance with examples	14 out of 15 students	Examples: "respecting others' religious holidays", "not mocking differences in worship"
Change in Attitude Toward Diversity	Showed inclusive and respectful behavior	13 out of 15 students	Students began greeting peers of other faiths and interacting more openly
Class Discussion Participation	Actively asked or responded in discussions	12 out of 15 students	Discussions were more reflective and conducted with respectful language
Teacher's Response to Change	Students became more critical and expressive	PAI teacher	Teacher noted a livelier class, with students sharing personal examples
Social Empathy Development	Understood and respected peers' feelings	11 out of 15 students	Examples: not disturbing others during worship, respecting other religious holidays
Post-Implementation Challenges	Some students still confused tolerance with agreement	2 out of 15 students	Teacher recommended clarifying the distinction between tolerance and syncretism

These findings reinforce the conclusion that interactive digital image media plays a vital role in developing deeper understanding and more tolerant behavior among students in a multicultural elementary school. The overall increase in knowledge, attitude, and engagement confirms that contextual visual media is an effective tool for conveying religious values in an inclusive and communicative way.

Discussion

This research was conducted at SD Negeri Pulau Tembang, a public elementary

school with multicultural characteristics, where students come from diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity makes the school a microcosm of a pluralistic society, necessitating an inclusive and contextual learning approach—particularly in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The findings of this study show that the implementation of interactive digital image media significantly enhances students' understanding of interreligious tolerance. This improvement is evident in students' ability to explain the meaning of tolerance more comprehensively, using real-life examples, and in their increased mutual respect toward peers of different faiths. Prior to the intervention, only a few students demonstrated a thorough understanding of the concept of tolerance. However, after the interactive media-based instruction was introduced, most students showed notable cognitive and affective development. These findings mark the success of interactive digital image media in bridging the gap between abstract values and real-life social-religious contexts in a multicultural elementary school environment.

Theoretically, these findings support the sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978), which asserts that effective learning occurs when students interact with mediational tools within meaningful social contexts. In this case, the interactive digital image media serves as a mediating tool, connecting abstract concepts with students' concrete experiences. Through engaging visualizations, contextual storytelling, and interactive features such as quizzes, animations, and simple simulations, students do not merely receive information—they actively construct understanding through interaction and reflection. For instance, illustrations of various places of worship allowed students to visually observe and discuss religious diversity. These findings also reinforce Mayer et al.'s (2012) multimedia learning theory, which states that combining text, visuals, and interactive activities can enhance attention, comprehension, and retention—especially at the elementary level, where students are in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development, according to Piaget (1972).

Compared to previous research, this study expands the understanding of the effectiveness of visual media in teaching religious and social values. Mulyati, Kusumadewi, and Ulia (2021) explored the use of interactive comic media as a solution during the pandemic and found that narrative visuals could increase student engagement in understanding abstract material. Similarly, Kuswanto and Romelah (2022) reported that video usage in PAI learning at the secondary level clarified religious concepts and supported students' visual and emotional comprehension. Meanwhile, Mulyosari and Khosiyono (2023) showed that animated digital media positively influenced elementary students' learning motivation due to its appealing presentation and alignment with the preferences of digital natives. Overall, these studies highlight the importance of visual media in helping students grasp moral and spiritual values more concretely and enjoyably.

However, the research at SD Negeri Pulau Tembang goes a step further by not

merely using visual media passively, but by integrating digital and interactive elements—such as dynamic images, infographics, interactive quizzes, and discussions based on contextual illustrations. This approach allows students not only to receive visual information but also to actively process, explore, and discuss tolerance values in scenarios relevant to their lives. The media's interactivity fosters deeper cognitive and affective engagement. As a result, students showed significant improvements in understanding the concept of interreligious tolerance, participated more actively in class discussions, and demonstrated respectful behavior in daily interactions. Thus, this research not only confirms earlier findings but also expands the scope of visual media-based learning approaches by incorporating more practical and transformative uses of interactive technology in teaching religious values in multicultural elementary schools.

This study offers promising contributions to the development of digital-based education policies that instill tolerance from an early age. In an era of rapid information technology and increasingly complex social diversity, innovative learning approaches such as this could serve as long-term strategies for designing inclusive and adaptive character education. Interactive digital image media has proven effective in conveying moral messages and religious values—concepts often difficult to explain through verbal or lecture-based methods alone. Its ability to simplify abstract ideas into engaging and concrete visuals makes it highly relevant for primary school education. Therefore, the development and integration of similar media should be considered in the national curriculum design, particularly for subjects like Islamic Religious Education and Civics, to strengthen values of religious moderation, tolerance, and multicultural education systematically and sustainably from the early years.

From a policy perspective, this study provides a strong empirical foundation for the formulation of educational policies that support the integration of digital learning media, particularly in PAI instruction in multicultural elementary schools. Government agencies such as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and the Ministry of Religious Affairs could consider interactive digital media a strategic alternative to support religious moderation programs and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. The findings affirm that digital media is not only pedagogically relevant but also effective in fostering an early understanding of tolerance. Furthermore, teachers' ability to develop interactive digital media is shown to be significantly influenced by continuous training and mentoring. The PAI teacher at SD Negeri Pulau Tembang involved in this study demonstrated a marked improvement in creativity and the use of educational technology. Hence, teacher training policies should include components of digital literacy, instructional design, and contextual media development, enabling teachers to act as adaptive and innovative learning facilitators.

The results of this research can be applied in the form of regular teacher training

programs or workshops focused on developing value-based interactive digital learning media. These training sessions should be scheduled periodically, with specialized modules that cover the integration of value education, religious moderation, and tolerance within the context of PAI learning in multicultural primary schools. Beyond theoretical instruction, the training should include hands-on practice and technical mentoring so that teachers can develop media that are contextual, engaging, and relevant to students' lives. The digital media products developed by teachers can then be compiled into a value-based digital media repository accessible to other schools with similar characteristics. The experience at SD Negeri Pulau Tembang where the intervention spanned eight sessions—demonstrated that routine and structured media use can shape new understandings and attitudes toward diversity. This highlights the importance of consistency and sustainability in media implementation.

Although initial implementation requires teacher training and media development, in the long term, the use of interactive digital image media proves to be cost-effective. Media created using applications such as Canva, Liveworksheet, and PowerPoint are not only economical but also flexible and reusable. These tools can be adapted for various learning themes and accessed by students outside class hours for self-study. At SD Negeri Pulau Tembang, media use did not depend on high-end technology—only a projector, a standard laptop, and basic internet connectivity were needed. This proves that innovative learning can still be achieved within limited budgets. Thus, schools should consider budget management policies that allocate funds proportionally for teacher training, digital media development, and basic equipment procurement. This approach is a strategic investment in improving the quality of PAI learning sustainably and in alignment with modern educational demands.

However, like most qualitative studies, this research has certain limitations. First, it was conducted at a single site SD Negeri Pulau Tembang which has unique social and geographic characteristics. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other multicultural elementary schools with different social contexts. Second, the study focused only on short-term changes in students' understanding and attitudes following the learning intervention, making the long-term impact uncertain. Third, the study did not deeply analyze how students' family backgrounds, parenting styles, or social environments might affect the effectiveness of digital learning media. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended with broader coverage—more participants, multiple school locations, and varied research methods, such as quantitative, mixed-methods, or longitudinal studies—to more accurately assess long-term outcomes.

In conclusion, this study successfully answers the main research question: Can interactive digital image media improve elementary students' understanding of interreligious tolerance? The findings from SD Negeri Pulau Tembang demonstrate

that this media not only enhances students' cognitive understanding of tolerance but also promotes positive social behaviors and active participation in the learning process. Students became more open-minded, respectful of differences, and tolerant in their daily interactions at school. The interactive media enabled learning through visual experiences, narratives, and collaborative activities effectively shaping value understanding both affectively and socially. Thus, the study's primary objective was achieved: to present a contextual, digital-based, and effective PAI learning model that fosters interreligious tolerance. The research also contributes practical insights into character-based media development and offers a theoretical contribution to the advancement of sociocultural approaches within the digitalization of values education.

D. Conclusions

This study concludes that the use of interactive digital image media in Islamic Religious Education at SD Negeri Pulau Tembang effectively enhances students' understanding and attitudes of religious tolerance in a multicultural elementary school setting. By combining visual, narrative, and interactive elements, this media helped students grasp the abstract concept of tolerance and encouraged active participation. Students not only understood the meaning of tolerance more clearly but also began to show respectful behavior and openness to diversity. Therefore, interactive digital image media is a practical and transformative tool for promoting tolerance in character education.

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