



INTERNALIZING RELIGIOUS MODERATION VALUES THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the internalization of religious moderation values through Community Service Learning (CSL) based English Language Teaching among university students. In the context of increasing religious diversity and the challenges of intolerance in contemporary society, higher education institutions are required to play a strategic role in fostering moderate and inclusive attitudes through innovative learning approaches. This research employs a qualitative descriptive design to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. The participants were undergraduate students of the English Language Teaching program at Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong, Indonesia, who were actively involved in community service activities. Data were collected through classroom observations, documentation, and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and meanings related to the internalization process of religious moderation values. The findings indicate that the implementation of CSL-based English Language Teaching effectively facilitates the internalization of religious moderation values, including tolerance, inclusivity, mutual respect, and social responsibility. In addition to improving students' English communication skills, this approach also promotes positive attitudinal changes toward diversity and strengthens their awareness of harmonious social interaction. The integration of experiential learning and community engagement creates meaningful learning experiences that bridge cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. This study contributes to the development of an interdisciplinary pedagogical model that integrates language learning with value education, particularly in promoting religious moderation in higher education contexts. It is expected that the findings can serve as a reference for educators and policymakers in designing transformative learning models that support peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies.

Keywords: religious moderation, community service learning, English language teaching, higher education, value internalization

INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has become a crucial concept in maintaining social harmony within multicultural and multireligious societies such as Indonesia (Pangalila & Rumbay, 2024; Suharto, 2021). The nation's diversity, encompassing ethnicity, culture, language, and religion, represents both a valuable asset and a potential source of conflict if not managed properly. In recent years, challenges to religious moderation have become increasingly complex, marked by the rise of intolerance, radicalism, and social polarization (Hutagalung, 2023). These issues are further exacerbated by the rapid development of digital technology, which facilitates the widespread dissemination of unverified information, hate speech, and extreme ideological narratives. Consequently, fostering religious moderation is no longer merely a normative discourse but a pressing necessity that must be systematically implemented in various sectors, particularly education (Shofiyuddin et al., 2023).

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Higher education institutions play a strategic role in cultivating students' intellectual and moral capacities, preparing them to become individuals who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and culturally sensitive. In this context, education should not be limited to the transfer of knowledge but must also emphasize character building and value internalization (Biggs et al., 2022). Universities are therefore expected to develop innovative learning approaches that integrate academic competencies with the cultivation of inclusive, tolerant, and moderate attitudes (Zhao & Zhang, 2025). Such integration is essential to address contemporary societal challenges and to promote peaceful coexistence in diverse communities.

Within this framework, English Language Teaching (ELT) offers significant potential as a medium for integrating religious moderation values. As a global language, English serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a bridge for intercultural understanding (Makhmudov, 2023). Through ELT, students are exposed to diverse perspectives, cultures, and worldviews, which can foster empathy, respect, and openness toward differences. However, in practice, ELT in higher education often remains focused on linguistic competence, emphasizing skills such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening, while neglecting the affective and value-based dimensions of learning. This tendency reflects a gap between the ideal goals of holistic education and the current practices of language instruction.

To address this gap, innovative pedagogical approaches are required to integrate value education into language learning (Kivenko et al., 2025). One such approach is Community Service Learning (CSL), which combines academic learning with community engagement. CSL enables students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts while simultaneously developing social awareness, empathy, and civic responsibility (Qodir et al., 2025). Through direct interaction with diverse communities, students gain meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom and contribute to their personal and social development.

In the context of ELT, CSL can be implemented through various activities, such as teaching English in schools, conducting language training for community members, or organizing literacy programs. These activities provide opportunities for students to engage with individuals from different social, cultural, and religious backgrounds (Porto, 2023). Such interactions encourage students to develop tolerance, mutual respect, and inclusive communication skills. More importantly, these experiences facilitate the internalization of religious moderation values, including tolerance, balance, justice, and equality. Therefore, CSL-based ELT has the potential to function as an effective pedagogical model that integrates language learning with value formation (Ambrosio, 2025; Salgado-Robles & Thompson, 2022; Tran et al., 2024).

Despite its potential, research on the integration of religious moderation within CSL-based ELT remains limited. Previous studies have predominantly focused on the effectiveness of CSL in improving academic performance or language proficiency, with little attention given to its role in fostering value internalization, particularly religious moderation. Conversely, studies on religious moderation have largely been conducted within the domains of religious education or Islamic studies, with limited exploration in the field of language education. This indicates a significant research gap, namely the lack of interdisciplinary studies that integrate ELT, community service, and religious moderation values within a unified framework.

Furthermore, empirical studies examining the implementation of CSL in Islamic higher education institutions, particularly those with pesantren-based traditions, are still scarce. Institutions such as Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong represent a unique educational environment that combines Islamic values with modern academic systems. This distinctive context offers substantial opportunities to develop learning models that integrate academic excellence with character formation rooted in religious moderation. Investigating this context is therefore essential to understand how CSL-based ELT can be effectively implemented to promote religious moderation among university students.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the internalization of religious moderation values through Community Service Learning-based English Language Teaching among university students. Specifically, it seeks to explore how CSL activities facilitate the integration of moderation values into language learning, as well as to analyze their impact on students' attitudes and behaviors toward diversity. By addressing this research gap, the study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it offers an interdisciplinary perspective that bridges language education, community engagement, and value formation. Practically, it provides insights for educators and policymakers in designing innovative learning models that are contextual, integrative, and transformative.

Ultimately, the integration of religious moderation values into ELT through CSL is expected to serve as a strategic approach to addressing contemporary social challenges. By engaging students in meaningful community-based learning experiences, this approach not only enhances their linguistic competence but also strengthens their social awareness and moderate attitudes. In the long term, such efforts can contribute to the development of a more harmonious, inclusive, and peaceful society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of internalizing religious moderation values through Community Service Learning (CSL)-based English Language Teaching (ELT) (Muzari et al., 2022; Lofland et al., 2022). This approach is chosen as it allows the researcher to explore meanings, experiences, and perspectives of participants within their natural context (Eberle, 2014). The participants of this study were undergraduate students of the English Language Teaching program at Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong, Indonesia, who were actively involved in CSL-based community service activities. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, with criteria including students who participated in CSL activities and had direct experience interacting with socially, culturally, and religiously diverse communities (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

Data were collected through several techniques: (1) participant observation of both classroom learning processes and CSL activities in the field, (2) semi-structured interviews to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding the internalization of religious moderation values, and (3) documentation, including activity reports, students' reflections, and relevant learning materials. These multiple data sources were used to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information about the research phenomenon (Mazhar et al., 2021; Hashimov, 2015).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The collected data were coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify patterns and key themes related to the internalization process of religious moderation values. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation of sources and methods, as well as *member checking* to confirm the consistency between the findings and participants' actual experiences (Hashimov, 2015). Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how CSL-based ELT can function as an effective medium for fostering the internalization of religious moderation values among university students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

A. Implementation of Community Service Learning (CSL) in ELT

Based on participant observation and documentation, the implementation of Community Service Learning (CSL) in English Language Teaching (ELT) at the English Language Teaching Program of Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong was systematically carried out through three main stages: planning, implementation, and reflection. These stages were interconnected and formed a comprehensive experiential learning process.

In the planning stage, students were introduced to fundamental concepts of religious moderation, intercultural communication strategies, and contextual English teaching methods. These materials were delivered through lectures and group discussions. Additionally, students were actively involved in designing CSL programs tailored to the needs of the target communities. Documentation data showed that the programs included teaching English in schools, providing basic English communication training for community members, and organizing literacy-based language activities.

During the implementation stage, students were directly engaged in community service activities. These activities were not limited to formal teaching sessions but also involved broader social interactions within the community. Observational data indicated that students interacted with individuals from diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. One student stated:

"During CSL activities, I realized that learning English is not only in the classroom, but it is directly applied in the community. I had to adjust the way I spoke according to different community conditions." (M1)

Another student added:

"We were not only teaching, but also learning from the community. Sometimes we had to use a more relaxed approach so they could feel comfortable." (M2)

These findings indicate that ELT through CSL does not merely focus on linguistic competence but also emphasizes social adaptation and intercultural communication skills. Students were required to adjust their communication styles according to the social context they encountered.

The reflection stage was conducted after the CSL activities through group discussions, written reports, and interviews. The data showed that students were able to identify their experiences, including challenges, strategies, and lessons learned. This reflective process played a crucial role in strengthening students' understanding of their experiential learning.

B. Process of Internalizing Religious Moderation Values

The findings reveal that the internalization of religious moderation values occurred gradually through four main stages: exposure, interaction, reflection, and internalization. The exposure stage was the initial phase in which students encountered the reality of diversity in society. At this stage, students experienced direct encounters with individuals from different backgrounds, which triggered their awareness of the importance of tolerance and openness. One student expressed:

"At first, I was surprised because I met people with very different backgrounds. From that moment, I realized the importance of respecting differences." (M3)

The interaction stage involved students actively engaging with the community. These interactions occurred in both formal teaching contexts and informal social activities. Observational data indicated that intensive interactions enabled students to understand different perspectives more deeply. A student stated:

"We often had discussions with the community, and there were many different viewpoints. From that, I learned not to judge immediately." (M4)

The reflection stage allowed students to critically process their experiences. Reflection was conducted individually and in groups, enabling students to connect their experiences with the values of religious moderation.

One student explained:

"After the activities, I felt that I understood the meaning of tolerance, not only in theory but through real experience." (M5)

The final stage, internalization, was marked by changes in students' attitudes and behaviors, indicating that the values had been embedded within them. A student stated:

"Now I am more careful in my behavior and more respectful of differences because I have experienced it directly in the field." (M6)

C. Internalized Values of Religious Moderation

The thematic analysis identified several key values of religious moderation internalized by students through CSL activities. The first value is tolerance. The data showed that students developed a greater ability to accept and respect differences. This was reflected in their more open-minded attitudes and reduced tendency to judge others.

"I learned that everyone has their own perspective, and we cannot force our opinions on others." (M7)

The second value is inclusivity. Students demonstrated openness in interacting with various community groups without discrimination.

"I became more open-minded, not differentiating between people, and trying to understand others' conditions." (M8)

The third value is balance (wasathiyah). Students showed the ability to avoid extreme positions and consider multiple perspectives when facing issues.

"I no longer see things in black and white, but try to look at them from different perspectives." (M9)

The fourth value is justice and equality. Students treated community members fairly without discrimination in delivering learning activities.

The fifth value is social responsibility. Students demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility toward the community and a willingness to contribute meaningfully.

"This activity made me feel responsible for helping the community, not just learning for myself." (M10)

D. Impact of CSL on Students

The findings indicate that CSL-based ELT had a significant impact on students across three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and skills. In the cognitive aspect, students demonstrated an improved understanding of religious moderation. They were able to explain the concept more contextually based on their real-life experiences.

"Now I understand religious moderation better, not only from books but from real experiences." (M11)

In the affective aspect, students experienced notable attitudinal changes, including increased empathy, tolerance, and social awareness.

"I feel more empathetic and more respectful of others after participating in this activity." (M12)

In terms of skills, students showed improvement in English communication, particularly in intercultural contexts.

"My English communication skills improved, especially when interacting directly with the community." (M13)

E. Changes in Students' Attitudes and Behaviors

One of the most significant findings of this study is the transformation in students' attitudes and behaviors. Before participating in CSL, many students had a limited understanding of diversity and religious moderation, mostly confined to theoretical knowledge.

However, after participating in CSL, students demonstrated significant changes. They became more open-minded, tolerant, and capable of engaging harmoniously with diverse communities. One student stated:

"Previously, I saw differences as something difficult, but now I see them as something natural." (M14)

Another student added:

"I have become more open and less judgmental toward others." (M15)

These findings suggest that direct experience through CSL plays a crucial role in shaping students' moderate attitudes. The transformation observed is not merely temporary but indicates a potential for long-term behavioral change in their social lives.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the implementation of CSL in ELT serves as an effective medium for internalizing religious moderation values. The internalization process occurs through direct experience, social interaction, reflection, and value formation. Furthermore, CSL contributes positively to students' development in cognitive, affective, and skill domains. Therefore, CSL not only functions as a teaching method but also as a transformative approach for character building, particularly in fostering moderate attitudes in multicultural societies.

DISCUSSION

A. Community Service Learning in the Perspective of Experiential Learning

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Community Service Learning (CSL) in English Language Teaching (ELT) aligns closely with the principles of experiential learning theory as proposed by Kolb (Kolb, 2014). Experiential learning posits that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, involving a cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The four stages identified in this study exposure, interaction, reflection, and internalization clearly reflect this experiential learning cycle (Alabi, 2024; Malik & Behera, 2024).

The exposure stage corresponds to the phase of concrete experience, where students encounter real-life diversity in social, cultural, and religious contexts. This direct exposure challenges their preconceived assumptions and creates a sense of cognitive dissonance, which is essential for meaningful learning. As Mezirow argues, transformative learning often begins with a disorienting dilemma that prompts individuals to critically reassess their perspectives. In this study, students' initial encounters with diverse communities functioned as such a trigger (Mezirow, 2018).

The interaction stage reflects active experimentation, where students engage directly with the community and apply their linguistic and social skills in authentic contexts. Through teaching, communication, and participation in community activities, students actively construct knowledge rather than passively receiving it. This finding is consistent with Eyler and Giles, who emphasize that service-learning enhances students' ability to connect theory with practice, thereby deepening their learning experience (Eyler, 2023).

Reflection, as identified in this study, plays a central role in transforming experience into learning. According to Schön, reflective practice enables individuals to critically examine their actions and develop professional competence. In the context of this study, reflection allowed students to connect their experiences with the concept of religious moderation, facilitating a deeper and more meaningful understanding (Ng et al., 2022).

Finally, the internalization stage represents the outcome of the experiential learning process, where students integrate their experiences into their values, attitudes, and behaviors. This stage aligns with Kolb's notion of abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, where learners not only understand concepts but also apply them in their lives. The findings confirm that CSL is effective in promoting not only cognitive learning but also affective and behavioral transformation.

B. Internalization of Values in the Perspective of Value-Based Education

The process of internalizing religious moderation values observed in this study can be explained through the framework of value-based education. According to Lickona, effective moral education involves three components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These components were clearly evident in the CSL-based learning process (Kurniawan & Fitriyani, 2023).

At the cognitive level, students acquired knowledge about religious moderation through both classroom instruction and real-world experiences. However, the findings indicate that knowledge alone was insufficient to produce meaningful change. It was through emotional engagement and social interaction that students developed

empathy, respect, and a deeper understanding of diversity. This finding supports Halstead and Taylor, who argue that values cannot be effectively taught through direct instruction alone but must be experienced and practiced (Khan et al., 2022). CSL provides a rich context for such experiential learning by engaging students in real-life situations that require them to apply and reflect on their values.

Moreover, reflection emerged as a crucial mechanism for value internalization. As Dewey emphasizes, reflection transforms experience into meaningful learning by enabling individuals to critically analyze their actions and their consequences. In this study, reflection allowed students to connect their experiences with the principles of religious moderation, leading to deeper internalization (Ansbacher, 1998).

The findings also align with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, which highlights the role of critical reflection in changing individuals' frames of reference. Through CSL, students were able to question their assumptions, develop new perspectives, and adopt more inclusive and moderate attitudes (Mezirow, 2018).

C. ELT as a Medium for Intercultural Communicative Competence

This study highlights the potential of English Language Teaching (ELT) as a medium for developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Hicham et al., 2025). ICC involves not only linguistic competence but also attitudes of openness, knowledge of cultural differences, and skills of interpreting and relating cultural practices (Kozlovska et al., 2022).

Through CSL activities, students were exposed to authentic intercultural interactions that required them to communicate effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds. This aligns with Kramsch, who argues that language learning is inseparable from cultural understanding (Asrif & Fatmi, 2023). In this context, ELT becomes a means of fostering not only language proficiency but also intercultural awareness.

The findings suggest that CSL extends the scope of ELT beyond the classroom, transforming it into a socially embedded practice. This supports Risager's (2007) view that language education should incorporate social and cultural dimensions to prepare learners for global citizenship.

Furthermore, the improvement in students' communication skills observed in this study is consistent with Ellis, who emphasizes the importance of meaningful interaction in second language acquisition (Long, 2022). CSL provides such interaction by immersing students in real-life communication situations, thereby enhancing both fluency and confidence. Importantly, this study demonstrates that ELT can serve as a platform for integrating value education, particularly religious moderation. This interdisciplinary approach addresses the gap in previous research, which often treats language learning and value education as separate domains.

D. Religious Moderation in the Context of Higher Education

The findings of this study confirm that religious moderation can be effectively internalized through experiential and participatory learning approaches. Religious moderation, often conceptualized as *wasathiyah* (middle path), emphasizes balance, tolerance, justice, and inclusivity (Taufiqi et al., 2024).

In this study, these values were not only understood conceptually but also practiced through real-life interactions. This supports Banks, who argues that

multicultural education should involve experiential learning to promote democratic values and social cohesion(Vavrus, 2023).

In the context of higher education, particularly in Islamic institutions, the integration of religious moderation into ELT through CSL represents a holistic approach that combines academic and moral development. This is especially relevant in pesantren-based institutions, where education is rooted in both intellectual and spiritual traditions. The findings also highlight the importance of contextual learning in promoting religious moderation. As Azra suggests, moderation must be practiced in everyday life to be meaningful. CSL provides a platform for such practice by engaging students in real-world contexts(Azra, 2019).

E. Contribution to Previous Studies

This study contributes to the literature by integrating three domains: English language teaching, community service learning, and religious moderation(Taufiqi et al., 2024). Previous studies on CSL have primarily focused on academic outcomes and civic engagement, while studies on religious moderation have been largely confined to religious education.

By bridging these domains, this study offers a novel interdisciplinary perspective. It demonstrates that language education can play a significant role in value formation, thereby addressing a critical gap in the literature.

Additionally, this study provides empirical evidence from a pesantren-based higher education context, which is underrepresented in existing research. This contributes to the diversification of CSL research and highlights the relevance of local contexts in educational innovation.

F. Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the importance of integrating experiential learning and value-based education. It shows that CSL can bridge the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning, thereby supporting a holistic educational approach.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that educators should incorporate CSL into ELT curricula to enhance both language skills and character development. Institutions can also use CSL as a strategy to promote religious moderation and social harmony. For policymakers, this study highlights the need to integrate value education into mainstream curricula as a response to contemporary social challenges such as intolerance and polarization.

Synthesis of Discussion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that CSL-based ELT is an effective pedagogical approach for fostering the internalization of religious moderation values. By integrating experiential learning, intercultural communication, and value-based education, CSL provides meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom.

This approach not only enhances students' linguistic competence but also shapes their attitudes and behaviors, preparing them to become socially responsible and culturally sensitive individuals in a diverse society.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the implementation of Community Service Learning (CSL) in English Language Teaching (ELT) effectively facilitates the internalization of religious moderation values among university students. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the findings show that CSL provides meaningful experiential learning through direct engagement with diverse communities. The internalization process occurs through four interconnected stages exposure, interaction, reflection, and internalization which enable students to move from theoretical understanding to real-life application.

The findings reveal that key values of religious moderation, including tolerance, inclusivity, balance (*wasathiyah*), justice, and social responsibility, are not only understood conceptually but also reflected in students' attitudes and behaviors. In addition, CSL-based ELT contributes significantly to students' cognitive, affective, and communicative development. Students demonstrate improved understanding of diversity, increased empathy and openness, and enhanced English communication skills, particularly in authentic intercultural contexts.

Overall, this study highlights the potential of CSL-based ELT as a transformative pedagogical model that integrates language learning with value-based education. By combining experiential learning and community engagement, this approach not only strengthens students' linguistic competence but also fosters their awareness of harmonious social interaction. Therefore, CSL-based ELT offers a strategic contribution to promoting religious moderation and supporting the development of a more inclusive and peaceful multicultural society.

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