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# Researching English Teacher Development and Classroom Instruction in Indonesian Madrasahs and Pesantren

Anne-Coleman Webre & Donald Freeman (editors)

Research from the English Language Teacher Training Project, 2022-2023, organized by World Learning with funding through the U.S. Embassy's Regional English Language Office in Jakarta, with the support of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### ***Creating Research Networks in ELT: An Indonesian Experience***

1. **Revitalizing the expanding circle: The value of local ELT communities and local knowledge creation**  
Gloria Romero
2. **Researching with others: The circumstances of the project and these studies**  
Donald Freeman with Abdul Syahid, Didin Nuruddin Hidayat, and Lois Scott-Conley
3. **Building a shared space for researching: The *why, how, and takeaways* from organizing a network**  
Anne-Coleman Webre and Martha Epperson

### ***Network Studies: The English-Language Teacher Training Project***

4. **Positioning ELT in Islamic schools: Insights from Indonesian madrasah and pesantren**  
Dedi Irwansyah
5. **'I have more English phrases': The impact of the ELTT program on the use of English as the medium of instruction**  
Siti Nurul Azkiyah, Waliyadin, Atik Yuliani, Nur'aeni, and Agus Sufyan
6. **From tiring to exciting: Perceptions of Indonesian madrasah English teachers of professional development in classroom management**  
Dian Erlina
7. **"So much hope; so little support": Indonesian madrasa English teachers' practices and perceptions of teacher professional development**  
Rahmah Fithriani
8. **Teacher and student perceptions of the English language teacher training program for Indonesian Islamic schools**  
Hanung Triyoko
9. **'I feel like Mr. English teacher now!': Developing Indonesian English teachers' agency through a blended professional development program**  
Faishal Zakaria
10. **Transitioning from trainee-teacher to teacher-trainer: The case of threshold concepts in language education**  
Abdul Syahid

### ***Moving Forward***

11. **Thoughts on developing an ongoing professional community – IARELTII**  
Hanung Triyoko, Dian Erlina, Dedi Irwansyah, and Faishal Zakaria
12. **Why culturally-relevant, appropriately-contextualised, teacher-focused research on English language teacher training matters – Some personal thoughts on this volume**  
Anne Burns

# Chapter 4

## Positioning ELT in Islamic schools: Insights from Indonesian madrasah and pesantren

Dedi Irwansyah

### Abstract

The heterogeneousness of Islamic education might be a new and exciting academic arena in the contemporary field of English language teaching (ELT). As a subset of Islamic education, Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* nowadays not only equip their students with classical Islamic sciences but also with English language proficiency. The inclusion of English into the madrasah and *pesantren*'s curriculum is not free from ideological and cultural challenges. When not tackled wisely, the challenges could hinder rather than facilitate ELT in such an institutional context. Supported by empirical data acquired through a questionnaire, group discussion, and personal interviews with eight English teachers of Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*, this chapter specifically aims to portray: (1) the English practitioners' perspectives related to English Language Teacher Training (ELTT) in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* during and after attending a teacher development program (TDP) sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, and (2) the plausible conceptual connection between ELTT and the Islamic educational tradition. This chapter offers an alternative insight to make ELTT more acceptable for the context of Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*, in particular, and in the context of Islam-affiliated schools, in general.

**Keywords:** ELT, madrasah, *pesantren*, practitioner perspective, specialist language

### Introduction

English officially became the first foreign language taught at the secondary school level in Indonesia since 1946, just a year after Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945 (Prayoga, 2022). The term secondary schools, in this context, might specifically refer to *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* (Junior high schools) and *Sekolah Menengah Atas* (Senior high schools). Madrasah and *pesantren*, other terms nowadays referring to secondary schools in Indonesian context, are hardly found in the discussion of early development of English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia although historical records show that in 1909, a madrasah named *Madrasah Adibiyah School* was established in West Sumatra (Syarif, 2020) and few *pesantrens* were found in Java island before the 1820s (Bruinessen, 2008). Thus, it is intriguing to explore how a long-established Islamic school like madrasah and *pesantren* seem to have disappeared from the first decades of the ELT narrative in Indonesia.

Syarif (2020) notes four remarkable points related to the history of madrasah in Indonesia. The points might shed light on the narrative of ELT in madrasah, often written as 'madrasa' yet pronounced as 'madrasah', and *pesantren*. *First*, madrasah used to serve as a basis of resistance to colonialism by the west, which at that time was represented by the Dutch colonialization. *Second*, madrasah was an attempt to systematize the variety of traditional Islamic education institutions, which before 1970s was generally carried out in mosques, *pesantren*, and *surau*, Islamic assembly building for worship. Madrasah was, then, a shift from the informal Islamic institution to a formal one. *Third*, madrasah was an Islamic educational institution aimed at anticipating secularism values that might be embedded in the existing educational system. *Fourth*, madrasah was first acknowledged as a government-run religious school in 1975 through the Joint Ministerial Decree (known as SKB 3 Menteri). The official recognition of madrasah came almost three decades after English was officially named the first foreign language in Indonesia.

Unlike madrasah, *pesantren* is a mostly a non-government-run religious school and is often labeled as a local Indonesian variant of madrasah. *Pesantren* that emerged before 1820s adopted the learning system that developed in Mecca and Cairo. In its early development, *pesantren* appeared to be divided into traditional *pesantren* and modern *pesantren*. The former is characterized by the rote learning of Arabic-written religious subjects, rural or urban lower-class students, and the veneration for previous Islamic scholars (*ulama*). The latter tends to put heavy attention on general subjects to prepare its students, who generally come from the urban and lower-middle class, to have professional careers outside the religious sector. Thus, modern *pesantren*, such as Gontor which was founded in 1926, would require its students to communicate in either Arabic or English. Meanwhile, many traditional *pesantrens* saw a changing labor market and adjusted their curriculum accordingly. In addition to traditional and modern *pesantrens*, there is a small number of the so-termed *salafi pesantren*. Most *pesantrens*, be they traditional, modern, or *salafi* stream, officially implement the government-approved curriculum of 70% general subjects and 30% religious subjects (Bruinessen, 2008) through their madrasahs, and at the same time apply their self-generated curriculum in the boarding facilities. While not all madrasahs might be organized by *pesantrens*, most *pesantrens* run madrasahs plus a boarding school system. It is mainly in the boarding system that a *pesantren* implements its self-generated curriculum which might or might not give an emphasis to the use of English.

As madrasah and *pesantren* in Indonesia have a long history and roots in the Islamic educational tradition, it makes them a distinctive institutional context for ELT, which has strong roots in the Western educational tradition. An institutional context, as proposed by (Brown, 2001) does not exist in a social vacuum and is one of the most salient variables affecting the implementation of ELT. This implies the importance of considering Islamic educational tradition and philosophy in teaching English at madrasah and *pesantren*. According to Al-Attas (1999), ELT might be categorized as a

branch of human and social science. Its teaching in an Islamic educational institution should be imbued with Islamic elements and concepts.

This chapter specifically portrays a teacher development program (TDP) called the English Language Teacher Training (ELTT) Program for English teachers at Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*. The program was sponsored by the Regional English Language Office (RELO) of the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta. It is assumed that the implementation of the ELTT Program is subject to the Islamic educational system. This chapter aims to generate a plausible conceptual connection between ELT, or specifically ELTT, and Islamic educational tradition based on the English practitioners' perspectives of Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*. The exploration of this connection might contribute to fostering mutual understanding of different educational traditions and facilitate a harmonious coexistence of these diverse educational paradigms.

### **Literature Review**

It is relevant to the study of ELT in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* to consider the historical and educational foundation of Islamic education. Through studying the history and tradition of Islamic education, it is hoped that a perspective on present-day practice in ELT and trends for its future growth in the Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* can be portrayed.

### **Islamic Education**

Islamic education began on the Arabian Peninsula with the declaration of Muhammad as the Prophet and with a curriculum that referred to the Holy Qur'ān and *hadith*, the sayings and acts attributed to the Holy Prophet, upon him be peace (Syarif, 2020). Its first teaching and learning activities were carried out in the Prophet's home, mosque corner (*suffa*), and learning circle (*halaqa*) (Niyozov & Memon, 2011), with a method of instruction closely resembling that of the Aristotelian style with students surrounding the teacher seated in the front (Hilgendorf, 2003). Through a massive expansion, Islamic education came in contact with various traditions such as Greek, Syrian, Egyptian, Persian, and Indian, which then helped color and shape the development of Islamic education itself (Halstead, 2004). Looking at the historical evidence, Islamic education is an evolving entity that is open to new insights derived from diverse traditions. Such an open attitude has its roots in the words of the Holy Prophet, upon whom be peace, which said "Go and seek knowledge and learn wisdom from any tradition available" (Rakhmat, 1998). These views imply two key points. The first is that a curriculum in Islamic schools has always been attached to the Holy Qur'ān and *hadith*. The second point is that Islamic education might be open to a branch of knowledge which is considered to come from a non-Islamic tradition.

Although Islamic education might have absorbed influences from various traditions, Halstead (2004) argues that it is still a distinctive educational system for it includes three specific concepts derived from the Arabic words —namely *tarbiyyah*,

*ta'dib*, and *ta'lim* — which are the equivalents of the word 'education' known in the Western scholarly tradition. Accordingly, *tarbiyyah* deals with the development of student's individual potential; *ta'dib* with the development of student's morality and social behavior; and *ta'lim* with the concrete process of knowledge transmissions such as training and instruction. Further, Davids & Waghid (2014) corroborate that *tarbiyyah*, *ta'dib*, and *ta'lim* are the instruments to achieve the Islamic educational purposes, namely to recognize God and to serve humanity. *Tarbiyyah* includes teaching students about Islamic faith and the prophetic tradition; *ta'dib* equips students with virtuous action of benefit the community and society at large; and *ta'lim* points out the critical engagement within the process of knowledge transmission. The interconnectedness among Islamic spirituality, morality, and pedagogy might be a factor that makes Islamic education distinctive.

### **Divine Ground for ELTT Program**

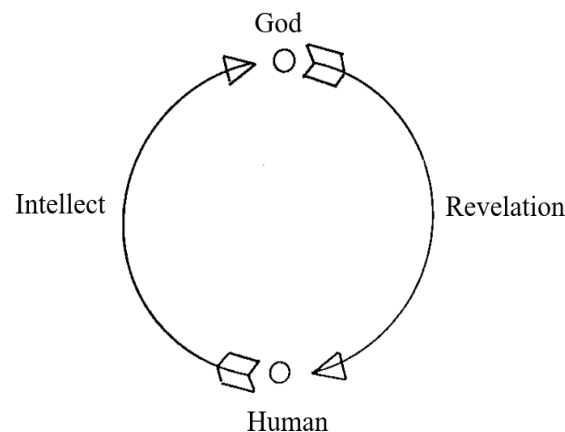
The distinctiveness of Islamic education might imply that all classroom instruction in the Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*, including that of English language classrooms, should be viewed as Islamic pedagogy in practice. To this end, ELTT needs to be seen as a derivative of Qur'ānic verses or Prophetic tradition. One of the verses in the Holy Qur'ān that underpins the ELTT is verse 22 of Qur'ān Chapter 30 which reads "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors. In this are signs for those who know" (Itani, 2016). The verse might at least imply two things. The first is that human language diversity is a manifestation of divine revelation. The second implication is that the divine revelation of human language diversity should be well-understood through a reasoning process leading to such predicate as: those of knowledge, the wise, and the knowledgeable (n.d., 2023). This point of view might foreshadow the importance of utilizing theological reasoning in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*.

Theological understanding and reasoning capability are, thus, of paramount importance in viewing the interconnection between Islamic educational tradition and ELTT. Niyozov and Memon (2011), furthermore, assert that although Islam is a rational religion in that logic and reasoning play important roles in the search for knowledge, still divine revelation should be placed over reasoning and become the guidance of human intellect. At the operational level, Islamic education then includes the divine revelation and human intellect as its sources of knowledge. The former is labeled as revealed knowledge (*naqliyyaa*) and the latter as discovered knowledge or constructed knowledge (*aqliyyah*) (Halstead, 2004). One point which is worth noting here is that ELT might be categorized as constructed knowledge. In order for ELT to be in tune with the need for knowledge construction in Islam, a revealed knowledge, basically derived from Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic tradition, might be mandatory.



## ELTT as a Discovered Knowledge

The term ‘discovered knowledge’ (*aqliyyah*) refers to humanly constructed knowledge. Niyozov and Memon (2011) maintain that all knowledge resulted from empirical, experiential, and logical processes might be considered as discovered knowledge. Thus, when ELTT, as a study area or a branch of knowledge, is strongly underpinned by human reasoning, it could be categorized as a discovered knowledge. It is worthy of note that Islamic education highly values the reasoning process that is based on and oriented toward the divine revelation. Quraish Shihab, a leading Indonesian Qur’ānic commentator, illustrates that the divine revelation, or Islamic religious guidance, is like the sun that could not be fully understood due to the glare of its light. To be able to understand it, humans need sunglasses to see without glare. In this case, the sunglasses refer to reasoning, intellect, or *‘aql* (Gita Wirjawan, 2022). Furthermore, the constellation of the relationship between revelation and human intellect (*‘aql*) can be seen in Figure 1, which is adapted from Nasution (2013).



**Figure 1.** Islamic conception of revelation and intellect

The above figure can alternatively be interpreted as God being the ultimate source of knowledge. He revealed the knowledge to humans through His prophets and apostles. To comprehensively understand the revelations, humans should utilize their intellect (*aql*). Only with the proper use of intellectual faculty, the one guided by revelation, can a human approach God as the primary source of knowledge. By understanding more of the knowledge, humans should draw near to God. Without knowledge, a Muslim might not come near God; and without the guidance of the divine revelation, a Muslim cannot come to the essence of true knowledge (Hilgendorf, 2003). Thus, any branch of knowledge taught in Islam-affiliated schools should be supported by a theological perspective.

The above view makes explains why all supplications for learning, as a part of the classroom routine in Islam-affiliated schools, lead to the awareness that knowledge comes from God. One of the most recited prayers derived from the Qur’ānic verse [QS 2:32] says: “Glory be to You, o God! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. You are truly the All-Knowing, All-Wise” (Irwansyah, 2023). Two other popular prayers

derived from the prophetic tradition, *first* reads: ‘O God, benefit me with what You taught me, and teach me things that benefit me, and increase me in knowledge,’ and *second* says: ‘O God, I seek refuge in You from knowledge which is not beneficial, from heart which does not fear You, from soul which is never satisfied, and from prayer which is not answered.’ A Muslim educator in *madrasah* and *pesantren* would always remind his or her students of the ultimate source, as well as the endmost direction, of beneficial knowledge. It is safe to state that for a Muslim educator in *madrasah* and *pesantren*, ELTT would not be truly beneficial when it is divorced from Islamic teaching tradition emphasizing God as the bestower as well as the destination of knowledge.

### ELTT and Indonesian Madrasah and Pesantren

While scholars, such as Pennycook (2007), suggest considering historical aspects in portraying ELT, historical facts point to the dominance of Western educational tradition in the Indonesian ELT landscape. Dardjowidjojo (2000) states that not until a decade after English was officially launched as a foreign language in Indonesia did the Indonesian government receive grants from the Ford Foundation and the British Council. As a result, more than a thousand English teachers were successfully trained to master the Oral Approach and thirty teachers continued their master and doctoral studies in the USA. Early Indonesian English teachers adopted the approach, method, and teaching materials from the Western educational tradition. The teachers might not be affiliated with *madrasah* and *pesantren* since both were officially acknowledged several decades after the grant.

Nowadays, *madrasah* and *pesantren* have incorporated English into their curricula. As they should be based on the Islamic educational tradition, rather than solely on the Western educational tradition, a distinctive conceptual framework in viewing ELT might appear. The author proposes the framework in Figure 2 below.

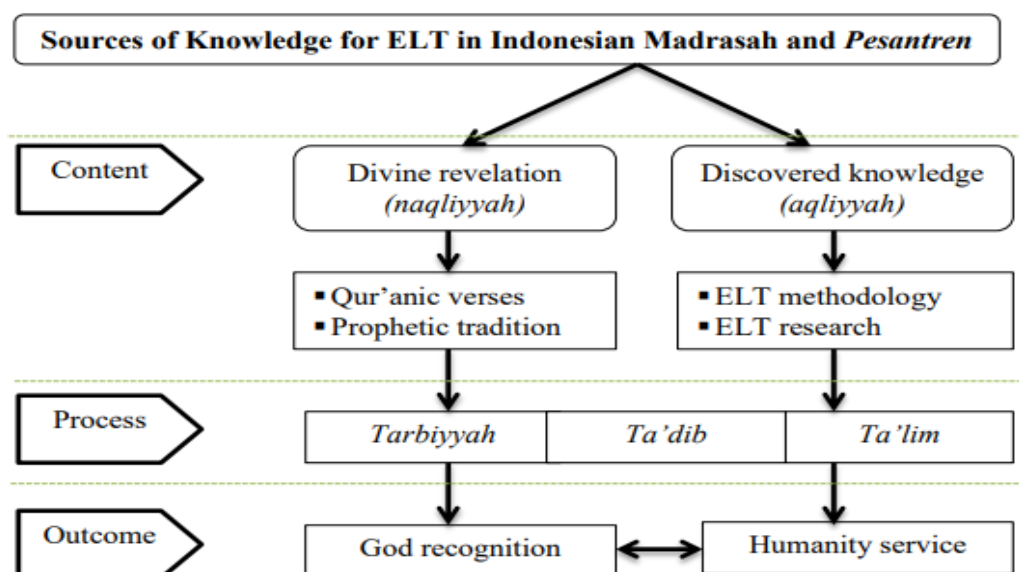


Figure 2. ELT as a discovered language in Islamic educational tradition

*Content.* Islamic education recognizes two sources of knowledge: divine revelation (*naqliyyah*) and discovered knowledge (*aqliyyah*). Divine revelation, which might refer to the Prophetic tradition and Qur'ān Chapter 30 verse 22 and Chapter 49 verse 13, should serve as the gateway of ELT to achieve the goal of Islamic education, which according to Alavi (2008) is to draw Muslims near to Allah. Discovered knowledge embraces the scientific development in the field of ELT. English teachers in madrasah and *pesantren* are supposed to work with both sources of knowledge for some reasons such as: (1) Allah is the base from which to depart, and the harbor to which to depart (Shihab, 2022); (2) Qur'ān and the prophetic tradition would become transparent for those who learn science (Hilgendorf, 2003) like ELT; (3) the exclusion of divine knowledge from the constructed knowledge leads to the loss of meaning (*ma'na*) (Ahmed, 2018). Thus, the incorporation of divine revelation is what makes ELT in madrasah and *pesantren* distinctive.

*Process.* Other salient educational features of madrasah and *pesantren* are manifested in such concepts as *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, and *ta'lim*. Saada (2018) maintains that *tarbiyyah* and *ta'dib* are two major purposes of Islamic education which at the operational level are achieved through *ta'lim*. *Tarbiyyah* is the spiritual domain of Islamic education aimed at helping students to live in accordance with the commands of God; *ta'dib* is the moral domain focusing on the inculcation of sound behavior and virtue guiding students to live well in the community and society; and *ta'lim* deals with the pedagogical practices. Using this theoretical lens, ELT in madrasah and *pesantren* should cover not only language skills but also spiritual and moral domains.

*Outcome.* While Al-Attas (1999) urges that the goal of education in Western civilization is to create good citizens, the goals of education in Islamic tradition are to acknowledge God and to serve humanity. The last mentioned goals are based on divine revelation saying that: "Say, "Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds" (Qur'ān: Chapter 6 verse 162); and the best people are those who contribute the most to mankind (Prophetic tradition).

The above framework which consists of content, process, and outcome might apply to all ELT activities, including the ELTT Program sponsored by the RELO, in the Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*. English practitioners might need to consider the combination between the divine revelation and the discovered knowledge when teaching English at Indonesian Islamic schools.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to describe the pedagogical practices of ELT in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* as distinct institutional contexts underpinned by Islamic educational philosophy and tradition. Based on textual data generated through a questionnaire, group discussion, and personal interviews, this qualitative research was guided by the following research questions: (1) what are the practitioners' perspectives related to Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* as an ELT teaching

context? (2) what are the teachers' responses toward the ELTT as a teacher development program? (3) what is the plausible conceptual connection between ELT and the Islamic educational system?

### **Research Participants**

Eight English teachers from different madrasahs and *pesantrens* in Lampung Province, Indonesia, participated in this study. The teachers were the participants of the ELTT sponsored by the RELO of the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, and implemented by World Learning, Inc. as well as National Geographic Learning through a carefully-designed online course from August to December 2022. Selecting participants who were following the ELTT program ensured a baseline of experience of learning a didactic method coming from outside Islamic tradition, and of implementing the method in madrasah and *pesantren*. All participants of this study were not necessarily representative of all madrasah and pesantren populations in Lampung Province, but they might illustrate diverse types of madrasah and *pesantren* which might be underpinned by traditional, modern, and *salafi* spirits. Table 1 provides basic information about the participants and their institutional contexts.

All participants of this study were graduates of Islam-affiliated university majoring in English language education. They had been formally trained to teach English at primary and secondary educational levels.

Table 1. Vignette of the participants and institutional context

Participants	Institutional context	Notes
NA*	<i>Pesantren</i>	Teacher 1 (T1). She has been teaching English in a madrasah for three years. The madrasah is a formal education run by a <i>pesantren</i> affiliated with the biggest Islamic organization in Indonesia called Nahdlatul Ulama, whose extracurricular activities cover, among others: Arabic, classical scripture, Qur'ān recitation and memorization, the reading of holy person biography ( <i>manaqib</i> ), calligraphy, and speech in three languages (Indonesia, Arabic, and English).
SWP*	<i>Pesantren</i>	Teacher 2 (T2). She has been teaching English in a public senior high school for 1 year. It is a variant of the school offered by <i>Pondok Pesantren</i> , which pays great attention to Islamic noble character ( <i>akhlakul karimah</i> ). The school is affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama organization.
DS	Madrasah	Teacher 3 (T3). He has 10 years of English teaching experience in an Islamic senior high school (Madrasah Aliyah).
MYK	Madrasah	Teacher 4 (T4). He has 3 years of English teaching experience in an Islamic junior high school with an emphasis on Qur'ān memorization. The madrasah, which is affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama organization, offers a boarding school for interested students.
SA*	Madrasah	Teacher 5 (T5). She has been teaching English in an Islamic senior high school with an emphasis on Qur'ān memorization. The madrasah offers some extracurricular activities such as scouting, English club, calligraphy, graphic design, and video editing.

VA*	Madrasah	Teacher 6 (T6) She has been teaching English for two years in an Islamic senior high school run by <i>Pondok Pesantren</i> .
AQ	Madrasah	Teacher 7 (T7). He has 6 years of teaching experience in an Islamic junior high school.
FAS	<i>Pesantren</i>	Teacher 8 (T8). He has been teaching English for 10 years in a number of Islamic schools such as a <i>salafi pesantren</i> , State Madrasah Tsanawiyah, and Vocational High School.

\*Female English teacher

### Data-collection Method and Analysis

The data were collected through primary resources including a questionnaire, group discussion, and personal interviews, and secondary resources such as enrollment fliers and school websites. To encourage the participants to share their views, the researcher used semi-structured interviews and group discussions characterized by open-ended questions (Creswell, 2014), related to teaching context exposure, teachers' responses to the ELTT program, and the connection between ELT and Islamic educational tradition. The open-ended questions were chosen to allow the participants to convey their perspectives regarding their actual teaching practices and to obtain rich data as the basis to conceptualize the place of ELT within Islamic education tradition. The eight interviews and two group discussions were transcribed manually to form a data corpus and were then subject to a grounded coding scheme. The information in the transcription was classified into categories and codes consisting of relevant keywords and concepts, and then thematically analyzed.

### Results

One point which is worth noting before presenting the results of this study is the information found within an enrollment flier of a *salafi pesantren* (Pondok Pesantren AFS, n.d.). The information might help readers understand the context of the research. Some noteworthy points in the flier include, *firstly*, the flier suggests that globalization has made it difficult for Muslims to deal with the negative influences of Western culture. These influences are especially dangerous for Islamic youth who do not yet have the skills to discriminate truth from fiction. *Secondly*, the solution to the problem is to regain the spirit and the practice of the pious predecessors (*salaf sholih*), who belong to the first three generations of Muslims after the death of the Holy Prophet, upon whom be peace. *Thirdly*, the *pesantren* applies two curriculums, namely the government-approved curriculum and the *pesantren*-generated curriculum. *Fourthly*, the desired goals of the *pesantren* are to generate young Muslims who adhere to the *sunnah* beliefs

and path (*manhaj*); have good knowledge, deeds, and characters; memorize the Holy Qur'ān and the sayings attributed to Muhammad, upon whom be peace (*hadith*); are able to speak Arabic and read the Arabic-written Islamic text; and are obedient to God, the Holy Prophet, and the ruling government (*ulil amri*).

The above portrayal is mentioned here to demonstrate that Western culture, despite its abundant beneficial resources for ELT, is likely to be depicted as a source of problems due to the historical legacy where secularism and colonialism are often associated with it (Syarif, 2020). The English language, as an entity coming from the West, might also be considered as playing an unimportant role in the daily lives of the pious predecessors (*salaf sholih*). Arabic, on the contrary, is deemed central to achieving the school's goals. As the English language is a part of the government-approved curriculum, its teaching might be viewed as an obedient act to the government (*ulil amri*). These are likely among the challenges faced by the English language teachers in Indonesian madrasahs and *pesantrens*, particularly that of the *salafi* stream which tends to be neo-traditional and conservative characterized by literalist, rigid, monolithic, dogmatic, and past-oriented teaching (Saada, 2018). The information contained in an enrollment flyer of a madrasah and *pesantren* might represent the schools in general. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate other remarkable issues seen from the English teachers' point of views. Preliminary analysis of the teachers' questionnaire, group discussions, and personal interviews led this exploration of practitioners' perspectives of Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* to several emerging themes which may include: the peculiarity of madrasah and *pesantren*, the school's priorities as perceived by the English teachers, the influence of Arabic on ELT, the importance of teacher development programs, teachers' strategies to improve the acceptability of English, and the conceptual connection between ELT and the Islamic educational tradition.

### **The Practitioners' Perspectives on Teaching Context**

Earlier studies within Indonesian contexts found that the practitioner's perspectives are of paramount importance in the efforts to support the teachers with their pedagogical responsibility and intercultural role (Waterworth, 2016) and to reach the meaningfulness of ELT (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2021). The following perspectives of English teachers specifically shed light on ELT in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* context.

#### ***Peculiar Context of Madrasah and Pesantren***

Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* might be a distinct educational context for ELT in terms of the need to intertwine the issues of authenticity and contextuality. The former refers to positive feelings of utilizing the materials and teaching methods derived from Western resources. The latter pertains to an attempt to integrate ELT with Islamic teaching and tradition. The following excerpts depicted how the participants of this study responded to the materials and teaching methods from Western resources.

#### Excerpt 1

*The common teaching methods in pesantren such as the lecture method and sorogan method might seem less effective for ELT. These methods need to be combined with teaching methods introduced by the Western world to make ELT more interactive.* (Interpersonal interview with NA (T1), English teacher of a madrasah run by a pesantren, 2022)

#### Excerpt 2

*The teaching materials and teaching methods from the Western world are not a problem. I am not worried at all. I can choose what is good.* (Interpersonal interview with DS (T3), English teacher of a Madrasah Aliyah, 2022)

#### Excerpt 3

*The Professional Knowledge (PK) section in the ELTT Program has provided me with an enrichment of teaching materials and teaching methods.* (Interpersonal interview with SA (T5), English teacher of a Madrasah Aliyah Tahfidzul Qur'ān, 2022)

#### Excerpt 4

*I have been positively impacted by the ELTT Program. However, we should connect what we have learned in the program with the existing customs in pesantren.* (Interpersonal interview with AQ (T7), English teacher of Madrasah Tsanawiyah, 2022)

The excerpts above collectively show that Western resources had been positively accepted by English teachers in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*. The teachers did not find any issues related to secularism which was often associated with Western educational tradition. Nevertheless, they found that the materials, teaching methods, and professional knowledge they had learned throughout the ELTT program need to be adjusted, both at the practical level and theoretical levels, to meet the contextual circumstances of madrasah and *pesantren*.

#### ***The School's Priorities as Perceived by the English Teachers***

While most madrasahs might have a lot in common as they refer to the same government-approved curriculum, *pesantrens*, or madrasahs which are integrated with pesantrens, might offer different emphases related to their educational objectives. The participants of this study described the priorities of their madrasahs and *pesantrens* based on what they had seen, felt, and experienced. NA (T1), who teaches English in a madrasah run by a *Pondok Pesantren* affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama organization, said that her school's priority was the Holy Qur'ān memorization and Islamic classical scripture. SA (T5) pinpointed that her madrasah also gave a great emphasis on the Holy Qur'ān memorization and Islamic classical scripture. SWP (T2), who teaches English in a senior high school run by a *Pondok Pesantren* affiliated also with Nadlatul Ulama, stated that the school emphasized 'the Holy Qur'ān memorization and the mastery of Arabic and English'. DS (T3) said that the madrasah where he teaches paid more attention to 'life skills, Islamic classical scripture, Arabic, and English'. By life skills, he



referred to the ability to work in the fields of tailoring, computers, and automotive. It was further stated that the headmaster, as well as the chairman of the school foundation, was knowledgeable about English in that he supported the idea of adopting ELLT program in the school. MYK (T4) said that his madrasah made 'the Holy Qur'ān memorization and the Holy Qur'ān proper recitation (*tahsin*)' its priority. VA (T6), who teaches English in a private madrasah run by a *pesantren*, said that her school emphasized 'good proficiency of Arabic and English'. Meanwhile, AQ (T7) said that even though his madrasah paid great attention to the Holy Qur'ān memorization, it stipulated that students communicate daily in Arabic and English.

Arabic and English always coexist in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantrens*—be it modern, traditional, or *salafi pesantren*—with diverse spectrums. While all madrasahs include English in their curriculum, some *pesantrens*, particularly the modern stream, might reinforce the existence of English through the boarding school's regulation of using the language for daily communication. At this juncture, English meets a challenge in an Islamic living context. For English to be welcomed and respected, the ELT in formal classes might need to address the Islamic specialist language. Otherwise, English will be less contextual compared to that of Arabic.

### ***The Influence of Arabic on ELTT***

English teachers in Islamic schools seem to be aware that Arabic has been strongly established and that this might affect the sustainability of ELT. The participants of this study described how they perceived the existence of ELT in Indonesian madrasahs and *pesantrens*. One participant, DS (T3), a madrasah English teacher for over 10 years, said that 'the students would prefer Arabic for it is the basic language'. Another participant, NA (T1), said that her students would take ELT for granted as only part of the mandatory curriculum, 'for the students, English is just formality'. To a certain extent, English seems to be a burden for the students. SA (T5), an English teacher in a madrasah with a focus on Qur'ān memorization, said that her students are not highly motivated to learn English. She assumed that her students would mostly say 'Why should bother learning English? It is much better to learn Arabic'.

Teachers in madrasah and *pesantren* are likely to find that Arabic is the language of classical Islamic learning and, thus, access to Islam's core texts such Qur'ān, hadith, and classical yellow books (*kitab kuning*). The practicality of Arabic for the students of madrasah and *pesantren* might have reduced the acceptability of English. English teachers, as well as policymakers of madrasah and *pesantren* with a modernist spirit, often view English as an important factor in education nowadays.

### **Teachers' Responses to ELTT Program**

Following the Islamic view of 'seeking knowledge from the cradle to the grave', English teachers in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* are supposed to be long-life learners. The view might stand as a spiritual reason to join a TDP and learn relevant strategies to improve the acceptability of English through relevant teaching methods

and materials. The following research findings describe the English teachers' responses to such TDP as ELTT program.

### ***The Importance of the ELTT Teacher Development Program***

One of the strategies carried out by the madrasahs and *pesantrens* is to permit their English teachers to take part in a teacher development program (TDP), namely the ELTT program sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in 2022 and supported by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA). The program was aimed at improving madrasah and *pesantren* teachers' teaching methods, ability and confidence to teach English using English, and professional networking. Most, if not all, the participants of the program had a positive impression of the program. For example, FAS (T8), who has been teaching in a *salafi pesantren*, where all its female students wear a piece of cloth to cover their faces (*niqab*), since 2012 said 'I am happy to join the ELTT Program'. He hoped that he could improve ELT in the school despite its very limited facilities and salaries. AQ (T7), with six years experience of teaching English in a madrasah where he graduated, said: 'I learnt many practical phrases in this program'. He emphasized the *Teacher Reference Book*, a material in the program, where he found various applicable expressions to enrich his language styles. DS (T3) said that the program had provided him with a network where he could meet and exchange teaching experiences with other English teachers. MYK (T4), who has three years of teaching experience in a madrasah focusing on the Holy Qur'ān memorization, said: 'I learned effective and applicable teaching methods'. He found it easier now to teach new vocabulary and phrases to his students.

It appears that the ELTT program has brought about positive pedagogical impacts for the participants ranging from positive feelings, practical materials, and interactive teaching methods to professional networking. The impacts are, mostly, in tune with the objectives of the TDP except that of teaching English using English. The following subheading presents not only the reasons why English teachers in madrasah and *pesantren* utilize language varieties other than English in their classroom, but also the perspective on why the use of these language varieties should be seen as strategies to improve the acceptability of English in madrasah and *pesantren*.

### ***Teachers' Strategies to Improve the Acceptability of English within Islamic Practices***

Although the English teachers felt better equipped with English for teaching and professional knowledge after attending the ELTT program, they did not use English as the only medium for their instruction. At the practical level, they applied some strategies to intertwine the existing Islamic pedagogical practices with what they had learned from the ELTT program. They showed three remarkable strategies to contextualize ELT, which in turn would enhance the acceptability of English, in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*. *Firstly*, MYK (T4) said that 'I sometimes use Arabic words in English class'. He was not only an English teacher but also an Arabic teacher. His using Arabic in the English class would emphasize that the two languages are of

paramount importance in today's world. The same strategy was also used by VA (T6) who said 'I used Arabic grammatical concept as a comparison' when explaining certain English grammatical points. SA (T5) also said 'I often said *fahimtum* right after 'do you understand''. *Secondly*, SWP (T2) said that 'preaching while teaching is important' and, therefore, she inculcated Islamic values when teaching English. AQ (T7) also corroborated the strategy and said that teaching English was also about '*wa tawaasaw bilhaqqi wa tawaasaw bissabr*' which literally means advising each other to truth and advising each other to patience. *Thirdly*, NA (T1) said that she used translanguaging approach in teaching English: 'I sometimes used Indonesian language to explain the lesson'. She also used the students' regional language for an ice breaker.

Recognizing the educational tradition in madrasah and *pesantren* provided the English teachers with an agency to make ELT contextual for their learners. The teachers' use of Islamic theological ground, Arabic language, national language, and regional language as parts of teaching strategies, not only might connect ELT with local pedagogical practices of madrasah and *pesantren*, but also lead to a larger conceptual need for designing the interface between Western resources and Islamic educational tradition.

### **The Conceptual Connection between ELTT and the Islamic Educational Tradition**

The following excerpt depicted the emerging need of generating a conceptual connection between ELT and the Islamic educational tradition that has been long-established in madrasah and *pesantren*.

#### **Excerpt 5**

*However, at the practical level I need to combine what I have learned throughout the ELTT program with the traditions that already exist in madrasah.*

(Interpersonal interview with SA (T5), English teacher of Madrasah Aliyah Tahfidzul Qur'ān, 2022)

The conceptual connection between Islamic education and contemporary English Language Teaching (ELT) is of paramount importance for two main reasons. The first reason is that it is unavoidable for English teachers in Madrasah and *pesantren* to connect ELT with Islamic pedagogical concepts and practices. The second reason is that an alternative conceptual connection needs to be proposed. According to Ahmed (2018), many critiques might have addressed the weakness of the secularization values within the Western intellectual tradition, yet often fail to present a real alternative.

The alternative connection between Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* might be a new and exciting academic arena. Madrasah and *pesantren* were first identified with Arabic language teaching, for Arabic has served as a lingua franca of Muslims around the world. Arabic has also been an instrument for spreading Islamic teachings and Islamic education. Arabic and Islamic education have long been connected. Such a connection has been preserved through the educational system in madrasah and

*pesantren*. Thus, madrasah and *pesantren* are mainly developed to protect the Islamic teachings and identities through a distinct Islamic educational system.

When the English language was first introduced in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren*, the stakeholders' responses might fall into one of the following options: rejection, adaptation, and complete acceptance (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). The first two responses, rejection and adaptation, might have something to do with the stigma of secularism and colonialism which are commonly attached by the Muslim World to the Western World. The author argues that toward ELT, Indonesian madrasahs and *pesantren* tend to belong to the second response, adaptation. This is quite understandable due to the scientific construction of Islamic education which combines divine revelation and discovered knowledge. It means that ELT as an autonomous area of study would only be well-accepted in Indonesian madrasahs and *pesantren* when it is equipped with pedagogical practices that are in tune with Qur'ānic teaching and the prophetic tradition.

### ***ELTT within the Islamic Educational Tradition***

Islamic education is often labeled as an indigenous knowledge system for it is based on non-Western beliefs, customs, and worldviews (Davids & Waghid, 2014). On the other hand, ELTT might be categorized as a non-indigenous for it is strongly attached to the Western construction of the knowledge system. Thus, ELTT within the context of Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* could be plausibly viewed as interplay between two distinct systems of knowledge. The challenge for Muslim educators in madrasah and *pesantren* is how to participate in ELTT Program without compromising the Islamic authentic and indigenous identity. The following excerpt portrayed the above view.

Excerpt 6

*We need to combine knowledge from the Western world with the pesantren tradition.* (Interpersonal interview with AQ (T7), English teacher of Madrasah Tsanawiyah, 2022)

The excerpt above suggests that studying and utilizing Western resources about English language pedagogy would definitely pave the way for becoming a professional EFL teacher. Nevertheless, digesting and applying Islamic theology would lead a Muslim professional EFL teacher to a direction that is by God's commands. In other words, knowledge would clear the path and faith would give the direction of the path.

### ***The Notion of Islamic Specialist Language***

As has been touched upon in the previous section, English might be less contextual than Arabic when it does not specifically address the expressions and terms commonly used in madrasah and *pesantren*. Given the fact that ELTT should be context-dependent and that Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* are peculiar contexts, English teachers might be required to utilize Islamic words, terms, and expressions that are not commonly found in general English. One of the participants said the following.

Excerpt 7

*My challenge now is how to combine the teaching materials from Western world with Islamic materials.* (Interpersonal interview with DS (T3), English teacher of Madrasah Aliyah, 2022)

The excerpt shows a need for contextual teaching materials that accommodate Islamic content and Islamic words in addition to that of globally-accepted materials produced by Western publishers. Specifically, Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* need Islamic specialist language. According to Freeman and Katz (2021), specialist language refers to the use of language for a specific context and profession such as medical language for doctors and legal language for lawyers. Thus, the use of English for Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* might be sensibly termed as Islamic specialist language. The term refers to a subspecification of English-for-Teaching, the handbook used in the ELTT program, and is basically built upon the assumption of specialist language stating that the mastery of general English does not make one a specialist in the language of teaching. As the findings of this research suggest that such specialist language as English for teaching might not fully accommodate the particularity of madrasah and *pesantren*, another generation of English-for-Teaching is needed to fit the needs of English teachers in Islamic schools.

### **Discussion**

The first research problem of this study deals with the location of madrasah and *pesantren* as an ELT context. The findings show that Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* might have two main views related to Western culture, in general and ELT in particular. The first is that Western culture is likely to be viewed as a potential threat by *salafi* stream. The view, to a certain extent, might be linked to Western pedagogies and epistemologies, which were once connected to Judaeo-Christian ideas, but now significantly follow rationalist and secular philosophies and ideologies (Diallo, 2012); and that the implementation of ELT in Islamic schools could possibly be seen as an instrument of secularization and de-islamisation (Hamid, 2022). As a result, English, as shown in the enrolment flyer of the *salafi pesantren*, would be a subject that must be taught because it is part of the curriculum imposed by the government. Teaching ELT might appear to be more about obeying the ruling government (*ulil amri*).

The second view is that the Western world tends to be viewed positively by English teachers in both traditional and modern madrasah and *pesantren*, particularly as a major source of English pedagogy that introduces authentic teaching materials and interactive teaching methods. Some madrasahs and *pesantrens* place English as one of their priorities. Another finding reveals that Arabic is seen to be more practical and exploitable than English. Students attending Arabic classes in madrasah and *pesantren*, would find Arabic practical when they learn other varieties of lessons and texts. Thus, English would have a high degree of practicality, exploitability, and intertextuality when it accommodates Islamic English (Faruqi, 1995; Iqbal, 2012) or more Islamic terms (Ali, 2007) which are rooted in Arabic words. It is important to note that most modern

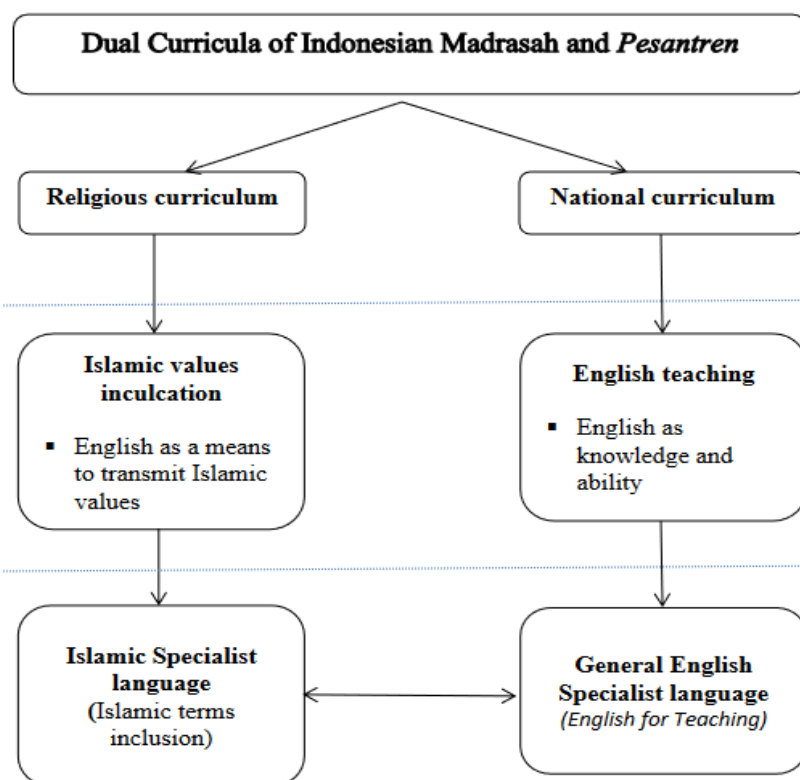
*pesantrens* might use English as their unique selling point by making English, in addition to Arabic, the language of daily communication.

The second research problem explores the English teachers' responses to a TDP, the ELTT program, sponsored by the U.S. Embassy. Although all participants felt the positive pedagogical impacts of the ELTT Program, not all of the pre-determined objectives of the program were achieved, particularly the goal of teaching English using English. Due to the multilingual condition of madrasah and *pesantrens* of this study, teachers use English, mainly, Arabic, Indonesian, and vernacular languages. The use of a rich linguistic repertoire extends Renandya's et al. (2023) argument that monolingualism in a multilingual educational setting of ELT is not always beneficial, given the fact that English teachers need to help widen and enrich their students' diverse linguistic and social needs. However, the finding of this study presents a different point of view in terms of the teachers' need to meet the students' spiritual needs. Another finding shows the teachers' uses of Islamic tradition and Arabic terms in ELT, within the framework of translanguaging approach, have been part of a potential teaching strategy in madrasah and *pesantren*. This lends partial support to Kumaravadivelu's (2012) argument that ELT needs to be conducted by considering the aspects of particularity, practicality, and possibility. This argument requires English teachers to accommodate their cultural and institutional needs, theorize their real pedagogical practices, and use their self-constructed pedagogical views to strengthen institutional identity.

The third research problem of this study conceptualizes a plausible connection between ELT and the Islamic educational system. There is evidence within the data that ELT should be interconnected with Divine revelation (*naqliyyah*) imbued by the spirit of the oneness of God (*tawhid*). By *tawhid*, it refers to the combination of supernatural realm and empirical realm. God said in the Holy Qur'ān [QS 59: 22] "He is Allah. There is no god but He, the Knower of secrets and declarations. He is the compassionate, the Merciful" (Itani, 2016). This verse is often used to emphasize the existence of the supernatural realm (*gaibi*, secrets) and the empirical realm (*shahādah*, declaration) that need to be combined for Muslims to live in the spirit of *tawhid*. Analogically, a sick Muslim needs to see a doctor and take medicine. For the treatment process to be in the corridor of *tawhid*, the Muslim needs to deal with the supernatural realm, namely by praying before taking the medicine with the belief that healing comes from God, and the observable realm, namely by taking the medicine prescribed by the doctor (Rakhmat, 2012). English mastery through ELT might be likened to a cure for an illness caused by a lack of mastery of science and technology, and learning English by involving Islamic tradition means combining the supernatural realm and the empirical realm leading to *tawhid*. This *tawhid* orientation of ELT echoes Alavi's (2008) explanation forward earlier in this paper that any branch of knowledge interconnected to Islamic educational tradition should draw Muslim learners to be near to God.

There is also evidence that shows an emerging need for an interdisciplinary understanding that connects the literature of English pedagogy and Islamic educational tradition in *madrasah* and *pesantren*. The study area of English pedagogy that stands alone appears to be a discovered knowledge (*aqliyyah*) only. It would never be strong enough for a trajectory to true knowledge in Islamic tradition that requires a divine base and orientation (*naqliyyaa*). This finding might be in a similar vein to the notion of Islamization of knowledge (Niyozov & Memon, 2011) which calls upon the need to understand all branches of knowledge from Islamic worldviews because true education in Islam should have a religious orientation. Thus, the interdisciplinary understanding should help English teachers to interconnect the contemporary ELT practices with two key pillars of the Islamic faith, God recognition and humanity service.

The finding of this research also reveals the acceptance of the Western sources, on one hand, and the preservation of the Islamic pedagogical tradition, on the other hand. Since both the acceptance and the preservation seem to be inseparable, the Western resource, particularly English-for-Teaching handbook as the ELTT program material, needs to be aligned with the conceptual foundations of the Islamic pedagogical traditions. Such alignment could be plausibly conducted through the development of Islamic specialist English. Using the theoretical lens proposed earlier by Saada (2018), the development of Islamic specialist language as a subspecification of the English-for-Teaching handbook would possibly respond to the students' spiritual needs (*tarbiyyah*) and Islamic moral needs (*ta'dib*) through ELT (*ta'lim*). The development also would reflect the view that English-for-Teaching should be a tool that helps teachers to teach according to their goals (Freeman & Katz, 2021), which might include the teachers' professional goals and their institutional goals. The following Figure 3 depicts possible reasons why Islamic specialist language is indispensable for Indonesian *madrasah* and *pesantren*.



**Figure 3.** Islamic specialist language for madrasah and pesantren

*Religious and national curricula.* A study conducted by Ihsan et al. (2021) demonstrated that Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* have been on a quest for systematically synergizing and balancing the religious and national curricula. The two curricula are contested based on the assumption that madrasah and *pesantren*, on one hand, are expected to imbue their students with adequate Islamic knowledge and that, on the other hand, the existence of non-religious subjects might erode their Islamic identity. Thus, as the national curriculum situates English as a non-religious subject, it might imply that ELT would focus only on the fulfillment of students' linguistic, affective, cognitive, and social needs. Meanwhile, the religious curriculum might greatly address the students' spiritual needs. Therefore, balancing the religious and national curricula within the framework of ELT would suggest that English teachers meet their students' diverse needs ranging from linguistic needs to spiritual needs.

*Inculcating Islamic values and teaching English.* Through their study, Qoyyimah et al. (2023) showed that English teachers in Indonesian Islamic schools tend to associate their professional identity with their roles as the guardian of their students' morals. Given the fact that all participants of this study inculcate Islamic values in their ELT, situating English as a mere non-religious subject divorced from Islamic values is against real pedagogical practices. Thus, English teachers in Indonesian madrasah and *pesantren* play dual tasks. *Firstly*, they might teach English both as knowledge and ability. According to Renandya and Jacobs (2021), when teaching English as knowledge, teachers would focus on the explicit teaching of language forms such as vocabulary



and grammar; and when teaching English as ability, teachers would provide students with plenty of language input so that students might implicitly acquire the language rules and features. *Secondly*, the teachers might inculcate Islamic values by using English as a tool to transmit Islamic knowledge, values, and tradition.

*Islamic specialist language and general English*. Freeman and Katz (2021) proposed the term 'general English' and 'specialist language'. The former pertains to the general language of English. The latter refers to specialized language like the medical language for doctors, the legal language for lawyers, and the English-for-Teaching for English teachers, which require the use of specific words and phrases. Knowing general English does not automatically mean mastering a specialist language. The same is true with knowing one specialist language, for example, medical language, which does not always mean mastering another specialist language such as English-for-Teaching. In this sense, the term Islamic specialist language is a subspecification of English-for-Teaching. This research's findings imply that the multilingual context of *madrasah* and *pesantren* has not been fully accommodated through the specialist language of English-for-Teaching since it lacks multilingualism flexibility. As Ali (2007) noted, the changing reality of ELT means that Islamic terms such as *azan*, *fakir*, *dhikir*, *muezzin*, *hijab*, *khutbah*, and *umrah* must be included in the curriculum.. Such inclusion could be expected to address not only the linguistic needs but also the spiritual needs of the students in *madrasah* and *pesantren* as a specific context of ELT.

### **Conclusion**

Supporting empirical or social sciences with revealed knowledge and spiritual insight is a distinctive feature of Islamic education. As a branch of human and social science, ELTT in Islamic schools should be, in the broadest term, connected to Qur'anic verses and Prophetic tradition. The integration of divine revelation (*naqliyyaa*) and ELTT as a discovered language (*aqliyyah*) could be an alternative response to the critiques of secularization values within the Western educational tradition. While this chapter shows that ELTT might have a strong Islamic theological ground from Qur'ān and hadith, which makes English inclusively accepted, it has not yet optimally addressed the exclusive needs of Indonesian *madrasah* and *pesantren*. English teachers in *madrasah* and *pesantren* need teaching English vocabularies, grammatical rules, and the four basic skills of the language. In addition, they are also expected to transmit Islamic values in their English classrooms. At this juncture, Islamic specialist English is to be carefully designed by accommodating contextual and relevant Islamic terms. Not only would Islamic specialist English enhance the exploitability and intertextuality of English, but it would also help both teachers and students to be cognitively and theologically engaged.

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