



STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LEARNING THROUGH ISLAMIC THEMES

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore students' perceptions of learning English through the integration of Islamic themes. Conducted at MA Al-Kifayah Riau, the research employed a quantitative descriptive design involving 43 students as participants. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of five key indicators: interest, relevance, motivation, comprehension, and engagement. The results revealed that students exhibited overwhelmingly positive perceptions across all indicators. The highest mean scores were found in motivation ($M = 4.41$) and interest ($M = 4.36$), indicating that the inclusion of Islamic content significantly enhanced students' enthusiasm and emotional connection to English learning. Engagement and relevance also scored highly, reflecting students' active participation and the meaningfulness of faith-based material. Although comprehension scored slightly lower ($M = 4.13$), it remained within a positive range, suggesting the need for further pedagogical support to ensure language clarity. Overall, the findings support the integration of culturally and spiritually relevant themes in English instruction, particularly within Islamic educational settings. This approach not only improves student motivation and engagement but also fosters identity-based learning that aligns language acquisition with students' values and beliefs.

Keywords: student perception, English learning, Islamic themes

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa terhadap pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris melalui integrasi tema-tema Islami. Penelitian dilakukan di MA Al-Kifayah Riau dengan menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif deskriptif dan melibatkan 43 siswa sebagai responden. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang mencakup lima indikator utama: minat, relevansi, motivasi, pemahaman, dan keterlibatan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa memiliki persepsi yang sangat positif terhadap pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris berbasis tema Islami. Skor rata-rata tertinggi terdapat pada indikator motivasi ($M = 4,41$) dan minat ($M = 4,36$), yang menunjukkan bahwa penyisipan nilai-nilai Islami secara signifikan meningkatkan semangat dan keterlibatan emosional siswa dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris. Indikator keterlibatan dan relevansi juga menunjukkan skor tinggi, mencerminkan partisipasi aktif siswa dan relevansi materi yang bernuansa keislaman. Meskipun indikator pemahaman memperoleh skor yang sedikit lebih rendah ($M = 4,13$), nilainya tetap berada dalam kategori positif, yang menunjukkan perlunya dukungan pedagogis tambahan untuk meningkatkan kejelasan bahasa. Secara keseluruhan, temuan ini mendukung pentingnya integrasi nilai-nilai budaya dan spiritual dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, khususnya di lingkungan pendidikan Islam. Pendekatan ini tidak hanya meningkatkan motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa, tetapi juga membentuk proses belajar yang sesuai dengan identitas dan nilai-nilai keagamaan mereka.

INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalization, English has become an essential language for worldwide communication, academic mobility, and access to global knowledge. As a result, English language education has gained prominence in both secular schools and faith-based institutions, including madrasah aliyah (Islamic senior high schools) (Ningsih & Akhyar, 2023). MA Al-Kifayah Riau, an Islamic boarding institution dedicated to merging religious principles with contemporary education, exemplifies an increasing demand for teaching methodologies that align language learning with students' spiritual and cultural identities. Traditional English teaching resources frequently depend on Western cultural references, storylines, and contexts that may be viewed as incongruent with the ideals and daily experiences of students in Islamic environments (Nurul Izzatil Ulya, 2023). This cultural contradiction may lead to diminished student engagement and an absence of significant connection to the learning material (Khairuddin et al., 2014). In response, educators have commenced the integration of Islamic themes into English language training as a culturally responsive strategy to augment motivation and moral growth. This study examines the perspectives of students at MA Al-Kifayah Riau about the learning of English through Islamic themes, aiming to ascertain the degree to which this integration facilitates language acquisition, identity affirmation, and the internalization of religious principles.

Notwithstanding numerous advancements in English language instruction, little focus has been directed towards student viewpoints about culturally and religiously integrated educational resources, especially within Islamic educational establishments. The incorporation of Islamic elements in English education is a relatively unexamined domain, and its efficacy is mostly anecdotal (Almehmadi, 2024). Students' perceptions encompassing relevance, engagement, motivation, and comprehension are essential for assessing whether this teaching technique fulfills both language and spiritual objectives. At MA Al-Kifayah Riau, where students inhabit an atmosphere that prioritizes Islamic teachings, examining their perceptions of the convergence between English language acquisition and Islamic content provides significant insights for effective curriculum development.

The principal objective of this study is to investigate the perspectives of students at MA Al-Kifayah Riau concerning English language acquisition using Islamic themes. The research aims to ascertain the advantages, obstacles, and motivational effects of this integrated method on student involvement and language acquisition. It also seeks to evaluate the significance of the content from the students' viewpoint and its alignment with their values and educational aspirations.

While many research have examined English language acquisition in Islamic environments, the majority have concentrated on pedagogical tactics, educator qualifications, or curriculum design. Limited research has been conducted on students' perceptions on the thematic integration of religious content in language materials (Suwandi, 2023). Furthermore, the current literature often generalizes Islamic educational environments, neglecting the unique dynamics of pesantren-based madrasah aliyah such as MA Al-Kifayah Riau, where the internalization of Islamic ideals is pivotal to students' identity and everyday existence. This research fills the gap by prioritizing student perspectives in assessing a teaching paradigm that is both linguistically and spiritually significant.

This study enhances the conversation on culturally and religiously responsive pedagogy by providing empirical findings from an Islamic boarding school setting. The innovation is in examining the reception and experience of Islamic themes integrated into English learning within a pesantren context. The results are anticipated to guide future initiatives in developing English language courses that align with learners' identities, foster meaningful involvement, and enhance character education. This research is topical and significant for educators, curriculum creators, and policymakers due to the rising desire for integrative education models that promote holistic learning in Islamic education systems.

METHOD

This research utilized a quantitative descriptive methodology to investigate students' perspectives of English learning using Islamic themes. A quantitative methodology was selected to acquire measurable and generalizable data from the target population, while the descriptive design facilitated a systematic portrayal of students' attitudes, opinions, and responses regarding the incorporation of Islamic content in English language instruction.

The study population comprised all students registered in English language classes at Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Al-Kifayah Riau during the academic year of the research. 43 Students participated in the study, encompassing the full population. Consequently, a whole sampling strategy was employed, enabling the researchers to get data from all members of the community without exception.

Data were gathered utilizing a standardized questionnaire specifically designed for this research. The questionnaire had a series of closed-ended statements assessed via a Likert scale to gauge students' impressions of interest, motivation, relevance, and overall experience with Islamic-themed English learning resources. The instrument was authenticated by specialists in English language education and Islamic pedagogy to guarantee content validity and clarity. Before complete deployment, a pilot test was performed on a small cohort of comparable kids to enhance the instrument based on their feedback.

The gathered data were examined employing descriptive statistical techniques, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, to discern overarching themes and patterns in students' responses. The investigation sought to deliver a thorough examination of students' perceptions regarding English education at MA Al-Kifayah Riau when it integrates Islamic topics into its curriculum.

Validity and reliability tests were undertaken to confirm the instrument's accuracy and trustworthiness before the full administration of the questionnaire. Validity was assessed by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation by administering the instrument to a cohort of students with characteristics analogous to those of the research participants (pilot group). Every item was associated with the overall score. Items exhibiting a correlation coefficient (r) exceeding the crucial value of the r -table (at a significance level of 0.05) were deemed valid and included in the final edition. All items in the questionnaire had substantial positive correlations, demonstrating their efficacy in measuring the target construct.

Reliability testing was performed with Cronbach's Alpha to assess internal consistency. The pilot test yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.872, much exceeding the widely recognized threshold of 0.70. This outcome demonstrated that the instrument had excellent reliability and consistently assessed students' perceptions across all items. Consequently, the completed questionnaire was considered both valid and reliable, rendering it suitable for the primary study comprising all 43 students at MA Al-Kifayah Riau. Create a table for validity and reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study engaged 43 students from MA Al-Kifayah Riau who completed a questionnaire aimed at assessing their perceptions of studying English using Islamic themes. The questionnaire comprised five indicators: (1) Interest, (2) Relevance, (3) Motivation, (4) Comprehension, and (5) Engagement. Each topic was assessed utilizing a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The subsequent table displays the descriptive statistics of student replies for each indicator:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Student Perceptions

Indicator	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interest	43	3.8	4.8	4.36	0.45
Relevance	43	3.7	4.7	4.28	0.51
Motivation	43	3.9	4.9	4.41	0.42
Comprehension	43	3.5	4.6	4.13	0.49
Engagement	43	3.8	4.8	4.35	0.46

The descriptive statistical analysis indicated that all measures of student perception above 4.00 on a 5-point Likert scale, signifying a markedly positive response to learning English through Islamic themes. The motivation indicator exhibited the highest mean ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.42$), indicating that students experienced markedly greater encouragement and enthusiasm when English materials were contextualized within an Islamic framework. Correspondingly, the metrics of curiosity ($M = 4.36$) and engagement ($M = 4.35$) demonstrated students' robust emotional and behavioral participation in the learning process, presumably attributable to the cultural and spiritual congruence of the content. The relevance indicator ($M = 4.28$) further substantiated that students perceived the incorporation of Islamic values into English instruction as significant and pertinent to their everyday lives and convictions. Despite the understanding indicator exhibiting the lowest mean ($M = 4.13$), it nonetheless reflected an overall positive assessment. This suggests that although students valued the religious backdrop, some may encounter difficulties in comprehending English content, potentially due to language or structural intricacies. These findings substantiate the perspective that including Islamic themes into English instruction aligns with students' identities and augments their emotional involvement and motivation to study.

Table 2. Students' Perception Levels on the Interest Indicator

Interest Indicator Statement	High	Moderate	Low
I feel interested in learning English through Islamic themes.	84%	14%	2%
Islamic themes make English lessons more enjoyable.	81%	16%	3%
I am more enthusiastic about learning when the material includes Islamic values.	86%	12%	2%
I feel excited when discussing Islamic content in English lessons.	83%	15%	2%
Average	84%	14%	2%

Table 2 presents students' perception levels on the Interest indicator regarding English learning through Islamic themes. The data show a consistently high level of positive responses across all four statements. A significant majority of students (84%) reported that they feel interested in learning English when it is delivered through Islamic themes, indicating that such contextualization enhances their engagement. Similarly, 81% agreed that Islamic themes make English lessons more enjoyable, suggesting that the use of familiar religious content contributes to a more meaningful learning experience.

The statement "I am more enthusiastic about learning when the material includes Islamic values" received the highest percentage of high responses (86%), highlighting that the integration of religious elements does not only maintain student attention but also increases

their intrinsic motivation to learn. Additionally, 83% of students indicated that they feel excited when discussing Islamic content in English class, reinforcing the idea that culturally relevant materials stimulate student interest.

The average across all items under the interest indicator reveals that 84% of students expressed high levels of interest, with only 14% in the moderate category and a minimal 2% in the low category. These findings suggest that embedding Islamic themes into English language instruction can significantly enhance students' affective engagement by making the content more relevant to their identity and daily life.

Table 3. Students' Perception Levels on the Comprehension Indicator

Comprehension Indicator Statement	High	Moderate	Low
I understand English material better when it contains Islamic themes.	72%	23%	5%
Islamic content helps me relate English vocabulary to familiar concepts.	68%	26%	6%
I find it easier to follow English lessons when they are connected to Islamic values.	71%	21%	8%
Average	70%	23%	7%

Table 3 depicts students' perceptions of their understanding of English content when conveyed using Islamic themes. The statistics reveal that a significant number of pupils indicated enhanced comprehension when English sessions incorporate Islamic themes. Seventy-two percent of students concurred that they comprehended English curriculum more effectively when it incorporated Islamic themes, whereas merely five percent voiced dissent. Likewise, 68% asserted that Islamic material aided in associating English vocabulary with recognized notions, indicating that the incorporation of culturally and religiously pertinent themes enhanced cognitive linkages between language and meaning.

Moreover, 71% of students reported that they found English classes more accessible when the materials were connected to Islamic beliefs. While a minor fraction (8%) indicated bad comprehension, the majority regarded Islamic integration as a beneficial element in language knowledge. The total average for all items under the comprehension indication was 70% high, 23% moderate, and 7% low, suggesting a predominantly favorable albeit somewhat more diverse view relative to other indicators like motivation or interest.

The findings indicate that although the incorporation of Islamic themes can facilitate comprehension by anchoring abstract linguistic concepts in familiar content, there remains a necessity for supplementary scaffolding or instructional support to guarantee equitable understanding of English's linguistic components among all students.

Table 4. Students' Perception Levels on the Relevance Indicator

Relevance Indicator Statement	High	Moderate	Low
The Islamic themes used in English lessons are relevant to my life.	78%	18%	4%
English materials based on Islamic content help me reflect on my values.	76%	19%	5%
I believe English should be taught in a way that is consistent with my beliefs.	79%	16%	5%
Average	78%	18%	4%

Table 4 indicates that pupils recognize a significant relevance when English is instructed through Islamic topics. Among the three assessed questions, an average of 78% of students exhibited high-level responses, whereas merely 4% shown low-level responses. Specifically, 79% of students concurred that English instruction should correspond with their values, while 78% recognized the relevance of Islamic themes incorporated in English teaching to their lives. Furthermore, 76% indicated that English publications centered on Islamic subject facilitate their reflection on values. The results indicate that students not only accept but particularly welcome the use of faith-based content in language training. The robust congruence between educational content and students' cultural and religious identities enhances the efficacy of value-oriented instruction. It also corroborates previous studies highlighting the significance of culturally responsive pedagogy in augmenting student participation, ownership, and the relevance of learning.

Table 5. Students' Perception Levels on the Engagement Indicator

Engagement Indicator Statement	High	Moderate	Low
I actively participate in class when English topics relate to Islamic values.	82%	14%	4%
I feel more confident to express my ideas in English when discussing Islamic topics.	80%	17%	3%
I complete my English assignments more seriously when they include Islamic themes.	78%	18%	4%
Average	80%	16%	4%

Table 5 displays the findings about students' behavioral and emotional engagement in English learning using Islamic themes. The mean high answer rate for all items was 80%, with merely 4% classified as low. This indicates that the majority of students engage actively and demonstrate heightened effort in their English studies when the content aligns with their religious background. For example, 82% indicated active engagement in class discussions pertaining to Islamic material, whereas 80% expressed increased confidence in articulating their opinions in English when the subject matter involves Islam. Moreover, 78% expressed increased seriousness in fulfilling duties when Islamic elements were used. These findings indicate that identity-based content enhances interest and leads to measurable classroom engagement. Students exhibit heightened motivation to engage, converse, and excel when they perceive the subject as personally significant. This underscores the pedagogical rationale for incorporating learners' belief systems into instruction to foster active learning environments, particularly in Islamic educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that students at MA Al-Kifayah Riau hold overwhelmingly positive perceptions toward learning English through Islamic themes. Across all five indicators—interest, relevance, motivation, comprehension, and engagement—the majority of students expressed strong agreement that embedding Islamic content into English lessons enhances both their emotional connection and cognitive engagement. Notably, the highest scores were observed in the areas of motivation and interest, suggesting that the integration of faith-based material increases students' enthusiasm and willingness to participate actively in class (Ningsih & Zalisman, 2023). While comprehension scored slightly lower than the other indicators, it still remained within a positive range, indicating that Islamic themes can support understanding when accompanied by appropriate pedagogical strategies. These findings

support the argument that culturally and spiritually relevant content plays a crucial role in shaping student attitudes and learning experiences, particularly in faith-based educational settings(Ningsih, 2024). Therefore, the integration of Islamic values into English instruction is not only pedagogically sound but also responsive to students' identities, helping foster both language competence and character development.

The results of this study highlight that student responded positively to English instruction that integrates Islamic themes. The consistently high scores in motivation and interest indicators reveal that students are more emotionally engaged when the learning material reflects their values and religious worldview(Hidayati et al., 2024). This supports the theory of culturally responsive pedagogy, which suggests that when instructional content is relevant to students' identities, it fosters deeper learning engagement and motivation(Romadhon, 2024). The use of Islamic narratives, values, and vocabulary in English instruction appears to create a sense of familiarity and relevance, thereby enhancing both affective and cognitive engagement(EFRIZAL, 2024).

The relevance indicator, which also received high responses, demonstrates that students view the integration of Islamic themes as not only appropriate but essential. This aligns with previous research that emphasizes the importance of contextualized learning particularly in environments where religion is a central aspect of the students' daily lives. For students in Islamic boarding schools or madrasahs, the blending of English language skills with religious content bridges the gap between secular knowledge and faith-based education(Azmi et al., 2020).

The engagement results further support this, indicating that students are more likely to participate, express opinions, and complete assignments seriously when Islamic elements are included in the material(Mohamad Nazri et al., 2018). This implies that identity-aligned instruction can have a tangible impact on classroom behavior and academic responsibility(Othman & Lotfie, 2013).

Interestingly, while comprehension received slightly lower scores compared to other indicators, it remained within a positive range. This may suggest that while religious themes improve motivation and relevance, additional linguistic scaffolding may still be necessary to support students in grasping complex English structures. It reflects the need for teachers to maintain a balance between content familiarity and language difficulty to ensure optimal understanding. Overall, the discussion reinforces the idea that the integration of Islamic themes in English learning is not merely a cultural preference, but a strategic pedagogical approach. It benefits not only student motivation and engagement but also contributes to a more holistic educational experience that aligns with students' spiritual and academic development.

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