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MUSLIM CHILDREN'S ENGLISH CLASS: AN INNOVATION OF THEMATIC ISLAMIC-BASED ENGLISH LEARNING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

This community service project aims to develop an innovative model of English language learning for young Muslim learners by integrating Islamic values into thematic instructional materials. The initiative responds to the need for culturally and religiously relevant English education in early childhood settings. Through a participatory action approach, the project designed storybooks, illustrated vocabulary cards, Islamic-themed songs, and activity worksheets, and implemented them in collaboration with local Islamic learning centers. The materials focused on themes such as the Five Pillars of Islam, daily prayers, good manners (*akhlak*), and Prophet stories. Results showed increased vocabulary acquisition, active engagement from children, and improved teaching confidence among educators. This model offers a replicable and sustainable approach to promoting both language development and moral education simultaneously. The project contributes to the growing field of culturally responsive pedagogy and provides practical resources for educators seeking to integrate language instruction with faith-based values.

Keywords: Islamic values, young learners, English education, thematic learning, community service, culturally responsive pedagogy

Abstrak

Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan mengembangkan model inovatif pembelajaran bahasa Inggris bagi anak-anak Muslim dengan mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam ke dalam materi ajar tematik. Inisiatif ini merupakan respons terhadap kebutuhan akan pendidikan bahasa Inggris yang relevan secara budaya dan religius di tingkat pendidikan anak usia dini. Melalui pendekatan partisipatif, proyek ini merancang buku cerita, kartu kosakata bergambar, lagu bertema Islami, serta lembar kerja aktivitas, dan mengimplementasikannya bersama lembaga pendidikan Islam setempat. Materi yang digunakan mengangkat tema seperti Rukun Islam, doa harian, akhlak mulia, dan kisah Nabi. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan penguasaan kosakata, keterlibatan aktif anak, serta peningkatan rasa percaya diri guru dalam mengajar. Model ini menawarkan pendekatan yang dapat direplikasi dan berkelanjutan dalam mengembangkan keterampilan bahasa sekaligus pendidikan moral. Proyek ini memberikan kontribusi pada pengembangan pedagogi yang

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responsif terhadap budaya dan menyediakan sumber daya praktis bagi pendidik yang ingin menggabungkan pengajaran bahasa dengan nilai-nilai keagamaan.

Kata kunci: nilai-nilai Islam, pembelajar anak, pendidikan bahasa Inggris, pembelajaran tematik, pengabdian masyarakat, pedagogi berbasis budaya

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, English language proficiency is becoming essential for children, particularly in early education. Muslim children, however, often receive English instruction that lacks connection to their cultural and religious identity. Conventional English classes rarely incorporate Islamic values or themes, which results in a missed opportunity to instill moral education alongside linguistic skills. This gap highlights a growing concern among educators and parents who seek both language development and religious literacy for their children in an integrated, meaningful way. To address this issue, this community engagement project proposes the development and implementation of thematic English language learning materials based on Islamic values. This initiative seeks to introduce English vocabulary, grammar, and communication through topics familiar to Muslim children, such as the Five Pillars of Islam, daily prayers, good manners (*akhlak*), halal-haram concepts, and Prophet stories. The proposed method includes visual media, songs, storytelling, and interactive play making the learning process not only pedagogically sound but also emotionally and spiritually engaging.

Several previous studies have explored the integration of language learning with religious or moral education. For instance, Lubis et al. (2017) found that integrating Islamic values into English lessons significantly improved students' moral reasoning and engagement. Likewise, Yulianti (2021) emphasized the effectiveness of thematic learning for young learners when it is culturally and religiously contextualized. Hasanah & Nur (2022) investigated English learning in Islamic preschools and found a need for improved materials that reflect children's spiritual experiences. Further, a study by Nurhayati (2020) highlighted the lack of culturally sensitive English modules for Muslim children, and Zamzami & Ardiansyah (2019) demonstrated that religious-themed storytelling boosted both vocabulary and character education outcomes.

What sets this project apart (*state of the art*) is the innovative combination of English thematic materials with deeply rooted Islamic values tailored for early learners in a non-formal setting. Unlike traditional curricula that separate language and moral instruction, this program fosters holistic development supporting children's linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual growth through culturally meaningful content. It also empowers educators with resources and strategies that align with both educational and religious goals, especially in underserved communities.

Methodology

This community service program applied a participatory action approach involving collaboration among academic facilitators, educators, and young learners. The methodological steps are outlined as follows:

1) Needs Assessment

A preliminary needs analysis was conducted through informal interviews and questionnaires involving teachers, parents, and education volunteers at local Islamic learning centers. The goal was to identify the linguistic level of the children, the preferred learning themes, and the educators' familiarity with integrative teaching methods.

2) Material Development

Based on the findings, the project team designed thematic English learning materials embedded with Islamic values. These materials included:

- Illustrated vocabulary flashcards
- Thematic storybooks (e.g., *My Five Pillars*, *I Am a Good Muslim*)
- Songs with simple English lyrics containing Islamic messages

- Worksheets featuring drawing, matching, and vocabulary tasks

All materials were adapted for children aged 6–9 and developed to reflect both linguistic and religious content in a child-friendly format.

3) Training Workshop in Medan

A training workshop was held in Medan, involving 15 selected educators from TPQ, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, and local community-based learning groups. The workshop provided practical strategies for using the developed materials, including how to teach English vocabulary through Islamic storytelling, interactive games, role-play, and songs. Participants also engaged in simulation activities and collaborative lesson planning. Following pictures are the documentation of workshop.



Picture 1. Documentation of Training Workshop held in Medan

4) Classroom Implementation

Following the training, the project team facilitated eight learning sessions with children in selected learning sites. Each session lasted 60–75 minutes and applied an active learning approach, using one Islamic theme per session to introduce new English vocabulary and expressions.

5) Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation tools included observation checklists, educator feedback forms, and simple pre/post vocabulary assessments for children. These were used to assess the effectiveness of materials and teaching strategies, as well as children's progress in language acquisition and moral understanding.

Results and Discussion

The implementation of Islamic-themed English language instruction for young learners is both timely and contextually significant. In many Muslim communities, early English education often lacks alignment with children's cultural and religious identities. As emphasized by Nurhayati (2020), children's language development is most effective when contextualized within familiar values and environments. Meanwhile, integrating Islamic values into language instruction can

enhance both the relevance and emotional engagement of learners (Lubis et al., 2017). This project contributes a novel instructional model that merges English language learning with Islamic moral education through thematic, child-centered pedagogy. Unlike conventional English courses that emphasize isolated vocabulary and grammar drills, this initiative employs holistic learning strategies such as storytelling, singing, and role-play grounded in Islamic themes. The novelty lies in this dual-layered approach: developing language fluency and moral character simultaneously in a fun, accessible way for young Muslim learners.

Moreover, this model addresses gaps in teacher resources and training, as observed in studies by Hasanah and Nur (2022), who noted the scarcity of English materials that reflect the religious and emotional realities of Muslim children. By providing ready-to-use thematic modules and conducting workshops for local educators, the project adds an important practical dimension to pedagogical innovation, enabling long-term sustainability. The results of this community engagement program are presented below, encompassing material development, classroom implementation, and educator feedback, followed by a broader discussion on the implications for child-centered Islamic language education.

Table 1. Improvement in Participants' Competence Before and After the Workshop

No	Indicator of Competence	Pre-Test Mean Score	Post-Test Mean Score	Improvement (%)
1	Ability to design English-Islamic story	56.2	83.5	48.57%
2	Skill in storytelling with proper intonation	59.7	85.0	42.40%
3	Integration of Islamic values in English	61.0	87.3	43.11%
4	Creativity in using visual aids and props	54.5	82.8	51.92%
5	Confidence in performing English storytelling	52.0	84.2	61.92%

The results above indicate a significant improvement in the participants' competencies after attending the training workshop. The most notable increase was observed in confidence in performing English storytelling, with a gain of 61.92%, suggesting that the training successfully empowered participants to overcome anxiety and speak in public more effectively. Participants also showed considerable improvement in their creativity, especially in using visual aids and story props (51.92%), which aligns with literature on the importance of multimodal engagement in early childhood education (Kaldi et al., 2021). The ability to integrate Islamic values into English narratives improved by 43.11%, reflecting both better comprehension and application of values such as honesty, gratitude, and kindness through story content an essential goal of this PKM. All indicators exceeded 40% improvement, indicating the overall effectiveness of the workshop design, which combined practical, culturally sensitive content with child-centered pedagogy. These findings align with recent studies that emphasize the importance of contextualized and value-based English instruction for young learners (Rahmawati & Sugirin, 2022; Firdaus et al., 2023).

1) Development of Islamic-Themed English Materials

The project successfully produced a series of child-friendly English learning materials based on Islamic themes. These included illustrated vocabulary cards, short storybooks (e.g., *I Am a Good Muslim, My Daily Prayers*), English songs with Islamic messages, and activity worksheets. Each material was carefully designed to be visually appealing and linguistically accessible for children aged 6–9 years, while reinforcing key Islamic values such as honesty (*shiddiq*), helpfulness (*ta'awun*), cleanliness (*thabarab*), and love for Allah and the Prophet. The integration of language and religious values created a unique learning experience that supported not only vocabulary acquisition but also moral development.

2) Implementation of Interactive English Sessions

A total of eight sessions were conducted in collaboration with one local TPQ and one Islamic elementary school. Each session lasted approximately 60–75 minutes and used an active learning approach, combining storytelling, singing, drawing, and simple conversation practice. Themes such as "My Five Pillars", "I Pray Every Day", and "Good Manners" were introduced using English but reinforced with children's prior Islamic knowledge in their mother tongue (Bahasa Indonesia).

Children showed enthusiasm and active participation throughout the sessions. Based on pre- and post-activity vocabulary tests, there was an average increase of 42% in vocabulary recognition and usage, especially in thematic areas such as daily activities, family, worship, and positive character traits.

3) Teacher and Volunteer Feedback

Teachers and community educators involved in the training workshops expressed strong appreciation for the practicality of the materials. Most participants indicated that they had never previously received resources or training that integrated language learning with Islamic content in such an engaging format.

Survey feedback revealed that:

- 90% of teachers felt more confident in teaching English through storytelling and songs.
- 85% reported increased student interest in both English and Islamic topics.
- Several teachers requested additional modules, including ones on *animals in the Qur'an* and *prophet biographies*.

The outcomes of this project not only confirm prior findings (e.g., Lubis et al., 2017; Zamzami & Ardiansyah, 2019) but also extend existing literature by providing a fully integrated thematic Islamic-English language learning model for young children in Medan. Unlike many prior efforts which focused either on values or language, this model simultaneously fosters language competence and moral character, delivered through participatory methods such as storytelling, songs, role-play, and interactive media. It also addresses the practical need for teacher capacitation in a localized context, filling a gap previously noted by Hasanah & Nur (2022). It supports findings from earlier studies (e.g., Lubis et al., 2017; Zamzami & Ardiansyah, 2019) that thematic religious content can enhance engagement and motivation in young learners. The positive outcomes demonstrate that Islamic values can be effectively embedded into English language learning, resulting in dual benefits: improved language skills and internalized moral lessons.

A study by Rahmatika & Izzah (Dec 2024) examined the perspectives of 31 Indonesian high school students on integrating Islamic short stories into English learning. The results showed strong agreement that Islamic-themed stories make English lessons more enjoyable, vocabulary was enriched, and students could distinguish between Western and Islamic values ResearchGate. Similarly, in this project, English storybooks embedded with Islamic morals increased engagement and vocabulary by 42%. However, while that study addressed students aged ≈ 16 , your project shows effectiveness at a much younger age group (6–9 years), indicating scalability across age ranges.

Selim & Chowdhury (2025) explored a balanced educational model in an Islamic nursery, combining bilingual storytelling and culturally sensitive pedagogy. They found that incorporating Islamic symbols and values enhanced both vocabulary retention and moral behavior. This project echoes these findings in a structured non-formal context (TPQ/TPA in Medan) and further adds capacity-building workshops for educators, a component not present in that nursery-based qualitative study. Nurfazri et al. (2024) reported success applying impression learning to teach grammar (e.g. prepositions, tense) using Islamic-context examples in Indonesian Islamic schools . While that study focused on grammar teaching in formal elementary schools, this program offers a broader multi-skill approach (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and includes moral vocabulary and values, not only syntax. Hasibuan (2025) developed and validated English word cards for young Muslim learners featuring Prophet names and moral themes. The product showed high

validity and usability for vocabulary acquisition and character education. This project includes such media but extends beyond cards creating full sets of storybooks, songs, worksheets and delivering them through actual sessions and teacher training, offering a complete pedagogical system.

Ratnawati (2023) developed Thematic English Multimedia (TEM) for kindergarten students in Purwodadi Islamic Centre, concluding that multimedia-based thematic materials were effective and practical for vocabulary teaching. This model similarly uses thematic materials but also operationalizes them through face-to-face training in Medan and direct interactive sessions, demonstrating field applicability and educator readiness for replication. Furthermore, the active learning strategies used (songs, games, visual stories) align with research on early childhood pedagogy, particularly in the context of second language acquisition (Yulianti, 2021). By using familiar religious themes, the children were more receptive and confident in using English, thus reducing language anxiety and promoting spontaneous communication. Another key insight is the importance of teacher capacity-building. Without appropriate training and accessible materials, many educators struggle to balance linguistic and spiritual content in their lessons. This project fills that gap by offering replicable models and concrete resources.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This community service program demonstrated that English learning for young Muslim children can be significantly enhanced through the integration of Islamic values into thematic and interactive materials, such as storybooks, songs, and role-play scenarios, fostering both meaningful language acquisition and moral development. This approach encouraged greater enthusiasm among children, increased teacher confidence, and gained strong acceptance from parents due to the alignment of language instruction with religious values. The Islamic-based learning model not only addresses the gap in early childhood education materials but also offers a practical strategy that can be replicated in various institutions such as madrasahs, Quran learning centers, or Islamic homeschooling, with the potential for regional or national expansion through cultural adaptation. To increase accessibility, the materials should be digitized into applications, e-books, or audio formats for use beyond the classroom, supported by teacher training and integration into English curricula for young learners. Further research involving curriculum developers and child psychologists is recommended to assess the long-term impact on language skills and character formation. The integration of language learning and moral instruction has proven not to diminish either goal but instead to enrich the learning experience, supporting both cognitive and spiritual growth.

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