

TEFL Methods and Classroom Practices in Islamic Educational Contexts: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This literature review examines contemporary TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) methods and classroom practices in Islamic educational contexts, focusing on five major strands: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) through culturally responsive pedagogy, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) integrated with local wisdom, blended learning for EFL instruction, comparative perspectives between Western and Islamic pedagogies, and student-centered learning in Islamic classrooms. Using a narrative literature review approach, the study synthesizes theoretical and empirical studies on how pedagogical methods can be adapted to integrate communicative competence, cultural identity, moral education, and digital literacy. The review indicates that effective TEFL practices in Islamic institutions depend on methodological contextualization rather than mere adoption of imported methods. Findings suggest that integrating modern language teaching approaches with Islamic educational philosophy enhances meaningful, contextualized, and value-oriented language learning. The review concludes that TEFL practices in Islamic settings should be grounded in a “glocal” pedagogical orientation, harmonizing global language teaching standards with local spiritual and socio-cultural realities.

Keywords: TEFL methods, classroom practices, Islamic education, communicative pedagogy, task-based learning, student-centered learning.

1. Introduction

Over the last several decades, TEFL has shifted from structural and teacher-centered traditions toward communicative, learner-centered, and socially responsive paradigms. Early methods such as Grammar Translation and Audio-Lingual approaches emphasized linguistic accuracy, whereas more recent approaches prioritize interaction, authentic communication, critical thinking, and intercultural competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This paradigm shift reflects broader developments in language education, where English is increasingly seen not merely as a body of grammatical knowledge but as a medium for participation in global social, academic, and digital communities (Brown, 2007).

Within Islamic educational institutions, however, the adoption of TEFL methodologies raises contextual concerns. Imported pedagogical models often reflect secular assumptions or culturally neutral orientations that may overlook learners' moral, spiritual, and cultural identities (Hidayati, 2016). In Islamic educational philosophy, teaching is not limited to knowledge transmission but encompasses ethical formation (*tarbiyah*), character development (*akhlak*), and social responsibility. Consequently, language pedagogy is expected to align with these broader educational goals.

Recent scholarship has therefore emphasized the need to contextualize modern TEFL methods through culturally responsive pedagogy, local wisdom integration, and value-based instructional design (Yassi & Priyatmojo, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2025). At the same time, globalization and digital transformation have intensified the need for students to develop 21st-century competencies such as collaboration, critical literacy, and digital communication, making blended and student-centered learning increasingly relevant (Widodo, 2016; Lubis, 2018).

This review synthesizes literature on five major dimensions of TEFL classroom practices in Islamic educational settings: communicative teaching through intercultural responsiveness, task-based learning with local wisdom content, blended learning, comparative pedagogical perspectives, and student-centered approaches. It aims to examine how these approaches contribute to a holistic model of English teaching grounded in both communicative effectiveness and ethical-cultural relevance.

2. Methodology

This study employs a narrative literature review design to synthesize theoretical and empirical scholarship related to TEFL methods and classroom practices in Islamic educational contexts. Sources were selected from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and studies focusing on communicative approaches, task-based pedagogy, blended learning, Islamic educational philosophy, and student-centered instruction.

The review followed three stages: identification of relevant literature, thematic categorization, and interpretive synthesis. Five analytical themes emerged: (1) Communicative Language Teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy, (2) Task-Based Language Teaching and local wisdom integration, (3) blended learning for EFL instruction, (4) comparative Western and Islamic pedagogical perspectives, and (5) student-centered learning in Islamic educational settings.

3. Theoretical Framework

This review is informed by three interrelated theoretical perspectives. First, communicative language teaching theory emphasizes meaningful interaction as the basis of language acquisition (Richards, 2006). Second, sociocultural theory highlights that language learning is mediated through social interaction and cultural tools, making contextualized and culturally grounded instruction essential (Nunan, 2004). Third, Islamic educational philosophy frames learning as holistic development involving intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth (Hidayati, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2025).

Together, these perspectives support a framework in which TEFL methods are evaluated not only by linguistic outcomes but also by their capacity to foster ethical communication, intercultural awareness, and learner agency.

4. Discussion

4.1 Communicative Language Teaching through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been widely recognized as a dominant approach in contemporary TEFL because it prioritizes interaction and authentic language use over isolated grammar instruction (Richards, 2006). However, scholars have argued that CLT in many contexts has historically underemphasized the cultural dimensions of communication. Early communicative materials often presented language as culturally neutral, neglecting the social meanings and value systems embedded in discourse (Corbett, 2022).

The intercultural turn in ELT challenged this limitation by positioning language and culture as inseparable. From this perspective, communicative competence includes not only linguistic and pragmatic skills but also intercultural awareness, empathy, and mediation abilities (Corbett, 2022). For Islamic educational settings, this orientation is particularly relevant because culturally responsive pedagogy allows learners to engage with English through their own socio-religious identities.

Studies suggest that culturally responsive CLT increases learner engagement by connecting classroom discourse to students' lived experiences and cultural frames (Yassi & Priyatmojo, 2016). Activities such as discussing local customs, analyzing ethical dilemmas, or practicing speech acts in culturally appropriate contexts enable students to develop communicative competence while reinforcing respect, politeness, and moral sensitivity.

Moreover, culturally responsive CLT supports the concept of English as an international language rather than a vehicle of linguistic imperialism (McKay, 2003). Learners are positioned not as imitators of native speakers but as intercultural users of English who negotiate meaning across diverse contexts. This aligns closely with Islamic educational goals emphasizing respectful dialogue and ethical communication.

4.2 Task-Based Language Teaching with Local Wisdom Content

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) centers language instruction around meaningful tasks that mirror real-life communication (Nunan, 2004). Rather than organizing instruction around grammatical forms, TBLT encourages learners to use language to solve problems, share information, or complete projects.

Recent literature highlights the value of integrating local wisdom content into task design. Local traditions, folktales, and social practices provide culturally familiar contexts that make tasks meaningful and relevant (Yassi & Priyatmojo, 2016). For example, students may conduct interviews about local customs, create presentations on traditional ceremonies, or design campaigns promoting community values. Such tasks strengthen both communicative competence and cultural identity.

Integrating local wisdom also transforms English into a medium for representing learners' own heritage. Rather than displacing local culture, English becomes a tool for intercultural dialogue. This “glocal” orientation aligns with arguments that effective EFL pedagogy should harmonize global language use with local identity (Kirkpatrick, 2012).

From a character education perspective, local wisdom tasks often embed values such as cooperation, respect, and social harmony. Thus, TBLT contributes not only to linguistic development but also to ethical formation. However, scholars note that successful implementation requires careful task sequencing, scaffolding, and teacher creativity to ensure tasks remain communicative and achievable (Nunan, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

4.3 Blended Learning for EFL Instruction in Islamic Educational Institutions

Blended learning combines face-to-face instruction with digital learning environments, offering expanded opportunities for interaction, flexibility, and learner autonomy. In EFL contexts, blended learning has been associated with increased exposure to authentic language input and greater opportunities for collaborative learning (Widodo, 2016).

For Islamic educational institutions, blended learning offers particular advantages because digital platforms can support both language development and value integration. Teachers can curate online resources related to ethical themes, Islamic history, or global issues while facilitating discussion and reflection through digital forums. This expands learning beyond classroom boundaries while maintaining alignment with institutional values (Hidayati, 2016).

Another major benefit is the development of digital literacy. As communication increasingly occurs in online spaces, EFL instruction must prepare students to navigate digital environments critically and ethically. Studies indicate that blended learning can foster not only language proficiency but also digital responsibility and learner autonomy (Lubis, 2018).

Nevertheless, literature consistently identifies infrastructure limitations, teacher readiness, and uneven ICT access as significant barriers (Lubis, 2018). Professional development and institutional support are therefore essential to ensure blended learning functions as pedagogical enhancement rather than technological burden.

4.4 Comparative Perspectives on Western and Islamic Pedagogies in TEFL

Comparative scholarship suggests substantial convergence between Western humanistic pedagogies and Islamic educational thought. Humanistic approaches emphasize learner autonomy, empathy, and respect (Brown, 2007), while Islamic pedagogy similarly values dignity, compassion, and communal responsibility (Yusuf et al., 2025).

Studies indicate that integrating these perspectives can produce a more holistic approach to language teaching. Humanistic principles support learner-centered interaction, while Islamic traditions contribute ethical grounding and community orientation. Together, they move TEFL beyond purely cognitive goals toward socially responsive and morally conscious education.

Community-based learning is one area where this convergence is particularly visible. Experiential tasks connecting classroom learning with social realities support both communicative development and civic responsibility. Such practices resonate with both Western experiential education traditions and Islamic notions of service and social benefit.

This synthesis challenges the false dichotomy between “modern” Western methods and “traditional” Islamic approaches. Rather than being oppositional, the literature suggests they can be complementary when interpreted through contextualized pedagogy.

4.5 Student-Centered Learning in Islamic EFL Classrooms

Student-Centered Learning (SCL) has become a key principle in contemporary language education because it emphasizes learner autonomy, collaboration, and active engagement (Kassem, 2019). In EFL classrooms, SCL often takes the form of cooperative learning, problem-based tasks, simulations, and project work.

Research in Islamic educational contexts indicates generally positive teacher perceptions of SCL, particularly regarding its role in fostering participation and independent learning (Lubis, 2018). Cooperative learning strategies have been found especially effective in promoting interaction, shared problem-solving, and equal participation (Slavin, 1995).

Importantly, SCL aligns well with Islamic educational principles when framed within ethical boundaries. Collaborative learning reflects values of consultation (shūrā), mutual support (ta‘āwun), and shared responsibility. In this sense, learner autonomy is not understood as individualism but as responsible participation within a learning community.

However, challenges remain. Some studies report limited integration of ICT within student-centered practices, suggesting that SCL implementation often remains confined to face-to-face interaction rather than extending into digital collaborative spaces (Lubis, 2018). Addressing this gap is increasingly important in the context of 21st-century education.

5. Findings and Synthesis

This review reveals five major patterns. First, communicative methods become more effective when combined with culturally responsive pedagogy. Second, TBLT gains greater relevance when tasks are grounded in local wisdom and students’ socio-cultural realities. Third, blended learning expands opportunities for autonomy and digital literacy but requires institutional support. Fourth, Western and Islamic pedagogies show significant compatibility, particularly around humanistic and ethical dimensions. Fifth, student-centered learning can support both communicative competence and moral development when interpreted through Islamic educational principles.

Overall, the literature suggests that effective TEFL in Islamic settings depends on adaptation rather than direct transplantation of methods. Contextualization is central to pedagogical success.

6. Conclusion

This literature review demonstrates that TEFL methods and classroom practices in Islamic educational contexts should be understood as contextually adaptive, value-oriented pedagogies rather than imported techniques applied unchanged. Communicative teaching, task-based learning, blended learning, comparative humanistic pedagogy, and student-centered instruction each contribute important dimensions to effective EFL education.

However, their effectiveness depends on integration with learners’ cultural identities, ethical values, and spiritual orientations. A “glocal” approach—harmonizing global TEFL principles with local Islamic educational realities—offers a coherent framework for meaningful language learning. Such an approach enables English instruction to support not only communicative competence but also holistic student development.

7. Suggestions

Future TEFL practice in Islamic institutions should prioritize:

1. Developing culturally responsive and value-integrated instructional materials.
2. Expanding teacher training in contextualized communicative and task-based methodologies.
3. Strengthening blended learning infrastructure and digital pedagogy.
4. Integrating assessment approaches that evaluate communicative competence alongside ethical and collaborative dimensions.
5. Conducting longitudinal research on the impact of value-integrated TEFL practices on both language outcomes and character development.

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