Developing English Literacy Skills to Promote Religious Moderation through English for Islamic Studies Programs among Indonesian Muslim Youth

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment through community service should have positive impacts across sectors, including education. Currently, strong English-language literacy among young Indonesian Muslims is considered vital for understanding and promoting moderate Islamic teachings globally. Thus, this study aims to explore the impact of empowering English education students through English for Islamic Studies programs on their English literacy skills. Three face-to-face programs were employed to depict the advantages of learning English literacy and religious moderation through English for Islamic Studies. This study reveals that the programs were significantly beneficial for them in improving their understanding of religious moderation, especially moderate Islam, by categorizing four indicators of those principles: national commitment, anti-violence, tolerance, and the accommodation of local wisdom and culture. Moreover, program participants improve their English literacy, specifically in reading and writing, by absorbing English technical terms related to religious moderation. The implication of the study was, first, that the implementation of English for Islamic Studies beneficially develops the participants' English literacy, specifically in reading and writing skills. Second, the program content has positively influenced participants' understanding of the principles of religious moderation within moderate Islam. It enhanced their ability to analyze religious moderation practices in their environment using four indicators of moderation.

Keywords: community service program, English for Islamic studies, English literacy, Muslim youth, 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 worldwide, from the latest news on the nation's economic developments to the current 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 (Ahmadvand, 2025; Fuente-Cobo et al., 2023; Rahmaniar & Nasution, 2025; Ridwan & Abbas, 2025; Zhang, 2025). This pattern suggests that the English language is essential for disseminating religious teachings and information (Muhalim, 2022). Therefore, it is impossible to ignore the significance of English as a medium of communication. Thus, imparting English literacy to future generations of young Muslims is required to educate them to propagate Islamic ideals across global societies.

Literacy commonly refers to the knowledge and skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Literacy is the capacity to read, write, and communicate effectively for the purpose of acquiring and producing information (Voyager Sopris Learning, 2023). It is also used to recognize the abilities in identifying, understanding, creating, and computing various contexts (Norton, 2010). Literacy has evolved through time, much like the subject of English. Literacy in English was originally defined as the capacity to read and write print texts, but this definition has been broadened to include "multi-literacies," including textual, digital, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modalities of communication in English and other languages (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Literacy is a crucial aspect of the educational process for understanding the content or materials received. Implementing the student's knowledge and skills is needed to positively impact their competence, readiness, and attitude (Rezai et al., 2025). According to PISA data from 2022, Indonesian students' literacy ranked 69th out of 80 countries, with an overall score of 369 (OECD, 2023). It is strongly indicated that Indonesian students' literacy is below the international average.

Regarding literacy, English has a unique and historic importance. The teaching of reading, writing, and visual and oral communication has always been, and continues to be, a major component of the English learning process. In this study, the focus of English literacy instruction is reading and writing, and participants will be encouraged to develop their skills in moderate Islamic discourse in English. Participants will be provided with reading comprehension practices on moderate Islam. According to Puspitasari (2021), eight literacy activities can be implemented in the learning process, including directed reading-thinking activity, guided reading, reading with multimedia assistance, thinking aloud, reading aloud, dictating, and recognizing letters and writing. During the writing activity, they will be given opportunities to discuss and write about the issues related to moderate Islam that they encounter in their everyday lives. Thus, it will encourage program participants to delve deeper into their experiences encountering the characteristics of moderate Islam and to express them in English.

As the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia is regarded as the center of Islamic teachings, particularly for its moderate Islamic principles (tho Seeth, 2023). For the purpose of resolving various religious issues, Muslim and non-Muslim majority nations are focusing a significant amount of emphasis on Islamic moderation. It occurs because moderate Islam is seen as a means of fighting extremism, radicalization, intolerance, and exclusivist ideologies (Dodego & Witro, 2020a; Islam & Khatun, 2015). A number of contemporary Indonesian Muslim academics are significant in the worldwide dissemination of moderate Islam (Akmaliah et al., 2024; Hoesterey, 2023; Jubba et al., 2022). They use English to share their perspectives on social media and to promote their work to foreign publications. It demonstrates that the notion of Islamic moderation can be disseminated internationally through English literacy.

Religious moderation is often defined as a religious group's tolerance of other religions while also avoiding liberalism. Thus, the notion of religious moderation, especially among Indonesian Muslims, is defined in terms of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) concepts and policies on religious moderation. The MoRA identifies the qualities of those who practice religious moderation, specifically whether they demonstrate religious tolerance, national commitment, and cultural accommodation. Thus, as a new concept and policy in Indonesia, religious moderation warrants further research, as there is currently insufficient information in this field (Abidin Bagir & Mubarok, 2022; Akmaliah et al., 2024; Hoesterey, 2023).

The words 'religious moderation', 'moderate Muslim,' and 'moderate Islam' are highly contextualized since various places and situations convey varying shades of meaning (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019; Tim Kelompok Kerja Moderasi Beragama Kementerian Agama RI, 2020). To characterize Muslims, Islam, and Islamists, as well as their connection

with the West, however, these specific vocabularies were developed by the media and academics against the 1979 Iranian revolution (Beyer, 2000; Wani, 2024). In this setting, professionals deemed 'moderation' an appropriate term to describe the then-emerging scenario. Since that time, "it has become a buzzword among journalists, academics, policymakers, and politicians.

In addition, the 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 (Zinira, 2022). Promoting moderate Islamic ideals becomes a vital aspect of presenting Indonesia as an example of a peaceful nation to global communities in light of this challenge.

Using the 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 (Akçayır et al., 2016). 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 for disseminating information to promote moderate Islam worldwide. In conjunction with the British Council, the administration of West Java Province developed the English for Ulama (EFU) program to train Indonesian Ulama (Islamic scholars) from various Islamic mass groups in West Java to serve as agents of moderate Islam globally (Safei, 2021). Thus, they used English to communicate moderate Islamic discourse.

As digital natives, a significant number of Muslim youths lack the English proficiency necessary to promote their ideals as part of moderate Islam. Although some of them have a strong background in Islamic education, their English proficiency as an international language remains a challenge (Hamid & Ali, 2023; Safei, 2021). 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 (Hamid & Ali, 2023; Hidayati, 2017; Parajuli, 2021). 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.

Furthermore, Islamic moderation values can be promoted for global communities as a solution to save Muslim millennials from extremism, radicalization, intolerance, and exclusivism (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019; Tim Kelompok Kerja Moderasi Beragama Kementerian Agama RI, 2020). Teaching the values of moderate Islam in English will enrich students' English skills and their understanding of moderate Islam. English for Islamic Studies (EFIS) is a part of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which focuses on the delivery of Islamic content in academic settings (Abudhahir et al., 2015). ESP design is tailored to the specific subject areas of language and content. It consists of pre-reading information, reading passages, structure review, vocabulary, dialogue, and pronunciation review. ESP is also used to develop students' language skills by learning grammatical structures, technical terms, and general vocabulary related to content materials. In this study, EFIS will be used to specifically discuss moderate Islam in Indonesia to be promoted in a global context. The content will also focus on examples of moderate Islam within Indonesian society.

Several studies have examined integrating Islamic values of moderation into English language learning. First, the study conducted by Safei, which analyzes the English for Ulama (EFU) program in West Java Province (Safei, 2021). The program aimed to train Ulama in West

Java in moderate Islam and to develop their English skills before promoting moderate Islam globally. Safei stated that this program is one of the best examples of promoting moderate Islam for foreign diplomacy and the global network. Second, the study by Sholeh (2021) showed that instilling Islamic moderation could be achieved through English subjects. It can be integrated through English lesson plans, learning materials, teaching and learning activities, and evaluation. It also eliminated students' negative attitudes towards English, which is associated with a symbol of Western culture. He found that Islamic moderation, such as *syura* (discussion), *musawah* (egalitarianism), *tathawur wa ibtikar* (dynamic, creative, and innovative), and *tasamuh* (tolerance), can be integrated into English teaching and learning. Third, the Daviq (2020) study found that the integration of Islamic moderation values into English language teaching in higher education was observed only in Indonesia.

Therefore, the aim of this community service program is to improve the English literacy of young Muslims and empower them to promote moderate Islam through online and digital media. This initiative is anticipated to examine the English literacy requirements of young Muslims in the promotion of moderate Islam. It is also meant to provide insights into the significance of English and to foster an appreciation of local knowledge as components of moderate Islam. At the conclusion of the program, participants must provide English-language content that promotes moderate Islam.

METHOD

This study was conducted as a qualitative participatory action research (PAR) project, explicitly framed as an applied educational intervention within the EFIS framework. The PAR approach was selected to align with the program and empowerment mission, ensuring that participants were not merely subjects of research but active co-creators of knowledge and materials (De Oliveira, 2023; Jordan & Jordan, 2008; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). The program was fundamentally a series of integrated workshops that used content-based instruction, in which learning English literacy was driven by engagement with substantive materials on religious moderation (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The primary goal was to empower young Indonesian Muslims by simultaneously developing their practical English skills and their conceptual understanding of moderate Islam, ultimately enabling them to contribute to global discourse.

The research collective consisted of the facilitator-researcher and thirty-two undergraduate students from the English Education Department who served as co-participants. All student participants were Muslim and possessed an intermediate level of English proficiency. Their role was central and active; they contributed to shaping the program's focus through initial discussions, collaborated in generating materials, and critically reflected on their learning journey throughout the process. This partnership was fundamental to the participatory ethos of the project.

The intervention consisted of three iterative workshop cycles, each representing a phase of the PAR process: planning, acting, and reflecting (De Oliveira, 2023; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). The first workshop cycle began with a collaborative diagnostic discussion to identify specific challenges in accessing English-language resources on moderate Islam. Informed by this, the action phase involved facilitated reading and analysis of English texts on religious moderation, leading to group reflections on both content and language barriers. The second cycle used insights from the first to focus on producing descriptive English captions about local examples of moderation. The final cycle was dedicated to the collaborative creation of digital advocacy content. Each workshop concluded with a reflective dialogue in which participants discussed what they had learned, what remained challenging, and how their understanding was evolving.

Data for this qualitative study were generated through three participatory methods

designed to capture the intervention's process and outcomes. The primary data sources were the participant-generated content, specifically the sixteen pieces of digital content created in English, which served as tangible evidence of applied learning and conceptual understanding. Secondly, transcripts from focused group discussions (FGDs), held at the end of each workshop cycle, provided rich narrative data on participants' changing perceptions, challenges encountered, and sense of empowerment. Finally, detailed facilitator field notes documented observations of group dynamics and the collaborative creation process, adding a layer of reflexive commentary on the action research process.

The qualitative data from all sources were analyzed thematically. These themes were then used as a lens to analyze the digital contents, evaluating how the participants' understanding was manifested in their creative work. The analysis was not a solitary researcher activity but was informed by member-checking discussions, where preliminary interpretations were shared with participants to ensure they resonated with their experiences. As a result, this triangulation of contents, dialogue, and observation provides a deep, nuanced understanding of the intervention's impact.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The participatory action research (PAR) cycles yielded rich qualitative data, primarily through the sixteen participant-generated digital contents, focus group discussion (FGD) transcripts, and facilitator field notes. The analysis reveals a synergistic outcome central to the project's aims: the development of functional English literacy was inextricably linked to a deeper, more articulate conceptual understanding of religious moderation. This section presents and discusses these integrated findings, structured thematically around the four indicators of religious moderation that served as both content pillars and language-learning objectives that can be seen in Table 1.

Table1. *Categorization of Participant-Generated Digital Content on Religious Moderation*

No.	Indicators / Theme	Participant Pairs	Caption Summary or Core Message	Illustration Description
1.		AR-SS	Advocates for national commitment through daily actions (loving country, preserving culture) and ceremonies (Independence Day), even within *pesantren*.	Collage of patriotic stock images (flags, ceremonies, traditional attire).
2.	**National Commitment**	AL-DA	Positions religious moderation as a national strategy, arguing that Indonesia's strength lies in unifying diverse groups while respecting religion.	Conceptual design highlighting unity in diversity (possibly with national symbols).
3.		NH-AP	Argues that religious moderation must be escorted by all societal sectors, leveraging Indonesia's "social capital" of cultural diversity and cooperative traditions.	Patriotic couples in traditional attire bringing Indonesian flags on bamboo sticks
4.	**Tolerance**	BY-HW	Defines religious tolerance and gives a historical example: Sunan Kudus promoting buffalo sacrifice to respect Hindu neighbors.	Images depicting the acculturation of Hinduism and Islam.

No.	Indicators / Theme	Participant Pairs	Caption Summary or Core Message	Illustration Description
5.		AN-YS	Highlights Indonesia's strong tolerance, exemplified by the side-by-side Al Hikmah Mosque and GKJ Joyodiningratan church in Solo sharing resources.	Stock images (Google) depicting interfaith harmony in Indonesia.
6.		NA-MM	Calls for Muslim awareness of diversity, urging students to contribute positively to ideology and politics with tolerance and anti-radicalism.	Infographic about people making circle together credited to @undp.
7.		MN-AA	Philosophically links tolerance and moderation, using the Qur'an and hadith to frame difference as a necessity for mutual understanding.	Likely a text-based graphic with religious and national symbols.
8.		RQ-MAS	Critiques the hijab ban in France as illiberal, framing the right to religious expression as a matter of freedom and identity.	Graphic supporting the #HandsOffMyHijab movement.
9.		SK-DP	Presents Bali's Puja Mandala complex as a perfect, tangible example of five major religions coexisting harmoniously.	Photograph of the Puja Mandala complex in Bali.
10.		AB-NP	Emphasizes the need to instill tolerance, using the Al Hikmah Mosque and GKJ Joyodiningratan in Solo as a prime example of practical cooperation.	Image of the side-by-side mosque and church.
11.		UK-ANP	Condemns state violence and coercion using the case of Mahsa Amini in Iran, asserting that Islam is peaceful and non-coercive.	News-style graphic or photo related to the Iran protests.
12.	**Anti-Violence**	NS-HAS	Quotes Gandhi to affirm that true religion (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) is based on truth and non-violence, which is essential for moderation.	Quote graphic likely featuring an image of Gandhi or peaceful symbols.
13.		MA-MZ	Argues that religious moderation prevents division, using Southwest Sumba as an Indonesian example of non-violent, harmonious interfaith youth collaboration.	Photo(s) depicting interfaith harmony in NTT/Sumba.

No.	Indicators / Theme	Participant Pairs	Caption Summary or Core Message	Illustration Description
14.		RA-LAS	Defines a moderate society by the presence of tolerance, high national commitment, and an anti-violence/radicalism stance.	Conceptual graphic representing a peaceful, pluralistic society.
15.		KU-MIA	Explains Islam's accommodative nature, using Sunan Kalijaga's method of adopting local culture for proselytization as a historical model.	Graphic related to Javanese/Islamic culture.
16.	Accom. Local Culture	MD-IS	Details Sunan Kudus's practical acculturation: prohibiting cow slaughter out of respect for Hindus and building the Kudus Minaret from hybrid cultural elements.	Photograph of the historic Kudus Minaret.

*Note: *Total per theme includes National Commitment (3), Tolerance (7), Anti-Violence (4), and Accommodating Local Culture (2).*

Digital Contents of Moderate Islam for Social Media Platforms

As a key output of the program, participants collaborated in pairs to create sixteen distinct digital assets for social media. Each item was produced by a duo consisting of 32 individuals. Participants created the material according to their preferences, as the researcher did not restrict them from articulating their views on religious moderation. Considering the programs attended by all participants, they commenced developing content based on the previously offered program materials. The program materials focus on the indicators of religious moderation proposed by the MoRA—national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture—the participants used this framework to categorize their content themes.

An analysis of the created materials reveals a clear preference in topic selection: tolerance was the most prevalent theme, followed by anti-violence, national commitment, and accommodation of local culture. Tolerance emerged as the most favorable indicator because participants were familiar with this indicator in their local environment. The EFIS programs on moderate Islam heightened their awareness of the significance of tolerance in daily life, encompassing inter-religious activities, interactions with neighboring religious institutions, interfaith dialogue, personal religious choices, and understanding others' religious practices and rituals.

The value of tolerance emerged as the most favored subject, reflected in seven digital pieces. Participants cited their lived experiences and the program's discussions as key sources of inspiration, highlighting tolerance in daily inter-religious life, dialogue, and respect for diverse practices. BY-HW and AB-NP highlighted historical and contemporary models of tolerance, such as Sunan Kudus's adaptation of using buffalo rather than cows for sacrifice to respect Hindu neighbors, and the side-by-side coexistence of the Al Hikmah Mosque and the GKJ Joyodiningratan church in Solo (See Number 5 in Table 1). On the same hand, AN-YS and SK-DP showcased physical symbols of harmony, including a mosque and a church built adjacent to each other in Solo, and the "Puja Mandala" complex in Bali, which houses five major religions in one compound (See Number 9 in Table 1).

In addition, RQ-MAS addressed global tolerance issues, discussing movement hashtags such as #HandsOffMyHijab that advocate for the freedom of religious expression amid bans in

some European countries (See Number 8 in Table 1). Then, NA-MM calls for Muslim awareness of diversity, urging students to contribute positively to ideology and politics through tolerance and anti-radicalism (See Number 6 in Table 1), while MN-AA philosophically links tolerance and moderation, using the Qur'an and hadith to frame difference as a necessity for mutual understanding (See Number 7 in Table 1).

Subsequently, the anti-violence value was the next most favored indicator. This indicator, established by NS-HAS, UK-ANP, RA-LAS, and MA-MZ, is represented by four digital contents. 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. UK-ANP and others used the international response to the death of Mahsa Amini in Iran to argue against state coercion and for personal freedom, emphasizing that "Islam is peaceful and not coercive" (See Number 11 in Table 1). At the same time, NS-HAS employed quotes from figures like Mahatma Gandhi to frame non-violence as a core religious principle (See Number 12 in Table 1).

Furthermore, it exhibited a poster advocating peace by ceasing violence, as the essence of global religion is peace. RA-LAS and MA-MZ connected anti-violence directly to religious moderation in Indonesia's pluralistic context, citing harmonious interfaith youth collaborations in regions like Southwest Sumba as practical examples (See Number 13 in Table 1). 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.

The participants developed digital resources that were both respectful of indigenous knowledge and culture and aligned with the nation's overarching objective. Three pieces of content focused on national commitment, framing love for the nation and its unifying symbols as integral to a religious moderation identity. Regarding the national commitment value, participants produced several contents, including two posters depicting the Indonesian flag, individuals attired in national ceremonial costumes, and traditional garments.

For instance, AR-SS emphasized tangible expressions of nationalism, such as commemorating Independence Day, preserving culture, and buying local products, noting that these practices are actively observed even in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) (See Number 1 in Table 1). In addition, AL-DA and NH-AP explored the philosophical foundation of Indonesia as a state that harmonizes religious values with local wisdom and national unity (See Number 2 in Table 1), arguing that religious moderation is essential to safeguarding the nation's identity and social capital.

Simultaneously, they produced content that illustrated the advantages of integrating indigenous culture and expertise. Two participants created content on accommodating local culture, demonstrating how religious practice can respectfully integrate with pre-existing traditions. For example, KU-MIA discussed the accommodative nature of Islam in general, using the historical method of Sunan Kalijaga, who utilized existing cultural arts for propagation (See Number 15 in Table 1). 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 by offering various food items to God and the community.

On the other hand, MD-IS (See Number 16 in Table 1) provided a specific case study of Sunan Kudus, detailing his prohibitions (e.g., against cow slaughter to respect Hindus) and architectural integrations (e.g., the Kudus Minaret featuring Hindu temple styles and Chinese plates) as enduring lessons in cultural sensitivity and religious moderation. 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 prohibition of cow slaughter, the construction of towers and mosques, the use of Chinese pottery plates, and the acculturation of Kudus's cultural legacy offer significant lessons about local culture and religious moderation.

The digital content created by the participants successfully translated the theoretical indicators of religious moderation into relatable, context-rich narratives for social media. The distribution of topics underscores a strong participant-driven focus on interpersonal and social harmony (tolerance and anti-violence), while also engaging with themes of national identity and cultural integration. These assets exemplify how principles of moderate Islam can be communicated effectively through modern digital storytelling.

Workshop Materials: Digital Literacy in the Context of Religious Moderation

The session began with statistical data on the trend of intolerance toward non-Muslim groups in Indonesia, based on the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI, *Lembaga Survei Indonesia*) (2020), involving about 1,500 respondents. The survey reveals a clear trend of increasing religious intolerance regarding elected officials over the past three years. Between 2016 and 2018, the percentage of Indonesian Muslims who opposed a non-Muslim president increased by 11 percentage points, rising from 48% to 59%. Similar patterns were also observed for lower-level elected public officials (Shidiq et al., 2020). This was followed by the development of digital literacy in English, using two indicators: the internalization of anti-violence and tolerance ideals, as outlined in the Model of Digital Literacy (Sharpe et al., 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. In the real world, every individual requires a mentor 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 (UNESCO, 2023; Berger & Golan, 2024; Gomes et al., 2025). 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 following questions.

This program's session presents several intriguing research-based statistics that demonstrate the extent of religious moderation among Indonesian college students. For instance, according to a study conducted by Alvara Research Center (2018). A survey was conducted involving 1,800 students from 25 leading universities in Indonesia and 2,400 high school students from various regions across the country (Alvara Research Center, 2018). The objective of this survey was to explore the potential of early detection of radicalism within campus populations as a predictive factor for Indonesia's future. This study revealed that 23.5% of students advocating for an Islamic state assert that Islam should be applied comprehensively. 17.8% of students regard the *khilafah* (Islamic state) 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" (Alvara Research Center, 2018).

Moreover, in the program session, the participants discussed a study from PPIM (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2018) that 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.

Synthesizing Literacy and Conceptual Understanding

The workshops created a context where English literacy was not an abstract goal but a necessary tool for engaging with and expressing complex socio-religious ideas. Analysis of FGD transcripts indicates a shift in participant perception. One participant reflected, "… through reading and discussing the materials in the program, I learned how to provide examples of certain concepts in religious moderation and contextualize these terms based on my personal experiences and surroundings." This statement encapsulates the core finding: the acquisition of specific thematic vocabulary (e.g., tolerance, plurality, acculturation, radicalism, harmony) and discursive skills directly facilitated and deepened conceptual engagement.

For instance, the term moderation signifies a state of being moderate, prioritizing equilibrium in perspectives, ethics, and character in interactions with individuals and governmental entities (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019; Tim Kelompok Kerja Moderasi Beragama Kementerian Agama RI, 2020). 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 (Abidin Bagir & Mubarok, 2022; Akmaliah et al., 2024). Various variables can serve as benchmarks for religious moderation, including national commitment, anti-violence, tolerance, and the accommodation of local wisdom and culture (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). These four indicators can be used to assess an individual's degree of religious moderation and vulnerability in Indonesia. These deficiencies must be acknowledged to facilitate the implementation of measures to enhance religious moderation.

The digital contents stand as the primary evidence of this synthesis. They demonstrate how participants applied their growing English literacy to analyze, categorize, and advocate for principles of moderate Islam. The following thematic analysis explores how each of the four MoRA indicators was articulated through English, revealing both the participants' learning and their empowered voices.

The first indicator is National Commitment. It 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 (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019; Tim Kelompok Kerja Moderasi Beragama Kementerian Agama RI, 2020). Three contents engaged deeply with national commitment (Numbers 1-3 in Table 1). Participants used English to express nuanced ideas about citizenship, weaving together references to Pancasila, national rituals, and the role of Islamic institutions, such as *pesantren*, in fostering patriotism. Therefore, this required translating culturally and politically laden concepts for an imagined global audience (Norton, 2010).

For example, one content (See Number 3 in Table 1) thoughtfully argued that Indonesia's unique "social capital"—its diversity and traditional values—serves as a foundation for moderation. The ability to express this sophisticated synthesis of national identity and religious principle in English marks a significant achievement in argumentative writing and conceptual fluency. It demonstrates participants grappling with how to position Indonesian Islamic moderation within a global dialogue, a direct aim of the empowerment program.

The second indicator is Tolerance. It denotes an open, generous, willing, and peaceful acceptance of differences. 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 others' perspectives (Alvara Research

Center, 2018; Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). The data indicate that tolerance was the most accessible and frequently expressed indicator, featuring prominently in 7 of the 16 contents (e.g., Numbers 4-9 in Table 1). FGD discussions suggested this was due to its tangible presence in participants' daily lives within Indonesia's pluralistic society. Their English-language content moved beyond dictionary definitions to narrate lived experiences.

For instance, contents described concrete examples: the side-by-side coexistence of the Al Hikmah Mosque and Javanese Christian Church (GKJ) of Joyodiningratan in Solo (See Number 9 in Table 1) (Firdaus & Rahmat, 2019), the historical precedent of Sunan Kudus promoting buffalo sacrifice to respect Hindu neighbors (See Number 4 in Table 1), and the interfaith architectural harmony of Bali's Puja Mandala complex (See Number 9 in Table 1). Crafting these narratives in English required participants to employ descriptive and explanatory writing skills, using sequential connectors and culturally specific vocabulary. This prevalence shows that the program successfully connected a core theoretical principle to observable reality, with English serving as the medium for articulating it and for its potential global dissemination.

The third indicator is Anti-Violence. 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 (Alvara Research Center, 2018; Dodego & Witro, 2020b; Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). Radicalism fundamentally involves the mentality and actions of an individual or group that uses violent methods to attain their objectives. Radical movements typically contest the existing social structure and advocate rapid, significant transformations (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). Radical organizations may employ many techniques, including intimidation of dissenters, to achieve their objectives; thus, radicalism is often associated with terrorism.

The theme of anti-violence was robustly explored in four contents (See Number 10-13 in Table 1). Here, English literacy empowered participants to critically engage with both global events and local contexts. They utilized English to analyze international issues, such as the protests in Iran following Mahsa Amini's death, framing their critique within an Islamic discourse of non-coercion and peace (See Number 10 in Table 1). Simultaneously, they applied this indicator locally, using English to celebrate harmonious interfaith relations in regions like Southwest Sumba and to advocate against radicalism (See Number 12 in Table 1). The process of constructing these arguments required precision in word choice (e.g., coercion, harmony, radicalism) and the ability to build a persuasive narrative. This indicates an advancement beyond basic literacy toward critical digital literacy, where participants used English to deconstruct narratives of violence and propose counter-narratives of peace—a key objective of the ESP-based intervention.

The fourth indicator is the Accommodation of Local Wisdom and Culture. The extent of receptiveness to adopting religious practices that align with local culture and traditions may be assessed through rituals and behaviors congruent with local customs (Dodego & Witro, 2020b). 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 (Jubba et al., 2022; Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). Non-rigid religious traditions are distinguished by their openness to practices and behaviors that prioritize virtue over strict adherence to normative truths, provided they do not contravene religious principles. Conversely, some groups exhibit intolerance towards tradition and culture, perceiving the incorporation of these elements into religion as a threat to their purity.

The theme of accommodation to local wisdom and culture was explored in two contents (Numbers 14-15 in Table 1), which provided some of the most culturally nuanced content. Participants used English to explain historical and ongoing processes of acculturation, such as the architectural and cultural synthesis embodied in the Kudus Minaret, which incorporates the

main building materials of a Hindu temple and Chinese ceramics (See Number 15 in Table 1). Discussing Sunan Kudus's teachings or the proselytizing methods of the Wali Songo in English demanded command of specific historical, theological, and anthropological terminology. This task enhanced their explanatory and analytical writing skills, as they were not merely describing but also interpreting the significance of cultural accommodation as a form of religious moderation. These contents underscore how the program fostered a sense of pride in local heritage, positioning participants as knowledgeable advocates able to explain the unique character of Indonesian Islam to a worldwide audience.

English Literacy Empowerment through English for Islamic Studies in Religious Moderation

The findings confirm that a PAR framework employing an ESP (specifically, English for Islamic Studies) approach effectively transforms language learning into a vehicle for agentive civic participation. By co-creating digital content for a real-world purpose, participants engaged in authentic communication tasks (Teng et al., 2025; Wiboolyasarin et al., 2023; Widiastuti et al., 2025)that directly addressed the gap identified in the literature regarding young Muslims' readiness for global discourse.

The predominance of "tolerance" and "anti-violence" in the contents suggests these are the most resonant entry points for youth engagement with moderation. Meanwhile, the successful articulation of "national commitment" and "local accommodation" demonstrates a capacity for more complex, historically grounded discourse. This progression mirrors the development of their English literacy from descriptive to analytical, scaffolded by the workshop cycles.

Furthermore, the English literacy skills of the program participants were enhanced through two methods: English-based programs and the development of English-based content. Participants were urged to enhance their reading and writing abilities in moderate Islamic discourse in English, specifically referencing the religious moderation indicators set forth by the MoRA, which encompass national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local wisdom and culture (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). The participants have been provided with reading comprehension exercises on moderate Islamic issues. 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 participants to explore their experiences with the attributes of religious moderation and to express them in English.

Therefore, this community service intervention achieved its dual aims through participatory pedagogy. First, it developed functional and critical English literacy by embedding language acquisition within a meaningful, relevant context. Second, it fostered a reflective, articulate, and advocacy-oriented understanding of religious moderation. The digital content is not merely academic exercises; it is proto-advocacy material, signaling the participants' emerging capacity to contribute informed, moderate voices to the global conversation on Islam. This aligns with the broader national and educational goal of empowering Indonesian Muslim youth as ambassadors for a peaceful and pluralistic Islamic discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that a participatory, content-based approach within an English for Islamic Studies (EFIS) framework serves as a potent pedagogical model for the dual empowerment of Indonesian Muslim youth. By situating English literacy development within the meaningful and urgent context of promoting religious moderation, the program successfully transcended conventional language instruction. The participatory action research (PAR) methodology was instrumental in this process, transforming participants from passive learners

into active co-creators of knowledge and digital advocacy content.

The findings reveal a synergistic outcome: the cultivation of functional English literacy—particularly in reading comprehension and persuasive digital writing—was inextricably linked to a more nuanced, critical, and articulate conceptual grasp of religious moderation. Participants did not merely learn vocabulary; they employed English as a tool to analyze, categorize, and advocate for the four key indicators (national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture) within their own socio-religious environment. The digital content they produced is a testament to this synthesis, translating abstract principles into relatable narratives grounded in local wisdom, historical precedent, and contemporary global issues.

In conclusion, this community service initiative provides a replicable model for educational empowerment. It confirms that integrating English for Islamic Studies (EFIS) with civic and religious education can equip young Muslims with the literacy skills and confident voice necessary to contribute to global discourses on Islam. The program effectively addresses a gap, preparing a generation not only to understand the principles of moderate Islam but also to articulate them in the international sphere, thereby positioning them as informed agents for Indonesia's pluralistic and peaceful Islamic tradition. Future iterations of such programs are recommended to expand on this foundation, potentially incorporating more advanced digital storytelling techniques and facilitating direct international dialogue to further amplify these youth-generated narratives of moderation.

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