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Interculturality in EFL Education as a Gateway to Religious Moderation: Voices from Religion-Based School Teachers

Galuh Nur Rohmah - Ulil Fitriyah - Lina Hanifiyah

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang - Department of English Literature (Indonesia)

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galuh98@bsi.uin-malang.ac.id
fitriyah_ulil@bsi.uin-malang.ac.id
linahanifiyah@uin-malang.ac.id

L'INTERCULTURALITÀ NELL'EDUCAZIONE EFL COME VIA VERSO LA MODERAZIONE RELIGIOSA: LE VOCI DEGLI INSEGNANTI DI SCUOLE CONFENSIONALI

ABSTRACT

This study investigates EFL teachers' conceptions of Intercultural Language Learning (IcLL) in Indonesian Madrasah Aliyah and examines how they link intercultural learning with the promotion of religious moderation. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry design, data were generated through a preparatory questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with five English teachers. Thematic analysis, informed by Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), was used to interpret teachers' intercultural orientations and classroom practices. The findings show that teachers view IcLL as fundamental to language learning and as a strategic medium for cultivating open, tolerant, respectful learners while reinforcing religious moderation. Most teachers are positioned between minimisation and acceptance, with some evidence of emerging adaptation. However, the enactment of IcLL remains uneven and dependent on school context, teacher training, and the availability of culturally rich materials.

Keywords: Educator perspectives; EFL education; Intercultural language learning; Religion-based schools; Religious moderation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although learning English is widely recognized as a way to enhance foreign language proficiency, English instruction in schools is still predominantly viewed as merely a compulsory subject with limited contribution to students' overall personal development. There is an urgent need to shift English pedagogy towards IcLL directing English classes, especially in religion-based schools, become spaces that foster students' wise and sensitive navigation of cultural diversity (Morganna *et al.*, 2020). Rising globalization pressures ELT practitioners to design meaningful, contextually relevant instruction, a shift that begins with exploring EFL teachers' conceptions of IcLL, which both indicate its urgency and ground its broader, systematic integration into school curricula.

IcLL provides a valuable opportunity to cultivate individuals who are open-minded and capable of engaging with diverse cultural perspectives (Perez-Gomez & Coss, 2021). IcLL holds that culture is relative, not absolute; by engaging diverse perspectives, students broaden their outlook, deepen appreciation of Indonesian heritage, and see truth as shared across communities. Within this framework, English becomes a long-term investment for thriving in multicultural settings and, in madrasahs, a vehicle for realizing religious moderation. Teachers' intercultural competence is thus critical, yet IcLL remains underdeveloped, with cultural content applied inconsistently and guidance limited. Resources for cultural integration are often used superficially, therefore IcLL is needed to link English-speaking and local identities and foster tolerant, dialogic, pluralistic citizens for all.

This study aims to investigate how EFL teachers conceptualize IcLL and its role in promoting religious moderation, recognizing that their background-informed conceptions shape instructional decisions and classroom practices (Batunan *et al.*, 2023). Understanding these conceptions provides valuable insights into teachers' readiness to integrate intercultural learning into English language instruction. Moreover, this understanding serves as a critical reference point for policymakers in assessing the preparedness of English teachers to transform their classrooms into environments that foster tolerance, peace, respect for traditions, and shared humanity – key foundational elements in strengthening religious moderation.

This article advances three key arguments. First, increasing global diversity poses a common challenge that educators across disciplines and educational levels must address, and in English language education, intercultural learning provides an effective means of preparing students to navigate complex cultural diversity. Second, intercultural learning closely aligns with efforts to strengthen religious moderation, a strategic priority of the

Ministry of Religious Affairs, with madrasahs positioned as key institutions responsible for its successful implementation. Third, initiatives to promote religious moderation extend beyond theological debate to encompass broader humanitarian and national concerns, positioning the English classroom as a powerful arena for cultivating tolerance, openness, mutual respect, and intercultural understanding.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Interculturality in English language learning*

In language teaching, integrating local cultural values into English materials and pedagogy is essential, requiring teachers to present target-language culture while reinforcing students' own heritage and connections between them (Parlindungan *et al.*, 2018; Fernández-Agüero & Chancay-Cedeño, 2019; Indah Kurnia, 2022). This approach bridges differing cultural values, fostering a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of language use. Accordingly, English teachers must integrate cultural values into instruction so that students can participate in intercultural communities and communicate effectively, appropriately, and with cultural sensitivity.

The integration of cultural values into English language learning is contested, particularly over which cultural elements should be taught. Many scholars advocate a balanced representation of target-language culture, students' local cultures, and other non-native English-speaking cultures, such as China, Korea, and Japan, to enhance critical thinking, cultural awareness, and sensitivity. Others argue that local culture should be the primary lens, though they acknowledge that relying solely on local content can hinder cross-cultural communication, while focusing only on foreign cultures risks weakening students' pride in their heritage and identity and encouraging uncritical adoption of trends misaligned with their own societal values and overall long-term community cohesion.

2.2. *Intercultural approach in English language learning*

Foreign language learning distinguishes linguistic competence from communicative competence, which prioritizes language use in context. However (Rusmana *et al.*, 2025) argues that currently, communication skills are

no longer considered complete without the cultural awareness that exists in the interaction of a foreign language. The intercultural approach requires language learners to have cultural awareness not only of the cultural aspects of the target language but also aspects of their own culture. Hang and Zhang (2023) proposed the an *intercultural speaker* mediates between cultures, so students also study target-language cultures and their own.

Excessive focus on target-language cultures can reduce self-perceptions and even foster students' anti-cultural attitudes. And according to Byram and Wagner (2018) causes the loss of the student's local identity. Conversely, teaching a language through balanced representation of target-language and local cultures offers clear advantages in a globalized world, accustoming students to compare, evaluate, and interpret cultural differences, fostering intercultural awareness and sensitivity, and thereby reducing confusion or communication breakdowns arising from divergent cultural norms in interaction and collaboration worldwide.

2.3. *Interculturality, EFL contexts and religious moderation*

The term «moderate» denotes a «middle way» or «what is best». In Indonesia, this concept underpins the Strengthening Religious Moderation (SRM) program of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, designed to safeguard the country's pluralistic Unitary State. SRM prioritizes four indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of tradition. National commitment denotes adherence to the constitutional principles of the 1945 Constitution and related regulations. Tolerance respects diversity and expression; non-violence rejects coercion; acceptance of tradition embraces compatible local customs.

All stakeholders, including madrasah teachers, play a crucial role in translating and applying these indicators in ways appropriate to their capacities and contexts. In madrasah classrooms, SRM is operationalized through various pedagogical strategies. As intercultural language learning becomes more widely adopted in English education, it offers a strategic entry point for aligning ELT with SRM. Through intercultural English lessons, teachers can foster students' moderation while simultaneously strengthening their knowledge of local traditions, reflecting the intercultural principle of mutual cultural growth. By engaging with both local and Western traditions in English learning, students develop respect for cultural diversity and a moderate religious outlook.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. *Research design*

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to explore teachers' conceptions of intercultural English learning and how these conceptions inform classroom practice. Teachers' classroom experiences and reflections were reconstructed as narrative accounts to generate in-depth insights into English teachers' perspectives on intercultural learning and its contribution to students' attitudes of moderation. In this approach, teachers' experiences are treated as meaningful data and as a source of professional knowledge for practitioners and other educators. Narrative inquiry is particularly appropriate because it captures the complexity and diversity of teachers' lived experiences in context (Richards, 2010) including the potentials, challenges, successes, and failures encountered in intercultural English teaching (Rohmah *et al.*, 2019).

3.2. *Participants*

Participants in this study were English teachers at Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic senior high schools) in Malang. They were initially recruited via a Google Form circulated through the local English Teachers Association group. From the respondents, eight teachers met the inclusion criteria: (1) currently teaching English at Madrasah Aliyah, (2) having at least three years of teaching experience, and (3) indicating willingness to participate in follow-up interviews. From these eight, five teachers were purposively selected for in-depth narrative inquiry to maximise variation in cultural background (Javanese and Javanese-Madurese), teaching experience (three to over twenty years), and intercultural exposure (e.g. overseas study, religious moderation programmes, or frequent contact with diverse communities), and because they provided the most detailed and reflective written responses.

3.3. *Data collection*

Data were collected in two stages. First, a Preparatory Questionnaire (PQ) was distributed via Google Form to obtain preliminary data on teachers' perspectives on intercultural learning, their integration of English

and Indonesian cultural elements, and their views on the contribution of intercultural English learning to religious moderation; this PQ generated written narratives and served as a screening tool, from which eight eligible teachers were identified and invited for interviews. Second, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted in two rounds: the first to verify and elaborate PQ responses, the second for validation and member checking. Due to scheduling constraints and limited narrative depth in some cases, only five teachers completed both interviews and produced sufficiently rich accounts for analysis, at which point thematic saturation was judged to have been reached.

3.4. Data analysis

Data were analysed using narrative and thematic analysis in two iterative phases, often described as vertical and horizontal analysis. In the vertical phase, each participant's written PQ responses and interview transcripts were first read several times to gain a holistic understanding, then subjected to open coding. Initial codes were generated inductively, using descriptive labels to capture key ideas, critical incidents, and recurrent meanings in each teacher's story. These codes were then grouped into broader categories (e.g. views of culture, perceptions of IcLL, understandings of religious moderation, classroom practices), and each teacher's narrative was reconstructed around these categories.

In the horizontal phase, reconstructed narratives were compared across cases using constant comparison. Codes and categories were reviewed, merged, or refined to form higher-order themes that captured shared patterns and meaningful contrasts between teachers. Bennett's DMIS and the IcLL framework were used as sensitising concepts, guiding a second cycle of coding in which teachers' statements and practices were interpreted in relation to stages of intercultural sensitivity. Themes were repeatedly checked against the raw data to ensure coherence and credibility, and minor adjustments were made until a stable set of themes representing teachers' conceptions and practices was established.

4. FINDINGS

A Preparatory Questionnaire (PQ) was used to map Madrasah Aliyah teachers' intercultural profiles, revealing that they generally possessed basic

intercultural knowledge, had limited formal training in IcLL, had attended some workshops on religious moderation, and reported occasional encounters with people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

4.1. *Teachers' intercultural narratives*

Teacher 1 – AR

AR comes from a culturally diverse Madurese-Javanese family and, although he lives in a predominantly Javanese environment, Madurese remains his first language. With more than six years of English teaching experience and two years of overseas master's study, he has substantial intercultural exposure. He regularly attends seminars and workshops on intercultural pedagogy and religious moderation and, as a practising Muslim, views interaction with people from different backgrounds as an opportunity to deepen understanding and cultivate mutual respect.

AR believes that the principles of religious moderation can be systematically integrated into English instruction. For him, this begins with awareness-raising and the reinforcement of *akhlakul karimah* (noble character) in students' daily behaviour, explicitly articulated in the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP). In practice, he opens lessons with prayer, uses stories of Muslim-non-Muslim friendship, and encourages students to treat every day experiences and English itself as media for *da'wah* while adopting positive values such as discipline and strong reading habits.

Teacher 2 – AD

AD, a Javanese-Madurese Muslim, lives in a largely homogeneous community where Madurese is used in daily communication. With over fifteen years of teaching experience, he has had limited direct contact with people from different cultural or religious backgrounds, although he is active in a local religious organisation. In the interview, he emphasised that diversity also includes differences in outlook and grounds respectful engagement with difference in Surah Al-Kafirun, verse 6: *lakum diinukum waliya diin*.

AD considers integrating religious moderation into English instruction feasible but argues that it must be tailored to the madrasah context. Because his students are relatively homogeneous, he does not view religious moderation as an urgent instructional priority and focuses instead on sustaining interest and improving writing and speaking skills. Nonetheless,

he recognises the need to prepare students for diverse values, suggesting scenario-based tasks – such as comparing Muslim and Western greeting practices without value judgement – to foster appreciation of diversity, open-mindedness, and intercultural awareness.

Teacher 3 – MS

MS comes from a Javanese cultural background and primarily uses Javanese in daily communication. With more than three years of teaching experience, she actively participates in seminars and workshops on intercultural learning and religious moderation. As a Muslim, she recognises that religious values fundamentally shape everyday life, including interactions at home, in social settings, and in educational environments, and this conviction strongly informs her beliefs about the aims and responsibilities of English language teaching in a madrasah context.

MS integrates religious moderation into her teaching by cultivating students' appreciation and respect for people of different faiths. When an American guest teacher of another religion visited the school, she prepared students by emphasising peaceful coexistence and explaining that religious diversity is inherent and valuable. She opens lessons with prayer, links materials to shared moral values, and uses storytelling, «telling experience» tasks (e.g., Malang Square church-mosque), and comparative texts (Sydney Opera House – TMII) to broaden students' intercultural perspectives.

Teacher 4 – KN

KN, like MS, comes from a Javanese cultural background and primarily uses Javanese in daily communication. With twenty-one years of teaching experience, he has not attended specific seminars on intercultural learning or religious moderation, yet he frequently interacts with people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. As a Muslim, he believes his faith has instilled key values – respect, courteous communication, and tolerance – which shape his open-minded approach and his efforts to create an inclusive, respectful classroom environment.

KN considers the integration of religious moderation into English instruction both feasible and strategic, particularly through the use of authentic materials. He argues that nurturing students' moderate attitudes requires cultivating open-mindedness, respect, and tolerance in response to daily encounters with different faiths, perspectives, and lifestyles. Practically,

he highlights respectful prayer practices in non-Muslim schools and uses foreign songs and stories on *birrul walidain* (filial piety) to connect intercultural content with local culture and Islamic teachings.

Teacher 5 – RU

RU is an experienced educator with twenty-one years of teaching. A Javanese Muslim, he primarily uses Javanese at home. Although he has not attended training specifically on intercultural English learning, he has actively participated in religious moderation programmes. His daily interactions with culturally diverse students, particularly those of Madurese descent, convince him that cultural background shapes values and worldviews, prompting him to adapt his instruction and foster an inclusive, culturally responsive classroom.

Although RU has no direct experience interacting with people from different religious backgrounds, he strongly believes that English can play a crucial role in promoting religious moderation in schools. He emphasises that, beyond linguistic proficiency, English teaching can motivate students to use the language as a medium for *da'wah*, challenging the stereotype that English is a «hypocritical language». RU also views language learning as inseparable from culture and encourages students to broaden their worldview, treat English as *da'wah*, and adopt positive British values such as discipline and a love of reading in their daily lives.

4.2. Teachers' intercultural sensitivity in light of DMIS

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) conceptualises intercultural development as a continuum from ethnocentrism (denial, defence, minimisation) to ethno-relativism (acceptance, adaptation, integration). Along this continuum, individuals move from largely ignoring or judging cultural difference to recognising its legitimacy, adjusting their behaviour, and flexibly navigating multiple cultural frames of reference.

Viewed through the lens of DMIS, the participating teachers in this study are positioned predominantly in the mid-range stages, with some variation in how far they have progressed toward ethno-relativism. AD, for example, works in a highly homogeneous environment and has limited direct exposure to religiously diverse contexts, yet he explicitly acknowledges that «diversity» includes differences in outlook and practice, even

within Islam. His emphasis on *lakum diinukum waliya diin* as a basis for respecting difference suggests that he has moved beyond denial and defence. However, religious moderation is not seen as an urgent instructional priority, and intercultural elements are not yet systematically embedded in his pedagogy. This profile is consistent with *minimisation* tending toward early *acceptance*, where difference is acknowledged in principle but only partially translated into intentional classroom practice.

RU, MS, KN, and AR exhibit more clearly ethno-relative orientations. RU's daily engagement with students from different cultural backgrounds, especially Madurese learners, and his readiness to adapt his teaching to students' cultural norms reflect a growing ability to decentre from his own perspective. His conviction that language learning is inseparable from culture and that English can be used for *da'wah* indicates *acceptance*, with emerging elements of *adaptation* as he selectively appropriates positive aspects of British culture (e.g., discipline, a love of reading) while maintaining an Islamic value framework.

MS and KN demonstrate strong *acceptance* with partial movement toward *adaptation*. They explicitly frame religious diversity as an inherent and valuable feature of society and design activities that prompt students to reflect on coexistence and difference, for example through narratives about Muslim-non-Muslim interactions, observations of a church and mosque in Malang Square, or comparisons between Indonesian and foreign cultural practices. Their use of authentic materials (stories, texts, songs) to foster empathy, tolerance, and critical comparison indicates a willingness to engage pedagogically with cultural difference. AR appears closest to adaptation, as his extensive intercultural exposure informs deliberate, IcLL-oriented lesson planning and practice.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the teachers have generally progressed beyond the ethnocentric stages of denial and defence, with most situated between *minimisation* and *acceptance* and a smaller number exhibiting features of *adaptation*. Interpreting the data through DMIS not only clarifies the current level of teachers' intercultural sensitivity, but also highlights the potential of targeted professional development and IcLL-informed curriculum support to facilitate movement toward more advanced, ethno-relative stages. In turn, this developmental progression strengthens the prospects for English language teaching to function as a strategic site for promoting religious moderation.

Table 1. – Summary of teachers' profiles, intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), and IcLL practices.

TEACHER	CULTURAL BACKGROUND & EXPOSURE	DMIS STAGE (INTERPRETATION)	CONCEPTION OF ICLL/CULTURE	INTEGRATION OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN ELT
AR	Madurese-Javanese; overseas study (2 years); seminars on IcLL and RM	Strong acceptance → early adaptation	IcLL as fundamental; English as <i>da'wah</i> and global citizenship	RM embedded in RPP; prayers; Muslim-non- Muslim stories; daily life as space for reflection
AD	Javanese-Madurese; homogeneous school; active in local religious organisation	Minimisation → early acceptance	IcLL important but not urgent; needs stronger material support	Scenario-based tasks (e.g. greetings); respect for difference, but RM not yet a central instructional focus
MS	Javanese; seminars/workshops on IcLL and RM; limited direct foreign contact	Acceptance	English as space to build tolerance and assess students' attitudes	Preparing for non-Muslim guest; stories; Malang Square church-mosque task; comparison of cultural texts
KN	Javanese; long teaching experience; frequent contact with diverse groups	Acceptance (with some adaptation elements)	IcLL feasible and strategic through authentic materials	Descriptions of prayer practices in other schools; songs/stories on <i>birrul walidain</i> linked to Islam
RU	Javanese; long experience with Madurese students; RM programmes	Acceptance → early adaptation	Language-culture inseparable; English as <i>da'wah</i>	Emphasises English to counter «hypocritical language» stereotype; adopts positive British values

The five teachers' narratives explain diverse levels of intercultural sensitivity along Bennett's DMIS continuum. AD, who teaches in a highly homogeneous setting, describes a minimisation-early acceptance position, acknowledging diversity mainly at the level of general principles and relying on simulated situation to introduce difference. In the other hand, AR, MS, KN, and RU show stronger acceptance and, in the case of AR and RU, raising adaptation, as reflected in their long efforts to form activities that face students with real intercultural situation and explicitly link English learning with religious moderation. These shared patterns suggest that teachers' intercultural experiences and professional development trajectories significantly shape how IcLL is perceived and inserted within madrasah English classrooms.

5. DISCUSSION

The teachers' conceptual understanding reflects an increasing awareness of the significance of intercultural learning and its strong relevance in reinforcing religious moderation (Syafiyah *et al.*, 2022). These developments indicate a paradigmatic shift from the communicative approach – dominant in the early 2000s as a turning point that redirected language teaching from linguistic form to meaning and function – towards an intercultural language learning framework. Accordingly, English is now seen mainly as communicative, foregrounding linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, sociocultural competencies (Lee *et al.*, 2023). Notably, sociocultural competence serves as the foundation for the development of intercultural learning.

The communicative approach has deepened language learning by prioritizing meaning, use, and communicative effectiveness. At the same time, its traditional emphasis on native-like proficiency has tended to reinforce English as a culturally dominant standard often resulting in imbalanced cultural representation. Despite these limitations, the communicative approach remains valuable, provided that it is enriched by intercultural perspectives and peaceful, dialogic communicative patterns (Linares, 2023). In this extended view, sociocultural competence underpins English learning by integrating intercultural communication, thus preparing students for meaningful engagement across cultural boundaries.

The teachers' conceptions in this study reinforce this shift by linking language and culture so that English teaching moves beyond purely linguistic proficiency toward broader sociocultural and intercultural under-

standings (Abidin *et al.*, 2024). Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) foregrounds meaningful interaction in the target language without conforming to native-speaker norms, upholding equal rights in language use and prioritizing self-awareness as a basis for understanding others. The primary goal of ICC is shared understanding, while contemporary global challenges and 21st-century skills demand call for more contextualised, dynamic, and critical pedagogical practices.

The teachers' reflections on the importance of intercultural learning and its connection to religious moderation constitute an initial but significant step toward implementing intercultural education in madrasah contexts. The urgency of this shift is shaped by at least three key factors: the impact of foreign language learning on learners' worldviews, the need to cultivate cultural and religious awareness, and teachers' responsibility to prepare students as global citizens who are firmly rooted in local and national identities. Within this framework, the core components of intercultural learning – knowledge, skills, and attitudes – structure the learning process and, when effectively integrated, foster intercultural competence. Intercultural communication is central point of departure to boost intercultural competent students who can interact meaningfully with culturally diverse interlocutors in both their first and foreign languages (Hasanah & Gunawan, 2020).

In practice, teachers gradually progress through several stages in intercultural learning rather than moving directly into ethno-relative orientations. Various scholars have proposed conceptually similar frameworks for intercultural development, among which the DMIS is particularly influential. DMIS outlines a continuum from ethnocentrism in six stages – denial, defence, minimisation, polarisation, acceptance, and adaptation – that are difficult to traverse and require sustained, intensive opportunities for meaningful intercultural interaction to gradually foster deeper awareness and sensitivity (Etri, 2023; Fitriyah *et al.*, 2024). Early stages such as denial and defence are characterised by an absence of, or resistance to, cultural difference, whereas minimisation acknowledges difference but downplays its significance.

The findings of this study suggest that none of the participating teachers are located at the denial or defence stages. Instead, some evidence points to minimisation, especially in contexts where classrooms are culturally homogeneous and religious moderation is not perceived as an urgent instructional priority. At this stage, teachers endorse general statements promoting unity and shared values but tend to engage only superficially with deeper complexities of intercultural interaction (Punti & Dingel, 2021). Their acknowledgement of diversity remains largely principle-

based, and classroom practices rely more on hypothetical scenarios than on systematic, critical engagement with actual intercultural experiences.

As teachers progress into the ethno-relative stages, their conceptions and practices begin to align more closely with acceptance and adaptation. At the acceptance stage, teachers view diverse cultures as alternative yet equally valid frames of reference and begin to show sustained curiosity about both their own and others' perspectives (Mellizo, 2017). In this study, teachers such as MS and KN exemplify this stage: they explicitly frame religious diversity as an inherent and valuable feature of society and design activities that invite students to reflect on coexistence and difference through narratives, observations of religious sites, and comparisons between Indonesian and foreign cultural practices. Their use of authentic materials to foster empathy, tolerance, and critical comparison indicates a willingness not only to recognise but also to pedagogically engage with cultural difference.

Adaptation, as the subsequent ethno-relative stage, is defined by the development of empathy and the capacity to shift perspective and adjust behaviour in intercultural encounters (Nazli & Asik, 2022). At this stage, ongoing engagement and sustained interaction refine teachers' intercultural skills, strengthening their ability to navigate cultural differences and respond flexibly to diverse classroom realities. The case of AR, for instance, illustrates emerging adaptation: his extensive intercultural exposure and deliberate integration of intercultural and religious moderation goals into lesson planning and classroom practice show an increasing capacity to design learning experiences that move students toward ethno-relative orientations.

The final stage, integration, is characterised by a more fully internalised intercultural identity, in which individuals can flexibly inhabit multiple cultural frames and engage inclusively with diverse perspectives. This stage requires ongoing efforts to maintain openness, reflexivity, and commitment to cultural plurality. However, as noted by Hang and Zhang (2023) that progression through the DMIS stages is seldom linear. Teachers may regress to earlier levels of sensitivity, particularly when confronted with disorienting or challenging experiences in unfamiliar environments. The present study echoes this insight, as teachers' positioning along the DMIS continuum appears to be strongly influenced by school context, opportunities for intercultural contact, and the availability of professional development and intercultural resources.

Overall, the discussion indicates that teachers in this study generally occupy mid-range positions between minimisation and acceptance, with some showing emergent features of adaptation. Their conceptions of IcLL and religious moderation are promising yet unevenly enacted, underscoring

the need for sustained professional learning, IcLL-informed curriculum support, and the systematic integration of intercultural aims into English language education in madrasah settings.

6. CONCLUSION

Teachers, as key facilitators of English education, play a central role in advancing intercultural learning within broader efforts to promote religious moderation. In increasingly diverse contexts, embedding intercultural perspectives in English instruction is essential for developing students' intercultural competence and dispositions of tolerance, understanding, and respect. This study shows that teachers regard IcLL as fundamental to language learning and view English as a strategic medium for reinforcing religious moderation, although their intercultural sensitivity ranges from minimisation to early adaptation. Methodologically, the findings are limited by the small, single-district sample and reliance on self-reported narratives. Future research should include larger and more varied madrasahs, classroom observations, and longitudinal work, and teacher training should integrate DMIS-informed IcLL modules, classroom tasks, and materials-design workshops.

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RIASSUNTO

Questo studio indaga le concezioni degli insegnanti di inglese come lingua straniera (EFL) riguardo all'Intercultural Language Learning (IcLL) nelle Madrasah Aliyah indonesiane e analizza come essi colleghino l'apprendimento interculturale alla promozione della moderazione religiosa. Adottando un disegno qualitativo di tipo narrative inquiry, i dati sono stati raccolti tramite un questionario preparatorio e interviste semi-strutturate a cinque insegnanti di inglese. Un'analisi tematica, informata dal Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) di Bennett, è stata utilizzata per interpretare gli orientamenti interculturali dei docenti e le loro pratiche didattiche. I risultati mostrano che gli insegnanti considerano l'IcLL fondamentale per l'apprendimento linguistico e uno strumento strategico per coltivare studenti aperti, tolleranti e rispettosi, rafforzando al contempo la moderazione religiosa. La maggior parte dei docenti si colloca tra la minimizzazione e l'accettazione, con alcuni segnali di adattamento emergente. Tuttavia, l'attuazione dell'IcLL rimane disomogenea e dipende dal contesto scolastico, dalla formazione degli insegnanti e dalla disponibilità di materiali culturalmente ricchi.

Parole chiave: Educazione EFL; Intercultural language learning; Moderazione religiosa; Prospettive degli insegnanti; Scuole a carattere religioso.

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