

## The Use of Thematic Reading-Based Approach in Internalizing Religious Moderation Understanding in ELT: Students Voice

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### ABSTRACT

Thematic reading-based approach for religious moderation values in ELT is one of the significant strategies in internalizing religious moderation values to prevent radicalism in higher education. This study aimed to investigate the student's understanding of religious moderation and answer the research questions related to the strategy used and the teaching method used by the teacher based on the student's voice. This study used qualitative approaches in gaining the data. The respondents are students from the second semester of the English and Literature department of Adab dan Humanities Faculty, UIN Alauddin Makassar. This research revealed the student's knowledge and understanding of religious moderation, from 4 indicators of religious moderation namely: tolerance, national commitment, accommodating culture, and against violence, a few students are identified be intoleran to certain cases. In addition, the findings show that tolerance is the most preferred section material for the using thematic reading-based approach and film is the most interesting learning media for them.

**Keywords:** *Reading Based Approach, Religious Moderation, Thematic Reading*

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### INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has drawn a lot of attention in both the east and west for its success in resolving many theological problems. Because Indonesian societies are multiethnic, religious, and cultural and are expected to make religion an ideological, ethical, and moral source, religious moderation within education has become particularly important there. (Adawiyah et al., 2021). The religious moderation values that can be practiced in education are tolerance, justice, balance, and equality (Anwar & Muhayati, 2021). The values can be internalized into several subjects, such as religious education, faith, Pancasila and citizenship education (PPKN), and general courses with integrated syllabus design.

Religious moderation is known in Arabic by the Islamic term *wasathiyyah*. In language (Ash Salibi: 2001, Ibn Faris: 1979, and Ibn Manzur, tt) it has been explained that the meaning of *wasathiyyah* leads to the meaning of fair, primary, choice, or best, and is balanced between two opposing positions (Syatar et al. 2020). Seen from the general understanding, religious moderation means promoting balance in terms of beliefs, morals, and character as an expression of the religious attitude of a particular

individual or group (Ahmad Sofyan, Johan Aristya Lesmana, 2022). Religious moderation shows a tolerant attitude, respects every difference of opinion, respects pluralism, and is not imposing intention in the name of religious understanding through violence (Akhmadi 2008)

The Tri Dharma of Higher Education, which includes academic components (teaching and learning), research, and community service, is meant to be embodied in higher education. (Lisan, 2018). Academics are the most important factor and have the greatest potential to influence students' attitudes about religious moderation. More specifically, curriculum, syllabus, teaching materials, and resources that have a religious moderation approach can all be developed to support academic progress. (Baidawi et al., 2020). Courses conducted in tertiary institutions can cover the principles and practices of religious moderation. Since lecturers are the ones who will transmit knowledge and values to students, they are also indirectly the target when the notion of religious moderation is incorporated into the curriculum. (Amin et al., 2019). The thematic approach in this research is assumed as a method of instruction and learning in which numerous curriculum topics are related and incorporated within a theme. A thematic approach to instruction is an effective tool for unifying the curriculum and removing separate lessons and reductionist teaching methods. It enables learning to be more organic than when school activities are fragmented. Here, students participate actively and pick up new skills through theme learning. With the general goal of enabling creative inquiry, cognitive abilities like reading, thinking, memorizing, and writing are placed in the framework of a real-life situation (Okoro & Okoro, 2016).

The current course materials, student learning activities, and the teacher's instructional strategies are thought to have failed to produce the expected results for learning English and satisfy the learners' professional and academic goals in Indonesia, particularly at Islamic institutions. This problem arises because most instructional materials, particularly for students who are not English majors, are prepared as PowerPoint presentations rather than handouts and sheets of paper. They gathered information from a variety of sources, including a book and the internet (Rizal, S, 2019). These educational materials might not meet the needs of the student because they might not address those needs, even though educational materials are essential to the teaching and learning process (Rohmah, Z, 2015). Additionally, learning activities, teaching strategies, and other learning materials do not motivate students to learn. Students' voice is a developing movement in education in an era of greater accountability and quantified student results. Students take an active and equal part in planning, learning, and directing their classroom instruction as well as helping to define school practices and regulations. This is in contrast to a top-down, teacher-directed approach to learning. All parties involved in this fundamental conceptual shift must adopt the perspective that every person, regardless of age, culture, socioeconomic level, or other qualifying qualities, has something to teach the group as a whole (John & Briel, 2017).

Although there are historical examples of students participating in educational decision-making, the idea of actively including students in school planning has only recently gained traction. (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). There are many ways to define a student's voice, but for the sake of this essay, it shall be understood to mean systematic involvement and empowerment of students in school decision-making. (Mitra and Gross, 2009). This paper will specifically address the role students can play regarding the content and organization of the curriculum in their classrooms and schools, rather

than on student voice in all aspects of school decision-making, which is crucial to highlight. Participatory design projects are one popular way to encourage student voices in this particular field. The design will refer to a project that relies on students' participation in the design (Könings et al., 2011). It should be noted that the phrases "student voice" and "student engagement" will be used interchangeably throughout this essay. The word will specifically apply to the idea of student participation in curriculum preparation and execution at the class, school, or a larger level in both situations.

A student's voice has two distinct meanings. In addition to referring to teaching approaches and tactics that are based on student preferences, interests, passions, and aspirations, it also refers to the expression of values, ideas, beliefs, and viewpoints by individuals and groups of students in a school. Students feel more invested in their education and can develop passions that will boost their persistence when teachers listen to and take into account their preferences, interests, and opinions (Donnini, 2015). Therefore, this study focuses on gaining the student's voice in several components namely, students' awareness of religious moderation, language learning materials (thematic reading-based approach), and the preference of the learning media that the lecturer in reading for authentic text classroom in relation with religious moderation value. Student's Voice is about respecting and the learning that happens as a result of utilizing the skills and diverse voices in our classrooms. It focuses on recognizing the innate leadership potential in all students. (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014).

## **METHOD**

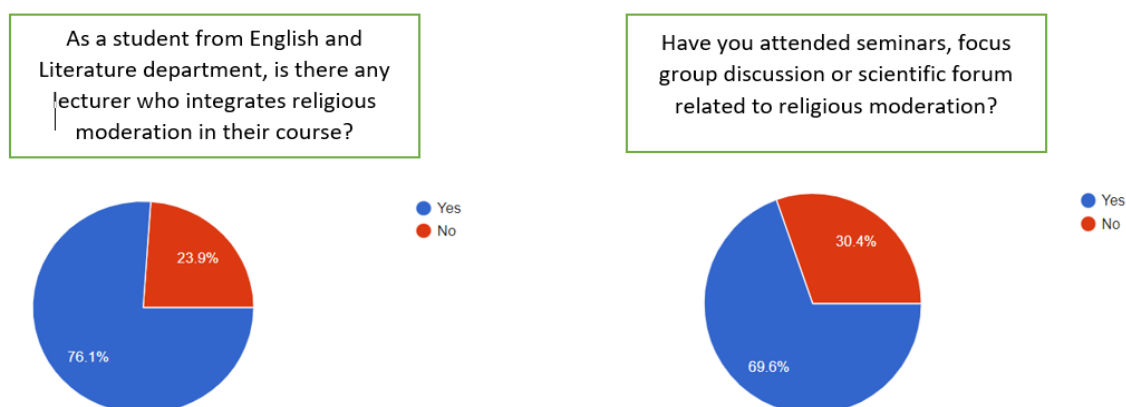
Qualitative techniques of data collection were adopted in this research. Thus, the data were collected by distributing a questionnaire to 60 respondents from the third semester of the English and Literature Department. This study chose semester three because they had taken the reading for authentic text course which was the subject of this study. This study intends to get the student's understanding of religious moderation and to answer research questions related to their preference for selecting material and learning media used by the teacher. Another method of data collection was done by conducting a focus group discussion. The focus group discussion was conducted with four groups of students with each group consisting of 5 participants. The descriptive and frequencies analysis were employed to analyze that data from the questionnaire and focus group interviews were analyzed by using thematic methods of data analysis, including coding, categorizing, and emerging themes.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **a. Student's knowledge and understanding of Religious Moderation**

The researcher identified students' awareness of religious moderation values by using the proposed questionnaire by (Ali, 2020) in his previous research in measuring students' religious moderation in higher education. The questionnaire has been adjusted to the four indicators of religious moderation value. The result of this point can be seen in the chart below.

Figure 1  
The student's presentation for their previous knowledge of religious moderation



The given chart above shows the student's knowledge of religious moderation and the involvement of students in activities with the theme of religious moderation. In the aspect of knowledge of theory, it shows that the number of students who know or at least ever heard of religious moderation is greater at 76.1% or 47 students and 23.9% or 13 students, who have not heard of religious moderation. Approximately 69,6% or 40 of students ever join the seminar, workshop, or forum of scientific discussion on religious moderation while 30, 4 % or 20 of students have not accepted material on religious moderation in the form of any activities. Although UIN Alauddin Makassar is an Islamic university under the ministry of religion, not all students are familiar with the term religious moderation which is one of the flagship programs of the ministry of religion. This is also evidenced by the high percentage of students who have never participated in religious moderation activities. Efforts to internalize religious moderation in non-Islamic departments require cooperation from various stakeholders, scientific integration should be a hallmark of Islamic campuses so that students can have broad knowledge and also have an adequate understanding of Islamic values at the same time. Some previous researchers have conducted a similar focus and found that Islamic higher education as a peace laboratory should be strengthening religious moderation content through the digital space as a counterweight to the rapid flow of information in the social media space. The counterbalance in question is counter-narrative in creating substantive and essential religious framing, namely moderate and tolerant (Hefni, 2020). Furthermore, the table below illustrates the student's understanding of religious moderation values from English and Literature students in UIN Alauddin Makassar.

Figure 2  
The student's presentation for their understanding of religious moderation

<i>Indicators of Religious Moderation</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Result</i>	
		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
<i>National Commitment</i>	Do you agree with people who continue to participate in various activities even though they work with	96,3 %	3,6 %

	people who have different religions, ethnicities, and races with the consideration that because we are all compatriots of one nation?		
<i>Accommodating the local culture</i>	Do you agree with the implementation of religion that must be balanced between the world and the hereafter and accommodate the culture and rituals of the local community?	96,2 %	3,8 %
<i>Tolerance</i>	1. Do you agree to be friends with other people with different beliefs and cultural practices?	96,2 %	3,8 %
	2. Do you feel strange if you hear or see worship rituals performed by people who have different beliefs and cultures from yours?	28,3 %	71,7 %
	3. I appreciate it if there are symbols of other religions posted in public places.	94,3%	5,7%
	4. I appreciate the celebration day of other religions by congratulating them	34%	66 %
<i>Against Violence</i>	1. Do you agree that conflicts and violence in society are triggered by the understanding of followers of their religion?	35,8%	62%
	2. Do you agree with people who spread content such as videos and photos that contain hate speech to incite disappointment with their different understanding from others?	98,2%	1,8%

Questions addressed to students to measure understanding of religious moderation are categorized based on indicators of religious moderation, these four indicators should be able to be integrated into various courses, both Islamic and non-Islamic subjects, especially in the social sciences and humanities majors such as English and literature, the results of the table The above shows that the understanding of religious moderation has met the expected expectations although there are still some students who need a deeper understanding. It is around 57 students 96.3% can be stated to have a good national commitment with a willingness to cooperate and participate in various activities involving people with different religious, racial, and cultural backgrounds. building positive interactions is not easy if it is not based on an understanding of multiculturalism and the awareness that we are all bound together in the one unitary republic of Indonesia.

On the other hand, the student's understanding of accommodating local culture also represents a good point of view, and most of the students agree with that condition. The next indicator is tolerance, Of the 4 questions about understanding student tolerance, there are 2 that get responses that need attention. the first is the

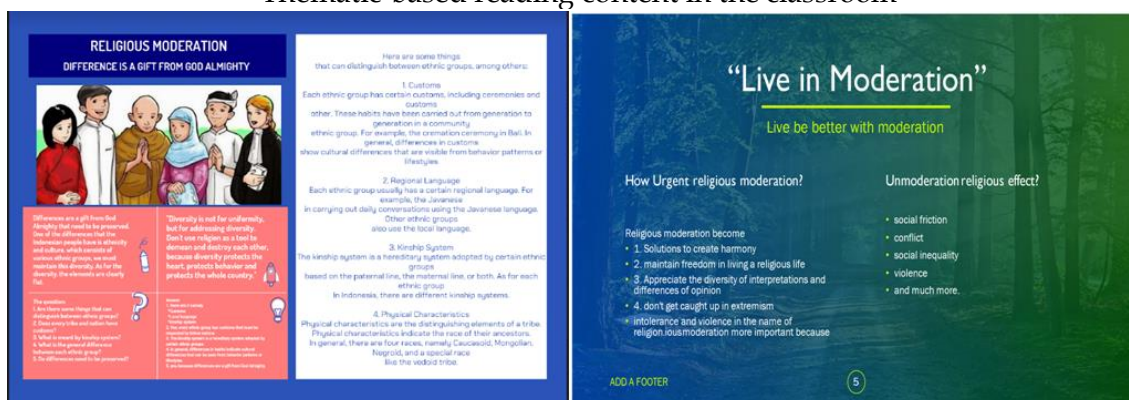
condition where students have not been able to accept or adapt to the rituals of worship of other religions, this is reasonable if it is associated with the context of South Sulawesi where the majority of the population is Muslim, even though their tolerance for rituals of worship of other religions needs to be deepened because they are likely will visit locations where various religions are both majority or minority. the second point is the understanding of giving greetings at the celebration of other religious holidays, this understanding is still a discourse that requires more in-depth study. Students from Islamic universities are expected to have a holistic and comprehensive understanding of tolerance, they should be agents of the peace who can accommodate any differences with an attitude of tolerance. To implement religious moderation in a multicultural society what needs to be done is; to make educational institutions the basis for religious moderation laboratories and carry out a socio-religious approach to religion and the state (Sutrisno, 2019).

The last indicator is against violence, in this term, the students showed that their understanding of religious conflict is mostly triggered by the religion itself, not by the followers. 20 students put their perception in that assumption. While 40 students believe that the religious conflict comes from the religious followers. Education is an appropriate place to instill the character of a peaceful individual, which is currently known as peace education. Peace education is education that promotes a culture of peace, which is transformative and manifested in the form of basic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that can change mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors that can prevent or eliminate violence in the face of conflict (Cook, 2017). Overall, the student's understanding of all indicators of religious moderation seems to be positive. However, it still needs to be improved for further practical implementation in their daily life. Therefore, educational institutions should provide a practical framework for instilling religious moderation values, particularly in the non-Islamic course (Lisan, 2018).

**b. Student's Preference toward the material selection and learning media**

In actual practice, the student's voice has five aspects, including 1. Student participation in educational and civic growth 2. Students as co-inquirers and researchers 3. Student opinions and enthusiasm for instruction and learning 4. Peer tutoring by students 5. Student engagement is an example of the inclusion principle (Cahyo et al., 2019). Students' preference toward the selection material is one of the best practices to involve the students in the context of the students' feedback and interest. The researcher conducted a focus group discussion with 5 groups of students as the representation in reading for authentic text course. The researcher provided some authentic text both in video and powerpoint presentation and elaborated the student's feedback and preference.

Figure 3  
Thematic-based reading content in the classroom



In the focus group discussion, the researcher composed several thematic readings and discussed the content related to the religious moderation value. Then the researcher gained the student's feedback about the material selection.

*"As far as the integration of religious moderation by using thematic reading approach involve the language skill such as reading skill, practice the pronunciation, speaking ability in that course, it will be very interesting." (Ahmad tsabit)*

*"Integrating the values of religious moderation made me more interested in learning because in addition to developing language skills at the same time we also gain knowledge about important issues (Asmida)"*

The students hope that scientific integration does not ignore their main need for mastery of English skills, in fact, students can get both things at the same time, on the one hand, they can get a good understanding of religion and build tolerance, and can improve their language skills. Therefore, the role of educators must maximize their efforts in creating a conducive classroom atmosphere. In integrating certain values, the teacher must pay attention not only to the teaching material but also method of delivering it to students. Class instruction is needed to be based on good teacher-student rapport and emphasizes ethical attribute and integrity in the Islamic way (Rohmana, 2020).

Most of the respondents also said that the variety of material presented in class made them more interested in exploring it. they are interested in finding other sources of material and even try to explore it from other subjects. In this study, the integration of religious moderation in the form of a thematic reading-based approach is an effort made by researchers to instill the value of religious moderation so that students can become agents in creating a campus that is tolerant and has a perspective of religious moderation as desired by the Ministry of Religion. As a multicultural nation, the younger generation must have an open mind, have broad views and be able to adapt to various conditions. Language is part of the culture, and the classroom is the most suitable place to negotiate acceptance of new culture and values while still paying attention to the outputs and outcomes of the learning process.

*Varied sources of material will make students have a deeper understanding of certain materials, we can also expand interdisciplinary knowledge. (Nurul Rahmawati)*

This point of view is related to the result of a previous study from (Nirwana et al., 2021) University as the center of knowledge transformation and also the place for the forging offuture national leaders of the nation is always demanded to be dynamic. Differences in understanding and thinking are common. In general, the integration of religious moderation must be supported by all relevant stakeholders, especially in the context of a multicultural society. First, making educational institutions the basis for religious moderation laboratories.

In this session, students also expressed their preference for the material they liked and the teaching media that has been used in the classroom during the research, particularly in reading for the authentic course. It is quantitatively by filling out a questionnaire form, in general, the results showed different interests.

Figure 4  
Students' preference for the material related to religious moderation

Choose one material that you think is relevant to the values of religious moderation in English language and literature courses

63 responses

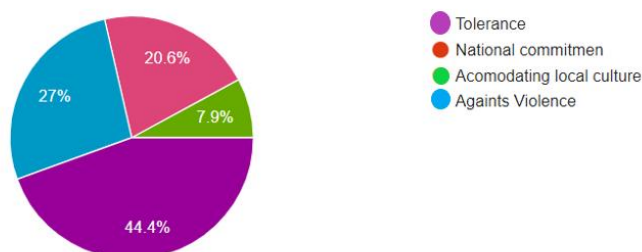


Figure 5  
The student's preference for the teaching media in the classroom

The source of Authentic Reading text	Presentation
Books	42,2 %
Website Based material	24,1 %
Social Media	57,8 %
Film	62,7 %
Newspaper and Magazines	47%

Students' interests and needs are the important points that need to be elaborated on in designing a thematic-based reading approach to internalizing religious moderation values in ELT (Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021). Based on the questionnaire, the researcher found that the preferred issues among the religious moderation indicators, the students preferred the tolerance issue (44,4 %) 32 students, respecting local culture (7,9 %) or 4 students, and against violence (27%) or 18 students and national commitment (20,6%) or 4 students, it means that material content that can be integrated will more about tolerance. Even though, it cannot be concluded that the other issue is not matching the learning material in ELT. This preference is by material provided by the researcher. It is possible to create more interesting material based on the media and teaching methods by the lecturer in the classroom.

In addition, in learning media, the students preferred to collaborate to use movies, and social media such as YouTube, Web-Based materials, books, and reading newspapers or magazines, these are the component of reading for authentic text. The students also considered the learning media based on the classroom situation, such as in online or offline learning. Most of the learning media preference is based on the fact that they are still in an online learning situation. However, in Indonesia, not all students are familiar with the E-Learning system because there may still be some students who have not been able to reach increasingly sophisticated technology that is a concern and still requires more attention from the government (Mahrani, Siti Meutia Sari, 2022). For that reason, some students feel comfortable in direct teaching by using movies or newspapers.

## CONCLUSION

The intricate network of institutional structures and cultures that are established by school administrators, teachers, researchers, and students themselves includes a place for student's voices. In its most conservative form, having a voice simply means speaking up when asked, but there is no guarantee that it will be followed by a necessary response. In contrast, in its most radical form, it calls for "a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students." (Cook-Sather, 2006). In relation to the use of a thematic-reading-based approach in internalizing religious moderation value in ELT, the student's voice creates a significant impact on both the learning process and students' understanding of religious moderation. In the future, this student's voice will be considered in designing an instructional framework that can be implemented in various courses within the English and literature department.

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