

INTEGRATING ENGLISH ISLAMIC HISTORY TEXTS TO ENHANCE READING SKILLS OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract: Reading skill is a fundamental component of language acquisition, particularly for students in Islamic education programs who are required to engage with both religious and academic texts in their learning process. Strong reading proficiency in English allows students to access broader academic resources while also supporting their understanding of Islamic knowledge presented in a global context. This study explores the integration of English Islamic history texts as instructional materials to improve the reading skills of Islamic Education students by combining language learning with meaningful historical and religious content that is familiar to learners. Through this approach, students are expected to demonstrate increased motivation, improved comprehension, and enhanced critical thinking abilities. A qualitative descriptive research method was employed, involving classroom observations, reading assessments, and student reflections to examine the learning process and students' responses to the instructional materials. The findings indicate that the use of English Islamic history texts contributes positively to vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and students' overall engagement with English learning activities. Students showed greater interest and participation when the reading materials reflected their religious and cultural background. The study concludes that contextualized historical content aligned with students' religious values plays a significant role in improving reading proficiency and fostering positive attitudes toward English learning among Islamic Education students.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Reading Skills, English Language, Pedagogy, Historical Context

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a crucial skill in mastering a foreign language, particularly English, which functions as a global medium of academic discourse. For students of Islamic Education, English proficiency is increasingly important for accessing global scholarship, classical Islamic studies in translation, and international academic resources. However, many students face difficulties

in reading comprehension due to limited vocabulary, lack of motivation, and unfamiliar cultural contexts within English texts.

Islamic history offers rich and meaningful content that can bridge this gap. When English learning materials are aligned with students' religious identity and academic discipline, learning becomes more relevant and motivating. Integrating Islamic historical narratives into English reading instruction may help students develop reading skills while simultaneously deepening their understanding of Islamic civilization. This study aims to examine how English Islamic history texts can be utilized to improve the reading skills of Islamic Education students and to analyze students' responses to this integrated learning approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The 21st century has been marked by the rapid acceleration of globalization—a process driven by advances in communication technologies, increased mobility, economic interdependence, and cultural exchange. Against this backdrop, young Muslims occupy a unique sociocultural and linguistic position. The interplay between religious identity, global connectivity, and language proficiency—especially in English—has become a focal point of academic inquiry across multiple disciplines, including sociolinguistics, education, religious studies, and globalization theory. This literature review critically examines existing scholarship on the experiences of young Muslims in a globalized world, focusing on the role and importance of English. It explores why English proficiency matters for social mobility, identity negotiation, educational opportunities, religious discourse, and cross-cultural engagement.

1. Reading Skills in English Language Learning

Reading is an interactive process involving decoding, comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis. According to reading theory, learners comprehend texts more effectively when they possess prior knowledge related to the content. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, unfamiliar topics often hinder comprehension and reduce learner confidence.

2. Content-Based Instruction

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) emphasizes teaching language through subject matter rather than isolated linguistic forms. Studies suggest that CBI enhances vocabulary retention, comprehension, and learner motivation because language is learned in meaningful contexts. When content is relevant to learners' academic or cultural background, engagement increases significantly.

3. Islamic History as Educational Content

Islamic history encompasses political, intellectual, social, and cultural developments of Muslim civilization. Using Islamic historical texts in English allows students to engage with familiar concepts while practicing language skills. This approach supports both linguistic development and identity affirmation, which is particularly important in faith-based education.

4. Previous Studies

Previous research has shown that religious and culturally relevant texts can improve reading motivation and comprehension. However, limited studies focus specifically on

English Islamic history texts for Islamic Education students, highlighting the need for further exploration in this area.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the effectiveness of integrating English Islamic history texts in improving the reading skills of Islamic Education students. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth understanding of students' learning experiences, perceptions, and engagement during the instructional process. The participants of this study were Islamic Education students enrolled in an English reading course at the tertiary level. The students were selected purposively, as they shared similar academic backgrounds and had comparable exposure to English learning within an Islamic educational context.

Several research instruments were used to collect data, including reading comprehension tasks, classroom observations, and reflective questionnaires. The reading comprehension tasks were designed to assess students' understanding of main ideas, supporting details, vocabulary, and inferential meaning in the selected texts. These tasks were administered after each instructional session to monitor students' progress and identify changes in their reading performance. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the learning process to capture students' participation, interaction, and overall engagement during reading activities. An observation checklist and field notes were used to record students' behaviors, responses, and interactions with the instructional materials. Reflective questionnaires were distributed at the end of the instructional period to gather students' perceptions, attitudes, and reflections on the use of English Islamic history texts in reading instruction.

The English Islamic history texts used in this study were carefully selected based on linguistic appropriateness and historical relevance to the students' academic and religious background. The texts covered various topics, including the life of the Prophet Muhammad, the development of early Islamic civilization, and the contributions of prominent Muslim scholars to science, education, and culture. The level of language difficulty was adjusted to match the students' reading proficiency, ensuring that the texts were challenging yet comprehensible. These materials were integrated into reading lessons conducted over several instructional sessions, each consisting of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to students' reading performance, engagement, and perceptions toward the learning materials. Data from reading tasks, observation notes, and questionnaires were coded and categorized systematically. The triangulation of multiple data sources enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Through this analytical process, meaningful insights were obtained regarding how contextualized Islamic historical content supports reading development and contributes to positive learning experiences among Islamic Education students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study regarding the integration of English Islamic history texts in improving the reading skills of Islamic Education students. The results are organized into four main themes: improvement in reading comprehension, vocabulary development, increased motivation and engagement, and the enhancement of critical reading skills. Overall, the findings indicate that the use of culturally relevant and context-based reading materials has a positive impact on both students' language proficiency and learning attitudes.

a. Improvement in Reading Comprehension

The results of the study revealed a noticeable improvement in students' reading comprehension after the implementation of English Islamic history texts. Students demonstrated a clearer understanding of main ideas, supporting details, and contextual meanings within the texts. During reading comprehension tasks, most students were able to identify key information, summarize passages accurately, and answer inferential questions more confidently than before the intervention. This improvement suggests that familiar historical and religious content played an important role in facilitating comprehension.

One significant factor contributing to this improvement was the reduction of cognitive load. Because students were already familiar with the historical events and figures discussed in the texts, they did not need to expend excessive cognitive effort to understand the content itself. Instead, they were able to focus more on linguistic elements such as sentence structure, discourse markers, and contextual clues. This finding supports the theory that background knowledge enhances reading comprehension by allowing learners to process new language more efficiently. In this study, Islamic historical narratives provided a meaningful framework that helped students connect prior knowledge with new English language input.

Classroom observations further indicated that students were more willing to reread texts and engage in discussion when they understood the content. This active engagement contributed to deeper comprehension and improved retention of information. These findings align with previous studies suggesting that content familiarity and relevance significantly influence reading comprehension in second or foreign language learning contexts.

b. Vocabulary Development

Another key finding of this study relates to students' vocabulary development. The integration of English Islamic history texts enabled students to acquire new academic and historical vocabulary more effectively. Vocabulary growth occurred naturally as students repeatedly encountered unfamiliar words within meaningful and coherent contexts. Rather than memorizing isolated word lists, students learned vocabulary through exposure to complete sentences and narratives, which facilitated deeper understanding and long-term retention.

The texts included a combination of general English vocabulary and Islamic or historical terminology, such as names of places, events, and concepts related to Islamic civilization. This integration enriched students' lexical knowledge and expanded their ability to comprehend both religious and academic texts in English. Students demonstrated improved ability to infer

word meanings from context, identify synonyms, and use newly learned vocabulary in discussions and written responses.

Reflective questionnaires revealed that students felt more confident when encountering new vocabulary because the surrounding content helped clarify meaning. This finding highlights the effectiveness of contextualized vocabulary instruction, particularly in content-based learning environments. The repeated exposure to key vocabulary across different texts also reinforced learning and contributed to increased lexical competence. These results support the view that vocabulary acquisition is more effective when embedded in meaningful content rather than taught in isolation.

c. Increased Motivation and Engagement

The findings also indicate a significant increase in students' motivation and engagement during reading activities. Classroom observations showed higher levels of participation, enthusiasm, and interaction when English Islamic history texts were used as learning materials. Students actively asked questions, participated in group discussions, and expressed opinions related to the historical and moral aspects of the texts.

Students expressed greater interest in reading English texts when the content reflected their religious and academic identity. Many students reported that they felt more connected to the learning materials and perceived English as more relevant to their lives. This sense of relevance reduced students' anxiety toward English learning and increased their willingness to engage with longer and more complex texts. As a result, students demonstrated more positive attitudes toward reading in English.

Motivation is a crucial factor in language learning success, and the results of this study suggest that culturally relevant materials can significantly enhance learners' intrinsic motivation. When students see their values and background represented in learning materials, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning process. This finding supports the argument that integrating culturally and religiously relevant content into language instruction can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

d. Development of Critical Reading Skills

In addition to improving basic reading comprehension and vocabulary, the use of English Islamic history texts contributed to the development of students' critical reading skills. Students were encouraged to analyze historical events, compare different perspectives, and reflect on moral and ethical values presented in the texts. Through guided discussion and reflective activities, students learned to evaluate information, identify underlying messages, and connect historical lessons to contemporary issues.

Students demonstrated an increased ability to express opinions, justify interpretations, and engage in higher-order thinking tasks. For example, students were asked to reflect on leadership qualities, social justice, and moral lessons derived from Islamic historical events. These activities required students to go beyond literal comprehension and engage in analytical and evaluative reading processes. Such skills are essential for academic success in higher education, where students are expected to critically engage with texts from various disciplines.

The findings suggest that English Islamic history texts serve not only as language learning tools but also as instruments for intellectual and moral development. By integrating critical reflection with language learning, students develop a more comprehensive set of academic skills that extend beyond reading proficiency alone.

Taken together, the findings of this study support the argument that culturally relevant content enhances both language proficiency and learner motivation. The integration of English Islamic history texts created a meaningful learning context that facilitated reading comprehension, vocabulary development, motivation, engagement, and critical thinking. These results align with content-based instruction and sociocultural theories of language learning, which emphasize the importance of meaningful interaction and contextualized input.

The study demonstrates that language learning is most effective when it is connected to students' background knowledge, values, and academic goals. By integrating Islamic historical content into English reading instruction, educators can foster a more holistic learning experience that supports linguistic, cognitive, and moral development simultaneously. This approach is particularly relevant for Islamic educational institutions seeking to strengthen English proficiency while maintaining religious identity and values.

CONCLUSION

The integration of English Islamic history texts has proven to be an effective instructional approach for improving reading skills among Islamic Education students, as it successfully combines language learning with meaningful and culturally familiar content. When students engage with reading materials that reflect their religious beliefs and historical heritage, they demonstrate higher levels of reading comprehension, vocabulary development, motivation, and critical thinking. This contextualized approach enables students to connect new linguistic knowledge with prior understanding, making comprehension more efficient and long-lasting. As a result, students are more confident in interpreting English texts and more willing to participate actively in reading activities.

Moreover, the use of Islamic historical texts in English encourages active engagement with learning materials and reduces students' anxiety toward foreign language acquisition. Many students in Islamic educational settings perceive English as difficult or disconnected from their daily and religious experiences. By integrating Islamic history into English reading instruction, this study shows that students feel more comfortable and motivated, as the content aligns with their values and identity. This sense of familiarity helps create a supportive learning environment that promotes positive attitudes toward English learning and increases students' willingness to explore complex texts.

From a pedagogical perspective, this approach aligns strongly with the principles of content-based instruction, where language learning occurs naturally through meaningful subject matter. Students acquire vocabulary, grammatical structures, and reading strategies implicitly while focusing on understanding historical narratives and Islamic contributions to civilization. In addition, the integration of English Islamic history texts supports holistic education in Islamic institutions by simultaneously strengthening linguistic competence and religious understanding. Students are not only trained to comprehend English texts, but they are also

encouraged to reflect on Islamic values, moral lessons, and historical insights, contributing to their cognitive, emotional, and moral development.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that English educators in Islamic educational institutions incorporate English Islamic historical materials into reading curricula to create more contextualized and engaging learning experiences. Teachers should carefully select texts that are linguistically appropriate and pedagogically aligned with students' proficiency levels. Curriculum developers are also encouraged to design structured reading modules that integrate Islamic history with specific language objectives, such as vocabulary enrichment, reading comprehension strategies, and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, teacher training programs should include guidance on implementing content-based instruction using religious and historical materials effectively. Future research is recommended to employ quantitative research methods, involve larger and more diverse samples, and explore broader educational contexts to further validate and expand upon the effectiveness of this instructional approach.

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