Interreligious Literacy Learning as a Counter-Radicalization Method: A New Trend among Institutions of Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia

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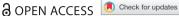
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ABSTRACT

Extremism and radicalization have become serious problems that are spreading rapidly around the world, penetrating even institutions of higher education in Indonesia. In response, institutions of Islamic higher education in Indonesia have developed interreligious literacy (IL) learning. To analyse this model's effectiveness in reducing radicalization, this article maps recent changes in the management of religious lectures and courses by focusing on two renowned institutions in Indonesia: Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University (UIN), Malang, and Tulungagung State Islamic Institute (IAIN). This study finds that IL learning involves direct learning at Christian colleges and places of worship, living in villages, and inviting leaders of various faiths to institutions of Islamic higher education. Under this model, religious learning has shifted from a doctrinal to a humanistic-functional approach. This article presents the IL model as a 'best practice' and urges the revitalization of religious education materials and learning models to improve students' religious experiences and communicate peaceful, inclusive and humanistic religious values.

1. Introduction

Religious radicalization has become a problem for many countries in the world,[1] and has frequently resulted in asymmetric warfare.[2] In Indonesia, radicalization movements have often found fertile ground in institutions of higher education. According to the Setara Institute, ten state institutions of higher education have been exposed to radicalism, including two Islamic institutions in Java.[3] Mun'im Sirry writes that seven of Indonesia's

best-known institutions are having to deal with rapidly growing radicalization movements.[4] The prevalence of radicalism in institutions of higher education was confirmed by Muhammad Nazib Azca and Imam Marsudi et al., who have shown the development and evolution of radical ideas and behaviours in student bodies. This situation is attributed to several factors: socio-political changes that have facilitated radical groups' efforts to infiltrate institutions,[5] minimal government supervision,[6] and limited institutional efforts to prevent extreme religious interpretations.[7] Various radical activities involving students have occurred, both on and off campus,[8] and have influenced the rise of radicalism in institutions.[9]

To address this issue and promote moderation, various institutions of Islamic higher education have sought to employ an interreligious literacy (IL) model. These have included Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University in Malang (UIN Malang) and Tulungagung State Islamic Institute (IAIN Tulungagung). Both institutions have focused their learning activities on preventing radical ideas and movements. Both accept students and host academics from universities overseas; in fact, with students from 29 countries, UIN Malang has been identified as the Islamic university with the most foreign students in Indonesia.[10] UIN Malang and IAIN Tulungagung are therefore very important for mapping the thinking of institutions of higher education, especially those that have implemented IL-based learning (among other approaches) to promote religious moderation.

The literature on IL learning has tended to focus on three aspects. First, the factors that lead to extreme and radical attitudes: sacred texts and doctrines are often interpreted to support extremist and radical movements, or to justify exclusivism; for example, texts on jihad have been interpreted as justifying war against infidels who colonize Muslim communities.[11] Similarly, injustice in in-group and out-group distribution and communication, has led to the emergence of Pan-Islamism, a Salafi movement rooted in the desire to be free of colonial oppression and socio-economic inequality.[12] Second are actions such as site blocking and inclusive religious education by government agencies, education institutions and social media platforms that are designed to prevent extremism and silence 'intolerant movements' that promote radicalization.[13] Third is the influence of radicalism, extremism and intolerance on the practice of democracy, youth identity crises, and the impact of ideological differences on social networks. The influence of such movements can be found, for instance, in the videos produced by ISIS for people of other faiths, students' inclusion in ISIS, and attacks carried out by youths against religious leaders (including a pastor who was delivering a sermon at the Church of St Joseph, Medan, Indonesia, and a shaykh who was giving a lecture at Falahuddin Mosque, Bandar

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[4]Sirry, 'Muslim Student Radicalism'.
[5]Azca, 'Yang muda, yang radikal'; Marsudi et al., 'Preventing Radicalism', 23–29.
[6]Rahma, 'Kemenrintek akui'.
[7]Haryani, 'Pendidikan moderasi beragama', 146.
[8]Syamsurijal, *Radikalisme kaum muda Islam*, 343.
[9]Basri and Dwiningrum, 'Potensi radikalisme', 89.
[10]Ali, 'Integrating Science and Religion', 950.
[11]Baidhowi, 'Islam tidak radikalisme dan terorisme'; Zuhdi, 'Potential Islamic Radicalism'; Fadal, 'Kontra-radikalisasi agama'.
[12]Nurjannah, 'Faktor pemicu'; Kachan, 'Evolution of Islamic Radicalism'; Thoyyib, 'Radikalisme Islam Indonesia'.
[13]Sari, 'Media literasi'; Sesmiarni, 'Membangun radikalisme'; Suryadi and Mansur, 'Role of Traditional Islamic Boarding School'; Gurlesin et al., 'Playful Religion', 5–6.

Lampung, Indonesia).[14] The literature has not so far covered recent trends in religious learning activities at institutions of higher Islamic learning, including the rise of IL learning and its effectiveness in preventing extremism and radicalization.

With the aim of challenging the rising exclusivism and intolerance that has plagued interfaith relations in Indonesia, as well as in other countries around the world, this article maps recent changes in the management of religious learning, considers how IL learning can create tolerance and diversity, and analyses the model's effectiveness and impact. It also seeks to fill the gap in the literature on the ability of higher education institutions to implement IL, recognizing that such institutions have the power to cultivate moderation and prevent radicalism. In doing so, the article responds to the suggestion of Supriadi Rustad (head of the Academic Performance Evaluation Team at the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education) to revitalize religious education by teaching students the differences between religions.[15] It also responds to Sirry's suggestion that higher education institutions require a 'different' approach to religious education.[16] After investigating the practice of self-deradicalization amongst students at public (non-sectarian) higher education institutions in Indonesia, Sirry states,

> The pressing issue is how to prevent Muslim youths from becoming targets of radical extremist groups in the first place, through informed public education, publications, support and caring, and alternative (and more nuanced) approaches to religious beliefs. Teaching methods at the university need to emphasize critical thinking and rigorous engagement with various subjects, including religion.[17]

Based on the above, this article seeks to answer two questions: (1) what, why, and how is IL learning employed at Islamic institutions of higher education? and (2) how does IL learning contribute to the prevention of radicalization and intolerance among college students? The answers to these two questions will provide an understanding of the effectiveness and process of IL learning in institutions of Islamic higher education. The article will thus provide recommendations regarding religious learning models for other institutions, both in Indonesia and even around the world.

2. Education and Counter-radicalization

The topic of counter-radicalization has been discussed by many experts.[18] It refers to the steps taken to prevent radicalization – an ideology or understanding that seeks to disrupt the existing socio-political system through mental, verbal and physical violence, and the understanding of it is thus integral to deradicalization – the freeing of individuals from the bonds of radicalism, be it voluntary or coerced.[19] Counter-radicalization is also understood as cultivating the values of patriotism and non-violence through formal and informal education, using a strategic approach; in this way, extremism – defined

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[14]Natalia, 'Faktor-faktor penyebab radikalisme'; Aminah, 'Peran pemerintah'; Haryani, 'Pendidikan moderasi beragama'; Yunus and Ghozali, 'Internalizing the Values of Religious Harmony'; Cottee and Cunliffe, 'Watching ISIS'.

[15]Rahma, 'Kemenrintek akui'.

[16]Sirry, 'Muslim Student Radicalism', 17.

[17]Ibid., 17–18.

[18]Amal, 'Counter-Radicalism'; Marsudi et al., 'Preventing Radicalism'; Presidential Regulation No. 7 of 2021; Marzuki and Setiawan, *Kontra narasi radikalisme*; Gurlesin et al., 'Playful Religion'; Aisy et al., 'Penegakan kontra radikalisasi'; Fadal, 'Kontra-radikalisasi agama'.

[19]Presidential Regulation No. 7 of 2021; Marzuki and Setiawan, *Kontra narasi radikalisme*, 54–71; Fadal, 'Kontra-radikalisasi agama', 56; Marsudi et al., 'Preventing Radicalism', 29.

as a rejection of other perspectives[20] – can be countered while preventing radicalization.[21] Such an approach is particularly urgent today, given that the internet – the most effective and efficient way to spread radicalism and terrorism (i.e. acts or threats of violence that result in fear, harm and death) – can be used quickly, easily and advantageously, without being impeded by national borders. Indeed, the internet has often been used by terrorists for communication, coordination and planning, as well as for recruitment, funding and propaganda purposes.[22]

Institutions of higher education, being institutions for future leaders and meeting places for youths from various regions and countries, must plan and implement programmes to prevent the rise of extreme and radical ideologies while recognizing students' diverse pedagogic-religious, psychological and socio-cultural backgrounds.[23] Several studies have reported on counter-radicalization strategies, showing, for example, that moderate religious education can be used to prevent the rise of radical religious understandings and that Indonesian local wisdom can provide a local values framework for counter-radicalization and counter-radicalization narratives.[24] A study conducted by Elvira Kondrakova reported that antisocial phenomena, radical understandings, extreme behaviours and terror (in various forms) could be reduced among Russian students using an educational approach.[25] Research conducted by Marzuki, meanwhile, showed that the construction of diverse places of worship in the same location has increased tolerance and mitigated conflict between people of different religions in Bali and Manado, Indonesia.[26] Institutions of higher education thus have great strategic potential to promote tolerance and cultivate counter-radical attitudes and behaviours.

3. Interreligious literacy and the learning process

The topic of interreligious literacy (IL) has been widely discussed and researched by experts, especially in Western Europe and North America.[27] Stephen Prothero defines religious literacy as the ability to understand and use the basic building blocks of religious traditions – their key terms, symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, characters, metaphors and narratives – in everyday life.[28] IL is understood as encompassing relevant knowledge about religion, the ability to know and understand the life practices of people with different beliefs, the ability to create mutual understanding and respect religious diversity, and the ability to remain composed and peaceful during interactions with people who have different beliefs without having to sacrifice one's religious traditions and

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[20]Ghosh et al., 'Can Education Counter Violent Religious Extremism?', 6–7; Marsudi et al., 'Preventing Radicalism', 23; Fadal, 'Kontra-radikalisasi agama', 53.

[21]Aisy et al., 'Penegakan kontra radikalisasi', 3–4; Marzuki and Setiawan, *Kontra narasi radikalisme*, 54–71; Fadal, 'Kontra-radikalisasi agama', 56; Gurlesin et al., 'Playful Religion', 4–5; Marsudi et al., 'Preventing Radicalism', 29.

[22]Haryani, 'Pendidikan moderasi beragama', 154–6; Marzuki and Setiawan, *Kontra narasi radikalisme*, 50–4; Cottee and Cunliffe, 'Watching ISIS', 186–92; Yunus and Ghozali, 'Internalizing the Values of Religious Harmony', 2–4; Hatta et al., 'Internet and Terrorism in Indonesia'.

[23]Kondrakova, 'Program Me', 56.

[24]Widyaningsih and Kuntarto, 'Local Wisdom Approach'; Marzuki and Setiawan, *Kontra narasi radikalisme*, 55–74.

[25]Kondrakova, 'Program Me', 56–61.

[26]Marzuki and Setiawan, *Kontra narasi radikalisme*, 71–4.

[27]Skerrett, 'Religious Literacies'; Conroy, 'Religious Education'; Dinham and Shaw, 'Religious Literacy'; Papen, 'Hymns, Prayers, and Bible Stories'; Crisp et al., 'Religious Literacy'.

[28]In Richardson, 'Religious Literacy', 374.

identities.[29] IL is also understood as topical knowledge regarding the affairs of world religions, as well as the ability to understand and appreciate that each religion is different internally.[30]

In the context of education, IL refers to the knowledge necessary to recognize different religions and accept different belief practices both within one religion and between different religions.[31] This has become particularly important today. A case study in the United States, for example, shows that religious literacy and interfaith dialogue have become increasingly important as incidents of religious intolerance have led to conflict, marginalization and discrimination.[32] The importance of IL is also underscored by the broad commitment of teachers, students and parents in the United Kingdom to studying religion and belief, which has been used to increase literacy in the workplace (and in general society)[33] and to create harmony between religious believers.

According to Rodney Stark, religious pluralism can give rise to instability in the social order when one religion dominates another or when several religions each claim to be the sole true religion.[34] The behaviour of religious organizations becomes monopolistic when political elites have an interest in supporting it, and this often leads to conspiracies between religious and political elites, and ultimately to interfaith conflict.[35] Religious tolerance, therefore, must be extended to all religious beliefs and rituals, and this underscores the urgency of IL learning.[36]

IL learning develops dynamically and adapts to social developments and public demands. According to Ambjörn Naeve et al., there are two types of learning process: knowledge transmission and knowledge creation. The former is used to convey knowledge that already exists in the religious education curriculum, while the latter creates knowledge through the management of religious learning.[37] According to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, knowledge about social life can be obtained through three dialectical processes: externalization, objectivation and internalization.[38]

IL learning can be initiated by defining, responding, taking various attitudes, and other actions. Such actions are related to individuals' educational background, religious insight, understanding of sacred religious texts, religious teachings and doctrines, socio-religious environments, religious organizations, traditions, and experiences in everyday life. According to Said Agiel Siradj, one factor that has underpinned religious clashes between Muslims and Christians is Muslims' superficial understanding of the teachings of Christianity, which has been exacerbated by political and economic factors.[39] Abou Al-Fadl states that moderate Islamic groups pay close attention to the qur'anic verses that stress the importance of peace, harmony and tolerance between religious communities, build moral cooperation, and uphold worldly virtue as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad.[40] Meanwhile,

[29]Gurlesin et al., 'Playful Religion', 13–16; Ashraf, 'Islamized Ideologies', 9–11.
[30]Chan et al., 'Recognition of Context and Experience', 11–13.
[31]Ashraf, 'Exploring the Potential', 2.
[32]See Burrel and Rahim, 'Developing Inclusive Leaders'.
[33]Dinham and Shaw, 'Religious Literacy', 11.
[34]Stark, One True God.
[35]Ibid., One True God, 171–5; Rabi', 'Christian-Muslim Relations'.
[36]Ashraf, 'Exploring the Potential', 14.
[37]Naeve et al., 'Modelling Approach', 5–6.
[38]Berger and Luckman, Tafsir sosial atas kenyataan, 32–5.
[39]Siradj, Tasawuf sebagai kritik sosial, 306–30.
[40]Al-Fadl, Selamatkan Islam, 252.

according to M. Zainuddin, citing Bambang Ruseno, Christian religious elites have begun accepting God as the centre of all religions, even as other world religions have forefronted their respective beliefs.[41]

4. Implementation of an Islamic Education Curriculum

Curricula are defining components of education systems, as they are tools used to achieve educational goals and guide the implementation of teaching in all types and at all levels of education.[42] Religious education curricula have therefore been widely discussed by scholars.[43] Curricula can be developed using two approaches: (1) a top-down approach (administrative model), which begins with educational administrators (policymakers) and uses administrative direction as policy direction, and (2) a grassroots approach, in which teachers develop a curriculum by refining and developing its components. Curricula consist of three components, namely: (1) goals to be achieved, both in each field of study and in the school as a whole, (2) learning materials and contents, and (3) learning strategies.[44]

In Indonesia, the Islamic education curriculum (abbreviated KPAI) is different from the general curriculum. Key differences include its conceptualization of the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*),[45] as well as its emphasis on the Qur'an and Hadith. In this curriculum, each of the four components of learning – materials, objectives, methods (strategies), and evaluations – must contain Islamic values. Three topics are highlighted in the Islamic education curriculum: faith (*īmān*), Islam and morality.[46] Each must be emphasized during the learning experience, ensuring that students can contribute to the development of society and advance the public interest.

5. Research Method

Religious learning, in the context of counter-radicalization and deradicalization, has been chosen as the research subject for two reasons. First, there is significant concern about the rampant rise of radicalization among students in higher education, who could potentially become subjected to radical actions. Second, the Islamic education curriculum has a strategic role in countering radicalization and intolerance between religious communities, and can thus be seen as a soft strategy for long-term counter-radicalization and deradicalization.

This research presents primary data obtained from observations and interviews. Observations were made by visiting places of teaching and learning, both on and off campus (places of worship, non-Islamic religious institutions, and community service locations), to obtain an overview of the dynamics of IL learning amongst students. As stated above, UIN Malang and IAIN Tulungagung were selected as the main objects of this research. Interviews were conducted by investigating the selected material aspects,

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[41]Zainuddin, *Pluralisme agama*, 114.
[42]Nurmadiah, 'Kurikulum pendidikan agama Islam', 53.
[43]See Muhammedi, 'Perubahan kurikulum di Indonesia'; Balboni et al., 'Religion, Spirituality, and the Hidden Curriculum'.
[44]Muhammedi, 'Perubahan kurikulum di Indonesia'.
[45]Khuzaimah, 'Paradigma pengembangan kurikulum', 82–9.
[46]Ibid., 82–3.

learning strategies, learning experiences and learning impacts. Most interview data were collected in person; due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, some data had to be collected online.

To avoid bias in sampling, fourteen informants were selected through purposive sampling. Informants were chosen on the basis of their diverse backgrounds, and after the IL learning practised by each campus was reviewed. This enabled the researchers to identify informants at each campus who possessed valid information, including the vice-chancellors of academic affairs, directors of programmes involved in IL learning, lecturers in religious studies programmes, and students (deemed representative because of their involvement in student organizations). To respect the privacy of informants, their identities have been concealed.

In-depth interviews were conducted with them. Primary data, in the form of descriptions of IL practices and management, were analysed through data reduction, display and verification. The validity of the data was tested by triangulation and focus group discussion (FGD), with a particular focus on the religious education material and IL practices at UIN Malang and IAIN Tulungagung.

6. Research Findings

6.1. IL Learning at Institutions of Islamic Higher Education

IL is used to provide religious believers with an understanding of religious values, and may take place in classrooms and places of religious worship. At institutions such as UIN Malang and IAIN Tulungagung, IL has been conducted through direct learning at Christian campuses and houses of worship, living with Christian communities in villages and at *maʿhad*, and inviting interfaith figures to act as resource persons.

For example, every semester Zain (male, age 58), a vice-chancellor of UIN Malang and a religious studies lecturer, gives his students an assignment to explain Islamic, Christian, Buddhist and Confucian teachings on theology, sociology and cosmology. Students are required to visit places of worship and conduct interviews with priests, monks and other religious leaders. They are well received, and most religious leaders have established close relations with the university, with many being invited to give guest lectures. The intention is that students will understand these religions' teachings, and be guided in identifying shared views through which society can be united.

Abazi (male, age 49), a vice-chancellor of IAIN Tulungagung, stated in an FGD that participants in the student community service (*Kuliah Kerja Nyata*; KKN) programme are placed in areas where diverse religious and ethnic communities coexist, including East Java and Pattani, Thailand. This emphasis is an aspect of IAIN Tulungagung's identification as a campus of *dakwah* and culture.

6.2. Religious Studies in Christian Colleges and Churches

The provision of religious studies in Christian colleges and churches gives Christians an opportunity to directly introduce Christianity to Muslim students. This process is important, as it ensures that students do not obtain knowledge from 'secondary sources' that may be misleading. This activity is supported by surveys, interfaith dialogue and

discussions on how religious teachings affect people's lives, through which students directly learn and understand the other religion's practices, values and traditions.

When IL learning is limited to seminars and interfaith dialogue, it is seen as restricted to the seminar room, which is far too narrow a context. Therefore, according to the chancellor of UIN Malang, all lecturers and students must conduct academic collaboration and community service activities with various parties, including Christian universities within and outside Indonesia. The chancellor of UIN has thus permitted lecturers and students to conduct interfaith activities (including the Forum for Religious Harmony) on campus, and promoted visits to Christian colleges, churches and other institutions. Such activities ensure that religious teachings are broadly understood, thereby advancing ideals of religious moderation.

Baharfa (male, 55 years old) followed up on this policy by visiting campuses affiliated with religions other than Islam. He and his students stated that they often visit other religions' campuses and places of worship in order to become familiar with these religions. This has included, for instance, visits to Yestoya Specialized College in Malang, East Java, a Christian college for intending Christian pastors and church leaders.[47] Baharfa explained that he invited Muslim students to visit and study directly from the 'source' because he wanted them to know the real facts about Christianity, and said that he was saddened when he heard conservative Muslims make untrue statements about Christianity and Christians. He saw that his Christian friends' attitudes towards him and other Muslims were good, and so he invited his students – future leaders of society – to learn about Christianity directly from Christian leaders. He has also set an example for his students when, as a guest lecturer, he has provided the students of Yestoya Specialized College with accurate information about Islam.

Drawing on his personal experience, Baharfa invited students to visit and conduct religious dialogue at locations where religious activities are held. He said:

> If students know, understand, and respect each other's religion, then in the future, after they have become religious leaders and elites, tolerance between religious communities will manifest itself properly and correctly. Peace and harmony between religious communities and religious elites will be realized. They will find it difficult to act against one another. Conflicts that are triggered by religious sentiments and the misuse of religious language can also be avoided.

Imamaqin (male, age 36), a lecturer at the Department of Religious Studies of UIN Malang, stated that, if someone wants to know and understand the values of Christian teachings and their differences from and similarities to Islam, they should go to a place where those religious teachings are taught and question the religious leaders. Failure to do so can lead to misunderstanding and promote one-sided claims to truth. On that basis, he has invited students to visit Christian churches as well as colleges that are affiliated with religions other than Islam. He emphasized,

> By visiting Christian places of worship and Christian colleges, my students have become more aware of the differences and similarities between Christianity and Islam, and know better the everyday religious traditions and rituals of Christians. If our students have never visited a Christian place of worship, or vice versa, and have never had a dialogue with Christian pastors and lecturers, they may be less open and claim to be the most

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[47]Yestoya is an abbreviation of *Yesus Tolong Saya* (Jesus Helps Me).

correct. Our society follows various religions: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and other religions. Therefore, religious studies must contain interreligious literacy material, conveyed through observation at other religions' places of worship and dialogue between religious communities.

Meanwhile, at IAIN Tulungagung, IL learning is implemented through the KKN programme. During this activity, students and their supervisors are placed in diverse regions where conditions differ. Some are placed in areas with a heterogeneous religious composition that emphasizes the cultural and religious diversity of Indonesia and shows that other religions should not be considered 'problems' but should rather be understood as diverse ways to understand reality.

Naimun (male, age 46) explained that, unlike students who are placed in homogeneous areas, students who are sent to heterogeneous areas receive special training. They learn to understand diversity, as they are not sent to teach the Qur'an (as in areas with a Muslim majority population), but to understand the differences that exist in society and thus build a better civilization. Lecturers at IAIN Tulungagung's *ma'had* (a sort of *pesantren*, or Islamic boarding school) are similarly involved in character building. Supervisors, meanwhile, are selected for their deep Islamic knowledge and broad insight, and are personally respected by many people. Using this mechanism, IAIN students receive good religious counselling and can learn about other religions directly from their followers. They also learn how to solve problems in society, rather than becoming part of the problems.

As part of the KKN programme, students provide community service over the course of two months and interact with local communities. Interestingly, when students were placed in Krisik Village, Gandusari District, Blitar Regency, East Java, Muslim students were invited to participate in Christmas celebrations at residents' homes. They accepted the invitation and, though they were uncomfortable at first (because they had never attended a Christmas event before), they finally gained valuable experience by directly learning about Christian religious practices from Christians and community leaders. They were thus provided with examples of how interfaith relations and communications can be implemented positively.

6.3. Coexistence with Christian Communities

At UIN Malang, interfaith coexistence is manifested in direct interfaith interactions at the university's *ma'had*. At the university, students from Christian and other religious colleges learn about *ma'had* management, culture and religious materials, and reside in the *ma'had* in order to receive good cross-cultural and cross-religious experiences. Invited students come not only from domestic universities, but also from foreign universities; for instance, students from Deakin University, Australia, often participate.

The *ma'had* also holds an interdisciplinary religious study event, or *Ta'līm afkār*. In this forum, religious material is presented within the context of current socio-political and religious issues (both national and international).[48] This activity is compulsory for all students, both domestic and international, during their first year. It thus involves

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[48]Ali, 'Integrative Curriculum', 114.

both Muslim and non-Muslim students, including participants in the Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) and cultural exchange programmes.

During the *Ta'līm afkār*, Christian students can learn about Islam from the people who teach Islamic studies at the *ma'had* and, because Christian students live at the *ma'had*, they can interact with other students. Muslim students can learn about the traditions of Christian students and vice versa. By communicating with each other, they address the negative stigmas that are often described by secondary sources, thereby curtailing the spread of exclusive beliefs and misinformation.

Dewiha (female, age 45), a teacher on the BIPA programme and head of the women's *ma'had*, explained that, when UIN Malang and Deakin University collaborated on a cultural exchange programme, Deakin students were allowed to participate in Islamic studies and live in the *ma'had* dormitory. At the time, some of the Muslim students complained, 'Why do Christian female students wear shorts and T-shirts (that do not cover their *'awrah*) in the *ma'had*?' However, after it was explained this was customary in the students' country of origin, the Muslim students understood. Similarly, the Christian students complained to the *ma'had* committee because the sound of people reciting the Qur'an and performing *tarheem* (religious ritual readings) was broadcast through the *ma'had* mosque's outdoor loudspeakers at 4 o'clock in the morning. During the subsequent dialogue, they were told that this activity was part of the Muslim student dormitory's religious and cultural rituals. Ultimately, students were able to understand each other and avoid feeling disturbed by each other's customs.

The presence of Australian Christian students at UIN Malang, over the course of which they learned Indonesian culture (including the religious traditions of Islamic tertiary institutions), had a positive impact. Samdin (male, age 52), a BIPA teacher, stated that foreign students were able to understand the religious values taught at the *ma'had* and the religious traditions of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). They collaborated with Muslim students and were directly involved in various cultural and religious activities, which enabled them to understand the religious values underpinning various cultural and community traditions. This prevented them from misunderstanding Islam and enabled them to develop mutual respect.

Students from Deakin University were also invited to several *pesantren* in East Java, during which they were introduced to a sympathetic expression of Islam. They were shown that Islam is not an extreme and radical-terrorist religion, as reported by the Western media.[49] This was described by Isda (female, age 54), who shared her experience of facilitating these students' study of Indonesian culture. She said,

> I accompanied the students from Deakin University to visit *pesantren* in East Java, including Pesantren Tebuireng in Jombang. They stated that they were surprised and happy because they were able to have a dialogue with the female students of the *pesantren*. They were surprised because the education for Muslim women at the *pesantren* was not like the information they had heard so far. They felt happy because they could play traditional religious music and dance together with the female students at the *pesantren*. They could also have an open dialogue with students about religious and cultural values. From their visits to and cultural dialogues at various *pesantren*, the Christian students concluded that Islam is a peaceful, tolerant and friendly religion.

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[49]Egger and Magni-Berton, 'Role of Islamist Ideology', 11.

This collaborative cultural study with Deakin University also shaped the attitudes and behaviours of Muslim students at Islamic colleges and boarding schools, so that they could better understand the differences and similarities between the values of these religions and cultures, making it easier to build togetherness and tolerance between religious people and college and *pesantren* students.

At IAIN Tulungagung, students live side-by-side with the Christian community during their KKN activities. As previously explained, these activities are conducted in heterogeneous areas, and thus students are forced to interact with people of different religions. At first, they usually feel uncomfortable in this context, which is different from their normal environment. However, over time, they become happier and put their community programmes into practice. They become aware of Indonesia's rich diversity, and understand that interfaith harmony is absolutely necessary for a peaceful life.

Ahmada (male, age 52) stated that students generally refuse at first to be placed in a religiously diverse village. However, after living and working together with communities for two months, they acquire more positive attitudes. They help each other and work together, especially, for example, when someone dies, even if he or she is a follower of a different religion. Ultimately, religious heterogeneity and harmony provide students with valuable lessons. Rahmad (male, age 22), a KKN participant in Krisik Village, stated, ' … my friends and I, during our community service activities, always invited and involved leaders and young people from all religious backgrounds. They were willing and happy to be invited to gather and cooperate in interfaith activities in the village.'

Naimun (male, age 46), explained that one of the KKN programme's objectives is to learn tolerance as practice, rather than limit it to theory. He said,

> Students who carry out community service in villages whose residents practise various religions are not the same as students who do community service in villages where all the residents follow the same religion. The students are no longer focused on religion, but more on social, cultural and other aspects. Tolerance is not simply discussed; it is applied as, for example, when students witness how their Christian neighbours come to *tahlilan* (communal prayers for Muslims who have died). Even though they remain silent when Muslims recite the *tahlil*, they participate and pray in accordance with their beliefs. Students observe this directly, and so they learn very valuable lessons.

> … At first, students felt uncomfortable doing community service because, for example, they had to live near a resident who kept a dog. In Islamic teachings, dogs are seen as unclean animals and prohibited from being kept as pets. Even so, after several months of interacting together, students realized that religions have their respective teachings, that differences exist in what adherents believe and practice.

Among the products of the Islamic moderation taught by IAIN Tulungagung and experienced by students in community service are histories of the villages where community service activities are conducted. Each book contains many stories about these villages, including their religion; it tells, for example, how Christianity, Hinduism and Islam were introduced and came to be practised by residents. An abundance of data is available, helping students understand the villages' religious heterogeneity and appreciate the continued existence of different religious communities. At the beginning of the KKN programme, each group is asked to write a similar book.

6.4. Inviting Interfaith Leaders as Resource Persons

At both UIN Malang and IAIN Tulungagung, interfaith leaders are often invited to give guest lectures, which are attended by students, lecturers and staff. The lecturers have included Christian priests, academics from the Church Council, and Buddhist monks. In this forum, all audiences gain a direct understanding of religious values from leaders of these religions. It is hoped that mistrust can be eliminated through such activities.

In this context, UIN Malang has awarded an honorary doctorate in the field of peace to a Christian: Sinyo Harry Sarundajang, Indonesia's former ambassador to the Philippines. Sarundajang, who served two terms as governor of North Sulawesi (2005–2015), was able to bring peace and tolerance to his region. Even though North Sulawesi is primarily Christian, he was able to protect followers of other religions – including Muslims – who lived in the area. At the same time, Sarundajang was made a resource person at UIN Malang, in which capacity he presented many topics about peace to the university's lecturers, staff and students. It is expected that, through such activities, harmony can be cultivated between religious communities and examples provided for prospective regional leaders.

Meanwhile, at IAIN Tulungagung, interfaith leaders have often been invited to build a framework of religious moderation and there is a Christian student (a local pastor) in the postgraduate programme. As noted by Abazi (male, age 49), such religious leaders provide a friendly and peace-oriented understanding of religion, which cannot be achieved without inviting followers of other religions. Zainfa (male, age 40), added that the institution had long been inviting interfaith figures as speakers, even before radicalization became as rampant as it is today.

6.5. The Impact of IL Learning on the Prevention of Radicalization

The impact of Islamic religious teachings on radicalization and counter-radicalization can be seen from the relationship between the content of religious materials and the level of students' interfaith literacy. It influences student perceptions, information disclosure and communication within the campus community. Counter-radicalization is pursued in a planned, integrated and sustainable way in order to avoid the development of radical attitudes. Students of UIN Malang and IAIN Tulungagung are traditionally accustomed to living side by side with each other, in both their academic and non-academic activities. In the academic sphere, students participate in interdisciplinary religious and cultural activities run by the student community and by tertiary institutions. Students are also accustomed to collaborating with foreign students undertaking religious and cultural studies. Outside of academia, meanwhile, students often receive guests of different religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds. They prepare activities and provide accommodation for overseas students of different religions, seeking to provide positive and correct religious learning experiences through the processes of imitation, habituation, application and problem solving, thereby helping them become tolerant and moderate.

IL learning is beneficial for counter-radicalization and deradicalization. Three types of activity – namely, direct learning at Christian colleges and places of worship, coexisting

and living with Christian communities, and including interfaith leaders in campus activities – significantly influence the level of students' religious literacy. This can be seen in several areas. First, Muslim students gain an understanding of the human values taught by interfaith leaders, especially Christian leaders, without distortion, which promotes tolerant and inclusive behaviour and attitudes that are appropriate for addressing socio-political and religious issues in society. It cannot be denied that conflict and animosity are often rooted in distortions of other people's religious teachings.

Dogmatic tensions between Indonesian Muslims and Christians have been palpable since Christianity was introduced to Indonesia. As Ropi puts it:

> Indonesian Muslims, from the beginning of their contacts with Christians, have developed some major patterns of responses over the centuries, ranging from mutual respect and accommodation to violent resistance. Mostly, they perceived Christians as untrustworthy allies, as corrupters of the Scripture, and as infidels.[50]

Through IL learning, students' conservative thinking and 'closed theological dogmatism' can be transformed into more pluralist mindsets.

Dewira (female, age 23), discussed her experiences visiting a Christian college:

> … At first, I did not want to visit the Christian college, because that college is a place for prospective pastors and church leaders to study. The activity was very taboo and inappropriate in my family tradition. I have also never been to places of worship other than places of worship for Muslims. However, after I participated in the programme, and visited the Christian college and church, and listened to lectures and explanations about Christianity and the importance of interfaith harmony in global and modern life and society, my negative impression of Christianity and Christians disappeared. Now, I feel comfortable communicating with and befriending Christians and people of other faiths.

Dewira's statement highlights how many Muslim Indonesians tend to have a negative mindset regarding Christians and Christianity. However, by visiting a Christian college, their mindsets can be opened and they can accept the humanitarian values taught by diverse religions. A similar statement was made by Zarkasi (male, age 23), a Muslim student of UIN Malang, who felt that his visits to a Christian church affected his way of thinking and resulted in his becoming more pluralist. In fact, he felt proud and happy to meet and have a dialogue with the pastor at the church. He gained new knowledge and information about the history of Christianity and the history of conflict between Muslims and Christians, which was very different from his previous views and did not claim that one party was right and the other wrong. This differed significantly from the information presented by 'narrow-minded' sectarian groups.

Furthermore, IL learning teaches students to accept followers of religions other than Islam and creates mutual openness. Religious radicalization is caused by issues of belief,[51] i.e. the exclusive belief that only one religion is right and that other religions are wrong. Exclusivity stems from mutual misunderstanding and distrust, and this is often a major trigger in Indonesia for radicalization, intolerance and even terrorism; the suicide bombings at three churches in Surabaya in 2018 that killed thirteen people, for instance, were driven by such exclusivism. This has continued even though, as noted by Mohammed

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[50]Ropi, *Fragile Relation*, 109.
[51]Marzuki and Setiawan, *Kontra narasi radikalisme,* 53–4.

Arkoun, Islam and Christianity are both Abrahamic religions, and mutual understanding should thus be readily developed.[52]

Knowledge and understanding of other religious communities can be achieved through IL learning, as shown by Muslim student community service activities in multi-religious communities as well as by their interactions with Christian students within the *maʿhad* dormitory.

Muhtam (male, age 41), a former student activist who now occupies an important position in one of East Java's Islamic universities, said that his visits to Christian campuses and churches were initially theologically burdensome, as they were like 'other worlds'. However, he recognized that these visits provided him with knowledge of Christianity and its teachings, which gave him important resources for the future. He acknowledged that IL learning provided students with effective guidance for maintaining good relations with non-Muslims. He explained:

> My experience visiting churches and other places of worship, and having a dialogue with Christian priests, Catholic priests and leaders of religions other than Islam, has made me tolerant in dealing with others and respectful of religious communities' differences and similarities. Even now, we are still friends and visit each other. Therefore, IL learning in university is necessary and urgent.

Furthermore, IL learning provides students with an understanding of Islamic moderation in practice, rather than focusing solely on theory. Islamic moderation, also known as *Islam wasathiyah* or 'middle of the road' Islam (i.e. neither rightist [*ifrāt*] nor leftist [*tafrīt*]),[53] offers a solution to radicalization, and thus should be taught from the beginning of the learning process.[54] Even so, understanding of Islamic moderation is commonly obtained through academic writings and classroom learning and is, of course, very different from that obtained through direct experience. IL learning, as acquired by having students live side-by-side with the Christian community, provides a deeper understanding than is possible through classroom learning. Students can directly experience and apply Islamic moderation. Naimun (male, age 46), said:

> I do not convey the theory of Islamic moderation to students because, in my opinion … it is too theoretical. However, when we went to the field directly, I surveyed and asked them, 'How did you do with community service?' They had a very fun story (about the reality of diversity in society). To me, that is what moderation and tolerance are.

From this explanation, it can be seen that several IL learning practices at Islamic institutions have been effective in tackling radicalism. Even though tension does occur, arising from students' deep-held beliefs and dogmas, IL can still instil in them ideals of tolerance, inclusion and religious pluralism. IL learning is thus an important and urgent means of minimizing conflict and avoiding practices of intolerance, radicalization and terror in societies that often use religious language and symbols.[55] More broadly, religious materials and learning methods are foundational for the formation of students'

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[52]Arkoun, *Islam kontemporer*, xxxi.
[53]Hilmy, 'Whither Indonesia's Islamic Moderatism', 27; Shihab, *Wasathiyah*, 54.
[54]Afwadzi, 'Membangun moderasi beragama'.
[55]Marzuki and Setiawan, *Kontra narasi radikalisme*, 15–22; Roibin, Rahmawati, and Nurhayati, 'Model for Acculturation Dialogue', 5.

mindsets, values and attitudes. In this context, IL learning has the potential to directly configure students' perceptions and interpretations of harmony in society.

7. Discussion

Today, radicalism has seduced many university students, and this has attracted global attention.[56] In 2005, for example, the European Union (EU), responding to the rise of radicalism and terrorism in Europe, released anti-terrorism strategies known as 'The EU Internal Security Strategy in Action' and 'The European Union Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment'.[57] In early 2021, Indonesia issued Presidential Regulation No. 7 of 2021 regarding the National Action Plan for Eradicating Violent Extremism leading to Terrorism, 2020–2024, which stipulates (among other things) that university materials should be oriented towards preventing violent extremism, providing appropriate methodologies and training lecturers and teachers.[58] This policy is important, as the Indonesian government has long been criticized for ignoring the rising tide of radicalism in the country's universities.[59]

Even before Regulation No. 7 of 2021 was issued, however, Indonesia's Islamic universities sought an effective means of stemming the rise of radicalism and intolerance. These institutions sought to promote peace and mutual respect, using the interactions between Khadīja (the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad) and the Christian priest Waraqa ibn Nawfal as examples of interfaith harmony.[60] According to Siradj, in Islamic law, all individuals have five rights that must be protected: (1) *hifzhu al-nafs*, the right to life, (2) *hifzhu al-dīn*, the right to practise one's religion, (3) *hifzhu al-māl*, the right to property, (4) *hifzhu al-nasl*, the right to family, and (5) *hifzhu al-irddh*, the right to respect, honour and employment.[61] That is, acts of terrorism and intolerance violate Islamic law.

In studies of religious education, learning materials that promote deradicalization can be used to transmit existing knowledge through the curriculum and create knowledge by learning management activities,[62] redesigning organizational and pedagogical activities and promoting socio-psychological and cultural development.[63] In the context of Indonesia's higher institutions of Islamic learning, the redesign of pedagogical organizations and transmission of knowledge can be seen in learning activities that integrate classroom learning with activities in the *maʿhad* and non-classroom settings (i.e. other religions' places of worship and community service locations). In matters of socio-psychological development, meanwhile, religious teaching and learning activities are conducted not only in classroom settings, but also off-campus (as seen, for instance, in interfaith dialogues in church settings). Finally, in the matter of socio-cultural development, IL activities are manifested through students' daily communication and harmonious interactions with others, both on campus and during community service activities.

[56]Pashentsev and Bazarkina, 'ISIS Propaganda'.
[57]Bakker, 'EU Counter-radicalization Policies'.
[58]Presidential Regulation No. 7 of 2021.
[59]Rahma, 'Kemenrintek akui.'
[60]Zainuddin, 'Islam–Christian Relations', 2100.
[61]Siradj, *Ahlussunnah wal jamaʿah,* 71.
[62]Naeve et al., 'Modelling Approach', 5–6.
[63]Kondrakova, 'Program Me', 57–9.

At UIN Malang and IAIN Tulungagung, the development of religious material and content is also related to particular methods for understanding how the Qur'an and other religious texts view extremism, intolerance, radicalization, terrorism, statehood and religion in society. Learning strategies, learning activities and religious experiences, meanwhile, are developed through observational studies and tutorials in places where religious values are applied, such as in churches, temples and forums for inter-religious activities, and through activities in multi-religious communities. This activity is intended to help students understand and benefit from their experiences, thereby fostering counter-radicalization and creating religious literacy. Radicalization, which generally emerges as a result of students' interactions with radical circles outside the campus,[64] can be prevented by the campus itself through its activities.[65]

When taught and developed using a mutual adaptation and enactment approach, and when using as sources the sacred texts of religion, society and culture, religious material can become more contextual and meaningful.[66] Students' involvement in activities outside the classroom, both on and off campus, instils in them a new awareness. Their presence on campus can provide them with diverse comparative perspectives that enrich their insights. Their experiences of interacting with or being part of diverse social systems provide them with new reference points that foster openness and even commitment to better living. In this way, students learn about differences, which allows them to position themselves in more open inter-ethnic, inter-religious and intergroup relations. New perspectives and perceptions regarding other religions emerge from students' interactions, revitalizing religious education on the campus itself, as expected by the head of the Academic Performance Evaluation Team of the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education.[67] They need not rely on off-campus actors (as shown by Zemmrich at the School of Interfaith in Yogyakarta and Sobat Muda, an interfaith community in Salatiga, Indonesia).[68]

Students' visits to places of worship and inclusion in multicultural and multifaith activities imbue them with knowledge and shape pluralist and inclusive religious attitudes.[69] Muslim students state that, on their first visit to a church, they were openly welcomed by Christians. Collective ties, based on religious education, thus play an important role in providing students with new perspectives and challenging mistaken opinions. Students may become actors who consciously promote a tolerant human-based movement, rather than insulting other religions (Q 49.11; 109.6). Thus, cases of radicalism like those that have disrupted Indonesia's Islamic universities – such as the book bombs of 2011[70] – can be avoided.[71]

Visits to churches and dialogues with religious leaders, unlike coexistence with Christian communities, have become common at several Islamic universities in Indonesia to

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[64]Basri and Dwiningrum, 'Potensi radikalisme', 91.
[65]Marsudi et al., 'Preventing Radicalism'.
[66]Reiser, Spillane, and Steinmuller, 'Investigating the Mutual Adaptation Process'.
[67]Rahma, 'Kemenrintek akui'.
[68]See Zemmrich, 'Making Sense'.
[69]Saeed, 'Living in a Religiously Plural Society', 1–5.
[70]Several alumni of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, sent book bombs to various background figures, both Christian and Muslim. These alumni also planned to bomb a church.
[71]Mubarak, 'Dari semangat Islam', 194.

facilitate interfaith communications.[72] Although this model was initially designed for students of religious and comparative religion programmes, over time it has become increasingly popular as universities have established new programmes. Indeed, in 2014, the Association for Religious Studies (*Asosiasi Studi Agama*, ASA) proposed that religious studies be taught to university students in their first year, as such studies are relevant to contemporary social conditions.[73] This is supported by the current study. For example, at UIN Malang, visits to churches are incorporated into religious studies courses; as this research has shown, such visits help students develop inclusive and tolerant mindsets. Such experiences were never encountered by the perpetrators of the book bombings: Pepi Fernando, an alumnus of the Islamic Education Programme (2001); Hendi Suhartono, an alumnus of the Philosophy Programme (2001); Muhammad Fadhil, an alumnus of the Philosophy Programme (2002); and Muhammad Maulana Sani, a fourth-semester student of the Arabic Literature Programme.[74]

The development of religious learning materials and the inclusion of such materials in counter-radicalization and deradicalization strategies has also been advocated by nonsectarian universities, such as the State University of Surabaya in East Java, Indonesia. These institutions hold that religious education offers a means of preventing radicalization by instilling in students religious values aimed at improving their understanding of tolerance.[75] However, religiosity can be dangerous if students are not provided with a direct understanding of the diverse religious teachings practised by followers of other religions. Learning models that prioritize a peaceful, inclusive and humanistic understanding of religious values, as developed and implemented through IL learning, are also needed to prevent the rise of radical ideas.[76] According to Law No. 20 of 2003 regarding the National Education System of the Republic of Indonesia, Indonesian education must be rooted in religious and cultural values, thereby ensuring that interfaith conflicts are minimized and differences are respected.

This approach to religious education has resulted in a major shift around the world, and approaches to religious learning – once doctrinaire – have become more humanistic and functional. This approach emphasizes the human aspects and goals of religion, thereby enabling students to understand the religious phenomena and traditions of different communities. Both Islam and Christianity believe that their religious teachings deal not only with God, but also with human beings. However, because many tertiary institutions continue to teach religion as doctrine, this aspect has not been easily manifested. The implication is that an individual's religion is used to judge other religions, as well as the personalities of their followers.

Counter-radicalization is urgent in educational institutions, as it provides necessary preventive action that promotes an integrated understanding of religion and religious phenomena, one that adapts to the current developments and needs of modern society.[77] A study by Kimberly Logan and James Hartwick has shown that socio-political, economic and socio-cultural realities are increasingly influencing religion in this

[72]Jamhuri and Maskuri, 'Model pembelajaran pendidikan agama Islam', 70.
[73]Pohl, 'Role of Interreligious Dialogue', 163.
[74]Umi, 'Ini peran 17 anggota'.
[75]Marsudi et al., 'Preventing Radicalism', 36–7.
[76]Saeed, 'Living in a Religiously Plural Society', 1–5.
[77]Zainuddin, *Pluralisme agama*; Zainuddin, 'Islam–Christian Relations'.

interconnected and interdependent world.[78] IL is also an important part of civic competence, as it provides a way to help prepare more knowledgeable citizens, teach and promote interfaith dialogue and develop an understanding of religion as an integral part of social science. Meanwhile, belief in religion has also been proven to encourage followers to be positive and behave in a commendable manner.[79]

Furthermore, as explained previously, IL learning at higher institutions of Islamic education can teach Muslim students religious tolerance and eliminate radicalization and intolerance. At the same time, Muslim students can also understand and experience Indonesia's diversity. Given these facts, IL needs to be widely implemented in religious colleges, enabling them to develop tolerance and improve students' understanding of peaceful, inclusive and humanistic religious values, as suggested by the head of the Academic Performance Evaluation Team of the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education.[80] This is evidenced by real experiences, wherein non-Muslim students who were initially unhappy with early-morning Qur'an recitation were able to understand the traditions of Muslim students after touring Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in East Java.

8. Conclusion

Islamic learning materials, when formulated on the basis of universal values, functional religion and humanitarianism, and when taught using the IL model, are capable of instilling tolerant attitudes in students and teaching them commendable behaviours, thereby countering radicalization. Improving IL thwarts the rise of radicalization and counters the rise of radical attitudes amongst students. The experience of institutions shows that students' visits to Christian colleges and places of worship, living in multicultural communities, interactions with non-Muslim students in a *maʿhad* and consultation with interfaith leaders can improve their understanding of the meaning of religion and its function for mankind. It also instils in them etiquette and tolerance, thereby minimizing radicalization among students. This reinforces the need to revitalize religious education at institutions of higher education and implement innovative learning methods, thereby providing an open learning process that promotes multiculturalism and religious pluralism.

The application of IL learning at UIN Malang and IAIN Tulungagung shows that religious learning can result in a shift away from the doctrinal approach and the embrace of a humanistic-functional approach. This model can orient religious studies towards peaceful, inclusive and humanistic values, and ensure that religion functions effectively. This article presents a 'best practice' for sectarian and non-sectarian institutions of higher education to promote universal religious values amongst their students.

Acknowledgments

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[78]Logan and Hartwick, 'Teaching and Talking about Religion', 176.
[79]Aksoy and Abdulfatai, 'Exploring the Impact of Religiousness', 768.
[80]Rahma, 'Kemenrintek akui'.

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