

Promoting Religious Moderation through Literary-based Learning: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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Promoting Religious Moderation through Literary-based Learning: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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Abstract This study aims to determine the effectiveness of literary-based learning to promote religious moderation among students. The study was conducted at the Institut Agama Islam Darussalam (IAID) Ciamis-Indonesia, one of the Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. This quasi-experimental research uses nonequivalent control group design—a quasi-experimental research design consisting of two groups, the experimental group and the control group. The research has proven that literary-based learning is useful in promoting and developing religious moderation. Literary-based learning succeeds in increasing students' understanding of the importance of religious moderation, as well as developing moderate attitudes and behaviors in religion, and also creating sincere ethics and friendship for adherents of different faiths.

Keywords Religious moderation, literary-based learning, knowledge, attitudes, behavior, ethics, friendships

Introduction

The real challenges faced by the major religions in the world are extremism, radicalism, intolerance, and exclusivism. Extremism is a challenge for every religious community because extremism not only undermines the teachings of a religion internally, even externally, it creates an evil image of faith. Extremism is often seen as one of the most dangerous threats to humanity in the 21st century. The spread of this phenomenon in the world is not only marked by the increasing number of extremist crimes, but also its various forms (Borissova, Kurguzenkova, & Nikishin, 2018). Some researchers call the rapid growth of religious extremism, threatening the preservation of established religious traditions (Kaldybay, Abdrassilov, Bapayeva, Chaklikova, & Nurnatov, 2019). Extremism, whether religious extremism or left or right extreme, actually has a similar worldview (van Prooijen & Kuijper, 2020). From the Muslims' view, on the one hand, Islamic extremism triggers reactionary extremism from the non-Muslim world; on the other hand, Muslim extremism often arises in response to perceptions of the colonizing and aggressive non-Muslim world (Pratt, 2015).

Radicalism is a big challenge for religions because radicalism destroys social order, tarnishes peace, threatens life, and breeds fear among the people. Radicalization is the process of adopting an extremist value system combined with the expression of approval, support, or use of violence and intimidation as a means of achieving change in society or encouraging others to do so. The final and most extreme stage of radicalization taken by individuals or groups is terrorist activity (Szlachter et al., 2020). The danger of radicalization lies not only in the fact that it can be linked to violence or threats to its use, but can also be a contributing

factor to other forms of harmful effects on society. Also, radicalism in all its types only causes instability, stagnation, and terror (Baskerville, 2018).

Intolerance is also a serious threat to every religion, not only because intolerance is against human rights, polluting places of worship, but also injuring the right of everyone to worship according to their own beliefs. Religious intolerance also often leads to violence (Mara, 2020). The last ideology that threatens civilized society is exclusivism. Exclusivism becomes a significant threat to human civilization, because exclusivism blunts common sense, blocking dialogue and communication, impedes progress, and social welfare. In Qorbani's view (2019), religious exclusivists have no ears to listen and no eyes to see the reality of other religions. Therefore, based on religious exclusivism, logical and rational dialogue between religious traditions is not possible. Indeed the concept of exclusivism itself is often debated among thinkers of religions. Alvin Plantinga, America's leading orthodox Protestant philosopher of God, for example, views the differences that exist between religions as evidence of the legitimacy of religious exclusivism, as well as showing contradictions in pluralism. (Jahanmehr & Yazdani, 2013). Plantinga's view is also defended, for example, by those who say that "contented religious exclusivists" are entirely rational when dealing with the diversity of world religions. He presents an epistemic strategy to reflect on one's beliefs and then offers two features of religious beliefs that make "contented religious exclusivists" rational (Gellman, 2000; Kim, 2012). Their views are undoubtedly different from the thoughts of other theological thinkers such as John Hick, David Basinger, Steven Wykstra, and of course, most religious scholars who see pluralism as the best way to deal with the difficulties caused by religious exclusivism (Jahanmehr & Yazdani, 2013).

Extremism, radicalism, intolerance, and exclusivism, which are a threat not only to the truth of religions but also to humanity, are increasingly spreading across the borders of all countries. Ideologies that often use violence in demonstrating their existence, not only infect ordinary people, but also become a plague among students, lecturers, scientists, and activists of social organizations and religious organizations. In Indonesia, for example, these frightening ideologies infiltrated higher education campuses, which caused many students and lecturers to become extreme, radical, intolerant, and exclusive. The high frequency of use of social media among students and lecturers contributed to the spread of these anti-humanitarian ideologies.

One effort to stem the spread of extremism, radicalism, intolerance, and exclusivism among students is through promoting religious moderation. Promoting religious moderation, of course, can be done through a variety of programs and activities. The development of religious moderation can be done through social campaigns, seminars, workshops, symposiums, focus group discussions, training, personal interventions, or introducing new approaches, models, methods, and others.

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of literary-based learning to promote religious moderation among students.

2. Literature Review

The Concept of religious moderation

Religious moderation is a term that represents moderate religious views and knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, ethics, and friendships. The word moderate refers to the phrase *wasatiyyah* (in Arabic) which in the terminology of the Koran uses the words *wasat*, *al-wusta*, *awsat*, *awsatuhum*, and *fawasatna*. The word moderation or *wasatiyyah*, *tawassut* in Arabic is also equivalent to *i'tidâl*, *tawâzun*, and *iqtişâd*. A textual study conducted by Muhamadul Bakir Yaakub (2016) shows the many variations of the Arabic word form. The forms of the word *wasat* (middle) include *wast* (central), *wasatiyyah* (neutral socio-cultural attitude and behavior), *wustâ* (middle time period), *awsat* (most central), *wâsit* (intervention), *wasîf* (intermediary), *wâsitah/wasîtah* (intermediate/medium), *tawassut* (central position), *mutawassit* (mediator). From the search results on the word *wasat*, Yaakub (2016: 65) then concluded three interrelated meanings, to be moderate, to be in the middle; and to be the best. Yaakub further explained that the meaning could be used to position in the middle between two extreme poles such as heat and cold, rich and poor, tall and short, large and small, empty and full, generous and stingy, courage and coward. As such, the intended meanings are 'moderation,' 'middle,' and 'centrism.' At the end of his study, Yaakub (2016) concluded that the term *wasatiyyah* generally refers to the characteristics of individual and collective behavior that are considered moderate, balanced, not overreacting, or extreme. In Western literature, there are several terms related to this term, such as moderation, mainstream, general, and others. According to Yaakub, the terminology *wasatiyyah*, which is rooted in the Qur'an, describes Muslims as people with balanced characteristics (al-Baqarah, 2:143). According to Islamic legal experts (classic and contemporary), *ummatah wasatan* is a community that enjoys social justice, freedom, and equal rights. But at the same time, the community must also be able to control unhealthy elements such as extreme ideology and excessive luxury and always maintain the middle ground. Therefore, Yaakub emphasized that the term has been used to describe specific references to Muslim communities as moderate, fair, and balanced was communities.

In this study, the concept of religious moderation refers to some dimensions of religiosity that are converged from several religious sociologists. The aspects chosen include the dimension of knowledge (Davidson, 1975; Stark & Glock, 1968), attitude dimension (Husni, Setiawan, Azis, Tantowie, & Rizal, 2020), behavioral dimension (King & Hunt, 1969, 1972a, 1972b, 1975), moral or ethical dimension (Mueller, 1980; Stark & Glock, 1968; Verbit, 1970), and friendship dimensions (Roof, 1979). Religious moderation, therefore, is religious knowledge, religious attitudes, religious behavior, friendship in an association, and moral or religious ethics, which respect diversity, uphold pluralism, tolerance, inclusiveness, and anti-violence.

The nature of literary-based learning

Literary-based learning is education based on a literary approach. Literary-based learning has many characteristics. First, literary-based learning must be able to express the author's thoughts and feelings. Second, literature-based learning must bring daily life experiences (deals with life experiences) to the classroom. Third, literary-based learning uses words in a powerful, effective, and captivating way for students and promotes the disclosure of facts that are hidden in social life. Fourth, literary-based learning should encourage students to be aware of choices, the willingness to be more flexible, self-efficacy, which is likely to be confident of one's ability to act and behave effectively (Selden, 1991).

3. Methods

This research was conducted at the Institut Agama Islam Darussalam (IAID) Ciamis-Indonesia, one of the Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. This quasi-experimental research uses nonequivalent control group design, a quasi-experimental research design consisting of two groups, the experimental group and the control group. Both groups were given a pretest and posttest. Members of the experimental group and the control group were not randomly selected. The data collected by observation and questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to measure students' moderate attitudes, while observations were made to find out students' religious behavior. Data were analyzed to answer the research hypothesis. The steps of data analysis start from the description of data, test requirements, and test hypotheses (different tests).

4. Results

Before conducting hypothesis tests, each score of the religious moderation dimensions is described, which consists of the knowledge dimension, attitudes dimension, behavior dimension, ethics dimension, and friendships dimension. This statistical description only applies to pretest scores, which aim to carry out a homogeneity test, one of the required test requirements.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Pretest Score Each Dimension

RM Dimensions	Group	Mean	Median	Variance	Std. Deviation
Knowledge	Exp. Group	43,8	45	41,6	6,9
	Con. Group	43,6	44	31,8	5,7
Attitudes	Exp. Group	54,9	55	9,4	3,1
	Con. Group	54,5	54	19,7	4,4
Behavior	Exp. Group	35,2	34	22,5	4,7
	Con. Group	35,2	35	24,9	4,9
Ethics	Exp. Group	49,6	50	15,7	3,9
	Con. Group	49,3	48	13,4	3,7
Friendships	Exp. Group	35,5	35	4,8	2,2
	Con. Group	35,7	36	3,2	1,8

RM = Religious Moderation; Exp. = Experimental; Con. = Control

The next step is to test the requirements in order to meet the required assumptions. The assumption necessary for the different test is the Test of Homogeneity of Variance. This test is based on Levene Statistics. The results of the Test of Homogeneity of Variance are presented in table 1 below.

Table 2. Test of Homogeneity of Variance (Levene Statistic)

RM Dimension	Levene Statistic	Sig.	Conclusion
Knowledge	2,01	0,16	The variances are equal
Attitudes	1,75	0,19	The variances are equal

<i>Behavior</i>	0,45	0,50	The variances are equal
<i>Ethics</i>	0,04	0,85	The variances are equal
<i>Friendships</i>	0,77	0,38	The variances are equal

RM = Religious Moderation; Sig. = Significance

The results of the Test of Homogeneity of Variance based on the Levene Statistics above show that the overall dimensions of religious moderation meet the assumption of homogeneity (the variances are equal). Thus, subsequent hypothesis tests fulfill the required assumptions. For the whole hypothesis test using the Independent Sample Test, because all variables of the dimensions of religious moderation meet the requirements to use the test.

The hypotheses tested are: (1) Understanding of religious moderation differs between groups using literary-based learning and those using conventional learning models. (2) The moderate attitude in religion differs between groups who use literary-based learning and those who use traditional learning models. (3) The moderate behavior in religion differs between groups using literary-based learning, and those using conventional learning models. (4) The ethical, religious moderation differs between groups that use literary-based learning, and those who use conventional learning models. (5) The friendship in the context of religious moderation differs between groups who use literary-based learning and those who use conventional learning models.

The results of the testing of these hypotheses can be seen in the following table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Hypothesis Testing (Independent Sample Test)

Hypothesis	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
First Hypothesis	1,99	62	0,049
Second Hypothesis	10,89	62	0,00
Third Hypothesis	10,41	62	0,00
Fourth Hypothesis	9,89	62	0,00
Fifth Hypothesis	6,56	62	0,00

df = degree of freedom; Sig. = Significance

Table 3 above shows that the entire hypothesis proposed was accepted and verified empirically. The second, third, fourth, and fifth hypotheses are of very high significance, so it can be concluded that the literary-based learning is very effective in developing attitudes, behavior, ethics, and friendship within the framework of religious moderation. Specifically, the first hypothesis, namely the effect of literary-based learning on students' understanding of religious moderation, the significance is not too strong, because of the value of Sig. = 0,049 slightly smaller than 0,05.

5. Discussion

The results of the quasi-experimental research show that literary-based learning is effective in promoting religious moderation to students at the Indonesian Islamic Higher Education Institutions (henceforth will be abbreviated IIHEI). Literary-based learning affects the attitude and religious behavior of students IIHEI. They are becoming more moderate,

more tolerant, and more inclusive. Although in this study, literary-based learning was only implemented in Islamic Studies subjects, this learning model remained open for implementation in other disciplines at IIHEI.

Quasi-experimental research that applies literary-based learning only to Islamic Studies subjects makes this research cannot be generalized to other disciplines at IIHEI. Nevertheless, looking at the many elements of similarity between one issue and another in IIHEI, literary-based learning is open to being applied to other subjects. Through this literary-based learning, every student has the opportunity to learn the teachings of his religion more dialogically, factually, objectively, and openly.

In their academic tradition, students at IIHEI study Islamic Studies by using learning approaches that tend to be textual, normative, indoctrinate, one-way traffic communication, and dominant using the lecture method. IIHEI students and lecturers find it difficult to avoid the textual learning approach because Islamic Studies learning resources almost entirely take the form of classical and contemporary religious texts. These religious texts are sacred sources of learning, the contents of which should not be criticized, questioned, let alone refuted. These texts are the holy books (Qur'an and Hadith of the Prophet). The commentaries or qur'anic interpretation books by classical and contemporary Islamic scholars. The hadith books, books that contain a collection of words, deeds, and provisions of the Prophet Muhammad or in the Islamic intellectual tradition called the *Kutub al-Sittah* (six books of collection of authentic hadiths) and the *Kutub al-Tis'ah* (nine books of collection of authentic hadiths). The classical and contemporary books are written by Islamic scholars in the fields of *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), *tawhid*, and *kalam* (theology), *akhlaq* (ethics), *sufism* (Islamic mysticism), Islamic dates (Islamic history and civilization), and other. The IIHEI lecturers and students believe that the books are sacred, holy, flawless, and free from error, so they must not criticize and question the truth of the method and its contents, and must not refute the teachings contained therein.

The characteristics of learning based on classical and contemporary religious texts cause learning activities to become normative. It also appears in the statement of learning objectives or competencies to be achieved in a lecture activity. Usually, the lecturers formulate learning goals by using a sentence like this: "after studying 'this text,' students' faith and piety become stronger, or the students' morals and behavior become better"; after students study 'this text,' their understanding of faith, piety and morals improves; after students study 'these verses,' their awareness of fasting is getting better." The phrase 'this text' or this verse' in the formulations refers to religious texts (Qur'an, Hadith of the Prophet, books of scholars).

Normative learning based on religious texts is not found in literary-based learning because this learning model is based on real experience and empirical reality. Religious texts are used only to help construct real experiences into meaningful knowledge. Through literary-based learning, students are invited to observe, discuss, reflect, and share experiences, then construct them into meaningful knowledge. Being a good person, being more civilized and having good character, or having awareness in religion, do not have to be indoctrinated or force students to understand and study religious texts repeatedly and tend to be boring. Students can be good people, noble, and religious by inviting them to observe empirical

realities and share their different experiences. This method can avoid the process of normative and indoctrinate learning.

In delivering messages of religious texts to students, lecturers tend to use the one-way traffic communication strategy. The choice of this strategy is indeed difficult to avoid, given the religious texts that they consider sacred, not the themes that need to be discussed or debated. Most religious texts are normative in the form of commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishment. The use of the one-way traffic communication strategy by lecturers is not only in terms of how to convey messages to students, but inherently, the texts themselves seem to demand submission and acceptance from their readers. Submission and acceptance is even one indicator of one's faith and piety.

Through literary-based learning, students recognize not only classical dan contemporary religious texts, but also use empirical reality and everyday experiences to strengthen their religiosity. Through literary-based learning, students are invited to reflect, for example, about their destiny through the simple phrase, "we should be grateful to God Almighty, because we are born from the womb of a Muslim mother, from a Muslim father, from a Muslim family, and a Muslim neighborhood; try to reflect on what if we were born to a non-Muslim mother, to a non-Muslim father, to a non-Muslim family, and a non-Muslim environment, what is the probability of us becoming a Muslim? When we are born into this world, we do not have the power to choose which womb to be born from, what father, from what family, and from what neighborhood. All those expressions are the will of God Almighty. So, we must always respect everyone because, at birth, they do not have the power to choose.

6. Conclusion

The most important findings of this study are: (1) Literary-based learning significant to increase understanding of the importance of religious moderation among students. (2) Literary-based learning is very meaningful in improving students' moderation in religion. (3) Literary-based education is very significant for developing moderate religious behavior among students. (4) Literary-based learning is significant for developing sincere ethics in a diverse, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society. (5) Literary-based learning is very significant to enhance genuine friendship between different religious communities.

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