

CHAPTER 13: ENHANCING EFL LEARNING IN INDONESIAN PESANTREN THROUGH ISLAMIC-BASED MATERIALS AND VALUES

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A. Introduction

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, there has been a growing attention for more culturally and spiritually contextualized pedagogical approaches, especially within the Islamic educational context, such as *pesantren* in Indonesia. In this sense, *pesantren* underscores not only intellectual growth but also moral and spiritual development. Conventional EFL materials, however, are often developed within globalized educational contexts, which may not fully align with students' lived experiences and religious values in *pesantren* (Umar, 2022). As a result, students may find it difficult to connect to the learning content, significantly influencing their motivation and engagement. Recent studies demonstrated that the integration of Islamic-based materials, such as Qur'anic verses, prophetic traditions (*hadith*), and moral stories and

values, can offer a meaningful way to foster both language proficiency and religious character development (Alfian et al., 2021; Sholeh et al., 2022; Wahyuningsih & Munawaroh, 2023; Widhi et al., 2023). In addition, Vygotsky's, (1978) sociocultural theory strengthens this approach, asserting that meaningful learning happens most effectively when it is in line with students' cultural and social contexts.

The integration of Islamic-based content into EFL teaching is also echoed with the global academic discourse on the Islamization of knowledge, which suggests the integration of Islamic worldview and epistemology into all disciplines, including English language education (Bukhori Muslim et al., 2024). Within this framework, EFL teaching in *pesantren* is not merely a linguistic process but a transformative activity that fosters religious identity and moral development among students (Rohman et al., 2023; Rohmana, 2020). Furthermore, empirical studies reveal that there are positive outcomes regarding students' motivation, identity construction, and deeper engagement with English language learning when Islamic values are incorporated into teaching instruction (Qoyyimah et al., 2023; Rohman et al., 2023). However, empirical research on the practice and outcomes of Islamic-based EFL materials remains limited, particularly in the *pesantren* contexts (Hasbi et al., 2025). Thus, this chapter explores how the incorporation of Islamic values into EFL learning can serve as a culturally relevant pedagogical strategy that not only enhances linguistic

development but also fosters students' spiritual and moral development within the unique educational environment of Indonesian *pesantren*.

B. Teaching Material Development

This section explores the urgency of incorporating Islamic-based materials and values into EFL learning to create contextually relevant and meaningful learning experiences for students in Indonesian *pesantren* through several stages elaborated below.

Conducting Needs Analysis in the Pesantren Context

The initial activity in the process of developing Islamic-based English teaching materials includes undertaking a comprehensive needs analysis, which functions as a primary process to ensure that the materials are tailored to the students' linguistic, cultural, and religious contexts (Lisan, 2018). In the *pesantren* environment, where students are generally acknowledged with religious literacy, especially in Arabic and Islamic studies, but often have limited proficiency and exposure to English, it is pivotal to identify specific learning needs and goals. This process covers various data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, to ensure language proficiency levels of students, learning styles, and their motivations in learning English. For example, understanding students' goals, such as interpreting English khutbahs, engaging with Islamic texts in English, or participating in global Muslim

discourse, enables material designers to tailor instructional content to relevant and purposeful learning outcomes. This is strengthened by Widhi et al. (2023) that designing Islamic task-based speaking English materials can enhance students' English learning and creativity for students in Islamic schools. These insights guided the development of thematic units centred on moral narratives, biographies of prominent Islamic figures, and discussions on ethical issues.

Selecting Islamic Themes and Language Skills

Following needs analysis, the development of instructional materials should strategically integrate Islamic themes with tailored to English language skills, thereby enhancing a comprehensive learning experience that balances linguistic development with moral development. Islamic values such as honesty (*sidq*), patience (*sabr*), and justice (*'adl*) providing rich thematic frameworks around which reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities can be integrated. Each thematic unit centers on a specific value and is designed to engage students in meaningful English tasks that not only foster communicative competence but also enhance critical thinking and ethical reflection. For instance, a unit emphasizing on "honesty" might incorporate a reading text exploring the story of Prophet Yusuf, emphasizing narrative structures and past tense verb forms to support grammatical development. Moreover, students could participate in role-playing activities creating scenarios necessitating a meaningful

interaction, followed by reflective writing assignments where they articulate their personal experiences related to honesty. This is confirmed by the previous study highlighting that Islamic values can be effectively integrated into EFL instruction through verbal reinforcement, materials, teaching methods, teacher behaviour, assignments, and across lesson planning, classroom activities, and assessment (Sholeh et al., 2022; Wahyuningsih & Munawaroh, 2023).

Developing Contextualized Materials and Tasks

The contextualization of ELT materials covers adapting content from Islamic texts, historical contexts, and biographical stories to adjust students' English language proficiency while maintaining religiosity and cultural authenticity (Minto, 2024). In this sense, materials can be simplified or scaffolded to ensure accessibility, drawing from primary Islamic sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and biographies of Islamic scholars or historical figures. Each lesson can be developed in accordance with communicative and task-based language learning principles, building interaction and meaningful engagement with language. For instance, a thematic unit on "Patience in Adversity" could incorporate a reading text recounting the story of Prophet Ayyub (Job), paired with vocabulary-building exercises and a grammar acquisition on the present perfect tense to convey ongoing states or experiences. Further, a group discussion could then describe the implementation of patience, bridging the historical narrative with students'

lived experiences. In fostering writing skills, writing tasks could cover composing reflective essays or responding to moral dilemmas, which helps students implement Islamic ethical concepts while practicing English writing. This pedagogical practice underscores that language learning occurs within authentic, meaningful contexts (Henry et al., 2018; Mestari & Malabar, 2016; Sofiana et al., 2019).

Utilizing Multimedia and Digital Resources of ELT in Islamic Settings

Incorporating multimedia and digital resources into Islamic-based ELT promotes dynamic and interactive engagement to foster English language learning, making the content more engaging and accessible while bridging traditional and modern educational paradigms (Kalyani, 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2020). The use of digital materials such as *nasheed* (Islamic devotional songs), English-language sermons (*khutbahs*), Islamic-themed videos, and podcasts can familiarise students with authentic spoken language, diverse accents, and global Muslim discourse. These resources enrich listening and speaking practice by providing varied and culturally relevant input (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020; Wahyuningsih & Maisyanah, 2021). For instance, a topic can cover listening to an English khutbah on gratitude, followed by vocabulary exercises, comprehension enhancement, and summary writing to reinforce language skills and enhance comprehension of the theme. Additionally, a YouTube video on Islamic etiquette

could be used to facilitate students in creating dialogues modelling proper behaviour, thus fostering both linguistic and social skills. This practice emphasises that digital tools are instrumental in bridging the gap between conventional *pesantren* learning and contemporary language acquisition demands, promoting learner autonomy and expanding access to diverse linguistic resources (Madkur et al., 2021; Mahsusi et al., 2024).

Providing Scaffolding and Language Support

Considering the different proficiency levels among students in *pesantren*, scaffolding is a critical instructional way that promotes comprehension and English language production. In this matter, materials need to be incorporated with supportive aspects such as glossaries, bilingual word banks, and model texts to assist students in navigating unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical structures (Stewart, 2013). These scaffolds enable students to focus on meaning-making and communicative enhancement rather than becoming hindered by linguistic complexity (Huang & Hung, 2013; Proske et al., 2012; Rad & Mirzaei, 2024). For example, in a writing activity centered on the character of Prophet Muhammad, students may be provided with sentence frames such as “The Prophet always showed ____” or “He was known for his ____ and ____.” Such engagement can enhance students’ confidence and scaffolding them from guided practice to autonomous practice.

Integrating Islamic Values through Pedagogical Practice

The integration of Islamic values and material development extends beyond content to cover teaching methodologies and classroom practices. In this context, teachers act as role models who exemplify *adab* (Islamic manners), punctuality, and respectful communication, thereby embodying the values embedded in the curriculum (Earle & Bianchi, 2022). Moreover, classroom management practices need to be designed to create an environment conducive to ethical development and mutual respect (Salehi & Salehi, 2012). In addition, teachers need to have reflective activities that help students connect language learning with personal and spiritual development. For example, a lesson focused on the value of helping others might end with a supportive prompt such as, “What did I learn today about kindness? How can I apply today’s vocabulary in my daily life?” Such reflective exercises not only reinforce linguistic gains but also promote the internalization of Islamic ethics, enabling students to express their moral understanding through language.

Providing Assessment and Feedback with Moral Dimensions

Assessment practices in Islamic-based ELT need to evaluate both language competence and ethical comprehension, reflecting the *pesantren*’s holistic educational background. In this sense, assessment tools, such as rubrics, can be developed to measure grammatical

accuracy, vocabulary use, coherence, and communicative effectiveness, alongside the depth of moral insight demonstrated in students' activities (Hamp-Lyons & Jin, 2022; Hasbi, 2025; Sofiana et al., 2019). For instance, a writing task may require students to compose a letter advising a friend on navigating anger in accordance with Islamic principles. Additionally, assessment criteria could cover not only the correct use of modal verbs and organizational coherence but also the thoughtful integration of values such as *sabr* (patience) and *rahmah* (compassion). Finally, the provision of feedback should be formative and multidimensional in which teachers and peers can provide comments that emphasize both linguistic proficiency and ethical reasoning. This dual-focus feedback reinforces the development of language skills while fostering students to develop their moral awareness.

Empowering Teacher Collaboration and Capacity Building

The successful enhancement of Islamic-based ELT is closely related to the collaboration between English language teachers and Islamic studies teachers. Joint curriculum development can foster Islamic knowledge accuracy, and pedagogical coherence, ensuring that language instruction remains faithful to Islamic principles while effectively promoting English proficiency. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives such as professional development workshops on Islamic-based material design empower

teachers to innovate and adapt teaching resources creatively. Qoyyimah et al. (2020) asserted that the critical need is to equip Islamic-based teachers with competencies that integrate language pedagogy and religious identity, thereby enhancing instructional quality and teacher confidence. Thus, sustained collaboration and knowledge sharing within the *pesantren* community contribute to the creation of a sustainable and contextually relevant ELT framework that meets both educational and spiritual development.

C. Further Discussion

The integration of Islamic-based materials and values into English language teaching within Indonesian *pesantren* offers notable potentials that echo with the cultural and religious context of the students. This approach promotes students' engagement by placing language learning within familiar spiritual and moral frameworks, thereby fostering not only linguistic competence but also character development. The culturally responsive nature of such materials facilitates meaningful learning experiences that resonate with students' identities, which can increase motivation and retention (Hasbi, 2025). Additionally, the use of multimedia and digital resources fosters students' exposure to authentic language use in Islamic discourse globally, building communicative competence in various contexts.

However, some challenges emerge in achieving an optimal balance between language complexity and religious content. For example, materials that are too simplistic may fail to foster critical language skills, while overly complex texts risk alienating students with limited English proficiency. Moreover, the effectiveness of this integrative approach may be constrained by the limited pedagogical training available to teachers in *pesantren*, who may struggle to develop and implement materials that authentically merge linguistic and religious objectives. To enhance Islamic-based ELT materials, this chapter recommends professional development for teachers, collaboration between English and Islamic teachers, ongoing needs analysis, and integration of technology. These efforts aim to establish a sustainable, contextually relevant teaching model that supports students' academic and ethical growth.

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