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A CRITICAL APPROACH TO DEVELOPING ENGLISH SPEAKING MATERIALS BASED ON ISLAMIC VALUES

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Abstract

English holds a strategic position in global communication, yet students' speaking skills remain limited. Widely used speaking materials often reflect external cultural values, lacking alignment with local contexts and moral education. This study aims to examine the development of English speaking materials based on Islamic values using a critical approach, focusing on both language mastery and character formation. This research employed a qualitative approach involving four English teachers and their instructional documents, including syllabi, lesson plans, and speaking activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Findings reveal that teachers act as critical agents in developing materials through needs analysis, content selection, adaptation, value integration, and reflective evaluation. Speaking activities such as role-plays, discussions, and contextual dialogues effectively internalize Islamic values while enhancing communicative competence. A critical approach in developing Islamic value-based speaking materials creates contextual, meaningful, and ethically oriented language learning, highlighting teachers' role as reflective and critical practitioners.

Keywords: Critical approach; ELT; English speaking materials; Islamic values; materials development.

Introduction

English holds a strategic position in the global context as a medium for cross-cultural communication, science, and technology (Irham et al., 2024; Crystal, 2003). In education, English mastery is required not only for passive comprehension but also for active



communication through speaking skills, which involve linguistic, pragmatic, and social competencies and serve as a key indicator of language learning success (Richards, 2008). Consequently, the development of effective and contextual speaking materials remains a central concern in English language teaching (Purnomo, 2016; Brown, 2007).

However, the globalization of English language education is closely linked to ideological and cultural issues. English learning materials are often produced within specific social and cultural contexts and therefore carry particular values, norms, and power relations, indicating that language is not neutral (Pennycook, 1999). In the Indonesian context, scholars emphasize the importance of integrating local culture and values into English materials to counter the dominance of target cultures and strengthen learners' cultural identity (Faizin, Permatasari, & Aziz, 2024). In speaking materials, such values are commonly reflected through topics, interaction patterns, and social practices embedded in communicative activities.

In practice, English speaking materials sourced from global contexts are frequently used without sufficient adaptation, which may reduce pedagogical relevance and overlook learners' contextual needs (Cunningsworth, 1995; Tomlinson, 2011). This tendency often positions English merely as a technical communication tool, neglecting its value and character dimensions. Therefore, reflective material development that integrates local values is necessary to ensure contextual relevance and cultural awareness (Miqawati et al., 2024; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Previous studies indicate that integrating Islamic values into English language teaching can enhance meaningful learning, student engagement, and character development without compromising linguistic competence (Irawan, 2020; Ersyadila et al., 2025). At the same time, a critical approach in language teaching challenges the notion of language as neutral by emphasizing the relationship between language, ideology, and social context (Freire, 1970; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). This approach encourages teachers to act as reflective agents who interpret and reconstruct learning materials in ways that align with learners' contexts and values, including local and cultural issues in Indonesia (Canagarajah, 2013; Santoso, 2021).

Despite growing attention to Islamic values in ELT, existing practices remain largely normative and lack critical reflection, while critical approaches are rarely applied to the development of speaking materials (Ariza et al., 2023; Pennycook, 2017). Speaking skills, which are rich in social interaction and value expression, remain underexplored in Islamic ELT research. This gap highlights the need for studies that integrate Islamic values, critical pedagogy, and the practical development of speaking materials.

Accordingly, this study offers novelty by positioning a critical approach as the main framework for developing English speaking materials based on Islamic values, with a specific focus on speaking skills and the reflective processes underlying material development. Using a qualitative approach, this study aims to examine how a critical approach is applied in developing value-based speaking materials, identify the principles guiding this process, and explain the contribution of such materials to English learning that supports both communicative competence and character formation.

Literature Review

Teaching Speaking in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Speaking is a core productive skill in ELT, as it reflects learners' ability to communicate actively and meaningfully rather than merely demonstrating passive language knowledge (Richards, 2008; Ur, 1996). As a productive skill, speaking requires the integration of linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competences, including grammatical accuracy, fluency, and contextual appropriateness (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hedge, 2000). Consequently, speaking ability is often regarded as a key indicator of successful language learning (Richards, 2015).

In classroom practice, speaking is commonly taught through communicative activities such as role-plays, discussions, simulations, and presentations that promote interaction and meaning negotiation (Harmer, 2007; Littlewood, 2004). However, EFL learners often face challenges such as anxiety, limited exposure, and low confidence, which necessitate supportive and meaningful instructional environments (Horwitz, 2001; Brown, 2007).

Importantly, speaking is not a neutral practice. Language use in speaking activities reflects social values, cultural norms, and ideological assumptions embedded in topics, interaction patterns, and speaker roles (Fairclough, 2010; Pennycook, 2017). Therefore, speaking materials function not only as tools for linguistic practice but also as media for shaping attitudes, communication ethics, and character. Teaching speaking thus requires materials that are communicative, authentic, and aligned with learners' social, cultural, and value contexts (Nunan, 2003; Richards, 2015).

Materials Development in English Language Teaching

Materials development plays a central role in ELT, serving as a bridge between learning objectives, pedagogical approaches, and learners' experiences. Effective materials should be

authentic, meaningful, and relevant to learners' contexts, which can be ensured through systematic needs analysis (Tomlinson, 2011, 2013; Hasanuddin, 2019). Needs analysis enables material developers to determine appropriate content, formats, and activities that support learners' communicative competence.

In speaking instruction, materials should be developed through an ongoing process of design, implementation, evaluation, and revision. Contextual and needs-based speaking materials provide learners with opportunities to express opinions, negotiate meaning, and engage cognitively and emotionally in communication (Puspita & Rosnaningsih, 2020). Studies further indicate that context-based and CTL-oriented materials enhance the relevance and applicability of speaking instruction by linking language use to real-life situations (Sugiyartanti & Robiasih, 2025; Mubarok et al., 2020).

Despite these principles, many teachers rely on international textbooks that are insufficiently adapted to local social and cultural contexts. This condition highlights the importance of teachers' roles as reflective and critical material developers who are responsible for ensuring pedagogical relevance and value alignment in ELT materials (Puspita & Rosnaningsih, 2020).

Critical Approaches in Language Teaching

Critical approaches in language teaching originate from Freire's (1970) view of education as a non-neutral social practice shaped by power relations and ideology. In ELT, this perspective emphasizes that language learning involves social, cultural, and political dimensions that influence learners' identities and worldviews (Pennycook, 1999).

Kumaravadivelu's (2006) postmethod pedagogy positions teachers as reflective decision-makers who evaluate methods, materials, and objectives based on local contexts and learners' needs. A critical approach encourages teachers to examine the implicit values and ideological assumptions embedded in language teaching practices. In the Indonesian context, this approach supports contextual, meaningful, and transformative English learning by integrating local social and cultural realities (Santoso, 2021).

Thus, combining critical pedagogy with materials development allows language teaching to function not only as linguistic training but also as a socially relevant practice that supports learners' critical awareness and character development (Freire, 1970; Pennycook, 1999).

Integration of Islamic Values in English Language Learning

The integration of Islamic values in ELT aims to align language learning with character and moral education. Values such as honesty, responsibility, politeness, cooperation, and social care can be embedded through learning materials and classroom interaction without compromising linguistic objectives (Ahmad, 2021). In Islamic educational contexts, English instruction is expected to support holistic learner development in line with institutional visions and missions (Sari, 2020).

Empirical studies demonstrate that integrating Islamic values in ELT enhances meaningful learning, learner engagement, and character formation while maintaining linguistic competence (Irawan, 2020; Ersyadila et al., 2025). However, challenges remain, particularly when value integration is limited to symbolic or normative inclusion without critical reflection, which may hinder deep internalization of values (Ahmad, 2021).

Critical Approach in Developing Islamic Value-Based ELT Materials

A critical approach provides a relevant framework for developing Islamic value-based ELT materials by encouraging reflection on ideology, social context, and value representation. Through this approach, material developers evaluate conversation topics, interaction patterns, and communicative roles to ensure alignment with Islamic values and local contexts (Santoso, 2021; Pennycook, 1999).

In speaking materials, a critical approach supports the creation of communicative activities that foster reflection, empathy, and social responsibility alongside linguistic competence (Ahmad, 2021). Nevertheless, existing studies often focus on material products rather than examining the reflective and critical processes underlying material development. Addressing this gap is essential to ensure meaningful and sustainable integration of values (Sari, 2020).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on the reviewed literature, this study is grounded in three interconnected concepts: teaching speaking in ELT, critical approaches in language teaching, and the integration of Islamic values in materials development. Speaking is viewed as a key indicator of successful language learning, while a critical approach serves as the primary lens for examining how materials reflect social context, ideology, and values (Harahap, 2022; Santoso, 2021).

This framework conceptualizes speaking materials as products of a reflective process that integrates linguistic goals, contextual relevance, and Islamic values. Using a qualitative approach, the study seeks to explore the process of developing speaking materials and the critical principles guiding this process, contributing theoretically and practically to contextual, meaningful, and value-oriented ELT.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine teachers' practices in developing English speaking materials grounded in Islamic values through a critical approach. A qualitative design was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of meanings, contexts, and pedagogical practices within natural educational settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Rather than evaluating instructional effectiveness or learning outcomes, the study focused on teachers' pedagogical decision-making, professional reflections, and the representation of values and ideology embedded in instructional materials (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A critical approach served as the analytical framework to investigate how English, Islamic values, and social contexts were constructed within speaking materials.

Participants and Research Context

The research was conducted in an Islamic-based educational setting where the integration of Islamic values is an institutional goal. This context is significant because English teaching materials, which are often globally produced and culturally neutral, require adaptation to align with local religious and moral values. Teachers frequently encounter textbooks that do not fully reflect these values, positioning materials development as a key site for pedagogical and critical intervention (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The participants were English teachers purposively selected based on their involvement in designing or adapting English speaking materials and their experience in integrating Islamic values into instruction. The study was limited to teachers and instructional documents to maintain alignment with the research objective of analyzing pedagogical practices and value representation rather than learner outcomes. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate for facilitating in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under investigation (Miles et al., 2019).

Instruments

Two primary instruments were employed: semi-structured interviews and instructional documents. The interviews were designed to explore teachers' reflections on speaking materials development, including content selection, activity design, value integration, and the application of a critical approach. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences while maintaining focus on the research aims (Patton, 2015). The instructional documents analyzed included syllabi, lesson plans, textbooks, and teacher-developed or adapted speaking materials. These documents were treated as primary data sources as they directly represented teachers' pedagogical decisions, including learning objectives, communicative activities, contextual settings, and embedded Islamic values (Bowen, 2009).

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and systematic document analysis. Interviews were conducted with participating teachers and focused on their processes and considerations in developing value-based speaking materials. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim.

Document analysis involved a systematic examination of instructional materials to identify speaking objectives, types of communicative activities, thematic content, and representations of Islamic values. Documents were analyzed not only in terms of content but also in terms of how values and social contexts were constructed through communicative tasks, dialogue scenarios, and discussion topics. This process enabled triangulation between interview data and documented pedagogical practices.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview transcripts and instructional documents were first read repeatedly to achieve data familiarization. Relevant data segments were then coded, focusing on teachers' reflections, strategies for integrating Islamic values, and the application of a critical approach in materials development. Codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes representing patterns in value-based speaking materials design.

The themes were interpreted through a critical lens to examine the interaction between language, values, and social context, as well as teachers' positioning as reflective pedagogical

agents. Trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, member checking, and systematic documentation of the research process to enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, and participant confidentiality was maintained. All data were used solely for academic purposes in accordance with established educational research ethics (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Results

This study involved four English teachers who were actively engaged in developing speaking materials based on Islamic values. Data were collected using two primary techniques: semi-structured interviews with the teachers and analysis of instructional documents, including syllabi, lesson plans, modules, and speaking activity sheets. This triangulation approach aimed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the materials development process, strategies for integrating Islamic values, and teachers' reflections in pedagogical practice. The findings indicate that teachers applied reflective principles and a critical approach at every stage of materials development, resulting in the systematic, relevant, and meaningful integration of Islamic values.

Teachers' Understanding of Speaking and Islamic Values

All four teachers emphasized that speaking skills extend beyond fluency or grammatical accuracy; they also involve the ability to use language appropriately within social contexts and moral values. One teacher asserted:

"Speaking materials should not only enable students to speak fluently but also instill an understanding of ethics, politeness, and Islamic values relevant to daily life."

Another teacher added: *"When designing materials, I always consider how students can express themselves politely and in accordance with Islamic moral norms. This is essential so that they not only learn the language but also develop into responsible individuals."*

The analyzed instructional documents revealed that learning objectives encompass linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competencies. For instance, one syllabus stated:

"Students are able to communicate effectively, express opinions politely, and demonstrate social responsibility in accordance with Islamic values."

In practice, teachers designed materials that allowed students to practice polite expressions, ethically express opinions, and interact cooperatively. Certain dialogue activities focused on expressing viewpoints without offending others or discussing everyday topics while emphasizing social responsibility. For example, a role-play activity titled *"Giving Advice to a Friend"* required students to deliver constructive feedback politely using expressions such as *"In my opinion, it would be better if..."* or *"Perhaps we could try..."*, thereby teaching students to adjust language to the social context.

Document analysis confirmed that learning objectives were formulated holistically, emphasizing not only language mastery but also character development. This reflects teachers' understanding of the interrelation between language, social context, and Islamic values.

Materials Selection and Adaptation through a Critical Approach

Teachers implemented a stepwise materials development process grounded in a critical approach. The process began with a needs analysis, where teachers evaluated textbook topics or other sources for alignment with learning objectives and Islamic values. One teacher reflected:

"I always review a topic before using it. If a topic is too competitive or focuses on unethical aspects, I reject it and seek alternatives more aligned with Islamic values."

The next stage involved content selection. Teachers chose topics that facilitated the internalization of moral values, such as cooperation, social responsibility, and empathy, while rejecting topics contradictory to Islamic principles. Instructional documents contained reflective notes, including the rationale for topic selection and its relevance to students' social contexts.

Subsequently, teachers adapted the materials, for example, replacing a *"Competitive Debate"* with a *"Collaborative School Project Discussion"*. They added social contexts more relatable to students' experiences to enhance meaningful learning, such as incorporating dialogues about assisting peers in community activities. One teacher's reflective note stated: *"This topic was chosen because it is relevant to students' daily lives and allows them to practice responsibility and social care."*

This process demonstrates how teachers acted as critical decision-makers, ensuring that the developed materials were not only communicative but also aligned with Islamic values and students' social contexts.

Integration of Islamic Values in Speaking Activities

Once the topics and materials were prepared, teachers designed speaking activities that systematically integrated Islamic values. Based on document analysis and interviews, the developed activities included group discussions in which students explored social responsibility while practicing empathy and care for others, such as discussing ways to assist peers struggling with academic tasks or participate in community service activities. Additionally, role-plays were conducted to simulate formal and informal situations, emphasizing politeness, ethical communication, and constructive criticism, for instance, by having students enact conversations between teachers and students in the context of providing academic advice. Contextual dialogues were also incorporated, focusing on honesty, cooperation, and moral responsibility, allowing students to practice scenarios such as apologizing or offering assistance to peers in need. Teachers emphasized that these activities not only trained language skills but also shaped students' attitudes and character. Values integration was achieved through realistic communication contexts rather than merely adding religious symbols or terms. Document analysis revealed consistency between the intended values and the activities developed, confirming the teachers' reflective approach.

Reflection and Evaluation of Materials

The materials development process continued with reflection and evaluation, during which teachers reviewed the content and activities to ensure alignment with both the learning objectives and Islamic values. Documented notes indicated revisions of dialogue examples that were less relevant to students' contexts, the addition of varied activities to actively engage all students, and adjustments to the language difficulty to accommodate different proficiency levels. This reflection was multi-layered; teachers evaluated content, activities, and the effectiveness of values internalization simultaneously. One teacher noted during an interview: *"I always reflect on every activity and material. If I feel students cannot internalize the values, I modify the activity or add clearer examples."* Document analysis showed that teachers' reflections enabled the development of adaptive materials, maintaining a balance between linguistic and moral objectives.

Teachers as Critical Agents

The findings affirm that teachers function as critical agents in materials development. They do not merely follow textbooks but assess, adapt, and reconstruct materials to

meaningfully reflect Islamic values. Teachers considered social context, linguistic objectives, and moral values at every stage of materials development.

Instructional documents provided concrete evidence of this role, including notes on materials improvement, activity reflections, and topic modifications. Teachers ensured that each topic, activity, and conversational context was relevant to students' lives and consistent with Islamic values. One teacher stated: *"I feel responsible for ensuring that the materials not only teach language but also shape character. All topics, dialogue examples, and activities are chosen critically to align with Islamic values and students' contexts."*

Summary of Process and Findings

Based on the analysis of interviews and documents, the four teachers' development of speaking materials based on Islamic values involved a systematic process that began with needs analysis to assess topics and materials in accordance with the learning objectives and Islamic values. This was followed by content selection, in which teachers chose relevant topics and rejected those inconsistent with the intended values. Subsequently, materials were adapted to align with students' social and life contexts, and speaking activities were designed to integrate moral values effectively. The process concluded with reflection and evaluation, during which teachers reviewed and revised the materials to ensure that both linguistic and moral objectives were met. The findings indicate that teachers perceive speaking as a communicative skill integrating linguistic, pragmatic, and moral dimensions. The critical approach was applied comprehensively, ensuring materials were relevant to Islamic values and social contexts. Values integration occurred through meaningful communicative activities, while teachers' reflections were multi-layered, enabling effective evaluation and adaptation of materials.

The study demonstrates that developing speaking materials based on Islamic values can be conducted reflectively and critically, producing materials that are communicative, meaningful, and contextual. Teachers successfully internalize moral values within language practice, so the materials not only teach language but also foster students' character. This process illustrates how teachers act as critical agents, balancing linguistic objectives, social context, and moral values in speaking materials development.

Furthermore, document analysis revealed that teachers consistently maintained reflective notes documenting decision-making processes, activity evaluations, and content adjustments.

This confirms that materials development is not merely procedural but dynamic, adaptive, and responsive to students' contexts.

Overall, this study provides a comprehensive overview of how teachers develop speaking materials based on Islamic values through a critical and reflective approach. The findings can serve as a reference for developing holistic and meaningful English learning materials aligned with students' value contexts, while reinforcing teachers' roles as critical agents of educational transformation.

Discussion

The findings reveal that English teachers involved in developing Islamic value-based speaking materials possess a holistic understanding of speaking competence, viewing it not merely as fluency or grammatical accuracy but as the ability to communicate appropriately within social and moral contexts. This perspective aligns with Richards' (2008) framework of linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competence. Teachers emphasized that speaking materials should foster ethical communication and awareness of Islamic values alongside language mastery.

Interview data and instructional documents consistently demonstrate that learning objectives integrate linguistic skills with moral value internalization. Speaking activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and contextual dialogues are designed to promote politeness, empathy, cooperation, and social responsibility. The materials development process is conducted reflectively and critically, beginning with needs analysis, followed by content selection, adaptation, and evaluation to ensure alignment with Islamic values and students' social contexts.

The integration of Islamic values occurs through meaningful communicative activities rather than symbolic or superficial inclusion. Teachers continuously reflect on and revise materials to balance linguistic and moral objectives, reinforcing their role as critical agents in materials development. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Irawan, 2020; Ersyadila et al., 2025) highlighting the positive impact of value integration on meaningful learning and character formation.

This study extends existing research by emphasizing the reflective and critical process of materials development rather than focusing solely on instructional products. The findings support Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy and Kumaravadivelu's (2006) postmethod pedagogy, highlighting teachers' roles as reflective practitioners who adapt materials to local contexts and

moral values. The study underscores the importance of systematic value integration in speaking instruction to ensure pedagogically meaningful and contextual learning.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its small sample size, exclusive focus on teachers, and emphasis on speaking skills. Future research is recommended to involve larger samples, include students' perspectives, explore other language skills, and examine the long-term impact of Islamic value-based materials, including the potential use of educational technology.

Conclusion

This study confirms that the integration of Islamic values in English speaking materials is implemented through a reflective and critical approach, in which speaking is understood not only as a linguistic skill but also as a medium for fostering moral values, ethics, and social awareness. The materials development process encompassing needs analysis, content selection, adaptation, values integration, and evaluation produces contextualized, communicative, and meaningful materials, with Islamic values internalized naturally through discussions, contextual dialogues, and role-plays. The findings contribute theoretically to ELT by highlighting value-based materials development grounded in the relationship between language, social context, and moral values, while practically emphasizing the importance of designing speaking materials that promote both communicative competence and character development. Despite its contribution, the study is limited by its small sample size, indicating the need for further research across larger samples, other language skills, and diverse educational contexts.

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