NEGOTIATING TEACHER AUTONOMY AND CURRICULUM STANDARDS IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Teacher autonomy plays a crucial role in enabling educators to respond effectively to diverse classroom contexts while maintaining curriculum standards. However, little is known about how English teachers in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) exercise professional autonomy within the dual demands of national curriculum requirements and Islamic educational values. This study investigates how teachers negotiate curriculum standardization, the factors influencing their professional autonomy, and the ways autonomy supports effective English language teaching in Islamic school contexts. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study involved four English teachers from Islamic boarding schools in East Java, Indonesia, who were purposively selected based on their teaching experience and educational background. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed three interconnected themes. First, teachers implemented contextual and value-integrated teaching by embedding Islamic values, cultural relevance, and students' lived experiences into English instruction. Second, they adopted adaptive teaching strategies through interactive learning, technology integration, and student-centered pedagogies to balance curriculum requirements with learners' needs. Third, teachers employed holistic assessment practices that evaluated not only language proficiency but also critical thinking, collaboration, communication skills, and character development. These findings suggest that teacher autonomy in Islamic boarding schools extends beyond instructional flexibility to encompass the integration of pedagogical innovation, religious values, and professional judgment within standardized curriculum frameworks. The study contributes to the growing literature on teacher autonomy by providing empirical evidence from an underexplored Islamic educational context and demonstrates that curriculum standardization and teacher autonomy can coexist when teachers are empowered to adapt instructional practices to local educational values. Future research should examine teacher autonomy across diverse Islamic educational settings and explore its long-term impact on students' academic achievement, intercultural competence, and character development.

Keywords: Teachers' Autonomy, Islamic Education, Curriculum Development, Standardization

INTRODUCTION

Education has historically been heavily reliant on teachers' independence, which allows them to tailor their teaching to meet the needs of students (Jahari, 2020). For instance, in Islamic boarding orientated schools present a complex issue where teachers' autonomy is taken into account. The educational system is characterized by a combination of religious customs, social norms and government-approved curriculum guidelines. While the curriculum aims to equip students with both material and spiritual knowledge

(Qamariah & Raya, 2015), the rigid and structured standards of these texts may restrict teachers' ability to modify teaching methods (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004). This strain stresses that teachers must analyze how they manage these issues while also keeping in mind both the curriculum and pedagogical goals.

The problem of teacher preparation in Islamic schools is one of lack of a systematic (Kasim & Abdurajak, 2018), integrated training and education curriculum that effectively integrates tailored teacher preparation programs within the specific culture of these schools (Memon et al., 2024). Although professional attributes demand competence in areas of subject knowledge and the incorporation of Islamic ideas, many educators are inadequately equipped and trained to respond effectively to the professional practice needs and skills development challenges of the profession (Day, 2006). In addition, the lack of organized, supportive services, including mentoring and peer-support services, compounds this problem.

Naturally teachers are often driven to create their own teaching materials, which is a very time-consuming and intellectually challenging, burdensome task (Boadu et al., 2014). This challenge is also increased by the expectation to obtain outcomes with very different educational objectives, at the same time as encouraging ethical and moral education, from which conflict of interest and very heavy stress on the educators may arise.

The similarity of the course attention being paid to syllabuses which are worked up for the formal exams there is so much less time to think about more advanced learning outcomes that should be the foundation of Islamic study (Sahin, 2018a). Furthermore, the process of delineating responsibilities, by which content education decisions are left to external groups, can lead to impasse and disenchantment for teachers who are required to transmit programming that has been defined in advance. In order to improve teacher preparation, and hence the quality of education in Islamic schools, these structural constraints have to be addressed. Approach including specific professional development, access to mentoring opportunities, and curriculum restructuring is crucial to equip teachers and create a more productive learning experience (Mclaughlin, 1995).

It was a study of teachers' freedom to teach in Islamic schools in relation to wider social and cultural settings in which the teachers work (Jamjoom, 2010). Teachers typically have the unenviable task of balancing government education regulations and religious teaching in an Islamic school. As a result, this mix provides a context in which teachers are required to not only act as knowledge providers but also as moral and spiritual agents. The degree to which teachers are able to make their own decisions within the constraints imposed by curriculum frameworks depends, amongst others, on the type of leadership at the school, community expectations, and the overall ethos of Islamic studies (Rissanen, 2012).

Teacher autonomy is deeply interwoven with the way in which teachers teach and enact their teaching approaches (Harðarson, 2019; Nazari et al., 2023; Paradis et al., 2019). In Islamic schools, this autonomy can and often includes the combination of good practices in pedagogy with Islamic ethoses. Education staff in these environments can apply strategies that focus on co-operation, critical thinking and practical work experience and how these measures are in line with Islamic values of relate, empathy and justice (Shakeel, 2018). These methods lead to the adoption of student-centered pedagogic methods with which learning, which is cooperative and reflective, takes place. Significant effective teaching in these environments calls for teachers to make considered judgements about when and how to adjust their approaches from best practice to suit students' needs whilst respecting religious and national curriculum requirements (Sahin, 2018b). The combined teaching of Islamic belief and national educational frameworks requires that the teacher has a deep understanding of both areas. This competence allows them to interact with complex teaching environments in which the Islamicizing elements of Islamic education need to be blended with wider curricular objectives. Accordingly, teacher autonomy in Islamic schools is not just independence (Fekrat et al., 2024). It includes the "*fidelity of representation*" of the capacity to combine a variety of educational elements into a unified and meaningful educational experience for students.

In line with the observations of other studies addressing different aspects of teachers'

autonomy and well-being, several studies have already been conducted and are able to provide distinct perspectives, but also have some limitations. Alkandari and Al-Failakawei (2022) pointed to shortfalls of traditional approaches to teaching in Islamic studies at Kuwait University and argued for change. Nonetheless their research has restriction in its target institution, this case, it may make the result difficult generalize.

Similarly, Amini and Kruger (2022) analyzed the association between teacher autonomy, teaching approaches and personal characteristics in Iranian EFL teachers, and found personal characteristics as an important factor in autonomy. However, the reliance on self-reported data in the study, along with the study's cultural context, may limit the study's generalizability. In a different vein, Amzat et al. (2021) focused on teacher burnout as well as on teacher retention, arguing for greater opportunities for better teacher training, for better support for teachers, for stress management for teachers, etc. Although their study suggestion will point to practical solutions, it does not necessarily give an indirect link between teacher well-being and student learning results. Another study by Fadaee et al. (2021) investigated the relation between teacher reflectivity, autonomy and learning results in Iran and demonstrated that teaching practices can be transformed in more reflective and autonomous rather than routinized and superficial ways in order to improve quality of teaching.

On the other hand, it does not give any attention to the difficulties that teachers should deal with when transposing these practice methods. Moè & Katz (2020) investigated psychological well-being of Italian teachers, and considered the psychotherapeutic effect of self-compassion to build a supportive instructional climate. Although this offers an important insight into the affective well-being of teachers, due to the cultural specialness and limited approach, the practical value of this research should be questioned. Conjointly, these studies provide valuable information concerning teacher autonomy and well-being, however, they are limited by cultural environments and particular educational environments, which may not be generalized across other geographical areas or pedagogical fields.

Teacher autonomy in the Islamic schools represents a challenging educational environment which tries to reconcile the mandatory standardization of the curriculum and the pedagogical freedom. Although this tension is recognized by the current literature, some stems of teacher autonomy can be deduced. This study provides an alternative view, in which the teacher is considered an architect of academic as well as spiritual development and not, as typically considered, a knowledge copier. Means of assessing autonomy are areas of investigation, as are comparative structures for various Islamic educational environments, and development of professional development courses which meet national requirements, yet are supportive of Islamic pedagogical approaches. The present work seeks to identify strategies that teachers use to manage the tension between formally mandated organizational goals and moral-spiritual objectives of Islamic education, providing potentially useful guidance for teaching and learning in religious classroom environments. Then, this research was consisting of three research questions, there are:

1. How do Islamic school educators manage the conflict between curriculum standardization and classroom ownership in the classroom?
2. What are the major determinants of teacher autonomy in Islamic schools, and how do these differ in various cultural and institutional environments?
3. How can professional development programs be structured so as to further teacher autonomy, within the confines of the country's educational standards and the principles of Islamic pedagogy?

METHODS

Using a qualitative approach in the present study, the researcher tries to collect the rich, personal data from each individual (Braun et al., 2017). The researcher tried to render the experience, the perspective, the questions of the participants in a whole format, based on direct exposure as the main method of data collection. This method, conversely, can allow for a deep, contextually rich view of the phenomenon of interest under study,

in which the researcher can capture the subtleties of the researcher's perspective. Furthermore, the study adopts a case study approach. According to the approach described, a case study design allows a qualitative investigation of a specific case, event, or process in real world settings (Tellis, 1997). Advantages of this approach, is that allows the investigator to ensure a profound characterization of the context, the dynamics and the interaction between the particular case. The case study design is especially valuable when it comes to investigating complex phenomena in their field context and offers a rich description of the phenomenon being investigated.

The included main data has been sourced from members participating in a recruitment undertaken by English teachers belonging to the *Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran* (MGMP) English Teachers' Association, Madrasah Aliyah level, regency, in the eastern part of Java, Indonesia. Although the community consists of about 30 individuals, the work intentionally includes only four participants for the study according to specified criteria. The following criteria were applied to teaching contract (only those with less than five years of teaching experience were recruited), workplace (working in an Islamic boarding school), and academic (only English language or literature background were recruited). That the research context is an intriguing arena in which the role of English teachers in a religious class within the run is progressively created through the process of curriculum implementation. Thus, as the study object are the participants of the MGMP who are positioned in a professional learning community aimed at solving the problems of teaching quality and matter specific problems, academic voice is given to the participants of the MGMP. Teaching English in a mixed environment of a secular and an Islamic school is one of the sensitive attempt to be covered in a *Madrasah Aliyah* level curriculum (high school) class.

TABLE 1| Participants' Demography

No	Participants (Code)	Gender	Teaching Experiences (Years)	Institution	Background of Study
1	ET1	Male	4 Years	PPA	ELT
2	ET2	Female	5 Years	PPB	ELT
3	ET3	Male	3 Years	PPC	English Literature
4	ET4	Female	4 Years	PPD	ELT

Reducing the size of the group participant sample to such a degree that sufficient depth and specificity can be gleaned from the data being collected is a trademark of the qualitative approach. The professional background and practice of participants contribute to the academic studies on English teacher practice in *pondok pesantren* in the sociocultural frame. In light of this view, the work may provide the opportunity to study the functions that these contextual factors could be playing in the development of English language program (ELP) teaching practices, professional development and the embedding of religious thought.

Data collection in the current research involved a combination of direct observation, and semi-structured interview. Furthermore, the data acquisition mainly involved the semi-structured interview. All sessions lasted between 30 and 60 min per session for a subject. The author, to use a data collection instrument, selected a series of pre-formulated question to correspond to the context of the research which, as a consequence, in turn enabled the interviewer not to be too restrictive but at the same time gave enough leeway in the interview, to lightly and deeply explore the necessary subjects. In vivo data collection was achieved using a research smartphone voice recorder, and a handwritten diary, to record responses with as much detail as possible. Therefore, the using of semi-

structured interviews as the method of implementation was chosen, with the objective to be able to collect full and detailed data in the area of research subject. Having this approach, the author attained a more profound, intrinsic, understanding of the emerging themes, which accordingly, resulted in more consistent and rich data acquisition.

TABLE 2| Interview's Guideline

Interview's guideline
Section 1. Background and Context 1. Can you tell me about your teaching experience in Islamic boarding school? 2. What motivated you to become an English teacher in this setting? Section 2. Curriculum Challenges 1. How do you experience the current curriculum standards? 2. How do you balance standard curriculum requirements with your teaching style? Section 3. Teacher Autonomy factors 1. Can you share an example of exercising your professional judgement in class? 2. What factors limit or support your teaching autonomy? Section 4. Professional Development 1. What professional support would you help you become a better teachers?

Therefore, the research observation made site-and time-consecutive work visits to study participants. Observations of the subject during one of the English classes in 45–60 min were made. The data collection aimed to detect resistance at the ELT in the curriculum of Islamic boarding school. Data collection also involved qualitative field notes to capture detailed descriptions of hidden interactions and situational characteristics of classroom activity. The semi-structured interviews also revealed hitherto qualitative data which allowed the participants to deepen their own concerns and to give some context to the information they shared on the issues they perceived within the school environment. This design made it possible to conduct a deep analysis of the relationship involving the teaching modalities and the ways the teaching strategies are translated in the classroom environment.

During the data analysis in this work the author used thematic analysis as the main approach. For this qualitative study method, the key advantage lies in the ability to capture, analyze, and summarize the patterns and themes, and offer detailed and nuanced explanations of complex phenomena. Thematic analysis is a method by which it is possible to systemically code data and thereby reveal covert meaning in conjunction with the structure which is in participants' experience (Clarke & Braun, 2015), all of which derive from the same contextual level. In order to get trustworthiness the author included techniques to improve the validity, generalizability, robustness and confirmation of the analysis. Trust was one of the foundations of this trust lay in achieving data saturation, for instance when new topics and results can no longer be uncovered in the data. This was accomplished through the iterative process of data acquisition and analysis which ensured full coverage of the phenomena examined.

Thematic analysis in this research consisted of several steps. At the beginning, the author learnt the data by several revisions of the transcripts with extensive note taking in order to have a complete and deep understanding of the data. This stage facilitated the observation of potentially early patterns and then guided subsequent coding tasks. Subsequently, the coder performed first coding by repeatedly examining the data set and breaking the data set into meaningful units. Code was developed exploratorily, inductively, in the sense that, themes would naturally emerge from the data. In this phase, data saturation was evaluated by tracking whether new codes or notions continued to develop. After validation of saturation, the coding process turned the attention to further elaborating and grouping of the codes into more general themes.

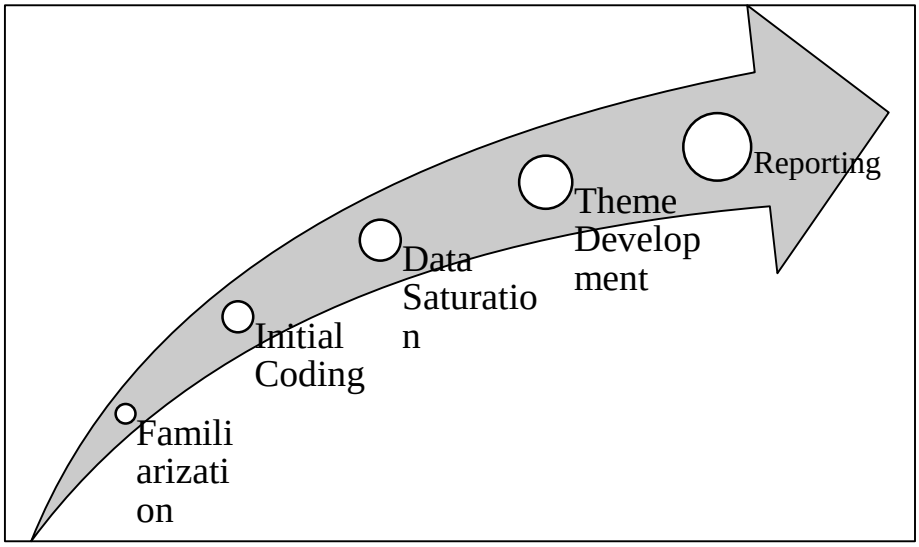


FIGURE 1| Data Analysis Process

Subsequently, codes were extracted through clustering and establishing the correlation between codes and their corresponding level of relevance to the research questions. So, the editor learned by repeated cycles of collation in order to bring the themes together, making sure the themes are consistent with, as well as, how the dataset has been gathered. This procedure consisted of cross-referencing themes with data to maintain consistency and not overgeneralize. In order to enhance the credibility of the system, the author recorded and logged all analytical decisions in a bespoke audit trail and also incorporated reflexive practices to deal with potential biases. Themes were then assigned themes and titles at the end of the analysis, with definitions describing each of the themes. These results were condensed into an integrative account of results, in which the thematic analysis model and methodological rigor were openly described. This approach guaranteed that results were believable, robust, and generated from the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the researcher categorized the findings into three main themes, consist of contextual and value-integrated teaching approach, adaptive teaching strategies, and holistic assessment and skill development.

Contextual and Value-Integrated Teaching Approach

The English language teaching is a rare mode of teaching based on language ability within the special teaching class of Islamic boarding schools, a systematic pedagogical architecture integrating language ability, religious, cultural and moral ability. In particular, the process takes into account students' linguistic and professional development but also moral, spiritual and intellectual development. As ET1 state:

> *"My classroom is centred on interaction. I have proposed to students that they "talk and write aloud" not as a means of avoidance (in case the grammar is about to be revealed), but as a chance to be more autonomous, to actively participate, and to actively improve critical thinking, reasoning and reflection on text." (ET1)*

This approach to teaching is an indication of an effort to develop rounded persons who will not only communicate proficiently in English but also reflect the values of their religious and cultural background. Language acquisition under ethical constraints is challenged by educators in Islamic boarding schools wanting to prepare their students as communicators with the rest of the world across the palm, as well as on their inner

spiritual as well as life goals. This translational model not only promotes linguistic proficiency, it also incorporates the development of students' potential to make a valuable contribution both to their local and global communities, whereas Islamic moral principles are at the heart of the process.

Moreover, the core of this pedagogical design is to the strong situatedness of it. English language teachers plan explicitly lessons that, by direct linkage to the experience of the students in daily life within the framework of the *pesantren*, show clearly what they are to learn. Yet when teachers' language teaching, Islamic texts and the real world become a context on its own, then the activity of language teaching becomes both meaningful and purposeful. There is something about this methodology of the context-based method in that students come to understand that English is not just an academic drudge about an abstract noun, but also a practical instrument for encountering and having a voice in the world and similarly maintain their belief. The introduction of truly culturally and religiously relevant data permits a transdisciplinary explanation and, as a result, deepens the correlation between the acquisition process of a language and the personal, social, and spiritual development. Specifically in relation to such an approach, it is also argued that such a strategy can be applied to encourage development of both critical thinking and communication skills in the student as the student is able not just to critically reflect, but also is provided with the ability to master both global and local discourses from a principled and informed perspective. It ultimately offers a framework in which learning a language can be depicted as one of a fluid, purposive and evolving process.

Interactive and innovative teaching methods are central to this model, as they create a dynamic and stimulating learning atmosphere. Teachers use many teaching strategies, such as project-based learning, group activity, discussion, debate, and technology-based instruction, in order to encourage student engagement. These approaches are explicitly created with the aim of developing communication skills, critical thinking and teamwork among students. ET3 argues:

> *"…Media and technology mix has been so transformative. I mean, with the use of digital resources like educational video clips and interactive software, the nature of the learning process can be rendered more engaging, dynamic, personalized, and, to some extent, an individual affair depending on learning modalities, fostering deeper engagement and independent learning…"(ET3)*

These approaches also that permit the student to reach a more complex and deep level of knowledge in the field, to enhance the student ability to solve systematic problems and to generalize theorical knowledge to practical application. Outside, by using digital tools it is possible to increase levels of differentiation in teaching in order to allow students to engage with the learning material that comes at different levels of complexity, with product at different levels of sophistication. Not only does this model enrich the study act, but it also prepares the student to function successfully in a digital, globalised world.

Moreover, The motivational underpinnings of this approach are equally significant. The future of the creators of education is the picture of a Muslim student as a mobile/globalized person and who possesses knowledge based on the international scene and keeps his/her Islamic belief. This is made possible in part by a somewhat cumbersome combination of increasing the student's field of vision, creating an international platform for communication between student peers, and of course, religious identity.

Assessment in this teaching model is consistent with its integrative and heuristic pedagogy. In contrast to the exclusive reliance on traditional assessment techniques, teachers use diverse assessments tools, effectively covering the monitoring of students' linguistic development, cognitive growth, and development of personality traits. There are various instruments for measuring such processes such as presentations, team-based

projects, written-tasks, and processes-focused assessments, each providing multiple dimensionality of student development. As ET4 said in her statement:

> *"…The integrative test activity (work, presentations and test) in fact offers something that is already available (and teachers themselves can precisely identify) in terms of what knowledge areas to work on and develop capacities focused on, in order to provide targeted support and develop individualized learning trajectories for each student." (ET4)*

This kind of equitable assessment model offers a fair yet valid test of academic potential, but also nurtures the development of key life skills like communication, teaming and critical thinking. Considering not only the knowledge acquisition process but also the knowledge result, it is be felicitous for teachers to be able to support student individual differences, providing individualized support for ongoing learning process, which leads to a sense of achievement in various facets of the students life. The approach is a methodology that has the basis of combining cognitive, affective and social development, so it enriches the whole of education.

Therefore, this contextual-grounded, value-based pedagogic model is an intelligent educational model for the view of language learning as a change process. Rather than being just a way of acquiring linguistic capabilities English education is a dynamic platform for intellectual development, intercultural communication, and globally minded people rooted in their spiritual and ethical values (Xia et al., 2024). If combined with language teaching by means of moral and cultural koans, this model is programmed toward forcing students to deal with difficult dialectical tensions in humanist values, yet it does so in a way that is sensitive to the values held by those who sit down to study them from their particular point of view and experience. Such an approach not only offers to learners the ability to communicate in their everyday dialogues, but also allows the learner to contribute in global dialogues and cross cultural gaps, create mutual understanding and respect (Echcharfy, 2019). In addition, it stresses the importance of the education process to develop whole persons, to excel in learning plus to develop a moral most desirable, with the aim to tackle complex and large global problems in a competent and meaningful way (Kim, 2020). Underpinning this framework is the degree to which language education is capable of change reinterpreting it as a way of life to be cultivated as much as a language be learned, serving not only as a tool, but a medium through which values can be articulated and shared across the world.

The research of context and value-based integrated English language teaching in Islamic boarding schools points out an exciting model that combines language ability with moral, spiritual, and intellectual development (Astuti et al., 2024). The advantage of this model is that it permits the development of holistic development in students, training them to communicate in English, but also to critically think, communicate interculturally, and demonstrate a profound knowledge of religious and cultural beliefs.

This method conforms to other research favoring the incorporation of values into language pedagogy, focusing on translation of the language as an instrument of social and individual growth (Habiburrahim et al., 2022). In addition, the adoption of interactive pedagogical practices such as project-based learning and technology-enhanced instruction is consonant with emerging trends in the world's education in which learner involvement and individualized learning are the effective pedagogy.

However, there are some challenges associated with this model. A pleasing combination of religious values into language education may not always sit well with more secular or heterogeneous school environments which restricts its wider application (Horwitz, 2021). Equally, although this method would be capable of facilitating

personalized learning, could take a lot of resources and school teachers' training to be

carried out in a determined manner, this, by itself, can be very difficult to obtain in a certain type of schools (Selvi, 2020). Generally, this study has common features with similar investigations, which state that integrative method should be taken for the education of language, but this study has also a distinctive feature, that is to infuse religious and cultural values in the teaching, which needs to be explored in various educational environments.

Adaptive Teaching Strategies

Furthermore, language teaching and the dissemination of the cultures and religions are highlighted in the view of ET1:

> *"…English itself, in fact, is a process to an objective, since English is the means to being able to obtain the state of being more skilful in skills and relating processes relevant to escaping the tedium of world knowledge, and, believe me, they will use the study of English in order to overcome it someday, which will make them ready to take those challenges and to deepen their idea of the world…" (ET1)*

Similarly, ET4 gives evidence for the value of English teaching for promoting intercultural awareness whilst preserving students' Muslim culture, that is, it allows the students to "*see and appreciate other cultures without losing their Muslim identity.*" These reflections underline how English education provides a route for cross-cultural (or intercultural) competence, enabling students to effectively interact on a global level yet maintain a religious and cultural identity. This dual emphasis not only provides students with the necessary linguistic competence for successful communication, but also promotes a balanced world perspective to enable students to effectively handle the challenges of globalization without losing their values and cultural traditions. Hence, the teaching of English is not only an academic opportunity to foster the cognitive development but also an opportunity for moral development which, of course, enhances the overall educational goals.

According to ET3 and ET2, however, even dedication to use of interactive and adaptive pedagogies by the teachers themselves is also reflected in their practices. ET3 highlights the importance of promoting students' active engagement in learning through varieed communication activities.

> *"Given that it is possible to teach students to be able to express themselves adequately, they are also able to express themselves effectively like the students become communicative and confident in talking" . (ET3)*

Furthermore, ET2 highlights the importance of facilitating participation:

> *"I encourage students to speak, discuss, and actively participate. It is not merely a matter of teaching them the language itself but, the language using which they can be empowered to use it confidently by expressing themselves as well (i.e., what to say), accept views of others, subscribe to language use and think about using the language (as well as now), and ultimately contribute to their own future, if not at present." (ET2)*

These approaches are in line with today's awareness of the prevailing pedagogical principles, wherein the students are at the centre of learning and communicative competence is a primary objective. By engineering for students opportunities for open talking and competition such as debate and discussion, teachers provide students with the opportunity to use language in the real world and in so doing help them to use the language more effectively and more deliberately. Further, such interactive formats encourage critical thinking, teamwork, and self-esteem, which are all up to date for academic and professional success.

Introduction of these strategies within a sequencing of the curriculum demonstrates an alignment of the approach to the end purpose of creating an environment conducive to integrated development. Upon employing an active involvement approach that also takes an adaptive perspective to teaching, teachers address students' unique needs while, at the same time, developing a sense of both involvement and deeper language learning. Specifically, this dynamic approach, not only enhances linguistic competence, but also equips the students with the necessary tools to manage challenging communicative situations that extend to their general academic and personal growth.

Moreover, The combination of media and IT has transformed everyday teaching. In teaching and learning environments, the introduction of digital resources, such as educational video, interactive educational tools and technologies, online community of practice, augments either the educational process or the learning process by supporting, a deeper, more active, engagement. Adopting the same approach, it is possible to answer those calls in the case of scarce resources and at the same time ensuring an adequate pedagogical quality. The technologies presently available permit the development of a great variety of lessons catering to the needs of the students, which contribute to the establishment of a dynamic and accessible type of educational environment. Moreover, technology-based resources offer perspectives of knowledge on a planetary scale and reciprocal relations, thus driving the development of skills in thinking critically and solving problems. With regards to its constraints on clinicians to maximize their own benefit at the potential expense of student academic achievement, this model demonstrates a classic effect seen by members of the professions ensuring that the concerns for student academic learning and success are circumvented for greater student learning and success.

Thus, the comprehensive approach to assessment is well-articulated by ET4, who state:

> *"In addition to the fact that the standardized measuring rubric, including the components of project, presentation, and essay is sufficient to develop a more integrated, considered (imbedded) representation of student achievement…" (ET4).*

However, the fundamental premise of ET2 is the plausibility of multimodal assessment tools "*not tests, but also tasks-based and presentation-based tests*." Integrative, for instance, it is also possible to achieve a more detailed and comprehensive view of the abilities of a learner across different domains. Even though this approach is more than just the practice of traditional testing, it can be used not only to deal with different learning styles, but also for example to foster, critical thinking, creativity or communicative skills. Overall assessment/evaluation is in line with contemporary pedagogic strategies that encourage student development, while also acknowledging, that not only is academic excellence important, but also that student learning is transferable to benefit the individual and the greater good of society. In addition, it allows the teachers to more accurately identify prevailing strengths and weaknesses and it is used to plan focused interventions and implement a customized learning infrastructure. This view, as an integrative framework, highlights the importance of balanced and representative evaluation to ensure educational achievement that is meaningful, subjective and authentic.

Then, English is not only a communication tool, but also a tool to popularize Islamic doctrine all over the world. It is observed that ET2 expresses this as,

> *"English is not a language but. That it is a medium through which the world may have contact with the ends of Islam, etc. two purposes of English teaching at the Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are described." (ET2)*

Providing translations of religious and cultural background inciter of attitudinal, communicative and religious/cultural schooling and transmitting attitudinal, communicative and religious or cultural schooling. Moreover, ET1 builds on this line of

reasoning, arguing that teaching English in a *pesantren* equips students to be effective in an international context while also staying true to their identity and cultural commitments. As content examinations allow students to explore broader fields of academic, occupational and interfaith communication, whilst adhering to Islamic practice, this pilot study examines how professional communicators approach this interface. The integration of language acquisition with the preservation of cultural and religious identity is the distinctive relational agent of English language learning for it allows learners to incorporate local content into global activities and empower them to move and actively change global space.

The last, general credo is concisely presented by ET3, who states that the motivation is "*The will to implement in my students skills that may allow them to grasp the wider world but that do not weaken their religious instruction*." This sentence reflects the core of adaptive pedagogic practices used in Islamic boarding schools. These findings highlight that teachers of Islamic boarding schools are not just teaching language. Instead, they undertake a transformative educational mission that redefines language teaching as a comprehensive endeavor. This task encompasses personal, cultural, and spiritual aspects, and it is designed with the aim of developing students into users of English who are sufficiently proficient to work and move around in a wide range of global environments while retaining their own identity. This method captures the central relationship between language development and development of character, ethics and intercultural communication, and emphasizes the special function educators play in educating the whole person.

This integrated approach is also well-suited to more general educational aspirations, which often aim at integrating cognitive development with value-based education, the graduates of which would become assets to both local and world communities.

Results of this study demonstrate the complex, dynamic and unique place of English language teaching in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), where language skills are fused with cultural and religious beliefs, which is found to be a significant factor in the learning, personal and moral development of students. A strength of the study is the focus on the balanced approach whereby language competency is achieved without compromising the Muslim identity of students. This method corresponds to other studies examining the need for intercultural competence in English teaching (Mu & Yu, 2023) as well as studies on the relevance of language learning to the development of a global awareness without loss of local or cultural identity. Moreover, the application of interactive and/or adaptive pedagogies, as seen in the classroom practices of project-based learning and communication activities, has demonstrated in practice to be successful in attracting students and in promoting students' critical thinking and self-confidence that has been also found in other studies on student-cantered teaching approaches (Song et al., 2024; Zhou, 2023).

Thus, one limitation of the study is that the results depend on the use of multimodal measurement instruments, which, although valuable for cultivating creativity and critical thinking, could create problems for resource-constrained environments, where availability of the technology and qualified personnel may be a limitation (Mhlongo et al., 2023). On the other hand, whereas the study highlights best practices for the benefits that the introduction of digital interfaces in language learning can bring, it also points towards challenges in maintaining a balance between using digital tools and traditional teaching approaches to avoid negative effects on students and teachers. Compared to other research, this study offers a more focused view of how Islamic values inform English language teaching, hence, it highly relates to English language teachers all around the world in such contexts. Nonetheless, more research is necessary to investigate the prospective impact of this combined strategy on students' academic and professional achievements on the global stage.

Holistic Assessment and Skill Development

The assessment process in English teaching in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools illustrates multifarious and holistic approaches, hence, it goes beyond traditional assessment techniques. As highlighted by ET1,

> *"Project-based and presentation based assessment can substitute the use of generic written tests, and allow the student to demonstrate a deeper knowledge of the student's competences not as isolated abilities, but as elements of a whole." (ET1)*

This integrative perspective seeks to offer an eclectic and holistic view of what students can do. Key assessment methods encompass individual and collaborative projects, portfolios, active participation, and other formative assessments, which collectively capture both linguistic proficiency and personal growth. Its use of multiple assessment methods brings the model into harmony with current pedagogic approaches that place great emphasis on holistic learning. The main purpose is that students, in addition to being proficient in English language competence, are choosing to be also in a critical approach, creative thinking, and ethical dispositions in their cultural and religious worldview.

Then, ET4 which applied pedagogical method at Salafi Islamic boarding schools is based on the holistic development of students and language proficiency coupled with moral character development to produce well-rounded people. The language acquisition is progressively developed by means of dynamic and interactive pedagogical approaches such as structured discussions, debates and presentations. As ET4 state:

> *"Conversation, discussion, presentation) in a cyclical way in order to enhance the communicative abilities of the participants, promote thinking, working and listening in an efficient manner, encouraging critical thinking, collaboration and the active listening that is necessary to ensure communication is communicated appropriately and with respect" (ET4)*

These approaches not only support linguistic competence, but they also foster students' belief in their communicative competency, so that students can be expressive and communicative in a variety of and flexible situations. In addition, the curricula place in a high position the education of moral and ethical disposition in line with Riaz et al. (2023) the wider institutional goal to produce not only academically successful individuals, but also people able to transmit positive messages and Islamic values. This bifocal approach corresponds to the schools' aim to train graduates having intellectual skills and with a moral duty to be valuable to society. The goal of integration of academicism and character education is to empower students to confront and overcome complex global problems while upholding and progressive Islamic principles, promoting a balanced and meaningful contribution not only to their communities, but indeed to the wider world (Khan & Ahmed, 2025).

Then, one feature of this pedagogical method is the natural and effective incorporation of the material standards taught in this subject into the religious and culturally observed nature of the Islamic boarding school world. Teachers carefully align required learning goals with classroom practices that are simultaneously respectful of, and attentive to, the institution's religious context (Utari et al., 2024). The teaching and learning process of the curriculum are aimed at building strong foundation for English language mastery to the learners, as well as development of critical thinking and intellectual independence. At the same time, it maintains and reinforces the fundamental values of Islamic teaching, guaranteeing that the spiritual and moral development of students is never eclipsed by their academic progress (Jalaldeen & Al-Hidabi, 2025).

This paradigm of pedagogy lies beyond the most traditional language teaching, containing a full systemic view of education, including the transcendental development of personal, intellectual and ethics. In this approach education is described as a way to transform students, who are not only skilled in using English as a language, but also prepared to face global environments with understanding and integrity from western society cultures (Zalli, 2024). As an educator has so aesthetically captured, however, the mission is "not only to instruct English, but, in the process, develop students with the skills to understand global complexities, speak persuasively and stand by their core values. This comprehensive vision underscores the role of education in fostering informed, morally grounded individuals prepared to contribute meaningfully to society (Ahmad & Islam, 2024).

The assessment methods used in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools described in the present study demonstrate a traditional model of education of language that goes beyond the routine and also engages the development of an integrated product (*holistic development*), of critical consciousness (*critical thinking*) and of moral good (*moral character*). A feature of this teaching method is the use of project work and oral test relating work as a form of wider quality-focused evaluation of student competence with potential to demonstrate competence in a relevant context (Chen et al., 2025). Integrative use of a variety of assessment methodologies, individual/group project, portfolio assessment, formative assessment, is utilised to promote linguistic and personal growth.

Second, inculcating critical thinking, professional ethics and interpersonal moral character are in keeping with the educational agenda of the host institutions, who are committed not only to equip students for academic excellence, but also strong positive influences of society. This method is consonant with other studies of integrative education, which focus on integrative development of cognitive, affective, and moral cognition (Hasriani et al., 2025). Conversely, there is a potential cost of such approach, namely, the complexity of academic and character development that could necessitate additional time and work to guarantee the fairness and validity of the assessment itself. In particular, although the extent to which teaching or experience is congruent with a cultural and religious values system is primary, there is a risk of becoming intolerant of the range of views other than Islamic traditions, or of allowing the teaching of ways different from the Islamic tradition to influence the teaching of the Islamic tradition. Generally, this work asks for a deeper reflection on the kind of relationship between pedagogy in character and pedagogy in the acquisition of communication, and demonstrates how the aims of the unified, integral, humane methods tend to lead to the unity of the human being (Semper & Iriso, 2026).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that teacher autonomy in Islamic boarding schools is not characterized by unrestricted instructional freedom but by teachers' capacity to exercise professional judgment while balancing national curriculum standards with the religious and cultural values of Islamic education. The findings reveal that English teachers negotiate curriculum demands through three interconnected pedagogical practices: implementing contextual and value-integrated instruction, adopting adaptive teaching strategies, and employing holistic assessment practices. These approaches enable teachers to maintain curricular compliance while preserving their pedagogical beliefs and the moral objectives of *pesantren* education.

The findings further indicate that teacher autonomy extends beyond instructional decision-making to encompass the integration of global competencies with Islamic values. Teachers strategically contextualize English learning through students' daily experiences, utilize interactive and technology-enhanced pedagogies to foster engagement, and implement diverse assessment methods that evaluate not only linguistic achievement but also critical thinking, communication skills, collaboration, and character development. These practices illustrate that professional autonomy can coexist with curriculum standardization when teachers are supported in adapting instructional approaches to their institutional context and learners' needs.

This study contributes to the literature on teacher autonomy by offering evidence from Islamic boarding school settings, where autonomy is shaped by the interaction between curriculum policy, institutional culture, and religious values. Rather than viewing curriculum standards as constraints, teachers reinterpret them as flexible frameworks that can accommodate meaningful pedagogical innovation. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its small number of participants and its focus on a single educational context in Indonesia, which limits the transferability of the findings. Future research should involve participants from diverse Islamic educational institutions and different cultural contexts, employ longitudinal or comparative designs, and examine how teacher autonomy influences students' academic achievement, intercultural competence, and character development over time. Such investigations would provide a broader understanding of how teacher autonomy can support high-quality English language education while sustaining the distinctive identity and educational mission of Islamic schools.

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