

Using Religious Materials in the EFL Classroom: Exploring Ideas

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Abstract- Indonesia is a country with the biggest Muslim population in the world. Most teachers and students in this country are, therefore, Muslims. Being Muslims, most of the students in Indonesian schools and universities must be interested in everything Islamic, including “Islamic” English. This interest will create a positive attitude towards this kind of English, and this positive attitude will in turn enhance their motivation in learning English. And high motivation will undoubtedly result in successful learning, as experts in language learning have attested. There are several types of Islamic religious English materials that can be used in EFL classrooms, such as English translation of the Qur’an and Hadith (the Prophet’s sayings), and English texts related to Islam and its teachings. This paper tries to explore the possibilities of using such materials in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia.

Keywords – Religious Material; EFL Classroom

I. MUSLIMS AND KNOWLEDGE

It is a demographic fact that Indonesia is the biggest Muslim country in the world. By “Muslim country” the writer does not mean, of course, that all Indonesians are Muslims. The phrase “Muslim country” simply means that most of Indonesian people are Muslims. According to the statistics of 2010, 87.18 percent out of more than 237 million of the Indonesian people are Muslims, which means that there are 207 million Muslims in this country [1]. Of course, not all of them are devout Muslims, but many of them undoubtedly are. This can be observed in daily social situation in our country: many Muslim women are *hijabers*, that is to say, they wear *hijab* when they go out of their houses; many female students of junior and senior high schools (SMPs and SMAs) as well as their female teachers are also *hijabers*; and last but not least, a lot of female university students and lecturers in Indonesian campuses are *hijabers*.

Another striking fact about Islam in Indonesia is that this country is the only one among the non-Islamic countries in the world that has a special ministry which deals with religious affairs. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs deals with many things related to the religious aspect of Indonesian people’s life. Among so many things that the ministry does is developing religious education, especially Islamic education, in Indonesia.

According to the latest data (2017) provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, there are 1.437 Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri in Indonesia, and 15.304 Madrasah Tsanawiyah Swasta. The number of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri is 759, and that of Madrasah Aliyah Swasta is 6.832. Beside madrasahs, the ministry also develops higher educational institutes of Islamic kinds, such as IAIN, UIN and STAIN. According to 2017 statistics provided by the same ministry, there are 25 IAINs, 11 UINs, and 9 STAINs throughout the country [2].

Now, what does this fact about Muslims and Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia have to do with the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in our country? In order to understand the relationship between the two seemingly unrelated things, we must look at the matter from two points of view: the Islamic point of view and the pedagogical point of view.

From the first point of view, it must be remembered that Islam contains some positive intrinsic value with regards to knowledge and knowledge seekers. The following popular traditions, or sayings, of the Prophet SAWW reflect this value clearly:

- *Seeking knowledge is obligatory to every Muslim --man and woman.*
- *Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.*
- *Seek knowledge even though it is in China*

Beside the above sayings of the Prophet SAWW, there are some verses in the Holy Qur’an which speak positively about knowledge and its possessors, for example:

- ... Allah will raise up those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, to high ranks. ... (al-Mujadilah, 11).
- ... Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Are those who know equal with those who know not?... (az-Zumar, 9).

With respect to language and knowledge of languages, Islam does pay special attention. The Holy Qur’an categorizes human languages as an *ayah* (i.e. sign) of God. It says:

And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are signs for those who know (ar-Rum, 22).

In the scientific history of Islam, the knowledge of foreign languages has played a very important role. As history witnesses, the development of knowledge and science among *Muslim* people began with translation. Before developing their own sciences, the *Muslims* translated the works of Grecian men of science like Hippocrates (370 B.C.), Galen (200 B.C) and Archimedes (212 B.C). Baghdad with its *Bait al-Hikma* (House of Wisdom) was the center of the translation movement in Islam, which was patronized by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (775 C.E). In their turn, European Christian scientists translated Arabic books of science into Latin, which was the language of Christian religion in medieval age. One of the well-known patrons of the translation movement in the West (12th – 13th centuries) was Alfonso the Wise, king of Castilia (1284 C.E)[3].

II. ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH LEARNING

The relationship between *Muslims* and the teaching-learning of English as a foreign language can also be viewed from pedagogical point of view. And since pedagogy is closely related to psychology, we must here talk about psychology, especially attitude and motivation and their role in English learning as a foreign language.

It is a well-known fact that school children who do not like a certain subject are usually bad at it and their marks in it are not good. Those who do not like mathematics, for example, are usually not good at it and their marks are usually bad. And *vice versa*. Now, what can we do, as teachers (or would-be teachers) of English, to develop a positive attitude towards English on the part of our students? One way to do this is to relate this foreign language to their knowledge background and daily experiences outside the classroom.

From the first paragraph of this paper we know that most of the Indonesian people are *Muslims*, and accordingly most of the students in Indonesian schools and universities are *Muslims*. As *Muslims*, they must know some basic teachings of Islam and also some Islamic texts like certain Qur'anic verses, sayings of the Prophet SAWW, popular religious sentences and phrases, etc. Now, when their English teacher introduces a teaching material that is related to one of these things it will automatically arouse their interest and they will pay more attention to their lesson. In other words, the lesson will engage their attention and interest.

The religious English teaching materials will also develop a positive attitude in the students. Those who may dislike English because of religious reasons will change their negative attitude towards the language when they see that English is not only used to express secular thoughts

and ideas but also religious, nay, Islamic thoughts and ideas. They will realize that English is not just the language of non-*Muslims*; it can be the language of Islam and *Muslims*. They will be more happily surprised when they know that one of the translations of their holy Book was done by a *Muslim* who is a born English man!

When a student has a positive attitude towards a subject, he/she will undoubtedly have a high motivation in studying it. And as stated by experts in language learning, motivation is the key in a successful learning of language, indeed in any kind of learning. As stated by [4]:

"Motivation is probably the most frequently used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task. It is easy to assume that success in any task is due simply to the fact that someone is "motivated." It is easy in second language learning to claim that a learner will be successful with the proper motivation. Such claims are of course not erroneous, for countless studies and experiments in human learning have shown that motivation is a key to learning."

III. RELIGIOUS ENGLISH TEACHING MATERIALS

By "religious teaching materials" the writer means those material which are related in some way to religious, in this case Islamic, teachings in all its aspects: rituals, moral, social, etc. It can also be said that religious materials are those materials which are contained in the subjects which are generally taught in Islamic teaching curriculum in Islamic religious schools, such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet SAWW), *tarikh* (Islamic history), etc. The materials must not necessarily be in English. An Indonesian text, if necessary, can be used as a base for English teaching, such as the case in translation method. In the context of Islamic higher educational institutions, the term "religious material" applies also to the subjects like Islamic theology, *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism) and Islamic philosophy.

The following are examples of Islamic religious materials which can be used in English teaching.

• Qur'anic verse:

Surah Fatiha: 1. In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. 2. Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds; 3. Most Gracious, Most Merciful; 4. Master of the Day of Judgement. 5. Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek. 6. Show us the straight way, 7. The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray [10].

- **Hadith:**

Actions are (judged) by motives (niyyah), so each man will have what he intended. Thus, he whose migration (hijrah) is to God and His Messenger, his migration is to God and His Messenger; but he whose migration is for some worldly thing he might gain, or for a woman he wanted to marry, his migration is to that for which he migrated[5].

- **Tarikh (Islamic history):**

In the fifth year of the Hijrah the idolaters made a great effort to destroy the Muslim in the War of the Clans or War of the Trench, as it is variously called; when Qureysh with all their clans and the great desert tribe of Ghatafan with all their clans, an army of ten thousand men rode against Al-Madinah (Yathrib). The Prophet (by the advice of Salman the Persian, it is said) caused a deep trench to be dug before the city, and himself led the work of digging it. The army of the clans was stopped by the trench, a novelty in Arab warfare. It seemed impassable for cavalry, which formed their strength. They camped in sight of it and daily showered their arrows on its defenders. While the Muslims were awaiting the assault, news came that BaniQureyzah, a Jewish tribe of Yathrib which had till then been loyal, had gone over to the enemy. The case seemed desperate. But the delay caused by the trench had damped the ardour of the clans, and one who was secretly a Muslim managed to sow distrust between Qureysh and their Jewish allies, so that both hesitated to act. Then came a bitter wind from the sea, which blew for three days and nights so terribly that not a tent could be kept standing, not a fire lighted, not a pot boiled. The tribesmen were in utter misery. At length, one night the leader of Qureysh decided that the torment could be borne no longer and gave the order to retire. When Ghatafan awoke next morning they found Qureysh had gone and they took up their baggage and retreated[6].

- **Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence):**

Rukunshalat:

1. Niat, artinyamenyengaja di dalamhatiuntukmelakukanshalat.
2. Berdiribagi yang kuasa.
3. Takbiratul ihram, yaitumengucapkan "Allahu Akbar."
4. MembacaSurat Al-Fatihah.
5. Ruku' danthuma'ninah.
6. I'tidaldenganthuma'ninah.
7. Sujuddua kali denganthuma'ninah.
8. Duduk di antaraduasujuddenganthuma'ninah.
9. Dudukuntasyahhudpertama.
10. Membacatasyahhudakhir.

11. Membaca shalawat atas Nabi Saw.

12. Mengucap salam yang pertama[7]

- **Tasawwuf**

*In two ways have I loved Thee: selfishly,
And with a love that worthy is of Thee.
In selfish love my joy in Thee I find,
While to all else, and others, I am blind.
But in that love which seeks Thee worthily,
The veil is raised that I may look on Thee.
Yet is the praise in that or this not mine,
In this and that the praise is wholly Thine[9].*

IV. HOW TO USE THE MATERIALS IN THE EFL CLASS:

Now, how do we use religious materials in teaching English as a foreign language? This question can be answered first by considering the four components of English teaching and learning: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The following are suggestions as to how the materials can be used in teaching the four components.

A. In Teaching Listening

First of all, the teacher should make an audio recording of the material, for example of the following long *hadith*, which is popular enough among the students of *madrasahs*:

Reported by Umar ibnKhattab, may Allah be pleased with him. He said: "While we were one day sitting with the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihiwasallam, there appeared before us a man dressed in extremely white clothes and with very black hair. No traces of journeying were visible on him, and none of us knew him.

He sat down close by the Prophet, sallallahu 'alayhiwasallam, rested his knee against his thighs, and said, "O Muhammad! Inform me about Islam." The Messenger of Allah sallallahu 'alayhiwasallam said, "Islam is that you should testify that there is no deity save Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger, that you should perform salah (ritual prayer), pay the zakah (alms tax), fast during Ramadan, and perform Hajj (pilgrimage)to the House (the Ka'bah at Makkah) if you can find a way to it (or find the means for making the journey to it)." (The man) said, "You have spoken truly."

We were astonished at his thus questioning him and telling him that he was right, but he went on to say, "Inform me about Iman (faith)." He (the Messenger of Allah) answered, "It is that you believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and in the Last Day, and in fate (qadar), both in its good and in its evil aspects." He said, "You have spoken truly. Then he (the man) said, "Inform me about Ihsan." He (the Messenger of Allah) answered, "It is that you should serve Allah as if you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him, He sees you." He said, "Inform me about the Hour." He (the

Messenger of Allah) said, "About that the person questioned knows no more than the questioner." So he said, "Well, inform me about the signs thereof (i.e. of its coming)." He said, "They are that the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress, that you will see the barefooted ones, the naked, the destitutes, the herdsmen of the sheep (competing with each other) in raising lofty buildings." Thereupon the man went off.

I waited for a while, and then he (the Messenger of Allah) said, "O Umar, do you know who that questioner was?" I replied, "Allah and His Messenger know better." He said, "That was Jibril. He came to teach you your religion."

The recording is played in front of the class and the students listen to it. After that the teacher asks several questions, for example:

1. What happens at the beginning of Umar's story?
2. What is the first question asked by the stranger to the Prophet SAWW?
3. What is Islam?
4. Etc.

B. In Teaching Speaking

The following Indonesian text can be used as a base on which the teacher can develop a speaking practice for the students.

Rukunshalatada 13, yakni:

1. Niat, di
dalamhatiuntukmelakukanshalat.
2. Berdiribagi orang yang mampu.
3. Takbiratul ihram, yaitumengucapkan "Allahu Akbar."
4. MembacaSurat Al-Fatihah.
5. Ruku',
yaitumembungkuksehinggapunggungmenjadidatar.
6. I'tidal, yaituberdiridariruku'.
7. Sujuddua kali.
8. Dudukantaraduasujud.
9. Dudukuntuktasyahhudpertama.
10. Membacatasyahhudke-duapadarakaatterakhir.
11. MembacashalawatatasNabidankeluarganya.
12. Mengucapsalam yang pertama.
13. Tertib, artinyaberturut-turutmenuruturutan yang telahditentukan.

The teacher can distribute the text to the students and ask them to do a role play in pairs. Each pair acts as a person who is teaching another person how to practice *shalah*, and the two take turns in playing the roles.

C. In Teaching Reading

In order to make use of a religious material in teaching reading skill, the teacher can pick out, for example, a text about Islamic history such as the one shown previously in

this paper. A long text can be used as a material for reading comprehension, and a shorter one for reading aloud. For a reading comprehension text, the teacher is, of course, expected to provide suitable questions whether in the form of essay questions or objective/multiple choice questions.

D. In Teaching Writing

Writing is perhaps the most difficult component in the learning of English as a foreign language in our country. To teach English writing in Islamic religious context, the teacher can do it in stages, starting from the easiest kind of writing like guided composition to the most difficult stage such as free composition.

As an example of guided composition, the teacher can ask the students to write a short life-history of the Prophet SAWW, using the following data as a raw material:

Data about the Prophet Muhammad SAWW

Born : 12 Rabi'ulAwwal 53 BH (Before Hijrah) or 571 A.D. as an orphan
 Age 6 : Mother died, grandfather Abdul Muttalib took care of him
 Age 9 : Grandfather died, uncle Abu Thalib took care of him
 Age 12 : first travel to Syria, met Christian monk, Bahira
 Age 25 : Worked for the widow Khadijah and married her
 Age 40 : The first revelation; became a prophet
 Year 1 BH : Isra' and Mi'raj
 622 A.D : Hijrah to Yatsrib
 2 A.H : The Battle of Badr
 3 A.H : Battle of Uhud
 4 A.H. : Battle of Khandaq
 8 A.H. : Conquest of Mecca
 11 A.H. : The Prophet SAWW died[8]

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