

Embedding Religious Moderation Values through Communication Activities in English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Some reports have uncovered that many religious intolerance and violation cases still appeared in Indonesia recently. Preventive actions must keep Indonesia aligned with its national motto, "unity in diversity." This paper discusses the importance of promoting religious moderation toward society to build peace and harmony. Furthermore, this paper addresses the urgency of inserting religious moderation values into school instructions, particularly in English language teaching. Some practical ways of embedding religious moderation values into English instructions are also presented to apply them in their classes. Finally, religious tolerance and respect for diversity are expected to be built among students.

Keywords: *Religious moderation, religious intolerance, English language teaching, character building.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Until today, the issue of religious intolerance is still flourishing in Indonesia. Some reports have been published with regard to this issue. Data from the investigation of SETARA Institute, an NGO based in Indonesia whose work is for conducting research and advocacy for democracy, political freedom, and human rights, uncovered 201 incidents of religious freedom being violated across Indonesia's 26 provinces. West Java was the region with the highest number of violations, followed by Jakarta with 26 incidents, Central Java with 14, East Java with 12, and Banten with 10 cases in 2017 (SETARA Institute, 2018). These religious intolerance and violations include intimidation, discrimination, assault, hate speech, bans on worship, and sealing houses of worship. In another investigation, SETARA found religious intolerance in 171 high schools in Jakarta and Bandung. Specifically, data recorded around 4.6 percent of the students supported an organization that regularly stopped people

from building places of worship. Even one percent supported ISIS. The Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly, Bambang Soesatyo, in his keynote speech at a seminar held by SETARA Institute, showed his concern with the research findings and declared that the government would take action to overcome this issue (Yasmin, 2019). These findings indicate that this intolerance and violations still exist and potentially undermine the harmony of inter- and intra-religious societies in Indonesia.

Indeed, Indonesia is widely-known as a multicultural country with diverse cultures and religious beliefs. In fact, several different religions and a lot of the branches/flows of beliefs were practiced in the country a long time ago. It might inspire the founding fathers of Indonesia to create the national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," meaning "unity in diversity," which is relevant to the country. Therefore, tolerance becomes a key determinant to keep unity among the Indonesian people.

Tolerance means showing acceptance and sympathy for beliefs or practices that differ from one's own. Due to its central role, tolerance can become a parameter of justice in treating different thoughts, feelings, and actions. Nevertheless, the strengthening of religious formalism could create an intolerant act. The more open access to information and the great inventions in technology nowadays make the situation even worse. Dewi (2021) informs that the hate speech contents on Facebook escalated from 2018 to 2019. Besides, in 2017 the second most hoaxes spread in social media was about the issues regarding sex, religion, race, and ethnicity (88.60%) based on MASTEL 2017 research. It shows there is a tendency that religious intolerance and violations can be more easily spread in the cyber world, including through social media. Some people may make disturbing content, such as intimidation, hoax, hate speech, etc. At the same time, there will be more people who get emotional and triggered because of accessing those disturbing content. Then conflicts become inevitable. This might answer why recent cases related to religious intolerance still come up in Indonesia.

The government has taken progressive action in handling religious intolerance and promoting respect for religious diversity. Through the Ministry of Religious Affairs,

currently, the government has attempted to promote what is so-called Moderasi Beragama or “religious moderation.” Taking a closer look, the word ‘moderation’ relates to the adjective ‘moderate,’ which refers to avoiding extremes of behavior or expressions. Comprehensively, the government defines this term as an attitude to reduce violence and avoid extremism in religious practices (Kemenag, 2019). This religious moderation comes up with the idea that no religion teaches violence and that diversity in Indonesia is destiny as well as a blessing from God and, thus, it is something to be grateful for. Religious moderation is the essence of religion, and its implementation is a must in the context of plural and multicultural country such as Indonesia. The goal is definite; to create harmony and to keep the unity of Indonesia.

To promote and strengthen the idea of religious moderation is the duty of all parties. It can start from schools. Teachers, as the front-liner of education, can take a prominent role to embed religious moderation into their teaching practices because they can shape students’ understanding and point of view about tolerance and respect for diversity. In an ethnographic study, the researcher found that not all teachers understood multicultural education. On the one hand, some teachers thought that it was the job of religious and civic teachers only to teach this. On the other hand, the religious teachers were incapable of relating their lessons to religious and cultural diversity. Some of them even tended to warn students about the danger of diversity for their own faith (Raihani, 2018). The finding of this study reveals that teachers contribute to either the success or failure of teaching religious moderation toward students.

Keep in mind that all teachers from different subjects can take part in immersing students in the values of religious moderation. Not to mention in English language teaching, teachers can insert the values such as tolerance and respect into their instructions. English as part of the social sciences, which includes the teaching of culture, gives broader space for teachers to design their instructions to fit the needs of teaching religious values. In line with this, Curriculum 13 demands the teachers teach character education through school subjects. This indicates the urgency of embedding religious moderation values into English subjects.

This paper highlights the essence of religious moderation for the sake of building peace in the country. Thus, it is prominent to take practical actions to promote religious moderation through schools, particularly in English language teaching. Further in the discussion section, this paper attempts to present some practical applications for teachers in embedding religious moderation values into their English instructions at the secondary school level.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There might be many ways of presuming whether or not one's attitudes or point of view reflect religious moderation in their daily lives. However, Kemenag RI (2019) selects only four main indicators, which comprise of (1) national commitment, (2) tolerance, (3) anti-violence, and (4) being accommodative toward local customs. National commitment measures how strongly someone accepts Pancasila as the ideology of the country and, more specifically, their attitudes toward the doctrines which are preached against Pancasila. National commitment needs to be strengthened because we live in a very diverse country, and any phenomena which can potentially disunite the country need to be prevented. Being a good Indonesian citizen means being obedient to Pancasila, and a moderate person would not contradict Pancasila in their religious practices.

The second indicator, tolerance, is defined as respecting other people's right to choose what is best for them. In the social, cultural, and religious context, tolerance prohibits discrimination among different groups (Bakar, 2016). Anti-violence is another important indicator of religious moderation. People from certain religious groups sometimes want to oppress their beliefs onto others, and in that attempt, they can become violent verbally or physically. This is dangerous because other people's lives and safety are at risk. Therefore, anti-violence among religious groups must be enforced, and this needs to be taught from children's early age. Regarding the last indicator, Kemenag RI (2019) feels the need to include being accommodative toward local cultures because people with this attitude tend to be more moderate in their religious practice.

In this section of the article, the writers attempt to illustrate several practical yet powerful ways of promoting national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodative attitudes toward local customs in English language instructions. In order to do this, the writers propose instructional activities based on the revised 2013 Curriculum determined by the Indonesian government. In the syllabi published for grades 7-12, specifically in the Learning (Pembelajaran) column, there are stages of the scientific approach, such as Observing (mengamati), Questioning (mempertanyakan), Exploring (eksperimen), Associating (mengasosiasi), and Communicating (mengkomunikasi). The writers use the descriptions in the Communicating sections as the basis in proposing the instructions.

In this curriculum, the lessons sometimes are repeated in a higher grade with slightly progressive content. For instance, both seventh and tenth graders are required to introduce themselves; in grades eight and eleven, students learn to create invitations, and eleventh and twelfth-grade students are given lessons about conditional sentences. Therefore, in illustrating the ways of embedding religious moderation values in English instructions, the writers combine two or more grades if they have the same topics.

2.1. National Commitment

Living in a multicultural and multireligious country, such as Indonesia, students need to internalize national commitment as a foundation to function in society. They need to not only be aware of the pluralism in Indonesia but also celebrate it to achieve mutual respect. National commitment can be immersed in English language lessons through situation-based exercises. To teach eighth-graders how to offer advice in English, teachers can prepare a few situations where students have to counsel in regard to the global influence on the changing lifestyles in Indonesia. Another example, twelfth graders can learn to use modal auxiliaries such as have to, should, or must to express obligation by analyzing situations about obeying regulations in Indonesia.

Another way of teaching national commitment is to have seventh-grade students practice their vocabulary about dates and months by presenting important dates in Indonesia. This activity helps recall, if not add, knowledge on several important national events and their significance, such as Kartini Day, National Education Day, Youth Pledge Day, etc. Similarly, when ninth-graders learn to express suggestions, they can create a poster on appreciating and using Indonesian products instead of imported ones. This way, students will have a better understanding that supporting local or national businesses is a form of love to the country as well as a defense mechanism against trade competition with other nations.

Regarding English language lessons about recipes for grade 9 students, the teachers can guide them to discuss and recreate simple yet delicious recipes from various regions in Indonesia. These activities should be utilized to remind students those recipes of traditional delicacies are national heritage, and they need to be preserved for the next generations. Furthermore, recognizing or being able to recreate the dishes is one way to deepen the love for the country.

Nationalism which is included in national commitment, can be taught through folklores. The students of ninth and tenth grades can find and retell folklore from different parts of the archipelago in English. This activity is a perfect complement for a lesson in the tenth grade where students practice describing tourism and historical attractions in Indonesia. To illustrate, the students firstly analyze the generic structure, language features, and social function of the folklore Roro Jonggrang and then retell to the class. Subsequently, the students learn to describe the famous tourist attraction, Candi Prambanan, which is associated with Roro Jonggrang. This set of activities can be implemented with other folklores and famous places in Indonesia. To name a few, folklore Sangkuriang and Mount Tangkuban Perahu, folklore Gunung Batur and the Mount Batur, or legend Danau Toba and the Lake Toba.

2.2. Tolerance

The immersion of tolerance in school subjects might be overlapping with the immersion of national commitment, as both deal with respecting cultural and religious differences. When seventh and tenth-grade students introduce themselves in English, they are encouraged to mention their cultural and religious background. This exercise enriches students' vocabulary on tribes in Indonesia as well as awareness that even though they come from different backgrounds, they can still form strong friendships.

Another way of embedding tolerance in English language teaching is to introduce eleventh-grade students to the biographies of successful world figures who believe in different religions. The point of this activity is to help students better understand that, despite their difference, these people can exemplify good behaviors. Students will develop their common sense on treating others as fellow human beings, regardless of their religions.

2.3. Anti-violence

It is crucial to teach anti-violence from an early age to prevent students from conducting cruelty to others. Seven graders can learn anti-violence through street signs that indicate places for worship, such as mosques, churches, and temples. When doing this activity, the teacher is encouraged to explain that these places are sacred to the adherents and that they must be respected and cannot be vandalized or harmed.

When ninth-graders are taught to express prohibition, the teachers should encourage students to promote anti-bullying in their sentences. One way to do this is by having students create short posts on their social media in English about standing against verbal or physical abuse. The teachers should explain that bullying is a form of violence and that it is dangerous to the victims' mental or physical wellbeing.

As eleventh-grade students practice expressing hopes and wishes in English, the teachers can direct them to have more sympathy toward the victims of any violence

caused by religious disputes. Students should realize that religions do not require their adherents to harm others. In doing this activity, the students could, for example, hope that the wounded victims would heal soon and the deceased ones would find peace in the afterlife. Moreover, the students could express hope that there will not be any cruelty in the future.

When eighth-grade students learn the English language with short fables, it would be ideal if the teachers select the ones with non-violent plots. Surely there may be disputes or arguments in the plots. However, if the fables involve wounding or killing, they should just remain unutilized. If it is inevitable, the teachers should explain that violence is evil conduct and it must be avoided under any circumstances.

For the lessons that involve songs in grade 7-12, students learn to sing and analyze the meanings of several English songs about universal compassion, such as *Heal the World* by Michael Jackson, *A Random Act of Senseless Kindness* by South Sixty-Five, *Count on Me* by Bruno Mars, etc. These songs would strengthen students' sense of togetherness, and they hopefully will not hurt each other in anyways.

2.4. Being Accommodative Toward Local Customs

Some local traditions are practiced by people no matter what their religions are. For example, in Central Kalimantan, people do ritual *tampung tawar* (splashing holy water to repel bad energy in Kaharingan belief) at some events such as welcoming guests and at weddings. Someone who is not familiar with *tampung tawar* would think that this ritual might interfere with their religious belief. To prevent such misunderstanding, it is necessary to introduce students to different local customs which are commonly accepted in the religiously diverse society.

In English language instructions, as eighth and eleventh graders learn to create invitations in English, they can make invitations for cultural events such as traditional wedding ceremonies or sets of ceremonies for newborn babies. It is recommended that the teacher explain that these ceremonies are not associated with specific religions and that most of the time, family and relatives whose religions are different treat the events as social functions. Another way to shape students' attitudes to be

more accommodative toward local customs is by having twelfth graders explore photos that depict various local ceremonies. Then, they can create a suitable caption for the photos while also developing an understanding that as long as these ceremonies do not contradict religions, they can still be held to preserve old traditions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Considering all unpleasant phenomena that have happened caused by religious differences in Indonesia and the trauma experienced by the victims, it is urgent to start taking action to prevent further occurrences. Religious moderation is seen as a powerful way to tackle this problem; thus, it must be implemented in society starting at school levels. The various ways of embedding religious moderation values proposed above are not limited to English language instructions. With some tweaks in the teaching materials and/or exercises, other school subjects, especially the ones categorized as social studies, definitely can apply the same principle.

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