



# Enhancing students' English short story writing skills containing religious moderation values: A mentorship program

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## Abstract

Religious moderation is an essential concept that should be taught and practiced by the students in Islamic senior high schools (Madrasah Aliyah), particularly in the context of an increasingly diverse society. Religious moderation emphasizes on balance, moderation, tolerance and respect for differences, both in terms of beliefs and religious practices. This community service program aimed to enhance students' English short story writing skills which is integrated with religious moderation values. The mentorship program was conducted at MAN 2 Pamekasan and enrolled 25 students as participants. The program was carried out by applying Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) as a community service approach which consists of discovery, dream, define, design, and destiny. The activities were internalizing the religious moderation values to the students and practicing to write English short stories guided by facilitators. The result of the present community service shows that the students are gaining a better understanding of religious moderation, demonstrating improved writing skills, and being able to reflect the values of religious moderation in their short stories. The result suggested that combining creative writing with religious moderation value-based education can foster both linguistics competence and character development. Therefore, it contributes to a more harmonious school environment.

### Keywords

Community service; religious moderation; English short stories; short stories; writing skills.

## Abstrak

Moderasi beragama merupakan konsep penting yang harus diajarkan dan dipraktikkan oleh siswa di Madrasah Aliyah, terutama dalam konteks masyarakat yang semakin beragam. Moderasi beragama menekankan keseimbangan, toleransi, dan penghormatan terhadap perbedaan, baik dalam hal keyakinan maupun praktik keagamaan. Program pengabdian masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menulis cerpen berbahasa Inggris siswa yang terintegrasi dengan nilai-nilai moderasi beragama. Program pendampingan ini dilaksanakan di MAN 2 Pamekasan dengan melibatkan 25 siswa sebagai peserta. Program ini menggunakan pendekatan Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) dalam pengabdian masyarakat yang terdiri dari tahap discovery, dream, define, design, dan destiny. Kegiatan yang dilakukan yaitu internalisasi nilai-nilai moderasi beragama kepada siswa serta pelatihan menulis cerpen berbahasa Inggris yang dibimbing oleh para fasilitator sekaligus pengabdian. Hasil dari pengabdian ini menunjukkan bahwa para siswa memperoleh pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang moderasi beragama, menunjukkan peningkatan kemampuan menulis, dan mampu merefleksikan nilai-nilai moderasi beragama dalam cerpen mereka. Hasil pengabdian Masyarakat ini merekomendasikan bahwa menggabungkan penulisan kreatif dengan pendidikan berbasis nilai moderasi beragama dapat meningkatkan kompetensi linguistik sekaligus

pengembangan karakter. Dengan demikian, hal ini berkontribusi pada terciptanya lingkungan sekolah yang lebih harmonis.

#### Kata Kunci

Pengabdian; moderasi beragama; cerpen bahasa Inggris; cerpen; keterampilan menulis.

## 1. Introduction

Islamic Senior High School 2 which is well-known as *Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pamekasan* is located at Jl. KH. Wahid Hasyim No.28, Pamekasan Regency, East Java. It is one of the favorite schools in Pamekasan under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Many students have been enrolled in this school who come from many places in Madura. That is why they may have different characteristics, habits, and preferences. Undoubtedly, it has become an asset for MAN 2 Pamekasan. This asset needs to be given attention so that students, who are Generation Z (Gen Z), are not affected by the negative impact of using mobile devices, such as lack of social solidarity, lack of respect for teachers, harsh words, mocking each other between friends, intolerance and so on which later effects on their social life. Since Gen Z is a generation with high digital mobility, they are now almost entirely dependent on mobile devices, even for accomplishing school assignments (Fiandra, 2020).

In recent years, the urgency of religious moderation has become increasingly recognized as a vital component in fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual respect within communities. Indonesia, a nation with a rich diversity of religions and cultures, faces challenges in maintaining harmony among its people. In the Policy Brief Series, Issue 4 Vol. 1 2018, as cited in Abidin (2021), it was highlighted that the rising threat of radicalism in schools is becoming increasingly alarming. A national cyber survey revealed that 41.4% of students hold strongly radical views, and 2.4% are involved in highly radical actions. On the other hand, 10% of students have very moderate views, and 54.3% exhibit very moderate behavior. These statistics should not be underestimated, as they may represent the early stages of growing intolerance and radicalism in the country, making it difficult to achieve religious moderation. Therefore, the rise of radicalism and intolerance in various parts of the world, including Indonesia, underscores the need for educational initiatives promoting tolerance, inclusivity, and understanding among the younger generation.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in embedding these values within their curricula. Man 2 Pamekasan, a prominent Islamic educational institution in Madura is committed to integrating the principles of religious moderation into its teaching and learning. It aligns with the broader national agenda of promoting moderate religious perspectives to counteract radicalization and extremism (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

Gen Z is the target in realizing national unity. They are the representation of the youth who are responsible for determining the future of the nation. They need to understand that our country is a peaceful, harmonious nation that respects differences. Not respecting differences will cause a generation with radical and extreme ways of thinking. One way to foster a sense of tolerance is by strengthening the values of religious moderation. By understanding religious moderation, social life will be harmonious, respect each other, maintain and tolerate without having to cause conflict due to existing differences. According to Kamaruddin Amin in the book "Religious Moderation from Indonesia to the World" states that upholding the spirit of nationhood based on Pancasila as a manifestation of Islamic attitudes is the key word for religious moderation (Suharto, et.all, 2021).

Religious moderation consists of 10 (ten) principles and values, namely *ta'addub*, *qudwah*, *muwathanah*, *tawasuth*, *tawazun*, *l'tidal*, *musawah*, *shura*, *tasamuh*, and *tathawur wa ibtikar* (Kementerian Agama RI, 2021). *Ta'adub* refers to civilized which mean emphasizing the noble morals and identity as *khairu ummah* (the best community) in society. *Qudwah* (exemplary) refers to being role model and inspiration. *Muwathanah* (citizenship and nationalism) refers to the mindset of recognizing and respecting the presence of religion, shown through a sense of nationalism that every citizen should embody. *Tawasuth* means understanding and practicing

religion in a balanced way, avoiding both excessiveness (*ifrāt*) and neglect or disregard for religious teachings (*tafrīt*). *Tawazun* (balanced) refers to the understanding and practicing religion in a way that maintains equilibrium, encompassing all aspects of life. *I'tidal* (Justice and consistency) means placing everything in its proper position and proportionally fulfilling rights and obligations. *Musawah* (equality) means treating everyone the same way, without any discrimination based on their beliefs, traditions, or background. *Shura* (*musyawarah*) means that Each problem is addressed through discussion to achieve agreement, with the principle of putting the common good above all other considerations. *Tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) involves recognizing and respecting differences, whether in religious beliefs or other aspects of life. *Tathawur wa ibkar* (being dynamic and innovative) means being continually open to making changes and evolving in response to changing times.

One effective way to internalize the value of religious moderation is through literature, specifically the writing of short stories. It is said that storytelling has been recognized as a powerful tool for conveying moral and ethical lessons (Hayati et al., 2021). By engaging students in writing English short stories infused with religious moderation, they have creative space to explore and express these values by developing their skills to create stories, develop characters and plots, and deliver messages effectively. This approach enhances students' literary skills and deepens their understanding of moderation, tolerance, and peaceful existence.

The implementation of this mentorship program at MAN 2 Pamekasan is also in line with the objectives of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, which emphasizes the development of character education alongside academic achievements (Kemdikbud, 2024). Given the strategic importance of this initiative, the mentorship program is expected to yield positive outcomes in shaping the students' character. It serves as a practical application of religious moderation principles, ensuring that students not only learn about these values theoretically, but also practice them through creative writing. Further, by conducting this program, the students have greater opportunities to be better at writing and publishing their best work.

Several community services (PKM) have been conducted in line with composing short stories. Hadi et.al (2022) conducted assistance in writing short stories based on local wisdom at SMP Negeri 2 Medan. Their community service aimed at enhancing junior high school students' writing skills in terms of Indonesian short stories containing local wisdom. Other community service held by Risnawati (2022) focused on developing literacy among women by conducting assistance on Indonesian short story composition for PW Nasyyatul Aisyiyah, West Java. Muttaqin et.al (2023) aimed at optimizing students of MA Azzuhriyah in writing short stories based on the culture. While the outcome of the community service was an anthology entitled "Cerita Gubuk Kami". Those community services focused on enhancing participants' writing skills in Indonesian short stories based on different substances. Therefore, the current community service tended to be different in actualization since the facilitators focused on English short stories containing religious moderation.

## 2. Method

The approach of the current empowering program is the Asset Based Community-driven Development (ABCD) approach. ABCD is one of several community empowerment approaches based on the strength of community assets and the potential to encourage social changes (Afandi & Fitriyah, 2019).

The program was conducted in Islamic Senior High School 2 of Pamekasan (*Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Pamekasan*) which involved 25 students of the English Club and Language majoring class.



Figure 1. Photo session with the principal, English teachers, and students

The program with the ABCD approach consists of 5 (five) steps, namely discovery, dream, design, define, and destiny. This step is described as follows.

### 2.1. Discovery

In this step, the facilitators identified the assets in MAN 2 Pamekasan both from the school and the students' perspectives. The asset of the school is the program or classes that focus on language improvement, namely English Club and *Kelas Bahasa*. On the other hand, in terms of students' assets, they come from different places in Madura. Undoubtedly, they have various personalities and cultures. In addition, the students' interest in English led them to join the English Club and *Kelas Bahasa*.

### 2.2. Dream

This stage was about formulating the targets to be achieved related to enhancing literacy in the form of writing short English stories containing Islamic moderation values. The facilitators held discussions with the principal and English teachers. The discussion was about the students' understanding about religious moderation from their perspective as well as the implementation of religious moderation in madrasah. Moreover, the activity in English club and language class was also discussed. From these discussions, several strategic plans were formulated based on literacy achievement indicators for writing English short stories. These stories should be between 1.000 to 2.000 words in length, focusing on the main topic, a few central characters, and a core theme that reflects religious moderation values. The values of religious moderation include moderation (*Tawassut*), justice (*I'tidal*), tolerance (*Tasamuh*), consultation (*Asy-Syuro*), improvement (*Al-Ishlah*), leadership (*Al-Qudwah*), patriotism (*Al-Muwathanah*), anti-violence (*Al-'Unf*), and cultural respect (*I'tiraf al-Urf*).

The strategic plans that have been formulated include conducting a session or presentation on the importance of religious moderation values in life, and carrying out a presentation on enhancing students' literacy in writing, particularly focusing on English short stories that align with their major in the foreign language class. Additionally, the plans aim to facilitate the practice of writing English short stories that incorporate the values of religious moderation. Finally, the initiative will culminate in the production of an anthology of English short stories written by foreign language class students of MAN 2 Pamekasan.

### 2.3. Design

After identifying assets and crafting strategic plans, the next step involves designing the subsequent program. This phase includes discussions between the PKM facilitators and the school. These discussions resulted in outlining the stages of activities that will be implemented to meet each indicator.

In terms of conducting sessions about religious moderation and short stories, the facilitators determined the speakers. Regarding practicing English short story writing, the facilitators assisted the students in groups of 5 students.

#### 2.4. Define

After designing the steps to be implemented to achieve the goals, the next stage is to determine the details related to the timeline and job descriptions. This step has been carried out from August 10 to September 1, 2023.

**Table 1.** Schedule of Mentoring Program

Day/ Date	Time	Program	Person in Charge
Thursday/ August 10, 2023	09.00–11.00 WIB	Survey	The facilitators
Friday/ August 11, 2023	09.00–10.00 WIB	Room meeting preparation	The facilitator, and committee
Saturday/ August 12, 2023	08.00–08.30 WIB	Opening Ceremony - Opening Speech from the representative of the facilitator; - Speech of the principal	Master of Ceremony
	08.30–10.00 WIB	Session 1: Islamic Moderation Values	Wahab Syakhirul Alim, M.Pd
	10.00–11.30 WIB	Session 2: English short stories	Lasmi Febrianingrum, M.Pd
	11.30–12.00 WIB	Assignment	The Facilitators
Tuesday/ August, 15 2023	08.00–12.00 WIB	Practice I Creating the Story Board of English Short Story	The Facilitators
Friday/ August, 18 2023	08.00–12.00 WIB	Practice II Mentoring and Accomplishing of Draft of an English short story	The Facilitators
Friday/ August 25, 2023	08.00–12.00 WIB	Practice III Submission of the first written document for review	The Facilitators
Friday/ September 1, 2023	08.00- 12.00 WIB	Submission of Final report	The Facilitators

#### 2.5. Destiny

The following are the technical steps carried out in the mentoring process for writing English short stories infused with values of religious moderation for students in the foreign language class at MAN 2 Pamekasan. In line with the target formulated in the dream stage, this mentoring was conducted from August 12 to September 1, 2023.

1. On the first day, August 12, 2023, two facilitators delivered material on religious moderation values and the writing of English short stories. This was followed by forming five groups, each with a facilitator and teacher responsible for the foreign language class.
2. On the second day, August 15, 2023, the mentoring was conducted online through a WhatsApp group created on the first day. The facilitator asked each student to create a storyboard for an English story consisting of an opening, setting, characters, problem, solution, and ending/ closing.
3. On the third day, August 18, 2023, the mentoring continued online, focusing on the task from the second day, which was to write a draft of the English short story.

4. On the fourth day, August 25, 2023, the mentoring was conducted online, with all students being asked to submit their writings for review by the respective facilitator or group supervisor. The works were then returned to the students for revision.
5. On the fifth day, September 1, 2023, the mentoring was conducted online, with students being asked to submit their final English short stories, revised according to the feedback from the facilitators.



Figure 2. First session about religious moderation



Figure 3. Session about English short stories



Figure 4. Practicing to write English short stories

Before the program was held, some surveys were administered to the participants. The survey was delivered in Indonesian language. The survey was about their understanding of religious moderation and competence in composing short stories. Table 2 shows the questions in line with student's knowledge of religious moderation.

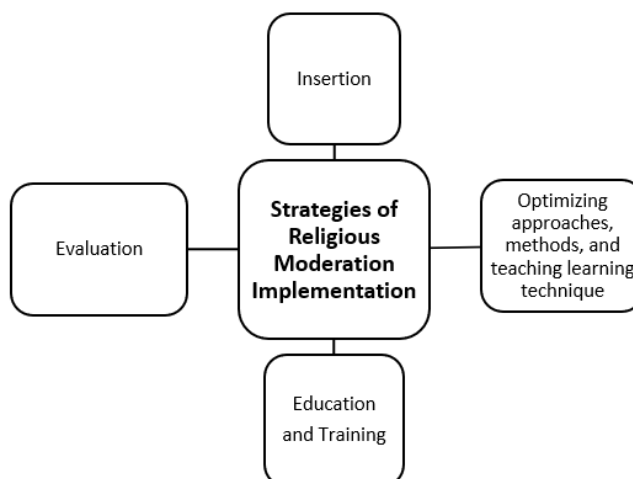
**Table 2.** Questions about knowledge of religious moderation

No	Questions
1.	What do you understand about the concept of religious moderation?
2.	In your opinion, how important is the attitude of religious moderation in community life?
3.	How much do you agree with the statement: "Every individual has the right to practice their religion without interference as long as it does not harm others"?
4.	Do you agree that schools should teach religious moderation?
5.	Do you think that differences can trigger conflicts in society?

Based on the preliminary survey and discussion with the principal before the community service, the student's implementation of Islamic moderation is quite good. They have presented the value of moderation although some do not recognize what they have done is fully associated with the value of religious moderation. Their understanding is supported by the fact that the *madrasah* is the place for implementing Islamic moderation by internalizing the value through lesson plans, textbooks, and habituation during intra and extracurricular activities. Moreover, since the students in the foreign language class were in the first semester, their competence in literacy especially in writing short stories is adequately low. Therefore, the current community service was expected to enhance students' understanding of religious moderation and literacy in writing English short stories.

### 3. Result and Discussion

As stated earlier, the understanding and the implementation of religious moderation among students of MAN 2 Pamekasan has been carried out. However, it still needs to be maintained and enhanced. In practice, the *madrasah* applied several strategies for implementing religious moderation (Kementerian Agama, 2021). The first strategy is about inserting religious moderation content in all relevant materials. Second, optimizing the learning approaches, methods, and techniques. It can foster critical thinking, respect for differences, appreciation of others' opinions, tolerance, courage to express ideas and responsibility. Third, implementing programs, education, training, and targeted briefings centered on religious moderation. In line with this, religious moderation is seen as a hidden curriculum. The last, conducting a simultaneous evaluation to assess the achievement of the learning process that has been carried out using methods that can foster a moderate attitude.



**Figure 5.** Strategies for implementing religious moderation in *madrasah*

This community service program has positively impacted students' character in alignment with the values of religious moderation as well as enhancing the literacy skills of the foreign language class students at MAN 2 Pamekasan. This supports Character Education and the Pancasila Student Profile, as outlined in the school's curriculum, whether it is the 2013 curriculum or the independent learning curriculum. Having students with good character also

positively affects the school's reputation. This community service activity also highlights the role of PTKIN lecturers as a foundation or laboratory for religious moderation in conveying social norms and structures.

Before the program, the facilitators administered a survey regarding religious moderation with several questions. The result of the survey presented in Table 3 shows that students' understanding and attitude toward religious moderation concepts changed after the program was accomplished. Regarding knowledge of religious moderation (question 1), 68% of students understand the concept of religious moderation as being respectful and tolerant of differences, 20% of students stated that they did not have any idea about it, and a slight number (only 8%) of students still associate moderation with extreme attitude. In line with question 2 which is about the importance of moderation in society, before the program, the majority of students consider that moderation is important (88%). Surprisingly, after the program was held, all students stated that religious moderation is important. In addition, regarding the item about the right to practice religion with no distraction (question 3) gain 100% agreement from the students. However, before the program was held, 60% of students strongly agreed with the statement that every individual has the right to practice their religion without interference and the remaining 40% agreed. After the program, support for this statement grew stronger, with 80% of students strongly agreeing and 20% agreeing. Regarding question 4 which is about the importance of teaching religious moderation in school, 96% of students agreed before the program and nobody disagreed after the program was accomplished. The last question is about the possibility of conflict due to differences. It is stated that 84% of students felt that differences were likely to trigger conflict while 12% considered it unlikely. As the program finished, this view became more moderate, with only 40% believing that conflict was very likely to occur, while the percentage of students who considered conflict unlikely increased to 28%.

**Table 3.** Questions about Student's understanding of religious moderation

No	Questions	Percentage (%)	
		Before	After
<b>1.</b>	<b><i>What do you know about the concept of religious moderation?</i></b>		
	Respectful and tolerant towards different in belief/ faith	68	100
	Extreme attitude in practicing religion	8	0
	Indifferent towards religion	4	0
	Don't know	20	0
<b>2.</b>	<b><i>In your opinion, how important is the attitude of religious moderation in community?</i></b>		
	Very important	72	80
	Important	16	20
	Less Important	12	0
	Not important at all	0	0
<b>3.</b>	<b><i>How much do you agree with the statement: "Every individual has the right to practice their religion without interference as long as it does not harm others"?</i></b>		
	Strongly agree	60	80
	Agree	40	20
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
<b>4.</b>	<b><i>Do you agree that schools should teach religious moderation?</i></b>		
	Strongly agree	60	68
	Agree	36	32
	Disagree	4	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
<b>5.</b>	<b><i>Do you think that differences can trigger conflicts in society?</i></b>		
	Very likely	52	40
	Likely	32	28
	Unlikely	12	28
	Very unlikely	4	0



The student's understanding of religious moderation is crucial to investigate. The study by Syahid et.al (2023) revealed that the students' understanding of religious moderation was very good which was seen from various indicators, namely tolerance, national commitment, anti-radicalism, and accommodating local wisdom. Understanding of religious moderation should be contextual, not textual. It means that religious moderation does not necessarily mean that religion being moderated, but the practice of individuals must be moderate because Indonesia has various cultures, habit, and traditions (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019). Another study by Salsabila and Frinaldi (2023), however, investigated the implementation of religious moderation programs in *madrasah* and found that the program has been well implemented and covers four indicators.

As the main objective of the current community service was to enhance students' writing skills, the facilitators initially questioned their competence and passion in English short story writing. They were questioned about their writing practice. Some students said that they were familiar of writing news or articles in tabloids but they never practiced writing short stories, especially English short stories, and remained students stated that they never compose a writing. At the end of the program, they are expected to compose English short stories containing religious moderation as they learned before. They are mentored by 5 facilitators which is preceded by creating a storyboard. Storyboarding is regarded as a technique emphasizing the detailed explanation, growing of the ideas, and sequencing (Basuki & Saputri, 2020). In addition, storyboarding technique can promote students' creativity (Bahloul, 2017) and is believed can enhance students' writing skills (Ahmed, 2021; Janah, 2017). As the storyboard was accomplished, the facilitators guided students to explore their own stories. As the program was conducted, a book or anthology of English short stories was accomplished by the foreign language class students at MAN 2 Pamekasan. Table 4 presents the English short stories containing Religious Moderation Values written by the foreign language class students at MAN 2 Pamekasan.

**Table 3.** Titles of English short stories with Religious Moderation values

No	Title	Authors	The values of religious moderation
1.	Love in Different Way	Fatmawati Dwi Putri	<i>Tasamuh</i> (Tolerant)
2.	A Different Way	-	<i>Tasamuh</i> (Tolerant)
3.	He is too Famous	Anni Wildanul Ummah	' <i>Unf</i> (anti-violence)
4.	Foreign Friend	Aqila Ghania	<i>Tasamuh</i> (Tolerant)
5.	The Story of a Farmer's Son	Delvita Sari	<i>Qudwah</i> (Leadership)
6.	Shackles of Anger	Dina Mulyana	<i>Tasamuh</i> (Tolerant)
7.	Wrong Target	Serliyatul Asrifah	<i>Tasamuh</i> (Tolerant)
8.	I learn from Differences	Niesa Ayudia S	<i>Tasamuh</i> (Tolerant)
9.	Silly Made Friendship Broken	Rizca	<i>Tasamuh</i> (Tolerant)
10.	Unbelievable	Sania Zaskiya Gina Naila	<i>Tasamuh</i> (Tolerant)
11.	Between friends and love	Maulidatul Hasanah	<i>Taaddub</i> (civilized)

Of 25 students joining the mentorship program to compose English short stories containing religious moderation, only 11 students accomplished the story within the deadline. Table 4 lists various works focusing on the theme of religious moderation highlighting the contribution of different authors. Most English short stories emphasize *tasamuh* (tolerance) which reflects a commitment to understand and accept the differences. Regarding this, it is not surprising if in the post survey students see that the differences likely do not trigger a conflict. Notable entries include "Shackles of Anger" by Dina Mulyana and "Foreign Friend" by Aqila Ghania, both promoting tolerance. "The Story of s Farmer's Son" by Delvita Sari represents *Qudwah* (leadership) and "He is Too Famous" by Anni Wildanul Ummah explores '*Unf* (anti- violence). Maulidatul Hasanah explores the valu of *taaddub* (civilized) in her story entitled "Between Friends and Love". The variety of title and values presented in the students' works underscores the importance of promoting harmony and understanding in a diverse society.

#### 4. Conclusion

This community service in the form of a mentoring program was important to provide an understanding of the values of religious moderation to the foreign language class students at MAN 2. The goal was to build behavior aligned with religious moderation values through writing English short stories. The activity was successful and ran smoothly. Several objectives of this activity were achieved. The students participated enthusiastically and eagerly in all the activities conducted over the two weeks. This enthusiasm was evident in how well they followed what the two presenters conveyed and applied it by producing English short stories infused with religious moderation values under the guidance of the facilitators. The seriousness of implementing this program has positively contributed to instilling the values of religious moderation and enhancing writing literacy that supports the subjects relevant to the student's classes or majors. It is hoped that this activity will be followed up with other initiatives to improve literacy skills, such as public speaking with the same theme of applying religious moderation values.

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