Fostering Religious Moderation through English Debating at *Tahfizul Quran* Boarding School Context

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Abstract

This article investigates the students' and teachers' perceptions of English debating and how English debating could foster religious moderation. This study employed a qualitative method with a narrative inquiry design in collecting the data in the form of stories from the members and the coach of an English debating club at a *Tahfizul Quran* boarding school senior high school. The data of this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with the English teacher, who also performed as the coach, and three former members of the club who had experienced one-year membership and had joined English debating competitions. The data were then analyzed using thematic coding to identify the themes from the data groups that correspond to the research questions and become the study's findings. The findings revealed that English debating had improved all students' English skills. As they were always triggered to build convincing arguments from different perspectives, they promoted their confidence to speak in public, critical and systematic thinking ability, and teamwork. English debating sometimes presented controversial issues against Islamic values and was troublesome for the students. Through English debating, they recognized that diversity and plurality existed, and at the same time, they could explore the universal values of Islam. English debating is beyond arguing pros and cons; it was a sequence that built many skills linguistically and non-linguistically.

Keywords: English Debating, Religious Moderation, *Tahfizul Quran* Boarding School

Introduction

English debating has long been believed as one of the effective techniques to improve students speaking skills and critical thinking.[1] Debating practices encourage learners to

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[1] Fernandes Arung and Jumadin Jumadin, "Improving the Students' Speaking Skill through Debate Technique," *Journal of English Education* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2016), http://usnsj.com/index.php/JEE/; Jaya Nur Iman, "Debate Instruction in Efl Classroom: Impacts on the Critical Thinking and Speaking Skill," *International Journal of Instruction* 10, no. 4 (October 25, 2017): 87–108, https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2017.1046a; Nafsul Muthmainnah and Misnar, "Boosting Speaking Performance through Debating: Students Perception at Uds (Umuslim Debating Society)," *Journal of English Education and Social Science* 2, no. 2 (2021): 79–86; Satria Adi Pradana, "Using Debate to Enhance Students' Speaking Ability as Their Character Building," *English Education: Jurnal Tadris Bahasa Inggris* 10, no. 1 (2017): 149–63; Rohadi Rohadi, "English Debate Technique in Senior High School in Improving Student's Speaking

speak up, get involved in discussions, defend their arguments, respond to the opponents by making counterarguments, and conduct research on related issues. Through English debating, they get involved in challenging and thrilling activities.[2] English debating requires several steps. It starts with analyzing an issue and evaluating the information resources as the basis in argument building. Through this stage they can foster their reading skill and enrich their vocabulary. Then, their speaking ability is crucial in delivering the arguments. After the debate, they should evaluate their arguments and performance for self-reflection and improvement. Hence, it is a well-developed speaking skill and other English skills such as reading, listening, writing, vocabulary, and grammar.[3]

The debating technique has been implemented in English teaching for several education levels, especially at secondary and higher education levels.[4] Both general public schools and religious schools could implement this technique. Supported by the available sources of information and along with their intellectual development, students in secondary and higher levels are supposed to develop strong arguments. However, not all students have this kind of privilege in debating, especially those who live in boarding schools with strict schedules and limited information sources.

Bringing English debating into a religious school, including boarding school, can be troublesome due to certain sentiments concerning ideology or religious belief.[5] English debating presents diverse motions on which the debaters should agree or disagree. Sometimes, they should agree with certain motions that contradict their religious beliefs and practices. However, they should keep going and find logic and reasonable arguments to accommodate the motions. It is not always easy for experienced debaters and it even

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Ability and Applying Knowledge Insight," *Journal of English Education Studies* 3, no. 1 (May 17, 2020): 45–52, https://doi.org/10.30653/005.202031.57.

[2] Ali Alasmari and Sayed Salahuddin Ahmed, "Using Debate in Efl Classes," *English Language Teaching* 6, no. 1 (December 11, 2012): p147, https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n1p147.

[3] Ira Atika Zahra, "The Effect of Debate Activity in English Four Skills: The Students' Perspective," in *ICELL Conference Proceedings 2019* (UHAMKA International Conference on ELT and CALL, Jakarta: UHAMKA, 2019), https://journal.uhamka.ac.id/index.php/uicell/issue/view/168.

[4] Haryanto Haryanto, Eka Setya Budi, and Ali As'ad, "Assessing Speech through English Debate to Improve Speaking Ability of University Students," *Edulingua : Jurnal Linguistiks Terapan Dan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris* 6, no. 1 (2019): 41–50, https://doi.org/10.34001/edulingua.v6i1; Khoirunisa Khoirunisa, "The Use of English Debate Club in Improving Students Speaking Skill (a Case Study of English Debate Club in Smkn 1 Serang)" (Undergraduate Thesis, Banten, UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanudin, 2018), http://repository.uinbanten.ac.id/id/eprint/2522; Firnantia Lara Lestari, "Debate Technique as Teacher's Strategies in Improving Student's Higher Education English Speaking Skill," *Education of English as a Foreign Language* 1, no. 2 (July 30, 2018): 10–19, https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.Educafl.2018.001.02.02.

[5] Rahmadsyah Rangkuti, "Improving Students' Speaking Ability through Debate Contest: A Case in Islamic Boarding School," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development* 5, no. 6 (2018): 6–9.

becomes harder for *newbie* debaters with tight religious values they learn in the *Tahfizul Quran* boarding school context.

In certain conditions, students are encouraged to find a moderate position in which they can accommodate others' beliefs without losing their beliefs and identity. This spirit is in line with religious moderation practice in some ways. In this stage, it can be seen that English debating is beyond English performance and critical thinking concerns. It is also about creativity, persistence, teamwork, confidence to present convincing arguments, and willingness to recognize diversity and address solutions.[6] Only those with firm determination and perseverance will grow to be well-established English debaters. Besides, dealing with human interaction, English debating does promote teamwork, tolerance, and mutual understanding in many aspects of life such as cultural and religious practices, beliefs, and ideology.

Debating which encourages students to think critically and logically can be a medium to foster religious moderation. Debating drives the students to accommodate contradictory beliefs by finding the logic and reasonable arguments that can shape their thinking from different perspectives.[7] Consequently, they do not easily judge someone else's belief as wrong, but try to understand it from a different point of view. To do it, someone should have strong beliefs on his side first before trying to understand others' perspectives. Bringing religious moderation issues into educational institutions is one of the best ways to disseminate its practices in a multicultural society.[8] Religious moderation does not only deal with the inter-religion approach, but also intra-religion since there are different perspectives on the same religion. Therefore, this issue is suitable to be brought to general public schools or religion-based schools.

Moreover, students in religion-based schools will later live together in society. Thus school curricula must address issues of living together as a nation united despite differences in religion and ethnicity.[9] For these purposes, English debating appears as one of the activities that can facilitate students to think critically and examine a case from multi

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[6] Rachelle S. Savitz, Susan Cridland-Hughes, and Mihaela Gazioglu, "Debate as a Tool to Develop Disciplinary Practices and Student Agency," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 102 (June 2021): 103341, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103341.

[7] Liqing Wang, "Critical Thinking Sub-Skills in English Debate," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 11, no. 12 (December 2, 2021): 1630–35, https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1112.15.

[8] Edy Sutrisno, "Aktualisasi Moderasi Beragama Di Lembaga Pendidikan," *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 12, no. 2 (December 27, 2019): 323–48, https://doi.org/10.37302/jbi.v12i2.113.

[9] Zakiyuddin Baidhawy, "Building Harmony and Peace through Multiculturalist Theology-based Religious Education: An Alternative for Contemporary Indonesia," *British Journal of Religious Education* 29, no. 1 (January 2007): 15–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200601037478.

perspectives. Recognizing diversity and critically assessing certain phenomena, they tend not to judge others easily.

Previous studies on English debating mostly concern its impacts on students' English skill improvements[10] and critical thinking aspects.[11] Those studies pointed out the significance of using English debating techniques to promote students' English skills and essential thinking abilities. Regarding religious moderation in English class, a study has reported that a cross-cultural understanding of the subject could facilitate religious moderation values.[12] Beyond linguistic improvement, the critical thinking aspect developed through debating activity can be a medium to initiate religious moderation in a school context. Students are trained to accommodate diversity and comprehensively look at certain phenomena. Moreover, in Islamic boarding school contexts where students do not experience religious diversity and relatively implement the same values, English debating could facilitate the students in initiating religious moderation through its diverse motions. However, among the previous studies, no study focused on how English debating plays a role in creating and promoting religious moderation values within a *Tahfizul Quran* boarding school context.

This recent study considers a debating community at a *Tahfizul Quran* boarding school through which the students are trained to have higher critical thinking ability and English-speaking performance. *Tahfizul Quran* boarding school is chosen since the students in this kind of school tend to have tight learning schedules and mostly live under similar norms and values of Islam. In contrast, they can perform well in English debating, covering diverse matters and phenomena apart from Islamic issues. This study focused on two problem statements: (1) how were the students' and teachers' perceptions of English debating? and (2) in what way could English debating foster religious moderation? This study presents insightful practices for developing students' competence and performance in English and critical thinking ability. Moreover, English debating is a way to disseminate religious moderation among students in religious schools.

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[10] Zahra, "The Effect of Debate Activity"; Muthmainnah and Misnar, "Boosting Speaking Performance."

[11] Abid el Majidi, Daniel Janssen, and Rick de Graaff, "The Effects of In-Class Debates on Argumentation Skills in Second Language Education," *System* 101 (October 2021): 102576, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102576; Wang, "Critical Thinking Sub-Skills in English Debate."

[12] Nirwana Nirwana and Waode Surya Darmadali, "Instilling Religious Moderation Value in ELT through Cross-Cultural Understanding Course," *Elsya : Journal of English Language Studies* 3, no. 2 (June 27, 2021): 117–25, https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v3i2.6780.

Methods

This qualitative study employed an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to gain insights dealing with students' and teacher's perceptions in a *Tahfizul Quran* school context on English debating and finding the idea of fostering religious moderation through English debating. The informants were three former members of one English debating club at a *Tahfizul Quran* boarding school in Central Java, for senior high school level and one English teacher who also performed as the coach in the English debating club. The school was chosen since English debating was relatively newly established, but it had made good progress at regional and national levels, which showed the students' ability in debating. Four informants of 30 formerly active debating club members were invited to participate in this study based on several criteria. First, they joined the club for more than one year. Second, they had already entered regional and/or national English debating competitions. Third, they were recommended by the English teacher, and fourth, they ought to confirm their willingness to be the informants in this study. However, only the three of them demonstrated their willingness to participate. The English teacher was a former reputable debater since she had competed in several national debating championships and was currently active as an English debating coach and adjudicator. She was the only one who performed as the English debating coach in this school.

The open-ended questionnaire was sent to the three student informants to gain general insight about the research topics. This study employed thematic analysis to identify the themes from the groups of data which correspond the research questions and become the findings of this study.[13] The questionnaire results were analyzed thematically to find out several themes from the informants, regarding their experiences, feelings, and thoughts.[14] Then several informal semi-structured interviews were conducted at different times for data confirmation and triangulation purposes. The English teacher was also invited for a semi-structured interview. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed thematically to discover several themes that confirmed the student informants' findings. It employed multiple data sources and triangulation techniques to confirm the study's validity.[15] The data

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[13] J.W Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, Fourth (London: Pearson Education, 2014), 78.

[14] Gary Barkhuizen, Phil Benson, and Alice Chik, eds., *Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research*, Second Language Acquisition Research Series: Theoretical and Methodological Issues (New York ; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

[15] J.W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquity and Research Design Choosing Among Five Approach* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 74.

were checked several times to convince the quality of data analysis. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the research questions.

Discussion

The Students' and the Teacher's Perceptions on English Debating

The students and the teacher agreed that English debating improved the students' English skills in all aspects, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It was also supported by their improved vocabulary and grammar mastery as stated by one of the informants.

Vocabulary was the first aspect that was improved and contributed to the other skills sourced by their intensive reading activity through the available sources as the base of building a background understanding of the motions. Further, the other skills were also improved simultaneously along with the debating stages. However, some skills might improve better than others. Their reading, speaking, and listening skills got better than their writing since the writing did not play a prominent role, but only for making notes during the debating.

As debating is such a complex process, their improvement in English skills can be explained as follows. The students' speaking skill enhancement results from the improved vocabulary from the reading stage. By collecting information from available resources, the students find new vocabularies and recognize various sentence constructions they can use to construct their arguments.[16] During the reading stage, they also recognize various sentence structures that can be implemented in their talks. Besides, English debating requires them to deliver their arguments properly and respond to their opponent's arguments, which eventually improved their speaking skills.[17] Their listening skill was well-improved simultaneously while speaking and discussing with the team members. On the other hand, writing might be the least tangible improved skill since the students do not make well-structured writing or essays in debating. They only write short sentences which can be hinted at in their speaking performance.

Furthermore, the improvement in their communicative skill is also related to their improved cognitive ability as the result of critical analysis during the reading and argument

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[16] Wang, "Critical Thinking Sub-Skills in English Debate."
[17] Rohadi, "English Debate Technique."

building. It can be identified from their ability to create real and convincing sentences through their arguments.[18]

Other than English skills, the students also reported improvements in their confidence to speak in public, critical and systematic thinking, and teamwork. Their confidence to speak in public resulted from improved English skills, regular practices, the coach's constructive feedback, and the team members' mutual support.[19] The teacher also confirmed that the students' confidence improved greatly, especially those who were passionate and eager to learn. Some students were shy at first, but they could be good speakers.[20]

The critical thinking ability was fostered through argument building which forced the students to develop strong and convincing arguments no one could disagree. For this purpose, they should think several times from making one argument and criticizing it until they finally create the strongest and most reasonable arguments to deliver. It is reflected in the thinking process. The thinking process makes students learn to think systematically. When they are given a motion, they will look for the context of the motion, thinking of why this motion exists. We should know the background of why it happens. After that we see what the impacts are. It is from that process that they can create an argument.

Once they found the "why" certain motions exist, they could see a phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Then, once they were placed in a certain position, they could build their arguments and the reason to support their position. It was followed by "so what" would happen if the reason was done/undone. It also functioned to anticipate the counterarguments from the opposite. This process would continue until they could not find any other reason to answer or questions to ask. This "why" and "so what" the English teacher introduced a method to encourage the students' critical thinking ability and she was convinced that this method worked pretty well.[21] However, during the debate, the coach should not help the team in any way so they have to survive together with the team members. It provides an authentic learning experience for the students in which they develop their personal responses to the arguments they should encounter which contributes to shaping their critical thinking.[22]

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[18] Prima Dona Hapsari and F.A. Wisnu Wirawan, "The Significant Connection between Communicative Competence and Cognitive Ability in Speaking English of English Debating Team," *Humaniora* 9, no. 2 (July 31, 2018): 149, https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v9i2.4492.

[19] Atin Kurniawati, "Questionnaire Resume of the Participants," 2021, http://bit.ly/3UX72FE.

[20] Atin Kurniawati, "Transcript of Interview with the English Teacher (Debating Coach)," January 23, 2022, http://bit.ly/3THtOQX.

[21] Kurniawati.

[22] Fiona Stockdale, "Finding Voice: Debating in Secondary School English," *Changing English* 27, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 285–94, https://doi.org/10.1080/1358684X.2020.1777532.

Since English debating is a group activity, there must be cooperation and organizational strategy among the team members. Every member must have strengths and weaknesses by which they should be able to manage the task in the group to achieve the goal effectively. They recognized their potential, characteristics, and debating styles through regular rehearsals, from which they collaborated. The interaction through peer assisting, supported by a well-engaged teacher, assists them in developing their communicative competence and active participation.[23] It would eventually be beneficial for their debating performance.

The English teacher who also performed as the debating coach played an essential role in shaping the students' skills enhancement, starting from recognizing the team members' strengths and weaknesses. Based on the identification carried out by the English teacher, there are two categories based on the student's ability to debate. First, students who are good at speaking English so they have no trouble in speaking, they have excellent pronunciation, and they know how to tell or how to deliver ideas using English. Second, students who still find it hard to speak in English, to deliver their ideas in English but generally don't have any basic debating.

During the coaching session, the English teacher would make the students try to speak and explore their arguments. Then, after each session, she gave the students feedback, tips, and motivation. This kind of support by letting the students explore their capabilities, encouraged the students' responsibility. The evaluation and constructive feedback enable the students to learn and share their voices comfortably.[24] Therefore, mutual communication through discussion and evaluation (feedback) among the team members and the debating coach is crucial and contributes to the progress of each team member.

These findings and discussion strengthen the benefits of English debating to improve students' English skills through the debating stages. Besides, this activity also improves the students' non-linguistic skills such as confidence, critical and systematic thinking, and teamwork. On the other hand, English debating helps English teachers know their students' strengths and weaknesses and how to treat them better.

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[23] Muliani Muliani and Dedi Sumarsono, "Intercultural Communicative Competence: L2 Learners' Participation on Debating Class," *Jo-ELT (Journal of English Language Teaching) Fakultas Pendidikan Bahasa & Seni Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris IKIP* 8, no. 2 (December 30, 2021): 198, https://doi.org/10.33394/jo-elt.v8i2.4528.

[24] Savitz, Cridland-Hughes, and Gazioglu, "Debate as a Tool to Develop Disciplinary Practices and Student Agency."

How English Debating Fosters Religious Moderation

This English debating club was first established to address an issue dealing with racist comments the English teacher found during the learning process. Some students have made comments about certain ethnic groups to which the English teacher responded. These responses lead to discussions between teachers and students. Based on the discussion, several problems were found related to thinking critically or analyzing something or some problems the students have. She then thought of a way to promote critical thinking so her students not be trapped in biased perspectives and easily judge others as worse or totally wrong.

What happened in this school as experienced by the teacher cannot be generalized, but this kind of attitude existed among the students. Right then, it becomes the responsibility of the teachers and the schools to educate and guide the students to think the better way. Therefore, introducing religious moderation in school subjects or other activities at school is definitely acceptable and isn't a new issue. Religious moderation is usually taught through religious education at schools,[25] but it can be implemented in other subjects, including English lessons. One of the notions of education is to increase empathy by promoting a deeper understanding of "the other", and highly educated people are commonly more empathetic of the individual's religious beliefs.[26] Hence, the role of educational institutions is essential.

Radicalism and/or intolerance in the name of religion can be prevented and solved through moderate Islamic education.[27] Since sometimes the curricula at schools do not explicitly recognize religious moderation through its subjects, extracurricular activities can take the role. One of the students informed that they did not get enough to deal with global issues, controversies, or religious tolerance in the curricular activities. They might learn it from the textbooks of Islamic teachings and values, but they could not practice it since Islamic boarding school context provided monotonous beliefs and values. Therefore, she believed that the English debating club allowed her to learn about those issues.

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[25] Baidhawy, "Building Harmony and Peace through Multiculturalist Theology-based Religious Education."

[26] Xiuhua Wang and Paul Froese, "Attitudes Toward Religion and Believers in China: How Education Increases Tolerance of Individual Religious Differences and Intolerance of Religious Influence in Politics," *Religion & Education* 47, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 98–117, https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2019.1626211.

[27] Mohamad Fahri and Ahmad Zainuri, "Moderasi Beragama Di Indonesia" 25, no. 2 (2019): 95–100, https://doi.org/10.19109/intizar.v25i2.5640; Lyn Parker, "Religious Education for Peaceful Coexistence in Indonesia?," *South East Asia Research* 22, no. 4 (December 2014): 487–504, https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2014.0231.

Moderate Islam looks at a problem through a compromise approach and takes the middle position toward differences between religions or in the same religion. It brings tolerance and respect while still holding their own belief tightly.[28] Therefore, both the student and the teacher argue that in religious moderation we do not need to be afraid of holding our beliefs as long as we do not discriminate against others or compel others to have the same perspective.[29] There are several criteria of comprehensive implementation of religious moderation, including a comprehensive understanding of Islam, balance of *sharia* and the changing era, supporting peacefulness and respecting humanity values, recognizing religious plurality, culture, and political views, and recognizing minority rights.[30] The essence of moderation in a frame of religious tolerance is neither to merge nor to exchange religious beliefs. It represents the sense of social interaction; no common boundaries may or may not be violated. Each party is expected to control themselves and provide space to respect each other's uniqueness without feeling threatened by their beliefs or rights.[31]

English debating brings motions representing debatable issues toward specific problems or phenomena, including those closely related to religious beliefs. It was very troublesome for the students joining English debating. For example, the motions about legalizing abortion, same-sex marriage, or prostitution would be very difficult for them to be in the affirmative position since it was strictly prohibited in Islam. They could drive the motion into certain limitations since the affirmative team could determine the debate limitation. However, when they did not have the chance, they should keep going and finding strong arguments without breaking the Islamic values they believed in. Seen from other aspects such as economy, psychology, or culture, sometimes those motions could be logically acceptable and tangibly beneficial.[32]

The teacher also confirmed that she sometimes felt it challenging to deal with controversial issues according to Islamic values, but then she tried to derive the issue from different perspectives. For example, she would see the issue from humanity, health, or universal values which Islam did not totally contradict. In other words, their arguments could implement religious moderation principles by respecting humanity's values, recognizing

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[28] Sutrisno, "Aktualisasi Moderasi Beragama Di Lembaga Pendidikan."

[29] Kurniawati, "Transcript of Interview with the English Teacher (Debating Coach)"; Atin Kurniawati, "Interview Resume with Student 2," April 15, 2022, http://bit.ly/3GkfH0N.

[30] Masykuri Abdillah, "Meneguhkan Moderasi Beragama," University website, *Prof. Dr. Masykuri Abdillah* (blog), Mei 2016, http://masykuriabdillah.lec.uinjkt.ac.id/home-1/meneguhkanmoderasiberagama.

[31] Mhd. Abror, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Bingkai Toleransi," *RUSYDIAH: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 1, no. 2 (December 18, 2020): 137–48, https://doi.org/10.35961/rsd.v1i2.174.

[32] Kurniawati, "Transcript of Interview with the English Teacher (Debating Coach)."

minority rights and a plurality of cultural and political views. Following the value of religious moderation, the arguments can try to find similarities by upholding universal values everyone likely has the same perspective. Since taking religious beliefs is somewhat unacceptable in English debating, the best way is to bring universal values everyone can accept such as health, psychological, humanity, and social aspects. From the students' point of view, English debating also motivated them to know certain phenomena from a multi-perspective.

One of the students who is a debate club member claimed that he gets some benefits through English debating. First, they can see something from a different perspective. In debating, they sometimes should agree with something they actually strongly disagree, or sometimes like agree to disagree. Second, it makes them think of why it happens because there must be a reason behind it, so they do not easily judge without knowing why. Third, it makes them curious and they should have enough information before judging or arguing.

English debating made the students recognize diversity in ideology, culture, or other aspects of life. Further, they recognized that Islamic teaching regulated the behavior of its believer and that people cannot compel others with different faiths to agree. As religious moderation involves mutual interaction among people, the student also believed that in certain cases, she could disagree about something due to religious belief and others should respect it too. When dealing with such controversial issues in English debating, they took the universal values in line with Islamic teaching and were likely more acceptable.

A study by Ma'arif Institute in 2018 reported that three aspects were considered as the medium of spreading intolerance and radicalism at schools, which are against religious moderation, namely extracurricular activities, teachers' role in delivering learning materials, and weak regulation from the schools.[33] This study, then, can counter this finding that despite the possibility of spreading intolerance and radicalism, extracurriculars such as English debating can be an effective way to shape the students' understanding and perspective about diversity and guide them think critically before judging something. They can respect others and choose their position wisely by being aware that diversity exists. On the other hand, recognizing diversity also made them know more about Islam itself, why Islam has such teachings and rules for its believers, what the good impacts, and what kind of harm it is violated. The teacher can be an effective role model for students to think critically and see phenomena from different perspectives.

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[33] Dirga Maulana, "Ruang Moderasi Beragama," *Media Indonesia* (blog), January 21, 2019, https://mediaindonesia.com/opini/211781/ruang-moderasi-beragama.

This study implied the English teacher's central role in addressing issues through EFL learning, including religious moderation issues. It was motivated by her view that the students in the boarding school should be able to adapt to the real society with its phenomena and diversity once they have graduated from the school. Since then Islamic boarding schools did not provide this context, she found English debating club the right place.

To coach the debating club effectively, an English teacher should have several competencies, such as English debating skills, critical thinking, and pedagogical knowledge. This is because the English teacher would be a role model for the students who can influence their perspectives on English learning and the language itself, influencing their motivation and determination to learn the language.[34] The teacher's good performance also contributes to the teacher's credibility, affecting the students' satisfaction and engagement.[35] Pedagogical knowledge implies the teacher's ability to recognize the students' learning style, strengths and weaknesses, give constructive feedback, and build their motivation during the learning process. It will help the teacher design the appropriate learning experience for the students.[36]

In instilling the moderate Islam perspectives, the teacher should first know what religious moderation is to guide the students correctly based on the religious moderation principles.[37] It helps build the argumentation in the debate as the result of critical and multi-perspective thinking. Secondly, teaching English is not only teaching the grammar or vocabulary of the language, but also teaching about culture.[38] As English has become a global language, it is also important for the English learners to recognize the global cultures as well as the phenomena that happen in the world. Those phenomena can be following the students' beliefs or contradictory Islamic values. Hence, it is essential to help the students think moderately in addressing the contradictory phenomena as their basic knowledge in facing the global interactions in the world society.

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[34] Mike Metz, "Ideology, Identity, and Pedagogy in English Language Arts Teachers' Linguistic Styling in U.S. Classrooms," *Linguistics and Education* 64 (August 2021): 100942, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2021.100942.

[35] Facundo Froment and Manuel de-Besa Gutiérrez, "The Prediction of Teacher Credibility on Student Motivation: Academic Engagement and Satisfaction as Mediating Variables," *Revista de Psicodidáctica (English Ed.)* 27, no. 2 (July 2022): 149–57, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psicoe.2022.05.001.

[36] Chin-Hsi Lin, Yining Zhang, and Binbin Zheng, "The Roles of Learning Strategies and Motivation in Online Language Learning: A Structural Equation Modeling Analysis," *Computers & Education* 113 (October 2017): 75–85, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2017.05.014.

[37] Samsul Ar, "Peran Guru Agama Dalam Menanamkan Moderasi Beragama," *Al-Irfan : Journal of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 27, 2020): 37–51, https://doi.org/10.36835/al-irfan.v3i1.3715.

[38] AGBA Yoboué Kouadio Michel, "Culture in EFL Teaching: Teacher Beliefs and Pratices in Ivorian Secondary Schools," *American Journal of Educational Research* 6, no. 12 (2018): 1600–1604, https://doi.org/10.12691/education-6-12-2.

Conclusion

The students and the teacher positively perceived English debating since it can facilitate the students' progress in linguistics and non-linguistics aspects. As one of the effective ways to enhance students' speaking skill, English debating activity, through the complex sequences, was also able to improve students' skill in reading, listening, and writing which is supported by their better vocabulary and grammar mastery. Beyond the English skill, English debating also improved the students' confidence in speaking in public, the ability to think critically and systematically, and mutual collaboration with the team members. Their ability to think systematically and critically contributed to their perspective on specific phenomena. They tend to recognize the phenomena comprehensively before developing their arguments. Through this process, they recognize that diversity and plurality exist. At the same time, they can explore Islam's universal values, which can encounter any debatable issues by bringing its universal values. Despite respecting diversity, they also strengthen their belief in Islam.

It implies that religious moderation can be included in daily regular and extracurricular school activities. It requires active participation of competent teachers to guide the students to think the right way. Schools can see this chance by applying supporting regulations. Islamic boarding schools do not accommodate actual daily practices of religious moderation among different religions. Still, it can be presented and taught differently through school subjects or extracurricular activities. This study encountered the previous study which reported that extracurricular activities and teachers' teaching practice could spread intolerance and radicalism at schools.

On the contrary, it can promote tolerance and prevent radicalism. Further studies may investigate students' beliefs on religious moderation in the daily practices in the educational context and the society outside the boarding school. This study also has limitations in the number of participants. Thus, further studies may involve more participants from several different schools to obtain more data and support a more comprehensive analysis.

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