
Bridging Language Learning and Religious Moderation: A Study in English for Islamic Studies Contexts

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Abstract: This study explores a narrative account of learning practices in an *English for Islamic Studies* course conducted at the Master's Program in English Language Education, UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. The article aims to bridge language learning with the promotion of religious moderation by integrating Islamic values within English language pedagogy. Employing a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, this study documents and analyzes classroom experiences, instructional strategies, and learner reflections that emphasize moderate religious perspectives in language use. The instructional design adopts a content-based instruction (CBI) approach combined with values-based education, where authentic materials related to Islamic teachings on tolerance, inclusivity, and balance (*wasatiyyah*) are embedded in language tasks. Data were collected through classroom observations, reflective journals, and documentation of learning artifacts, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of pedagogical integration and student engagement. The findings reveal that integrating religious moderation into English for Islamic Studies not only enhances students' language proficiency but also fosters critical awareness of intercultural and interreligious understanding. The learning process encourages students to articulate moderate viewpoints in English, thereby positioning language as a medium for promoting peaceful and inclusive religious discourse. This study highlights the importance of contextualizing English language teaching within socio-religious values and proposes a pedagogical framework that aligns linguistic competence with the development of religious moderation.

Keywords: English for Islamic Studies; Religious Moderation; Content-based Instruction; EFL Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

English language education in higher education has increasingly moved beyond the teaching of linguistic competence toward the development of broader academic, social, and cultural competencies. In the context of Islamic higher education, English is not only viewed as a communication tool but also as a medium for accessing global academic discourse related to Islamic studies, education, society, and contemporary challenges. Therefore, English learning contexts need to accommodate students' disciplinary knowledge and cultural identities.

The rapid globalization of higher education has transformed English from merely a foreign language into an essential medium for academic communication, interdisciplinary

collaboration, and participation in international scholarly communities. Universities increasingly expect graduates not only to possess linguistic competence but also to demonstrate intercultural awareness, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and the ability to communicate disciplinary knowledge to diverse audiences. Consequently, English Language Teaching (ELT) has shifted from emphasizing grammatical competence toward preparing learners to engage meaningfully with authentic academic and professional discourse (Richards, 2015; Nation & Macalister, 2010).

This transformation is particularly evident in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where language instruction is designed to meet learners' disciplinary and professional needs rather than focusing solely on general English proficiency. ESP emphasizes contextualized language learning by integrating subject matter knowledge with language acquisition, enabling students to develop communicative competence relevant to their academic fields (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hyland, 2006). Within Islamic higher education institutions, this paradigm has given rise to English for Islamic Studies, an emerging branch of ESP that integrates English language learning with Islamic scholarship, allowing students to access international academic literature while simultaneously articulating Islamic perspectives in global contexts.

The development of English for Islamic Studies has become increasingly important as Islamic universities actively participate in international academic networks. Graduate students are expected to read scholarly journals, present research findings at international conferences, publish in English-medium journals, and communicate Islamic perspectives using internationally accepted academic discourse. Therefore, English instruction should not merely develop linguistic accuracy but also foster students' ability to engage critically with Islamic intellectual traditions and contemporary global issues. Such contextualized instruction supports the integration of disciplinary knowledge, language proficiency, and academic identity, which has become one of the primary goals of higher education in the twenty-first century (Hyland, 2006; Basturkmen, 2010).

Among contemporary issues discussed within Islamic higher education, religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) has emerged as one of Indonesia's major educational priorities. Religious moderation promotes balanced religious understanding, respect for diversity, social harmony, and rejection of extremism. Rather than representing a compromise of religious commitment, moderation reflects the Islamic principle of *wasatiyyah*, emphasizing justice, balance, tolerance, and responsible citizenship (Kamali, 2015). The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has also positioned religious moderation as a strategic educational agenda to strengthen national cohesion within Indonesia's multicultural society. Consequently, universities are encouraged to integrate moderation values across curricular and co-curricular activities rather than limiting them to religious education courses alone.

From an educational perspective, integrating religious moderation into language classrooms represents a promising pedagogical innovation. Language learning is inherently connected to culture, identity, and worldview, making English classrooms suitable spaces for developing intercultural understanding and responsible communication (Byram, 1997). Through meaningful discussion, collaborative learning, academic reading, and argumentative writing, students learn not only to use English accurately but also to negotiate meanings, evaluate multiple perspectives, and communicate respectfully across

cultural and religious differences. Such learning experiences contribute simultaneously to language development and character formation.

One instructional approach that facilitates this integration is Content-Based Instruction (CBI). CBI views language as a vehicle for learning meaningful content rather than an isolated object of study. Students acquire language while exploring authentic disciplinary knowledge through reading, discussion, presentation, and writing activities (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 2003). Numerous studies have demonstrated that CBI increases learner motivation, promotes higher-order thinking, and enhances academic literacy because language learning occurs in meaningful communicative contexts rather than through decontextualized grammar instruction (Lyster, 2007; Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Within English for Islamic Studies, CBI enables Islamic themes to become authentic learning materials through which students simultaneously develop English proficiency and deeper conceptual understanding.

Recent studies have increasingly explored the integration of Islamic values into English language teaching. Research has reported that contextualizing English materials with Islamic values enhances learner engagement, strengthens cultural identity, and supports character education while maintaining academic rigor (Widodo, 2016; Abdullah, Hidayati, & Hidayat, 2022). Other scholars have investigated religious moderation in Islamic education, highlighting its importance for promoting peaceful coexistence, intercultural dialogue, and democratic citizenship within pluralistic societies (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023; Yusuf & Sterkens, 2015). However, most previous studies primarily examine curriculum policy, textbook development, or teachers' perceptions of religious moderation. Comparatively limited attention has been given to how moderation values are naturally enacted through actual English classroom interactions, particularly within postgraduate English for Islamic Studies courses.

Furthermore, previous ESP research has extensively discussed discipline-specific language learning in fields such as medicine, engineering, business, and science (Hyland, 2006; Basturkmen, 2010), yet English for Islamic Studies remains relatively underexplored despite its growing significance within Islamic higher education. Existing publications generally focus on instructional material development or curriculum design, while fewer studies document authentic classroom experiences illustrating how language learning simultaneously develops English proficiency, critical thinking, and moderate religious perspectives. This indicates a clear research gap regarding pedagogical practices that integrate English language education with religious moderation in postgraduate contexts.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the implementation of an Advanced English for Islamic Studies course offered in the Master's Program in English Language Education at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. The course was intentionally designed to integrate English language development with contemporary Islamic themes, including religious moderation, peace education, environmental issues, artificial intelligence, and global challenges. Students engaged with authentic English-language academic articles, collaborative discussions, presentations, reflective writing, and critical response essays that encouraged them to articulate moderate Islamic perspectives using academic English. These learning activities are consistent with the course learning outcomes emphasizing critical literacy, interdisciplinary thinking, academic communication, and integration of Islamic values.

Unlike many previous studies that evaluate learning outcomes quantitatively, this research adopts a qualitative narrative inquiry to document how students and lecturers experience the integration of English language learning with religious moderation throughout classroom interaction. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to understand educational experiences from participants' perspectives while capturing the dynamic processes through which meaning, identity, and values are negotiated during learning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach is particularly appropriate because the objective of the study is not merely to measure language achievement but to understand how English functions as a medium for constructing academic knowledge and promoting moderate religious discourse.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of three complementary dimensions rarely examined simultaneously: English for Specific Purposes, Content-Based Instruction, and religious moderation within a postgraduate English language education context. Rather than positioning moderation as an additional moral topic, this study conceptualizes moderation as an integral component of meaningful language learning in which English serves as a vehicle for critical reflection, intercultural communication, and responsible religious engagement. Consequently, the study contributes both theoretically and pedagogically by proposing an instructional model that aligns English language development with values-based education in Islamic higher education.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate how the implementation of Advanced English for Islamic Studies facilitates the integration of English language learning and religious moderation through classroom practices, instructional strategies, and students' learning experiences. Specifically, the study seeks to explain how language learning activities contribute to the development of academic English proficiency while simultaneously fostering moderate religious perspectives, intercultural awareness, and critical engagement with contemporary Islamic issues.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the integration of language learning and religious moderation in an Advanced English for Islamic Studies course. The research context was a postgraduate English Language Education program. Data were obtained from course documents, learning activities, classroom observations, student presentations, and reflective academic tasks.

The analysis focused on how learning materials and classroom practices supported students' English development and understanding of religious moderation. Data were analyzed thematically by identifying patterns related to language skills development, Islamic discourse engagement, tolerance, balance, and critical reflection.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Advanced English for Islamic Studies course is a compulsory subject offered to postgraduate students of the Master's Program in English Language Education at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. The course is designed to strengthen students' advanced English proficiency through meaningful engagement with contemporary issues in Islamic Studies. Rather than emphasizing language forms in isolation, the course integrates listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary development, academic presentation, and critical

response writing within authentic Islamic academic discourse.

The instructional design adopts a Content-Based Instruction (CBI) approach, in which language learning occurs simultaneously with disciplinary content learning. Students are expected to analyze academic journal articles, participate in collaborative discussions, deliver presentations, and produce Critical Response Essays and a Library-Based Research Paper. Throughout the semester, the learning process encourages students to develop academic communication skills while critically examining contemporary Islamic issues such as religious moderation, peace education, environmental sustainability, artificial intelligence, and global challenges from both linguistic and Islamic perspectives.

In addition to improving English proficiency, the course aims to cultivate critical thinking, intercultural awareness, academic integrity, and religious moderation through classroom interaction. Therefore, English functions not only as a communication tool but also as a medium for constructing knowledge, expressing Islamic perspectives, and engaging in scholarly dialogue.

The Implementation of Advanced English for Islamic Studies

Integrating English Language Learning and Religious Moderation through Islamic Studies can function as a bridge between linguistic competence and religious understanding. The course was designed not only to improve students' English proficiency but also to provide an academic space where students could explore Islamic contemporary issues through English discourse. In this context, English became more than a communication skill; it became a medium for developing critical awareness, intercultural competence, and moderate religious perspectives.

The integration of Islamic Studies content into English learning was implemented through a content-based instruction approach. In this approach, language acquisition occurs simultaneously with the exploration of meaningful subject matter. Students learned vocabulary, academic expressions, reading strategies, speaking skills, and writing skills through authentic materials related to Islamic issues. The course design reflected the principles of integrating language competence with Islamic intellectual discourse. Learning activities included lectures, academic discussions, collaborative learning, group presentations, and critical response essays. Students were required to read English articles, identify important arguments, discuss the ideas, and present their perspectives using academic English.

During classroom observation, students showed active engagement when discussing Islamic-related topics because the materials were connected with their academic background and religious identity. This reflection indicates that students perceived English as a tool for knowledge construction rather than merely a language subject. The learning process encouraged students to develop academic communication skills while strengthening their ability to articulate Islamic ideas in a global context.

Religious Moderation as Academic Content in English Learning

One of the major findings of this study was the effectiveness of religious moderation topics in developing students' critical engagement. The topic Religious Moderation in Islam became an important learning theme because it connected Islamic concepts with contemporary social challenges. Students explored concepts including wasathiyyah (middle

path), tolerance (tasamuh), justice (i'tidal), balance (tawazun), and peaceful interaction. Through English articles and classroom discussions, students analyzed how these concepts are related to Islamic teachings and social harmony.

Religious moderation emphasizes a balanced religious attitude that avoids excessive positions and promotes justice, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Rahmadi and Hamdan (2023) explain that religious moderation in Islamic education is rooted in the concept of *wasathiyyah*, which represents balance, fairness, and the avoidance of extreme attitudes.

In classroom practice, students were encouraged to connect these concepts with real social situations. During group discussions, students analyzed cases related to religious diversity, social interaction, and the role of Muslims in multicultural societies. This finding shows that English learning activities can contribute to deeper understanding of religious concepts. Students were not only learning English expressions but also developing conceptual understanding through academic inquiry.

Classroom Interaction and Development of Critical Thinking

Another important finding was the role of classroom interaction in developing critical thinking. The learning activities were structured through collaborative discussions and presentations. Students worked in groups to analyze articles and present their interpretations. Collaborative learning created opportunities for students to encounter different perspectives. During discussions, students were required to listen to others' opinions, respond with academic arguments, and negotiate meaning. This process encouraged intellectual openness and respect.

The classroom interaction reflected the principles of religious moderation, especially tolerance and balance. Students learned that differences in interpretation do not necessarily create conflict but can become opportunities for academic dialogue. The use of academic expressions such as "From another perspective" and "This argument can be understood through" demonstrated that language learning supported respectful communication.

Content-Based Instruction and Meaningful Language Development

The findings reveal that content-based instruction provided meaningful opportunities for language development. Instead of teaching vocabulary and grammar separately, language elements were introduced through Islamic Studies topics. Students developed academic vocabulary related to religion, education, peace, environment, and social issues. They learned how to construct arguments, summarize academic texts, and present ideas.

The use of authentic materials increased student motivation. Several students mentioned that reading English articles about Islamic topics was challenging but meaningful because the topics were related to their academic field. This finding suggests that meaningful content can encourage students to overcome linguistic difficulties. When learners perceive relevance between materials and their academic identity, they become more engaged in the learning process.

English as a Medium for Intercultural Religious Communication

The course also contributed to students' ability to communicate Islamic perspectives in international academic settings. Since English functions as a global language, students need the ability to explain Islamic concepts to audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The classroom activities trained students to present Islamic ideas using accessible and respectful language. Students practiced transforming religious concepts into academic explanations through evidence, references, and logical arguments. This process represents an important dimension of religious moderation because communication across differences requires openness and mutual understanding. Rahmadi and Hamdan (2023) emphasize that cross-cultural communication plays an important role in strengthening religious moderation. The findings suggest that religious moderation should not be positioned only as an additional topic but integrated into academic learning processes. English learning provides a practical space where students can develop language skills and moderate perspectives simultaneously. The Advanced English for Islamic Studies course shows that language education can contribute to character development, academic literacy, and social awareness. Through reading, discussion, presentation, and writing activities, students developed the ability to communicate religious ideas responsibly.

Course Outline

The learning activities were implemented over one semester consisting of sixteen meetings. Each learning unit gradually introduced students to increasingly complex academic topics while simultaneously strengthening their English language competence. Table 1 summarizes the sequence of learning objectives and instructional materials implemented during the course.

Table 1

Course Outline of Advanced English for Islamic Studies

Meeting	Learning objectives	Learning materials
1	Understand the course contract, learning outcomes, assessment system, and academic expectations.	Course orientation and introduction.
2–3	Develop pre-advanced English skills through academic discussion on Qur'anic perspectives.	Miracles of the Qur'an
4–5	Analyze Islamic concepts using English academic literature and present arguments collaboratively.	Religious Moderation in Islam
6–7	Develop critical reading and discussion skills on Islamic educational perspectives.	Islam and Peace Education
8–9	Examine contemporary technological issues from Islamic perspectives while strengthening academic vocabulary.	Islam, Technology, and Artificial Intelligence
10–11	Integrate Islamic values into English language teaching through collaborative presentation and academic writing.	Integrating Islamic Values into English Teaching
12–13	Analyze environmental issues using English academic texts from Islamic perspectives.	Islam and Environmental Issues
14–15	Critically discuss global contemporary issues affecting Muslim societies using	Islamic Responses to Global Issues

academic English.

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Present and submit a Library-Based
Research Paper integrating English
language education and Islamic Studies.

Final Research Project

Classroom Assessment

Student assessment emphasized both language competence and academic engagement. Classroom participation, collaborative presentations, Critical Response Essays, and the final Library-Based Research Paper were designed to evaluate students' ability to communicate academic ideas effectively while integrating Islamic perspectives into English discourse. The assessment process therefore reflected higher-order thinking, academic literacy, and interdisciplinary understanding rather than memorization of linguistic forms.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of the Advanced English for Islamic Studies course as a pedagogical approach for integrating English language learning with the promotion of religious moderation in a postgraduate English Language Education program. Employing a qualitative narrative inquiry, the study demonstrates that English instruction can function not only as a means of developing linguistic competence but also as a medium for fostering critical thinking, intercultural communication, and moderate religious perspectives. Through authentic academic materials, collaborative discussions, presentations, critical response essays, and library-based research projects, students were able to strengthen their academic English proficiency while engaging with contemporary Islamic issues such as religious moderation, peace education, environmental sustainability, artificial intelligence, and global challenges.

The findings indicate that the integration of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) with English for Islamic Studies creates a meaningful learning environment in which language acquisition and disciplinary knowledge develop simultaneously. Rather than treating religious moderation as an isolated topic, the course embedded moderation values throughout classroom interaction, encouraging students to construct evidence-based arguments, appreciate diverse viewpoints, and communicate Islamic perspectives responsibly in English. This integration contributed not only to language development but also to students' academic identity, ethical awareness, and readiness to participate in international scholarly discourse.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that English language educators, particularly in Islamic higher education institutions, should adopt contextualized instructional designs that integrate disciplinary content and character education into language learning. Such an approach enables English classrooms to become spaces for academic inquiry, intercultural dialogue, and values-based education while maintaining rigorous language learning objectives. The instructional framework presented in this study may also serve as a reference for curriculum developers seeking to strengthen English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs through meaningful and culturally relevant learning experiences.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on English for Islamic Studies by demonstrating how the integration of ESP, Content-Based Instruction,

and religious moderation can provide a comprehensive pedagogical framework for postgraduate English education. The findings extend existing discussions on values-based language education by illustrating that religious moderation can be developed through authentic academic communication rather than through explicit moral instruction alone.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited to a single postgraduate course within one Islamic higher education institution and primarily relies on narrative classroom experiences. Future research is therefore recommended to investigate similar instructional models across different universities and educational contexts using mixed-methods or longitudinal designs. Further studies may also examine the measurable impact of integrating religious moderation on students' language proficiency, intercultural competence, academic literacy, and character development. Such investigations would provide broader empirical evidence for developing sustainable pedagogical models that integrate language education, disciplinary knowledge, and values education in higher education.

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