

Utilizing Islamic Literature in EFL Classroom

by Dedi Irwansyah

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Melalui kegiatan seminar internasional ini, dimaksudkan untuk membuka wawasan para mahasiswa khususnya program studi PBSI Unswagati untuk memahami betapa luasnya peluang untuk membuka usaha di bidang pembelajaran bahasa Indonesia bagi penutur asing. Perlu kiranya mahasiswa mempersiapkan diri dan ikut berperan serta dalam menghadapi pasar bebas MEA melalui pembelajaran BIPA.

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Utilizing Islamic Literature In Efl Classroom

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Abstract

The interface of literature and ELT has been a global trend. One of the integral issues is selecting the relevant literary texts for EFL classroom activities. The selection is greatly influenced by the context, learners and educational setting, where the instruction takes place. Islamic Higher Education is a particular setting in Indonesia that seeks to integrate Islamic values into all disciplines including ELT. The use of literature is believed to be an effective way to support such effort. It provides the students with both linguistic aspects of English language and universal Islamic values which are not yet adequately represented by the existing teaching materials in the field of ELT. In order to meet the Islamic university's need, I intend to utilize the so-termed Islamic literature and religious literature to develop a literature-based English language teaching. The basic assumption of this paper is that the use of Islamic literature fits the need of EFL classrooms held by Islamic higher education in Indonesia. Carefully selected

literary texts drawn from a wide range which are supported by suitable lesson plans will equip the students with language usage, language use, Islamic values, and the vision of unity within diversity. Besides, the students of English Department at Islamic university would learn meaningfully when the teaching model, including the teaching material, provides them with more than just English.

Keywords: Islamic literature, local text, ELT, EFL, Islamic university

A. Introduction

The use of literary texts within the context of English language teaching (ELT) has been a global trend in the last two decades. Teaching language apparently cannot be separated from teaching literature. Where language exists, literature coexists. Language teaching might be more meaningful when the materials provide the students with more than just linguistic aspects. They ought to offer the students opportunities to develop their personalities. Literary texts, then, would create a window of opportunity to foster the students' character building including spiritual realm.

The interface of ELT and literature is strengthened

by the shifting from modernism into postmodernism. Alwasilah (2010: 121) argues that the domination of empiricism and rationalism during the modernism era has put aside the spiritual aspects. Postmodernism, on the other hand, becomes a momentum for the revival of spiritual dimension. This notion is in tune with the very basic role of literature which according to Showalter (2003: 22) is to make people better humankind. In the history of English literature, literary texts were utilized to moralize, civilize, and humanize. They were viewed as resources to teach moral and spiritual values.

It is no exaggeration to say that a piece of literary works carries certain values. However, it might not fit with all target readers' needs. Specific classification of literary works such as children literature, teen lit, chick lit, young adult literature are obvious evidence of the readers' diversity. If literary texts are used to deliver values effectively through the instructional process, then they have to be in line with the target readers' interests and knowledge background.

This paper deals with the effort to utilize the so-called Islamic literature within Indonesian context particularly in EFL classroom of Islamic Higher Education. While many Islamic universities organize English Departments, ELT practitioners have not conducted

adequate researches on the use of Islamic literature in the classrooms. This preliminary writing specifically tries to portray theoretical and practical consideration of Islamic literature selection for classroom use.

Literature and ELT

There might be a number of quotations defining the nature of literature. To one extent, it refers to rule-governed genres or text types like poetry, song, fiction, drama, essay, biography, philosophical and religious texts, etc. To another extent, it indicates any text that needs to be read aesthetically rather than efferently. The interpretation toward a literary text is open to representational or personal, rather than referential (Maley, 2012; 302). Other definitions of literature are possible. In this respect, one might adopt the definition that conforms most closely to his or her context.

In the context of ELT, literature has undergone four remarkable phases. Firstly, it was widely used in 19 century following the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Literary texts were utilized as resources to expand the students' vocabularies and to develop their grammar and translation skills. Secondly, literary texts became less and less familiar in language classrooms when Direct Method (DM) and Audio Lingual Method (ALM) became more and more popular. Thirdly, in the era of

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), literary works were excluded from language syllabus. Fourthly, in the mid of 1980-s up to the present time, there has been a revival of the use of literary texts as teaching resources (Mohammad, et.al., 2012: 32). Furthermore, Madya (2013: 15-24) argues that literary texts served as primary material during GTM era and as complementary material during DM era. The use literature in the classroom should consider historical aspects and those views against the use of literature itself.

McKay (1987: 191-193) proposes three arguments of rejection toward the use of literary texts in EFL classroom. Firstly, literature is believed as to have its own distinctive and complicated grammatical aspects. This argument is not always true for many literary texts also present common expressions with simple grammatical points. In case the complex grammatical elements exist, a teacher might simplify the text in accordance with the students' level. Secondly, literature is assumed as hindering the students from achieving academic and occupational goals. This assumption is not totally correct. The use of literary texts in the classroom does not automatically exclude the non-literary texts. The combination of the two will develop students' reading proficiency which in turn make contribution to academic

and occupational goals. Thirdly, literature is commonly viewed as to contain certain cultural perspective which is conceptually not always easy for the students to understand. Such view might be true. Nevertheless, motivated teacher will see that as a challenge to help his or her students enrich their imagination and develop their cultural awareness.

The objectives of teaching literature are various. Showalter (2003: 25) maintains that to teach literature is to develop the students' critical thinking, reading proficiency, analysis ability, writing skill, etc. McKay (1987: 193) believes that literature can be utilized to develop the students' linguistic knowledge, both on a usage level and use level. Meanwhile, Oemarjati (1974: 196) points out that literature teaching is aimed at inserting, fostering, and developing the students' sensitivity toward values shared by the society. The above objectives are not conflicting one another. Rather, they should shed a light on practical classroom activities such as how a teacher would form assignments and carry out assessments.

In summary, literature offers several benefits to ELT. It could be useful in developing students' linguistic knowledge, affective domain, cultural awareness, etc. Literary texts, as shown by Rini's (1999: 65) *Honey My Rival*, can be used to emphasizes that word-for-word translation

could be misleading; Lie's (1999: 77-78) *Nassredin's Class* could be utilized to illustrate the concept of cooperative learning; and Kuntjara's (1999: 47-48) *A Boy and a Missing Axe* might be exploited to accentuate that prejudice could be wrong.

One interesting point left to be explored is the assumption stating that non-native learners of English literature might deal with many cultural and linguistic differences that lead to barriers for both the students and teachers (Shakfa, 2012: 101-102). To minimize such difficulties, the English teachers in Islamic higher institution might utilize the Islamic literature. It promotes linguistic knowledge and Islamic values so that it would be meaningful for the Muslim learners.

B. Islamic Literature

It has been stated that literature might refer to philosophical and religious texts (Maley, 2012; 302). Moreover, Showalter (2003: 22) points out that literature is 'repository of moral and spiritual values'. Literature often becomes a vehicle to deliver religious values and social criticism (Nurgiyantoro, 2013: 446). Many literary texts are rooted in scriptures so that they can be used for the sake of students' character building (Zuchdi, 2013: 39). As literature and spirituality are closely connected,

Islamic literature is not very difficult to be accepted.

In the broadest sense, Islamic literature is understood as text types written with an Islamic perspective, in any language (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_literature; 10 July 2014). Nevertheless, Kritzeck (1964:3) maintains that the term ‘Islamic literature’, for those literate in English, might be easily associated with those works like *Arabian Night* and *Rubaiyat* of Umar Khayyam. Further, he argues that:

“The term “Islamic literature” requires an explanation, if not an apology. It is not a common term and may even be misleading. Islam is not the name of a language or group of languages. It is the name of religion...of...persons calling themselves Moslems...The world’s Moslems are centered chiefly in the northern and eastern parts of Africa and the western and southern parts of Asia. Islam has also been used, more loosely, to denote this vast community of Moslems, the lands in which they live, their social and political institutions, and indeed the whole of their culture. It is in this last, most generous sense that the term is employed...”

In the context of Malay literature, Winstedt (1969: 85, 90) notes a significant role of Islamic literature in spreading the religious doctrine. It is used as a method of propaganda. One way in doing so is by giving a Muslim

color to what has been supposed as local or other religion' romances. Islamic literature is divided into four classification, namely: (1) romances of pre-Islamic heroes covering the stories of Alexander the Great; the prophets like Joseph and Jesus; Persian hero and Arabic hero; (2) tales of the Prophet including the stories of Shiah saints Hasan and Husain and Muhammad Hanfiah; (3) the adventures of people about the Prophet; and (4) locally concocted tales. Further, Qomar (2012: 35) argues that the story of *Punokawan Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong* is an example of Islamic local text within Indonesian context. Those characters are built upon Islamic value stating *sâmir nâla khairin, fatruk mâ baghâ* which literally means 'do what is good and leave what is idle'.

In brief, Islamic literature covers any text types produced by Moslems or are emerged from Moslem' community all over the world. It might represent various cultures, local colors, or the interface among them. What connects such variety is the Islamic perspective underlying the deep structure of the works. Therefore, the term 'Islamic Literature' is used in this context denotes any English written literature that contains Islamic moral and spiritual values.

C. Approaches to Using Literature in EFL Classroom

Maley proposed three approaches to the use of literature in a language teaching program (2012: 303-304). Those are:

1. *Literature as study*. Literature is primary to this approach. It is characterized as *teaching about* literature and focuses on canonical texts drawn from Inner-Circle countries. It deals with the writer's biography, influences, and critical views of his or her works. As the emphasis is on *'telling'* rather than on *'discovery'*, this approach is inappropriate for a class which requires the students to become active participants rather than passive recipients.
2. *Literature as resource*. Literature is secondary to this approach. It centers upon the notion of *teaching with* literature. The texts drawn from a wider range are utilized as springboards to engage with other language learning activities.
3. *Literature as appropriation*. It is characterized as *teaching through* literature. Its aim is to appropriate literature for the students' own learning purposes so that it would fit the context in which the students move. While the two previous approaches are externally constructed, this approach advocates students to put *literature from the inside out* through extensive reading and listening,

performance of texts, creation of texts by students themselves, project work, etc. This approach is believed to be appropriate for English as an International Language (EIL) context.

Another theory of approaches that a teacher could draw on when using literature in the classroom is mentioned by Lazar (2002: 22-24) . Those are: (1) a language-based approach, (2) literature as content, and (3) literature for personal enrichment. The following table is presenting the features of each approach:

Figure 1
Lazar's Approaches to Using Literature

Approach	Methodological Assumptions	Selection and Organisation of Material
A <i>language-based approach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the language of literary text helps teacher integrate the language and literature syllabus more closely • detailed analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • material is chosen to fit certain stylistic features of the language • material is chosen for

	<p>of the linguistic aspects of the literary text helps students to draw meaningful interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students are conditioned to make aesthetic judgments of the texts 	<p>the sake of its literary merit</p>
<p><i>Literature as content</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • frequently is university level • literature itself is the content of the course • students' other tongue may be used to discuss the text • students may be required to translate texts from one language into the other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • texts are selected in accordance with their importance toward the literary canon or tradition
<p><i>Literature for personal</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literature is used as vehicle to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • material is chosen to

<p><i>enrichment</i></p>	<p>3 encouraging students to draw on their own personal experiences, feelings, and opinions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literature helps students involve 3 actively, both intellectually and emotionally, in English learning • this approach is a good stimulus for group work 	<p>meet the students' interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • texts are chosen on the basis of whether they stimulate 3 high level of personal involvement • material is often organized thematically • literary texts may be placed alongside non-literary texts which deal with a similar theme
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(Source: Lazar, 2002: 22-24)

D. Selecting Literary Texts

Selecting relevant literary texts for EFL classroom activities is crucial. a teacher needs to analyze the type of literature suitable for his or her students and needs to

identify whether to use full-length text, abridged version, or simplified version. With regard to this, Vardell, Hadaway, and Young (2006: 736) list four general criteria to consider when selecting literary texts:

1. Content accessibility. Teachers should consider the relevant topics for the students.
2. Language accessibility. It deals with the level of the language of the text.
3. Visual accessibility. It indicates the availability of illustration aid in conveying the content of the text.
4. Cultural accessibility. It refers to the connectivity between the cultural content with the students' lives.

Furthermore, Lazar (2002: 48-55) proposes three main areas to be considered in selecting literary texts for classroom use. They are: (1) type of the course, (2) type of the students, and (3) the relevance of the text. The first consideration refers to the level of the students, the students' reason for learning English, kind of English required on the course like English for Academic Purposes and General English, and the possibility of including literary texts. The second embraces the identification of the students' ages, interests/hobbies, cultural background, and previous experience of reading literary texts. The third indicates the students' intellectual maturity, emotional understanding, linguistic proficiency, literary background,

etc. Other relevant factors are: availability of the text, length of the text, exploitability – other available resources to help both students and instructor to exploit the text – and the link between the text with the syllabus.

With regard to the selection of the texts, Maley (2012: 307) argues that moral and cultural sensitivity are among the most contentious problem. A text which is prized by certain communities for its literary value might be challenged by other communities for its offending local sensitivities. The selection of the texts for a language teaching program is, therefore, ought to be contextual in the sense that it suits common moral, cultural, and political views possessed by the students.

E. Islamic Literature and EFL Classroom

1. Materials design and lesson planning: Islamic short story

a. Material

Key point : This story describes how disharmony often occurs because we do not understand the language—in the broadest sense-- of others. This story, however, also reveals the importance of mastering foreign

language (s). This, at once, emphasizes that such mastery could be an instrument to make peace among the nations.

- How the story can be used :**
- *Either*. Within the approach of ‘literature as resource’; the text is used as springboards to engage students with other language learning activities (i.e., grammatical points of a narration) [see Maley, 2012: 303]
 - *Or*. Within the approach of ‘Literature for personal enrichment’; the text is used to encourage the students and to help them involve in English learning intellectually and emotionally. [see Lazar, 2002: 24]

A Linguist

1 Four men—a Persian, a Turk, an Arab, and a Greek—were standing in a village street. They were traveling companions, making for some distant place;

But at this moment they were arguing Over the spending of a single piece of money which was all that they had among them.

—I want to buy *angur*," said the Persian.

—I want *uzum*," said the Turk.

—I want *inab*," said the Arab.

—No!! said the Greek, —we should buy *stafil*."

Another traveler passing, a linguist, said,

—Give the coin to me. I undertake to satisfy the desires of all of you.!!

At first they would not trust him. Ultimately they let him have the coin.

He went to the shop of a fruit seller and bought four small bunches of grapes.

—This is my *angur*," said the Persian.

—But this is what I call *uzum*," said the Turk.

—You have brought me *inab*," said the Arab.

—No!! said the Greek, —this in my language is *stafil*." The grapes were shared out among them, and each realized that the disharmony has been due to his faulty understanding of the language of the others.

(Source: *Shah*, 1971: 21-22)

b. Lesson Plan

The following lesson plan are adapted from Lazar (2002: 87):

1. Pre-activities
 - Brainstorm for vocabulary of beverage
2. Creating anticipation
 - Eliminating some words from the text and let the students guess the missing words (conducted through either cloze test or dicto-comp)
3. During reading
 - Help students with difficult words or terms
 - Help students with difficult grammatical points
 - Eliminating the last sentence of the text and let students predict the moral of the story
4. Follow-up activities in class
 - in a small group, students modify and rewrite the story (i.e., substituting the origin and the local term for '_angur')
 - Acting out the modified story
5. Written homework
 - Students are asked to conduct a brief interview with Islamic scholars with regard to relevant qur'anic verse(s), prophetic tradition, or sayings that supports that support the moral of the story.

2. Materials design and lesson planning: Islamic song (local text)

Key : This Islamic local song is meant to

point emphasize the appreciation towards ethnic literature or local text. The use of local text is in tune with the long-held traditional wisdom, which states that teaching should begin from here to there, from easy to difficult, and from familiar to unfamiliar (Alwasilah, 2014: 199).

How the story can be used : • *Either*. Within the approach of ‘_literature as resource’; the text is used as springboards to engage students with other language learning activities (i.e., writing or translation) [see Maley, 2012: 303]

• *Or*. Within the approach of ‘_Literature for personal enrichment’; the text is used to encourage the students and to help them involve in English learning intellectually and emotionally. [see Lazar, 2002: 24]

Material

Lir-ilir, lir-ilir

Bangunlah, bangunlah

Wake up, wake up!

Tandure wis sumilir

Tanaman sudah bersemi

The plant is blossoming

Tak ijo royo-royo tak senggo penganten anyar

Demikian menghijau bagaikan pengantin baru

So green and passionate like the newlywed

Cah angon-cah angon penekno blimbing kuwi

Anak gembala, anak gembala panjatlah (pohon) belimbing
itu

O shepherd boy, shepherd boy, go and climb that starfruit tree

Lunyu-lunyu yo penekno kanggo ngisah dhodhot-iro

Biar licin dan susah tetaplah kau panjat untuk membasuh
pakaianmu

*No matter how slippery it is, keep on climbing to wash your
clothing*

Dhodhot-iro, dhodhot-iro, kumitir bedah ing pinggir

Pakaianmu, pakaianmu terkoyak-koyak di bagian samping

Your clothing, your clothing is torn down the side

Dondomono jlumatono kanggo sebo mengko sore

Jahitlah, benahilah untuk menghadap nanti sore

Mend it immediately so you can use it this afternoon

Mumpung padhang rembulane mumpung jembar

kalangane

Mumpung bulan bersinar terang, mumpung banyak waktu

luang

While you are still healthy and have a little time

2
Yo surako... surak hore...

Ayo bersoraklah dengan sorakan iya

Cheer up! Hooray!

a. Lesson Plan

The following lesson plan are adapted from Lazar (2002: 129-131):

1. Pre-reading activities
 - Rising students' awareness of local text
 - Stimulating student interest in the text
 - Providing the necessary historical or cultural background
2. While-reading activities
 - Students are given a jumble English translation version of the song (either lines or verses) and asked to put it together again.
 - Certain words are removed from the English translation version of the song, and students have to fill in the gaps—either by themselves or using a list of words provided.
 - Students underline all the words connected with a particular lexical set and then speculate on their metaphorical or symbolic meaning.

3. Post-reading activities

- This stage is about helping students towards the interpretation of the poem/song
- Students are given a series of statements about the possible underlying meanings of the poem, and they decide which ones are true or false.
- Students are asked to translate the poem/song from English into Bahasa.
- The advanced students can be asked to compare their translation.
- Students imagine that they are filming the poem/song.
- Students practice reading the poem aloud and singing it together (whenever possible)

4. Further follow-up activities

- Students rewrite the poem/song as a different form of discourse.
- Students read and discuss other local Islamic poem/song and translate it into English.
- Students write their own poem, using the original as a model.
- Students discuss the values and world-view which are either implicitly or explicitly expressed in the poem.

F. Concluding Remarks

Islamic literature embraces any text types produced by Moslems or are emerged from Moslem's society all over the world. It presents Islamic values but is sometimes not free from local wisdoms. The use of Islamic literature in EFL classrooms fits the students' needs of Islamic higher education in Indonesia. Carefully selected literary texts drawn from a wide range which are supported by suitable lesson plans will equip the students with language usage, language use, Islamic values, and the vision of unity within diversity.

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