

Incorporating Religious Moderation Values Through English Language Teaching (ELT) Instructional Materials to Prevent Religious Intolerance

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Abstract

In recent years, Indonesian educational institutions and authorities have been concerned about religious intolerance and cultural diversity. According to some reports, Indonesia has recently seen an increase in the number of incidents involving religious intolerance as well as violations. Therefore, Indonesia's national motto, "unity in diversity," must be preserved by implementing preventative measures. This study explored the efforts accomplished by Indonesian EFL Teachers in fostering religious moderation in society in order to establish peace and harmony through the integration of religious moderation values in ELT instructional materials. Through a qualitative case study design, this study involved four EFL teachers in an Islamic State University in Central Java, Indonesia, as research participants. The data of this study were garnered through an in-depth interview with the four participants. The data of this study were then evaluated narratively. The findings of this study include some useful strategies for incorporating religiously moderate principles into English language teachings, such as (1) the EFL teachers integrate the values of religious moderation through the four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing, (2) for listening and reading, the receptive skills; they carefully select the passages which contain the values of religious moderation, such as pluralism, for students to listen and read, and (3) for speaking and writing, the productive skills, they choose the topics about religious moderation, religious tolerance, and pluralism for speaking and writing activities.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT), instructional materials, religious (in)tolerance, religious moderation

Introduction

In Indonesia, religious intolerance continues to persist to this day. Several reports have been published concerning this topic. For example, according to their inquiry, the SETARA Institute, an Indonesia-based NGO conducting research and advocating for democracy, political freedom, and human rights, identified 201 violations of religious freedom throughout Indonesia's 26 provinces. The region with the most infractions in 2017 was West Java, followed by Jakarta with 26 events, Central Java with 14, East Java with 12, and Banten with ten crimes (SETARA Institute, 2018). These abuses of religious tolerance include intimidation, discrimination, violence, hate speech, worship prohibitions, and the sealing of houses of worship. In another survey, SETARA discovered religious intolerance in 171 high schools in Jakarta and Bandung. Specifically, around 4.6% of students backed a group that routinely prevented the construction of houses of worship. One percent even backed ISIS. In his keynote

address at a SETARA Institute-hosted seminar, the Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly, Bambang Soesatyo, expressed concern about the research findings and announced that the government would take steps to address the problem (Yasmin, 2019). These findings imply that intolerance and violations continue to exist and threaten the harmony of Indonesia's inter- and intra-religious societies.

Indeed, Indonesia is well-known for being a multicultural country that is home to a variety of different cultures and religious beliefs. Many distinct faiths and a considerable number of their offshoots and currents of thought were practiced in the region long ago. Therefore, it is possible that it served as inspiration for the founding fathers of Indonesia to come up with the national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," which means "unity in diversity." This phrase is significant to the nation of Indonesia. Tolerance, therefore, becomes a vital factor in determining how to maintain unity among the people of Indonesia.

To be tolerant is to demonstrate compassion and understanding toward those whose views and behaviors differ from one's own. Tolerance plays such a significant part that it may be used as a measure of fairness when considering how to respond to various perspectives, emotions, and behaviors. Nonetheless, growing religious rigidity may lead to intolerance. The dilemma is exacerbated by the greater availability of knowledge and the remarkable developments in technology in recent decades. According to Dewi (2021), there was a dramatic increase in the volume of hate speech posted on Facebook in 2019. In addition, according to MASTEL 2017 data, sex, religion, race, and ethnicity-related hoaxes were the second most often disseminated in 2017. It demonstrates that bigotry and transgressions of religious norms have a greater chance of spreading in the online environment, primarily through social media. Disturbing content, including threats, hoaxes, hate speech, etc., may be created by some users. The number of persons whose emotions and triggers are aroused by exposure to such material will also increase. If that happens, disputes are practically guaranteed. This might explain why examples of religious intolerance are cropping up in Indonesia today.

The government has taken significant steps in treating religious intolerance and promoting respect for various religious traditions. Currently, the government is trying to promote what is known as "religious moderation" through the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This concept is also known as "moderasi beragama." When looked at more closely, the term "moderation" is related to the adjective "moderate," which refers to avoiding extremes of conduct or expressions. In other words, "moderation" means "avoiding extremes." The

government comprehensively defines this phrase as an attitude that seeks to lessen violent acts and steer clear of extremism in religious rituals (Kemenag, 2019). This religious moderation is based on the idea that no religion teaches violence and that variety in Indonesia is both a blessing from God and a product of destiny. As a result, it should be acknowledged as a source for which we should be grateful. The practice of religious moderation is essential to religion, and it must be put into practice in a pluralistic and multicultural nation like Indonesia. The purpose is clear: to maintain Indonesia's unity while also fostering peace within the country.

It is the responsibility of all involved parties to promote and strengthen the concept of religious moderation. It is possible to begin in schools. Because they can mold students' understandings and points of view regarding tolerance and respect for diversity, teachers, who are the front-liner of education, may play a significant role in incorporating religious moderation into their teaching methods. The researcher found out through an ethnographic study that not all educators had a solid grasp of what multicultural education included. On the one hand, some educators believed that it was exclusively the responsibility of religious and civic instructors to provide this knowledge.

On the other hand, the religious instructors could not make connections between what they were teaching and the variety of world religions and cultures. Some even tended to caution pupils about diversity's potential threats to their religious beliefs (Raihani, 2018). The findings of this research indicate that teachers play a positive or negative role in determining whether or not students learn to practice religious moderation.

There has been much discussion about the religious component in ELT instructional materials, but the topic has not yet received enough attention. It is a widely held and incontestable idea that the process of establishing cultural identities is inextricably linked to religious practices in some way. This faith is necessary for ELT materials design, which includes bringing together two distinct and frequently antagonistic cultures that adhere to its religion. This can be challenging. This research seeks to remedy the issue of a socially created lack of religious literacy among Indonesian students. They continue to have the standard stereotyped and prejudiced views of these religions. As a result, efforts to promote variety, peaceful coexistence, and tolerance on the local, regional, and worldwide levels are sometimes hampered by the emergence of hostility and rivalry among groups of different religious backgrounds. This paper aims to inform those who teach and study English in Indonesia about the potential of English language instructional materials to assist students in developing a

greater awareness of the risks associated with religious hostility, terrorism, and extremism. It is an effort to bring attention to the role of English language teaching (ELT) instructional materials in combating religious ignorance and aiding in developing students' respect for religious variety, tolerance, and coexistence. As a means of better understanding local and international religions, it emphasizes the inclusion of activities that allow students to compare and contrast the concepts and beliefs that underlie numerous prominent religions. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following question: How do Indonesian EFL teachers foster religious moderation in society through integrating religious moderation values in ELT instructional materials?

Method

This study used a qualitative case study approach (Creswell, 2012; Elliott, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2019; Miles et al., 2014; O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003) to understand better the efforts of Indonesian EFL teachers to foster religious moderation in society through the integration of religious moderation values in ELT instructional materials. Case studies are conducted to learn more about situated phenomena in their natural settings, as stated by Creswell (2012). This research, which focused on EFL teachers at a State Islamic University, attempted to learn more about their attempts to promote religious moderation in society by using ELT resources that emphasized the importance of moderation. Then, we introduce the four participants and the research sites, all of whom are anonymously named.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at a State Islamic University in Central Java, Indonesia. Purposeful sampling was used to choose the study locations. Using this sampling method, the already-available data might be retrieved with minimal effort (Creswell, 2012). In addition, participants were required to read, fill out, and sign an informed consent form attesting to the fact that they were providing their time to the study willingly and had the option to discontinue participation at any time, as per the standards of research ethics. Four English as a Foreign Language instructors were involved in this research. To protect their identities, the names Zaza, Zizi, Doni, and Deni were chosen as pseudonyms (see Table 1). All of the EFL instructors have extensive experience in the field of education.

Table 1 Participants' Information

No.	Names	Bachelor Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree	Teaching Experience
1	Zaza	Major	Major	None	>6 years
2	Zizi	Major	Major	None	>3 years
3	Doni	Major	Major	None	>6 years
4	Deni	Major	Major	None	>4 years

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted to collect the necessary empirical data for this investigation. Each 20-30 minute in-person interview was recorded using a smartphone. Interviews were conducted in the participants' first language (Bahasa Indonesia) to ensure clear communication and a deeper understanding of the studied phenomena. In addition, to establish peace and harmony in Indonesian society, the researcher asked EFL teachers about their experiences incorporating concepts of religious moderation into ELT curricula.

Data Analysis

The researcher employed the pattern-coding method proposed by Miles et al. (2014) to evaluate the data, with preliminary codes developed following the study questions that emerged from the themes and interview questions. Creating more effective labeling and retrieval data processing techniques was a significant contribution that coding helped to facilitate (Miles et al., 2014). First, all transcripts were compared and contrasted and then reread line by line to uncover regularities and growing themes and sub-themes within the data (Anwar et al., 2020; Jati et al., 2019; Muyassaroh et al., 2019). As the first step in this process, the researcher examined the transcripts to get an overview of what was learned from the interviews. Then, the researcher grouped similar pieces of information into a single category based on the analysis of the interviews.

Trustworthiness

The researcher must undertake member checks to ensure that the research was conducted honestly. This was done by delivering copies of the interview data, conclusions, and final report to each participant after each interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1990). This method was applied to guarantee that every participant gave permission for the researchers to utilize the information that was obtained from them, as well as to give the researcher permission

to use the information in the investigation. Through the use of this approach, both the validity of the data and their dependability for qualitative interpretation were verified, as well as the precision of the findings.

Results and Discussion

Strategies for incorporating religiously moderate principles into English language teachings

According to the findings of in-depth interviews conducted with the four participants, there are a number of strategies that they use to integrate the values of religious moderation in learning English. One of these strategies involves using learning materials on the four language skills, specifically listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

“For me, it is important to incorporate religious moderation components into all learning resources, including but not limited to listening, speaking, reading, and writing. That way, students may learn about many forms of moderation and how to apply them in their lives.”

(Zaza)

“When I am using English for whatever purpose—listening, speaking, reading, or writing—I do my best to include the ideals of religious moderation. It is simply that when it comes to listening, I still struggle with texts that emphasize moderation.” (Zizi)

“Reading literature, giving speeches, and completing writing projects are all activities that I choose to undertake in English related to religious moderation, based on my previous experiences. In addition, I encourage students to talk about topics such as moderation, pluralism, and so on.” (Doni)

“I think the easiest way is to include it in learning materials, especially reading. Based on my experience with listening, it is still a bit difficult to find texts that discuss moderation. There are several listening texts but about pluralism. Yes, it can actually be used, too. For Speaking and Writing, I think it is simply to instruct students to speak and write with moderate themes. It's pretty easy, in my opinion.” (Deni)

This finding is aligned with the study conducted by Sholeh et al. (2022), which concludes that The Islamic principles of moderation could be incorporated into pedagogical frameworks

such as lesson planning, learning materials, teaching and learning activities, and evaluation. The teacher pulled from texts and other material that highlighted Islamic principles of moderation. Authentic materials that were never intended to be utilized in teaching and learning processes are now readily available and are routinely put to use in these contexts. The application of real-world information inside the language learning environment offers the same benefit. Martinez (2002) outlines a number of benefits associated with the use of authentic materials, some of which are as follows: (1) keeping students informed about current events in the world, which has intrinsic educational value; (2) exposing students to authentic discourse, such as a video or interview with a famous person, in which intermediate students listen for general ideas; and (3) using current events as a language learning tool.

Because language is an integral aspect of culture and Indonesia is widely recognized as a religiously pluralistic society, cultural sensitivity is essential to teaching English in Indonesia. Hidayati (2016) bolsters this assertion by stating that Indonesia is progressive, accepting, and respectful of its community's multiculturalism and religious diversity. In addition, it is well-established that most English students struggle with communication difficulties stemming from their target language's culture (Umam, 2014). The aforementioned arguments might be reiterated to argue that encouraging moderate religious practice while studying English can help mitigate disappointment caused by the urge to do so. Knowing religion in appreciating societal variety is an example of how religiously tolerant education integrates the cognitive and the somatic (Hanapi, 2014).

Integrating religious moderation values into receptive skills (listening and reading skills)

When it came to the English learning materials that were used for listening and reading, also known as receptive skills, they made a point of selecting and organizing content that was especially relevant to religious moderation. Texts that are offered for listening to and reading have been carefully chosen so that they are truly appropriate and embody the values of religious moderation, such as religious tolerance and pluralism.

“Typically, I chose texts that emphasize religious moderation while teaching listening and reading skills. I generally use English-language research papers. I believe that to be the easiest option. As for listening, I often have some difficulties finding native-speaker-spoken literature on the topic of moderation. Consequently, I typically substitute the text with a topic still associated with religious moderation, such as pluralism.” (Deni)

“That's correct. So, usually, I incorporate religious moderation values into English learning materials, including listening and reading skills. However, I've found that when I have to look for text sources for listening, it's a little difficult to find topics that are relevant to me related to religious moderation, so sometimes I find texts about pluralism or maybe multiculturalism that I use as a source of material for listening. However, for reading text, there is a wide range of reading materials available that can be related to religious moderation.” (Doni)

“Okay, so the English teaching materials I use to teach listening and reading skills include texts that are related to moderate religious values. Usually, much reading topics have to do with religious moderation from different sources. However, I've found that it's hard to find text sources for listening skills, but we can deal with topics that are still relevant to moderation, like pluralism or multiculturalism, for example.” (Zizi)

“Yes, based on my experience in integrating the value of religious moderation in English language material, particularly listening and reading skills, it is through selecting materials linked to moderation, such as multiculturalism in the Indonesian setting.” (Zaza)

According to (Sholeh et al., 2022), when it comes to teaching listening, an English teacher will search for learning resources and media that promote the Islamic principles of moderation and the fundamental skills taught in a curriculum. The most common types of media that are distributed include an audio-visual medium that typically displays an image and an audio-lingual form that mostly involves listening to narratives that provide context for religious moderation in English. Further, according to (Ait Bouzid, 2016), ELT instructional materials should include materials that correct false understandings and readings of Islam, particularly the incorrect association of Islam with terrorism, as well as reading or listening activities that inform learners about other mainstream religions and discuss the dangers of extremism, terrorism, and religious antagonism.

Integrating religious moderation values into productive skills (speaking and writing skills)

The next is related to English teaching materials containing the values of religious moderation in speaking and writing skills. Generally, the respondents agreed that related to English teaching materials containing the values of religious moderation, speaking and writing skills could be easily done, for example, teachers or students. Lecturers ask students to have conversations with these themes, for example, about ethnic and cultural diversity in Indonesia about religious tolerance or others as well as for writing skills; lecturers can instruct students by writing about topics, for example, religious moderation, pluralism, multiculturalism, nationalism, and so on.

“For speaking skills, I usually ask students to perform or conduct conversations or monologues or tell stories related to religious moderation. Then for writing skills I also ask students to write down what they have said in speaking skills class sessions to be used as material or topics for their writing.” (Doni)

“Well, for speaking and writing skills, it is quite easy for us to relate to the values of religious moderation. For example, in speaking skills class, I will ask students to perform a conversation or a monologue related to religious tolerance, for example, then ethnic diversity and the culture that exists in Indonesia in particular, and so on, which is clearly related to religious moderation. It's the same with writing skills, so we ask students to write on topics similar to those covered in the speaking skills class.” (Zaza)

“Now, it is quite simple to integrate the values of religious moderation in speaking and writing skills, which means that teachers can easily integrate the values of religious moderation in these two skills. For example, in speaking skills, we simply ask students to talk about tolerance, then ethnic diversity, cultural diversity, and religious diversity in Indonesia. The same scenario applies with writing skills, where the teacher can encourage students to write on the same topics they discussed when speaking, but in written form.” (Zizi)

“Speaking and writing skills are interesting to discuss because the teacher does not need to look for source texts or reading materials related to religious moderation because speaking and writing skills are productive skills, and the teacher simply directs the

students to write or speak about the topic of religious moderation. So, it's pretty simple.”
(Deni)

According to (Al-Khusain, 2022), learning English as a foreign language requires pupils to develop this productive skill to communicate with others. In reality, as a material debate, a topic regarding religious moderation triggers the learners to generate sounds and communicate opinions and ideas. According to Yaakub & Othman (2017), Islamic moderation, as a religion of blessing to the universe, conveys the objectivity of Islam in which the principle of balance is characterized as a fundamental creed in shaping the Islamic way of life, knowledge paradigm, type of action, art of worship, and interaction that transforms culture and personal character in civilization development and nation building. Further, (Al-Khusain, 2022) also asserts that students also develop an attitude of respect for contrasting viewpoints as they learn speaking skills. This is important because students are bound to have varying perspectives when it comes to delivering lectures and exchanging information. In addition, (Ait Bouzid, 2016) also states that the instructional materials for ELT should include speaking activities that encourage students to talk about their attitudes toward other religions. Additionally, the materials should include writing or speaking activities that encourage students to compare and contrast local and foreign religious concepts and rituals.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efforts made by Indonesian EFL teachers to promote religious moderation in society in order to achieve peace and harmony through the incorporation of religious moderation ideals in ELT teaching materials. Following in-depth interviews with the four participants, it was found that they employ a variety of methods to incorporate the ideals of religious moderation into their English-learning experiences. One such method is using resources geared toward the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). They took extra care to choose and arrange content that was highly relevant to religious moderation in the English learning materials used for listening and reading (receptive skills). The available texts for listening and reading activities have been selected with great care to ensure they are really acceptable and represent the principles of religious moderation, such as religious tolerance and plurality. It was generally agreed upon that instructors and students would benefit greatly from access to English-language resources emphasizing religious

moderation. Conversations on religious tolerance, pluralism, multiculturalism and ethnic and cultural diversity in Indonesia are encouraged among students in the speaking class. Those topics may also be used to teach students in writing classes.

This study has several limitations, including the limited number of samples, the limitations of the research location, the limitations of the research methodology, and the limitations of the breadth and depth of the research. In addition, this study only focuses on integrating the values of religious moderation in the four language skills and how teachers integrate these values into learning materials. Therefore, it is recommended for future researchers who want to research similar topics, it is better to study, for example, developing English teaching materials that integrate the values of religious moderation or classroom learning activities that can encourage the growth of religious moderation or tolerance and several other things.

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