



## **English for Islamic Studies: A Book Review**

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### **Abstract**

This review evaluates the book *English for Islamic Studies: Reading and Exercise Book* by Yuli Astutik and Ruli Astuti. The review begins with a brief introduction to the book, the authors' background, and the book's main features. The review then presents a description and evaluation of the book's content based on its central themes. Through 14 units, the authors explore the integration of English language proficiency and Islamic values, covering social ethics, rituals, health, and the history of Islamic civilization. The authors suggest that English instruction in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) must validate learners' religious identities. The review concludes that the book is an important tool for English language teaching practitioners in Islamic educational settings. However, there is room for improvement in the range of cognitive tasks.

**Keywords:** *Book Review, English for Islamic Studies, English for Specific Purpose, Islamic Education*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the current landscape of English language teaching (ELT), the discourse on the relationship between language and identity has shifted from mere linguistic mastery to the recognition of learners' sociocultural backgrounds (Bonilla-Medina et al., 2021; Mansoor et al., 2025; Norton & Pavlenko, 2019; Piasecka, 2019). This perspective is further reinforced by studies that conceptualize identity as socially constructed and dynamic, shaped by cultural narratives, linguistic practices, and educational contexts, and that highlight the role of language teaching in mediating learners' cultural and identity formation (Bigirimana, 2018; Khor, 2020; Miravalles, 2025). This evolving phenomenon is also reflected in recent studies that emphasize the dynamic interplay among identity, agency, and pedagogical contexts, in which both learners and teachers continuously negotiate their roles, positioning, and practices within socially and culturally situated language classrooms (Li, 2023; Lie, 2025; Weng, 2025).

On the other hand, the significance of ELT materials that validate learners' identities has become a central issue, given that English is no longer viewed as the preserve of native speakers but rather as an international language that must accommodate local contexts (Alruwaili & Altalab, 2023; Guerra et al., 2022; Harendita, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Sultan, 2025). For adult learners, particularly those in Islamic higher education institutions, the language learning process often creates tension between the demands of global professionalism and efforts to maintain religious heritage (Mustofa & Romadhon, 2025; Sofi & Jenks, 2025). Curricula that rely solely on Western-centric materials risk causing cultural disorientation or even contradicting learners' spiritual values (Farah & Sumarsono, 2025).



Therefore, an identity-responsive content-based instruction (CBI) approach is needed to ensure that language learning does not alienate students' personal beliefs.

A real challenge faced in the field is the limited availability of textbooks that systematically integrate Islamic values into ELT. Often, educators rely on imported textbooks that emphasize Western cultural practices that may be inconsistent with Islamic ethics, underscoring the need for localized materials. The book "English for Islamic Studies: Reading and Exercise Book" (2023) by Yuli Astutik and Ruli Astuti emerges as a pedagogical tool that directly addresses this challenge. This book seeks to bridge global language proficiency with a deep understanding of Islamic teachings, enabling students to accurately and with dignity communicate their religious identities in English.

The two authors leverage their strong academic backgrounds at the Muhammadiyah University of Sidoarjo (UMSIDA) to develop holistic materials. As lecturers active in research and development of ELT materials, they understand that for students in Islamic education departments, English materials must have high utility value to support their specific disciplines. The book's focus goes beyond mastering grammar and extends to enriching character and religious literacy through the analysis of historical texts, culture, and Islamic intellectual thought. Thus, the primary goal of this work is to equip learners with the linguistic skills necessary to become ambassadors of Islamic information on the international stage, ensuring their global competence without compromising their spiritual integrity.

## **2. CONTENT ANALYSIS**

An analysis of the learning units in English for Islamic Studies: Reading and Exercise Book demonstrates a highly consistent application of the CBI approach, positioning English as both a tool for deepening Islamic content and an object of learning itself. Organizationally, the book consists of 14 units, systematically structured to facilitate learners' transition from basic to more complex understanding. It uses a consistent structure: reading texts (Reading) as the primary anchor, a glossary for vocabulary support, and a series of tasks (Tasks) that range from comprehension tasks to productive practice. The glossary component plays a crucial role as lexical scaffolding, defining religious and academic terms by their word classes to help learners comprehend the text without significant lexical barriers. The diversity of tasks, from answering questions to practicing dialogues, demonstrates an integrative approach to the four language skills, with a primary focus on reading and vocabulary.

The exploration of the material begins in the realm of fundamental social ethics and morality. Unit 1 (The Best Neighbor) utilizes key content from Surah An-Nisa 4:36 and the Hadith on neighborly etiquette, emphasizing that kindness to neighbors is an integral part of faith. Its relevance to Islamic Studies lies in strengthening the value of social harmony. Moreover, its assignments train learners to extract information from texts through essay questions, true-or-false questions, similarity words, writing, and speaking. In addition, Unit 2 (Lying and Backbiting) examines moral integrity by providing a detailed definition of lying, discussing the psychological reasons behind dishonesty, and outlining theological sanctions for hypocrites based on Qur'anic quotations 69:44-46 and 2:283. In this unit, learners can work on assignments such as answering reading questions with essay responses, writing opinion pieces, using synonyms, writing sentences, and speaking. Besides, Unit 3 (Do Not Lose Hope of the Mercy of Allah!) touches on mental health aspects by connecting the



concepts of depression and anxiety with spiritual solutions through prayers from the Hadith. This unit is highly relevant for equipping learners with psychological-religious terminology through reading assignments, finding the correct definitions, filling in blanks with words, writing (rearranging words to form a sentence), and speaking. Complementing this morality phase, Unit 4 (Good Habits for New Muslims to Develop) presents a holistic lifestyle guide, from the importance of reading the Quran to simple acts of charity, such as a smile. Some assignments can train learners' English skills, such as reading (essays), identifying true and false statements, choosing the correct words, summarizing the text, rearranging words, and speaking.

The content analysis continues with practical social and legal issues. Unit 5 (The Gracious Relationship of Marriage) examines the rights and obligations of husband and wife, grounded in religious teachings that strictly prohibit domestic violence and emphasize obedience to the Creator as the foundation of the relationship. This unit provides students with various assignments, including reading, antonyms, fill-in-the-missing-words, question-and-answer exercises, and speaking. Unit 6 (A Balanced Diet - Prescribed in the Quran) offers an interesting perspective on nutrition by connecting Sunnah-based moderation in eating with holy verses. Linguistic accuracy is honed through assignments such as reading, multiple-choice exercises, choosing the right words, completing sentences (writing), composing a paragraph, and speaking. Meanwhile, Unit 7 (How to Inspire Our Children to Gain Knowledge) provides andragogical strategies for parents to motivate their children through an interactive 10-step plan during Ramadan. The assignments are designed to train students' logical thinking and include reading (essays), term substitution methods, multiple-answer exercises, writing (summary and opinion), and speaking.

The middle units of the book are dominated by ritual and historical sections. Unit 8 (A Brief History of the Hajj) presents a historical narrative of Hajar and the construction of the Kaaba, which is highly relevant for strengthening understanding of ritual history. This unit trains students in reading (essays), choosing the right words, using antonyms, completing verbs, making questions and answers, speaking, collaborative work, and productive skills tasks. Unit 9 (The Health Benefit of Fasting) uses scientific arguments regarding the body's autolysis and detoxification processes during fasting to demonstrate the harmony between science and religious practice. The tasks train students in reading, true/false, matching words, personal expression, daily activities, collaborative work, and speaking. Unit 10 (Eat Only Halal Food) provides critical guidance on halal food vocabulary, including how to identify haram ingredients (such as gelatin, rennet, and lard) in modern products. The productive tasks include reading (essay), synonyms, matching the words, daily foods, making a paragraph (writing), speaking, and designing an international halal menu that connects religious values with practical creativity.

The final units broaden learners' horizons into the realms of ideology, environment, and heroism. Unit 11 (The Importance of Learning about Islam) discusses integrating religious literacy into reading classes to stimulate students' imaginations. Assignments such as reading (essay), true/false, multiple-choice (closest meaning), inner portrait, and speaking can encourage learning and build pride as Muslims. Unit 12 (Treatment of Animals in Islam) explores environmental ethics by arguing that torturing animals is a major sin because animals form communities like humans. Creative assignments such as reading (essay), synonyms, the odd one out, creative writing, and speaking provide a refreshing variety of

teaching methods. The book culminates in Units 13 (Eid al-Adha) and 14 (Salahudin Ayubi). Unit 13 explains the essence of sacrifice as a symbol of submission to Allah and social strengthening through the distribution of sacrificial meat. The assignments involve reading (an essay), true/false, antonyms, describing the picture, and speaking. Finally, the narrative biography of Salahuddin al-Ayyubi in unit 14 provides an inspiring conclusion on Islamic leadership, complete with paraphrasing assignments of historical texts about other great Muslim figures such as Harun Al-Rashid and Tariq bin Ziyad, with assignments such as reading (essay), true and false, synonym, paraphrase, and make a sentence. Through these 14 units, this book effectively demonstrates that English language mastery can be strengthened alongside deepening Islamic Studies literacy through a systematic pedagogical framework.

### **3. EVALUATION**

The main strength of this book lies in its highly authentic implementation of CBI, where English is not taught in isolation but is fully integrated with substantive Islamic content. In the context of global ELT research, the development of EFIS materials has long been a concern for researchers seeking to decolonize the curriculum to avoid the “trap of admiring Western role models” that often ignore the sociocultural identities of Muslim learners. The authors of this book successfully address this challenge by presenting texts deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, such as direct quotations from the Qur’an and Hadith. However, they remain relevant to the demands of modern international communication. This approach aligns with previous research on EFIS development, which emphasizes that integrating local values can lower learners’ affective filters and increase their intrinsic motivation because the material being studied has direct relevance to their spiritual lives (Boonsuk, 2026; Nafiah, 2020; Purwati et al., 2018). The glossary provided with each unit effectively serves as lexical scaffolding, enabling learners to master technical religious terms in English that are often absent from mainstream textbooks, thereby supporting learners’ autonomy in understanding authoritative texts independently. Furthermore, the variety of tasks offered—ranging from low-level cognitive exercises such as vocabulary matching to high-level productive tasks such as designing an international halal menu in Unit 10 or compiling a biography of an inspiring Muslim figure in Unit 14—provides a dynamic, integrative, and task-based learning experience (Task-Based Language Teaching).

However, this review noted several critical areas that need further development. Most of the comprehension tasks at the beginning of each unit remain literal and mechanistic, such as true/false questions or direct answers to the text, which may not provide sufficient intellectual challenge for learners with high critical thinking skills. The book needs to be enriched with tasks that require case analysis, information synthesis, or theological argument debate in English to stimulate learners’ higher-level cognition. Besides, the integration of multimedia elements is needed; the absence of an auditory component leaves learners with an unbalanced communicative competence, so the inclusion of QR codes for listening exercises would significantly enhance the book’s value as a holistic ESP resource. Visually, the layout and illustrations in this book remain quite simple and could use aesthetic updates to appeal to a generation of digital learners accustomed to interactive, multimodal materials. Improvements in these aspects, coupled with sharpening the more analytical task instructions, will strengthen this book’s position as a primary reference, excelling not only in religious content but also in cutting-edge ELT pedagogical methodology globally.

#### **4. SYNTHESIS**

The book "English for Islamic Studies: Reading and Exercise Book" feels inadequate without a broader research framework, particularly in ELT. Its connection to ESP and religious values-based education emerges as a crucial point, not merely a background detail. This text attempts to weave the book's pedagogical approach with previously developed theoretical frameworks and empirical findings. Not all of these connections are neatly structured. Rather, there is room for interpretation. While there are clear continuities, there are also gaps that remain unfilled. With this perspective, the book does not cease to be a teaching resource; rather, it becomes part of an ongoing academic conversation open to critique.

If traced to its conceptual foundation, this book's approach intersects with the principles of CBI, long discussed in ELT. The essence is quite simple, although the practice is often less straightforward. Language is more easily understood when embedded in content relevant to learners. In the context of Islamic education, several studies have shown a fairly consistent pattern: when subject matter intersects with students' daily beliefs and practices, their engagement tends to increase (Agustina et al., 2023). This book does not rest on that assumption. The authors incorporate Quranic verses, Hadith, and Islamic narratives into structured reading activities. This choice has consequences. There is the potential for increased cognitive load, especially for early learners. However, this approach demonstrates how CBI theory translates into concrete classroom practice.

Furthermore, the issue of identity is also inseparable from this discussion. In several studies of Muslim learners, the idea emerges that language learning is always linked to identity formation (Al Onazi, 2025; Hassan, 2020; Wulandari & Noor, 2020). Sometimes this goes hand in hand; sometimes it creates tension. English often carries certain cultural values that do not fully align with students' religious backgrounds. At this point, the concept of glocalisation becomes relevant, although its implementation is not always smooth. This book attempts to take this position by placing Islamic values at the core of the material. The results are quite interesting. Students are not forced to choose between becoming English speakers and maintaining their religious identity. The two coexist, although in practice, certain negotiations may still arise. Besides, it is also shown that identity-affirming materials can reduce cultural dissonance and increase learning motivation (Zaidi & El Chaar, 2022).

From a lexical perspective, the vocabulary design in this book shows a strong influence from studies of vocabulary acquisition in ESP. There is a classic problem in English for Islamic Studies: many important concepts lack direct equivalents in general English. When this is ignored, learning often devolves into rote memorisation rather than a full understanding. This book seems to recognise this gap. The presence of a glossary in each unit is not merely supplementary; it serves as a fairly systematic support. Vocabulary is not only introduced but also placed in contexts of use. This approach aligns with findings showing that explicit vocabulary learning, especially when linked to context, tends to be more effective in aiding retention (Kaivanpanah, 2021). Compared to more general ESP textbooks, this material feels more specific. However, this specificity also limits its flexibility for use outside specific contexts.



From a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) perspective, the task design in this book shows an inconsistent pattern. Some tasks feel lively and close to real-life practice, such as preparing a halal menu or writing a biography of a Muslim figure. Activities like these open up space for more authentic language use. However, not all tasks achieve the same depth. Some of the materials are still at a relatively basic cognitive level. This is interesting because, in recent ELT literature, the push to integrate Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) is growing stronger. Activities involving analysis or evaluation are considered capable of producing deeper learning. This book appears to occupy a middle ground. The TBLT structure has been adopted, but its cognitive potential has not been fully maximised. This may be a deliberate decision, perhaps to accommodate students' ability levels. However, it still leaves room for development.

Compared with previous efforts in developing English-language materials for Islamic Studies (Irwansyah & Yawisah, 2026; Mazraehno & Mazdayasna, 2016; Susilawati, 2024), this book aims to avoid two common extremes. Some materials are too heavy on religious content to the point that the pedagogical aspects of the language become obscured. Others follow the general ELT pattern but add Islamic elements only superficially. This book does not fall entirely into either of these areas. The learning structure remains clear, while the content does not feel tacked on. This balance is not easy to achieve. Some researchers even emphasise that integrating linguistic precision with theological accuracy is a key requirement for effective EFIS materials. In that context, this book can be seen as a step forward, although it does not completely address all the shortcomings.

From an Islamic pedagogical perspective, there are traces leading to the concept of Prophetic Pedagogy. This concept emphasises that education focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on character development and moral awareness. This book addresses these dimensions through themes of ethics and social responsibility. Units like "The Best Neighbour" or discussions on lying and backbiting go beyond mere information conveyance. They encourage reflection. The integration of moral values into language activities like this is appealing because it combines two often-separated objectives. Consequently, this approach can strengthen students' character development. However, its effectiveness depends heavily on how teachers manage classroom interactions.

One striking aspect relates to the absence of multimodal elements. In current developments in ELT, the use of audio, visual, and interactive media is becoming increasingly common. Many studies show that multimodal input helps improve listening skills, pronunciation, and communication confidence (Galimberti et al., 2023; Han, 2024; Salmani & Rahimi, 2025; Usman et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2026). This book still relies on printed texts and written assignments. This approach is indeed simpler and perhaps easier to implement in certain contexts. However, when compared with recent developments, a significant gap is apparent. Integrating digital elements such as QR codes, audio recordings, or online materials could be the next step. Without them, this book risks being less responsive to increasingly diverse learning needs.

More broadly, this book can also be read as part of decolonisation efforts in ELT. Criticism of the dominance of Western-centric materials has long been present, particularly because they often neglect local knowledge systems. Responses to this criticism have been varied, and not all have been successful. This book takes a rather bold approach by placing an



Islamic perspective at its centre. This choice is not neutral. It challenges the dominant hierarchy of knowledge in English language teaching. Numerous studies support this direction by emphasising the importance of a more inclusive, context-based curriculum. However, further questions remain, particularly regarding how to maintain a balance between strengthening local identity and openness to global perspectives.

When all these discussions are put together, it becomes clear that the book sits at the intersection of ELT, ESP, and Islamic education. It draws on utilisation and utilises theoretical foundations such as CBI and TBLT while addressing contemporary issues, including identity, decolonisation, and moral education. However, not all challenges are addressed. Limitations in the development of HOTS and in the minimal integration of technology remain apparent. From a practical standpoint, the book remains a worthy primary resource, with the caveat that educators should include activities that encourage critical thinking and more dynamic interactions. From a research perspective, there is still room for exploration. Developing more complex EFIS materials or empirically testing their effectiveness are interesting possibilities. Positioned in this way, the book serves not only as a teaching tool but also as a catalyst for broader academic discussion.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

English For Islamic Studies: Reading and Exercise Book (2023) by Yuli Astutik and Ruli Astuti is a fundamental contribution to the field of ESP that consistently applies the CBI approach to bridge English language proficiency with the deepening of Islamic values. Through 14 systematically arranged learning units, this book presents reading texts (Reading) as the main component, covering a wide spectrum, from interpersonal ethics to the history of the Hajj ritual and fasting to the biographies of inspirational figures such as Salahuddin al-Ayyubi. The structure of each unit is supported by a glossary that functions as lexical scaffolding to facilitate mastery of religious terminology, as well as a series of tasks (Tasks 1-7) that vary from literal comprehension, True/False exercises, to productive tasks such as writing paraphrases and dialogue practice in the "Let's Write" and "Let's Speak" sections. Although it requires enrichment in Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-based assignments and visual elements, this book successfully validates learners' sociocultural identity. It is highly recommended as a means of strengthening the character of moderate Muslims who are also skilled at communicating at the international level.

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