

Integrating Islamic Values Into English Instruction For Junior High School Students Aligned With The Independent Curriculum

Ghina Fidaraini Ersyadila¹, Rika Rahmi², Kalayo Hasibuan³

^{1,2,3}English Education Department, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam
Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau

Email: ¹12210421346@students.uin-suska.ac.id, ²12210421482@students.uin-suska.ac.id,
³khalayohasibuan@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to integrate Islamic values in teaching English for junior high school students based on Merdeka Curriculum. Using a qualitative approach, this study collected data through sources on journal articles and analysis of curriculum documents and relevant teaching materials. Islamic values, such as honesty, discipline, and mutual respect, were identified and analyzed to find out how they are applied in the context of English learning. The results show that the integration of these values can not only improve students' understanding of the language, but also shape positive characters that are in line with Islamic teachings. In addition, teaching strategies involving collaborative activities and self-reflection proved effective in facilitating the application of these values. This study recommends the development of more contextualized and relevant teaching materials, as well as training for teachers to understand and implement this approach effectively. Thus, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of education that is not only oriented towards language skills, but also the formation of student character in accordance with Islamic values within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: *Islamic Values, English Language Teaching, Independent Curriculum*

1. Introduction

Education has a strategic role in shaping students' character and personality. In the Indonesian context, education serves not only as a means to improve academic competence, but also as a medium to instill moral and spiritual values. The Merdeka curriculum introduced by the government gives educators the freedom to design learning that is relevant to student needs and in accordance with local and cultural values. In this case, the integration of Islamic values into various subjects, including English, becomes one of the innovative approaches to create learning that is not only cognitive but also affective and spiritual.

English, as an international language, has an important role in preparing students to face the challenges of globalization. However, English learning is often seen as separate from moral aspects and religious values. In fact, with the right approach, English can be a medium to strengthen the internalization of Islamic values that are relevant to students' daily lives. For example, through the selection of teaching materials that reflect Islamic principles, teachers can help students not only master the language, but also develop character based on noble morals.

This article aims to explore how Islamic values can be integrated into English language teaching at the junior secondary level with reference to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. It underscores the importance of the teacher's role as a facilitator in creating balanced learning between cognitive, affective and spiritual aspects and presents relevant implementation examples to be applied in the classroom context. Thus, it is hoped that English

learning will not only produce students who are competent in language, but also have a strong Islamic character in accordance with the values of faith and piety.

2. Theoretical Studies

English Language Teaching

Learning originates from the root word "learn," referring to a process, method, or action through which individuals or students acquire knowledge and understanding. Or learning means trying to gain intelligence or knowledge (Maru'ao, 2020). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), English language teaching relies on three main components, namely approaches, methods and techniques. Approaches refer to the basic principles that underpin the learning process, methods describe the practical framework applied in the classroom, while techniques include the specific steps used to implement the methods. Language learning theory serves as the foundation for teaching English. Brown (2007) states that English language teaching focuses not only on mastering language structures, but also on students' communicative abilities.

English language teaching has various approaches that focus on specific aspects of learning. The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, for example, emphasizes the importance of speaking and listening skills in authentic contexts. According to Harmer (2007), this approach is designed to help students communicate effectively in everyday life, rather than simply memorizing grammar rules. Other methods, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), as outlined by Ellis (2003), are oriented towards completing specific tasks relevant to real life. Through this method, students are involved in an active and contextualized learning process, so that they can develop language skills as well as critical thinking skills.

Islamic Values

Lubis et al. (2021) explain that Islamic values can be categorized into three main types: aqidah values, worship values, and moral values. The first category, aqidah values, emphasizes the belief in the existence of Allah, the Almighty Creator of the universe, who observes and accounts for all human actions. Aqidah holds a central place in Islamic teachings because it forms the foundation of faith, beginning with the Shahada, a declaration acknowledging that Allah is the sole deity worthy of worship. For Muslims, demonstrating strong aqidah involves recognizing the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as the ultimate role model for submission to Allah. Consequently, the Prophet's words and actions should guide a Muslim's daily life. According to Embong (2020), teaching aqidah is considered effective when students exhibit unwavering faith in Allah and practice values that encourage righteous deeds in their everyday lives (Alfian et al., 2021).

The second Islamic value pertains to worship or Islamic rituals (Hidayat, 2017). Linguistically, worship signifies humility and submission. As stated by Hidayat (2017), the core rituals of Islam, known as the Pillars of Islam (shahada, prayer, zakat, fasting, and hajj), serve as the foundation for worship practices and symbolize commitment to faith.

The third value is moral (akhlak), which originates from the Arabic root word *khalaqa* or *khuluqun*, meaning behavior or, in English, "ethics." This value encourages individuals to conduct themselves in alignment with appropriate and virtuous norms. In Islam, ethics encompass religious teachings, directives, customs, and social interactions. Lubis, Syaekani, Harahap, and Siregar (2021) emphasize that moral values are essential for shaping students' character and must be ingrained in Muslims to reflect their faith. Examples of good morals include sharing knowledge, assisting others, showing compassion, practicing honesty, and giving alms.

Independent Curriculum/Merdeka Curriculum

Merdeka Curriculum is an educational approach that gives more autonomy to schools, teachers, and students in designing, managing, and evaluating the learning process (Fitra, 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and

Technology to address the demand for a more flexible and timely approach to learning. Its basic philosophy refers to the principle of independent learning, which gives freedom to teachers and students in designing learning that is meaningful, contextual, and in accordance with the local environment.

Ki Hadjar Dewantara, as a pioneer of Indonesian education, was a major inspiration for the Merdeka Curriculum. He emphasized the importance of education that frees individuals from the shackles of ignorance and compulsion. In this view, learning must humanize humans and allow students to develop their potential optimally through freedom of thought and work. Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum is an educational policy designed to provide flexibility in the learning process, so that it can adapt to the needs, potential, and interests of students. This curriculum emphasizes competency-based learning and character strengthening through the application of the Pancasila Student Profile.

DISCUSSION

English has long been a mandatory subject in Indonesia, taught from junior high school through university. At the senior high school level, the primary goal of English instruction is to equip students with the ability to use the language effectively, both in spoken and written forms. Consequently, the English curriculum focuses on developing language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) alongside language components (grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary). Beyond fostering proficiency in these areas, English teaching should also aim to cultivate positive attitudes, ignite enthusiasm, and boost students' motivation to learn the language. (Alfian et al., 2021)

English often reflects the cultural values of Western society, which in many aspects may contradict Islamic teachings. One of the most significant examples is their perception of God and religion. Western society typically emphasizes logic and reason, requiring everything to be understood and measured through intellect. Because the existence of God cannot be perceived through the five senses, they rely on their reasoning to define divinity and religion. This has led to the notion that all religions are fundamentally the same, teaching goodness to their followers, and thus, there is no need to view religions as opposing one another. Furthermore, Western society has propagated ideas like agnosticism, where individuals refrain from following any religion, and atheism, which outright denies the existence of God. Interestingly, this perspective persists despite their rejection of communism, which also dismisses religion (Wijayanto, 2020).

These beliefs have influenced the thinking of various communities outside the West, including Muslims. Learners of the English language are likely to encounter such perspectives in the texts they study. Another example involves differences in social ethics. English lessons often feature dialogues depicting casual interactions between men and women. In Islam, interactions between men and women are governed by strict guidelines, which often contrast sharply with the norms of Western social behavior. English students may come to view Western approaches to social interactions as desirable or worth imitating, even though Islamic teachings emphasize maintaining boundaries between genders.

Achieving learning objectives and fostering learners' personal and spiritual development in English education involves various factors, including teachers, learning materials, teaching methods, learning strategies, the learning environment, and students' needs. At the curriculum level, the Indonesian government has undergone multiple curriculum transformations. Integrating Islamic values into the curriculum can be achieved using an integrated curriculum development model. To enhance education in Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture introduced the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum aims to address the challenges posed by pandemic-era learning and provide schools, teachers, and students the freedom to innovate, learn independently, and engage creatively (Fitra, 2023).

Schools can design and implement an English curriculum by evaluating their strengths and challenges in education. Teachers can tailor content to align with the goals or mission of their institution. For instance, they can develop English learning materials rooted in Islamic

values, such as including Quranic verses or hadiths relevant to the topics being taught. These activities not only aim to enhance students' understanding of Islamic principles but also improve their English language skills. Islamic values can be incorporated through lesson plans, which form a crucial part of teaching preparation and play a significant role in the learning process (Astuti et al., 2024).

All teachers agree on the importance of integrating Islamic values into English learning. However, this integration must be fully supported and aligned with its implementation in the learning process, including lesson planning (Irayanti, 2022). One way to achieve this is by incorporating Islamic values into English textbooks. For instance, Islamic schools under the Ministry of Religious Affairs often provide additional teaching materials that emphasize Islamic principles.

Teachers can also integrate Islamic values through activities such as using Islamic-themed picture media, where students write short stories based on the images provided. This approach not only develops students' writing and grammar skills but also promotes creative expression. Additionally, teachers can utilize picture descriptions as a fun and engaging learning method to enhance student participation and improve learning outcomes. Visual teaching resources for these activities can be sourced from platforms like [freepik.com](https://www.freepik.com), [gettyimages.com](https://www.gettyimages.com), unsplash.com, and [pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com) (Astuti et al., 2024).

Research by Kusumah et al. (2024) highlights two main strategies for integrating Islamic values into English Language Teaching (ELT): first, through classroom activities; and second, by embedding these values into the content used during lessons. Similarly, Wijayanto (2020) identifies several methods for incorporating Islamic values into learning materials, including:

1. Adding exercises that reflect Islamic values to the topics taught.
2. Using Islamic names for individuals, places, or events in exercises.
3. Including Qur'anic verses or hadiths relevant to the subject matter.
4. Combining common Islamic expressions with English language structures related to the lesson topics.

The integration of Islamic values into learning activities can be achieved through several approaches. First, teachers can use code-mixing and transcoding by combining English expressions with relevant Islamic phrases based on the context. Second, they can connect the topics being taught to Islamic teachings by quoting relevant Qur'anic verses or hadiths and explaining their relation to the topic. Third, Islamic names for individuals, places, or events can be incorporated into example sentences or conversational texts. Fourth, students can be assigned tasks such as writing or searching for specific texts that align with Islamic values and the topics being studied. In assessment activities, Islamic values can be integrated through informal methods like oral questioning, teacher observation, assignments, and reading aloud materials that include Islamic values. Additionally, formal assessments, such as daily oral and written tests, can also include content that reflects these values.

Integrating Islamic values into English learning at the junior high school level is a strategic approach designed not only to enhance students' language abilities but also to develop their character in alignment with religious principles. Values such as honesty, discipline, and mutual respect are important foundations in creating a conducive and meaningful learning environment. In this context, the integration of these values not only helps students understand the subject matter, but also strengthens the internalization of positive characters that have a long-term impact on their lives.

Honesty, as one of the core values in Islamic teachings, can be applied through learning activities that encourage students to be honest in various situations. For example, in essay writing activities or group work, students are taught the importance of avoiding plagiarism and always acknowledging the source of ideas or information. This is in line with the principles of character education that emphasize intellectual honesty and academic responsibility. Thus, English learning does not only function as a medium of knowledge transfer, but also as a tool to build students' integrity.

The value of discipline also has a significant role in supporting the success of English learning. Discipline can be applied through the organization of study time, accuracy in completing assignments, and active engagement during the learning process. Strategies such as using a structured study schedule and providing regular feedback can help students understand the importance of discipline in achieving their learning goals. This discipline is not only relevant in an academic context, but also an important provision for students in facing the challenges of everyday life.

Mutual respect, which is a universal value in Islam, can be integrated through collaborative learning activities. In English teaching, activities such as group discussions, role plays or joint projects provide opportunities for students to share ideas, listen to others' opinions and work together to achieve goals. Through these interactions, students are taught to respect different opinions, cultural backgrounds and individual abilities, which is in line with the spirit of tolerance in Islamic teachings. Thus, English language learning becomes an effective means to instill the values of inclusiveness and empathy.

A collaboration-based teaching strategy not only enhances English language learning but also helps internalize Islamic values. For instance, during group discussions, students are encouraged to solve problems collectively while respecting each other's opinions. This approach not only improves their English communication skills but also fosters mutual respect and cooperation. Such activities can be creatively designed to reflect Islamic principles, such as consultation (*shura*) and collaboration.

Self-reflection is another effective strategy for integrating Islamic values into English learning. Through reflection activities, students evaluate their learning experiences, recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and plan for improvement. These reflections can take place through daily journals, class discussions, or experience-sharing sessions. This strategy not only deepens students' understanding of English concepts but also raises their awareness of the role Islamic values play in daily life, making learning more meaningful and relevant.

Additionally, Islamic values can be integrated into English learning by carefully selecting teaching materials that are relevant and contextual. Teachers can choose reading texts, dialogues, or discussion topics that reflect values such as honesty, discipline, and mutual respect. For example, reading materials about inspiring Islamic figures can both teach new vocabulary and instill positive values in students. These contextualized teaching materials enrich learning and help students connect English concepts to their everyday lives.

The role of teachers in implementing Merdeka Curriculum is crucial in ensuring that the integration of Islamic values takes place effectively. Teachers not only function as facilitators, but also as role models who reflect these values in everyday life. According to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers have the freedom to design learning according to student needs, so that the integration of Islamic values can be carried out creatively and flexibly. Thus, teachers have a strategic role in creating holistic learning, covering cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects.

Technology can also be utilized to support the integration of Islamic values in English language learning. The use of learning apps, interactive videos or digital platforms allows teachers to create more interesting and innovative learning experiences. For example, teachers can use videos containing Islamic values as discussion materials or writing assignments. This technology not only facilitates students' access to learning resources but also increases their motivation in learning English. In this way, learning becomes more interactive and relevant to students' needs.

In the context of Merdeka Curriculum, project-based learning is one approach that can be optimized to integrate Islamic values. Projects such as making presentations about Islamic figures, writing short stories that contain moral messages, or designing campaigns about the importance of Islamic values in everyday life can be effective means of developing English language skills while instilling character values. This approach not only actively engages students

in the learning process, but also helps them apply the values in a real context. Integrating Islamic values in English learning also has a positive impact on students' identity formation.

In addition, the integration of Islamic values in English learning also supports the achievement of the Pancasila Learner Profile. Values such as gotong royong, independence, and critical reasoning can be developed through learning activities designed in accordance with Merdeka Curriculum principles. For example, in group assignments, students are invited to work together to solve problems or make presentations, which trains them to think critically and appreciate the contributions of other members. Thus, English learning is not only oriented towards academic achievement, but also towards strengthening student character.

The integration of Islamic values into English language learning faces several challenges. One of the primary obstacles is the lack of understanding among teachers on how to effectively incorporate these values. Providing training and mentorship for teachers is crucial to ensure they possess the necessary skills to design lessons that align with the Merdeka Curriculum principles. Additionally, the availability of appropriate learning resources that support the integration of Islamic values is another important factor that must be addressed.

To address this issue, intensive training for teachers is essential. This training should include developing competence in designing teaching materials that combine Islamic values with the English curriculum. For example, teachers can be trained to use texts containing Islamic moral values, such as stories from the Qur'an or Hadith, as interesting and relevant teaching materials. In addition, the development of appropriate learning resources, such as Islamic values-based textbooks and supporting digital media, also needs to be considered. Schools should collaborate with educational institutions and religious organizations to create teaching materials that are consistent with Islamic teachings. Another approach that can be utilized is project-based learning, where students participate in social activities that combine language learning with the application of Islamic values. This method not only enhances students' English proficiency but also reinforces their religious identity. By adopting this approach, the integration of Islamic values into English learning can be achieved effectively, fostering a holistic and meaningful learning experience for students.

4. Conclusion

Integrating Islamic values in English learning is very important to shape students' character. The Merdeka curriculum provides flexibility for teachers to design learning that suits local needs and contexts, including moral and spiritual values. Education not only serves to improve academic competence, but also to instill ethical and spiritual values that are relevant to students' daily lives. English language teaching, which is often separated from religious values, should be used as a means to strengthen the internalization of Islamic values. Through the use of teaching materials that reflect Islamic principles, students can engage in active and meaningful learning. Approaches that emphasize collaboration and self-reflection have also proven effective in integrating these values into the learning process.

Activities such as group discussions and collaborative projects allow students to respect each other's opinions and work together, which is in line with Islamic teachings on tolerance and empathy. However, challenges in the implementation of integrating Islamic values remain, especially regarding teachers' understanding of effective ways to do so. Therefore, training is needed for teachers to ensure they have sufficient competence in designing appropriate teaching materials. Thus, Integrating Islamic values into English learning not only enhances students' language skills but also helps shape their identity and character.

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