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Teaching English in Islamic Education: Lecturers' Narrative Experiences in an Indonesian Islamic Higher Education Context

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Abstract

English teaching in Islamic Education programs requires more than the transmission of general language skills because it needs to respond to students' religious identities, disciplinary orientations, and future roles as Islamic educators. However, English courses in Islamic higher education are often positioned as compulsory general subjects, with limited attention to how lecturers construct their relevance to Islamic scholarship, academic communication, and professional preparation. This study explored EFL lecturers' narratives of teaching English to students majoring in Islamic Education and examined the pedagogical, cultural, and institutional meanings constructed from their experiences. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry design, the study involved two EFL lecturers from a State Islamic University in Lampung, Indonesia, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through two rounds of semi-structured narrative interviews and analyzed using narrative thematic analysis. The findings revealed three interrelated narrative themes. First, lecturers negotiated the relevance of English by linking it to Islamic scholarship, academic participation, and students' future roles as Islamic education teachers or religious educators. Second, lecturers adapted their pedagogy to students' religious and disciplinary orientations through topic selection, material adaptation, classroom interaction, and contextual support. Third, lecturers constructed professional meaning as language educators, academic facilitators, and cultural mediators within Islamic higher education. These findings suggest that EFL teaching in Islamic Education programs is a contextual, identity-sensitive, and value-responsive pedagogical practice. The study contributes to EFL scholarship by connecting teacher cognition, investment, teacher identity, culturally responsive pedagogy, and narrative inquiry in Islamic higher education contexts.

Keywords: EFL Teaching; Islamic Education; EFL lecturers; Narrative Inquiry; Islamic Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in higher education is increasingly understood as more than the transmission of linguistic knowledge. In contemporary academic contexts, English functions as a resource for accessing global knowledge, participating in scholarly communication, and supporting students' future professional development(Saez-Zevallos and Montalvo-Apolín 2025). However, English language teaching is never socially or culturally neutral; it is shaped by learners' disciplinary backgrounds, institutional missions, and the values embedded in the educational

context(Burns et al. 2015). For this reason, EFL teaching should be understood not only through curriculum, materials, or classroom methods, but also through the meanings constructed by teachers and lecturers in response to their specific teaching contexts. Language teacher cognition is useful here because it explains that teachers' classroom practices are closely related to what they think, know, believe, and do within particular instructional settings(Borg 2003). Therefore, examining EFL teaching in Islamic higher education requires attention to lecturers' beliefs, pedagogical reasoning, and contextual interpretations.

This issue becomes particularly significant when English is taught to students majoring in Islamic Education. Unlike students in English education programs, Islamic Education students are not primarily prepared to become English language specialists. Rather, they are generally prepared to become Islamic education teachers, religious educators, or professionals in Islamic educational institutions. Their English learning needs may therefore be connected to their ability to access international Islamic scholarship, communicate religious and educational ideas, engage with global academic references, and support their future professional roles. Previous research has shown that English teaching in Indonesian Islamic higher education is not only concerned with language competence, but also intersects with Islamic epistemology, locality, and religious values(Irwansyah 2018). Similarly, studies on EFL materials in Islamic higher education suggest that English competence can be developed without neglecting students' religious character and local wisdom(Darmayenti et al. 2021).

In such a context, the relevance of English cannot be assumed; rather, it must be pedagogically constructed. Students majoring in Islamic Education often perceive the language as peripheral to their disciplinary identity and future professions. Darvin and Norton's model of investment provides a valuable framework to address this misalignment, as it conceptualizes language learning as a dynamic process mediated by identity, ideology, and capital(Darvin and Norton 2015). From this perspective, learners actively invest in English when they recognize its utility as a form of academic, symbolic, or professional capital. For Islamic Education majors specifically, English gains currency when explicitly linked to Islamic scholarship, contemporary educational discourse, global communication, and their prospective roles as Muslim educators. Consequently, instructors play a pivotal role in shifting student perceptions, reframing English from a mere compulsory requirement into a strategic resource that empowers their academic and professional trajectories.

Understanding this pedagogical negotiation also requires attention to lecturers' professional identity. Teacher identity in language education is dynamic and socially constructed through personal histories, institutional discourses, classroom experiences, and interactions with learners. Tsui's narrative inquiry into an EFL teacher's identity formation demonstrates that professional identity is shaped through lived experiences, tensions, and negotiations of meaning within specific institutional contexts(Tsui 2007). In Islamic higher education, EFL lecturers may negotiate multiple roles: as language instructors, academic facilitators, curriculum mediators, and cultural interpreters who connect English language learning with Islamic educational values. Their professional identities are therefore shaped not only by their expertise in English, but also by how they interpret students' needs, institutional expectations, and the religious-academic mission of the program.

Previous studies have provided important insights into English teaching in Islamic educational contexts. Research on Indonesian Islamic higher education has emphasized that ELT in this context involves epistemological and religious dimensions, not merely linguistic objectives (Irwansyah 2018). Studies on Islamic-based EFL materials have also highlighted the importance of integrating religious character and local wisdom into English instruction(Darmayenti et al. 2021). More recent research has shown that English teachers in Indonesian Islamic higher education may experience dual pedagogical responsibilities: teaching English while contextualizing Islamic traditions in classroom practices(Syuhda et al. 2024). These studies suggest that EFL teaching in Islamic institutions is a contextual, ideological, and value-responsive practice.

At the same time, a growing body of ESP and EAP research has emphasized the importance of aligning English instruction with learners' disciplinary and professional needs (Hyland 2006; Basturkmen 2010). Within Islamic higher education, this line of research has primarily focused on curriculum development, needs analysis, and instructional materials. For example, Muhsinin et al. (2017) highlighted the need to develop ESP reading syllabi specifically for students majoring in Islamic Education, while Gusmuliana et al. (2023) showed that students in Islamic higher education learn English for religious, academic, and professional purposes, including access to international Islamic scholarship and participation in wider educational communities. Although these studies provide valuable evidence regarding the design and relevance of English instruction for Islamic Education students, they largely examine English teaching from curricular, material-development, or learner-needs perspectives.

Consequently, little is known about how EFL lecturers themselves experience and make sense of teaching English to students majoring in Islamic Education. Existing studies rarely explore how lecturers negotiate the relevance of English, respond to students' religious and disciplinary identities, manage pedagogical tensions, or construct professional meaning within Islamic higher education settings. In particular, the lecturer perspective at the intersection of EFL, Islamic Education, teacher preparation, and Islamic higher education remains underexplored. Addressing this gap requires an approach that can capture lecturers' lived experiences, identity negotiations, and meaning-making processes. Therefore, narrative inquiry offers a valuable lens through which these experiences can be examined and theorized.

This limitation points to an important research gap. Existing studies tend to focus on Islamic higher education in general, English teachers in Islamic schools, Islamic-based materials, or the integration of Islamic values into ELT. Less attention has been given to the voices of EFL lecturers who teach students majoring specifically in Islamic Education. This group of learners occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of language learning, religious education, teacher preparation, and Islamic institutional values. Consequently, lecturers may encounter particular pedagogical questions: how English should be made relevant to Islamic Education, how students' attitudes toward English influence classroom participation, how Islamic values intersect with English materials, and how lecturers construct professional meaning from teaching English in this context. These issues require an approach that can capture lecturers' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. The novelty of this study therefore, lies in shifting the unit of analysis from curriculum content or student needs to lecturers' narrative sense-making. By foregrounding lecturers' voices, the study offers a more

process-oriented account of how English is made relevant, how Islamic-disciplinary content is pedagogically negotiated, and how lecturers construct professional meaning within a religiously oriented teacher-education program. This contribution is both empirical and theoretical: empirically, it documents a rarely examined group of EFL lecturers teaching Islamic Education majors; theoretically, it connects investment, teacher cognition, and teacher identity to show how relevance is constructed through lecturers' lived pedagogical narratives.

For this reason, narrative inquiry is appropriate for the present study. Narrative inquiry in language teaching and learning research allows researchers to understand how teachers and learners make sense of their lived and imagined experiences through stories(Barkhuizen 2014). It is especially useful for exploring how teachers interpret their professional lives, reconstruct meanings from challenges, and negotiate identities across time and context. In this study, lecturers' narratives are treated as a source of insight into what lecturers experience, how they interpret pedagogical challenges, and what meanings they construct from teaching English to students majoring in Islamic Education. Narrative inquiry therefore enables the study to move beyond describing teaching strategies toward understanding the personal, pedagogical, cultural, and institutional meanings embedded in lecturers' experiences.

Based on the background, literature, and gap discussed above, this study aims to explore EFL lecturers' narratives of teaching English to students majoring in Islamic Education. Specifically, it investigates how lecturers describe their teaching experiences and what pedagogical, cultural, and institutional meanings they construct from those experiences. By foregrounding lecturers' voices, this study is expected to contribute to the literature on EFL teaching, teacher cognition, teacher identity, investment, and narrative inquiry in Islamic higher education contexts. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do EFL lecturers narrate their experiences of teaching English to students majoring in Islamic Education? and (2) What pedagogical, cultural, and institutional meanings do EFL lecturers construct from their experiences of teaching English to students majoring in Islamic Education?

Methodologically, this study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design because the research questions required an in-depth exploration of lecturers' lived experiences rather than statistical measurement. The study involved two EFL lecturers at a State Islamic University in Lampung, Indonesia, who had taught English to students majoring in Islamic Education for at least two semesters and were selected through purposive sampling for their relevant teaching experience and willingness to share reflective narratives. Data were collected in two rounds of semi-structured narrative interviews: the first explored lecturers' teaching experiences, while the second clarified and deepened their initial accounts. Guided by the narrative dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place, the interviews invited participants to reflect on their past and present teaching practices, future expectations, beliefs, student interactions, and institutional context (D. Jean Clandinin and Connelly 1990). The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through narrative thematic analysis involving repeated reading, identification of significant narrative segments, inductive coding, theme refinement, and qualitative comparison across participants' accounts. As a qualitative study, no statistical tests were conducted. The methodology was limited to retrospective narratives from two lecturers in one Islamic higher education context; therefore, the findings are intended to provide contextually grounded insights rather

than statistical generalization. Ethical procedures included informed consent, pseudonym use, confidentiality, and secure data storage. Consistent with narrative inquiry, the analysis focused on how participants made sense of their experiences through stories rather than treating interview data as isolated thematic units. Drawing on the narrative dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place (D. J. Clandinin and Connelly 2000), the analysis examined how lecturers described changes in perception, moments of challenge, pedagogical negotiations, and professional reflections over time. Narrative thematic analysis was therefore employed to identify recurring patterns while preserving the developmental trajectories embedded in participants' accounts. The findings are presented as narrative trajectories that illustrate how lecturers negotiated the relevance of English, responded to contextual tensions, and constructed professional meaning within Islamic higher education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the lecturers' narratives showed that teaching English to students majoring in Islamic Education was experienced as a contextual, negotiated, and meaning-making process. The lecturers did not narrate their teaching merely as the delivery of English language materials. Rather, they described it as a continuous effort to make English linguistically accessible, academically relevant, culturally meaningful, and professionally useful for students whose primary disciplinary identity was rooted in Islamic Education. Across the narratives, three major trajectories were identified: (1) from students' initial perception of English as a peripheral subject to lecturers' efforts to reframe English as academic and professional capital; (2) from the use of general EFL materials to more religiously and disciplinarily responsive pedagogy; and (3) from understanding teaching as language delivery to constructing professional meaning as contextual facilitators and cultural mediators within Islamic higher education. These trajectories are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Narrative themes, trajectories, and evidentiary basis

Narrative Stage	Narrative trajectory	Illustrative evidence
Negotiating relevance of English	From students' initial skepticism toward English to lecturers' reframing of English as academic, symbolic, and professional capital for Islamic Education.	Lecturer 1: English provides access to global Islamic literature and enables students to articulate Islamic educational concepts internationally. Lecturer 2: Islamic school and moral education topics made students more confident and participatory.
Adapting pedagogy to religious-disciplinary orientations	From reliance on general EFL topics to context-sensitive selection of Islamic Education texts, bilingual support, gradual participation, and familiar disciplinary themes.	Lecturer 1: texts on Islamic education, teacher responsibility, and moral values helped students participate. Lecturer 2: materials should connect global knowledge with students' values and future roles.

Narrative Stage	Narrative trajectory	Illustrative evidence
Constructing professional meaning	From seeing teaching as language delivery to understanding the lecturer role as contextual facilitator and cautious cultural mediator within Islamic higher education.	Lecturer 1: English should support students' future as Islamic education teachers. Lecturer 2: English helps students become confident Muslim educators who can communicate with wider communities.

Table 1 indicates that the findings were not treated as static categories. Instead, they were interpreted as narrative movements in the lecturers' accounts: how they encountered students' initial distance from English, how they responded pedagogically, and how they constructed professional meaning from their teaching experiences. This organization is consistent with narrative inquiry because the analysis foregrounds lecturers' lived experiences, shifts in perception, contextual tensions, and processes of meaning-making.

Negotiating the Relevance of English for Islamic Education Students

A dominant trajectory in the lecturers' narratives concerned the need to negotiate the relevance of English for students majoring in Islamic Education. Both lecturers explained that many students initially viewed English as a supporting subject rather than as a central component of their academic and professional development. Since the students' primary disciplinary identity was associated with Islamic Education, some of them perceived English as distant from their future roles as Islamic education teachers, religious educators, or professionals in Islamic educational institutions. This perception influenced their motivation, classroom participation, and willingness to engage with English learning activities.

Read narratively, this theme shows a movement from perceived irrelevance to negotiated relevance. The lecturers first encountered students who positioned English outside their disciplinary identity. In response, they attempted to reframe English by connecting it to Islamic scholarship, teacher professionalism, global communication, and the wider dissemination of Islamic educational ideas. This turning point is important because it shows that relevance was not automatically present in the classroom; rather, it had to be pedagogically constructed by the lecturers.

Lecturer 1 narrated that the first challenge in teaching Islamic Education students was not simply introducing grammar, vocabulary, reading texts, or speaking activities, but helping students understand why English mattered for their academic and professional futures. The lecturer explained that students became more engaged when English was connected to Islamic educational issues, international Islamic scholarship, or the possibility of communicating Islamic values in broader contexts.

> "*Initially, many Islamic Education students questioned the relevance of English to their field of study. To address this skepticism, I demonstrated how English proficiency enables them to access a broader range of global Islamic literature and articulate Islamic educational concepts on an international stage.*" [Lecturer 1]

This excerpt shows that the lecturer positioned English not as a foreign or external subject, but as an academic and professional resource for Islamic Education

students. By linking English to students' disciplinary identity, the lecturer attempted to shift students' perception from English as a compulsory course to English as a meaningful tool for academic growth and professional preparation. This finding suggests that EFL instruction for Islamic Education students needs to be contextualized according to students' academic background, religious orientation, and future professional roles.

The lecturer 2 narrated a similar experience. Students became more willing to speak, read, and write in English when the materials were connected to familiar topics such as Islamic schools, moral education, character building, religious moderation, pesantren, and the role of teachers in Muslim communities. In this context, disciplinary familiarity became a bridge between language learning and students' academic identity.

> "*When I used general topics, some students were passive. But when the topic was about Islamic schools, moral education, or the role of Islamic teachers, they became more confident because they already had ideas about the topic. English became easier for them because the content was close to their world.*" [Lecturer 2*]*

This narrative indicates that students' engagement with English was shaped by how they perceived its value in relation to their own world. When English materials were connected to Islamic Education, students had prior knowledge that could support participation. They were not simply learning vocabulary or grammar; they were learning to express familiar religious and educational ideas through English. Therefore, the negotiation of relevance became a central pedagogical task.

This finding can be interpreted through the concept of investment in language learning. Peirce (1995) argues that learners' investment is closely related to their social identity and their imagined relationship with the social world. Darvin and Norton (2015) further explain that investment is shaped by the interaction of identity, ideology, and capital. In the present study, Islamic Education students' willingness to engage with English depended on whether they could see English as a form of academic, symbolic, or professional capital. When lecturers connected English to Islamic scholarship, global academic communication, and students' future roles as Muslim educators, English was repositioned as a meaningful resource rather than merely an institutional requirement.

The concept of imagined communities also helps explain this trajectory. Kanno and Norton (2003) argue that language learners' investment is influenced by the communities they imagine themselves joining in the future. In this study, lecturers attempted to expand students' imagined communities by showing that English could allow them to participate not only in local Islamic education contexts, but also in wider academic, professional, and intercultural spaces. Through English, students could imagine themselves accessing international Islamic literature, communicating educational ideas beyond national boundaries, and participating in broader conversations on Islamic education.

This finding is consistent with studies on English teaching in Islamic higher education. Irwansyah (2018) argues that English teaching in Indonesian Islamic higher education should be understood within an epistemological perspective that considers Islamic values, locality, and particularity. Darmayenti et al. (2021) also emphasize that English competence can be developed without neglecting religious character and local wisdom. Similarly, Gusmuliana et al. (2023) show that Islamic university students may learn English for religious, academic, and professional purposes. The present study

extends these discussions by showing that the relevance of English is constructed not only through curriculum content or materials, but also through lecturers' classroom narratives and pedagogical framing.

Therefore, the first finding demonstrates that lecturers acted as mediators between English as a global language and Islamic Education as a religious-academic field. Their role was not only to teach language skills, but also to help students understand why English mattered for their academic, religious, and professional futures. This contributes to investment theory by showing how lecturers' pedagogical framing can shape students' recognition of English as meaningful capital within Islamic higher education.

Adapting Pedagogy to Students' Religious and Disciplinary Orientations

The second trajectory concerned lecturers' adaptation of pedagogy to students' religious and disciplinary orientations. Both lecturers narrated that teaching English to Islamic Education students required more than the use of general EFL materials. They needed to select topics, examples, texts, classroom tasks, and interactional strategies that were linguistically appropriate and contextually meaningful. In this sense, pedagogical adaptation was not merely a technical classroom adjustment but a form of professional reasoning shaped by lecturers' understanding of students' academic background, religious values, English proficiency, and future professional roles.

Lecturer 1 described adapting reading and speaking materials by using texts related to Islamic education, teacher ethics, moral education, and educational leadership in Islamic schools. This adaptation was not intended to replace English learning objectives with religious content, but to make English learning more accessible and relevant. The lecturer explained that students were more confident when discussing topics they already understood conceptually, even though they still struggled to express their ideas in English.

> *"I usually choose texts that are still connected to their field, for example, about Islamic education, teacher responsibility, or moral values. They may not have strong English proficiency, but they understand the topic. That helps them participate more actively." [Lecturer 1]*

This narrative suggests that content familiarity supported language participation. When students were given topics related to their disciplinary and religious background, they could rely on prior knowledge to engage with English tasks. The lecturer's adaptation therefore functioned as a form of scaffolding, enabling students to move from familiar content to unfamiliar language forms. It also indicates that contextualized materials can reduce anxiety and encourage more meaningful classroom interaction.

The lecturer 2 emphasized the need to balance language objectives with Islamic values and global perspectives. The lecturer did not view Islamic values as a barrier to English learning. Instead, Islamic values were treated as a contextual foundation that could make English more meaningful for students.

> *"I think English materials should be suitable for their context. But it does not mean that students only learn Islamic topics. They also need global knowledge. The important thing is how we connect the topic with their values and future roles." [Lecturer 2]*

This excerpt shows that contextualization did not mean narrowing students' exposure to global knowledge. Rather, it involved connecting global educational discourse with students' values and future roles. In this process, lecturers acted as curriculum mediators. They did not simply follow general English materials, but adapted them according to students' background, proficiency, disciplinary needs, and the institutional mission of Islamic higher education.

The lecturers also narrated challenges related to students' varied English proficiency. Some students had limited vocabulary, low confidence in speaking, and difficulty understanding academic texts. These challenges required lecturers to simplify materials, provide bilingual explanations when necessary, use group discussion, and encourage gradual participation. However, both lecturers emphasized that low proficiency did not mean lack of potential. Rather, students needed pedagogical support that connected English learning with familiar concepts and meaningful purposes.

> *"Some students were afraid to speak because they felt their English was poor. I usually asked them to start with simple expressions. Sometimes they could discuss the ideas in Indonesian first, then we tried to express them in English together." [Lecturer 1]*

This excerpt illustrates how lecturers adapted their teaching strategies to students' linguistic readiness and emotional needs. The use of gradual participation, familiar topics, and supportive classroom interaction helped students build confidence. Thus, the lecturers' pedagogy was shaped not only by linguistic considerations but also by affective and contextual sensitivity.

This finding is closely related to teacher cognition theory. Borg (2003) explains that teachers' classroom practices are shaped by what they think, know, believe, and understand about teaching, learning, students, and context. In this study, lecturers' decisions to use topics related to Islamic education, moral values, pesantren, teacher responsibility, and religious moderation reflected their professional cognition. Their teaching practices were shaped by their beliefs about what would make English meaningful and accessible for Islamic Education students.

The finding also resonates with postmethod pedagogy. Kumaravadivelu (2001) proposes that language pedagogy should be guided by the principles of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The principle of particularity is especially relevant because it emphasizes the need to respond to local linguistic, sociocultural, institutional, and learner-specific realities. In the present study, lecturers did not simply apply general EFL methods. They reconstructed English teaching according to the realities of Islamic higher education and the needs of Islamic Education students.

The principle of practicality is visible in how lecturers generated pedagogical strategies from their own classroom experiences. When students had limited vocabulary or low confidence, lecturers used familiar topics, bilingual support, group discussion, and gradual participation. These practices show that lecturers theorized from their own teaching realities. The principle of possibility is also evident because lecturers used English teaching to expand students' academic and professional imagination. By connecting English with Islamic Education, students were encouraged to see English as a resource for participating in broader academic and professional communities.

This finding can also be read through culturally responsive pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that culturally relevant pedagogy supports academic success while

affirming learners' cultural identities. Gay (2002) explains that culturally responsive teaching uses students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference to make learning more effective. In this study, lecturers used students' religious knowledge, disciplinary familiarity, and future professional identity as entry points for English learning. In doing so, they affirmed students' Islamic educational background while supporting their participation in English classroom activities.

Overall, the second finding indicates that EFL teaching for Islamic Education students requires religious-disciplinary responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, and professional judgment. Contextualized pedagogy helped make English more meaningful, accessible, and relevant for students whose academic identity was rooted in Islamic Education. This contributes to teacher cognition and postmethod pedagogy by showing how lecturers' beliefs, contextual knowledge, and classroom experiences shaped their adaptation of English teaching within Islamic higher education.

Constructing Professional Meaning as EFL Lecturers in Islamic Higher Education

The third trajectory revealed how lecturers constructed professional meaning from their experiences of teaching English in Islamic higher education. Both lecturers described their role as more than language instructors. They saw themselves as educators who helped students recognize the value of English for Islamic Education, future teaching careers, and broader academic participation. Their narratives reflected a sense of professional responsibility to bridge English language learning with students' religious and educational identities.

Lecturer 1 explained that teaching Islamic Education students encouraged deeper reflection on the purpose of English teaching. The lecturer felt that English instruction should not be separated from students' values and future roles. This reflection shaped the lecturer's professional identity as someone who needed to be flexible, context-sensitive, and responsive to students' needs.

> *"Teaching them makes me think that English is not only about grammar or speaking. I have to think about how English can support their future as Islamic education teachers. So, I need to adjust my teaching to their context." [Lecturer 1]*

This narrative shows that the lecturer constructed professional meaning through the act of contextualizing English. The lecturer's identity was shaped by the responsibility to make English relevant to students' future roles. Teaching in this context required the lecturer to move beyond a general EFL orientation and develop a more situated understanding of English pedagogy.

The lecturer 2 narrated a similar experience, emphasizing that teaching in Islamic higher education required sensitivity to institutional mission and student identity. The lecturer viewed English as a medium through which students could develop confidence to participate in wider academic and professional communities without losing their religious values.

> *"For me, teaching English here has a special meaning. We are not only teaching language, but also helping students become confident Muslim educators who can communicate with wider communities." [Lecturer 2]*

This account illustrates how institutional and cultural contexts contributed to the lecturer's professional meaning-making. The lecturer did not view Islamic identity and English learning as contradictory. Instead, English was understood as a resource that

could support students' academic development and religious-educational mission. This finding suggests that EFL lecturers in Islamic higher education may construct hybrid professional identities as language teachers, academic facilitators, curriculum mediators, and cultural interpreters.

Across the narratives, lecturers also described moments of tension. They struggled with limited teaching time, students' diverse proficiency levels, and the lack of specifically designed English materials for Islamic Education students. However, these challenges became sources of professional learning. The lecturers learned to adapt materials, redesign activities, and reflect on their pedagogical assumptions.

> *"The challenge is that we do not always have materials that really fit their major. So, I often modify the materials myself. It takes time, but I think it is necessary because students need English that is connected to their field." [Lecturer 2]*

This narrative indicates that material adaptation was both a challenge and a form of professional agency. The lecturer actively responded to contextual limitations by modifying materials and creating more relevant learning experiences. Such agency reflects the lecturer's commitment to making EFL teaching more meaningful for Islamic Education students.

This finding is closely related to teacher identity theory. Tsui (2007) argues that teacher identity is constructed through lived experiences, institutional discourses, tensions, and negotiations within particular teaching contextsBeauchamp and Thomas (2009) also emphasize that teacher identity is central to understanding how teachers interpret their roles, respond to educational contexts, and develop professionally. In this study, lecturers' identities were shaped by their responsibility to make English meaningful for Islamic Education students while also responding to the religious-academic mission of Islamic higher education.

The lecturers' identity construction can also be understood through the distinction between identity-in-discourse and identity-in-practice. Varghese et al. (2005) explain that language teacher identity is shaped both by how teachers talk about who they are and by what they do in classroom practice. In this study, lecturers discursively described themselves as educators who helped students understand the value of English for their future roles. Practically, they enacted this identity by adapting materials, selecting Islamic Education-related topics, providing supportive interaction, and framing English as relevant to students' professional trajectories.

Teacher agency also emerged clearly in this trajectory. Tao and Gao (2017) argue that teacher agency is closely related to identity commitment, especially when teachers respond to curricular or institutional demands. The lecturers in this study showed agency by modifying materials, reframing English learning, and creating contextually meaningful classroom practices despite limited resources and students' varied proficiency levels. Their agency was exercised within institutional and classroom constraints, not outside them. This means that professional meaning was constructed through negotiation, adaptation, and reflective response to contextual realities.

Narrative inquiry provides an appropriate lens for understanding this meaning-making process. Barkhuizen (2014) explains that narrative research in language teaching and learning enables researchers to understand teachers' experiences through the stories they tell about their professional lives, identities, and teaching contexts. In the present study, lecturers' narratives revealed not only what they did in the classroom, but

also how they interpreted their roles, challenges, and responsibilities. Their stories made visible the pedagogical, cultural, emotional, and institutional dimensions of teaching English to Islamic Education students.

Taken together, the third finding shows that lecturers' professional identities were constructed through their efforts to mediate between English language teaching and Islamic Education. They positioned themselves not simply as transmitters of English knowledge, but as reflective educators who helped students understand English as meaningful for their academic, religious, and professional futures. This finding contributes to discussions of EFL teacher identity by demonstrating how lecturers' identity work is shaped within a religiously oriented higher education setting.

Implications

The findings of this study offer several implications for EFL teaching in Islamic Education programs. Theoretically, the study strengthens the view that EFL lecturers' pedagogical decisions are shaped by teacher cognition, investment, identity construction, and narrative sense-making rather than by curriculum or materials alone. By showing how lecturers framed English as academic, symbolic, and professional capital for Islamic Education students, the study demonstrates that English relevance must be deliberately constructed through context-sensitive pedagogy. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that English courses for Islamic Education students should be designed around themes that connect language learning with Islamic scholarship, teacher professionalism, moral education, religious moderation, and students' future roles as Muslim educators. Lecturers may therefore need to adapt materials, examples, classroom interaction, and assessment tasks so that English learning becomes linguistically accessible and religiously as well as professionally meaningful. Institutionally, Islamic higher education should support lecturers by providing context-specific English materials, curriculum guidelines, and professional development programs that help integrate EFL instruction with Islamic Education students' disciplinary needs. Such support would allow English teaching to function not merely as a general language requirement but as a purposeful academic resource aligned with students' religious, pedagogical, and professional trajectories.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved only two EFL lecturers from one State Islamic University in Lampung, Indonesia; therefore, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. Instead, they provide contextually grounded and transferable insights into lecturers' meaning-making within a specific Islamic higher education setting. Second, the study relied on lecturers' retrospective narratives, which may be shaped by memory, personal interpretation, and selective emphasis. Although follow-up interviews were used to clarify and deepen the participants' accounts, future studies could strengthen the evidence by combining narrative interviews with classroom observation, document analysis, or students' perspectives. Third, this study focused on lecturers' experiences rather than students' learning outcomes; therefore, further research could examine how contextually designed English materials influence Islamic Education students' motivation, participation, academic literacy, and communicative competence. Future studies may also involve participants from different Islamic higher education institutions, compare EFL teaching across different religiously oriented

programs, or explore how institutional curriculum policies shape lecturers' agency in designing English instruction for non-English majors.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how EFL lecturers narrate their experiences of teaching English to students majoring in Islamic Education within an Indonesian Islamic higher education context. The findings demonstrate that teaching English in this setting extends beyond language instruction and involves the continuous negotiation of disciplinary relevance, religious values, and professional identity. Through their narratives, lecturers positioned English not merely as a compulsory subject but as an academic and professional resource that supports students' participation in Islamic scholarship, teacher preparation, and wider educational communities.

The study contributes to EFL and teacher education scholarship by showing how investment, teacher cognition, and teacher identity are enacted through lecturers' efforts to contextualize English within students' religious and disciplinary worlds. Rather than treating English and Islamic Education as separate domains, lecturers actively mediated between them, constructing pedagogical practices that were linguistically meaningful, culturally responsive, and professionally relevant. These findings extend current discussions of EFL teaching in Islamic higher education by foregrounding lecturers' narrative sense-making as a key site for understanding contextualized language pedagogy.

The findings also suggest the need for English curricula, materials, and professional development initiatives that are more closely aligned with the academic and professional trajectories of Islamic Education students. While the study is limited to two lecturers in a single institutional context, it highlights the value of narrative inquiry for examining how teachers make sense of language teaching within religiously oriented higher education settings. Future research may build on this work by incorporating classroom observations, student perspectives, and cross-institutional comparisons.

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