

## **EFL Curriculum and Syllabus Studies in Islamic Educational Contexts: A Narrative Literature Review**

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### **Abstract**

Curriculum and syllabus studies play a significant role in shaping effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, particularly in contexts where language learning intersects with moral, cultural, and spiritual goals. This narrative literature review examines the relationship between macro-level curriculum planning and micro-level syllabus design in EFL education, with special attention to Islamic educational contexts. The review synthesizes literature on value-based curriculum development, alignment between national standards and Islamic educational goals, culturally responsive syllabus design, needs analysis in Islamic higher education, and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in EFL. Drawing on conceptual and empirical studies, the review suggests that successful EFL programs depend on coherence among curriculum objectives, learners' needs, pedagogy, and assessment systems. The literature also indicates that integrating Islamic values, local wisdom, and 21st-century competencies contributes to more contextually relevant and holistic language education. However, gaps remain in empirical evidence on implementation models, outcome assessment, and curriculum adaptation in diverse Islamic contexts. The review concludes that an adaptive and value-oriented EFL curriculum provides a promising framework for balancing global communicative demands with local educational missions.

*Keywords: EFL curriculum, syllabus studies, Islamic education, needs analysis, outcome-based education, value-based curriculum*

### **1. Introduction**

Curriculum and syllabus are central concepts in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education because they shape what is taught, how it is taught, and what learners are expected to achieve. Although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, curriculum generally refers to the broader educational framework encompassing goals, content, pedagogy, and assessment, while a syllabus functions as the operational plan that organizes these goals into classroom-level instruction (Richards, 2013). Understanding the relationship between curriculum and syllabus is therefore fundamental to effective language teaching.

In contemporary EFL education, curriculum development extends beyond linguistic competence to include communicative ability, intercultural awareness, and broader educational outcomes. This shift has contributed to the development of learner-centered, communicative, and task-oriented syllabi that prioritize meaningful language use over purely structural approaches (McKay, 2003; Nation, 2013). At the same time, globalization and technological change have created demands for curricula that foster 21st-century competencies such as collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy.

In Islamic educational contexts, these demands intersect with additional expectations related to moral formation, spiritual identity, and culturally responsive pedagogy. English is not merely taught as an international language but is often viewed as a medium through which students engage global knowledge while maintaining ethical and religious commitments (Hidayati, 2016). Consequently, curriculum and syllabus studies in such settings increasingly address questions of value integration, contextual adaptation, and alignment between national education standards and Islamic educational aims.

Although scholarship has examined curriculum design, needs analysis, communicative approaches, and Outcome-Based Education (OBE), these strands remain fragmented. This article therefore provides a narrative synthesis of literature across five major themes related to EFL curriculum and syllabus studies in Islamic educational contexts.

## **2. Method of Review**

This study employs a narrative literature review method to synthesize conceptual and empirical studies related to EFL curriculum and syllabus studies. Narrative reviews are appropriate for analyzing broad themes, comparing theoretical perspectives, and identifying conceptual developments and research gaps.

The literature was selected according to relevance to five thematic areas:

1. Developing value-based EFL curricula integrating Islam and local wisdom
2. Curriculum alignment between national standards and Islamic education goals
3. Designing EFL syllabi incorporating cultural and religious values
4. Needs analysis for EFL curricula in Islamic higher education
5. Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in EFL from an Islamic perspective

Sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, theoretical works, and empirical studies published primarily between 2003 and 2025. The studies were analyzed through thematic categorization to identify recurring patterns, major findings, and unresolved issues.

### **3. Thematic Review and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Developing a Value-Based EFL Curriculum Integrating Islam and Local Wisdom**

A major theme in the literature concerns the development of value-based EFL curricula that integrate linguistic competence with moral and cultural education. Scholars argue that in Islamic educational settings, curriculum should support not only language acquisition but also ethical formation and identity development (Hidayati, 2016). Islamic values such as honesty (ṣidq), trustworthiness (amānah), cooperation (ta'āwun), and stewardship can be embedded across curriculum content, classroom interaction, and assessment. Rather than treating values as separate topics, studies suggest integrating them into reading texts, speaking tasks, and writing activities so that language learning and character formation occur simultaneously (Hidayati, 2016).

Local wisdom also emerges as a significant component of contextualized curriculum design. Research in Indonesian EFL settings shows that incorporating folklore, proverbs, and local cultural narratives increases relevance and learner engagement while strengthening cultural identity (Yassi & Priyatmojo, 2016). Such materials allow students to use English to articulate their own cultural heritage rather than merely consume foreign cultural content. Pedagogically, value-based curricula often draw upon communicative and learner-centered approaches. Collaborative projects, discussions, and reflective writing have been identified as effective methods for linking language practice with ethical exploration (Widodo, 2016). Overall, the literature positions value-based curriculum as a means of harmonizing global language learning with local educational purposes.

#### **3.2 Curriculum Alignment Between National Standards and Islamic Education Goals**

Another recurring theme concerns the alignment between national curriculum standards and Islamic educational goals. Scholars note that national frameworks often emphasize measurable competencies and 21st-century skills, while Islamic education places strong emphasis on character, faith, and ethical responsibility.

The literature suggests these aims are not inherently contradictory. Instead, shared principles such as discipline, responsibility, lifelong learning, and critical inquiry can serve as common ground for integration (Richards, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 2012). Several studies argue that curriculum alignment is achieved when Islamic perspectives are embedded within disciplinary

content rather than added superficially. For example, critical thinking in national standards may be connected with reflective inquiry in Islamic educational thought, while environmental education may be linked to stewardship concepts (Hidayati, 2016).

Assessment is also central to alignment. Scholars emphasize the need for evaluation models that capture both academic achievement and behavioral development. Alternative assessments such as projects, portfolios, and reflective journals have been proposed as more appropriate than purely standardized measures for such purposes (Borg, 2006). The literature therefore suggests that curriculum alignment requires coherence among goals, instructional design, and assessment systems.

### 3.3 Designing an EFL Syllabus Incorporating Cultural and Religious Values

The literature on syllabus design increasingly emphasizes cultural and religious relevance. Scholars argue that syllabi should reflect learners' identities, lived realities, and value systems rather than present English as culturally neutral (McKay, 2003). Needs analysis is often identified as the first step in culturally responsive syllabus design. In many EFL settings, students' communicative needs are closely connected to themes such as family, community, environmental responsibility, and spiritual reflection. These themes can inform the selection of topics, communicative functions, and language tasks (Nation, 2013).

Content selection also receives considerable attention. Studies suggest that reading texts, dialogues, and listening materials can incorporate culturally meaningful stories and ethical themes while promoting critical engagement through discussion and reflection (Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) are frequently cited as suitable approaches for integrating values into syllabi. Through role-plays, presentations, and collaborative problem-solving, students practice language in contexts that reinforce empathy, cooperation, and intercultural awareness.

Assessment in such syllabi is also described as multidimensional, evaluating not only linguistic performance but also respectful communication and cultural understanding. Portfolio and project-based assessments are often recommended for capturing these dimensions.

Overall, the literature suggests that value-oriented syllabi contribute to more meaningful and contextually relevant EFL learning.

### 3.4 Needs Analysis for EFL Curriculum in Islamic Higher Education

Needs analysis is consistently described as a foundational stage of curriculum development, particularly in Islamic higher education where academic, professional, and religious objectives intersect. One major area identified in the literature concerns academic literacy needs. Students often require English for reading scholarly texts, writing research papers, and participating in international academic discourse (Fareh, 2010).

Another dimension concerns professional communication needs. Graduates may need English for teaching, research, social services, Islamic finance, or international collaboration. Consequently, curricula should address practical communication, negotiation, and digital literacy skills (Ainin et al., 2015). A third dimension involves religious and intercultural communication needs. Studies note that students may need specialized language for explaining Islamic concepts, engaging in interfaith dialogue, or representing Islamic perspectives internationally (Kirkpatrick, 2012).

Methodologically, scholars recommend triangulated needs analysis using surveys, interviews, observations, and stakeholder consultation. This evidence-based approach ensures that curriculum design reflects actual rather than assumed learner needs.

The literature therefore positions needs analysis as essential for aligning EFL curricula with institutional missions and global demands.

### 3.5 Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in EFL Curriculum from an Islamic Perspective

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has become an important framework in curriculum discourse because of its emphasis on clearly defined learning outcomes and alignment between teaching, learning, and assessment. In EFL contexts, OBE shifts focus from content coverage toward demonstrable communicative competence (Richards, 2013). Studies suggest this orientation aligns well with Islamic educational philosophy, where knowledge is valued when translated into meaningful action and social benefit.

Several scholars argue that learning outcomes in Islamic EFL contexts should include ethical and intercultural dimensions alongside linguistic skills. Outcomes may involve respectful communication, global engagement, and the ability to articulate Islamic perspectives in English (Hidayati, 2016). Teaching methods associated with OBE include task-based learning, collaborative projects, and reflective activities that allow students to demonstrate outcomes in authentic contexts. These approaches are often linked to holistic development rather than purely academic achievement.

Assessment under OBE also differs from traditional testing by emphasizing performance-based evaluation. Portfolios, projects, and reflective writing are widely recommended because they capture both knowledge and application (Borg, 2006).

However, the literature notes challenges in outcome formulation, teacher readiness, and balancing global competency frameworks with local religious values. These challenges indicate a need for context-sensitive OBE models.

#### **4. Research Gaps**

Despite increasing scholarship, several gaps remain. First, empirical studies on long-term implementation of value-based EFL curricula in Islamic contexts remain limited. Second, research on how Islamic educational values are operationalized within specific syllabus models such as task-based or content-based syllabi is underdeveloped. Third, there is limited evidence regarding assessment models that effectively measure both linguistic and moral outcomes in OBE-oriented EFL programs. Fourth, more comparative studies are needed across different Islamic higher education contexts to examine contextual variation in curriculum adaptation.

Future research should address these gaps through longitudinal, mixed-method, and context-sensitive studies.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The literature reviewed suggests that EFL curriculum and syllabus development in Islamic educational contexts requires balancing linguistic competence, academic achievement, and value formation. Through value-based curriculum development, alignment with national standards, culturally responsive syllabus design, needs analysis, and Outcome-Based Education, EFL programs can become more meaningful and contextually relevant.

The evidence indicates that English can function not merely as a foreign language subject but as a medium for ethical communication, intercultural engagement, and intellectual growth rooted in moral responsibility.

Therefore, an adaptive and value-oriented EFL curriculum offers a promising framework for preparing learners who are academically capable, culturally grounded, and spiritually aware in both local and global communities.

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