



## How to Bridge Cross-Cultural Understanding? Indonesian Language Instruction as an Instrument for Advancing Religious Moderation Diplomacy in Vietnam



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### [ *Abstract* ]

Indonesian, recognized as an official language by UNESCO, has emerged as a crucial tool for fostering international cultural exchange and soft diplomacy. This paper investigates Indonesian as a foreign language (a.k.a. BIPA or *Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*) programs to promote religious moderation, particularly within Hanoi, Vietnam. The research examines how Indonesian programs facilitate cross-cultural understanding and tolerance by immersing international students in Indonesia's rich religious and cultural landscape by way of an autoethnographic study conducted at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi. Lessons address Indonesia's religiously pluralistic society, illustrated by the architectural diversity of Indonesian mosques and syncretic traditions like *Sekaten* and *Grebeg Sura*, which blend local customs with Islamic values. Such cultural narratives help introduce students to the fundamental principles of religious moderation—respect, tolerance, and coexistence—that underpin Indonesia's social fabric and contribute to its distinctive identity on the global

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stage. The findings suggest that Indonesia's integration of content related to religious moderation not only enhances Indonesia's international image but also equips international students with the ideological tools necessary to appreciate and nurture peace within diverse contexts.

**Keywords:** diplomacy, Bahasa Indonesia, Indonesian instruction, religious moderation, Southeast Asia.

## **I . Introduction**

This study analyzes and describes the form of religious moderation diplomacy through Indonesian language teaching in Hanoi, Vietnam. In particular, it investigates how Indonesian instruction can effectively bring the values of religious moderation to the international arena. The following questions will be explored: 1) Which values of religious moderation can be promoted as a form of soft diplomacy in Indonesian language classes? 2) What pedagogical methods are utilized in promoting the value of religious moderation through the teaching of Indonesian? and 3) What impact does this promotion have? Additionally, why is it crucial to advocate for religious moderation as a diplomatic tool through Indonesian instruction? Through these questions, this study aims to explore a new area of diplomacy in Indonesian instruction. Current studies show that cultural diplomacy is conducted predominantly through tourism. Hence, religious moderation exposure will broaden a new horizon in the context of cultural diplomacy through Indonesian instruction.

In an elementary-high (BIPA 2 or A2) level Indonesian class at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), Hanoi, Vietnam, there was a long discussion on the topic of the environment, including the socio-cultural environment. Learners at USSH were learning to write texts on environmental conditions in Indonesia. One of the learners asked a critical question. She is a student actively learning Indonesian because she studies in the Southeast Asian Studies department. Of course, this question does not represent all Vietnamese students' views on Indonesia. However,

this question is an important indication of discussions of religious conditions in Indonesia for students in Vietnam.

The student asked, "Sir, Indonesia is home to many religions. Do they coexist in the same areas, or are they separated into distinct communities?" inquired Luu Cam Ly, the Buddhist student currently exploring Indonesia. This seemingly simple question reveals foreign individuals' complexities in grasping Indonesia's religious dynamics. It invites international students to adopt a new perspective, acknowledging the country's diversity and dedication to fostering harmony among various faiths. A comprehensive answer to this question necessitates understanding "religious moderation." Her fascination with the country deepened after participating in the Indonesian class at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, at University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University (USSH-VNU) in Hanoi.

As of 2023, Indonesian has achieved notable global recognition, with the language being taught at nearly 500 institutions worldwide (Alam et al. 2022; Maharani et al. 2023; Oktania et al. 2023; Prima 2020). A significant milestone is the designation of Indonesian as an official language during a United Nations session at UNESCO (Indonesia.go.id). Promoting the Indonesian language as an international communication medium is a longstanding initiative of the Republic of Indonesia. This effort is anchored in Law Number 24 of 2009, which articulates the commitment of the government to enhance the international status and function of the Indonesian language. This legislation outlines various strategies to foster the global presence of Indonesians, recognizing it as a vital tool for cultural exchange and international dialogue. One of the primary avenues for implementing this mandate is establishing BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*/Indonesian as a foreign language). These programs are designated specifically to teach the Indonesian language to non-native speakers, both within Indonesia and in international settings. The BIPA initiative serves not only to promote language acquisition but also to facilitate cultural understanding and cooperation among diverse communities around the world. Scholars such as Khoirunnisa and Sunarya (2023), Faizin (2020), Amil (2020), and Sambas et al. (2020) have highlighted the importance of these

programs in furthering the internationalization of Indonesian and enhancing its role as a significant global language.

Moreover, BIPA teaching is broader than merely instructing foreign nationals in Indonesian. However, there is an essential mission within the learning process. BIPA can also be viewed as a soft diplomacy initiative carried out by the government of the Republic of Indonesia. Within BIPA, there exists a process of cultural, economic, tourism, and even political diplomacy. BIPA can be utilized to promote Indonesian culture, economy, and political perspectives on the international stage. The diplomacy fostered through Indonesian instruction is crucial for enhancing Indonesia's global image. A vital and impactful aspect of this diplomatic strategy is promoting religious moderation. Indonesia is renowned for its rich diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and religions, making it one of the most multicultural nations in the world. Despite this diversity, many individuals and organizations in the international community often perceive Indonesia primarily as an Islamic country, mainly due to the significant majority of its population identifying as Muslim. While this perspective is not entirely inaccurate, it oversimplifies the complexity and pluralism of Indonesian society, which encompasses a wide range of religious beliefs and cultural practices (Nguyen 2024; Tran et al. 2024).

Cultural diplomacy through Indonesian language instruction is widely explored by various instructors and researchers. However, many successful approaches tend to focus on tourism (Amin 2021; Idris 2018; Widiyanto 2017). For instance, educators often emphasize Indonesian tourist destinations as a means of cultural diplomacy. Alternatively, they may concentrate on Indonesian arts, including traditional dance, textile heritage, or culinary arts (Khaerunnisa et al. 2024; Rahmatika and Suharja 2024; Saddhono et al. 2024). Conversely, Indonesia's religious or spiritual heritage is rarely addressed in the context of cultural diplomacy. Some argue that introducing religious topics may lead to sensitive tensions in the classroom. Nevertheless, engaging with these themes can provide international students with valuable insights into the rich tapestry of religious diversity in Indonesia. In conclusion, incorporating discussions of religious topics into cultural diplomacy can help

reduce misunderstandings among students and enhance their understanding of the Indonesian context.

Indonesia can actively promote religious moderation through diplomacy to address this narrow viewpoint. This approach aims to educate and inform international students about the country's inclusive stance on religious coexistence and tolerance. By highlighting the values of harmony, respect, and acceptance that are central to Indonesian culture, the goal is to dispel any misconceptions about its religious landscape (Dastagir 2019; Muhajarah & Soebahar 2024; Widigdo et al. 2024). Moreover, promoting religious moderation helps eliminate misunderstandings and fosters a more comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's identity on the global stage. By opening the minds of international audiences to the country's diverse religious landscape, Indonesia can strengthen its diplomatic relations and create a more favorable environment for investment and collaboration. This diplomatic effort ultimately contributes to a more nuanced appreciation of Indonesia's role in the international community, highlighting its commitment to peace and coexistence.

From the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia's perspective, implementing the BIPA program is not a novel initiative. The Ministry actively engages in the development of BIPA through various service and programmatic provisions. Noteworthy Islamic universities, including UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, UIN Walisongo, UIN Maliki Malang, and UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, have taken significant steps to organize and facilitate BIPA teaching programs. Furthermore, the Directorate General of Islamic Higher Education has contributed to this endeavor by publishing an academic document delineating the Competency Standards for Graduates of the BIPA Program for the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This document is a derivative of the BIPA standardization established in Permendikbud Number 27 of 2017. The publication of this academic paper underscores the necessity for the BIPA program, under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, to align with the essential mission of promoting "religious moderation" (Christina 2021; Habibie et al. 2022; Nurhidin 2021; Wardati et al. 2023).

Examining these conditions highlights a shared perspective among Indonesians and the Southeast Asian community regarding the experiences of religious individuals in Indonesia. The Indonesian language can effectively act as a bridge for promoting the values of religious moderation to global citizens, especially those in Southeast Asia (Chang 2016; Kawangung 2019). Religious moderation aims to align religious understanding and practice with its fundamental essence: to uphold human dignity, respect, and civilization. Indicators of religious moderation can be observed through a national commitment to nonviolence, tolerance, and the embrace of local traditions (Afwadzi et al. 2021; Solahudin et al. 2023).

## **II . Method**

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive research approach to investigate the inquiries at hand, with a particular emphasis on autoethnography (Chang 2016). The researchers immerse themselves directly in the learning process to enhance their understanding. The data for this investigation is derived from the discourse surrounding religious moderation diplomacy, gathered through field notes (Boll 2024; Day 2024) and archival research from the Ministry of Religious Affairs' SKL BIPA, BIPA textbooks, as well as contributions from students at USSH-VNU Hanoi. Methodologically, data collection encompasses both observational research and interviews conducted with Indonesian language course students enrolled in the level A2 (basic/elementary) class at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Hanoi. This research unfolded over the span of one academic semester, specifically tailored to the Indonesian instruction cohort.

The study involved a total of 26 participants, comprising three male and 23 female students. These students are enrolled in Indonesian studies within the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at USSH-VNU. All participants are citizens of Vietnam, with the majority originally from Hanoi, while the remainder are from various cities in the surrounding regions. These learners engage in Indonesian instruction that spans from basic to advanced levels,

with each semester consisting of 16 instructional meetings. The focus of this research was specifically confined to the elementary-level classroom setting. The methodology employed in the study included multiple approaches to data collection, specifically interviews and observations informed by autoethnographic techniques. First, in-person observations and interviews were conducted in November 2023 during regular class sessions at USSH Hanoi. Additionally, interviews and observations were performed remotely via Zoom meetings, which enhanced the comprehensiveness of the data collected. Furthermore, interviews were facilitated through the Zalo platform, a communication tool widely adopted by the participants in Vietnam. This platform was utilized to establish class groups, thereby enabling instant communication and facilitating more in-depth interviews.

The interview is semi-structured, with a few general questions as interview prompts. Some of these questions are as follows.

1) Please elaborate on your experiences related to the acquisition of the Indonesian language and an understanding of its culture.

2) What motivates your interest in the study of the Indonesian language and culture?

3) What is your current knowledge regarding Indonesia and the Indonesian language?

4) Can you describe your understanding of the socio-religious landscape within Indonesia?

5) What experiences have you had in learning about the values associated with religious moderation in Indonesia?

6) In your opinion, is the subject of religious moderation in Indonesia a pertinent topic for educational discourse within Indonesian language classes?

7) What significant insights have you gained from studying this subject matter?

8) What aspirations do you wish to express concerning future

learning opportunities related to these themes?

The interview process is likely to proceed favorably when considering the preceding inquiries. However, participants are afforded the opportunity to express their responses and share their experiences with considerable flexibility. Consequently, the queries posed serve primarily as prompts rather than exhaustive questions. In practical application, the interview process may evolve into a more expansive and comprehensive dialogue.

The data for this study were systematically gathered through field notes, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and extensive archival documentation. A narrative analysis approach was employed to rigorously analyze this data (Day 2024), enabling a comprehensive exploration of the emerging narratives and themes. Data triangulation proved crucial to this analysis (Carter 2014), serving to bolster consistency and reliability across various sources. By cross-referencing findings from field notes, interview transcripts, and observational insights derived from archival materials, the researcher effectively established connections and validated interpretations originating from these diverse data sources.

The researcher integrated reflective analysis (Embree 2011), drawing upon personal classroom experiences to enhance the understanding of the research context. This reflective approach informed the analysis and contributed an element of authenticity to the findings. Employing an autoethnographic research design, the researcher capitalized on personal reflections and lived experiences to enrich the narrative, resulting in a more nuanced and relatable presentation of the research outcomes. This multifaceted strategy offered a holistic perspective, linking individual experiences with broader educational themes and thereby augmenting the overall depth and impact of the study.

Additionally, this research has conscientiously addressed ethical considerations in accordance with the standards of qualitative research. Throughout the field research process, while incorporating observation and interviews, this study adhered to protocols designed to protect the consent of research participants. Each observation and interview was conducted in alignment with

the participants' consent, thereby pre-empting potential ethical concerns. All participants provided their explicit consent for the publication of research results, ensuring compliance with ethical standards in dissemination.

### **III. The Development of Teaching Indonesian in Vietnam**

The instruction of the Indonesian language in Vietnam has evolved significantly since its initiation, reflecting diverse developmental levels across the country's regions. This analysis explores the growth trajectory, institutional adoption, and pedagogical methodologies associated with Indonesian language education in Vietnam, employing historical, institutional, and pedagogical perspectives. The earliest efforts can be traced back to 1992 in Ho Chi Minh City, where initial courses catered primarily to language enthusiasts and professionals drawn to Indonesian culture and economic opportunities. The subsequent years saw considerable expansion of these programs, culminating in the establishment of a comprehensive Indonesian Language Studies Program at the USSH in Ho Chi Minh City. This program offers a wide array of courses aimed not only at language acquisition but also at immersing students in Indonesia's cultural heritage, thereby addressing fundamental aspects of grammar, vocabulary, conversation, writing, and cultural studies (Leksono et al. 2020).

In parallel fashion, the introduction of Indonesian language programs in Hanoi since 2018 marks a noteworthy development in the North's educational landscape. Launched through a collaboration between the Indonesian Embassy and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, this initiative reflects a strategic response to the increasing interest in Indonesian among Vietnamese students and professionals. The appointment of qualified instructors facilitated a structured language education framework, expanding access to Indonesian language instruction across various socio-professional contexts (Nugraheni et al. 2024). Furthermore, in 2019, the inclusion of Indonesian language instruction in the Southeast Asian Studies Program at USSH Hanoi exemplifies

growing institutional support for linguistic and cultural studies, highlighting the collaboration between diplomatic initiatives and academic institutions to address the educational demands of an ASEAN-focused curriculum (Oktriono et al. 2017).

The teaching methodologies employed in these programs reveal a tailored approach responsive to the distinctive contexts of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. The established program in Ho Chi Minh City, with its comprehensive curriculum, provides in-depth linguistic training alongside practical experiences that foster cultural immersion. In contrast, the recently established programs in Hanoi adopt a more foundational approach, emphasizing essential conversational skills and basic grammar to build learners' confidence in real-life communicative situations. Engaging cultural exchange initiatives, such as language cafes and cultural festivals sponsored by the embassy, enrich the language learning experience while promoting a deeper understanding of Indonesian society.

Overall, the ongoing development of Indonesian language education in Vietnam manifests as a multi-faceted phenomenon influenced by cross-national educational policies, cultural diplomacy, and collaborative academic partnerships. This framework aligns with language diffusion theory, which investigates the impact of political, cultural, and economic factors on language teaching, and integrates aspects of Vygotsky's (2012) sociocultural theory, emphasizing the role of social interactions in language acquisition. Through an examination of these interconnected elements, the analysis elucidates the dynamic interplay between formal educational frameworks and cultural exchanges, ultimately enhancing the Indonesian language learning environment in both Vietnam and Indonesia.

This study selects the USSH in Hanoi for several compelling reasons. Firstly, USSH is the sole institution in Hanoi that offers a Southeast Asian Studies program with a concentration in Indonesian. It provides instruction in two significant Southeast Asian languages: Indonesian and Thai, with sustained high interest in the Indonesian language over the years. Secondly, from a historical perspective, USSH was not the original site of language and cultural

diplomacy initiated by the government of the Republic of Indonesia in 2018 through a partnership between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Indonesian Embassy in Hanoi (Anggaira 2022; Widianto 2021). Hanoi University served as the inaugural center for Indonesian language and culture diplomacy at that time, with USSH following as the subsequent center in 2019. Nevertheless, USSH has proven to be the more enduring institution, maintaining its Indonesian language classes to the present day, while Hanoi University has ceased such offerings due to various challenges and changed policies. Lastly, USSH is characterized by the presence of Indonesian nationals who continue to oversee the Indonesian language program, thereby facilitating comprehensive and sustainable implementation of this research. For these reasons, USSH has been selected as the focal point of this study, as it effectively represents the Indonesian language program in Hanoi, Vietnam.

#### **IV. Teaching Indonesian as a Foreign Language in Islamic State Universities in Indonesia: a Comparative Study**

The BIPA program, which is designed to facilitate the instruction of Indonesian as a foreign language, requires significant institutionalization within the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Among the approximately 55 Islamic Religious Universities throughout Indonesia, only a limited number—fewer than 10—have undertaken the initiative to develop and actively advocate for BIPA programs. This minimal engagement can be largely attributed to the prevailing perception that BIPA is predominantly regarded as an educational endeavor managed by various other governmental ministries, rather than being under the purview of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

To foster a more nuanced understanding of the distribution and implementation of BIPA within the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it is advisable to refer to the accompanying table. This table elucidates the specific universities that are engaging in the BIPA program and delineates their respective contributions, thereby offering a comprehensive overview of the academic framework associated with this initiative.

<Table 1> Progress of BIPA Under the Ministry of Religious Affairs

No	University	Program
1	UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta	Darmasiswa RI Scholarship Ministry of Religious Affairs Scholarship Institutional Scholarships
2	UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang	Darmasiswa RI Scholarship Ministry of Religious Affairs Scholarship Institutional Scholarships
3	UIN Walisongo Semarang	Ministry of Religious Affairs Scholarship Institutional Scholarships
4	UIN Tulungagung, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, UIN Sulthan Thaha Syaifuddin Jambi, etc.	Initiating

**4.1. Purpose**

Teaching Indonesian to international students in public Islamic universities in Indonesia serves multiple objectives. Foremost among these objectives is academic necessity. It is imperative for them to attain proficiency in the Indonesian language prior to embarking on their degree studies as they are deeply engaged with the vibrant cultures of Indonesia. Moreover, the vast majority of academic programs offered at state Islamic universities in Indonesia do not include English language courses, thereby rendering proficiency in the Indonesian language essential for international students.

Another significant objective pertains to the policy on Indonesian language mastery. In accordance with Act Number 24 of 2009, which advocates for the enhancement of the Indonesian language's role as an international language, a more robust and comprehensive implementation is warranted. Thus, the establishment of Indonesian language programs for international students within Indonesian educational institutions is essential. These programs not only serve as foundational support for international students seeking to study in Indonesia, but they also embody a tangible enactment of the mission to internationalize the Indonesian language within the domestic context. Additionally, Indonesian language courses for

international students function as a conduit for introducing local culture, thereby mitigating the risks of cultural shock that may arise.

## **4.2. Curriculum**

The Government of the Republic of Indonesia, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, has officially promulgated a curriculum for the instruction of Indonesian as a foreign language, delineated in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture (Permendikbud) Number 27 of 2017. This regulation governs the standardization of the teaching of Indonesian as a foreign language (BIPA Standardization), establishing seven levels of language proficiency ranging from BIPA 1 to BIPA 7. The curriculum document explicitly states that this standardization adheres to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), widely recognized for assessing individuals' proficiency levels in foreign language acquisition prevalent in Europe.

Nevertheless, within the context of imparting Indonesian language education to international students, particularly in public universities affiliated with the Ministry of Religion, the Indonesian language teaching curriculum is tailored to accommodate the specific needs of the institution. As a result, the proficiency levels utilized in Indonesian language instruction within faith-based universities in Indonesia may differ, reflecting the unique contextual needs of each institution. For instance, at Walisongo State Islamic University in Semarang, the curriculum has been developed to meet institutional requirements, comprising only two proficiency levels for international students: a basic level and an academic level (intermediate-advanced). The formulation of this curriculum is aligned with the institution's vision and mission, the temporal context of the learning experience, and the available program budget.

## **4.3. Teaching Materials**

In accordance with the modifications made to the curriculum in response to the distinct needs of various educational institutions, the accompanying teaching materials have also been tailored to align with the evolving nature of the curriculum. The Government of the

Republic of Indonesia has supplied instructional materials and enrichment resources aimed at facilitating the teaching of Indonesian as a foreign language. These teaching materials are accessible for download via the designated webpage [www.bipa.kemdikbud.go.id](http://www.bipa.kemdikbud.go.id). The BIPA textbook titled *Sahabatku Indonesia* encompasses comprehensive content from BIPA 1 to BIPA 7, with the PDF version available for free to all users through the website.

However, it is important to note that the BIPA textbooks provided by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia are somewhat general in nature, as they are designed to meet the broader needs of language diplomacy. Consequently, many institutions in Indonesia articulate a necessity to further develop and customize the materials to align with the unique characteristics of their respective educational environments.

For instance, Walisongo State Islamic University Semarang has developed an Indonesian language textbook specifically tailored for its international students, entitled *Rumahku Indonesia*. This textbook is available in two tiers: a foundational level and an advanced academic level, with each tier comprising two series. The first series focuses on oral language skills, encompassing listening and speaking, while the second series addresses written language skills, including reading and writing. This nuanced approach to the dichotomy of language skills—oral and written—reflects the contextual needs and pedagogical framework of Indonesian language instruction at Walisongo State Islamic University Semarang. Moreover, the textbook incorporates elements of local Semarang culture and aligns with the values espoused by UIN Walisongo, thus adhering to the institution's overarching visions and missions. This distinction sets apart the Indonesian textbooks disseminated by the Ministry of Education and Culture from those produced by specific educational institutions.

#### **4.4. Instructors**

To date, there is no distinct profession dedicated to the instruction of Indonesian as a foreign language. Educators engaging in the teaching of Indonesian to international students come from a variety of educational backgrounds. Firstly, these educators typically possess

at least a master's degree in Indonesian Language Education. Secondly, it is common for BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*) teachers to hold a minimum of a master's degree in English Education. Furthermore, BIPA instructors with a master's degree in the field of foreign language education—covering languages such as Arabic, French, Japanese, Chinese, and others—are also eligible to teach Indonesian as a foreign language. Consequently, the pedagogical approaches to teaching Indonesian are likely to vary considerably, influenced by the educators' diverse educational backgrounds.

#### **4.5. Ethnography**

In the context of teaching Indonesian to international students at faith-based universities affiliated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, distinctive characteristics delineate this approach from other exemplary practices in Indonesian language education. A notable distinction is the incorporation of a hidden curriculum that facilitates an introduction to the values of religious moderation. This introduction to religious moderation is paramount, as this paradigm represents a fundamental mission of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in addressing the global issues of radicalism and extremism. Consequently, all programs under the auspices of the Ministry, including those that focus on Indonesian language instruction for international scholars, must prioritize the integration of religious moderation values.

Distinctively, the Indonesian language teaching initiative at USSH Hanoi has established a collaboration with Walisongo State Islamic University Semarang. This collaboration was manifested in the Indonesian language instruction program and visiting lectures conducted through several remote meetings during the period of 2022-2023. The program affords students in the Southeast Asian Studies department at USSH Hanoi the opportunity to engage in direct online learning sessions with native speakers from Indonesia. Through this initiative, Indonesian language educators from Walisongo State Islamic University Semarang endeavor to impart the values of religious moderation utilizing accessible and engaging texts. Moreover, researchers participate in this program to facilitate reflection on both individual and collective experiences pertinent to

this study. Overall, the content surrounding the values of religious moderation not only holds intrinsic interest but also plays a critical role in the Indonesian language education framework, as it offers Vietnamese students an expanded perspective and a profound understanding of the socio-religious dynamics within Indonesia, which are notably diverse.

## **V. An Approach to Religious Moderation: Diplomatic Strategies Through Indonesian Instruction**

There are a variety of practical approaches for introducing the concept of religious moderation to international students participating in Indonesian language courses. These initiatives draw on a wealth of resources, including BIPA at USSH Hanoi, which provides an engaging and immersive educational experience. The curriculum is further enriched by BIPA textbooks developed by esteemed institutions in collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, offering essential knowledge and insights into the intricacies of Indonesian culture and belief systems. The Graduate Competency Standard (SKL BIPA), established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, also serves as a benchmark for assessing students' comprehension of these crucial themes. To complement these resources, textbooks published by the Language Development and Fostering Agency of the Republic of Indonesia enhance a well-rounded education that underscores the principles of religious moderation within Indonesia's diverse social landscape.

### **5.1. Introduction to Indonesian Mosque Architecture**

Students at USSH Hanoi pursuing a degree in Southeast Asian Studies, particularly those specializing in Indonesian studies, are deeply engaged with the vibrant culture of Indonesia. Their educational experience extends beyond simply learning the Indonesian language; it encompasses an in-depth exploration of the country's intricate cultural fabric and the diverse sociocultural conditions that shape daily life.

One particularly fascinating aspect of their studies is the

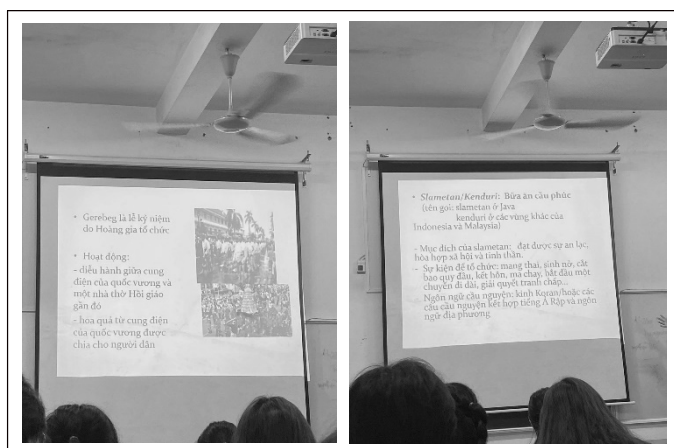
architecture of mosques across Indonesia. As students investigate this subject, they appreciate the beauty and grandeur of these sacred structures and uncover layers of meaning reflecting Indonesian society's pluralistic nature. A notable example is the Menara Kudus Mosque in Central Java, which features a unique architectural design that illustrates both Islamic motifs and its status as a monument during the Hindu-Buddhist era of earlier centuries. The contemporary fusion of architectural design creates a visual narrative that emphasizes the country's rich history of cultural pluralism. The historical context of the monument is related also in local practices of tourism; Sunan Kudus, a prominent historical figure in the fourteenth century on the north coast of Java, established a ban on slaughter of cows, to promote respect among those following different religions in Kudus at that time, a practice which continues to distinguish descriptions of local cuisine. *Soto Kudus*, a popular soup made from water buffalo meat, rather than beef, is known both to local residents and to visitors to Kudus, as an example of the enduring values of religious moderation embedded in local Indonesian life. A third example is during the first part of the month of Muharram, in which visitors to Kudus Menara mosque are given packets of rice and *kerbau* (water buffalo meat) distributed by the local community to those who visit the site. These local practices illustrate how architecture, culture and religion are intertwined to reflect a society that embraces diversity and coexistence.

## **5.2. The Exploration of *Sekaten* and *Grebeg Sura* Traditions to Vietnamese Students at USSH Hanoi**

In addition to examining the intricate designs and features of mosque architecture in Indonesia, students are actively engaged in vibrant local traditions, including the captivating celebrations of *Sekaten* and *Grebeg Sura*. The *Sekaten* tradition, deeply embedded in Javanese cultural practices, holds particular significance in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. This annual festivity honors the Prophet Muhammad's birth (SAW) and is characterised by various ceremonies, music, and community gatherings.

During *Sekaten*, blending Javanese cultural elements with Islamic values comes to life, resulting in a distinctive expression of

religious devotion and local heritage. This tradition exemplifies cultural acculturation, demonstrating a harmonious coexistence of various cultural and religious identities. Such a dynamic showcases the principles of religious moderation, particularly the willingness to embrace local customs and traditions. As students investigate the *Sekaten* tradition, they consider its historical significance and immerse themselves in the beauty of Indonesian culture, which artfully weaves spiritual beliefs and cultural practices together. This enriching exploration allows them to recognize how such traditions nurture a sense of community and shared values, celebrating the diverse richness of Indonesia's cultural and religious tapestry.



<Figure 1> USSH Hanoi Students Learn About *Sekaten* and *Grebeg Sura*

Like the *Sekaten* celebration, *Grebeg Sura* plays a significant role in the cultural studies program at USSH Hanoi. This vibrant traditional festival, organized by the Javanese community in Indonesia, celebrates the Islamic New Year, observed on 1 Muharram. *Grebeg Sura* marks the onset of the new year in the Islamic calendar and enriches our understanding of the intricate relationship between Javanese cultural traditions and Islamic customs.

During *Grebeg Sura*, the community participates in various ceremonial activities, including offerings, prayers, and processions. These rituals pay tribute to the Javanese people's spiritual beliefs

and agricultural heritage, reflecting their respect for nature and the significance of community cohesion. The celebration often includes traditional music, dance, and beautifully arranged food displays, symbolizing abundance and expressing gratitude for the blessings received in the past year.

It is essential to recognise that the date of 1 Muharram coincides with 1 Sura in the Javanese calendar, underscoring the interconnection of these two cultural systems. This blending of Islamic and Javanese traditions reflects the moderate and tolerant spirit of the Islamic community in Indonesia, particularly among the Javanese, who embrace local customs alongside their religious practices. Such cultural syncretism highlights the harmonious coexistence of diverse spiritual beliefs and local traditions, illustrating a broader theme of unity within Indonesia's multicultural society.

### **5.3. A Comprehensive Review of the Moderation Content about BIPA Graduate Competency Standards**

The Graduate Competency Standards outlined by the Ministry of Education and Culture include an essential standard for attitudes that underscores the importance of respect. These standards mandate that student "demonstrate respect for cultural diversity, differing viewpoints, beliefs, and religions while valuing the original ideas and contributions of others." This emphasis on respect highlights Indonesia's rich cultural tapestry and reinforces the vital values of religious moderation necessary in such a diverse nation.

Indonesia is a nation celebrated for its rich tapestry of cultures, traditions, and beliefs, highlighting students' need to develop an appreciation for this diversity. Honoring and respecting the wide range of cultural expressions, perspectives, and faiths is crucial for cultivating social harmony and understanding. Therefore, the principles of religious moderation must be thoughtfully integrated into the academic curriculum of the BIPA program, ensuring that students are well-equipped to engage respectfully and thoughtfully in Indonesia's multicultural environment.

## **VI. The Influence of Religious Moderation Diplomacy on BIPA Classes: Its Opportunities and Challenges**

The incorporation of values related to religious moderation in the BIPA class not only highlights Indonesian cultural identity but also elevates Indonesia's standing as a dignified nation on the global stage. This approach demonstrates that differences need not be barriers to unity; instead, the diversity inherent in Indonesia can promote harmony (Solahudin et al. 2023; Sujono et al. 2022). Religious moderation is a prime example of how Indonesia embraces and values differences. In a world marked by conflicts among tribes, religions, and races, Indonesia emerges as a compelling example of how peace can be achieved through diversity (Amirudin et al. 2022; Subchi et al. 2022; Syarif 2021; Weix 1998).

BIPA learners explore the significant values that emerge through the practice of religious diplomacy in their classroom settings. Many students become fascinated by the rich diversity of Indonesia's religious landscape. As their curiosity deepens, they look forward to visiting Indonesia, eager to witness firsthand the principles of religious moderation. For instance, several students are enthusiastic about travelling to Bali, a destination celebrated for its rich Hindu culture. They convey their intention to locate a mosque during their visit, curious about the presence of such places of worship within a predominantly Hindu region. This inquiry reflects a heightened awareness and critical thinking fostered through the religious diplomacy classes at BIPA, encouraging students to explore and engage with Indonesia's diverse tapestry of faiths.

### **6.1. Opportunities and Challenges of Integrating Religious Moderation into Indonesian Instruction**

Teaching BIPA through the framework of religious moderation presents both opportunities and challenges. One of the notable opportunities is Indonesia's extensive cultural and sociocultural-political diversity (Abdulkarim et al. 2020; Hartawan 2021). This diversity enhances Indonesia's positive reputation on the international stage, particularly within Southeast Asia. As a leader in promoting peace in the region, Indonesia also exemplifies a model for other nations

in effectively managing diversity within their borders (Acharya 2021; Arifinsyah et al., 2020; Grzywacz, 2020).

The challenge of promoting religious moderation in diverse educational environments is considerable for BIPA teachers who serve as diplomats in the classroom. These educators need a comprehensive understanding of religious moderation beyond merely grasping basic concepts. They must actively embody this understanding through their thoughts and actions. In other words, the principles of "moderation" discussed in class should also be reflected in their classroom management. Furthermore, BIPA learners often pose challenges by raising sensitive topics related to religion, such as the *hijab*, polygamy, religious discrimination, and the discourse surrounding LGBT rights. Therefore, it is essential to provide specialized training in religious moderation for BIPA teachers working abroad.

The values of religious moderation are encompassed within the BIPA Graduate Competency Standards (Permendikbud Number 27 of 2017). One essential competency standard emphasizes fostering mutual respect for cultural diversity, beliefs, and religions (Azizah et al. 2022; Nuryani et al. 2022). This principle can be effectively realized through cultural diplomacy and frameworks established by BIPA (Collins et al. 2020). The cultures explored in BIPA classes can delve into those that reflect local wisdom. There is a need for substantial development in highlighting traditions such as *Sekaten* and *Grebeg Sura* to promote religious moderation on a global scale (Fahmi et al. 2021).

## VII. Conclusion

The diplomatic process inherent in the BIPA program extends beyond serving as a mere educational resource; it is pivotal in showcasing and celebrating Indonesia's rich cultural diversity on a global stage. This diplomatic engagement illuminates the country's multifaceted identity while actively promoting values of harmony and coexistence among diverse communities. In a global context often marked by ethnic, religious, racial, and inter-group tensions,

Indonesia's principles of religious moderation can serve as a source of inspiration for other nations, particularly within the Southeast Asian region.

The introduction of religious moderation values through the instruction of the Indonesian language can be interpreted as a practical implementation of cultural diplomacy. This initiative employs various methodologies, including the careful selection of appropriate teaching materials. Generally, the instructional resources utilized are based on existing materials, notably the *Sahabatku* Indonesia series, published by the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, the available materials are further developed to meet specific needs, particularly by incorporating a hidden curriculum. Additionally, the manner in which religious moderation values are introduced is rendered more effective through the selection of engaging content—such as the architectural features of Indonesian mosques and the celebration of religious festivals—designed to minimize potential sensitivities among students enrolled at the USSH in Hanoi.

The positive outcomes of this pedagogical strategy are particularly apparent among BIPA participants at USSH in Hanoi, Vietnam. These students cultivate a deeper appreciation for Indonesia's historical and cultural narratives, while also gaining valuable insights into the importance of upholding and celebrating diversity. They are exposed to role models who exemplify effective strategies for promoting peace and unity amid differences—an essential competency in today's globalized environment. Consequently, the integration of religious moderation as a diplomatic facet within the BIPA curriculum is vital for fostering a mindset grounded in tolerance and understanding. While these benefits are significant, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of this research, given that it was conducted exclusively at USSH Hanoi. There exists a considerable opportunity to broaden the initiative of promoting religious moderation diplomacy through BIPA. This could be achieved by developing a more diverse array of program offerings across various educational institutions, thereby enhancing awareness and comprehension of these essential values among a wider audience.

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