

Classroom English Teaching Practices Integrating Islamic Perspectives in Muslim Minority Madrasah Contexts

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Abstract

This study explores classroom English teaching practices and the enactment of Islamic perspectives in a Muslim-minority madrasah in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. It addresses the gap between normative discussions of Islamic English Language Teaching and classroom-level evidence by examining the practical implementation of English teaching, the integration of Islamic

perspectives during instruction, and the challenges faced by teachers in the classroom setting. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the English teacher, school leaders, and selected students, and document analysis. The findings show strong alignment with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) curriculum and textbook sequencing, resulting in predominantly textbook-centered and form-focused instruction. Islamic perspectives were most visible in classroom routines, greetings, interactional norms, and moral reminders, while they were less evident in instructional content and language-learning tasks. Classroom interaction remained largely teacher-led; student participation was more apparent in task completion than in extended communicative use of English. Interview data indicate that these patterns were shaped by contextual constraints, including mixed-ability learners, limited English foundations, curriculum demands, restricted instructional time, and limited pedagogical space for alternative materials. Overall, this study provides context-sensitive, empirically grounded insights into English teaching in Islamic educational institutions within Muslim minority settings and highlights the need for pedagogical support and flexible curriculum interpretation to strengthen integration of Islamic perspective in task and content design while maintaining alignment with national standards.

Keywords: *English language teaching, Islamic perspectives, classroom practices, Muslim minority madrasah, qualitative case study*

INTRODUCTION

English is a mandated foreign language subject in Cambodian secondary education, supported by state-developed materials, including the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports MoEYS-approved English for Cambodia textbook series (Sok, 2019). National policy documents and teacher accounts commonly emphasize communicative competence as an intended outcome of English education; however, classroom implementation often remains constrained by factors such as limited instructional time, uneven learner proficiency, and reliance on prescribed textbooks (Bon, 2022). Empirical research in Cambodian TEFL has documented recurring tensions between communicative aims and

more form-focused, teacher-led routines in practice, particularly in settings where teachers prioritize coverage and manageability under resource and proficiency constraints (Em, 2022).

Within the national system, Islamic education in Cambodia operates in a distinct minority context. Cambodia's Muslim communities (often identified as Cham/"Khmer Islam") maintain Islamic schooling networks that support religious learning and identity preservation while navigating national curricular expectations (American Institute, 2008). Reports note that some Islamic schools integrate or adapt curricular elements from regional Muslim-majority systems (e.g., Malaysian-oriented pathways), while still engaging with Cambodian education structures and opportunities (Lunsford et al., 2018). Recent scholarship further highlights how school policies and curricular decisions are shaped by this minority positioning necessitating a balance between institutional religious identity and broader national education demands (Kosim et al., 2025). Conceptually, this study draws on practice-oriented perspectives that view curriculum and institutional values as enacted through classroom interaction and teacher decision-making under contextual constraints. In this sense, teachers' instructional choices are understood as forms of situated agency, shaped by available resources, policy texts (e.g., textbooks), and the practical requirement to maintain lesson coherence for mixed-ability learners (Ball et al., 2011). This approach allows the study to examine how English teaching and Islamic perspectives are negotiated in everyday classroom practice in a Muslim minority madrasah, rather than treating "integration" as a fixed or purely curriculum-level attribute.

English has long been associated with global communication, academic mobility, and access to wider bodies of knowledge, making it a central subject in many educational systems worldwide (Ashrafova et al., 2025; Kurusu et al., 2024; Ngoc Thu, 2023). For many learners, English represents more than a school subject; it symbolizes opportunity, connection, and participation in a global community shaped by transnational flows

of information and culture (Peng, 2023; Ten, 2022; Tobing et al., 2024).

In Islamic educational institutions, however, English learning is rarely a purely linguistic endeavor. Language is never neutral; it carries cultural meanings, ideological assumptions, and ways of seeing the world that may influence learners' identities and values (Al-beshri et al., 2024; Bekou & Mhamed, 2023; Gonzales & Zhang, 2025; Selvi & Galloway, 2024). Consequently, English teaching in madrasahs is often accompanied by expectations that it should align with, or at least not contradict, the Islamic perspectives and moral values upheld by the institution (Hamdanah, 2023; Sultana & Fatima, 2022; Zahiri, 2025).

These complexities become more visible in Muslim minority contexts. In such settings, madrasahs operate within national education systems that are largely secular, while simultaneously functioning as spaces for religious learning and identity preservation (Ihsan et al., 2021; Srinio et al., 2025). English is commonly mandated as a foreign language subject under national curricula, with an emphasis on communicative competence and global competitiveness. At the same time, teachers in Islamic madrasahs are expected to maintain the religious character of classroom life (Habiburrahim et al., 2022; Hasbullah et al., 2019).

Much of the existing literature on English Language Teaching (ELT) in Islamic educational contexts has explored the integration of Islamic values through curriculum design, instructional materials, or pedagogical frameworks (Djamdjuri et al., 2023; Selvi et al., 2025). While these studies provide important conceptual and normative contributions, comparatively fewer studies have investigated the interpretation and implementation of such integration in everyday classroom practice (Braun et al., 2021; Zhang, 2022).

In this study, integration is not treated as a fixed category divided into "symbolic" or "substantive" forms. Rather, it is approached as a situated and socially constructed practice shaped by institutional norms, teacher agency, and students lived religious

experiences. Practices such as greetings, prayers, or moral reminders are therefore not assumed to be merely symbolic; instead, this study seeks to explore how these expressions function pedagogically within English language instruction and how they are understood by classroom participants.

This gap is particularly visible in Muslim minority madrasahs, operate within broader national education systems while simultaneously maintaining institutional religious identities. In such contexts, instructional practices are often shaped not only by limited resources and standardized textbooks but also by structural expectations embedded in national curricula. Grammar-focused and teacher-centered approaches, therefore, may reflect wider systemic pressures common to under-resourced or examination-oriented settings (Gumelar & Jubaedah, 2025; Littlewood, 2013; Richards & Rogers, 2000), rather than being solely attributable to the minority context itself.

Rather than assuming that limited integration of Islamic perspectives results from pedagogical inadequacy or a lack of intention, this study posits that teachers' reliance on textbooks and conventional instructional formats may also function as adaptive or protective strategies within a secular national context. In this perspective, expressions of Islamic identity, such as greetings, prayers, or moral reminders, are examined not as insufficient forms of integration but as situated practices that are negotiated within institutional constraints (Alfian et al., 2021; Godana et al., 2015; Rohmah et al., 2019).

Despite the growing body of research on Islamic values in ELT, there is a scarcity of classroom-based empirical studies that comprehensively examine teachers' instructional practices in Muslim minority madrasah contexts. What happens inside the classroom, how teachers teach, how they frame content, and how Islamic perspectives are presented in daily interactions have not been sufficiently explored in existing literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Without addressing these classroom realities, discussions on integrating Islamic perspectives

into English teaching risk remaining abstract and detached from pedagogical practice.

Therefore, this study focuses on classroom English teaching practices that incorporate Islamic perspectives in Muslim minority madrasah contexts. It aims to explore how English is taught during classroom instruction, how Islamic perspectives are integrated into teachers' daily practices, and what challenges teachers face at the classroom level. By foregrounding lived classroom experiences, this study seeks to contribute a more grounded and human-centered understanding of English teaching in Islamic educational institutions. To situate these findings within the Cambodian setting, the next section provides a brief review of key literature on English language teaching in Cambodia (including MoEYS curriculum and textbook policy) and on Islamic education in Cambodia's Muslim minority communities. This sources collectively frame the institutional and pedagogical conditions examined in this study (Sok, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODS

This section outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study, including the research design, participants and research context, data collection techniques, and data analysis procedures. The methods were selected to address the research objectives and to enable readers to critically evaluate the rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to understand classroom English teaching practices and how Islamic perspectives are integrated during actual instruction. As teaching practices and classroom interaction are context-dependent phenomena, they require in-depth exploration rather than purely numerical measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A case study approach was adopted to facilitate an in-depth examination of a specific educational setting within its real-life

context (Yin, 2017). This study was bounded by place, time, and participants, focusing on Institute *An-Nikmah Al-Islamiyah* in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, during August 2025. The participants included one English teacher, school leaders, and one observed class of students. The data sources comprised classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis.

Participants and Research Context

The study was conducted at *Madrasah An-Nikmah Al-Islamiyah* in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, an Islamic educational institution operating in a multilingual setting. In addition to Khmer as the national language, the school also offers Malay in its curriculum. During English lessons, teachers typically deliver classroom explanations in Khmer to support students' comprehension, while English is used for target-language examples and practice. Interviews were conducted in participants' preferred languages: English for the teacher, Malay for administrators, and Khmer for students. All interview and observation excerpts reported in this article are English translations prepared by the researcher for consistent presentation.

The participants selection process integrated purposive and random sampling strategies. Purposive sampling was used to identify key participants directly involved in English teaching and institutional decision-making, namely the English teacher, the school principal, and the vice principal for curriculum affairs (Patton, 2015). Complementing this, the study included all sixteen students from the target class in the observation phase. To further investigate these findings, a random subset of these students were interviewed to minimize selection bias and broaden representation (Cohen et al., 2007; Etikan, 2017). The integration of institutional, instructional, and student viewpoints within the classroom context enhanced the credibility of the study.

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained. Written informed consent was obtained from the adult participants after providing a brief explanation of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the importance of

confidentiality. For students, the school's granted permission and students provided assent before participating in interviews. Students were informed that participation was voluntary, would not affect their grades, and that they had the option to skip questions or discontinue at any time. All participant names were anonymized, and identifying details were removed during the transcription process. The data were stored securely and accessible solely to the researcher.

Table 1. Presents an overview of the research participants and data sources

Participant	Number	Role in the study	Data source
English teacher	1	Main classroom instructor	Observation, interview
School principal	1	Institutional leadership perspective	Interview
Vice principal (curriculum)	1	Curriculum and instructional perspective	Interview
Students	16	Classroom participants	Observation, interview

Data Collection

Data were collected using three techniques: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The use of multiple data collection techniques was intended to strengthen the credibility of the findings through data triangulation (Denzin, 2012; Meydan & Akkas, 2024).

Classroom observation provided the primary data, targeting teaching methods, classroom interaction, teacher language use, and instructional activities. Particular attention was paid to the emergence of Islamic perspectives during English lessons. By acting as a non-participant observer, the researcher

reduced potential interference with classroom activities. Data were captured through systematic field notes covering all instructional phases and linguistic nuances (Cohen et al., 2007; Griffiee, 2005; Howard et al., 2018; Tjora, 2006).

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with key institutional stakeholders (the English teacher, the school principal, and the vice principal) and a subset of students. While the staff interviews focused on curriculum affairs to explore their teaching experiences, their perceptions of integrating Islamic perspectives, and the institutional support for English teaching, the students' interviews explored their perspectives on how Islamic integration was experienced during English lessons. Stratified random sampling was used for student selection to minimize selection bias. Through the categorization of students according to achievement levels and participation styles, the study ensured a representative cross-section of voices, rather than relying solely on more dominant or high-achieving learners (Cohen et al., 2007; Mohammadi et al., 2026).

Student interviews were conducted in Malay, as it is an integral component of the madrasah curriculum and a language that students learn and use in the school community. For consistency in reporting, the Malay excerpts are presented alongside English translations. Prior conducting any interviews, participants were required to provide their informed consent for participation and, where applicable, for audio recording.

Document analysis involved reviewing syllabi, lesson plans, and textbooks used in English instruction to contextualize classroom practices (Bowen, 2009; Spitzman & Balconi, 2019; Wotring et al., 2021). Table 2 summarizes the data collection techniques and their focus.

Table 2. Data collection techniques and focus

Technique	Focus of data	Purpose
Classroom observation	Teaching methods, interaction, Islamic	To capture actual classroom practices

Technique	Focus of data	Purpose
	integration	
Semi-structured interviews	Teachers, leadership, and student perspectives	To understand instructional, institutional, and student viewpoints
Document analysis	Syllabi, lesson plans, textbooks	To contextualize teaching practices

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative and inductive process, beginning with repeated readings of observation notes, interview transcripts (including those from the teacher, school leaders, and selected students), and documents to develop familiarity with the data (Ahmed et al., 2025; Braun & Clarke, 2019). During the initial coding phase, recurring patterns were identified related to teaching practices, classroom interaction, instructional materials, and forms of Islamic integration. Using constant comparison across data sources (Gale et al., 2013), these codes were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories. These themes were then refined and interpreted by relating them to the research objectives and the broader context of English teaching in Islamic educational institutions (Gumelar & Jubaedah, 2025; Selvi & Galloway, 2024).

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of these findings, the study employed a multi-dimensional triangulation of data sources (Denzin, 2012; Satria & Budrianto, 2025). This involved cross-referencing classroom observations with stakeholder interviews and documentary evidence, such as syllabi, lesson plans, and textbooks. During interviews—conducted in participants' preferred languages, including Malay for students—member checking and clarification questions were used to verify intended meanings and to avoid imposing external definitions (e.g., follow-up questions such as what routines signified in the lesson

and whether participants understood them as expressions of Islamic values in classroom practice). Furthermore, the analysis was supported by reflexive memoing, maintaining an audit trail where themes were retained only when validated by converging evidence. Through these rigorous procedures, the analysis established a grounded basis for interpreting how Islamic perspectives are enacted and perceived within an authentic pedagogical context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings from classroom observations and interviews, followed by a critical discussion of their significance. The findings describe how English teaching practices and Islamic perspectives were enacted in classroom instruction. The discussion then interprets these practices in relation to the research focus, methodological approach, and the gap identified in the Introduction. In addressing this gap, we recognize that the limited visibility of classroom-based studies in Muslim minority madrasahs may reflect not only a shortage of empirical research but also broader publication tendencies that often privilege large-scale or generalizable designs over deeply contextual case studies. Accordingly, this single-site study does not aim to offer a universal model of "Islamic integration" across minority settings. Instead, it provides context-sensitive, empirically grounded insights intended to support analytic comparison and potential transferability to similar contexts, while clearly limiting generalization beyond the Cambodian setting. Interview data are integrated as explanatory evidence to clarify why certain instructional patterns emerged in this Muslim minority madrasah context.

Findings

Curriculum implementation in classroom English teaching

Classroom observations revealed that English teaching practices at the madrasah were strongly aligned with the national English curriculum. At the beginning of each lesson, the teacher explicitly stated lesson objectives that reflected the competencies

outlined in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) textbook. Instructional activities focused mainly on grammar explanation, vocabulary exercises, and reading comprehension tasks, following the sequence provided in the textbook.

As the primary instructional resource, the MoEYS textbook dictated the pace and content of the lesson. The teacher drew consistently from its explanations, examples, and exercises while seldom incorporating supplementary materials. Consequently, the learning activities was characterized by a repetitive, teacher-centered pattern dominated by explanation and individual written tasks. This rigid adherence to prescribed text resulted in limited opportunities for interactive or communicative activities, and minimal adaptation of instructional content to students' language proficiency levels or contextual background.

Interview data provides insights into this instructional pattern. The teacher explained that students at the madrasah come from diverse regional and educational backgrounds, resulting in wide variations in English proficiency. To address these disparities and ensure that all students could comprehend the lesson, the teacher relied heavily on the national curriculum and textbook as a practical and structured guide. This indicates that textbook-centered instruction was a strategic response to classroom realities rather than a manifestation of a lack of pedagogical awareness.

Interviews conducted with the school principal and the vice principal regarding the curriculum further contextualize this pattern. They emphasized that English teaching is mandated to adhere to national curriculum standards and the official textbook sequence, particularly to facilitate students' readiness for school-level requirements. They also noted that the scarcity of instructional time and the need to maintain consistency across classes constrained teachers' ability to introduce supplementary materials or redesign tasks beyond the textbook.

Integration of Islamic perspectives in English teaching

Findings related to Islamic integration indicate that Islamic identity was present primarily through classroom routines and

social practices. The teacher consistently used Islamic greetings and maintained polite classroom etiquette that was framed through Islamic moral language. For example, the teacher reinforced religious social norms by ensuring students returned Islamic greetings appropriately. Furthermore, the teacher occasionally integrated religiously marked phrases into the classroom routine, employing phrases such as *Alhamdulillah* (praise be to God) and *Insha'Allah* (If God willing) to affirm students' effort or provide behavioral feedback. While respectful etiquette is also consistent with broader Cambodian cultural norms, these religiously marked expressions provided a distinctly Islamic context in this classroom. Moral reminders related to discipline and respectful behavior were occasionally delivered during instruction, contributing to an orderly and supportive classroom climate.

While a religious atmosphere permeated the classroom, Islamic perspectives were less visible in the instructional content and the design of language-learning tasks. The English materials and activities observed rarely required students to articulate Islamic ideas, values, or personal religious experiences in the target language. In other words, integration was more evident in the procedural management of classroom interaction than in substantive content-based language use or communicative tasks, which remained largely detached from Islamic themes.

Student interviews provide further insights into the learners' experiences during these integration moments. For instance, when inquired about the presence of Islamic elements in English lessons, one student explained in Malay, "*Ada juga. Kadang-kadang cikgu bagi contoh tentang kita solat*" [Yes, it happens. Sometimes the teacher gives examples about our prayer]. This indicates that Islamic references were often incorporated through examples embedded in teacher talk. Likewise, when prompted about the teacher's use of Islamic greetings such as *Assalamualaikum*, the student responded, "*Oh ya, masih. Cikgu masih guna 'Assalamualaikum' dalam kelas*" [Oh yes, it's still used. The teacher still uses 'Assalamualaikum' in class]. It suggests that

these greetings remained a recognizable routine in classroom interactions.

The student also described how Islamic etiquette was reinforced through classroom norms and moral guidance, stating, “*Kalau cikgu bagi salam, kami kena jawab salam. Itu adab. Bila kami buat kerja elok, cikgu akan cakap ‘Alhamdulillah’ atau ‘Insha’Allah kamu boleh’. Jadi kami jaga disiplin dan hormat dalam kelas.*” [When the teacher gives the greeting, we should return it. That is proper conduct [*adab*]. When we do our work well, the teacher says ‘Alhamdulillah’ or ‘Insha’Allah you can do it.’ We maintain discipline and respect in the classroom]. Overall, these accounts indicate that students perceived Islamic integration mainly through routine greetings, the modelling of etiquette (*adab*), and illustrative references. These elements supported a religious classroom atmosphere even though Islamic perspectives were not consistently developed through task-based language practice.

Classroom interaction and student engagement

Observation data further show that classroom interactions were predominantly teacher-centered. The teacher exercised primary control over the instructional flow, initiating most questions and strictly regulating student responses. Students participated mainly by answering short questions and completing written exercises as instructed.

Although students appeared attentive and responsive to classroom routines, opportunities for extended speaking and sustained interaction in English were limited. Student engagement was therefore more visible in task completion and short responses than in extended communicative language use. The classroom climate remained orderly and respectful, reflecting the moral norms emphasized during instruction.

Interview data provide additional insight into teacher-centered pattern. The teacher emphasized the challenges of managing mixed-ability classes and addressing students limited

English foundations; under these conditions, maintaining instructional clarity and classroom order necessitated a teacher-led interaction which inadvertently restricted communicative experimentation. This is echoed in the selected student interviews (conducted primarily in Malay) which suggest that learners experienced classroom participation as a process of following teacher explanations and completing textbook-based tasks. These testimonies align with the observational data, confirming a limited opportunities for extended oral production.

Table 4 summarizes key themes derived from the teacher interview and shows how interview data contextualize the instructional patterns observed in classroom practice. Overall, these themes suggest that teaching decisions were shaped by contextual and structural constraints (e.g., mixed proficiency levels and curriculum obligations), influencing both classroom interaction patterns and the ways Islamic values were enacted during English lessons.

Table 4. Summary of interview-based themes

Theme	Description	Relevance to classroom findings
Student heterogeneity	Students have varied educational and linguistic backgrounds	Explains reliance on textbook-centered instruction
Curriculum obligation	Teacher prioritizes national curriculum requirements	Supports strong curriculum compliance
Limited pedagogical space	Constraints in time, role, and resources	Explains minimal instructional adaptation and limited interactional variety

Theme	Description	Relevance to classroom findings
Islamic identity as moral framing and routines	Islamic values enacted through classroom norms, routines, and guidance	Explains how Islamic perspectives were enacted through interactional norms and classroom climate

Selected student interviews (conducted primarily in *Malay*, as most students were more comfortable communicating in Malay) further support this pattern. One student described classroom participation as strongly textbook- and writing-oriented, stating, “*Kami tengah menulis dalam buku latihan.*” [We usually just write from the book], which aligns with the observed emphasis on teacher-led explanation and written exercises. At the same time, the student also noted that speaking occasionally occurred through peer interaction “*yang bercakap dalam bahasa Inggris dengan kawan.*” [Doing speaking with a friend] suggesting that oral practice was present but tended to be episodic rather than sustained across lesson activities.

Challenges faced by the teacher at the classroom level

The findings reveal several classroom-level challenges that shaped instructional decisions. First, the teacher reported substantial variation in students’ English proficiency and educational backgrounds, which posed difficulties in pacing lessons and implementing extended communicative activities. Second, the limited instructional time and the obligation to cover MoEYS competencies led to a reliance on textbook sequencing and form-focused exercises. Third, students limited English foundations and the teacher’s need to maintain classroom order restricted opportunities for experimenting with interactive tasks, as clarity and manageability were prioritized. These constraints help explain why English teaching remained strongly curriculum-

aligned while pedagogical adaptation and content-based integration opportunities were more limited in everyday practices.

Discussion

Curriculum compliance and pedagogical implications

The findings indicate a closely alignment between classroom English teaching and national curriculum requirements, as reflected in consistent textbook sequencing and explicit reference to MoEYS competencies. However, this alignment did not necessarily translate into sustained opportunities for communicative or contextualized language use, given the predominance of form-focused, textbook-centered activities.

Triangulation across classroom observations and interviews (teacher, school leaders, and selected students) suggests that the teacher tended to prioritize curriculum coverage, clarity, and manageability within existing constraints. The teacher's reliance on the textbook was influenced by the students' heterogeneity, the limited instructional time, and the necessity to maintain lesson coherence and ensure minimum learning access for all learners. In this single-site context, these findings illustrate how strong curriculum alignment can coexist with constrained pedagogical adaptation, thereby addressing the study's primary focus on the interplay between curriculum and classroom realities in everyday practice.

The integration of Islamic perspectives and interpretive considerations

The findings suggest that Islamic perspectives were manifested primarily through classroom routines, interactional norms, and moral framing, rather than through the design of instructional content or language-learning tasks. In the observed lessons, Islamic identity was reinforced through greetings, etiquette, and occasional moral reminders that socio-behavioral atmosphere. However, English activities rarely required students to use English to articulate Islamic ideas, values, or lived experiences, indicating that integration was a structural feature of classroom interaction rather than a substantive component of task-based language use.

The participant accounts clarify how this pattern was understood within the madrasah context. The teacher emphasized that English instruction was organized primarily around meeting national curriculum requirements and following the MoEYS textbook sequence, while Islamic values were viewed as part of the school's moral environment guiding behavior rather than being systematically embedded into English tasks. Student interviews further demonstrate that learners recognized Islamic elements mainly through routines and illustrative references in teacher talk (e.g., examples related to prayer), which they associated with maintaining a religious classroom atmosphere. Operationally, therefore, "Islamic perspectives" in this study were identified based on participants' own descriptions and locally recognized classroom expressions of faith (e.g., greetings, moral guidance, and illustrative references), rather than through a pre-set external typology.

Given the researcher's positionality as an outsider observing a Muslim minority context, the study design incorporated explicit measures to reduce interpretive bias and to ensure that interpretations were not filtered through a secular or external academic lens.

Within these methodological boundaries, this single-site study does not claim to offer a universal model of Islamic integration across diverse Muslim minority settings. Instead, it provides a context-sensitive, empirically grounded account of how Islamic perspectives may be enacted through routines, interactional norms, and moral framing under curricular obligations and classroom constraints. These insights are offered for analytic comparison and cautious transferability to similar contexts, with clear limits on generalization beyond the Cambodian madrasah examined.

Negotiating curriculum demands in a Muslim minority context

The findings also illuminate how teachers negotiate national curriculum demands and Islamic identity within a Muslim minority context. National requirements shaped lesson structure and instructional focus, while Islamic identity influenced

classroom norms and interpersonal relations. These influences coexisted without overt conflict but resulted in a classroom environment that was morally supportive yet pedagogically constrained.

Student engagement patterns reinforce this interpretation. Although students demonstrated attentiveness and discipline, their opportunities to use English meaningfully were limited. Engagement remained largely behavioral rather than communicative, indicating that a positive classroom climate alone does not guarantee effective language learning.

Implications for practice in Islamic English classrooms

The findings suggest several implications for English teaching practice in Islamic educational institutions, particularly those operating in Muslim minority contexts. Curriculum compliance should be accompanied by pedagogical flexibility, allowing teachers to reinterpret curriculum objectives into context-sensitive learning activities. Rather than relying solely on textbooks, teachers can adapt examples, texts, or tasks to reflect students' lived experiences, including their Islamic and community-based realities.

The integration of Islamic perspectives can also extend beyond symbolic practices through small but meaningful pedagogical adjustments. For instance, English tasks can incorporate Islamic routines, moral values, or familiar community settings without requiring extensive curriculum redesign. Such practices help position English as a means for expressing cultural and religious identity, not merely as an academic subject.

Supporting teacher agency in constrained contexts

Another important implication concerns teacher agency. The findings indicate that limited instructional adaptation is closely linked to structural constraints such as mixed-ability classrooms, limited instructional time, and restricted resource availability. Consequently, professional development initiatives should prioritize practical strategies for managing diversity and integrating contextualized content within existing curricular frameworks.

Furthermore, school leaders and curriculum coordinators are pivotal in creating a pedagogical space conducive for innovation. Even modest institutional support can empower teachers to move beyond textbook dependency toward instructional approaches that promote communicative engagement and substantive integration of Islamic perspectives. In Muslim minority madrasahs, supporting teacher agency is essential for balancing national curricular mandates with a more meaningful, contextually responsive approach to English teaching.

The findings and discussion collectively demonstrate that classroom English teaching practices in this Muslim minority madrasah are characterized by strong curriculum compliance, limited pedagogical flexibility, and predominantly symbolic integration of Islamic perspectives. By integrating classroom observation and interview data, this study provides a nuanced explanation of the reasons behind such practices and offers practical insights for improving English language teaching in Islamic educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the English teaching practices in a Muslim minority madrasah and the implementation of Islamic perspectives within everyday classroom instruction. The findings revealed that while English teaching was closely aligned with national curriculum requirements and textbook sequencing, Islamic perspectives were enacted primarily through classroom routines, interactional norms, and moral framing, rather than being consistently embedded in instructional content and language-learning tasks. Consequently, this pattern points to a tension between the madrasah's institutional religious identity and the pedagogical realities of meeting national curricular obligations.

The significance of this study lies in its classroom-based evidence showing that the forms and scope of integration are shaped not only by teacher preference, but also by contextual constraints such as student heterogeneity, curriculum demands,

and limited pedagogical space. At the classroom level, teachers struggled to manage learners with mixed ability and limited English foundations while simultaneously maintaining lesson clarity and order, and meeting curriculum coverage targets within restricted instructional time. These compounded constraints restricted the opportunities for communicative activities and meaningful content-based integration. Triangulation across classroom observations, interviews (with the teacher, school leaders, and students), and documents highlights how teachers navigate these constraints while maintaining classroom order and ensuring lesson manageability. These findings may help educators, school leaders, and curriculum designers better understand the practical challenges of connecting religious identity with English teaching in comparable minority settings.

By moving beyond normative theories to document actual classroom practice, this study offers a grounded perspective on Islamic ELT, despite its single-site scope. It suggests that meaningful integration requires institutional support for teacher agency and the development of materials that connect English pedagogy with local Islamic contexts. Future research should explore multi-site comparisons and intervention-based designs to develop professional learning models that help teachers navigate the dual demands of Islamic integration and national curriculum standards.

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