

## Exposing Islamic Character Values at English for Islamic Studies (EIS) Class

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### Abstract:

This descriptive qualitative research aims to describe the selection and usage of English for Islamic studies material based on Islamic character values. It was conducted at English for Islamic studies class followed by the students of *Akhwat As Syakhsiyah* Department, IAIN Pontianak. The results showed that the lecturer chose internet authentic material regarding Islamic character values, and he administered an online readability test to gain a reading passage that fits students' abilities. According to interviews with several students, after reading and discussing passages containing Islamic character values, students felt that such reading materials were beneficial information, and they attempted to behave according to Islamic characters mentioned in the reading passages.

**Keywords:** English for Islamic studies, Islamic character values, Islamic studies class

### A. Introduction

In April 2019, video of bullying was viral in social media. It happened in Pontianak, and the victim was a junior high school student while the suspects were 12 students of senior high school. They beat, hit, and kick her just because of puppy love (Wismabrata, 2019). Furthermore, Indonesia is the world's second rank of bullying (Indra, 2015), and it is an irony as Indonesia is popular with its friendship and tolerance.

To anticipate such violation, the ministry of education and culture has imposed a policy to strengthen the enforcement of character building through the integration of five main characters with the intra-curricular learning activity, co-curricular learning activity, and extra-

curricular learning activity at school. These characters include religious belief, nationalism, integrity, independence, and *gotong-royong*/mutual assistance (Kemdikbud, 2017). Character building or character education aims to expose students with noble character values so that the students implement the values in their daily life or activities (Hasibuan, Syah, & Marzuki, 2018; Jalil, 2012; Ngamanken, 2014).

In other words, the Effort that may be taken to prevent bullying, violation, intolerance and other negative conduct of youngsters is through the integration of good character values with all subjects (Saifurrohman, 2014; Tanzeh & Junaris, 2019). This is an opportunity for teachers or lecturers and other academicians to expose, introduce, and internalize the noble characters to students. One of the subjects that can involve good character values in the learning activity is English.

Several studies have been conducted as an attempt to integrate characters' values with English language teaching at the school (Islami, 2016; Mambu, 2015; Parlindungan, 2014). Yet, in the context of English for Islamic Studies, traditionally lecturer makes use of textbooks addressing Islamic discussion and issues such as "The Qur'an," "Pilgrimage to Mecca," "Life After Death," "The Angels," and so on, and he/she does not have any idea about integrating other Islamic discussions, e.g. Islamic noble character, with his teaching activity since he relies too much on the available textbooks. The difficulty of finding learning material for character building often occurs because of the unavailability of the material, while the teacher/instructor does not know what to do to instill good character values in his/her classroom learning activity (Faridi, 2014; Sudartini, 2019).

Thus through this research, the researcher tried to insert good character values in his English language class. The values were according to Islamic good character since he taught English for Islamic studies at IAIN Pontianak, and because of most of the learning activity at English for Islamic studies (EIS) class is reading activity, he selected some authentic reading materials containing Islamic character values. Islamic character itself is one of five main characters (religious belief) campaigned by the ministry of education and culture.

## B. Literature Review

### 1. Islamic Character Values

Islamic character values refer to *akhlaq mahmudah* such as honesty, humbleness, patience, respectfulness, resilience, sincerity, and other good characters while the bad character is called as *akhlaq madzimumah* for instance untruthfulness, arrogance, anger, disrespectfulness, desperateness, *riya*, *ujub*, *sum'ab* and other bad characters (Tamuri, 2007).

Further, good character is also based on how to maintain a relationship with Allah, the One, *habluminnallah*, and with other human, *habluminnas*. In detail *akhlaq* to other humans include *akhlaq* to parents, *akhlaq* to the teacher, *akhlaq* to the older person, *akhlaq* to the neighbor, *akhlaq* to other Muslim, *akhlaq* to non-Muslim (Izfanna & Hisyam, 2012). Those noble *akhlaq* or noble characters are according to Al Qur'an and *As-Sunnah* (Prophet Muhammad's teachings).

The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the role model of Islamic character (Hamid & Hassan Mydin, 2009). He is the best mankind, sent to his *ummah* (Muslims). He is the best husband, father, grandfather, and friend, and Muslims should behave according to his teachings such as how to maintain a wife, love and take care of children, and respect friend, guest, neighbor and even prison or enemy (Alwani, 2019). In other words, Muslims

must have *aklaqul karimah* when interacting with other people, and indeed the prophet himself was sent by Allah to enhance the moral of human beings as hadith, narrated by Ahmad 2/381, the prophet said: "I am sent to complete one's noble character".

The example of Islamic good character can also be learned from the other 25 prophets. Another role model is Prophet Muhammad's friends or *sahabah* as they did their actions as Muslims according to what Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did. Good story of Islamic scholars and figures are also role models for internalizing Islamic noble character values to students (Haryanto & Akhirin, 2018).

## **2. Selection of Reading Materials based on Islamic Character Values**

In selecting and providing reading materials, the lecturer noticed the following aspects: pupil's level, pupil's interest, pupil's needs, and pupil's background knowledge (Rahimpour & Hashemi, 2011). To select materials that fit students' academic level, the lecturer made use of authentic materials especially those obtained from the internet and he then only need to administer a readability test of the materials. Some research found that the readability test of reading text positively influences students' learning activity using the material (Ease, 2009; Kasule, 2011; Neuhauser, Rothschild, & Rodríguez, 2007; Vajjala & Meurers, 2014). To get an instant automatic result of the test, the lecturer used online free applications by clicking certain websites such as <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/>.

Meanwhile, the students' needs in the context of the effort in internalizing Islamic character value is exposure to moral message and Islamic teaching contained in reading passages. Next, the last aspect that should be considered in choosing learning material is the pupil's background knowledge. According to some research, background knowledge/schemata play a crucial role that influences the reader's comprehension when reading (Concepción, 2004; Nižnan, Pelánek, & Rihák, 2015; Taboada & Guthrie, 2006; Thompson & Zamboanga, 2004; Wang & Degol, 2014). However, in selecting learning material, the lecturer should consider pupils' needs, and does not merely emphasize their schemata (Arias, 2007).

Since the textbook of English for Islamic studies used by English lecturer often merely discusses "Obeying Allah," "Obeying Prophet Muhammad," "Obeying Parents," "Al-Qur'an," and "Pillars of Islam," the researcher, in this research, selected material containing Islamic character values of respecting guest, respecting teacher, respecting others, and maintaining a relationship with non-Muslims.

## **C. Research Methodology**

This was descriptive qualitative research. It was conducted to observe a community, object, set of conditions, way of thinking, or current event (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). Such research is intended to describe a depiction or picture systematically, factually, and accurately, and is also employed to describe or analyze research findings but is not aimed to draw an extended conclusion (Maxwell & Reybold, 2015). Further, it is utilized to identify facts through precise interpretation (Crozier, Denzin, & Lincoln, 1994).

This descriptive qualitative research was conducted at the Department of Akhwal As Syaksiyah, IAIN Pontianak. Its population was the students of the department who followed English for Islamic studies class. Next, the researcher utilized a purposive sampling technique by considering and selecting particular persons that can give accurate information needed by his research (Tongco, 2007).

During this research, the researcher observed classroom reading activity using Islamic character valued based EIS material; he monitored and made a note as to students' activity in reading phases: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. Then he interviewed some of the students by asking their opinion regarding the text they read and the reading activity they underwent.

The researcher analyzed the data, which he obtained from observation and interview, through interactive model data analysis: "data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For data reduction, the researcher focused on matters related to the problem formulation of the research: teacher' selecting reading materials, his instruction in reading phases, his effort to introduce and expose students to the moral message of the reading passage, and students' reading activity and their response to the usage of reading material based on Islamic character values. After doing data reduction, he displayed the data by arranging certain data that he focused on data reduction, and then, according to that, he could conclude. Further, to assure the trustworthiness, he conducted triangulation by comparing information or data I got from one student to another.

## D. Findings

### 1. Reading Passage Containing Islamic Character Value of Respecting Gues

The reading material used to expose the Islamic character value of respecting guest was entitled "Guests – A Blessing of Allah" downloaded from <https://islamicencyclopedia.wordpress.com/2013/12/23/guests-a-blessing-of-allah/> and the result of its readability online test was "Your page (<https://islamicencyclopedia.wordpress.com/2013/12/23/guests-a-blessing-of-allah/>) has an average grade level of about 6. It should be easily understood by 15 to 17-year-olds". The following table displays the detail of the readability test result:

Table 1: Readability Indices

No.	Readability Indices	Score
1.	Flesch Kincaid Reading Ease	74.9
2.	Flesch Kincaid Grade Level	4.9
3.	Gunning Fog Score	6.4
4.	SMOG Index	5.5
5.	Coleman Liau Index	10.1
6.	Automated Readability Index	3.4

The passage was addressed in classroom reading activity involving three phases: pre-reading activity, while-reading activity, and post-reading activity. In the pre-reading activity, after distributing reading passage to students, the lecturer questioned students

about what students know about guests according to their experiences. Such a question was intended to bridge between students' prior knowledge/schemata with a reading passage. Then, he asked students about what they would probably read based on the title. This was aimed to formulate students' reading purpose and motivation i.e. to find information about 'guests – a blessing of Allah'.

Next, in while-reading, the lecturer told students to read the passage silently. After that, he purposed some questions related to reading material: "What Prophet Muhammad said about visiting other Muslims?" "Who served his guests generously, mentioned in the Qur'an (51: 24-27)?" "What will Allah do to those who warmly welcome their guests?" and "Who was the man coming to Abraham's house?"

Then, in post-reading, the lecturer questioned students "What is the lesson that you can learn from the passage?" S13 replied: "We can learn what should be done to respect a guest" then the lecturer said, "good, well done". Further, the lecturer proposed other questions: "Have you ever been ignored when visiting one's house?" "What do you feel?" The answer to the questions was not available in the passage thus, he told the students to activate their background knowledge to answer the questions. Such questions are higher-level questions and beneficial to promote students' critical thinking (Veeravagu, Muthusamy, Marimuthu, & Subrayan, 2010). S22 answered the lecturer's question "I once went to my friend's house, but I was ignored as he was busy with his mobile phone, he did not even offer me a beverage or mineral water". "I felt so sad at that time, and I don't think that I will go to his house next time".

After class, the lecturer interviewed some students about their opinion regarding the passage. S5: "This reading text remind me to respect guest", S19: "I can learn English and Islamic teaching at the same time", S11: "It is interesting topic, and I should always respect anyone who comes to my house because it is *barakah*", S25: "from the passage I know that I must welcome and serve my guest because he can avoid me from calamities". Those statements showed that students think that the passage is beneficial for them as they can learn English and Islamic good character simultaneously.

## **2. Reading Passage Containing Islamic Character Value of Respecting Teacher**

To internalize the Islamic character value of respecting teacher to students, the lecturer provided a reading passage entitled "Status of Teachers in Islam". It was obtained from <http://edugrid.pk/status-of-teachers-in-islam/>, and its readability test result was "Your page (<http://edugrid.pk/status-of-teachers-in-islam/>) has an average grade level of about 7. It should be easily understood by 16 to 18-year-olds". In detail the result of online readability test of the passage is as the following table:

Table 2: Readability Indices

No.	Readability Indices	Score
1.	Flesch Kincaid Reading Ease	70.4
2.	Flesch Kincaid Grade Level	5.7
3.	Gunning Fog Score	6.8
4.	SMOG Index	6
5.	Coleman Liau Index	10.4
6.	Automated Readability Index	4.2

In pre-reading, the lecturer questioned students "What do you know about the teacher?"; S30: "Teacher is someone who teaches students at school"; lecturer: "Good answer, but the term of teacher we are going to discuss today does not only refer to those who teach students at school but those who tell us any knowledge and valuable information, and train us to acquire particular skills as well, and the passage we are reading today is entitled "Status of Teachers in Islam". Then, before telling students to read, the lecturer purposed a question "What most likely this passage addresses according to its title?"

In while-reading, the lecturer told students to read the passage silently, and afterward, he purposed some questions related to the reading text: "What Imam al-Baqir said about teacher?"; "What is Umar Ibn Al Khattab's opinion about scholar?"; "Mention teacher's numerous rights according to Imam as-Sajjad!"; and "What Qur'an says about those who acquire knowledge?"

In post-reading, the lecturer asked students about what went right or went wrong during classroom reading activity. He then asked two questions that beyond but still associated with the reading passage: "What do you think about disrespecting teachers?"; "What is your opinion on the viral video of students' violating their teacher?" The answers were different from one student to another since they were based on students' way of thinking and could not be found in the reading passage.

Next, the lecturer interviewed some students about their opinion on the passage they had just read. S12: "After reading the passage I should be careful; I must respect all my teachers at SD, SMP, SMA, and IAIN" S27: "From what we lean today I become more afraid of hurting my teacher and lecture because my knowledge will not *barakah*"

### 3. Reading passage containing Islamic Character Value of Respecting Others

In the next classroom reading activity, the lecturer provided students with a reading passage entitled "Hurting the Felling of the others". This passage was aimed to internalize the Islamic character values of respecting others to students. It was downloaded from <https://sufilive.com/Hurting-the-Feelings-of-Others-1436-EN-print.html>, and the result of its online readability test was "Your page (<https://sufilive.com/Hurting-the-Feelings-of-Others-1436-EN-print.html>) has an average grade level of about 7. It should be easily understood by 16 to 18 years olds". In detail, the result of the online readability test of the passage is the following table:

Table 3: Readability Indices

No.	Readability Indices	Score
1.	Flesch Kincaid Reading Ease	77.5
2.	Flesch Kincaid Grade Level	5.9
3.	Gunning Fog Score	8.1
4.	SMOG Index	6.2
5.	Coleman Liau Index	8.5
6.	Automated Readability Index	5

In the pre-reading activity, the lecturer asked students about their feeling when they were hurt by other people. He then told students to predict what most possibly discussed by the passage according to its title. S16: "We are discussing the effect of hurting other people"; lecturer: "let's read the passage to make sure whether your answer is correct?"

Further, in while-reading lecturer told students to read the passage silently and afterward, to check their reading comprehension, he purposed several questions: "what is meant by being silent is equal to gold?" "What did the Prophet Muhammad Say about controlling the tongue?" and "Why we cannot directly ask for Allah's forgiveness after hurting others?"

In post-reading, the lecturer asked students about whether they once hurt their parents, friends, neighbors, and other people. If they once did that, the lecturer then said: "Have you asked for forgiveness from them?" S4: "I once hit stranger on the road, and now I felt sorry, I tried to find him but I fail as I neither know his name nor his address, I am confused what to do?"; lecturer: "If you cannot find him, you should do good things such as almsgiving and its merit is intended as a reward for him. Then make *dua* so that Allah forgives your fault?"

After classroom reading activity, the lecturer interviewed some students about their feeling regarding reading material. S17: "I like reading this reading text because it reminds me not to hurt other humans"; S9: "From the passage, I understand that Allah will not forgive our making mistake to other before we ask for forgives to the person we hurt and I am happy to know that".

#### 4. Reading Passage about Maintaining Relationship with Non-Muslims

The passage that the teacher selected to explain Islamic character value of maintaining the relationship with non-Muslims was entitled "Attitudes and Behaviour of the Prophet towards Non-Muslims". It was downloaded from <http://www.lastprophet.info/attitudes-and-behavior-of-the-prophet-towards-non-muslims>, and the result of its online readability test was "Your page (<http://www.lastprophet.info/attitudes-and-behavior-of-the-prophet-towards-non-muslims>) has an average grade level of about 8. It should be easily understood by 17 to 19-year-olds". The detailed result is displayed in the following table:

Table 4: Readability Indices

No.	Readability Indices	Score
1.	Flesch Kincaid Reading Ease	59.1
2.	Flesch Kincaid Grade Level	7.6
3.	Gunning Fog Score	8.7
4.	SMOG Index	7.8
5.	Coleman Liau Index	12
6.	Automated Readability Index	6.1

In pre-reading, the lecturer asked students about what they knew about maintaining a relationship with non-Muslim; S11: "We should refer to a *quranic ayah: lakum dinukum waliyadin*"; S9: "even Indonesia consists of people from different entices and religions, we must always unite as a nation so that we must respect each other". Then, the lecturer asked students about what they would read based on the title of the reading passage.

In while-reading, after distributing reading passage to students, the lecturer told them to read the passage silently and afterward he questioned students about information mentioned in the passage. "What is region well known as the Golden Crescent?" "What are religions of Hejaz people before converting to Islam?" and "What the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said about tormenting non-Muslim?" Then the lecturer randomly pointed a student and told him to mention the basic principles of the prophet's relations with non-Muslims.

In post-reading, the lecturer along with students analyzed unfamiliar vocabularies found in the passage and then the lecturer proposed a question in which the answer could not be found in the passage but still related to its topic "Will you say 'Merry Christmas' to your Christian or catholic relatives or friends on Christmas day?" S15: "Yes, of course, I don't think it is forbidden according to our religion to say 'Merry Christmas' to our non-Muslims relatives or friends as long as we do not trust their belief; we only say that because want to maintain a relationship with them" meanwhile S12 said "I disagree with her opinion; I think we need not say 'Merry Christmas' to them, we only have to respect them and do not bother them when they celebrate Christmas day" lecturer "Islamic scholars have different views on the matter of saying 'Merry Christmas' to Christians or Catholics; some of them allow it but some others have forbidden it, but the most important is that Islam tells us to respect and do not hurt them as long as they respect and do not hurt us".

Once students had finished reading and comprehending the passage, the lecturer interviewed some of them about their opinion on the classroom reading activity. S3 "the reading text is easy to understand and I am familiar with most of the vocabularies, then from the passage I learn how to maintain a relationship with non-Muslim"; S17 "I am impressed with the story of prophet Ibrahim when he was warned by Allah because he did not serve his *Majusi/Zoroastrian* guest improperly". Based on the statements, it can be inferred that the selection and usage of a reading passage discussing maintaining a relationship with non-Muslim is not difficult to comprehend, and contains a moral message telling the reader to be always kind to everybody including non-Muslims.



## **E. Discussion**

The interview with several students indicates that students have a positive perception of the engagement of Islamic character values in EIS Materials. They affirm that the usage of such material enables them to learn English and acknowledge the noble values of Islam simultaneously. The students' positive perception of the material may influence students' learning motivation (Deslauriers, McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, & Kestin, 2019; Manwaring, Larsen, Graham, Henrie, & Halverson, 2017; Noor Erma Abu & Eu, 2014).

Meanwhile, the lecturer's involving higher-level questions in reading comprehension phases: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading are not only beneficial to evaluate students' comprehension but also allow them to think critically and creatively (Li et al., 2016; Mohd Zin, Eng, & Rafik-Galea, 2014). Furthermore, proposing higher-level questions may support students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) (Nguyễn & Nguyễn, 2017; Retnawati, Djidu, Kartianom, Apino, & Anazifa, 2018; Tajularipin, Muniyan, Diwiyah, Raidah, & Suzieleez Syrene, 2017; Yee et al., 2015).

Next, the lecturer employs and selects authentic EIS materials from the Internet which is beneficial to find up-to-date materials containing new and factual issues. Authentic learning material itself is material produced or designed not for instructional purposes (Macwan, 2015) such as newspapers, magazines, movies, songs, radio or television news, and so forth. Research shows that authentic materials can promote students' reading comprehension; even some others reveal that the usage of such materials can improve students' reading interest and motivation (Akbari & Razavi, 2015; Emerick, 2019; J. Liu, 2016).

Above all, according to some students, the usage and selection of reading material of EIS is useful for them to be aware of Islamic good values which should be implemented in their daily life. The usage of the reading material aims to expose students with *akblaqul karimah* like the saying 'you are what you read', in other words, reading materials may influence readers' personality (He, Huang, Wang, Meng, & Yan, 2015; X. Liu et al., 2016).

## **F. Conclusion**

As the effort to expose and introduce students to Islamic character values in EIS class, the lecturer selected and used internet authentic material for he could find easy up-to-date information only by clicking a certain website, and then he administered online readability test to get reading a passage that fits students' abilities. Further, the lecturer chose reading passages containing following Islamic character values: respecting guest, respecting teacher, respecting others, and maintaining a relationship with non-Muslims because available EIS textbook used by English lecturer often merely discusses about "Obeying Allah" "Obeying Prophet Muhammad" "Obeying Parents" "Al-Qur'an" and "Pillars of Islam". Next, in post-reading, the lecturer purposed creative questions in which aimed to make students think critically as the answer to the question could not be found

in the passage but their mind or according to their experiences and background knowledge. Further, according to the result of the interview with students after classroom reading activity or after reading the passages containing Islamic character values, students said that the passages provide useful information about how to behave according to Islamic teachings.

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