

Integrating Islamic Values into EFL Instruction: A Thematic Framework for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Athaya Dwi Insyra¹, Amanda Azzahra², Esliana³, Fathir Nur Rahman⁴, Kalayo Hasibuan^{5*}
English Education Department, UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

*Correspondence Email : khalayohasibuan@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of Islamic values into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, particularly in Muslim-majority educational contexts. As language and culture are closely interconnected, EFL instruction that neglects learners' cultural and religious backgrounds may result in reduced engagement, moral conflict, and ineffective learning outcomes. Many widely used EFL materials are developed in Western contexts and often contain content that contradicts Islamic norms, such as references to alcohol, dating, or gambling. This creates a need for culturally responsive teaching practices that respect Islamic teachings while maintaining language learning objectives. Using a qualitative approach, this study involved structured group discussions with five undergraduate EFL students and a comprehensive literature review of academic sources and Islamic texts. Thematic analysis revealed three key areas central to effective Islamic-based EFL instruction: cultural awareness, material appropriateness, and ethical communication. Cultural awareness helps teachers foster inclusive environments and build stronger relationships with students. Culturally appropriate materials ensure learners can engage with content without compromising their values. Meanwhile, Islamic communication principles emphasize respectful and purposeful language use, aligning with Qur'anic and prophetic teachings. The findings suggest that integrating Islamic perspectives into EFL education not only supports language acquisition but also promotes students' moral and spiritual development. This study contributes to the discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy by emphasizing the need to localize curriculum content and train educators in culturally and religiously aligned instructional strategies. As global interest in culturally sensitive education grows, this research underscores the importance of aligning language teaching with learners' cultural and ethical frameworks to ensure holistic educational success.

INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is closely connected to culture because language learning involves not only linguistic competence but also cultural understanding. In many Muslim-majority educational contexts, however, EFL materials are commonly adapted from Western

sources that may contain values and social practices inconsistent with Islamic teachings. Topics such as dating, alcohol consumption, and gambling may create moral discomfort and reduce students' engagement in the learning process (Kramersch, 1993; Rahman, 2019).

In Islamic educational environments, students' cultural and religious identities strongly influence their attitudes, communication styles, and classroom participation (Chotimah et al., 2025). Therefore, EFL instruction should consider Islamic cultural values to create a more inclusive and meaningful learning environment. Teachers who ignore learners' cultural backgrounds may unintentionally create barriers to effective language acquisition and classroom engagement (Ali, 2020; Hassan & Karim, 2018).

The use of culturally inappropriate teaching materials remains a major challenge in EFL classrooms within Muslim-majority contexts. Many textbooks and learning resources reflect secular Western perspectives that may conflict with Islamic norms and values. As a result, educators are encouraged to adapt or develop teaching materials that are culturally relevant and ethically appropriate for Muslim learners (Permana & Rohmah, 2024). In addition, Islamic teachings emphasize ethical and respectful communication. The Qur'an and Hadith encourage Muslims to speak honestly, politely, and wisely in social interactions. Therefore, EFL teaching in Islamic contexts should not only focus on grammar and vocabulary mastery but also promote communication practices aligned with Islamic moral values (Al-Sayyed, 2018; Yusuf & Ahmed, 2021).

This article aims to examine how Islamic perspectives can be integrated into EFL teaching through three main dimensions: cultural awareness, the selection of culturally appropriate teaching materials, and the promotion of Islamic communication values. By incorporating these elements, EFL instruction can support both students' language development and their moral and cultural identity. The study contributes to the discussion of culturally responsive pedagogy in language education, particularly within Islamic educational contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative thematic analysis design to explore the integration of Islamic values into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction as a framework for culturally responsive pedagogy in Muslim-majority educational contexts (Byrne, 2022). The study focused on how Islamic perspectives can support culturally responsive EFL teaching practices through cultural awareness, material appropriateness, and ethical communication.

The participants were five undergraduate students from the Department of English Education at the Islamic State University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. The students were not researchers in this study; rather, they served as participants whose experiences, opinions, and reflections regarding Islamic values in EFL instruction were documented and analyzed. The researchers facilitated the data collection and interpretation process.

Purposive sampling was used because the participants had direct experience as Muslim learners in EFL classrooms and were considered capable of providing relevant insights into culturally responsive pedagogy within Islamic educational settings (Creswell & cresswell, 2021; Sika & Sugiarto, 2025).

Instruments

This study used two instruments: a group discussion guide and a literature review sheet. Open-ended questions about incorporating Islamic beliefs into EFL instruction were included in the group discussion guide. Students evaluating English education at UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau utilized it in a peer debate. The literature review sheet was used to organize and analyze findings from 20 academic sources and selected Islamic texts related to culturally responsive pedagogy and Islamic-based EFL instruction. The inclusion criteria for academic sources included: (1) peer-reviewed

journal articles and scholarly books, (2) studies discussing EFL teaching, Islamic education, cultural awareness, or culturally responsive pedagogy, and (3) publications written in English between 2000 and 2024. Sources unrelated to EFL education or Islamic educational contexts were excluded.

The Islamic texts included selected verses from the Qur'an and Hadith emphasizing ethical communication, honesty, politeness, respect, and moral conduct. The texts were coded based on thematic relevance to Islamic communication values and culturally responsive language teaching. Interpretations prioritizing educational ethics and interpersonal interaction were emphasized during analysis.

The group discussion guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the integration of Islamic values into EFL instruction. The questions included:

1. "What specific content in EFL textbooks makes you feel uncomfortable as a Muslim learner?"
2. "How should English teachers adapt learning materials to reflect Islamic values?"
3. "What kinds of classroom communication reflect Islamic ethics?"
4. "How does culturally responsive teaching influence your motivation in learning English?"

The discussions allowed participants to express their perspectives regarding Islamic cultural integration in EFL learning environments. All discussions were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

Data analysis procedures

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by repeatedly reading the discussion transcripts and literature review notes. Second, initial codes were generated to identify important ideas related to Islamic values and culturally responsive EFL pedagogy. Third, the researchers searched for broader themes by grouping similar codes together. Fourth, the themes were reviewed to ensure consistency and relevance across the dataset. Fifth, the themes were clearly defined and named according to their conceptual focus. Finally, the themes were interpreted and synthesized to develop conclusions regarding the integration of Islamic values into EFL instruction.

Three major themes emerged from the analysis: cultural awareness, material appropriateness, and Islamic communication values. These themes represent important dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy in Islamic educational contexts.

FINDINGS

In the Findings section, the study identified three main themes from the collected data: cultural awareness, material appropriateness, and Islamic communication values. Data were derived from structured group discussions and a literature review of 20 academic sources, including journal articles, Qur'anic verses, and Hadith.

Table 1 shows the frequency of these themes based on coding references across the two data sources.

Table: 1. Frequency of Themes Identified in the Study

Theme	Frequency of Mentions	Percentage(%)
Cultural Awareness	18	90%
Material Appropriateness	17	85%
Islamic Communication	16	80%

The highest emphasis was placed on cultural awareness (90%), followed by material appropriateness (85%), and the development of Islamic communication values (80%). These findings indicate a consistent concern across participants and sources for integrating Islamic principles in EFL instruction, particularly regarding ethical alignment of materials and respectful communication.

Detailed Thematic Findings

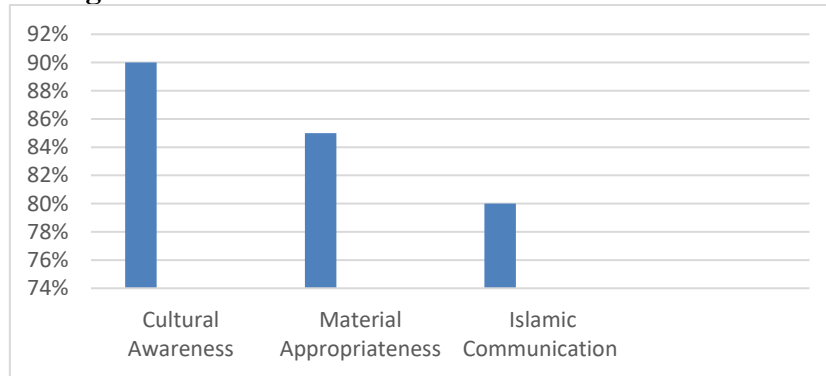


Figure 1: Themes identified in group discussion and literature review

1. Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness was the most frequently referenced theme, appearing in 90% of data sources. Findings showed that developing successful teacher-student relationships in EFL classes requires an awareness of Islamic principles, including gender sensitivity, modesty, and respect for religious customs. Participants highlighted that more inclusive and stimulating learning environments are created by educators who exhibit cultural sensitivity. According to the examined literature, culturally appropriate content lowers classroom conflict and increases student motivation.

2. Material Appropriateness

Material appropriateness appeared in 85% of data references. Participants noted that depictions of dating, drinking, and gambling are among the themes commonly found in EFL textbooks that conflict with Islamic principles. According to the study, students moral growth and level of involvement can be adversely affected by unsuitable information. Using or creating locally relevant EFL resources that are consistent with Islamic principles was advised by a number of sources. In order to improve understanding and value-based learning, these resources contain Islamic stories, morality-based discussions, and culturally relevant settings (Mulyati & Kultsum, 2023).

3. Islamic Communication

Islamic communication values were referenced in 80% of the sources. This theme involved integrating Islamic values such as politeness, honesty, and speaking clarity in speech into language use. The significance of educating students to speak politely and refrain from using offensive language was highlighted by data from literature and group discussions. Hadith and verses from the Qur'an were regularly used to back up this approach. Among the strategies found were modeling polite interactions in the EFL classroom, encouraging active listening, and teaching expressions of gratitude and apology.

The findings suggest that culturally responsive EFL materials in Islamic educational contexts should include culturally familiar and ethically appropriate content. Participants recommended replacing contexts such as “bar,” “nightclub,” or “dating culture” with alternatives like “mosque,” “family gatherings,” “community activities,” or “school discussions.” The materials may also

incorporate Islamic stories, moral lessons, and socially relevant situations reflecting Muslim students' daily experiences (Deiniatur & Hasanah, 2024).

The study also revealed a tension between linguistic authenticity and cultural protection. While exposure to target-language culture is important for developing communicative competence, unrestricted exposure to culturally conflicting content may create discomfort and moral conflict among Muslim learners. Therefore, culturally responsive pedagogy requires balanced material adaptation that maintains English language authenticity while preserving Islamic identity and values.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the study emphasize how important it is to incorporate Islamic principles into EFL instruction in Muslims majority settings. Significant alignment between religious beliefs and effective language instruction is demonstrated by the identification of three major themes: Islamic communication values (80%), cultural awareness (90%), and material appropriateness (85%). The prominence of cultural awareness in the data confirms that EFL teaching cannot be culturally neutral. Language, as a carrier of culture, must be taught in a way that aligns with students' beliefs and everyday realities. In Islamic contexts, this includes sensitivity to gender norms, religious practices, and collective community values. These results support Kramsch's (1993) theory that language learning is a cultural act, not just a linguistic process. Practically, this means that teacher training programs must include cultural competence modules specific to the Islamic worldview to prevent cultural dissonance and disengagement in the classroom (Liddicoat & Kohler, 2012).

The second finding, the importance of culturally appropriate materials, has both theoretical and practical implications. The prevalence of Western-produced EFL content often leads to classroom challenges when such materials conflict with Islamic principles. This confirms propositions from Ali (2020) and Rahman (2019), who argue that culturally irrelevant content hinders moral development and student engagement. The results of this study call for a shift toward curriculum localization developing or adapting EFL resources that incorporate Islamic narratives, values, and moral teachings. This has broader implications for policy-making and textbook publication within Muslim-majority educational systems. The third key finding, Islamic communication values, underlines the necessity of integrating ethical speech into language instruction. Islamic teachings place a strong emphasis on being polite, truthful, and communicative, which is consistent with current educational trends that place equal weight on character development and intellectual success. The findings support the idea that language instruction needs to develop responsible, moral communicators in addition to grammar and fluency. Richards & Rodgers (2014) complement this viewpoint by highlighting the need for effective language instruction to take into account the social and cultural realities of the learners.

In extrapolating these findings to larger issues, it becomes evident that EFL education in Muslim settings is not merely a linguistic endeavor-it is a moral and cultural process. The incorporation of Islamic viewpoints into EFL lessons demonstrates how identity-affirming teaching improves students' academic and personal growth. On the other hand, learners may become resistant, less motivated, and experience ethical dissonance if cultural congruence is not addressed.

Practically, localized EFL textbooks should contain culturally appropriate settings, ethical narratives, and respectful social interactions. For example, learning materials may replace contexts such as "nightclub," "bar," or "dating culture" with "family gatherings," "community activities," "Islamic celebrations," or "school discussions." Visual representations should also reflect modest clothing and culturally respectful interactions in order to create learning environments that are comfortable for Muslim learners.

However, this study also highlights the tension between linguistic authenticity and cultural protection. While authentic language learning requires exposure to target-language culture,

unrestricted exposure to culturally conflicting content may create discomfort and moral conflict among students. On the other hand, excessive removal of foreign cultural content may reduce learners' intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, culturally responsive pedagogy in EFL instruction should maintain a balance between authentic language exposure and the preservation of Islamic identity and values.

Theoretically, these findings affirm the value of culturally responsive teaching frameworks in second language acquisition, particularly within faith-based education. Practically, they support the need for teacher preparation programs, curriculum developers, and policymakers to adopt a holistic approach that aligns language instruction with students' religious and cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that integrating Islamic values into EFL teaching is essential for fostering both language proficiency and moral development in Muslim-majority contexts. The necessity of culturally responsive teaching methods is emphasized by the three main themes that were found: cultural awareness, material appropriateness, and ethical communication. Integrating Islamic values into educational materials promotes holistic education, maintains cultural identity, and increases student involvement. Future initiatives should concentrate on creating value-based, locally appropriate EFL resources and preparing educators to use culturally sensitive teaching methods.

Future research should focus on developing and testing the effectiveness of localized Islamic-based EFL materials as part of culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, large-scale quantitative studies are needed to measure the impact of culturally responsive instruction on students' motivation and language achievement using instruments such as a modified Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Future studies may also investigate teachers' perceptions, classroom implementation challenges, and the influence of Islamic-based EFL instruction on students' intercultural communicative competence.

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