

## Religious Moderation Education: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis on Identity Reconstruction in Polite Islamic Literacy Ambassadors

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – Literasi Islam Santun's or LISAN's program stress the necessity for religious moderation education around State Universities. Millennials are the main target of this program. It is clearly seen that intolerant values on social media considerably affect their personal and social identity so that it further requires an understanding of how to establish identity reconstruction in millennials who become the ambassadors of LISAN. The purpose of this research is to find out how self-and social identity reconstruction in students who become LISAN Ambassadors.

**Design/methods/approach** – The research is qualitative research with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. The data source of this study is millennials who participated in the ambassadors of LISAN. Data collection techniques were conducted through interviews and collection of essay writings by research subjects.

**Findings** – The results of this study showed that according to the analysis of two main superordinates and the five subordinate themes presented by seven informants, it can be concluded that the reconstruction of the informants' identity as the ambassador of LISAN involves important aspects in the process of individual development, namely cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Thus, this gives rise to a new identity that makes them become individuals as the LISAN's ambassadors who have new behaviors that are more moderate and tolerant.

**Research limitation** – The study has limitations as it covers only a small number of respondents in one locus. Future research is suggested to investigate a wide range of respondents.

**Originality/value** – The research contributes to motivating academics for promoting moderation in practicing faith and religion in the milieu of State University.

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## Introduction

One of the programs emphasizing for religious moderation in Surakarta is the program of Polite Islamic Literacy or Literasi Islam Santun (LISAN) which is a collaboration program between the Center for Community Studies and Education of the Islam Archipelago (PPM-PIN) and the Wahid Foundation under the Innovation Challenge Fund for Rejecting Hate Speech (ICF Tolerant) program. The program is designed for young Muslims who study at Madrasah Aliyah (MA) or university level (Kurniawati and Maemonah, 2021). They were selected as the target of the program because they are representations of the younger generation who are more comfortable interacting with technology and media.

The development of the Polite Islamic Literacy (LISAN) program under the auspices of PPM-PIN takes place to meet the needs of emphasizing religious moderation education at the State Islamic Religious Higher Education (PTKIN) due to the views of the current younger generation of Muslims, especially in the Solo region, towards inter-religious harmony which still need special attention. This condition is also in line with the socio-religious and cultural historical records regarding the Soloraya region, which recount many events that often appall the print and online media.

The phenomenon of conflict emerges particularly with nuances of violence, ranging from conflicts between Muslims to non-Muslims, and among ethnicities that have occurred in the Soloraya region (Baidhawiy, 2021). The conflict involves actions such as terror bombings in the church, suicide bombings, conflicts between ethnic Javanese and Chinese, Islamic and Christian conflicts due to film screenings with Hollywood actors who are considered Christianization, the Habib's family dissolution on midodareni event by warrior (lascar or militiaman) groups to the conflict in the corridor of Jalan Jendral Sudirman in the Surakarta City Hall area which is considered a crusader. Such a phenomenon, then, seems to legitimize the results of mapping the conditions of the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) that the "Soloraya" is one of the areas where radical-extreme group movements develop in Indonesia (Wildan, 2013).

Interestingly, the younger generation is one of the social classes that are massively involved in movements that lead to violence. To date a few studies on the phenomenon of violent conflict have shown that the younger generation are very vulnerable to become a target and the main culprit. A variety of research findings on the perspective of the younger generation in Soloraya also show that this generation is often associated with the development of radical youth movements (Wildan, 2013).

A research by Kafid gave a clear picture that Solo is a city with high fragmentation and the emergence of the Surakarta Islamic Youth Front (FPIS) group often causes conflicts among civil societies since its establishment (Kafid, 2016). Another picture of the conflict tendency of Soloraya's young generation is also shown from the results of research on the perspective and attitude of young Muslims in Solo which are heavily influenced by their involvement in the organizations (Anwar et al., 2021). Therefore, in

order to counter these major issues, the narration of emphasizing religious moderation cannot be completed in the personal perspective but through institutions to help reconstruct the self-identity and social identity of individuals based on Islamic values and norms that are far from radicalism and extremities.

The previous research related to the formation of self-identity and social identity demonstrated that the identity of the younger generation can be influenced by the internalization of religious values according to the activities and organizations they participate in (Afriantoni et al., 2020). A newer research focusing on the attitude of millennial youths of their perception towards radicalism is conducted by Lessy and Rohman (2022). Through this study, it is of significant for the authors to know how the identity on the LISAN ambassadors is reconstructed with religious moderation education provided out by PPM-PIN Surakarta.

The findings of these previous studies further strengthen the understanding of the theory of identity formation, either personally and socially. Identity can be defined as self-image, self-concept and or the individual's belief about himself. In relation to self-identity, Vaughan and Hoog also suggested that a person will tend to define himself based on attributes that distinguish himself from others (Turner et al., 1987). This is in line with the definition pointed out by Waterman that self-identity is understood as an attempt to clearly portray an individual's self, in which, individual discovers a number of goals, values, and beliefs which are based on the target to achieve goals, values and beliefs and considered important to give direction, purpose and meaning to life (Waterman, 1984). This also supports the notion of self-identity, according to Yusuf, who pointed out that self-identity consists of physical aspects, intellectual abilities, emotions, attitudes and values and beliefs that individuals believe in living their lives (Yusuf, 2004).

Meanwhile, the social identity attached to the individual according to Turner et al. (cited also in Aryanto, 2018) is defined based on the membership and participation of the individual in a social group (Aryanto, 2018). This is in line with the concept that in addition to the cultural background that influence on the individual identification, how the individual defines his social identity will also depend on the situation and social context (Bryrne & Branscombe, 2006). That means that identity is part of the reflection of the family environment, culture and process of socialization of the individual in lives and the relationship of the individual with his social group will have an effect on how the individual will treat others.

Based on the aforementioned theory, this study aims to find out the picture of self-identity reconstruction in the ambassadors of Polite Islamic Literacy (LISAN) after getting education on emphasizing for religious moderation in the context of morals (ethics) which contains three basic principles of moderation, namely moderation of movements, thoughts, and actions.

## Methods

This study tries to understand in-depth how the process of reconstruction of self-identity and social identity on Ambassadors of Polite Islamic Literacy (LISAN). The researchers look at those identities through discovering information about the context of his life. This can be analyzed through particular self-definition based on the principle of moderation of movements, thoughts, and deeds manifested in the attitudes and values and beliefs that the individual believes in living his or her life (Glesne, 2006).

This study employs a qualitative approach using phenomenological methods. This study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) data analysis techniques. This data analysis technique is considered appropriate by researchers because this seeks to examine how an individual interprets important experiences that occur in his life (Smith et al., 2009).

The selection of subjects in this study was based on purposive sampling techniques. The subjects were selected after the researchers conduct a preliminary survey or interview in the field to ensure that the subjects selected in the study display the appropriate criteria in the study (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Participants in this study were seven people who had participated in the LISAN program. The data in this study was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, in which, the researcher first makes a framework regarding the subject matter that will be asked to the participants in the form of interview questions. Interview questions addressed to participants do not lead directly to the research questions that the researchers conducted and the questions are open-ended. The process of collecting data through interviews was carried out with a voice recording device with the consent of the participants, and the recording results were then changed in the form of transcripts (Grbich, 2013; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). In addition, data is also taken from participants' essays when participating in the ambassadors of LISAN.

As for data analysis, the authors carried out several stages including the stage of memorizing transcripts and initial recording of interviews with research subjects, the ambassadors of LISAN. Then the next stage was formulating the superordinate theme and the subordinate theme which is adjusted to the results of the interview transcript. Then the authors identified the patterns of cases or experiences among participants (Leedy et al., 2019).

In this study, the analysis of data sources is illustrated in the following indicators shown in Tabel 1.

**Tabel 1. Research Analysis Unit**

Sub-Analysis Unit	Aspect	Indicator
Self-Identity	Physical	Illustration on how to dress appropriately before and after becoming an ambassador of LISAN
	Intellectual Ability	Religious knowledge before and after becoming the ambassador of LISAN
	Emotion	1. Feeling towards various religious groups before and after becoming the ambassador of LISAN 2. Feeling towards various religious orientations before and after becoming the ambassador of LISAN
	Family Influence Attitude	Family's viewpoints on religion  1. Subject's perspective to handle difference of opinions before and after becoming the ambassador of LISAN. 2. Subject's perspective to interact with various religious groups before and after becoming the ambassador of LISAN
Social Identity	Family Influence and Others	1. The most influential persons in lives 2. Family's response before and after becoming an ambassador of LISAN
	Self	1. Subject's view on what makes people so different from those who have various religious orientations. 2. Commitment and participation on religious organisation

Researchers highlight the following limitations of this study: 1) the difficulty with time that owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers have limited access in terms of time and space when communicating with the subjects; 2) unstable network connection due to the interview process must be done via telephone; 3) experiencing difficulties during interviews with an informant who had limited time after executing the manual labor. Researchers, therefore, suggest that these are of important to note and future research certainly can be done to reach maximum results.

## Result and Discussion

Researchers have conducted interviews with seven participants who have met the characteristics in the study. From the interview transcript data, researchers found two main themes with five superordinate themes during the interview with them which can be seen in Table 2.

**Tabel 2. Superordinate Theme and Subordinate Theme**

Subordinate Theme	Superordinat Theme
1. Self-Identity	1. Religious orientation and meaning in the self-image of individuals 2. Experience of Religious dynamics
2. Social Identity	Attitudes and interactions of individuals towards different groups of thought orientations in religion.

The results of the interviews of the seven participants have been analysed by researchers and indicated that students who took part in the Religious Moderation Education program organized by PPM-PIN basically consisted of several family backgrounds, namely pesantren and abangan families. There were 2 participants from the Pesantren family and those who come from the abangan family included 5 people. Meanwhile, in terms of the educational background before participating in the Ambassador of LISAN, there were 3 people who came from madrasah Aliyah and actively participated in religious organizations. 2 people studied at Madrasah Aliyah but did not actively participate in religious organizations and also 2 people studied at state school and actively participated in religious organizations. We noticed that these different backgrounds of family, schools and the activeness of organizations have a huge influence in the process of forming the identity of participants before and after becoming the Ambassador of LISAN.

## 1. Self-Identity Resonstruction in Ambassadors of LISAN

### 1.1 Orientation of Religious Attitudes and Meanings in the Self-Image of individuals

From the results of interviews that have been conducted by researchers to participants who come from pesantren families, it is very apparent that family self-image greatly influences the mindset, attitudes and meaning of religion in the process of forming an individual's self-image. This means that the family environment will play an important role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of individuals in the process of life. Before participating in the Ambassador of LISAN, participants who came from pesantren families said that their religious concepts and methods were very clear and regulated by referring to the Qur'an and hadith.

Individuals who come from pesantren families has culturally shown the perspective of religious orientation through attitudes and self-image and also revealed similarities with the parenting patterns used by parents, which are more idealistic and fundamental. Although these do not lead to extreme values, participants who come from pesantren families receive religious values holistically and pose religion a practical guide in life.

Meanwhile, the role of the family in shaping self-image was not so obvious in the attitude and orientation of religious meanings in participants who came from abangan families. In this point, the participants who came from abangan families asserted that their attitudes and self-image were more universal in nature and they basically returned everything to each individual. It seems that the perspective of the attributes of individual self-identity is more flexible and able to adapt to the surrounding cultural environment. Nevertheless, participants who come from abangan families remained firmly adhered to religious teachings according to their understanding and the majority of them come from villages and community which lack of religious knowledge. Therefore, the religious attitudes and orientations that arise are more blended with the culture that exists in the community around them.



Although there was no significant difference in the orientation of religious attitudes and meanings, researchers found that 2 participants who came from abangan families before participating in the ambassador of LISAN, in fact, had a fairly extreme orientation of religious meaning and also affected on their attribute identity as individuals such as dressing more introverted and religious. After participating in the Ambassador of LISAN program, they drastically changed their dress style to be more flexible and universal.

In regard with the orientation of religious attitudes and meanings for the Ambassadors of LISAN who come from pesantren and abangan families, they basically interpret religion in the same way, whereby religion can be viewed as a fundamental value in living life. This is in line with Raymond F. Paloutzian's thinking stating that the meaning of religion can be interpreted as an orientation that is intrinsic in nature (living based on religious values) or extrinsic (living by utilizing religion) (Aryani, 2016).

In terms of the religious attitudes and orientations, participants in this study can give birth to moral attitudes that are relevant to their respective religious orientations as individuals. The ambassadors of LISAN showed a difference in the attributes of self-identity where they are basically from pesantren families and tend to represent their religious image with clothes that are religious in nature but still perpetuate the local culture. Whereas the ambassadors of LISAN who come from abangan families, they are more flexible on the identity of religious attributes as their self-image

## 1.2 Individuals' Religious Dynamics

The journey in dynamics of religious development concepts experienced by each individual participant is so different. A participant with a background family of pesantren, P1 said that the parenting style of the family and the limited scope of learning makes him become a more arrogant person and often forces his own will even though he comes from a religious family and P1's participation in religious organizations when studying at state school. However, it turns out that his activeness influences the way of looking at the process of the journey of making religious meaning according to the version of the organization that he follows and makes him a person who interprets the piety with the philosophical version of a conservative religious organization. Meanwhile, the second participant (P2) experienced the religious dynamics which was inversely proportional to the first participant. This means that P2 in the religious dynamics environmentally experienced in the home environment which is more moderate and able to minimise conflict.

Then, participants who came from "abangan" families had similar problems in the process of religious dynamics they went through. Although, in fact, the majority of them come from Madrasah Aliyah (MA), they find almost the same problems in the

process of the religious dynamics. The third participant (P3) said that the initial interest in religious issues began with the problem of religious issues discussed by his peers such as hijab models to teenagers who actively devote themselves to religious studies that lead to extremist and fundamentalist studies.

Similarly, the fourth participant (P4) who also came from an “abangan” family and, basically, he was studying at the State High School, asserted that in her religious dynamics, P4 experienced a phase where she had participated in religious organizations at his school and caused conflicts at the family level due to the factor of minimal religious knowledge. P4 had an interesting story when she started using the veil in high school and participated in one of the religious extracurricular organizations, namely ROHIS and often received hard value of teachings.

Meanwhile, the fifth participant (P5) with a background of abangan family living in the village, had a different story. P5 lives in the village area with very few people who understand religion in depth and only prioritize religion practically (worship). In other word, his dynamics of religious development were influenced by many of his peers. In a few cases, religious practices are relatively rare to perform. In line with this, the sixth partisan (P6), which his essay was popular with title “Momentum of Repentance” in the book entitled “Leaving a Knowledge in Laundry Basket” (2018), stated that P6's family home is indeed close to Musala and most husbands from families in the surrounding environment do not carry out prayers. Even though P5 and P6 come from an environment with minimal religious knowledge, they do not affect their way of thinking about religion. Then, they started to experience their process of religious understanding by the time they entered college. Meanwhile, the seventh participant (P7) revealed that the dynamic process of religious development began when family directed their children to an Islamic-based school. Although he did not come from a family of santri but in the process of internalizing religion his parents preferred to entrust it to educational institutions.

In this point, generally the process of developing religious dynamics experienced by each participant improved with age and activity in following the organization. In a behavioristic approach, the process of social learning essentially takes place through a process of modelling (Bandura, 1986). Thus, if this is linked to the results of this study, the role of people closest to individuals will greatly affect the development of their religious orientation. The role of those closest to them as significant the others in the process of finding religious identity is also very influential on the religious thoughts, attitudes and behaviors that they will exhibit.

The Ambassador of LISAN program has also made a significant contribution in the process of meaning religious means in the participating student's live. In the process of forming thoughts and attitudes experienced by participants, they compared with the thoughts, attitudes and behaviors of others to check whether the individual's views are correct or not. This is in line with Festinger who describes that social



influence is very influential in the process of self-evaluation as an individual (Festinger, 1954). In this point, the individual can find an objective reality in the process of determining his or her identity. Either those coming from the background of pesantren and abangan families, the majority of participants said that before becoming the ambassadors of LISAN, they had previously exclusive attitudes and thoughts. However, when they became part of the Ambassadors of LISAN and participated in religious moderation education programs, they responded that this program made them understand more about religion and the importance of tolerance. Also, they were more selective in looking at the different understandings of Islam so that the different perspective had to be based on prevailing values and norms.

After becoming the ambassadors of LISAN, they tend to be more moderate and their emotions and religious attitudes also indirectly experienced a better development. This is a result of the model of internalization of religious moderation education provided by PPM-PIN which provides a stimulus to the emotions and religious attitudes of the Ambassadors of LISAN and makes intellectual progress. Hence, those individuals are able to evaluate themselves and have a new understanding about ways of being religious in life. This is essentially one of the indicators of the maturity of religious attitude of the Ambassadors of LISAN.

## 2. Social Identity Reconstruction in Ambassadors of LISAN

One of the formations of social identity as an ambassador of LISAN can be seen from the patterns of interaction, attitudes and behaviors that individuals raise towards other groups or individuals which is one of the indicators of religious attitudes. P1 and P2, individuals coming from families with pesantren background, have almost the same belief that there are basically no crucial problems regarding religious perspectives due to the fact that they come from a pesantren family, in which, they have been taught self-concept and how to interact with the surrounding community in a more tolerant manner. P1 reveals that as he matures and ages, his religious insights increase after meeting with more plural society. P2 also said that it is almost the same because it comes from a pesantren family and a compound family and community environment makes the process of interaction in the community relatively minimal conflict. P1 reveals that the more mature and older people get, their religious insights increase after living with plural societies. P2 also said similarly where basically they comes from a family with the background of pesantren and plural families and societies which is deemed to be able to minimise the chance of conflict within the process of interaction in the community. In social life, P1 is more mature in making decisions that differences in religious understanding must still be based on each religious teaching. This was clearly seen when P1 asserted that if there are neighbors who are non-muslims participating in religious events, muslims inevitably have to accept even though P1 personally expressed a little objection. On

the contrary, P2 also said that there needs openness to build friendship with people of different faith such as sharing food and activities together in the village without questioning their religions. This is because P2 defines religion as a guideline for polite behavior and religious diversity would not be a problem in society as long as we can respect each other. Meanwhile, in terms of attitudes and behaviors in society, participants coming from the *abangan* category, were initially more dominant in the exclusive direction owing to the lack of knowledge and influence of the environment in which they were located.

In the process of interaction with the community, P3 initially said that he was self-limiting and reluctant to gather with them. This includes people who get dressed do not conform to his style of dress. Similarly, P4 tends to disagree with other's perspectives and do not receive people's input. Besides, because of his commitment to the organization during school, P4 was once forbidden to unfollow the religious traditions in his home. Meanwhile, P5 and P7 have an moderate view and they argued that the differences in religious understanding was not a problem in their surroundings because P5 and P7 lived in an almost majority of non-muslim environment. Unlike the previous participants, although P6 lived in a Muslim-majority society, conflicts arose in the surrounding communities, in which, they are unwilling to perform a worship to the mosque because of differences in understanding so that P6's parents should be a role model and gave an exemplary to the family and community by actively interacting and inviting them to enliven the mosque. This illustration can be analyzed that the majority of participants tend to have an exclusive attitude towards differences in either the different *mahzab* or faith.

The research findings, in the perspective of social identity formation theory, indicated that this is in line with Turner's thinking which explains that the process of forming social identity has two important processes, namely cognitive and motivational processes (Turner et al., 1987). In the cognitive realm of the new identity, the individual as an Ambassador of LISAN is the result of the design of a program that produces a new identity that is far different from the previous identity, in which, the process of forming social identity as the Ambassadors of LISAN can not be separated from how they perceive others as ingroups or outgroups in the groups they meet. This can be clearly seen through the point of view of the three subjects regarding what makes the subject feel different from people of different orientations of thought in religion and what makes them feel the same in the process of self-identification in the group. Participants as part of the Ambassador of LISAN, accordingly, were formed to become more tolerant individuals and better understanding that the expression of faith between one person and another is different so that there is a respect for others and begins to get rid of excessive judgments and thoughts.

Looking at details, the cognitive process in the formation of the social identity of the participants as the Ambassador of LISAN indicates that there is a motivational

role of an individual in showing behaviors that are appropriate to his group to obtain self-esteem and a positive social identity (Islam, 2014). Hence, individuals have a commitment to promote polite and tolerant behavior as a spirit of providing religious moderation education as well as willing to take a social role according to their wishes in living life and have a commitment to their organization to spread a friendly and tolerant Islam.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the two superordinate themes and three subordinate themes presented by the three informants, it can be concluded that their identity reconstruction as the ambassadors of LISAN involves important aspects in the individual development, namely cognitive, emotional and behavioral process. Therefore, although they come from a family that is considered mature and mature in religious attitudes, it does not guarantee that the orientation of religious attitudes is inclusive. On the other hand, the cognitive aspect is the experience of the informants who takes a central position in the change of moderation movement and thought as the ambassador of LISAN. In this point, this program plays a significant role to create a new identity as individuals who have a new behavior which is more moderate and tolerant.

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