

## **Incorporating Islamic Messages in the English Teaching in the Indonesian Context**

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### **Abstract**

*In the context of postcolonial Indonesia, the teaching of English which often implies the teaching of norms and cultures embedded within English language may create tensions among learners. To help Muslim students minimize the tensions, material writers and teachers may incorporate Islamic messages in the teaching of English. Since this is possible to carry out within the school-based curriculum, the writer offers some ways of integrating Islamic messages in the English teaching: writing/using English course-books tailored with Islamic messages, using authentic materials containing Islamic messages or using available supplementary materials containing Islamic messages designed by ELTIS. At the end of the paper, the writer gives an example of using an Islamic song to generate communicative activities among learners.*

**Keywords:** *Postcolonial, Indonesia, Islamic messages, English teaching.*

The teaching of English might bring cultural content residing within the English language, whether the teacher includes the cultural items in purpose or not. Rohmah (2005a, p. 243) explained that teachers need to teach the cultural items of certain language because, "many linguistic symbols cannot be interpreted without knowing their cultural contents. Several cultural aspects do exist beyond the lexical symbols." Brown also (1990) mentioned that language may be dependent of cultural background and is not value-free, "there are values, presuppositions, about the nature of life and what is good and bad in it, to be found in any normal use of language" (p. 13).

Buttjes (1990) stresses that language teaching is culture teaching by arguing that: 1) language codes cannot be taught in isolation because processes of sociocultural transmission are bound to be at work on many levels, e.g. the contents of language exercises, the cultural discourse of textbooks, and the teacher's attitudes towards the target culture; 2) in their role of "secondary care givers," language teachers need to go beyond monitoring linguistic production in the classroom and become aware of the complex and numerous processes of intercultural mediation that any foreign language learner undergoes (Buttjes, 1990, p. 55-56). The same idea is echoed by Valdes (1990) and Lessard-Clouston (1997).

Oftentimes, however, the culture embedded in the second/foreign language being taught is different and sometimes in conflict with the culture held by the learners of English. The English mastery by speakers of other languages might also create mixed feelings of happiness and disappointment (Rohmah, 2005b, p. 116), especially, when the speakers are aware of the domination of English over their languages—and also their cultures. An instance for this situation was experienced by Basthomi (2011) when he had the feeling that learning English would be futile—although later on he changed his feeling—for he believed that his English would not help him be a good Muslim. Part of this was because he did not see the

relationship of the English materials exposed to him at that point and his being a Muslim. What he saw was that the teaching of English with its norms mixed with the globalization was loaded with hedonistic life that was in conflict with his Muslim's values. In the Indonesian context, this might bring somewhat disapproving effects on students who are mostly Muslims whose religion does not endorse pleasure-seeking life propagated by hedonism.

Integrating Islamic messages in the English teaching might prevent students from feeling bewildered. It might reduce the tension between imperialistic English language (and literature and any other embedded norms) and situations in the post-colonial Indonesia. The researcher would like to relate this with Basthomi's (2011) later experience that changed his view toward English language as he goes to say:

Such a personal perplexity, however, did not last quite long and, in fact, ceased as I started to get along with Moslem students in the context of an Australian university. The fact that I had to use English to socialize with other fellow Moslems led me to the awareness that English (as any other languages) is neutral, to some degree: I was even confronted with the fact that English was used to communicate (Islamic) religious lessons. This situation drastically dropped my previous belief that there was no direct connexion between English and my religion—Islam.

Being a linguistic convert, my position as a faculty member at an English department has contributed to nurturing more intensive penchant of English on my part. (p.2)

While Basthomi's direct exposure to the use of English among Muslim people in Australia could change his attitude toward English, we can also help students to have better attitude toward English and behave more confidently in the potentially confusing situation by tailoring English materials with Islamic themes or the lives of the Muslims in English speaking countries. Thus, what is at stake here is material selection.

In this kind of scenario, the teaching of English is still in context but with values that are in line with the students' own values. This is also to respond to the advice from among Islamic School community in Indonesia that the English language training should be '*murni*' (pure), that is, there should be no hidden agenda to introduce Western values which are often characterized as lacking in a strong moral foundation, and the teaching materials should be appropriate to an Islamic educational environment (Indonesia Australia Language Foundation, 2007). In the Indonesian context, similar to many other Asian countries, the practical importance of English is recognized but the learning of Western values is not desired (Kirkpatrick & Prescott, 1995:99). To accommodate the objections from the Islamic school community, writers and teachers need to modify English, which is, an imperialistic language (Phillipson, 1992), into an instrumental language.

With Competency-based Curriculum in place, now schools in Indonesia are free to develop their own curricula by referring to content standard issued by *The Board of National Standards of Education* (Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan/BSNP). This opens up opportunities for teachers to incorporate any specific contents in line with the schools' mission. Teachers in Islamic schools can include the Islamic messages in their teaching materials while helping the students to master the targeted English language skills and components.

In this article, the writer will exemplify practical ways of how to incorporate Islamic contents and messages into the learning materials by observing the content standards stipulated in the curriculum. At the end of the paper, I include an example of lesson procedures in using an Islamic song to teach English.

## 1. Overview

The national education system in Indonesia includes public and private schools under the Ministry of National Education (MONE) and Islamic schools/*madrasahs* (public and private) under the management

of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA). However, all schools offering the national curriculum are subject to standards set by MONE. The Islamic School Sub-sector has a central role to play in national education. Approximately 6 million children, representing nearly 15% of school enrolment, attend *madrasahs*. This figure is significantly higher at junior secondary level, estimated at 21% students attending Islamic schools. There is considerable variation across regions, with West Nusa Tenggara (WNT) recording the highest percentage of children attending *madrasah*; the provincial MORA office statistics indicate that in 2006 approximately 25% of all children in the Lombok attend *madrasahs*. There is a growing demand in WNT, and growth rates are higher than the national average. The local communities support *Kyai* (Islamic leaders of educational institutions) to establish schools that provide a faith-based education grounded in Islamic values.

*Madrasah* education is expected to be ‘National Plus’ – a good general education based on the national curriculum *plus* a religious education designed to inculcate a strong understanding of religious and moral values based on the tenets of Islam. This vision echoes the debate whether *Madrasahs* should concentrate more on religious education while remaining poor in general education, or develop general education at the cost of poor religious education. This should be resolved by bringing *madrasahs* back to the original fundamental educational philosophy that underlines their establishment, that is, that Islamic education is a more comprehensive education than ordinary general education. Teachers, students and *madrasah* principals are also found out that they are in need of English materials with Islamic teaching in it (Rohmah, 2009). Under this situation, the teaching of English, especially, in *madrasahs* should be administered by incorporating Islamic teachings in it.

## 2. How to Incorporate

This section presents three ways of how to integrate the Islamic messages in the English teaching. The first is by writing and/or using English course-books loaded with Islamic teaching and the second is by using authentic materials containing Islamic values and messages, and the third is by using Islamic supplementary materials in addition to the general books available in the market.

### *Writing and using English course-book containing Islamic messages*

The first choice can be done only after a writer or a team of writers devote their time to writing an English course-book incorporating the Islamic messages. However, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, this kind of course-book has not been available in the Indonesian market. The only available ‘course book’ with suitable Islamic contents is ‘English in Context.’ This book is still in the form of draft copy intended as a resource book developed by trainers under the Islamic Schools English Language Project (ISELP) with Learning Assistance Program for Islamic Schools (LAPIS) funding. Only year VII was completed. The ISELP trainers were concerned about the poor materials being used by English teachers in the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) where they worked and therefore designed this book in an effort to minimize this hampering situation. The central aim was to provide the students with opportunities to talk about themselves and their lives in the *pesantren* with a significant focus on speaking and listening (Rohmah, 2010, p. 8-9).

The results of the evaluation administered by English Language Training for Islamic Schools (ELTIS, 2008) team show that ‘English in Context’ (EIC) scores the best among the most commonly used text books in three provinces in Indonesia (East Java, WNT, South Sulawesi). This is because the book is specifically designed for *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs/Islamic Secondary Schools) students; therefore, the topics, themes, contexts are relevant to the lives of the learners. EIC also contains numerous attractive color pictures of learners in the *pesantren* and gives plenty of opportunities for learners to talk about their lives as young people and as Muslims (Rohmah, 2010).

Therefore course-books similar to EIC need to be written and published, especially, for Islamic schools. The Islamic contents might be included in the course-books in two ways:

- Straightforwardly, that is, mentioning the Islamic topics explicitly, such as, 'How to do *wudlu*', 'Muslim to Muslim'. In this case, the title of the unit shows the Islamic messages openly so teachers as well as students can see and understand the Islamic messages easily.
- Inclusively, that is, including the Islamic messages in the materials indirectly through pictures, names, building, language activities, messages, etc. Unit title, such as, 'Can you keep the floor clean, please?', 'Daily activities,' including Muslims' activities are among the examples of the indirect inclusion of Islamic messages indirectly. The use of Muslim's names, for instance, Ahmad, Fathimah, Lathifah, Umar, Hakim, Azizah, Ali, Luthfia, might help the Muslim students express themselves more conveniently because they might feel that their life is linked to the books.

### **Using authentic materials containing Islamic messages**

In addition to using the available textbooks, teachers can insert Islamic teachings in their English classes by using authentic materials. Authentic materials are available and used in daily life, originally not intended for teaching learning process. A common example is newspaper. Other examples are 'junk mail', catalogues, novels & short stories, newspapers, magazines, shop flyers, telephone books, calendars, travel brochures, postcards, songs, DVDs, Radio shows and TV shows. To find newspaper with Islamic messages, teachers may, for instance, subscribe to 'Muslim News Digest' that can be obtained electronically. Other good sources for Islamic books can be found, for example, from IQRA International Education Foundation based in Chicago that provides different kinds of books in the printed forms and online. There are also video showing speeches or songs containing Islamic messages performed by native speakers of English.

Using authentic materials in the classroom is advantageous. Among the advantages are: the materials have positive effect on learner motivation; they provide authentic cultural information about the target culture; they provide exposure to real language; they relate more closely to learners' needs; and they support a more creative approach to teaching. However, authentic materials also have some weaknesses, for instance, they may use low-frequent words; using authentic materials might be a burden for teachers; and authentic materials do not contain suggestions on how to use them in the classrooms.

Since authentic materials are not originally intended for teaching, teachers who want to use them should select the materials so that they can be of maximum benefit for the students' learning. Among the guiding questions that the teachers need to think before using the materials include the following questions. Do the materials fit in with the syllabus? Do the materials provide opportunity for communicative practice? Do the materials facilitate self-assessment? Is the purpose of the materials clear? Are the materials up to date? Are the materials likely to motivate the learners? (Are they inherently interesting?) Do the materials have credibility? (Will the learners feel they come from a believable source?) Are the materials culturally appropriate, or do they provide an interesting view of another culture? Can learners relate to the materials on a personal basis? Can the materials be used with classes of various levels of ability? Are the materials quick, easy and cheap to prepare? Do the materials provide a good model of *usable* English?

### ***Using ELTIS Islamic Life Resource Pack***

Another way of incorporating Islamic teaching in the English classes is by using the available English textbooks and supplementary materials focusing on Islamic teachings. This is more feasible for teachers and students in Islamic schools in Indonesia. One supplementary material suitable for this context is Islamic Life Resource Pack written by ELTIS team (ELTIS, 2008).

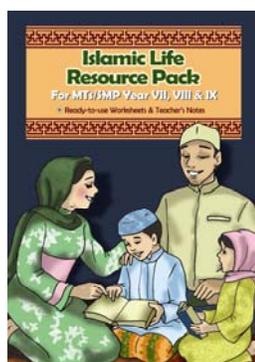
Prior to the writing of the materials, the team conducted research to get information on the kinds of English materials needed by *madrasahs* (ELTIS, 2008). The team consisted of native speakers and non-

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native speakers of English. Based on the information, the team designed ELTIS Resource Packs consisting of four packs: Listening Resource Pack, Game and Picture Resource Pack, Assessment Pack, and Islamic Life Resource Pack.

The Islamic Life Resource Pack is one of the four ELTIS Resource Packs designed to meet the needs of both MTs students and English teachers. By using the Pack, students know the English terms and expressions related to the Islamic themes so that they experience using the expressions in their daily communication.

The writing of the materials were executed through several phases. After conducting needs analysis of the students, teachers, and Principals in Junior High schools in three provinces in Indonesia, the writers—native speakers and non native speakers of English—wrote the draft of the materials. As certain terms originally from Arabic cannot be translated into English, for example, *wudlu*, *zakaah*, *hajj*, the writers kept the words in Arabic. Translating *wudlu* into ablution, *zakaah* into gift, *hajj* into pilgrimage does not give real meaning of the words as conceptualized in Islam. Hence, these kinds of words were written as they are. The draft was then proofread by native speakers of English, gender advisers, and Islamic advisers from IQRA International Education in Chicago. After being revised based on the suggestions of those people, the materials were then tried out among Master Trainers, and students in Islamic junior schools. More improvement was then made.

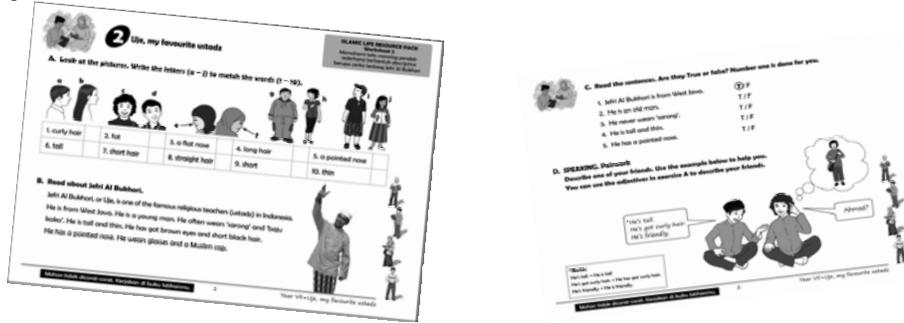


The pack consists of reading materials with a focus on Islamic practices and values as well as cross cultural understanding followed by language exercises. In the first reading text 'I like writing emails,' students are introduced to modern equipment to send messages, that is, email. The second text 'Uje, my favorite ustadz' responds to the young people's fond of famous people. A young, energetic and religious actor is chosen to fulfill the students' thirst for good model to follow. 'It's different, but we're happy' is a text promoting more understanding of Muslim people living in a western country. 'How to do *wudlu*' is an explicit text teaching students how to express in English ways of doing religious rituals before praying. 'How to make banana kolak' presents a procedure texts related to Muslims' habits of preparing a special appetizer during the fasting month of *Ramadhan*. 'Can you keep the floor clean, please' teaches students about cleanliness in addition to English expressions related to hygiene. Another text, 'Joyful Idul Fithri in India' tells students other ways of celebrating idul fithri, hence it is a cross cultural content. Other texts teach students English expressions in the context of some Islamic teachings. The pack consists of worksheets and teachers' guide that can be used as supplementary materials in class.

### **Ready-to-Use Worksheets**

The ready-to-use worksheets consist of 20 copies of each – suitable for large classes. The worksheets are laminated, so they are reusable and teachers do not have to photocopy the worksheets for each student

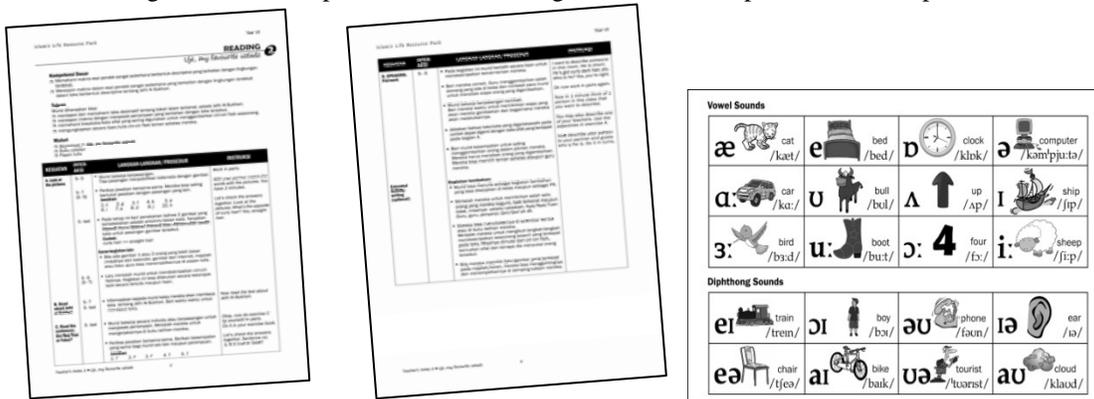
each time they teach the students. Each worksheet consists of fun and interesting activities suitable for the students' age and an Islamic social environment.



Islamic Life Resource Pack Worksheets

**Teacher's Guide**

It contains photocopiable A4-sized version of the worksheets. The guide consists of teacher-friendly teacher's notes for each worksheet. The notes include: standard competence, objectives, interaction patterns, stages, answer keys, alternative activities, suggested classroom instructions, and extended activities. The guide also has a phonemic chart of English sounds with pictures and samples in it.



Islamic Life Resource Pack Teacher's Guide

**Using Islamic Songs**

Islamic songs can also be used to teach English interestingly. The songs should be chosen by considering the age of the students, the size of the class, the language items to be introduced, the language ability of the students, the skills to be trained, and the messages to be conveyed. For Islamic secondary school students, we may choose a song entitled, 'We love Muhammad.'

The following procedures might be used in teaching English using 'We love Muhammad' song.

Interaction Patterns	Time	Activities	Materials	Aims
S---S (pair work)	5'	<b>Pre Listening activity</b> - SS have conversation about Prophet Muhammad	-	- Activate students (ss)' background knowledge
S---S (group work)	4'	Ordering Sentences - SS put the cuts up in a correct order	Cuts up sentences in the first	- Help ss recognize the words and structure used in the song - Let's ss predict the correct order

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			stanza	in the song - Help ss focus on meaning - Prepare ss for listening
T ---S---S	4'	<b>Whilst Listening</b> - SS listen to the first stanza of the song while checking the order of the sentences	The first stanza	- Give ss opportunities to listen and check the order of the sentences
T---S---S (group work)	8'	<b>Fill in the blanks</b> - T gives 2 <sup>nd</sup> stanza with some blanks in it. - SS predict what words are in the blanks. - Ss listen to the 2 <sup>nd</sup> stanza and check their answer	The 2 <sup>nd</sup> stanza deleted in some parts	- Help ss focus on meaning - Give ss exercise on grammar points or lexical sets (depending the deleted items) - Give focus to ss' listening
S---S (group work)	8'	Unjumble sentences - T distributes jumbled sentences to ss - Ss unjumble the jumbled sentences - SS listen to the 3 <sup>rd</sup> stanza and check their work	3 <sup>rd</sup> stanza	- Give ss exercise on grammar - Help ss to be creative with language - Give opportunities for ss to listen to the cassette
S---S (group work)	8'	Correct the wrong words - T distributes 4 <sup>th</sup> stanza with some words changed - SS identify the wrong words - Ss listen to the 4 <sup>th</sup> stanza and check their answers.	4 <sup>th</sup> stanza	- Give ss exercise on grammar and vocab - Give opportunities for ss to listen to the cassette
S---S	5'	- T distributes the whole text of the song - SS listen to the song and sing along the cassette	Whole text	- Give opportunities for ss to listen to whole song and enjoy the song
S---S (pair work)	5'	<b>Post Listening</b> Speaking in pairs - SS discuss with their friends about the content of the song		- Give opportunities for ss to understand the song better and appreciate the song. - Give opportunities for ss to practice speaking about Muhammad
		<b>Other alternatives</b> - Role play. SS prepare at home to perform a role play reflecting the song in the following meeting. - Writing. SS write a composition about 'We love Muhammad' at home. - Grammar focus. T focuses ss' attention on		- Help ss appreciate the song - Help ss develop their speaking skills - Help ss practice writing about Muhammad - Help ss understand grammar points in specific context.

		a grammar point and help ss understand it.		
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### 3. Materials

#### 1<sup>st</sup> stanza (Cuts up & put in correct order)

Allah sent him here to guide us with the message of Islam  
 Du  
 In the town of Mecca long ago a baby boy was born  
 Near the Ka'ba Alloh's holy house upon a Monday morn  
 With hair of black and eyes of brown a lovely child was he  
 With the smile so sweet that all agreed a special man he be

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza (fill in the blanks)

Ya Muhammad, Ya Muhammad  
 ----- him throughout --- ----  
 Allah ---- him here to guide us with the ----- of -----  
 Du  
 Though mother ----- he --- none  
 An ----- it is true  
 He always did his ---- best to ---- the poor their due  
 He was ---- to ----- man to rich and ----- alike  
 He was ---- because he --- them all as ----- in God's sight

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza (Unjumble sentences with 'o' symbols)

Ya Muhammad, Ya Muhammad  
 Praise him through all the land  
 Allah sent him here to guide us with the message of Islam  
 Du  
 ○ One night all alone was sitting  
 ○ came The angel to say  
 ○ in the name Read of Allah everyone and show the way  
 ○ quickly went to share Muhammad he had heard the words that  
 Come to Islam and follow me and hear God's holly words

#### 4<sup>th</sup> stanza (identify the wrong words)

Ya Muhammad, Ya Muhammad  
 Praise him through all the land  
 Allah sent him here to guide us with the message of Islam  
 Du  
 For hours and hours Muhammad worked and never tuck a rest  
 So that shoe and me would Muslims be and has Allah's great test  
 With patience, fitness, care, and have  
 Muhammad gathered all to meet Allah Lord the love  
 and now we proudly call ya ya ya ya

### 4. Conclusion

While teachers and students, especially, in Islamic schools, are in need for English materials with some Islamic messages, writers have opportunities to provide them with English course-books tailored with Islamic messages. In this case, in addition to basic requirements for good English book writers, good understanding of the Islamic messages is highly recommended for such writers so that messages inserted in the books will accurately represent Islamic principles. When writing such course books is difficult to do, using supplementary authentic materials containing Islamic themes—which now can be easily found

via the internet—together with the use of the general course-books available in the market might be easier and more possible.

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