



THE INTEGRATION OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) SETTING: STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' VOICES

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Abstract

This case study research explores the integration of religious moderation within setting of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, specifically in an Islamic Junior High School. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the religious moderation integration into the educational process and to capture the perspectives of both teachers and students. The study employed qualitative approach particularly case study research design which was conducted within one of Islamic junior high school in East Java. Ten students and four English teachers were selected using purposive sampling to participate in the study. Data was collected through interviews, documentation, and observation. The results indicate that religious moderation has been effectively integrated into the teaching and learning process, including lesson planning and thematic material, by the teachers. Tolerance, anti-violence, accommodating to tradition/culture, cultural sensitivity, and open mindedness were the aspect of religious moderation found in EFL classroom. The perception of the teachers on the integration of religious moderation in EFL classrooms are linked to their roles as educators, the act of students, and the diverse backgrounds of the students. Students have reported that the integration of religious moderation has allowed them to gain insights into both appropriate and inappropriate aspects of another culture as they learnt English.

Keywords: *EFL, Religious Moderation, Students' Voices, Teachers' Voices*

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INTRODUCTION

مقدمة

Learning is a part of human nature that can develop skills and potential while still living. Many things can be learned by humans, one of them is about language. Besides, integrating religious views becomes a concern that also is related to human nature besides learning. Religious moderation aspect can expose students to ways to tolerate, respect and understand kinds of beliefs that people have (Sholeh et al., 2021). Therefore, religious moderation aspects should be integrated in the educational system. The integration can be done through including it in lesson plan, teaching and learning strategy, as well as in courses. Thus, usually religious values are only exposed to students in religious courses. However, through the integration of religious moderation and education, religious aspects in life can be included in other courses or subjects such as English.

English has become a language that is mandatory to be learned. It has been learned and included in Indonesia curriculum since Dutch governed Nusantara, a long time ago (Mappiasse & Sihes, 2014). It is mainly taught as a means of communication. It has been taught in kindergarten,

elementary school, middle school, and high school as well. Also, it has been taught both in general school and religion-based school. Thus, English has been exposed to Indonesian students in every level of education and every kind of school both general and religion-based school.

Teaching English involves lesson plan, strategy, and media that are used in the classroom. Lesson plan can include pre, main, and post activities when teaching about English skills (Movva, et al, 2017). Creating lesson plans by using effective strategies is an important skill that EFL teachers should have (Alfiani & Sheryl, 2023). Also, in the process of implementing lesson plans, EFL teachers may find difficulties and ways to solve it during the teaching and learning process (Abdulloh & Khomsatun, 2022). Besides, teaching and learning English strategies can be done by using narrative approach (Nguyen & Terry, 2017). Strategies in learning also depend on students' learning preferences (Sartika, et al, 2019). Also, teachers should also have strategies in solving problems that become students' difficulties in learning English (Ariyanti, et al, 2019).

In the Indonesian education context, especially in Islamic institutions, the teaching and learning process is encouraged to be integrated with religious moderation. Religious moderation creates tolerance in the diversity of various cultures that exist in Indonesia. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious moderation is perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors of always taking centered positions, always doing enough, and not being extreme in practicing a religion.

Religious moderation has been widely socialized in several aspects including the educational system. Therefore, parts of the educational system such as lesson plans and material that are used by some schools should be integrated with religious moderation values. Furthermore, the integration of religious moderation should involve lesson plan, teaching strategy as well as media in teaching and learning English. Integrating religious moderation values can be done not only in religious subjects that are taught in school, but also in other subjects such as English. In short, there is a need for integrating religious moderation in English classrooms in Indonesia.

There are four indicators of religious moderation based on the ministry of religion affairs including national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence and accommodating to tradition/culture (Afwadzi et al., 2023). Meanwhile Kasdi (2019) proposed some indicators of religious moderation based on *wasathiyyah Islam* including open mindedness, justice, equality, tolerance, liberty, humanity, pluralism, and non-discrimination. Some schools and universities in Indonesia have integrated religious moderation pillars as done by Irwansyah & Andianto (2022) in Islamic schools. Activities such as vocabulary acquisition, classroom routine activity, speaking class, and competition in English subjects can be integrated with religious moderation. Then, religious moderation also has an important role in the higher education environment (Marfu'ah & Nawawi, 2021). Moreover, one of educators' efforts in integrating religious moderation is immersing it into the curriculum development in the form of *ta'aruf*, *tasawwut*, *tasamuh*, *ta'awun* and *tawazun* (Zainuri, 2021). On the other hand, an interactional approach has been used by teachers in Islamic universities for improving students' speaking skill as well as enhancing student's ability in implementing religious moderation value (Wahyuni, 2021). Also, Religious moderation view can also be exposed to students by integrating it with one of the courses namely cross-cultural understanding course (Nirwana & Sarmadali, 2021). It also has been integrated in Madrasah (Pelu & Nur, 2022).

Some schools in Indonesia have focused on the religious aspects as its foundation and backgrounds. Thus, religion value implementation in religion-based schools has become a crucial

aspect currently. Religious moderation value that is integrated in teaching and learning process include four indicators that is similar to *wasathiyah* Islam aspects (open mindedness, justice, equality, tolerance, liberty, humanity, pluralism, and non-discrimination) (Kasdi, 2019). The four indicators of religious moderation based on The Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (2019) include national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence and accommodating to tradition/culture. Thus, religious moderation is a new approach that supports the educational system to implement religious values in the process of teaching and learning (Husna & Thohir, 2020). Every lesson, including English lesson, in Islamic-based school should include the integration of religious moderation view during its teaching and learning process.

There have been some studies about integrating religious moderation in several disciplines which have purposes, ways, strategies. Ghufron (2022) found the integration was included in the material in the four skills, receptive skills as well as productive skills. Research about integrating religious moderation through lessons in teaching English has been done by Alfian et al., (2022). The study found that the integration of Islamic values in teaching and learning process has not been in line with what has been stated in the lesson plan. Investigating how religious moderation topics in English lessons were used at Pesantren has been done by Khusain (2022). The data showed that students' ability in speaking was increased when the topic discussion that was used was about religious moderation. Observing religious moderation values' integration in ELT specifically in Madrasah has been done by Sholeh et al., (2021). Thus, the researchers found that religious moderation could be fostered through lesson plan, materials, activities in classroom as well as evaluation specifically in teaching and learning English process. Also, researchers suggested teachers and policy makers at school integrate religious moderation in EFL classrooms through learning materials and school rules.

Previous studies portrayed the religious moderation in teaching and learning process. However, none of the studies has focused on the integration of religious moderation based on the four indicators of Ministry of Religious Affairs (national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence and accommodating to tradition/local culture and *wasathiyah Islam* (open mindedness, justice, equality, tolerance, liberty, humanity, pluralism and non-discrimination) in EFL classroom. Thus, this research aimed to analyse thematically about the integration of those aspects in teaching and learning English specifically in Islamic Junior High School and teacher's as well as students' perspective about it.

METHOD

منهج

Participants

The study involved a total of ten participants, comprising six English teachers and four students from grades 7, 8, and 9. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure that those with relevant experience and knowledge were included in the study. Prior to their involvement, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their consent to participate. The teachers and students were interviewed to uncover the ways in which aspects of religious moderation have been integrated into the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. The teachers provided valuable insights into the specific religious indicators that have been incorporated into their teaching and learning processes. The inclusion of students aimed to capture their perspectives on the integration of religious moderation in their English language learning experience. These student interviews helped to complement the teachers' viewpoints and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Research Design

This study was conducted at one of Islamic Junior High Schools in East Java. The research design of this article is a qualitative case study. Case study research is particularly suitable for this investigation because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex issues within their real-life context, making it ideal for examining how religious moderation is integrated into EFL classrooms (Yin, 2014). Data were obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. The type of interview used as an instrument was a structured interview, which can be used as an instrument in English Language Teaching research (Jie & Xiaoqing, 2016). Interviewing teachers aimed to understand how the integration was implemented and to investigate teachers' and students' perspectives about the integration of religious moderation in EFL classrooms. The researchers observed the implementation of religious moderation in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. Additionally, documentation was used to collect information about materials and lesson plans from teachers. Documentation has been used in EFL studies to support the data collection process (Inayah, et al., 2019).

To analyze the data, thematic analysis was employed. The analysis went through several phases, including data familiarization, initial code generation, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining and naming, and finally, reporting in the form of writing (Dawadi, 2020)

RESULT | نتائج

The result shows that religious moderation is integrated into the EFL classroom in Islamic junior High school through the teaching and learning process, lesson plan and thematic material from the teacher. Also, the teacher's perception reveals that the religious moderation in the EFL classroom is important to be integrated to create a good classroom environment. Then, students saw that the integration of religious moderation in EFL classrooms is crucial since learning English gives students exposure to western culture. Therefore, points in religious moderation give them a way about how to decide what aspects should be learnt and should not be learnt from western culture.

Religious Moderation in Teaching and Learning Process and Material

The study found that religious moderation had been integrated in EFL setting which was revealed in teaching and learning process and material. Several religious moderation aspect was found including accommodation to tradition/local culture, open-mindedness, commitment to nationalism and tolerance.

Teaching and Learning Process

Regarding the finding from an in-depth interview which was done with four English teachers from Islamic junior high schools and researchers' observation, religious moderation in form of accommodating to tradition/local culture was already integrated with school's rules and cultures.

"Since our school is Islamic junior high school, religious moderation has been integrated in every activity through the school's regulations and cultures. Mainly, the values that are integrated are based on Islamic values. In the beginning of the class, specifically in the first meeting, I told my students to be respectful toward me as a teacher and their friends as well. The only way to be successful people is being respectful towards others including their different culture ." (Teacher 1)

Therefore, the teacher statement above shows that teaching and learning in the EFL classroom are already integrated with religious moderation. This integration follows the school's rules and cultural norms, emphasizing respect and cultural acceptance rooted in Islamic values. By encouraging respect from the start, teacher helps students learn language skills while embracing values important for personal and social growth in a culturally aware environment.

Teaching and Learning Material

Regarding the finding from an in-depth interview which was done religious moderation is integrated in students' material thematically specifically about open-mindedness, nationalism, humanity, equality, tolerance, discrimination, pluralism, radicalism, extremism, and cultural sensitivity

“Teaching and learning media such as YouTube, Magazine and Online Article are the kinds of media that have been implemented in English class. Through those media students are exposed to what has happened in today's world. By using teacher-centered, student-centered, discussion, and demonstration teaching strategies have also been used in the class. Therefore, from using those media and teaching strategies, students learn about several aspects from religious moderation which include open-mindedness, nationalism, humanity, equality, tolerance, anti-discrimination and cultural sensitivity. The example includes giving students exercise in the form of writing descriptive text about their living environment, report text about Prague, and listening western song by Louis Armstrong “What a Wonderful World”. It could help them in improving their cultural sensitivity.” (Teacher 3)

From the statement above, it shows that teacher employed various teaching methods and media like YouTube, magazines, and online articles to integrate religious moderation in the form of cultural sensitivity into the English classroom. These tools expose students to current global issues and values such as open-mindedness, nationalism, humanity, equality, tolerance, and awareness of discrimination, pluralism, radicalism, and extremism. By utilizing teacher-centered, student-centered, discussion, and demonstration strategies, teacher ensured students actively engage with the concepts of cultural sensitivity. This approach not only broadens students' understanding of diverse cultures but also cultivates respect and empathy.

Religious Moderation in Teachers' Lesson Plan

According to in-depth interviews and documentation that has been done, some aspects in the lesson plan used by the teacher was integrated with the religious moderation aspect namely open-mindedness.

“In the lesson plan, specifically in pre-activity, there is “Gerakan Literasi” activity. Therefore, students will read any form of passages in 5 minutes. Moreover, there is an attitude of competence that students should pay attention to during the main activity which is to be well-mannered. Lastly, there is discussion in the post-activity, they are asked to listen to their mates' opinion.” (Teacher 2)

The excerpt above reveals that teacher had integrated religious moderation by promoting open-mindedness through structured activities which was shown in the lesson plan. The activities include those which promote reading, good behavior, and respectful discussions. The pre-activity involves reading, the main activity focuses on being polite, and the post-activity includes group discussions. This approach helps students become literate, ethical, open-minded and respectful,

embedding religious moderation into everyday learning and creating a balanced, harmonious classroom environment.

Teacher perception of the integration of religious moderation in EFL classrooms

According to an in-depth interview that had been done, the teacher stated that integrating religious moderation in EFL classrooms is important. It is related to teachers' responsibility as educators, students' manners, and students' background. Thus, religious moderation aspect that has been implemented is tolerance and accommodating to tradition/ local culture.

"As a teacher, knowing a student's family background is crucial. Therefore, as an educator I would know the reason why my students act the way they act. It is a form of my responsibility as a teacher. Thus, I could create a classroom environment which is comfortable for my students, where they can express themselves and respect differences among their friends' backgrounds." (Teacher 4)

The statement of the teacher above emphasizes the importance of understanding students' family backgrounds to create a supportive classroom environment. By knowing the reasons behind students' behaviors, teacher fulfilled their responsibility as an educator. This understanding allows them to foster a comfortable classroom atmosphere where students feel safe expressing themselves and respecting their peers' diverse backgrounds. It relates to the tolerance and accommodating to tradition/ local culture aspect of religious moderation by promoting acceptance and respect for diverse backgrounds. Thus, teachers have a commitment as an educator to implement religious moderation in their classroom.

Students' perception of the integration of religious moderation in EFL classrooms

The findings on the students' perception regarding the religious moderation in EFL setting reveals that students believe that the integration of religious moderation allows them to learn about appropriate and inappropriate western culture during their process in learning English. Therefore, religious moderation aspect which has been implemented is open-mindedness.

"Learning English from authentic material such as western songs and western movies is fun. Many new vocabularies can be found when listening to songs and watching movies. However, the difference between Indonesian culture and western culture is clear, specifically when we learn from songs and movies. Thus, we should know what positive aspects from western culture that we can implement in our life. Also, we should not copy any negative aspects from it. Therefore, in order to be able to find the differences between positive and negative impact from western culture, religious moderation integration in the EFL classroom is important." (Student 1)

The excerpt above shows that learning English through western songs and movies enjoyable and useful for building vocabulary. However, they recognize clear cultural differences between Indonesian and western cultures. It's important to adopt positive aspects of western culture and avoid negative ones. To distinguish these, integrating religious moderation in the EFL classroom is crucial. This relates to the open-mindedness aspect of religious moderation. By exposing students to different cultures and teaching them to discern positive from negative influences, they develop a broad, balanced perspective. This approach fosters open-mindedness, helping students appreciate cultural diversity while maintaining their own values.

All in all, the results of the study show that religious moderation is integrated into EFL classrooms in Islamic junior high schools through teaching and learning process, teachers' lesson plans and thematic material from teachers. The documentation of lesson plans and students'

textbooks reveals various strategies to embed these values. In the pre-activity, there was a silent reading session. After reading, students submitted the book or passage they read. Besides enriching knowledge, sustained reading also exposes students to particular cultural aspects from the author of the book, enhancing cultural sensitivity—a key indicator of religious moderation.

Another religious moderation aspect, **anti-violence values**, were also found to be integrated through various activities observed during the study. One effective method was role-playing scenarios where students practiced non-violent conflict resolution, learning phrases and vocabulary that emphasized empathy and understanding. Group discussions on themes of peaceful coexistence encouraged students to share their thoughts on maintaining peace and handling conflicts without violence. It was proven by the teacher's statement, *"Incorporating anti-violence themes into our English lessons helps students to not only improve their language skills but also to develop important life skills. They learn the value of peaceful communication and respect for others, which are crucial for their personal development and for maintaining a harmonious school environment."* Teacher also added *"The role-playing exercises taught students how to talk to others calmly and find solutions without arguing."* These practices foster a culture of peace and respect aligned with religious moderation principles.

Meanwhile, in the post-activity, there was a group activity where students were expected to work together and discussed chosen topics. Collaborative learning allows students to respect each other's opinions and perspectives, fostering tolerance during the discussion process. Tolerance is another indicator of religious moderation reflected in this activity. Furthermore, students learned texts, with themes like Prague which was inserted by cultural aspects of other countries. Understanding foreign cultures alongside their own enhances cultural sensitivity, aligning with the goals of religious moderation.

DISCUSSION

مناقشة

The result shows that religious moderation is integrated into EFL classrooms in Islamic junior High schools through the teaching and learning process, lesson plan, and thematic material from teachers. Also, the teacher's perspective toward the integration of religious moderation in the EFL classroom is important to be integrated to create a good classroom environment. Then, students saw the integration of religious moderation in EFL classrooms as crucial since learning English gives students exposure to Western culture. Therefore, points in religious moderation give them a way to decide what aspects should be learned and should not be learned from Western culture.

The Integration of Religious Moderation in Islamic Junior High School

Teaching and Learning Process

Regarding the findings from the in-depth interview which was done with four English teachers from Islamic junior high schools and the researchers' observation, religious moderation is already integrated with the school's rules and cultures. Therefore, it shows that teaching and learning activity in EFL classrooms is already integrated with religious moderation, for it is ruled by the school's regulations and culture. It is in line with research that was done by Pelu (2021), instruction that is moderation-based is implemented by paying attention to the school's context. Thus, the instruction is related to teachers' chosen teaching design, materials, as well as media. All in all, the instructional activities in class are based on the school's culture and context. Moreover, the teacher also focused on reminding students about the importance of being

respectful toward others. Thus, protecting human dignity is a form of good attitude regarding religious moderation (Sulaiman, et al, 2022). Religious moderation integrated school's culture can prevent the extremism ideology in school (Husna & Thohir, 2020). Respect for others is in the form of cultural sensitivity, it is a form of good attitude which is also included in the religious moderation aspect.

Lesson Plan

According to in-depth interviews and documentation that has been done, some aspects of a lesson plan that is used by the teacher is integrated with the religious moderation aspect. Therefore, religious moderation is integrated into the lesson plan. Values in religious moderation can be implemented in English lesson plans (Sholeh, 2022., Rohmana, 2022). Moreover, activities in pre, main, and post-activities in the lesson plan also show that there is religious moderation integrating activities. Those include "Gerakan Literasi" which allows students to be more "open-minded" people. Thus, open-mindedness and humanity are parts of religious moderation aspects namely *wasathiyah* Islam (Kasdi, 2019). Implementing open-mindedness can create social stability (Viktorhadi, 2022). Also, being well-mannered in the main activity and being respectful towards others' opinions is in the form of humanity, namely sympathy in the form of tolerance.

Thematic Material from Teacher

Regarding the findings from the in-depth interview which was done, religious moderation is integrated into students' material thematically. The presence of cultural sensitivity can prevent the happenings of incidents in multicultural EFL classroom settings (Yilmazel, 2022). Cultural awareness is a key point in the language learning environment (Yeganeh & Raessi, 2015). Regarding Ghufron (2022), incorporating principles of religious moderation can be done through selecting passages in writing or reading practices. Therefore, the learning materials which are chosen by the teacher thematically exposed students to religious moderation aspects namely cultural sensitivity.

Teachers' and Students' Perception about the Integration of Religious Moderation in Islamic Junior High School

Teacher Perceptions

According to an in-depth interview that has been done, the teacher stated that integrating religious moderation in EFL classrooms is important. It is related to teachers' responsibility as educators, students' manners, and students' backgrounds. It is related to tolerance aspect. Thus, teachers have a commitment as an educator to implement religious moderation in their classrooms. Teachers should evaluate the process of integrating religious moderation by implementing formal or informal values such as Islamic values (Pelu & Nur, 2022). Also, knowing students' life backgrounds help teachers in choosing suitable material contexts. Thus, in accordance with Pelu (2021), recognizing students' habits, culture and religion is a form of integrating the concept of moderate-based instruction in Islamic schools. Therefore, there is a connection between learning objectives and indicators of religious moderation (Nirwana, 2023). Thus, the aim of a healthy classroom environment is to create students with tolerance toward differences among their classmates.

The findings also reveal that **anti-violence** values were integrated into the EFL curriculum through various observed activities such as role-playing scenarios where students practiced non-violent conflict resolution skills, focusing on empathy and understanding through language. Additionally, group discussions centered on themes of peaceful coexistence provided a platform

for students to express their views on maintaining peace and managing conflicts without resorting to violence. The teacher highlighted the value of peaceful communication and respect for others as critical for personal growth and maintaining a harmonious school environment. Furthermore, role play also demonstrated the practical application of anti-violence principles in everyday interactions. These findings align with previous research on integrating values of peace and conflict resolution in educational settings (Schultze-Kraft, 2022) which found that role-playing and group discussions effectively promote non-violent communication skills among students, fostering a culture of respect and tolerance.

Students Perceptions

From the student perceptions, they believed that the integration of religious moderation allows them to learn about appropriate and inappropriate Western culture during their process of learning English. Learning from authentic material helps students to learn the real use of language. It is in line with Tanihardjo (2018) research, that authentic material enhances students' fluency in English. Thus, religious moderation value is included in the cross-cultural understanding aspect of English courses (Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021). Understanding intercultural communicative competence is a part of language teaching and learning process (Imsa-ard, 2023). Also, differences between Indonesian culture and Western are related to the process of cross-cultural understanding that encourage students to implement religious moderation aspect namely open-mindedness.

CONCLUSION

خاتمة

The integration of religious moderation in the EFL classroom is important. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the religious moderation integrated in the EFL classroom in Islamic Junior High School and the perception of English teachers and students about the integration of religious moderation in the EFL classroom in Islamic Junior High School. The finding shows that religious moderation is integrated in teaching and learning activity, lesson plan, and thematic material from teachers. Tolerance, anti-violence, accommodating to tradition/culture, cultural sensitivity, and open mindedness were the aspect of religious moderation found in EFL classroom. Furthermore, the teacher emphasized that integrating religious moderation in EFL classrooms is crucial for it is related to teachers' responsibility as educators, students' background, and students' manner. Then, students saw the importance of religious moderation in EFL classrooms is related to their cross-cultural understanding since learning English exposed them to another culture.

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