

Interpreting pedagogical beliefs: English language teaching in Islamic educational institutions

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ABSTRACT

Within Islamic educational institutions, English language instruction embodies a dual focus: the cultivation of linguistic proficiency and the transmission of ethical and spiritual values. This qualitative phenomenological study investigates the pedagogical beliefs of English teachers in *Madrasah Aliyah* (Islamic senior high schools) and their subsequent enactment in classroom practice. The research addresses two core questions: (1) What epistemological and pedagogical beliefs underpin their approach to English language teaching? and (2) How are these beliefs operationalized in instructional strategies and teacher-student dynamics? Conducted across three urban centers in Indonesia—Jakarta, Bogor, and Tangerang—the study engaged eleven experienced English teachers, each with over five years of service. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations, then subjected to thematic analysis. Findings reveal that teachers conceptualize English not merely as a global lingua franca but as a vehicle for fostering ethical conduct and spiritual consciousness. This belief system manifests in pedagogical actions such as adapting secular textbook content, intentionally embedding Islamic principles into lessons, and modeling values of respect and integrity. The study concludes that a strong alignment exists between teacher belief and pedagogical practice within this faith-based context. It underscores the necessity for teacher education programs to explicitly bridge English language teaching methodologies

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with Islamic educational philosophy and calls upon curriculum developers to design materials that integrate linguistic and moral-ethical learning objectives.

Keywords: *English language teaching; Islamic education; Pedagogical beliefs; Qualitative research; Teacher cognition*

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, English has emerged not only as a lingua franca but also as a key to accessing academic, professional, and intercultural opportunities worldwide (Nafee & Farid, 2025; Zeng & Yang, 2024). As English language proficiency becomes increasingly essential, educational systems across diverse cultural and religious landscapes have responded by integrating English into their curricula, for example, Piyawason (2024) in Thailand, Dimici and Başbay (2023) in Türkiye, and Kim, Brutt-Griffler and Park (2023) in South Korea. Islamic educational institutions, which traditionally prioritize religious and moral instruction, are no exception (Hamid, 2022; Sidqurrahman, 2024). These institutions face the unique challenge of embedding English language teaching within a framework that upholds Islamic values, philosophies, and pedagogical traditions. This dual educational mandate prompts important questions about how English is taught, and more critically, what beliefs underlie the pedagogical choices of English teachers working within these religiously informed contexts.

While considerable research has been conducted on ELT (English Language Teaching) in secular and multicultural settings, relatively little is known about the belief systems of teachers operating in Islamic educational environments. Teacher beliefs, defined as the implicit principles that guide instructional decisions (Nalipay et al., 2019), play a crucial role in shaping classroom practices, curricular choices, and teacher-student interactions. In Islamic schools, where educational goals are inseparable from moral and spiritual development, religious doctrine, cultural expectations, and personal convictions may deeply influence these beliefs. Yet, the literature remains sparse on how English teachers reconcile the perceived Western ideological underpinnings of the English language with the values central to Islamic education. However, while the practice of ELT in these institutions has been increasingly documented, the underlying pedagogical belief systems of the teachers themselves remain largely unexamined. This gap highlights a crucial area of inquiry, as understanding these belief systems can reveal how faith-based values interact with professional pedagogical frameworks and influence everyday teaching decisions. Exploring these pedagogical beliefs is vital for understanding the multifaceted ways in which teachers mediate between language, culture, and faith in their teaching practices.

In light of these concerns, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What core pedagogical beliefs do teachers hold about teaching English within Islamic educational contexts? and (2) How do these beliefs shape their instructional practices and classroom interactions with students? The objectives of this research are twofold: first, to

explore and categorize the key pedagogical beliefs of English teachers working in Islamic educational institutions, and second, to analyze how these beliefs are enacted through teaching methods, classroom strategies, and teacher-student relationships. By investigating these issues, the study aims to contribute to the growing body of work on culturally responsive pedagogy, enrich the understanding of teacher cognition in religious schooling environments, and offer practical insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators seeking to harmonize English language instruction with Islamic educational values.

2. Literature review

2.1. Islamic pedagogical philosophy as cultural lenses influencing pedagogy

Islamic pedagogical philosophy is rooted in a comprehensive worldview that intertwines knowledge acquisition with moral, spiritual, and ethical development (Islam, 2024; Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, 2024). Central to this tradition are the concepts of *tarbiyah* (holistic education), *adab* (proper conduct and character), and *tawhid* (the unity of God), which collectively shape the aims and processes of teaching and learning in Islamic contexts. *Tarbiyah* emphasizes the nurturing of learners not only cognitively but also spiritually and emotionally, reflecting the Prophet Muhammad's model of integrated moral education (Hashim, 2024; Younis et al., 2024). *Adab* goes beyond behavioral etiquette to encompass a deep internalization of justice, humility, and respect in the learner-teacher relationship (Mudzkirah & Rivauzi, 2024). Meanwhile, *tawhid* provides the ontological foundation for education, asserting that all knowledge ultimately points to the Creator and should be framed within a unified, divinely anchored vision of reality (Husni & Hayden, 2024; Lombard, 2024). These principles collectively encourage a pedagogical stance where teaching is viewed not merely as a technical act but as a form of spiritual guidance and ethical responsibility.

When applied to the teaching of English, these Islamic values introduce a distinctive orientation toward curriculum content, instructional strategies, and the teacher's professional identity (Pallathadka et al., 2023). For instance, English materials are often selectively adapted to align with Islamic moral frameworks, and teaching methods may be designed to encourage both language proficiency and character development. Teachers operating within this paradigm may perceive themselves not only as educators but also as moral exemplars and spiritual mentors (*murabbi*), entrusted with the dual task of academic instruction and moral development. As such, pedagogical decisions are frequently filtered through a religious-ethical lens, shaping how language skills are contextualized and delivered. Understanding Islamic educational philosophy as a cultural lens is thus essential for interpreting the beliefs and practices of English language teachers in faith-based institutions, as it informs both their educational objectives and the deeper purpose they ascribe to language teaching.

2.2. *Teacher beliefs in language education*

Teacher beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping instructional decision-making, classroom interactions, and overall pedagogical orientations (Ambusaidi et al., 2020). These beliefs, often deeply embedded and implicitly held, influence how teachers perceive students, interpret curriculum goals, and choose teaching strategies. In the context of language education, beliefs extend beyond methodological preferences to encompass assumptions about language acquisition, the purpose of language learning, and the cultural implications of language use (Truan & Jahns, 2024). They act as cognitive frameworks through which teachers construct meaning, respond to challenges, and address the complexities of diverse classroom environments. Although these beliefs may not always be explicitly articulated, they significantly impact teaching behavior and professional judgment.

In ELT, teacher beliefs are especially influential due to the ideological and cultural dimensions associated with the English language (Mirhosseini, 2018). These beliefs are often shaped by personal experiences, institutional norms, educational backgrounds, and sociocultural values. Teachers bring to the classroom a unique set of convictions about what constitutes effective teaching, how students learn best, and what role language plays in identity formation and social mobility (De-Costa & Norton, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2019). However, there is often a disjunction between what teachers believe and what they practice, particularly when institutional constraints, curricular demands, or sociopolitical factors are at play. Understanding teacher beliefs is, therefore, essential for interpreting instructional practices, supporting professional development, and fostering reflective pedagogy (Gallagher & Scrivner, 2024), especially in contexts where language education intersects with broader cultural or religious frameworks.

2.3. *English language teaching in Islamic educational contexts*

English language education holds a complex yet increasingly significant position in Islamic educational settings, particularly within Muslim-majority countries where English is often taught as a foreign or additional language. The rise of globalization, coupled with the growing demand for international communication and access to higher education and employment, has led many Islamic institutions to adopt English as part of their formal curriculum (Taguchi, 2014). English is perceived as a powerful tool for socioeconomic advancement and cross-cultural engagement in these contexts. Consequently, Islamic schools face the challenge of balancing the instrumental value of English with preserving religious and cultural identity, resulting in a unique pedagogical space where linguistic goals must be harmonized with spiritual and moral objectives.

Despite its global utility, English is frequently associated with Western ideologies, secular worldviews, and cultural narratives that may conflict with the principles upheld in Islamic education (Hamid, 2022). For many educators in these institutions, the English language is not a neutral medium of communication but one embedded with cultural and ideological assumptions that must be critically negotiated. Concerns often arise about the

influence of language content on learners' values and identity, particularly when instructional materials include references that are incongruent with Islamic teachings (Scatolini, 2023). Teachers may find themselves in the position of cultural mediators, tasked with filtering or modifying content to ensure alignment with Islamic ethics. This tension creates a pedagogical dynamic where English is simultaneously embraced for its utility and approached cautiously for its perceived ideological implications.

In response to these concerns, many Islamic educational institutions strive to integrate Islamic values into English language instruction, both in content and pedagogical approach. This integration often involves adapting materials to include culturally appropriate themes, embedding moral lessons within language exercises, and framing language learning as a means to serve religious and ethical purposes. Teachers may emphasize virtues such as honesty, respect, and responsibility during lessons, using English not only as a linguistic tool but also as a medium for reinforcing Islamic character development. The intentional blending of language instruction with spiritual education reflects the broader educational philosophy of Islamic schools, where learning is not merely academic but inherently value-laden. Understanding how teachers balance and negotiate these dual aims is essential for appreciating the complexities of English language teaching in Islamic contexts.

2.4. Previous studies on teacher beliefs in faith-based and Islamic schools

An increasing body of literature has examined the intersection between religious belief systems and educational practices in faith-based institutions, particularly Islamic schools. These studies span leadership perspectives, teacher identity, pedagogical strategies, and institutional dynamics. While some have explored the implications of religious beliefs on school governance and policy (Alazmi & Bush, 2023; Brooks et al., 2020), others have focused on how such beliefs shape teaching practices and professional identity development within Islamic contexts (Succarie, 2024; Tambak et al., 2023). Collectively, this scholarship affirms that religiosity and belief systems significantly influence how educational actors operate in Islamic schools. However, a specific focus on English language teachers' pedagogical beliefs - especially how these beliefs are enacted in daily classroom practice - remains underexplored.

Several studies have illuminated the challenges educators face in reconciling secular curricular demands with religious commitments. Adnan (2017) and Munandar (2022) document the tension English teachers experience when attempting to integrate Islamic values into English language instruction, particularly in contexts where English is perceived as a cultural product of the West. Similarly, Muhalim (2022) highlights how neoliberal ideologies and global English create conflicted spaces for teachers in faith-based institutions, affecting their ideological formation and identity. While these works underscore the ideological dilemmas teachers manage, they fail to fully explore the specific pedagogical beliefs that support these tensions or how those beliefs materialize in classroom interactions.

Other contributions have examined the broader role of religious beliefs in shaping professional practice and teacher-student relationships. Charki et al. (2021) demonstrate that teachers' implicit attitudes, more than religious affiliation alone, influence the quality of student-teacher relationships in Islamic schools. In a similar vein, Häusler et al. (2019) provide a broad review suggesting that teachers' religiosity impacts pedagogical decisions, but note a significant empirical gap in exploring how these beliefs influence classroom-level practice. This gap is further supported by studies such as Zamsiswaya et al. (2024), which point to the role of Islamic behavior and teacher identity in shaping project-based learning in moral theology, though without extending this analysis to English language instruction specifically.

Leadership-focused studies, while informative, largely address institutional ethos rather than individual pedagogical convictions. For example, Alazmi (2023) and Brooks et al. (2020) show how school leaders internalize and project Islamic values in their leadership roles, but do not examine how these values translate into the instructional beliefs and methods of classroom teachers. Similarly, Saada (2022) and Martínez-Ariño and Teinturier (2019) highlight the civic and pluralist challenges in religious education, suggesting potential implications for teacher beliefs in diverse societies, but without offering insight into the micro-level pedagogical practices within classrooms. Gleeson and O'Neill (2017) offer a broader perspective, emphasizing the growing prioritization of safe and caring school environments over explicitly faith-based objectives, particularly in Catholic settings, a trend echoed by Hammad and Shah (2019) in the context of Muslim schools in the UK.

A smaller subset of studies has begun to engage more directly with pedagogical processes. Amin (2023) and Tuna (2021) examine moral and value-based education frameworks and the professionalization of Islamic education teachers, respectively, highlighting the growing complexity of teaching in religious environments. However, their focus lies primarily in curriculum policy and teacher training, rather than the lived pedagogical beliefs of classroom practitioners. Meanwhile, Tambak et al. (2023) and Succarie (2024) emphasize the formative role of Islamic teacher education in shaping professional identity. Yet, their findings relate more to the developmental trajectory of teachers than to the real-time enactment of belief systems in subject-specific teaching like English.

Finally, Berglund (2019) and Martínez-Ariño and Teinturier (2019) consider macro-level policy issues such as state-funded Islamic education and intercultural tensions, providing useful context for understanding the socio-political backdrop of faith-based schooling. However, these studies are distant from the pedagogical concerns at the classroom level. Similarly, Zamsiswaya et al. (2024) and Adnan (2017) provide valuable insights into teacher identity and belief, but do not explicitly address how these belief systems are operationalized through lesson planning, classroom interaction, or task design in the English language classroom. The current literature confirms that religious belief systems exert considerable influence on educational leadership, teacher identity, and

institutional frameworks in Islamic schools. However, the specific domain of ELT remains underrepresented in this discourse. Few studies have explored, in a systematic and practice-oriented manner, how English language teachers in Islamic educational settings conceptualize their pedagogical beliefs and how these beliefs inform their instructional decisions and student interactions. This study addresses that gap by focusing explicitly on the core pedagogical beliefs of English teachers in Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior Secondary School) settings and analyzing how those beliefs are enacted in the classroom. By centering both belief and practice, this research advances the conversation from abstract ideological tensions to tangible pedagogical enactment, thus contributing a critical dimension to the existing scholarship on teacher beliefs in faith-based education.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative research design, guided by a phenomenological approach (Smith et al., 2022), to explore the core pedagogical beliefs held by English language teachers in Islamic educational contexts and how those beliefs inform instructional practices and classroom interactions. Phenomenology was selected as the methodological lens because it facilitates a deep exploration of participants' lived experiences and the meanings they ascribe to their pedagogical roles within faith-based environments. This approach is particularly suited to uncovering the complex, subjective dimensions of teacher cognition—dimensions shaped not only by educational training but also by religious commitment, cultural context, and institutional expectations. By prioritizing teachers' voices, phenomenology enables the researcher to capture the complexities of how belief systems are constructed, internalized, and translated into classroom realities. In addition to interviews, classroom observations were conducted using a structured observation protocol focusing on teacher-student interaction, language use, instructional materials, and explicit value-oriented discourse. This protocol allowed the researcher to systematically document how pedagogical beliefs were expressed through communication patterns, material adaptation, and the moral framing of classroom activities. The research questions guiding this inquiry focus on identifying these core beliefs and understanding their enactment in teaching methods and interpersonal dynamics, while the research objectives seek to systematically categorize these beliefs and analyze their practical manifestations. Through this design, the study aims to generate rich, contextualized insights into the interplay between language pedagogy and Islamic educational philosophy.

3.2. Research setting and participants

The study was conducted in three urban areas of Indonesia - Jakarta, Bogor, and Tangerang - where Madrasah Aliyah offers English as part of the national curriculum while simultaneously upholding Islamic educational values. These institutions operate within a dual-framework model: they are mandated to fulfill state educational objectives,

particularly in language acquisition, while integrating Islamic moral, spiritual, and ethical teachings into the learning process. This educational configuration provides a rich context for examining how English language instruction is shaped by faith-based pedagogical orientations. Within these schools, English is not merely a foreign language subject but also a site where cultural negotiation and religious identity construction take place.

A total of eleven English language teachers participated in the study. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling, ensuring alignment with the study's focus on experienced educators who are currently teaching in Islamic senior secondary schools. The sample comprised five teachers from Jakarta, three from Bogor, and three from Tangerang. Of the eleven, six were females and five males, all of whom had accumulated more than five years of teaching experience. Four participants held a Master's degree in English Education, while the remaining seven had obtained a Bachelor's degree in the same field. Their ages ranged from 29 to 40, reflecting a cohort of educators situated in the mid-career phase, offering both maturity and professional insight. Their diverse backgrounds and geographic distribution allowed for a broader understanding of how pedagogical beliefs may be shaped by local cultural and institutional variations.

Prior to participation, each teacher provided informed consent and was assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Ethical considerations were strictly upheld throughout the research process. All participants were made aware of the study's aims and procedures, and confidentiality was guaranteed by anonymizing both their personal identities and the names of their institutions. By securing trust and transparency, the study fostered a setting in which participants could reflect candidly on their beliefs and practices. The richness of their perspectives was essential to addressing the research questions: namely, identifying the core pedagogical beliefs English teachers hold within Islamic educational contexts, and understanding how those beliefs inform instructional practices and classroom relationships.

3.3. Data collection methods

To understand teachers' pedagogical beliefs and their application in classroom practices, this study employed two primary data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Combining these methods allowed for methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings by capturing both teachers' articulated beliefs and their observed behaviors in the classroom. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all eleven participants, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were carried out either face-to-face or via secure video conferencing platforms, depending on logistical feasibility and participant preference. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility to probe emergent themes. Questions were organized around key areas such as instructional aims, approaches to integrating Islamic values, decision-making processes, and challenges encountered in teaching English within an Islamic framework.

In addition to interviews, classroom observations were conducted to document how stated beliefs were translated into pedagogical practice. Each teacher was observed during two separate instructional sessions, resulting in a total of 22 classroom observations. An observation protocol was developed to guide the process, focusing on elements such as instructional strategies, language use, classroom discourse, student engagement, and the presence or absence of religious or moral themes in lesson delivery. The aim was not only to record what teachers did, but also to interpret how these actions reflected their underlying belief systems. All interviews and observational field notes were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. These data provided a comprehensive basis for examining both the espoused and implemented pedagogical orientations of English teachers in Madrasah Aliyah.

3.4. Data analysis

The data analysis process was guided by a thematic analysis framework, which enabled a systematic examination of both interview transcripts and classroom observation data to uncover recurring patterns and meanings. Thematic analysis was selected for its flexibility in identifying and interpreting themes related to complex, context-bound phenomena such as teacher beliefs and pedagogical executions. The analysis followed a six-phase process: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of emerging themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and synthesis of findings through narrative construction. This approach allowed for a holistic engagement with the data, ensuring that themes were not merely descriptive but conceptually meaningful in relation to the study's research questions and objectives.

During the initial phase, the researchers engaged in repeated reading of the transcripts and field notes to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. Segments of text related to teachers' pedagogical beliefs, instructional choices, classroom interactions, and integration of Islamic values were then coded inductively. Codes were later clustered into broader thematic categories that captured patterns across participants, such as the belief in teaching as a moral responsibility, the alignment of English content with religious principles, and the perceived role of English in shaping students' futures. Classroom observations served to validate and enrich these themes by providing evidence of how beliefs were implemented in practice. Particular attention was given to identifying both consistencies and contradictions between what teachers articulated in interviews and what was observed in their pedagogical behaviors.

To ensure analytical rigor and trustworthiness, the study incorporated peer debriefing and member checking as validation strategies. Regular discussions with academic peers were held to challenge and refine thematic interpretations, reducing the risk of researcher bias. Additionally, participants were provided with their individual interview transcripts and a summary of preliminary themes to verify the accuracy of interpretations and to offer clarifications where necessary. This iterative process not only enhanced the credibility of the findings but also upheld the ethical commitment to

respectful and collaborative inquiry. Through this rigorous analytical framework, the study effectively addressed its research questions and objectives.

4. Findings

The data analysis yielded three major themes that reflect the core pedagogical beliefs of English teachers in Madrasah Aliyah and how these beliefs shape their instructional practices and classroom interactions. These themes are: (1) central pedagogical beliefs about teaching English, (2) instructional practices shaped by beliefs, and (3) classroom interactions and belief-driven relationships. While these themes collectively illustrate teachers' integrative approach - harmonizing English instruction with Islamic values - they also reveal underlying tensions and practical challenges. Several teachers expressed difficulty balancing faith-based integration with the demands of the national curriculum, time limitations, and administrative expectations. Others noted moments of personal conflict when prescribed materials or assessment requirements did not align with their ethical or spiritual priorities. Acknowledging these challenges provides a fuller picture of how the integration of language and faith, though deeply meaningful, can create both pedagogical enrichment and professional strain.

4.1. Central pedagogical beliefs about teaching English

Participants consistently conveyed the belief that teaching English in Islamic educational contexts is a responsibility that transcends the conventional boundaries of language instruction. English was viewed not only as an academic subject but also as a vital tool for engaging with the broader global community. Teachers emphasized its importance for students' future academic pursuits, career development, and participation in international discourse. At the same time, there was a strong consensus that the teaching of English must remain rooted in Islamic ethical and spiritual frameworks. As one teacher (participant 3) from Jakarta stated, *“Teaching English is a way to prepare students for the world, but I always remind them that our identity as Muslims must guide how we use the language.”* This belief in the dual function of English - as both a practical skill and a medium for maintaining Islamic values - was foundational to how teachers conceptualized their pedagogical roles.

Equally prominent among participants was the belief in character-building as a central educational goal. Teachers consistently expressed a commitment to nurturing students' moral development alongside their linguistic competence. English lessons were framed as opportunities to instill values such as honesty, respect, humility, and responsibility. A teacher (participant 11) from Bogor explained, *“Vocabulary and grammar are important, but teaching adab [Islamic etiquette] is even more important. I want my students to be good speakers and good Muslims.”* This emphasis on values education was not merely rhetorical; it was actively integrated into lesson content and activities. Teachers demonstrated intentionality in selecting themes and constructing exercises that could simultaneously promote language acquisition and ethical reflection.

Observations corroborated these beliefs by revealing specific ways in which moral messages were embedded into English language tasks. For instance, in one Jakarta classroom, a teacher used a reading comprehension passage that had been adapted to recount the story of a boy who returned a lost wallet to its rightful owner. Students were then asked to identify the moral of the story and discuss, in English, how similar actions align with Islamic teachings on honesty and trustworthiness. In another observed lesson in Tangerang, a group speaking task required students to role-play scenarios involving ethical dilemmas, such as finding a valuable item in a public place, and to articulate their responses using English expressions of intention, obligation, and consequence. These activities not only reinforced key language structures but also created space for value-oriented discussion, thereby reflecting the teachers' belief that English instruction should support both communicative competence and moral reasoning.

Another recurring belief was the perception of the teacher as an *ustadz* or *ustadzah*, a spiritual guide whose influence extends beyond classroom instruction. Teachers viewed themselves as role models, responsible for embodying the values they sought to impart. This role was evident in how teachers conducted themselves, addressed students, and organized classroom rituals. One teacher (participant 6) from Tangerang noted, "*I am not just an English teacher; I am also a representative of Islamic values. So, how I teach, how I speak, even how I dress - it all matters.*" This belief shaped teacher behavior both within and beyond the classroom, contributing to an educational environment where language learning was framed as a morally purposeful endeavor. The intertwining of professional identity and religious commitment illustrates how deeply embedded pedagogical beliefs are in the broader cultural and spiritual mission of Islamic education.

4.2. Instructional practices shaped by beliefs

The pedagogical beliefs described above directly influenced participants' instructional practices. Teachers were highly selective in choosing materials, often modifying or omitting content perceived to conflict with Islamic principles. Several participants reported avoiding texts with romantic themes, references to alcohol, or culturally inappropriate imagery. A female teacher (participant 1) from Jakarta explained, "*Sometimes the textbook has stories that are not suitable. I change the story or make my own worksheet with Islamic content.*" Classroom observations confirmed this practice, with many teachers integrating Islamic narratives or moral stories into reading materials.

Instructional strategies also reflected a blend of conventional ELT techniques with faith-based content delivery. Teachers frequently used code-switching between English, Indonesian, and Arabic to explain complex concepts or reinforce religious values. Additionally, the use of Islamic storytelling (*qisah*) was a common strategy to enhance engagement and moral reflection. For example, one observed lesson on past tense narration was built around the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), combining linguistic instruction with spiritual enrichment.

Participants also emphasized the importance of fostering religious consciousness alongside language development. Student engagement was encouraged through discussions on ethical dilemmas, Islamic quotes, and group tasks that required moral reasoning. One teacher (participant 2) stated, “*When we practice speaking, I ask them to describe good behavior from an Islamic perspective. So, they practice English and also reflect on values.*” This dual-focus approach was evident in observed classroom activities that prompted both linguistic output and ethical introspection.

4.3. Classroom interactions and belief-driven relationships

The relationship between teachers and students was shaped by a pedagogical ethic that balanced authority with compassion. Teachers viewed their interactions not merely in terms of classroom management but as opportunities for spiritual guidance and character formation. Several participants emphasized the need for firm but respectful discipline, rooted in Islamic principles. A male teacher (participant 10) from Bogor noted, “*Students must respect the teacher, but the teacher must also be gentle and guide them like the Prophet guided his companions.*”

Teachers fostered classroom environments that promoted mutual respect, humility, and accountability, guided by Islamic principles that emphasize ethical interaction and communal responsibility. Observations revealed that these values were not only espoused but enacted through consistent practices embedded in classroom discourse and routines. Teachers began and ended lessons with Islamic greetings such as *Assalamu’alaikum*, reinforcing a sense of spiritual connection and social etiquette. Praise was frequently expressed through phrases like *barakallahu fik* (may Allah bless you), which served both to encourage student participation and to embed moral affirmation within pedagogical feedback. During group activities, teachers often reminded students to cooperate respectfully, avoid arrogance, and listen attentively to one another, behaviors rooted in Islamic teachings on *adab* (etiquette). In addition, students were encouraged to draw on personal and religious experiences in completing writing or speaking assignments. For instance, in a lesson on descriptive paragraphs, students were asked to describe a role model in their lives and explain how that individual reflected Islamic values such as patience, generosity, or trustworthiness. In another instance, students shared stories about community service or acts of kindness, which they then presented in English using past tense structures. These practices collectively demonstrated a deliberate effort to create a morally grounded learning environment where English language development was deeply intertwined with the promotion of faith, reflection, and ethical awareness.

Finally, participants expressed a strong commitment to developing their students' holistic identity. English lessons were seen as platforms for promoting not only communicative competence but also spiritual awareness. As one participant (participant 4) summarized, “*Our goal is to teach English, yes - but more importantly, to raise students who speak English with Islamic values in their hearts.*” This alignment of

language instruction with spiritual development reflects the deep entwining of belief and pedagogy within the Islamic educational context.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the intricate relationship between English language pedagogy and Islamic values as conceptualized and enacted by teachers in Madrasah Aliyah. The core belief emerging from participants is that English is not only a linguistic tool but a medium through which moral and spiritual formation can be pursued. This dual purpose is evident in teachers' efforts to harmonize language instruction with character development, viewing themselves not only as language educators but also as spiritual guides (*ustadz/ustadzah*). This aligns with existing literature that highlights the integrative role of faith in shaping the ethos of Islamic schooling (Alazmi, 2023; Alazmi & Bush, 2023). While those studies focus on leadership, this research provides empirical evidence from the classroom level, showing that the same values permeate teacher cognition and practice.

Classroom observations further confirm this interplay between pedagogy and faith. Teachers consistently opened lessons with brief reflections or Quranic verses related to honesty, discipline, or gratitude before transitioning to English language activities. In one observed class, a teacher linked a vocabulary exercise about "success" to an Islamic perspective on hard work and reliance on God, illustrating how linguistic input was contextualized through moral discourse. Such classroom behaviors concretely demonstrate that the integration of language and spirituality is not merely a declared belief but an enacted routine within instructional practice.

In terms of instructional practices, the data show that teachers routinely modify content and incorporate Islamic themes into lessons to ensure alignment with religious norms. Activities that embed ethical decision-making, such as discussing moral dilemmas in English or using stories with Islamic values, illustrate how pedagogy becomes a vehicle for both language development and value transmission. These practices substantiate findings by Häusler et al. (2019) and Zamsiswaya et al. (2024), who argue that religiosity significantly influences pedagogical decision-making and classroom interaction in faith-based environments. They also complement studies such as Succarie (2024) and Tambak et al. (2023), which demonstrate how Islamic education can transform professional identity and shape innovative teaching methods grounded in religious worldviews.

Empirical classroom evidence reinforces these patterns. Observations revealed that teachers often replaced or adapted dialogues from commercial textbooks to reflect Muslim cultural contexts, for instance, substituting Western names or scenarios with local ones that carried ethical undertones. During a speaking task on expressing opinions, one teacher encouraged students to debate a moral issue in English, guiding them to use polite expressions and to justify arguments through both rational and faith-based reasoning. This illustrates the alignment between teachers' pedagogical choices and their intention to promote both communicative competence and ethical awareness.

Moreover, this study reveals a consistent theme of teacher agency in shaping the learning environment. Participants exercised discretion over textbook content, employed code-switching to bridge conceptual gaps, and fostered reflective classroom cultures rooted in Islamic etiquette. These findings respond to gaps identified by Munandar (2022) and Muhaimin (2022), who note the ideological tension faced by teachers in negotiating Western language content with local cultural and religious values. However, unlike those studies that emphasize resistance and ambivalence, this study highlights constructive adaptation and integration. Teachers here are not passive recipients of global pedagogies, but active agents who reframe ELT through an Islamic lens, echoing insights from Adnan (2017) and Tuna (2021) on teacher identity formation in religious contexts.

Observation data vividly illustrated this agency. Teachers used English and Arabic interchangeably to clarify moral or grammatical points, and they encouraged students to relate English expressions to Islamic sayings. One teacher, for example, prompted reflection after a reading text about honesty by asking students to cite relevant hadith in English translation, thereby merging critical thinking with moral engagement. Such acts of mediation exemplify teachers' autonomy in localizing curriculum materials while maintaining both linguistic rigor and faith coherence.

In terms of teacher-student relationships, the findings demonstrate a strong ethic of care, rooted in mutual respect and modeled Islamic behavior. This reflects a communitarian approach to education (Saada, 2022), wherein the teacher's role extends into the moral and spiritual domains of student life. These relational dynamics are consistent with findings by Charki, Hornstra, and Thijs (2021), who found that religious values influence student-teacher rapport and that implicit beliefs, rather than religious affiliation alone, affect classroom dynamics. While their study focused on student perceptions, the present research offers complementary teacher-centric insights. Furthermore, teachers in this study consistently demonstrated a desire to nurture students' holistic identities - linguistic, moral, and spiritual - an aim also reflected in studies emphasizing value-based or peace-oriented education (Amin, 2023; Gleeson & O'Neill, 2017).

Observation notes corroborate this ethic of care, showing teachers engaging in mentoring behaviors such as offering personal encouragement in English after prayers or reminding students to apply Islamic manners during group work. Instances of students apologizing or expressing gratitude in English, modeled after the teacher's behavior, suggest that the classroom interaction itself served as a site of moral formation. These behavioral patterns demonstrate how teachers' relational ethos directly shapes the affective and moral climate of English learning.

Despite the breadth of literature on Islamic leadership (Brooks et al., 2020), faith-based school governance (Hammad & Shah, 2019), and intercultural religious education (Berglund, 2019; Martínez-Ariño & Teinturier, 2019), few studies have explored the practical manifestations of pedagogical beliefs within the English language classroom. This study addresses that gap by documenting how teachers' religious commitments shape

not only their conceptualizations of English education but also their methods, interactions, and goals. While existing studies have acknowledged the influence of faith on general instructional orientation (Häusler et al., 2019; Saada, 2022), they often fail to examine how these beliefs are translated into task design, classroom routines, and interactional norms. In doing so, this research contributes a critical and underrepresented dimension to the scholarship on English language teaching in Islamic contexts.

By embedding classroom observation data into the analysis, this discussion substantiates the argument that pedagogical belief and practice are inseparable. What teachers say about integrating faith and language is consistently mirrored in what they do, from the organization of classroom discourse to the use of materials and the relational tone they establish. This empirical grounding reinforces the validity of the interpretations presented and situates this study as an authentic representation of how pedagogical beliefs materialize in daily classroom realities.

5.1. Implications for ELT in Islamic schools

The findings of this study carry significant implications for ELT in Islamic educational institutions. First, teacher education programs should be restructured to address the unique intersection of language pedagogy and religious ethics. As noted by Succarie (2024) and Tuna (2021), conventional secular teacher training often overlooks the spiritual and moral dimensions central to teaching in Islamic schools. Thus, professional development must not only equip teachers with technical ELT skills but also foster capacities for ethical decision-making, curriculum adaptation, and value-based instruction.

Second, curriculum developers must consider the contextual realities of Islamic schooling when designing ELT materials. The tendency of teachers in this study to reject or modify culturally incongruent content underscores the need for materials that are both pedagogically sound and culturally resonant. Supporting this view, Munandar (2022) and Muhalim (2022) advocate for the localization of ELT frameworks that respect indigenous knowledge and religious identity. Content should be adaptable, inclusive of Islamic narratives, and designed to encourage critical thinking without compromising core beliefs.

Finally, school administrators and policymakers must acknowledge the integrative role of English instruction in shaping not only students' communicative competence but also their moral and spiritual development. The teacher-student relationships observed in this study reflect a deeper pedagogical ethic that prioritizes care, dignity, and communal responsibility. These findings suggest that ELT should be reimagined as a holistic endeavor that supports intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth.

6. Conclusion

This study establishes that, for English teachers within Madrasah Aliyah, pedagogy constitutes a fundamentally moral and spiritual vocation. Their practice transcends the conventional secular-sacred dichotomy in education, presenting a holistic model that synergizes communicative language teaching with character formation. This core finding underscores that English language instruction in Islamic institutions is not a purely academic endeavor but a moral enterprise deeply embedded in faith, identity, and social responsibility.

The research reveals that teachers' pedagogical cognition frames English as both a global lingua franca and a medium for cultivating ethical character and Islamic values. This belief system is directly operationalized in classroom praxis through strategies such as material adaptation, task design, and interactions grounded in ethical principles, thereby illustrating a pedagogical model that integrates communicative competence with spiritual and moral development. By situating teacher cognition within the specific cultural-religious milieu of Islamic education, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how faith-based epistemologies shape English Language Teaching (ELT) practices, challenging simplistic binaries between secular pedagogy and religious instruction.

Notwithstanding these contributions, the study's scope is constrained by its small, urban-centric sample and its reliance on self-reported and observational data, which may not fully represent the diversity of Islamic educational contexts. To bridge the theory-practice nexus, it is recommended that teacher education programs systematically integrate Islamic pedagogical principles into ELT methodology. Concurrently, curriculum developers should create culturally and religiously responsive materials that support dual linguistic and ethical learning objectives. Institutional leaders should further acknowledge teacher beliefs as a cornerstone of instructional quality and cultivate environments conducive to faith-informed pedagogical innovation.

Future research should expand the geographic and institutional scope, incorporate student voice and reception studies, and employ longitudinal designs to examine the evolution of teacher beliefs in response to policy changes and professional development. Such investigations would deepen our comprehension of the dynamic intersection between language education, identity negotiation, and faith across diverse Islamic educational landscapes.

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