WHEN ENGLISH TEACHERS INCORPORATE THE NOTION OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION

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Abstract Religious moderation has received increased attention in Indonesian Islamic educational context. Despite the massive incorporation of religious moderation into various teaching contexts, the English teaching context still remains less explored. This paper is aimed at exploring what happens to English teachers when they contextualize such four pillars of religious moderation as national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and local culture accommodation into their English language instruction. Following a narrative inquiry, the paper presents the narrations of four English teachers of Islamic boarding schools in the Province of Lampung, Indonesia, pertaining to the integration of religious moderation pillars in English language teaching. The teachers were recruited through the scheme of a convenience purposive sampling. Research data are drawn from questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with teachers. Research findings show that the notion of religious moderation is best incorporated into supplementary teaching materials and the teaching milieu. Vocabulary building, classroom routine, public speaking activity, English competition, and the use of local text are among the plausible schemes for integrating religious moderation in English instruction at Islamic schools. Other potential schemes include curriculum development, content-based instruction, and theme-based language instruction. This study suggests English teacher's role model to optimize the religious moderation integration.

Keywords English Language Teaching; Religious Moderation; Supplementary Materials; Teaching Milieu

A. INTRODUCTION

In the global context, religion has been considered a critical component in the socio-political landscape of educational practices (Koukounaras-liagis, 2012; Roux, 2005; Senefonte, 2018). In the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) of the Republic of Indonesia has been calling for religious moderation integration into the educational system to eradicate radicalism (Fahri and Zainuri, 2019). This policy has required all Islam affiliated-schools to integrate such values as national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and local culture accommodation through any feasible instructional components, given the fact that the schools are the laboratory of religious moderation (Sutrisno, 2019). The above-mentioned values are also known of the indicators of religious moderation (Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), that should be pursued through any fields of social structure.

To date, most studies of religious moderation in the field of education have tended to investigate two big issues. First, many researchers have observed the implementation of religious

moderation in an Islam-affiliated educational context. The researchers reported that religious moderation has been integrated into the religious education subject in Islamic junior high school (Nugraha et al., 2020); it also has been embedded in the curriculum of Islamic higher education (Nasir & Rijal, 2021); and it could be instilled through certain courses, like cross-cultural understanding, at Islamic university (Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021). Second, some researchers have investigated the implementation of religious moderation in a public educational context. It was reported that religious moderation was integrated through Islam religious education courses to promote anti-radicalism both in public universities (Herlinawati, 2020), and in public senior high schools (Husna & Thohir, 2020); and that headmasters and teachers, at public senior high schools, played central roles in initiating religious moderation through curriculum and instructional model (Islamy, 2021). Relatively, little attention has been given to understanding the implementation of religious moderation in a secular subject like the English language within Islamic schools.

This study intends to investigate how English teachers at Islamic schools (*madrasas* and *pesantren*) in Lampung province narrate the integration of the four pillars of religious moderation into their English instruction practices. In this article, I explore, through a narrative inquiry, the English teachers' thoughts toward religious moderation, their experience of integrating religious moderation, and their suggestion for better religious moderation integration into English language classrooms or English language extracurricular activities. This study contributes to the literature by examining how the four pillars of religious moderation might be implemented by English language teachers in *madrasa* and *pesantren*.

B. METHOD

The integration of religious moderation into English instruction in Islamic schools in Lampung Province was conducted through a narrative inquiry. Following the steps proposed by Barkhuizen et al., (2014), the researcher recruited four English teachers , through the scheme of a convenience purposive sampling, from three regions of Islamic schools in Lampung province. The study was conducted following these steps: (1) a call for participants was conducted via phone; (2) four teachers responded; (3) an initial questionnaire was distributed via Google form to the participants; (4) a semi-structured interview was conducted through a face-to-face meeting; (5) all participants were interviewed in the Indonesian language. There were four participants involved in this study. They were English teachers from three different regions in Lampung Province, and from three different Islamic namely Madrasah Aliyah Roudlotul Jannah Lampung Tengah, Madrasah Aliyah Darul A'mal Kota Metro, and Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Insan Cendikia Lampung Timur. These schools were equal to senior high schools in terms of level and were all supported by the boarding school system.

The data were mainly collected through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Here the interviewer used an interview guide with pre-set questions including: (1) is it important to integrate religious moderation into English instruction? Why? (2) Would it be necessary for the students to be able to deliver the Friday sermon in English? Why? (3) Is it relevant to teach the students to deliver a speech in English? Why? (4) Would it be beneficial for the students to memorize sayings in English? Why? These pre-set questions, however, did not limit the interviewer to asking follow-up questions for interviewees to elaborate.

The data analysis was conducted in the manner proposed by Tsui (2007). First, the data were sorted chronologically from the first participant to the last one. Second, the data were sorted thematically from those related to the pillar of national commitment to those of local culture accommodation. Finally, the data were analyzed according to the framework of how the participants have implemented and would elaborate the notion of religious moderation in English instruction.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As was previously touched upon, the data of this study were collected through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview and were directed to digest the participants' perception of the importance of religious moderation as well as the feasible schemes to integrate the notion into practices. The data gained from both the questionnaire and interviews reveal that all

participants of this study agreed to integrate the pillars of religious moderation into English language instruction in Islamic schools.

The notion of religious moderation is underpinned by the implementation of the four pillars namely national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and local culture accommodation. The data collected in this research show that those pillars are critical with various rationale. The following narration thematically displays the participants' reasoning.

Most participants considered the pillar of national commitment a crucial value to be inculcated in English instruction. The pillar is associated with patriotism and heroism which could be plausibly inserted into teaching materials, particularly as a reading text and as a springboard for the students to digest cultural awareness.

> *"Nationalism and patriotism are essentials and could be instilled into teaching materials."* (Interview with AS, English teacher of MA Roudlotul Jannah, 2021)

> *"I myself often insert the values of nationalism in my teaching."* (Interview with HU, English teacher of MA Darul A'mal, 2021)

> *"I am thinking about utilizing our national heroes' biographies as reading material."* (Interview with LU, English teacher of MA Darul A'mal, 2021)

> *"National commitment should be emphasized when discussing 'cultural awareness', particularly when comparing Indonesian culture to that of Western culture."* (Interview with IR, English teacher of MAN IC, 2021)

The data suggest the crucial role of learning materials in strengthening the pillar of national commitment. As such, English teachers are likely to select relevant materials or develop appropriate supplementary material about national commitment. The data also designate that such commitment might be inserted when teachers are making a comparison between Indonesian culture and Western culture. As selecting contextual materials and highlighting cultural awareness might belong to the so-termed 'Explicit Mode' of integrating values and culture (Sugirin, 2009), the pillar of national commitment might be best introduced explicitly.

Tolerance has been a fundamental value for the Indonesian as reflected, directly and indirectly by the participants' insights in this study. The participants were able to connect the importance of tolerance to their teaching contexts. The following interview quotations represent such a proposition.

> *"Inculcating tolerance is of paramount importance in this school, due to various tribes of the students we have."* (Interview with AS, English teacher of MA Roudlotul Jannah, 2021)

> *"English teacher can easily insert the value of tolerance into his/her teaching materials.'"* (Interview with IR, English teacher of MAN IC, 2021)

> *"The value of moderation could be inserted when teaching 'suggestion' and 'asking opinion'."* (Interview with HU, English teacher of MA Darul A'mal, 2021)

The above research data confirm that tolerance should be first introduced to the Muslim learners *(santri)* so that they might be aware of the uniqueness embedded in various tribes in Indonesia. Given the fact that English Muslim learners often come from different regions and tribes, tolerance should be a solid foundation for the learners' social interaction. To strengthen such a foundation, English instruction should play an interesting part. English teachers might design specific supplementary materials emphasizing tolerance. They also might specifically insert the value when discussing relevant lessons such as asking suggestions and asking opinions. The teachers might be

telling the students to appreciate differences for such an attitude is the essence of tolerance. It is worth noting here that the learners' various tribes should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a threat. Al-Obaydi (2019) reported that learners with various cultural backgrounds tend to respect and appreciate cultural diversity.

While anti-violence has become a global concern, it should be contextualized to any necessary levels such as in schools and subjects. The data of this research generally indicate that the spirit of anti-violence should be instilled in all subjects, including English, to enhance its narration. A strong narration of anti-violence is then considered a promising strategy to deal with the bullying phenomenon in school. Specifically, the participants of this research stated:

> *"I am thinking that anti-violence should not only be introduced in a such course as civic education. It should also be integrated into English subject." (Interview with AS, English teacher of MA Roudlotul Jannah, 2021)*

> *"The notion of anti-violence ought to be connected to the phenomenon of bullying." (Interview with LU, English teacher of MA Darul A'mal, 2021)*

> *"The idea of anti-violence could be integrated into the teaching materials." (Interview with IR, English teacher of MAN IC, 2021)*

It seems obvious that the English subject should become a part of the anti-violence campaign. When reading materials, teaching agendas, classroom scenarios, or extracurricular activities do not explicitly contain anti-violence values, English teachers at Islamic schools are suggested to set up activities or design supplementary materials aimed at accentuating anti-violence messages. About the last point mentioned, Yoshihara, (2010) demonstrated that theme-based language instruction is effective in enhancing English language skills and students' awareness of domestic violence. Thus, a theme-based supplementary material might work well to deliver anti-violence messages at Islamic schools.

When Indonesian Islamic education like madrasa and *pesantren* are still perceived, by many, as traditional and orthodox by many (Helmiati, 2021), the attribute of English as a secular subject becomes harder to be erased. As such, the accommodation of local culture in the English teaching and learning process should deserve teachers' attention. The following interview quotations might portray the English teachers' concerns about the importance of integrating local culture at madrasah and *pesantren* contexts.

> *"Local texts and local names are key elements of the accommodation of local culture... Introducing local culture in the English classroom would reduce the tension between global culture and local culture in TEFL." (Interview with AS, English teacher of MA Roudlotul Jannah, 2021)*

> *"In our practice, to strengthen the local culture, we use local narrative in the storytelling competition." (Interview with HU, English teacher of MA Darul A'mal, 2021)*

> *"By using local descriptive and narrative texts, English teachers have helped accommodate local culture." (Interview with IR, English teacher of MAN IC, 2021)*

It might be evident that the use of local texts and local names would be an advantage in the effort of reducing tensions that might appear due to the differences between Western culture, and Indonesian culture. The data also suggest that selected text, like local narratives, and extracurricular activities, such as speech competitions, might be a supporting system in promoting Indonesian Muslim English learners. Concerning the use of local text, Mohaideen et al., (2020) (99) in their study

conclude that in the Malaysian context, local text or local literary text gave a great impact on the learners' English mastery. Thus, the term local text should also be understood as a local literary text.

From the questionnaire, it was found that all participants considered religious moderation as a relevant element of Indonesian nowadays education. About the possibility of integrating religious moderation through Friday sermon training *(khutbah)*, speech training *(muhadhoroh)*, and saying teaching *(mahfudzhot)*, participants were having different views. Figure 1 displays such differences.
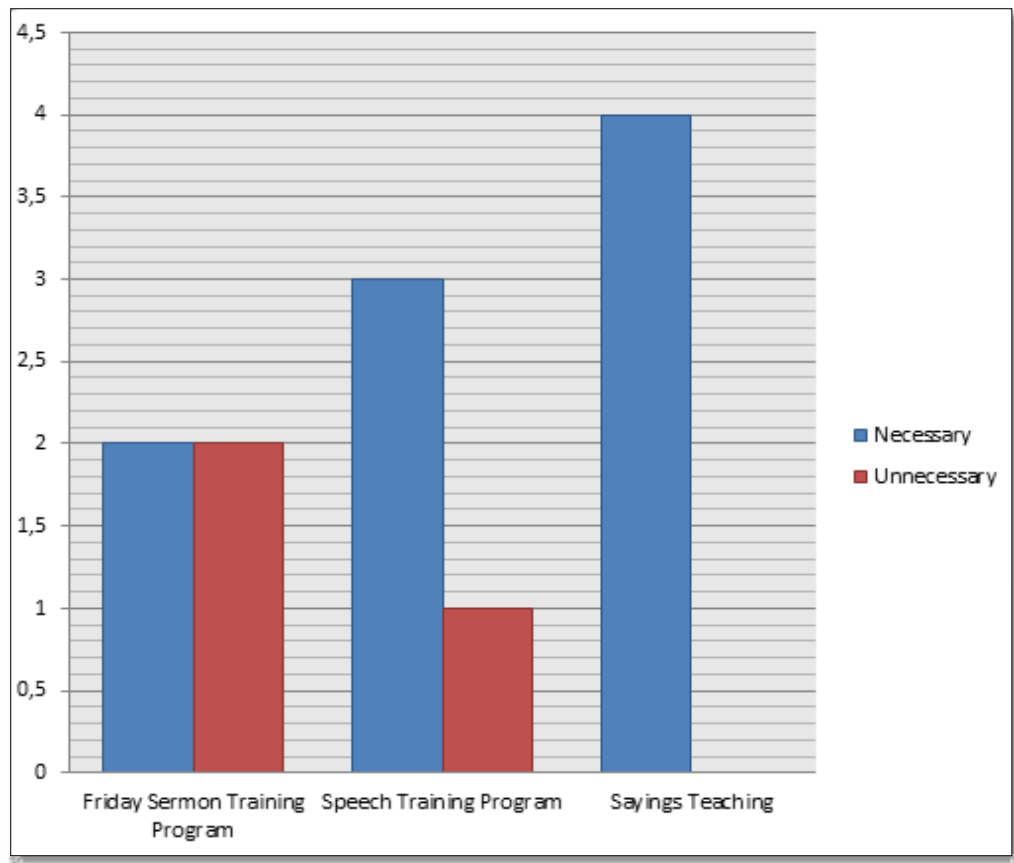
**Figure 1. The Integration Schemes of Religious Moderation
into English Instruction**

Figure 1. shows that half of the teachers (50%) agreed on the scheme of the Friday sermon training program, while half others did not agree; most teachers (75%) agreed on the scheme of speech training program, while the rest (25%) did not agree; and all teachers (100%) thought that sayings are the most feasible way to integrate the religious moderation. Although Friday sermon training is officially taught in Islamic schools, it is not always considered essential to teach all students to utilize English to deliver the Friday sermon. A participant stated:

> *"I don't think teaching the students to deliver Friday sermon in English is necessary. It is not contextual since, in the real life, most of the target audience of the sermon does not understand English" (Interview with AS, English teacher of MA Roudlotul Jannah, 2021).*

Another participant of this study made it clear that Friday sermon in English should be optional by making it works for interested students only. "The Friday sermon in English might be best introduced as a new variety in the speech competition which is periodically held in the school" (Interview with LU, English teacher of MA Darul A'mal, 2021).

The same is true with the use of English for delivering a speech, which not all participants agreed on. The only scheme of religious moderation integration that is agreed upon by all participants is through the use of sayings. "Integrating religious moderation through saying is potential. The sayings often touch the students' hearts" (Interview with IR, English teacher of MAN IC, 2021).

The results of this study make it safe to state that integrating religious moderation into English instruction is of paramount importance. While it might be necessary to integrate the notion into Friday sermon, speech, and sayings in English, it would not be relevant to have all students deliver Friday sermon and speech in English. Instead, the use of English for public speaking should be optional.

Other noteworthy things from interviews with the English teachers at the Islamic schools pertaining to the scheme of religious moderation are as follows.

> *"The integration of religious moderation into English lessons is important due to the plural nature of Indonesian society... Religious moderation might be best integrated through the teaching of related vocabularies, relevant sayings, and a routine public speaking program called muhadaroh." (Interview with AS, English teacher of MA Roudlotul Jannah, 2021)*

> *"If we do not introduce religious moderation, extremism would appear in the education world...English teachers might want to develop appropriate supplementary materials to support religious moderation." (Interview with IR, English teacher of MAN IC, 2021)*

> *"Various competitions such as storytelling, speech, and singing, are potential ways to introduce the notion of religious moderation. Such competitions make English learning more interesting for the students." (Interview with HU, English teacher of MA Darul A'mal, 2021)*

> *"Religious moderation might be best integrated through the classroom routine rather than through the lesson content." (Interview with LU, English teacher of MA Darul A'mal, 2021)*

Based on the data above, it can be inferred that religious moderation should be compulsory for Indonesian plural society and should be integrated into English instruction in all types of schools including Islam-affiliated schools. Among the suggested schemes proposed by the participants of this research are: vocabulary building, sayings teaching, public speaking training, supplementary materials, English competition, and classroom routine. These schemes enrich such existing schemes as curriculum (Kirkgöz, 2021); lesson plans, content-based instruction, stories and folktales (Abu Rass, 2014); learning materials, teaching-learning activities, and evaluation (Sholeh et al., 2022).

D. CONCLUSION

English teachers at Indonesian Islamic schools consider religious moderation as an essential element of their instruction. Such supporting pillars as national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and local culture accommodation might be integrated through some plausible schemes including classroom routine, vocabulary building *(mufrodat)*, sayings teaching *(mahfudzhot)*, public speaking training *(khutbah* and *muhadhoroh)*, local text, literary text, supplementary materials, and English competition *(musabaqah)*. Other plausible schemes embrace curriculum, lesson plans, evaluation, video-making projects, and murals. One point worth mentioning here is that one of the most popular sayings in the Islamic schools states that knowledge without action is like a tree without fruit. Thus, English teacher's being a good role models for religious moderation implementation should be the most potential integration scheme.

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