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Exploring *Asnaf* Students' Acceptance of an Islamic-Integrated English Module in Malaysian Muslim Orphanage

Nur Yasmin Khairani Zakaria,[1]* Harwati Hashim[1,] Khairul Azhar Jamaludin[2]
[1]Teaching and Learning Innovation Research Center, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia, [2]Education Leadership & Policy Research Center, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

* Corresponding Author
Email: yasminzakaria@ukm.edu.my
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ABSTRACT
English language proficiency, particularly communicative competence, is essential for socio-economic mobility. Communicative competence in English refers to the ability to communicate effectively in all contexts. However, *asnaf* students—underprivileged Muslim individuals from Islamic backgrounds—often encounter Western-centric content that can lead to feelings of alienation and eventually limits their learning. Recognizing this need, the present study explores the integration of Islamic content into a communicative English module to create a more inclusive and responsive educational experience for *asnaf* students. Utilizing a Design and Development Research (DDR) model, this study comprises three phases: analyzing students' learning needs,

developing content for the module, and evaluating *asnaf* students' acceptance of the module. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, where researchers recorded students' engagement in class and participants reflected on their learning experiences. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes: confidence in spoken English, connection to Islamic-integrated content, participation in tasks, and challenges in the English language. The study noted several limitations, including a small sample size and a relatively short intervention period, impacting generalizability. Future research could replicate the module in different socio-religious settings or employ quantitative approaches to further assess its effectiveness on language performance.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, English, Islamic Values, *Asnaf* Students, Faith-Integrated Learning, Language Confidence.

INTRODUCTION

The English language has long served as a global medium for various purposes. As it has evolved into an important global language, proficiency in English grants access to numerous fields, including education, the economy, and policymaking (Clark, Shlobin, Batra, & Liotta, 2022). Primarily, English proficiency facilitates effective communication (Puad, Jamil, Rahman, & Mukhtar, 2024). In the realm of English language learning, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is essential for acquiring the English proficiency needed to communicate effectively in the real world. CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction, fluency, and student-centered activities rather than rote memorization and structured exercises.

While the benefits of CLT approaches are well established, their application remains limited in various contexts, particularly within Islamic educational settings and among underserved groups, such as *asnaf* students (Tan & Listyani, 2020). In Islamic education, *asnaf* refers to the group of people who are eligible to receive zakat according to the Quranic principles (Surah At-Tawbah, 9:60). These groups include orphans, the poor *(fuqara'),* and the needy *(masakin).* In most cases, underprivileged students attend welfare educational institutions where resources are limited, and educational frameworks often lack cultural or contextual

relevance (Nattheeraphong, 2020). Despite their socio-economic disadvantages, *asnaf* students frequently exhibit perseverance and resilience in their educational pursuits (Karim, Khemanuwong, Ferdous, Humaira, Sultana, & Ismail, 2024; Mohamad & Zakaria, 2018). This determination empowers them as learners with potential for academic success, especially if appropriate support structures are provided (Xu, Abdullah, & Tang, 2024). However, the *asnaf* children are at risk of falling behind without enough support in 21st-century skills, particularly in English communication (Astrid, Hasanah, & Syafryadin, 2020). Proficiency in English, especially oral communication skills, is increasingly important for accessing higher education, securing employment, and participating in global discourse (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021).

Students from *Asnaf* groups are among the most vulnerable and underserved groups in education (Souriyavongsa, Rany, Abidin, & Mei, 2013). Their societal position often reflects in a lack of parental support, restricted economic resources, and limited access to enriched learning environments (Yürekli & Afacan, 2020). Given the unique challenges faced by students from low socioeconomic status (Villacañas de Castro, Cano Bodi & Hortelano Montejano, 2018) and the scarcity of Islamic educational materials, there is an urgent need to develop teaching methods that are contextually relevant. Furthermore, the disconnect between traditional English teaching content and students' religious and cultural values further alienates them from the learning process.

This study aims to directly respond to the identified gap within the underprivileged community (Villacañas de Castro et al., 2020) by developing and implementing a communicative English module that is not only interactive but also incorporates Islamic values, making it relevant to the life of *asnaf* students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CLT continues to dominate language teaching methodologies because it promotes functional language use and communicative competence (Shobikah, 2023). In contrast to the Grammar Translation Method or the Audio-lingual Method, CLT focuses on students' communicative participation by emphasizing interactive tasks (Metruk, 2022). This approach has been used in variety of contexts from urban classrooms in

East Asia to remote language institutions in sub-Saharan Africa and has shown consistent success in developing students' confidence and oral autonomy (Waluyo & Bucol, 2021; Astrid, Hasanah, & Syafryadin, 2020).

The integration of Islamic content in English language teaching involves purposefully embedding Islamic values into language teaching (Djazilan & Hariani, 2022). However, despite its recognized potential, Islamic content is seldom featured in mainstream English language teaching textbooks (Hoerudin et.al, 2023; Lestari, & Karim, 2024). Textbooks published Internationally frequently contain secular Western themes, such as celebration of holidays like Halloween, explorations of dating culture, or a focus on individualism—all of which may conflict with the moral values of many Muslim students. Consequently, many Islamic educators choose to reject these textbooks entirely, prioritizing grammar instruction or avoiding conversational practices altogether (Fakhrurriana & Ningsih, 2023). Incorporating Islamic values into communication content aims not to "Islamize" English, but to develop a value-sensitive content that enhances students' emotional engagement (Mardiana, 2020; Md Yazid, Sulaiman, & Hashim, 2024).

Asnaf learners face not only economic hardship but also emotional deprivation, often characterized by feelings of sadness, abandonment, and inferiority (Sari & Sari, 2022; Mohamad & Zakaria, 2018). Failure to equip orphans with communicative English skills is not only educational neglect, but also a loss of opportunity (Farangi & Mehrpour, 2024; Hussain et al., 2024). This challenge has sparked an interest in incorporating Islamic content into English Language Teaching (ELT) to enhance relevance and student engagement. Despite extensive research on CLT and a growing interest in culturally responsive teaching, there remains a notable gap in published research specifically addressing CLT approaches that integrate Islamic values for orphans or *asnaf* students. In this study, the adaptation of CLT's principles, such as interactivity, are integrated into an Islamic framework. By applying values such as piety *(amanah),* faith *(ihsan),* loyalty *(ukhuwah),* and sincerity *(ikhlas),* students engaged in authentic communication within a familiar moral and cultural context. This approach provides culturally responsive teaching, as the content is relevant to the learners' backgrounds.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

The researchers employed a qualitative research design to conduct an in-depth analysis of the current phenomenon. Creswell (2009) and Yin (2018) asserted that qualitative descriptive research enables researchers to deeply explore social phenomena. To develop the communicative English module with integrated Islamic values, the Design and Development Research (DDR) design was implemented which consists of three main phases: 1) Needs Analysis 2) Design and Development and 3) Implementation and Evaluation. The ADDIE model guided the whole process, which included analyzing the needs of *asnaf* students' in learning English, designing and developing the Islamic-integrated content module and evaluating the *asnaf* students' acceptance of the module (Suharsiwi, Lestari & Karim, 2024; Richey, Klein & Tracey, 2010). For this paper, the implementation and evaluation phase are presented.

Module Development

Following the DDR model, this study adhered to an iterative cycle of needs analysis, module design, implementation, and reflective evaluation of the developed module. The module aims to develop students' communicative competence by integrating Islamic moral and spiritual values. In this module, Islamic values such as *amanah* (trust), *ihsan* (empathy), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *ikhlas* (sincerity) are embedded in communicative speaking activities. These values promote ethical communication and, at the same time, are aligned with the Malaysian Standard Secondary School Curriculum (KSSM). The teachers who implemented the module were Muslim teachers who had formal training in English language teaching and a strong understanding of Islamic moral teachings, facilitating the effective integration of these values into the communicative tasks. However, this study did not systematically explore how the teachers' expertise in CLT, or Islamic beliefs influenced classroom instruction.

The integration of these values is underpinned by previous studies conducted by Hassan (1989) and Hashim and Langgulung (2008), who emphasized the importance of incorporating the Islamic worldview and

moral education into instructional practices. For instance, speaking tasks encourage students to practise *ukhuwah* through cooperative dialogue, *amanah* by being honest in group reporting, and *ikhlas* by expressing personal opinions sincerely.

Research Location

This study was conducted in a Muslim orphanage in a suburban area of Selangor, Malaysia. The institution incorporated Islamic studies into its curriculum; however, English classes had previously been taught using a traditional grammar-based approach. There was a lack of interactive teaching methods for English, and the teaching materials used were not adapted to incorporate Islamic values.

Research Samples

In this study, data were collected using a purposive sampling technique based on specific characteristics: 1) the children were categorized as *'asnaf'*; 2) they exhibited low proficiency in the English language; and 3) they were willing to participate in the study. A total of 15 students were selected for a six-week intervention, reflecting both the exploratory nature of the research and the need to consider vulnerable populations. While these limitations may restrict statistical generalizability, the qualitative data collected offer valuable insights that could apply to similar socio-religious education contexts.

Data Collection and Analysis

Islamic-Integrated Communicative English Module

The Islamic-integrated communicative English module was designed to infuse Islamic values such as *amanah* (trust), *ihsan* (empathy), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *ikhlas* (sincerity) into communicative speaking activities. This module was adapted from previous studies conducted by Hassan (1989) and Hashim and Langgulung (2008). Figure 1 below illustrates planned activity to enhance communicative skills through the Islamic value of *ihsan* (empathy).

Figure 1. Example of *ihsan* (empathy) value integration

Research Instruments

To gain in-depth insights from the students, this research utilized a variety of qualitative data collection techniques.

Classroom Observation

First, non-participant classroom observations were conducted over a six-week implementation, allowing the researchers to record students' responses, levels of engagement, and the use of English during classroom activities. An observation checklist was designed to capture students' communication behaviors and engagement patterns during task performance, adapted from the classroom observation framework developed by Burns (1999) and Richards (2003).

Reflective Journal

The structure of the researcher's reflective journal followed the guidelines established by Farrell (2015), which emphasized the importance of teacher reflection in understanding classroom dynamics and pedagogical insights. Each week, the students completed a written reflection form, describing their learning experiences, enjoyment level, perceived progress, and thoughts on the application of Islamic values.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students to gain a deeper understanding of their thoughts and feelings regarding the module. The interview questions were formulated based on a model used in student-centered language learning studies (Mackey & Gass, 2016) and

were tailored to accommodate the beliefs and socio-cultural backgrounds of the *asnaf* students. These interview sessions occurred after the sixth week and lasted approximately 35-45 minutes each. To mitigate the risk of social bias—especially in religious settings where students might feel pressured to respond favorably—several safeguards were implemented. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their responses were not being solicited under pressure. Interviews were conducted in a neutral setting to ensure that their responses reflected both positive and negative experiences. These measures were designed to foster a safe space for honest reflection from the students.

Validity and Reliability

To guarantee the validity and relevance of the data collection instruments, the observation checklist, reflective journal format, and semi-structured interview questions were adapted from tools commonly used in previous qualitative studies of language education and classroom studies.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Participants Demographic Background

All respondents came from poor families and primarily resided in or received assistance from Islamic welfare institutions, such as orphanages, zakat-funded projects, and religious welfare foundations, as depicted in Table 2.

Theme 1: *Asnaf* Students' Confidence in Speaking English

One of the notable findings discovered in this study was the confidence exhibited by *asnaf* students in their English-speaking ability. In the context of English communicative skills, confidence is not limited to linguistic accuracy or fluency but extends to students' willingness to participate, their reduced fear of making mistakes, and their emotional comfort in engaging with the language (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021).

Table 2. Demographic background of the participants

No.	Participant Code	Gender	Age	Background Description
1	S1	Female	13	Resident in Islamic-based orphanage
2	S2	Male	14	Registered zakat recipient (*asnaf*)
3	S3	Female	14	Student under orphan care program
4	S4	Male	13	Underprivileged youth with limited access to English
5	S5	Female	15	Recipient of Islamic charitable support
6	S6	Male	16	Long-term resident in Islamic orphanage
7	S7	Female	13	Dependent of religious welfare institution
8	S8	Male	14	Zakat-supported student from rural area
9	S9	Female	16	Participant in orphanage education program
10	S10	Male	13	Student with minimal English exposure
11	S11	Female	15	Child under religious care foundation
12	S12	Male	14	Low-income orphan with educational support
13	S13	Female	15	Learner from Islamic social welfare institution
14	S14	Male	16	Teenage orphan supported through zakat fund
15	S15	Female	14	Resident in full-time Islamic orphanage school

Increased Confidence in Earlier Sessions

In the initial sessions, the researchers noted, in the observation sheet, that the students were reluctant to speak. However, as the instructional module progressed, students gradually began engaging and

participating in group discussions. One female participant, designated S1, mentioned in the interview session that,

> *"Yes…Less scary. I know the topic, so I have the idea to say in class…Previously, during English classes, we learn about different (Western cultures), and I am not sure… I don't know about that (culture)"* (S1)

This increased confidence observed in earlier sessions can be attributed to two critical factors: using familiar, value-based content and applying CLT strategies (Tan & Listyani, 2020). When students are familiar with the context and can relate it to their lived experiences and values, their affective filter is lowered, allowing them to take risks and speak without fear of failure.

Increased Confidence in Later Sessions

In the first session, most students remained quiet and avoided eye contact when prompted to speak. However, by the fifth week, several students proactively initiated small discussions and volunteered more actively during class activities. An observation log recorded:

> *"By mid-program, over half of the students participated actively in their groups, with minimal teacher prompting. Some students rehearsed their dialogues on their own before presenting."*

This shift, noted in later sessions, indicated a growing sense of comfort and engagement among students. Their written reflections further confirmed this transformation, attributing it to familiarity with the context. Two students wrote in their reflective journal,

> *"I feel more courageous in speaking English because the activities are enjoyable, and   I no longer fear making mistakes."* (S15/RJ/W3)

> *"It's easier to speak when I am already familiar with the story. Discussing   about Prophet Yusuf or zakat in English helps me learn the words without being confused."* (S4/RJ/W5)

These reflections highlighted how familiarity with the Islamic themes reduced cognitive load, allowing students to focus more on language production than content engagement (Shobikah, 2023). Interview data noted that students' confidence increased when sharing their opinions on familiar topics. This is observed through responses from one participant who explained,

> *"If the topic is something I know, I feel more confident to speak. When we talked about Islamic values, I could share my ideas because I already understand the meaning in my language."* (S7)

Another added how the less threatening situation allows them to be freer to express ideas and makes mistakes less scary as stated by R8,

> *"I used to be afraid of speaking English, but in group tasks, we help each other and it's less scary to make mistakes."* (S8)

The cultural relevance in the lessons helped lower the students' anxiety and built trust within the learning environment (Krashen, 1982). However, the integration of Islamic content in speaking tasks provided a safe space that encouraged students' communicative competence (Hoerudin et al., 2023).

Theme 2: *Asnaf* Students' Connection to Islamic-Integrated Content
Another theme from this study was the students' emotional connection to the English lessons due to the integration of Islamic content. This theme highlighted how using familiar religious values and stories builds a sense of comfort, belonging, and relevance that could enhance the learning experience (Djazilan & Hariani, 2022; Hosaini, Zukin, & Firdaus, 2022).

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Building a Sense of Comfort and Belonging
Students did not view English as a detached or foreign subject but began to see it as a comfortable medium to express their faith, identity, and moral understanding. This theme was evident across classroom observations, reflection forms, and interviews. In a lesson where students performed a role-play about helping the poor, the researchers noted:

> *"Students were more animated during this session. Several volunteered to perform and shared personal experiences related to the value of generosity."*

Building Relevant Learning Content
Islamic-integrated contents were better aligned with the students' values and lived experiences as the researchers discovered more spontaneous use of English and peer interaction. Students' written reflections also highlighted that Islamic stories are "easier" to be talk about. One participant wrote,

> *"I like learning English with Islamic stories because I already know the meaning. It makes it easier to speak."* (S5)

> Another stated, *"Learning about Prophet Yusuf's story in English helped me understand patience, and I enjoyed telling it in my own words." (S3/RJ/W2)*

Students were not only learning how to speak English they were speaking from the heart, using topics they cared about. This was observed from S2 response, mentioning that the content is more relatable as he mentioned,

> *"When we talked about Islamic values, I could share my ideas better. It felt like I was learning English and learning about myself."* (S2)

Another participant said,

"It felt meaningful. I didn't feel like I was just memorizing English. I was talking about something important." (S5)

This theme emerged because traditional English language materials often lack cultural and spiritual relevance, especially for *asnaf* students in Islamic educational settings (Mohamad & Zakaria, 2018). As supported by previous studies, culturally appropriate content increases both comprehension and motivation (Wang, Abdullah, & Leong, 2022; Xu, Abdullah, & Tang, 2024). In terms of *asnaf* students' connection to Islamic-integrated content, the researchers noted that students' acceptance of the Islamic-integrated content was due to their personal beliefs and connection with the Islamic values.

Theme 3: *Asnaf* Students' Engagement in Communicative Tasks

Analysis from the findings revealed another theme that revolved around students' active engagement in communicative tasks. These tasks encouraged students to practice English in socially authentic ways, promoting greater autonomy, peer support, and enjoyment (Astrid, Hasanah, & Syafryadin, 2020). In the early weeks, students were observed relying heavily on the teacher for guidance and rarely initiating English conversation on their own. However, by the middle of the module, this behavior had noticeably changed. An observation notes from Week 4 reported:

"Students in Group 2 negotiated meaning in English with limited support from the teacher. They asked each other questions, corrected pronunciation, and discussed vocabulary before presenting."

This behavior not only indicated a growing sense of confidence but also suggested that students began to internalize the goals of communication. Students' written reflections further illustrated the success of these communicative tasks in promoting engagement. One participant wrote,

> *"I enjoy the group activities more than usual lessons. Talking about Prophet stories or daily values with my friends helps me learn and practice without pressure."* (S12/RJ/W5)

Another reflected,

> *"Storytelling was my favorite. I could use what I know and try to say it in English. It helped me focus more on language than textbook comprehension."* (S4/RJ/W4)

These responses show that students appreciated the freedom and support offered by pair and group activities, where they could apply their ideas and learn from their peers. One student commented,

> *"When we worked in groups, I felt more excited. I wanted to try. If I didn't know a word, my friend helped me. We all tried to speak more."* (S2)

Instead of remaining passive recipients of knowledge, students transformed into active language users, engaging in the construction of meaning in an environment that emphasized both collaboration and cultural relevance (Yürekli & Afacan, 2020). The researchers observed that collaborative activities and values-based tasks appeared more relevant to students' experiences, resulting in increased engagement and a greater interest in participation in these activities.

Theme 4: *Asnaf* Students' Challenges and Limitations

The analyses conducted also revealed another theme concerning the challenges and limitations faced by students in the context of traditional English instruction within various Islamic institutions. These lessons often prioritize memorization and lack of authentic communication (Shobikah, 2023; Singh Negi & Laudari, 2022). Despite the overall positive outcomes observed throughout the module, several challenges and limitations were nonetheless identified. A common observation was that

many students resorted to their mother tongue, Malay, during group discussions, particularly when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts. Observation notes from Week 2 recorded:

> *"Several students switched back to Malay during role-play rehearsal, stating they didn't know the English word for certain parts of the dialogue."*

This behavior highlighted students' vocabulary limitations and a lack of confidence in a spontaneous language production. Some participants expressed uncertainty when required to speak without assistance. For example, one student reflected:

> *"I like the story, but sometimes I don't know the English words to explain it. I feel stuck."* Another wrote, *"I want to speak more, but I'm still shy when I can't remember the words."*

This phenomenon is common in a non-English speaking country and highlights the gap between comprehension and production, whereby students may understand the topic but struggle to verbalize their thoughts in English (Ramalingam, Yunus, & Hashim, 2022). The interviews provided additional insight into this limitation. One participant remarked:

> *"I enjoyed the story but speaking in English was still a bit hard for me. I know the meaning, but it's difficult to express it in English."* (S1)

Another student also expressed nervousness and anxiety when sharing his thoughts whenever he was lost of words. S4 stated,

> *"Sometimes I get nervous when I don't know the words. I just wait for my friends to speak first."* (S4)

These reflections indicate that linguistic challenges remain, despite the supportive framework provided by the module. While the integration of familiar Islamic content helped reduce anxiety and improve motivation for many students, issues surrounding language production continued to be a major challenge for some due to lack of vocabulary and unfamiliarity with the language structures (Hoerudin et al., 2023; Mohamad & Zakaria, 2018). Although the module offered more opportunities for interaction and provided moral relevance, the transition from passive to active language utilization required time, practice, and sustained exposure. While the integration of Islamic values influenced students' emotional comfort, analyses derived from classroom observations and student reflections suggest that this emotional engagement subsequently facilitated increased verbal engagement. Students who were previously reluctant displayed greater willingness to participate in communicative tasks, suggesting that emotional safety is important for communicative language teaching.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the acceptance of a communicative English module designed with Islamic values among *asnaf* students. A key finding of this study is the empowering role of cultural and spiritual connections in supporting students' English language learning. For many underprivileged students, English often appears distant, difficult, or disconnected from their lives due to lack of exposure to the language. The students were not only taught to communicate in English, but also to express their beliefs and identities through the language. This sense of belonging plays a crucial role in building their self-confidence and willingness to participate in communication tasks. However, the study also identified some important limitations. While the module effectively reduced affective barriers to English speaking, the findings suggest a need for ongoing vocabulary support and structured scaffolding to promote sustainable language development. The study reflects broader implications, emphasizing the value of religiously sensitive, context-based language instruction in Islamic educational settings. Generic, one-size-fits-all English curricula may fail to adequately serve marginalized or

religiously distinct student populations. Teaching must be contextualized and connected to students' lives, beliefs, and identities. In this way, English will not merely serve as a tool for global communication, but also become a meaningful medium through which students can express their identities, values, and lived experiences.

Future research could explore how similar modules function in various Islamic learning contexts, including rural madrasahs, urban religious schools, or adult education settings. Additionally, research could investigate the impact of teacher training in culturally responsive pedagogy on the delivery and effectiveness of communicative approaches in Islamic-based classrooms.

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