Improving Young Muslims' English Literacy Skills and Religious Moderation Understanding through English for Islamic Studies Workshops

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ABSTRACT

Community service is a part of three pillars of higher education institutions in Indonesia. Empowerment as an act of community service should provide positive impacts to the community in certain aspects, including educational services. Currently, the English literacy skills of young Muslims in Indonesia related Islamic studies are considered important in terms of promoting and grasping the moderate Islamic teaching globally. Thus, this study aims to explore the impacts of the English education students' empowerement on their English literacy skills through a series of workshop in English for Islamic Studies. Three face-to-face workshops were employed to depict the advantages of learning English literacies and religious moderation through English for Islamic Studies. This study reveals that the workshops were significantly beneficial for them in improving their understanding of religious moderation especially moderate Islam by categorizing four indicators of those principles, including national commitment, anti-violence, tolerance, and accommodative to the local wisdom and culture. Moreover, the workshop participants also improve their English literacy, specifically in reading and writing because they absorbed technical term of English words related to the religious moderation. The implication of the study was, first, the implementation of English for Islamic Studies significantly improves the participants English literacy, specifically in reading and writing skills. Second, the content materials delivered during the workshops have positively influence the participants' understanding of religious moderation principles within moderate Islam. It enriched their capability in analysing religious moderation practices in their environment according to four indicators of being moderate.

KEYWORDS:
community service program;
English for Islamic studies;
religious moderation

Introduction

In terms of its economic, social, political, and ideological implications, English has become the most influential language. It also influences the delivery of information around the globe, from the most recent news on the nation's economic developments to the present state of religious and ideological disputes (Phan, 2021). Numerous religious groups across the globe, for instance, disseminate their philosophy and ideas via English-language blog entries, YouTube videos, social media captions and design graphics, and podcasts. This pattern suggests that the English language is essential for the dissemination of religious teachings and information (Muhalim, 2022). Therefore, it is impossible to ignore the significance of English as a vehicle for the dissemination of religious instruction. Thus, imparting English

literacy to the future generations of Muslim youngs is required to educate them to propagate Islamic ideals across worldwide societies.

As the biggest Muslim-majority nation in the world, Indonesia is regarded as the center of Islamic teachings, particularly for its moderate Islam principles. For the purpose of resolving various religious issues, Muslim and non-Muslim majority nations are focusing a significant deal of emphasis on Islamic moderation. It occurs because moderate Islam is seen as a means of fighting extremism, radicalization, intolerance, and exclusivist beliefs (Dodego & Witro, 2020; Islam & Khatun, 2015). A number of contemporary Indonesian Muslim academics, such as Nadirsyah Hosen, Farid F. Saenong, Ayang Utriza Yakin, Muhammad Ali, Eva Fahrun Nisa, etc., are significant in the worldwide dissemination of moderate Islam. They use English to communicate their perspectives on social media and to promote their works with foreign publications. It demonstrates that the notion of Islamic moderation can be disseminated internationally with the help of English literacy.

In addition, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) promotes moderate Islamic discourse and encourages Muslim academics to instill moderate Islamic ideals in their teaching and preaching practices by regulating religious preaching (Millie et al., 2019). After multiple acts of religiously motivated terrorism and intolerance in the context of Islamic communities, the notion of Islamic moderation is growing in popularity, which is directly tied to the local knowledge in Indonesia (Menchik, 2019). Consequently, the discourse of religious moderation emerges as the ministry's top priority program. The majority of MoRA-funded research and community service programs were supported by an emphasis on religious moderation. Promoting moderate Islam ideals becomes a vital aspect of presenting Indonesia as an example of a peaceful nation to global communities in light of this challenge.

Using internet and digital media, moderation in Islam will be successfully promoted. The young generation and subsequent generations are considered digital natives since they have spent practically their entire lives surrounded by digital technology. Given the relationship between the young generation and the use of digital technologies, material on moderate Islam will be widely disseminated and readily accessible. English is important to facilitate the distribution of information in order to promote moderate Islam in worldwide societies. In conjunction with the British Council, the administration of West Java Province developed the English for Ulama (EFU) program in order to train Indonesian Ulama (Islamic scholars) from different Islamic mass groups in West Java to become agents of moderate Islam in the global context. Thus, they used English to communicate moderate Islamic discourse.

As digital natives, a significant number of Muslim youngs lack the English proficiency necessary to promote their ideals as part of moderate Islam. Although some of them have a good history in Islamic education, their English proficiency as an international language is a challenge. They are unable to identify the worldwide concerns of violence and radical or extreme behaviors because they do not grasp the adjectives used to describe them. Reading internet resources and credible news sources may help enhance their English literacy for certain topics. In addition, they lacked the self-assurance to utilize English to promote moderate Islam via various media, such as blogs, YouTube, social media, and podcasts.

Therefore, the aim of this study for a community service program is to improve the English literacy of young Muslim and empower them to promote moderate Islam in global communities through online and digital media. This initiative is anticipated to examine the English literacy requirements of young Muslim in the promotion of moderate Islam. It is also meant to provide insights on the significance of English and an appreciation of their local knowledge as components of moderate Islam. At the conclusion of the program, participants are required to provide quality material in English to promote moderate Islam.

Method

The events were conducted in face-to-face meetings through a series of workshops considering the secure level of COVID-19 pandemic. The strategy utilized for this community service initiative was to provide a workshop on religious moderation in English for the younger generation of Muslims studying Islamic Studies. This session was designed to increase the English literacy abilities of the participants in relation to the subject. At the start of the program, the researcher convened a FGD with relevant stakeholders. The data are then reviewed and evaluated with the facilitators in order to build the most suitable and efficient program for the participants. The program subjects that include the introduction of Islamic moderation, the relevance of English for promoting moderate Islam, and English literacy development for promoting moderate Islam will be presented after an analysis of the needs and English literacy levels of possible participants.

After completing the workshop requirements, the facilitators and researcher cooperated to construct the workshop day's materials and activities. Participants were intended to comprehend the notion of Islamic moderation and the significance of English literacy in spreading them to global communities based on the program's design. At the conclusion of the workshop sessions, participants were required to generate material in English that adhered to a moderate interpretation of Islam. The study will culminate in the form of a final research report, supplemental budget report, book or article, and copyright certificate as a consequence of the program's outcomes. Consequently, this community service program might serve as a resource for future research or community service activities.

Result and Discussion

Moderate Islam as a Part of Religious Moderation

The term moderation originates from the Latin word moderâtio, signifying a state of being moderate, characterized by neither excess nor deficiency. Furthermore, it signifies self-mastery derived from the attitudes of excess and lack. Moderation frequently denotes average, central, standard, or non-conformist. Moderation often involves prioritizing equilibrium in perspectives, ethics, and character throughout interactions with individuals and governmental entities.

Religious moderation should be characterized as a religious disposition that reconciles exclusive adherence to one's own beliefs with inclusive tolerance for the beliefs of others. This equilibrium in religious practice will undoubtedly safeguard us from religious fanaticism, bigotry, and revolutionary inclinations. Religious moderation serves as a solution to the presence of two extreme factions in religion: the ultraconservative or far-right and the liberal or far-left.

Various variables can serve as a benchmarking system for religious moderation, including national dedication, tolerance, non-violence, and cultural sensitivity or acceptance. These four indicators can be utilized to assess the degree of religious moderation and vulnerability of an individual in Indonesia. These deficiencies must be acknowledged to facilitate the implementation of measures aimed at enhancing religious moderation.

National commitment is a vital indicator of how an individual's perspectives, attitudes, and religious practices affect their adherence to the fundamental national consensus, especially regarding their acceptance of Pancasila as the state ideology, their stance toward ideological challenges opposing Pancasila, and their sense of nationalism. Adherence to nationalism necessitates the adoption of the nationhood principles stated in the UUD 1945 Constitution and its corresponding legislation.

Tolerance is the inclination to refrain from obstructing others' rights to hold differing perspectives, articulate ideas, and convey thoughts, regardless of their divergence from our own. Tolerance denotes an open, generous, willing, and peaceful acceptance of variety. Tolerance is invariably accompanied with respect, the acceptance of diverse persons as integral to our identity, and a positive outlook. Consequently, tolerance, as an approach to managing differences, constitutes the fundamental foundation of democracy, as democracy can only operate when individuals are capable of acknowledging and accepting the perspectives of others.

Third, under the framework of religious moderation, radicalism or violence is perceived as an ideology that aims to transform the social and political order using violent or extreme methods under the guise of religion, encompassing verbal, physical, and psychological violence. Radicalism fundamentally involves the mentality and actions of an individual or group that use violent methods to attain their objectives. Radical movements typically contest the existing social structure and advocate for rapid and significant transformations. Radical organizations may employ many techniques, including intimidation of dissenters, to achieve their objectives; thus, radicalism is often associated with terrorism.

The extent of receptiveness to adopt religious practices that align with local culture and traditions may be assessed by rituals and behaviors that are congruent with local customs. Moderate individuals generally exhibit greater tolerance for local customs and cultural practices in their religious observance, provided these do not conflict with the fundamental tenets of their faith. Non-rigid religious traditions are distinguished by their openness to religious practices and behaviors that prioritize virtue over strict adherence to normative truths, provided these practices do not contravene religious principles. Conversely, some groups exhibit intolerance towards tradition and culture, perceiving the incorporation of these elements inside religion as a threat to their purity.

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Workshops Content Materials on English for Islamic Studies

Digital Literacy in the Context of Tolerance and Non-Violence

The beginning of this session was openned with the statistical data of intolerance trend toward non-Muslim group in Indonesia based on the Indonesian Survey Institution (2020).

Figure 1. Non-Muslim Intolerance Trend
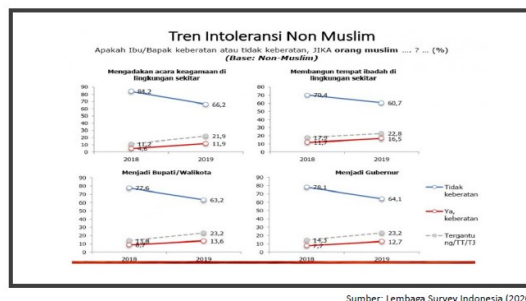
This was succeeded by the capacity for digital literacy in English, utilizing two indicators: the internalization of anti-violence and tolerance ideals, as outlined in Beetham &

De Freitas' Model of Digital Literacy (2010). The promotion of contradictory narratives on extremist, abusive, and violent individuals was crucial in fostering religious moderation.

To avoid radical ideologies, Generation Z must critically evaluate the credibility of the content seen on social media. It is advisable for them to reexamine the subject with their parents, educators, and community clerics if they encounter information that contradicts their prior knowledge. Thus, social media does not serve as the principal reference for understanding religion. Every individual requires a mentor in the real world to address inquiries posed on social media.

The digital platform serves solely as a supplement rather than the principal guide in the acquisition of religious knowledge. The features now under development for social media sites are akin to razor blades for their users. A knife must possess optimal balance to ensure effective use for any activity. The effectiveness of social media will improve if users can discern quality content and avoid radical perspectives.

Enhancing literacy in digital media about religious moderation practices can be achieved by bolstering the ability to critically evaluate content. It is essential to identify the creator and uploader of content on social media networks. Whom is being specifically pursued? Does anyone contest the presented facts, and if so, what are the reasons? Is the rationale sufficient? Is it in accordance with the Pancasila, or does it contradict it? Finally, when presenting verses and hadiths, do they derive interpretations from the text itself or from the surrounding context? When assessing the trustworthiness of information published on social media, the young Muslim generation should consider the answers to these questions..

Following the Pathway to Religious Moderation

According to this session, there are a number of intriguing research-based statistics that demonstrate the degree of religious moderation among Indonesian college students. For instance, according to study done by the Institute of Islamic Studies and Peace (LaKIP) between October 2010 and January 2011 in the Jabodetabek region, 48.9 percent of junior and senior high school pupils supported religiously motivated acts of violence or radicalism.

Figure 2. Religious Moderation Urgency

Conversely, Alvara Research Center (December 2017) conducted a study on 25 of Indonesia's leading universities. This study revealed that 23.5% of students advocating for an Islamic state assert that Islam should be applied comprehensively. Seventeen point eight percent of students regard the Khilafah as the ideal form of governance compared to the Republic of Indonesia. 23.4% of students concur with the assertion, "I am prepared to advocate for the establishment of an Islamic state/khilafah." The 2016 BNPT youth poll revealed that 26.7% endorsed violent jihad. In an April 2017 study of students across 15 Indonesian provinces, the BNPT found that 39% expressed interest in joining radical groups aimed at altering state ideology.

Moreover, PPIM Jakarta 2018 presents remarkable results from a survey about the perspectives of Muslim students; 37% of participants see the concept of jihad predominantly as warfare (qital), while 23% regard suicide bombings as a form of jihad. 34% of participants said that apostates should be executed, while 33% indicated that acts of discrimination against minorities are widespread..

Digital Contents of Moderate Islam in Indonesia for Social Media Platforms

Participants in this class created sixteen digital assets for social media platforms. Each item was produced by a duo including ten individuals: BY, AA, UK, NS, RQ, AS, NH, RA, MD, and AB. Participants created the material according to their preferences, as the researcher did not restrict them from articulating their views on religious moderation. Considering the workshops attended by all participants, they commenced developing content based on the previously offered workshop materials. The training materials focus on the indicators of religious moderation proposed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), including national dedication, tolerance, anti-violence, and receptiveness to local knowledge and culture. As a result, the participants employed these four criteria to categorize their digital content topics.

Among the seven materials, the predominant choice of participants was the tolerance category for their digital content. Subsequently, anti-violence, national dedication, and sensitivity to local knowledge and culture were awarded 4, 3, and 2 points, respectively. Tolerance emerged as the most favorable indicator due to the participants' familiarity with this trait in their local environment. The EIS workshops on moderate Islam heightened their awareness of the significance of tolerance in daily life, encompassing inter-religious activities, neighboring religious institutions, interfaith dialogue, personal religious choices, and the understanding of others' religious practices and rituals. These occurrences were identified in the works of BY and AS, AA and MD, NS and UK, and RQ and AB.

The anti-violence value was the next most favored indicator. This indicator, established by NS and UK, BY and AS, and RA and NH, is represented by four digital entities. In their publications, they provided examples and elucidations of the violence in Iran about the autonomy of Muslim women to forgo the hijab or veil. Furthermore, it exhibited a poster advocating peace by ceasing violence, as the essence of global religion is peace. A depiction and declaration illustrating Indonesia's plurality were created under this signal, accompanied by a compelling image of a handshake between hands representing diverse faiths.

Subsequently, the participants developed digital resources that were both respectful of indigenous knowledge and culture and aligned with the nation's overarching objective. MD and AA, NH and RA, and BY and AS each provided one of the five components to the final product, which comprised a total of five parts. Concerning the national commitment value, the participants produced several artifacts, including two posters illustrating the Indonesian flag, individuals attired in national ceremonial costumes, and traditional garments.

Simultaneously, they produced content that illustrated the advantages of integrating indigenous culture and expertise. This value emphasizes the tradition of 'sedekah bumi' (charity for the soil) and the Sunan Kudus principle of religious moderation. The custom of 'sedekah bumi' (charity for the earth) is widely recognized throughout the Indonesian archipelago, as it symbolizes respect and gratitude for the environment through the offering of various food items to God and the community. The idea of religious moderation espoused by Sunan Kudus significantly impacted the local culture and wisdom of the Kudus people. Sunan Kudus's teachings on the restriction of cow slaughter, the construction of towers and mosques, the utilization of Chinese pottery plates, and the acculturation of Kudus's cultural legacy impart significant lessons regarding local culture and religious moderation.

English Literacy Improvement of Millenial Muslims through Learning Moderate Islam

T The English literacy skills of the workshop participants were enhanced through two methods: English-based workshops and the development of English-based content. Participants were urged to enhance their reading and writing abilities for moderate Islamic discourse in English, specifically referencing the religious moderation indicators put forth by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), which encompass national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and receptiveness to local wisdom and culture. The participants have been provided with reading comprehension exercises on moderate Islamic issues. Various literacy exercises, such as Directed Reading-Thinking Activity, guided reading, multimedia-assisted reading, and letter and word recognition, have been integrated into the seminars. During the digital content creation activity, participants engaged in discussions and wrote about indicators of religious moderation observed in their daily lives. Consequently, it significantly encouraged the seminar participants to explore their experiences with the attributes of religious moderation and to express them in English.

Conclusion

This community service initiative concludes that we selected the theme "Developing English Literacy of Muslim Millennials to Promote Moderate Islam Through English for Islamic Studies Workshop" due to the prevalent lack of understanding among millennial Muslims regarding moderate Islam, which is exacerbated by their challenges in accessing information in English and their insufficient English proficiency. This community program aims to enhance English literacy through English for Islamic Studies classes, with a specific focus on moderate Islam and religious moderation.

Two methodologies, specifically English-based workshops and English-based content production, are employed in the implementation of this community service to enhance English literacy. The workshops encounter several challenges in providing community service, primarily owing to time constraints; tutoring occurs for a certain duration based on the availability of both tutors and participants, resulting in complaints from some participants who feel neglected. Customizing workshop design is challenging, hindering facilitators from implementing activities that improve students' communication skills, particularly with a significant number of millennial Muslims in the program. The solutions we employ when facing challenges consist of offering additional facilitators to direct discussions and arranging various engaging and interactive activities during the sessions.

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