

English Teachers' Criteria for Assessing the Compatibility of English Literary Texts with Islamic Principles

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Abstract

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Islamic education and English language teaching, limited research has examined how English teachers determine the compatibility of literary texts with Islamic principles during classroom instruction. Existing studies have primarily focused on curriculum integration, religious values, or literary pedagogy independently, leaving a gap in understanding the professional decision-making processes teachers employ when balancing literary quality, language learning objectives, and Islamic beliefs. This study explored the criteria English teachers use in assessing literary texts, examined how Islamic principles influence their selection and evaluation practices, and identified the challenges they encounter in balancing literary, pedagogical, and religious considerations. Employing a qualitative narrative inquiry design, the study involved eighteen Muslim English teachers purposively selected from Islamic educational institutions. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The findings revealed that teachers assessed literary texts based on moral congruence with Islamic ethics, modesty and decency, appropriateness of sensitive content, linguistic cleansing, and ideological compatibility. Islamic principles influenced their practice through faith-based decision-making, character formation, contextualization of literary works, balanced evaluation of literary merit and religious sensitivity, and professional accountability before Allah. Teachers also encountered significant challenges, including the shortage of religiously compatible literary resources, curriculum tensions, extensive text adaptation, diverse student interpretations, and stakeholder expectations. The study concludes that literary text selection in Islamic educational contexts is a reflective and context-sensitive professional practice that integrates academic excellence with faith-based values.

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1. Introduction

The teaching of English literature has long been recognized as an essential component of English language education because it develops learners' linguistic competence, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and ethical reasoning through meaningful engagement with literary texts (Beach et al., 2020). Beyond exposing students to language structures, literature invites them to examine human experiences, values, and perspectives that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. However, the selection of literary texts is rarely a neutral pedagogical task. English teachers continuously exercise professional judgment in determining whether literary works are

appropriate for their learners, institutional contexts, and educational objectives. Contemporary scholarship has increasingly acknowledged that literary instruction is shaped not only by curricular goals but also by teachers' beliefs, cultural contexts, and value systems, making text selection a complex instructional responsibility rather than a routine curricular decision (Lu et al., 2022; Ligudon & Ildefonso, 2022).

Within Islamic educational settings, the complexity of literary text selection becomes even more pronounced because teachers are expected to reconcile language learning objectives with Islamic moral and spiritual principles. Rather than viewing English literature as incompatible with Islamic education, recent scholarship has argued that literary works may be interpreted, contextualized, and taught through Islamic ethical frameworks that preserve both academic integrity and religious identity (Ramli, 2013). Similarly, studies on curriculum implementation in madrasahs have demonstrated that educational reforms become more meaningful when instructional materials are aligned with Islamic values while maintaining academic quality (Amalia et al., 2025). These perspectives reflect a growing recognition that English language education in Muslim contexts is not solely concerned with linguistic development but also with nurturing learners' moral character, cultural identity, and spiritual formation.

The literature further suggests that teachers serve as critical mediators in determining how educational content reflects institutional philosophies and religious expectations. Studies on religious moderation, Islamic pedagogy, and values integration consistently reported that teachers deliberately evaluate instructional resources before incorporating them into classroom instruction (Nurbayani & Amiruddin, 2024; Juwairiyah & Fanani, 2025; Sholeh et al., 2022). Likewise, research on Islamic literature has demonstrated that literary texts can simultaneously promote English language proficiency and ethical development when teachers intentionally select works that resonate with Islamic teachings (Irwansyah, 2021; Irwansyah et al., 2021). These findings collectively suggest that the educational value of literature depends not only on the literary text itself but also on the evaluative processes through which teachers determine its suitability for specific instructional contexts.

Recent developments in English language education have likewise reinforced the expanding role of teachers as evaluators of instructional materials. Studies examining key competencies in English teaching, artificial intelligence integration, sustainable development education, and peace linguistics have consistently emphasized that teachers must critically assess educational resources before classroom implementation to ensure that they support broader educational goals and uphold ethical standards (Cordova, 2024; Kohnke & Ulla, 2024; Lu et al., 2022; Parcon & Adriano, 2024; Zaiarna et al., 2024). Even in technology-enhanced learning environments, teachers remain responsible for determining whether instructional content is accurate, culturally responsive, pedagogically appropriate, and aligned with institutional expectations. These developments indicate that evaluating instructional materials has become an increasingly sophisticated professional competency that extends beyond considerations of language difficulty or curriculum alignment.

Despite the growing body of literature on Islamic education, literature instruction, curriculum integration, and teacher decision-making, an important gap remains. Existing studies have predominantly examined the integration of Islamic values into English language teaching, the use of Islamic literary texts, curriculum reforms in Islamic schools, and broader pedagogical strategies that support religious education (Amalia et al., 2025; Arif et al., 2025; Sali, 2023). Other investigations have explored teachers' instructional practices, reading strategies, or conceptualizations of effective English teaching without specifically examining how literary texts are evaluated before classroom use (Heidari & Mowlaie, 2016; Ligudon & Ildefonso, 2022; Lu et al., 2022). Consequently, little empirical evidence explains the specific criteria English teachers employ when determining whether English literary texts are compatible with Islamic principles. More importantly, the literature offers limited understanding of how teachers negotiate potential tensions among literary authenticity, educational objectives, institutional expectations, and religious values during the text selection process.

Addressing this gap is particularly important because English teachers increasingly encounter literary works representing diverse cultural traditions, ideologies, and moral perspectives in both printed and digital learning environments. As global literary resources become more accessible, teachers are required to make increasingly complex instructional decisions regarding which texts should be included, adapted, contextualized, or excluded from classroom instruction. Without a clear understanding of the criteria guiding these professional judgments, curriculum developers, school administrators, and teacher education programs may lack the empirical evidence needed to support literature instruction in Islamic educational institutions. Investigating teachers' evaluative frameworks therefore contributes not only to English language teaching but also to curriculum studies, literature education, and Islamic pedagogy by illuminating how professional judgment operates at the intersection of educational practice and religious values.

In response to these gaps, the present study explored the criteria English teachers used to assess the compatibility of English literary texts with Islamic principles. Specifically, it examined the pedagogical, cultural, moral, and

religious considerations that informed teachers' decisions during literary text selection and investigated how these criteria were negotiated alongside language learning objectives and instructional responsibilities.

The present study was anchored on Reader-Response Theory, Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), and Islamization of Knowledge Theory. Reader-Response Theory, developed by Rosenblatt (1978), posits that meaning is not inherent in a literary text but emerges through the dynamic interaction between the reader and the text. Within the context of this study, English teachers function as professional readers whose interpretations of literary texts are influenced by their pedagogical experiences, cultural backgrounds, and Islamic worldview. Complementing this perspective, Shulman's (1987) Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) explains that effective teachers make instructional decisions by integrating subject matter expertise with knowledge of learners, curriculum, and instructional contexts. This framework provides a basis for understanding how English teachers evaluate literary texts not only for their linguistic and literary merits but also for their appropriateness within Islamic educational settings. Finally, Al-Faruqi's (1982) Islamization of Knowledge Theory argues that knowledge from diverse disciplines should be critically examined and harmonized with Islamic principles without disregarding academic rigor or disciplinary integrity. Applied to literature education, this perspective suggests that English literary texts may be selected, contextualized, or interpreted according to Islamic ethical and moral values while preserving their educational significance. Collectively, these theoretical lenses explained how teachers interpreted literary texts, exercised professional judgment during instructional decision-making, and applied Islamic principles when determining the compatibility of English literary texts for classroom instruction.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative narrative research design to explore how English teachers constructed and explained their criteria for assessing the compatibility of English literary texts with Islamic principles. Narrative inquiry is appropriate for investigations that seek to understand how individuals interpret experiences, construct meanings, and make professional decisions within particular social and cultural contexts. Rather than quantifying teachers' responses, the design enabled the researcher to obtain rich accounts of how participants evaluated literary texts, negotiated religious and pedagogical considerations, and justified their instructional decisions. Through participants' narratives, the study captured the beliefs, values, and lived experiences that shaped literary text selection in Islamic educational settings, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of teachers' evaluative practices (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Participants and Sampling

The participants consisted of eighteen (18) Muslim English teachers currently teaching English language and literature in schools and higher educational institutions located in Muslim communities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as this technique allows researchers to recruit information-rich individuals who possess direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Eligible participants met the following criteria: (1) identified as practicing Muslims; (2) taught English language and/or English literature for at least two years; (3) had experience selecting, evaluating, or teaching English literary texts; and (4) willingly provided informed consent to participate in the study. The selected participants represented diverse educational settings to capture varied perspectives while maintaining the shared context of Islamic educational practice. Purposive sampling is widely recommended in qualitative research because it facilitates an in-depth exploration of participants who can provide meaningful insights into the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed from the study's objectives and the reviewed literature. Semi-structured interviews provided a balance between consistency across participants and flexibility to probe emerging ideas, allowing respondents to elaborate on their experiences, beliefs, and decision-making processes. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to describe how they evaluated English literary texts, the considerations they applied, and the challenges they encountered when balancing pedagogical objectives with Islamic principles. Follow-up probing questions were employed whenever clarification or elaboration was necessary to obtain deeper insights into participants' responses. Table 2 presents the interview questions of the study.

Table 1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Research Objectives	Main Interview Question
1. To explore the criteria English teachers use when assessing the compatibility of English literary texts with Islamic principles.	a) What are the criteria you consider when deciding whether an English literary text is compatible with Islamic principles for classroom use?
2. To examine how Islamic principles influence teachers' selection and evaluation of English literary texts.	b) How do Islamic principles influence your decisions when selecting or evaluating English literary texts for your students?
3. To identify the challenges teachers encounter when balancing literary, pedagogical, and religious considerations.	c) What challenges have you experienced when balancing literary value, language learning objectives, and Islamic principles during text selection?

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, approval to conduct the study was obtained from the appropriate institutional authorities. After securing permission, the researcher identified eligible participants through purposive sampling and invited them to participate voluntarily in the study. The objectives of the research, interview procedures, confidentiality measures, and participants' rights were explained before obtaining written informed consent. Individual interviews were scheduled at a time and venue convenient for the participants or conducted through secure online platforms when face-to-face interviews were not feasible. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission. Field notes were also documented to capture non-verbal observations and contextual details. Upon completion of each interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, reviewed for accuracy through member checking, and organized for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). The analysis began with familiarization through repeated reading of the interview transcripts, followed by systematic coding of meaningful statements relevant to the research objectives. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into categories from which themes and subthemes emerged. The researcher reviewed and refined the themes to ensure coherence and consistency with participants' narratives before defining and naming each theme. Finally, representative excerpts from the participants were selected to illustrate the findings while preserving the authenticity and richness of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing qualitative research involving human participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews commenced. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, their right to decline participation or withdraw at any stage of the research without penalty, and the intended use of the collected data. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of pseudonyms and participant codes, while all digital files and interview transcripts were securely stored in password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. The study complied with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) to safeguard participants' personal information. Furthermore, the research observed the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice in accordance with the National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants issued by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB, 2022), ensuring the protection of participants' rights, dignity, and welfare throughout the conduct of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1. *To explore the criteria English teachers use when assessing the compatibility of English literary texts with Islamic principles.*

Question 1: *What are the criteria you consider when deciding whether an English literary text is compatible with Islamic principles for classroom use?*

Theme 1. Moral Congruence with Islamic Ethics (Aqeedah Alignment)

Fifteen out of the eighteen participants identified moral congruence with Islamic ethics as one of the primary criteria for determining whether an English literary text was appropriate for classroom instruction. Teachers consistently explained that their evaluation extended beyond the literary quality of a text to include its underlying moral and theological messages. In particular, they examined whether the narrative promoted virtues encouraged in Islam, such as honesty, compassion, humility, justice, modesty, and responsibility, while avoiding content that normalized beliefs or practices contradicting Islamic creed (*Aqeedah*). Participants emphasized that literary texts portraying polytheism, sorcery, witchcraft, pagan rituals, or irreverent depictions of God and the prophets were considered incompatible with Islamic educational principles. For these teachers, literature serves not only as a medium for language learning but also as a resource that should reinforce ethical and spiritual development rather than create confusion regarding fundamental Islamic beliefs.

"The first thing I look at is the core worldview of the book. If a novel treats sorcery or black magic as a good or if it portrays God irreverently, it's an immediate red flag for my classroom." – P11

"I have to check how the supernatural is handled. Fantasy is fine, but if the text actively validates pagan rituals or challenges the oneness of God, I can't use it with my students." – P16

Theme 2. Modesty and Decency Threshold (*Haya*)

Sixteen out of the eighteen participants emphasized the modesty and decency threshold (*Haya*) as a fundamental criterion when evaluating the compatibility of English literary texts with Islamic principles. Participants explained that they carefully examined whether a literary work contained explicit sexual content, intimate romantic relationships, vulgar language, substance use, or other behaviors that could compromise the values of modesty and moral discipline expected in Islamic education. Rather than rejecting all forms of romance or conflict, teachers differentiated between narratives that portrayed such themes responsibly and those that appeared to normalize or glorify behaviors considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings. For the participants, literature should contribute to students' moral development without exposing them to content that may weaken their sense of *haya* or encourage the acceptance of inappropriate lifestyles.

"For me, it always comes down to modesty. Before I even think about the literary value of a book, I read through the scenes that involve relationships. If I find explicit romance, detailed bedroom scenes, or conversations that openly promote immoral behavior, I immediately question whether the text is appropriate. Our responsibility is not only to teach English but also to protect the values that our students are learning." – P17

"I also pay attention to how the story presents certain lifestyles. Some novels repeatedly show drinking, partying, casual relationships, or vulgar language as if they are completely normal and without consequences. When those behaviors are celebrated or treated as acceptable, I become very hesitant to include the book because it creates a conflict with the Islamic values we are trying to cultivate in our learners." – P12

Theme 3. Appropriateness of Sensitive Content

Seventeen out of the eighteen participants identified **the appropriateness of sensitive content** as a critical criterion when assessing the compatibility of English literary texts with Islamic principles. Participants explained that they carefully examined whether a literary work contained themes such as explicit sexuality, profanity, alcohol and drug use, excessive violence, occult practices, dating culture, or LGBTQ-related content before considering its inclusion in classroom instruction. While many acknowledged that these topics may appear in literature as part of realistic storytelling, they distinguished between texts that critically portrayed such issues and those that normalized, glamorized, or encouraged them. For the participants, literary texts should promote meaningful reflection without exposing students to content that could conflict with Islamic moral teachings or negatively influence their values and behavior.

"Whenever I review a literary text, I pay close attention to the sensitive parts of the story. If there are explicit sexual scenes, frequent profanity, drug use, or graphic violence that adds nothing to the educational purpose, I usually decide not to use it. Even if the book is considered a literary classic, I believe our responsibility is to make sure the content remains appropriate for our students and consistent with the values we teach." – P12

"There are books that discuss dating, same-sex relationships, magic, or alcohol as if they are simply normal parts of everyday life without inviting students to think critically about them. I understand that these themes exist in many societies, but in our context, I have to consider whether presenting them in class would create confusion or contradict the Islamic principles that our learners are expected to uphold." – P8

Theme 4. Linguistic Cleansing

Fourteen out of the eighteen participants identified linguistic cleansing as an important criterion when evaluating the compatibility of English literary texts with Islamic principles. Participants explained that they carefully

examined the language used throughout a literary work, paying close attention to profanity, vulgar expressions, offensive dialogue, and statements that could be interpreted as blasphemous or disrespectful toward God. They emphasized that language itself carries moral significance and that repeated exposure to inappropriate expressions may influence students' communication habits and ethical conduct. Consequently, participants regarded clean and respectful language as an essential characteristic of literary texts intended for classroom instruction, regardless of the overall quality or popularity of the work.

"A book might have a great moral story, but if the characters are constantly using the F-word or saying 'Oh my God' as a casual curse throughout the story, I become very hesitant to use it. Our students learn not only from the plot but also from the language they repeatedly read. We always remind them that purity of speech reflects one's faith, so I don't want the classroom to normalize expressions that contradict that value." – P9

"One of the first things I do is literally scan several pages of the book just to observe the language. If the dialogue is filled with vulgar words, insulting expressions, or slang that encourages disrespect and crude behavior, I usually reject the text. Even if the novel has an acceptable storyline, I believe the language students are exposed to should model respect, discipline, and good character rather than normalize offensive speech." – P2

Theme 5. Ideological Compatibility with the Islamic Worldview (13 out of 18 participants)

Thirteen out of the eighteen participants considered **ideological compatibility with the Islamic worldview** as a crucial criterion when assessing English literary texts. Participants explained that they looked beyond the plot and characters to examine the philosophical assumptions embedded within a story. They expressed concern over literary works that promoted secular humanism, nihilism, moral relativism, or worldviews that diminished the role of God, objective morality, or divine purpose. While participants acknowledged that literature often presents diverse perspectives, they believed that texts should not encourage students to adopt beliefs fundamentally inconsistent with Islamic teachings. For these teachers, evaluating the ideological orientation of a literary work was essential in ensuring that language education remained aligned with the Islamic understanding of truth, morality, and human purpose.

"My biggest concern is not always the story itself but the worldview behind it. Some modern novels suggest that life has no real purpose, that people simply create their own meaning, or that there is no higher truth. Those ideas may be acceptable in some societies, but they conflict with our belief that life has purpose because it comes from Allah. I would not want students to absorb those ideas without careful guidance." – P18

"I also pay attention to books that suggest morality is entirely personal...where every choice is presented as equally right as long as someone believes it. Islam teaches that there are objective standards of right and wrong. If a literary text completely removes those moral boundaries, I become very cautious about introducing it in my classroom." – P5

Objective 2: To examine how Islamic principles influence teachers' selection and evaluation of English literary texts.

Question 1: How do Islamic principles influence your decisions when selecting or evaluating English literary texts for your students?

Theme 1. Faith as a Filtering Lens

Sixteen out of the eighteen participants described faith as a filtering lens that fundamentally influenced how they selected and evaluated English literary texts for classroom instruction. Participants explained that their decisions were not guided solely by curricular standards, literary quality, or institutional expectations; rather, they were deeply shaped by their personal accountability to Allah. They viewed the selection of literary texts as both a professional and spiritual responsibility, believing that the ideas, values, and worldviews presented in literature have the potential to influence students' moral and spiritual development. Consequently, participants approached text selection with a heightened sense of responsibility, carefully considering whether a literary work would contribute positively to students' faith, character, and ethical formation.

"Whenever I sit down to choose a novel or short story, I remind myself that this decision is more than just part of my job. My faith constantly reminds me that I will be accountable before Allah for what I introduce into my students' minds." – P14

"Islamic accountability changes the entire way I evaluate literature. I cannot choose a book simply because it is popular, widely recommended, or considered a literary classic. If the story normalizes dishonesty, corruption, or other behaviors that contradict Islamic teachings, I feel personally responsible for exposing my students to those messages." – P13

Theme 2. Literature for Character Formation and Value-Based Learning

Fourteen out of the eighteen participants viewed literature for character formation and value-based learning as a significant way through which Islamic principles influenced their selection and evaluation of English literary texts. Participants explained that they intentionally chose literary works capable of nurturing virtues emphasized in Islam, including patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), honesty, humility, compassion, justice, and empathy. Rather than treating literature solely as a resource for language acquisition, they regarded it as an educational tool that cultivates students' moral character and spiritual consciousness. Consequently, participants favored texts that presented meaningful moral struggles, positive character transformation, and ethical decision-making, believing that such narratives contribute to the holistic development of learners in accordance with Islamic educational goals.

"For me, the purpose of teaching literature is not limited to improving vocabulary or comprehension. Education should also help purify a person's character, what we refer to as Tazkiyah. That is why I deliberately search for stories where the characters experience hardship, remain patient, admit their mistakes, or develop humility through their experiences. Those are the kinds of narratives that encourage students to reflect on their own character and become better Muslims and better individuals." – P10

"Whenever I encounter a story that highlights sacrifice for others, honesty despite difficulty, courage in defending what is right, or compassion toward the oppressed, I immediately see its educational value. Those stories do more than teach English." – P4

Theme 3. Balancing Literary Merit and Religious Sensitivity

Twelve out of the eighteen participants described balancing literary merit and religious sensitivity as a central influence of Islamic principles on their selection and evaluation of English literary texts. Participants explained that they recognized the educational and artistic value of many literary works but did not regard literary excellence alone as sufficient justification for classroom use. Instead, they carefully weighed the linguistic richness, thematic depth, and pedagogical benefits of a text against its compatibility with Islamic beliefs and moral values. This balancing process often required teachers to exercise professional judgment, determining whether a literary work could enrich students' language and literary competence without compromising the ethical and religious expectations upheld in Islamic education.

"I always ask myself whether the values presented in the story are appropriate for my students. If the literary merit is high but the content conflicts with Islamic teachings in ways that may confuse or negatively influence learners, I have to reconsider whether it belongs in my classroom." – P7

"...I look for another literary work that achieves the same learning objectives without creating unnecessary religious conflicts." – P11

Theme 4. Contextualizing Un-Islamic Elements

Ten out of the eighteen participants explained that **contextualizing un-Islamic elements** significantly influenced how Islamic principles shaped their selection and evaluation of English literary texts. Rather than completely rejecting literary works originating from secular or Western traditions, participants emphasized the importance of exercising moderation (*Wasatiyyah*) through careful contextualization. They acknowledged that students need exposure to diverse literary traditions to develop language proficiency, cultural literacy, and academic preparedness. However, they believed that such exposure should be accompanied by guided discussions that help students critically examine ideas and distinguish between literary representation and Islamic teachings. In this way, participants sought to balance students' academic development with the preservation of their religious identity and worldview.

"Our students have to succeed academically because they will eventually take national examinations and pursue higher education. They need to understand different literary traditions and perspectives, and that is part of preparing them for the world. At the same time, my responsibility is to make sure those texts do not gradually weaken their Islamic worldview. I try to choose books that provide academic growth while giving students opportunities to reflect on ideas through the lens of Islamic values." – P8

"I don't believe we should isolate students from every secular literary work because that would limit their understanding of global literature. What I do is evaluate those texts carefully and provide the necessary guidance during discussions so students can appreciate the literary qualities without accepting ideas that contradict their faith. The goal is not avoidance but thoughtful engagement." – P16

Theme 5. Professional Accountability Before Allah

Fifteen out of the eighteen participants described professional accountability before Allah as a defining influence on how Islamic principles shaped their selection and evaluation of English literary texts. Participants explained

that teaching extends beyond fulfilling institutional responsibilities or meeting curriculum standards; it is also an *amanah* (sacred trust) entrusted to them by Allah. Consequently, selecting instructional materials was regarded as an act of *ibadah* (worship), requiring sincerity, integrity, and careful discernment. Participants believed that every literary text introduced in the classroom carries the potential to shape students' beliefs, values, and character, making them spiritually accountable for the educational choices they make. This sense of accountability encouraged teachers to approach text selection with greater caution, reflection, and commitment to Islamic ethical principles.

"Teaching is an amanah that Allah has entrusted to me. When I choose a literary text, I do not see it as simply completing a lesson plan or satisfying curriculum requirements. I always remind myself that I will be accountable for the knowledge and values I bring into the classroom. If a book has the potential to strengthen my students' character and faith, then I feel I have fulfilled that trust. But if I knowingly expose them to ideas that may misguide them, I believe I will also answer for that responsibility before Allah." – P2

"...I try to approach text selection with sincerity, asking myself whether I would feel comfortable standing before Allah and explaining why I chose a particular book for my students. That question helps me become more careful, more intentional, and more responsible in every decision I make as an English teacher." – P3

Objective 3: To identify the challenges teachers encounter when balancing literary, pedagogical, and religious considerations.

Question 1: What challenges have you experienced when balancing literary value, language learning objectives, and Islamic principles during text selection?

Theme 1. Shortage of Religiously Compatible Literary Resources

Sixteen out of the eighteen participants identified the shortage of religiously compatible literary resources as one of the greatest challenges they encountered when balancing literary value, language learning objectives, and Islamic principles. Participants explained that while many English literary texts offer rich language, compelling narratives, and sophisticated literary devices, they often contain themes or content that conflict with Islamic values. Conversely, books that are considered religiously appropriate are frequently perceived as overly simplistic, didactic, or lacking the literary depth necessary to develop students' higher-order language and analytical skills. As a result, teachers found themselves investing considerable time searching for literary works that simultaneously met academic standards and Islamic educational expectations.

"If you want a text that is completely clean from an Islamic perspective, you usually end up with children's fables or stories that are overly preachy. The problem is that secondary and university students quickly lose interest because the stories are too simple and do not challenge their language abilities. We really need English literary works that are engaging, intellectually stimulating, and still respectful of Islamic values without making students feel like they are reading materials meant for much younger learners." – P1

"One of my biggest struggles is finding books that are both appropriate and academically strong. Many of the clean texts have limited vocabulary, predictable plots, and very little literary complexity. While they may be safe to teach, they often fail to expose students to the richness of the English language or prepare them for more advanced literary analysis." – P10

Theme 2. Negotiating Curriculum Requirements and Islamic Principles

Fifteen out of the eighteen participants identified negotiating curriculum requirements and Islamic principles as one of the most persistent challenges they encountered during literary text selection. Participants explained that curriculum standards and language learning objectives often require the use of authentic English literary texts to develop students' critical thinking, literary appreciation, and advanced language proficiency. However, many of these recommended works contain themes, behaviors, or lifestyles that conflict with Islamic teachings, including dating, alcohol consumption, and other morally sensitive issues. Consequently, teachers frequently found themselves balancing their responsibility to achieve curriculum outcomes while ensuring that classroom instruction remained consistent with Islamic values. This tension required careful professional judgment, as participants sought to fulfill educational expectations without compromising their religious obligations.

"We are required to prepare high school students for advanced proficiency examinations, which means exposing them to authentic and intellectually challenging literature. However, almost every modern novel on the recommended reading list includes elements such as drinking, dating, or casual relationships. It becomes an exhausting daily struggle to satisfy the curriculum requirements while making sure that these behaviors are not unintentionally presented as acceptable or normal to our students. Every lesson requires careful planning because I constantly have to balance academic expectations with my responsibility to uphold Islamic morals." – P15

"...many of the texts that best develop language proficiency also contain ideas or lifestyles that do not align with Islamic teachings. As a teacher, I constantly have to decide whether the academic benefits outweigh the religious concerns, and that is never an easy decision." – P13

Theme 3. The Labor of Text Filtering (14 out of 18 participants)

Fourteen out of the eighteen participants identified the labor of text filtering as a major challenge in balancing literary value, language learning objectives, and Islamic principles during text selection. Participants explained that selecting appropriate English literary texts extends far beyond simply choosing a story from a textbook or anthology. Before introducing any material in class, they carefully reviewed every chapter, dialogue, and scene to identify content that might conflict with Islamic teachings, including explicit romance, profanity, alcohol use, or other morally sensitive themes. Many participants described spending considerable time censoring, rewriting, omitting, or contextualizing portions of literary texts before they were suitable for classroom use. This additional workload often consumed more time than lesson planning itself and increased the complexity of preparing literature lessons.

"I cannot just hand out a short story anymore without scanning every single line first. Last week, I spent two hours editing a beautiful essay just to black out two paragraphs detailing a nightclub scene. You end up spending more time acting as a religious censor and rewriting materials than actually planning your teaching methodology." – P14

"Before I can even teach a good story, I spend hours reviewing every page, removing unsuitable passages, and rewriting activities so the material reflects our Islamic values. The preparation often becomes far more demanding than the lesson itself." – P8

Theme 4. Managing Diverse Student Interpretations

Thirteen out of the eighteen participants identified managing diverse student interpretations as a significant challenge when balancing literary value, language learning objectives, and Islamic principles. Participants explained that classroom discussions often became complex when students interpreted literary texts differently, questioned Islamic perspectives, or expressed opinions shaped by social media, popular culture, and secular influences. While teachers recognized the importance of encouraging critical thinking and open dialogue, they also felt responsible for ensuring that classroom conversations remained respectful of Islamic beliefs and values. This required participants to carefully facilitate discussions, address misconceptions, and guide students toward thoughtful reflection without discouraging intellectual curiosity or limiting meaningful literary analysis.

"Students today are exposed to many different ideas through social media, films, and the internet, so they often bring those perspectives into our literature classes. There are times when they question why certain behaviors in a story are considered acceptable in one culture but not in Islam. I cannot simply tell them they are wrong. I just balance." – P7

"The greatest challenge is not the literary text itself but helping students discuss sensitive issues respectfully without creating confusion about our Islamic values." – P2

Theme 5. Fear of Stakeholder Backlash

Twelve out of the eighteen participants identified fear of stakeholder backlash as a significant challenge when balancing literary value, language learning objectives, and Islamic principles during text selection. Participants explained that their decisions were influenced not only by curriculum requirements and professional judgment but also by concerns about how parents, school administrators, and the wider school community might respond to particular literary texts. Even when a book possessed considerable literary merit and educational value, teachers sometimes chose not to use it because they anticipated misunderstandings, complaints, or criticism regarding sensitive themes. This constant awareness of external expectations made literary text selection a cautious process, as participants sought to avoid situations that could damage trust with stakeholders or create unnecessary professional difficulties.

"There are times when I avoid using an excellent literary text, not because it lacks educational value, but because I worry it might lead to complaints from parents or from our dean" – P4

"You constantly feel like you are walking on eggshells when picking a text. Even if a book has massive literary value, I often pass on it out of pure fear. All it takes is one outraged Messenger message from a parent to the principal, and suddenly your job or your professional reputation is at risk." – P6

DISCUSSION

English teachers employ a comprehensive evaluative framework when determining the compatibility of English literary texts with Islamic principles, considering not only literary quality but also moral, theological, linguistic, and ideological dimensions. The emergence of the five themes—moral congruence with Islamic ethics, modesty

and decency (*haya*), appropriateness of sensitive content, linguistic cleansing, and ideological compatibility—indicates that participants perceive literature as a powerful medium capable of shaping students' beliefs, values, and character alongside their linguistic competence. This perspective reinforces the argument of Ramli (2013) that English language instruction in Islamic educational settings should integrate language learning with moral and spiritual formation rather than treating them as separate educational goals. Similarly, Amalia et al. (2025) emphasized that literary instruction in Islamic schools should strengthen learners' ethical consciousness and religious identity while cultivating critical literacy. The participants' careful screening of literary texts for explicit content, moral messages, and philosophical assumptions also aligns with the findings of Nurbayani and Amiruddin (2024), who reported that Muslim teachers deliberately evaluate literary materials against Islamic ethical principles before introducing them into the classroom. Moreover, the emphasis on ideological compatibility extends previous scholarship by demonstrating that teachers examine not only visible content but also the underlying worldview communicated through literary narratives, reflecting a holistic understanding of literature as both a linguistic and value-laden educational resource.

These findings may be best understood through the lens of Reader-Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), which posits that meaning is not inherent within a literary text but is constructed through the interaction between the reader and the text. The participants' responses clearly illustrate this transactional process, as their interpretations of literary works were consistently mediated by their Islamic beliefs, professional responsibilities, and educational contexts. Rather than approaching literary texts as neutral instructional materials, teachers actively interpreted narratives through an Islamic worldview, allowing religious values to shape judgments regarding what constitutes appropriate classroom literature. Consequently, identical literary works may be perceived differently depending on the interpretive framework brought by the reader. In this study, participants' religious commitments served as the interpretive lens through which literary meaning and educational suitability were evaluated. This finding suggests that literary text selection in Islamic educational settings is not merely an act of curriculum implementation but an interpretive and reflective professional practice. Teachers function not simply as transmitters of literary knowledge but as active meaning-makers who negotiate the relationship between literary interpretation, educational objectives, and faith-based values, thereby illustrating the central proposition of Reader-Response Theory that readers' identities, experiences, and belief systems fundamentally shape how texts are understood and ultimately selected for instruction.

Fundamentally, Islamic principles influence teachers' selection and evaluation of English literary texts through a holistic educational philosophy that integrates faith, moral formation, and academic instruction. The emergence of the themes faith as a filtering lens, literature for character formation and value-based learning, balancing literary merit and religious sensitivity, contextualizing un-Islamic elements, and professional accountability before Allah demonstrates that participants do not perceive religion as an external restriction imposed upon literature but as the very foundation that informs their pedagogical decisions. Rather than rejecting literary texts solely because they originate from Western or secular traditions, participants exercised careful discernment by evaluating whether these works could contribute positively to students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. This finding supports Ramli (2013), who argued that Islamic education seeks to integrate English language learning with the cultivation of Islamic ethics, ensuring that language instruction remains inseparable from character formation. Likewise, Juwairiyah and Fanani (2025) emphasized that literature instruction in Islamic educational settings should encourage learners to critically engage with texts while strengthening Islamic identity and moral reasoning. The participants' practice of contextualizing rather than automatically excluding secular literary works also resonates with the findings of Heidari and Mowlaie (2016), who observed that religious values can serve as an interpretive framework through which students critically examine literature without diminishing its educational value. Furthermore, the emphasis on amanah, ibadah, and accountability before Allah extends previous scholarship by illustrating that literary text selection is perceived not merely as an instructional responsibility but as a form of ethical and spiritual stewardship grounded in Islamic educational philosophy.

These findings are best explained through Al-Faruqi's (1982) Islamization of Knowledge Theory, which argues that knowledge should neither be accepted uncritically nor rejected because of its cultural origin but should instead be examined and harmonized with the principles of Islam. The participants' narratives clearly embody this theoretical perspective. Their willingness to contextualize secular literary works, preserve texts with significant educational value, and guide students in critically examining conflicting ideas demonstrates an intentional effort to integrate contemporary knowledge with Islamic beliefs rather than isolate learners from global intellectual traditions. Instead of creating a dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge, participants viewed literature as a valuable educational resource that could be retained, adapted, or critically interpreted when aligned with Islamic ethical principles. Their emphasis on developing character (*tazkiyah*), exercising moderation (*wasatiyyah*), and fulfilling their professional amanah further illustrates the Islamization process envisioned by Al-Faruqi, wherein education nurtures both intellectual excellence and spiritual integrity. Consequently, the findings suggest that English literature instruction in Islamic educational settings represents an integrative

pedagogical practice that seeks to cultivate academically competent learners who are equally grounded in Islamic values, demonstrating that faith serves not as a limitation to literary education but as the guiding framework through which educational knowledge is evaluated, contextualized, and meaningfully transformed.

Finally, the challenges experienced by English teachers extend far beyond selecting appropriate literary texts, encompassing the complex realities of balancing curriculum expectations, pedagogical effectiveness, religious obligations, learner diversity, and institutional accountability. The themes of shortage of religiously compatible literary resources, negotiating curriculum requirements and Islamic principles, the labor of text filtering, managing diverse student interpretations, and fear of stakeholder backlash collectively demonstrate that literary text selection is a multifaceted professional undertaking rather than a straightforward instructional decision. These findings support Kohnke and Ulla (2024), who argued that English teachers frequently negotiate multiple contextual demands, including curriculum expectations, learner needs, and sociocultural values, when selecting instructional materials. Likewise, Cordova (2024) emphasized that teachers exercise considerable professional judgment in adapting learning resources to ensure that educational objectives remain responsive to learners' cultural and ethical contexts. The participants' accounts of filtering literary texts and searching for suitable materials also resonate with Kusingan and Castromayor-Gumanoy (2025), who observed that English teachers often invest substantial time adapting instructional resources to accommodate learners' cultural and contextual realities. This finding also aligns with Biri et al. (2026), who reported that students' participation and communication are shaped by peer interactions, disciplinary culture, and psychological safety, highlighting the need for teachers to create supportive learning environments where diverse perspectives can be discussed without discouraging meaningful engagement. Furthermore, the concern over stakeholder reactions highlights that literary instruction is influenced not only by classroom considerations but also by broader institutional and community expectations. These findings therefore extend existing literature by demonstrating that teachers in Islamic educational settings navigate overlapping academic, religious, pedagogical, and social responsibilities, making literary text selection a continuous process of professional negotiation rather than a purely curriculum-driven task. This finding is consistent with the study on English teachers' experiences with translanguaging, which found that teachers continuously negotiated institutional expectations and classroom realities through adaptive pedagogical decisions while maintaining their professional identity (Biri, et al., 2026).

These findings are best interpreted through Shulman's (1987) Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which posits that effective teaching requires more than mastery of subject matter; it demands the integration of content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, curriculum understanding, knowledge of learners, and contextual awareness into sound instructional decisions. The challenges identified in this study illustrate precisely this complex professional reasoning. Participants were not merely selecting literary texts based on literary merit but were simultaneously considering language learning objectives, students' developmental and religious needs, institutional policies, parental expectations, and the broader Islamic educational environment. Their accounts of modifying texts, contextualizing controversial themes, facilitating sensitive classroom discussions, and balancing competing expectations reflect the sophisticated pedagogical judgments that characterize expert teaching. Rather than viewing these challenges as barriers, the findings suggest that they represent opportunities for teachers to exercise professional expertise by making informed, context-sensitive decisions that preserve both educational quality and religious integrity. Consequently, the study affirms Shulman's assertion that effective instructional practice is grounded in teachers' ability to transform disciplinary knowledge into meaningful learning experiences that respond to the unique demands of their educational context. In Islamic English literature classrooms, this transformation requires teachers to function simultaneously as language educators, curriculum designers, ethical mentors, and reflective practitioners who continually negotiate the intersection of pedagogy, literature, and faith.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the compatibility of English literary texts with Islamic principles is not determined solely by the content of the literature itself but by the thoughtful and reflective professional judgment of English teachers. The findings reveal that participants employ a comprehensive evaluative framework grounded in Islamic ethics, considering moral congruence, modesty, sensitive content, language use, and ideological orientation when selecting literary materials. More importantly, Islamic principles were found to function not as restrictive barriers to literature instruction but as an educational framework that guides teachers in integrating faith, character formation, and academic excellence. Rather than rejecting literature originating from secular or Western traditions, participants exercised critical discernment by contextualizing ideas, preserving literary merit where appropriate, and ensuring that instructional decisions remained consistent with Islamic educational objectives. Despite these deliberate efforts, teachers continued to face substantial challenges arising from limited access to suitable literary resources, curriculum demands, extensive text adaptation, diverse student interpretations, and institutional or parental expectations. These findings illustrate that literature instruction within Islamic educational settings is a dynamic process requiring continuous negotiation between linguistic development, literary

appreciation, and religious responsibility. Ultimately, the study affirms that meaningful English literature education in Islamic contexts is achieved not by separating faith from literary learning, but by thoughtfully integrating both to cultivate learners who are intellectually competent, ethically grounded, and spiritually conscious.

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