

INDUCTING STUDENTS INTO PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY IN ENGLISH FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Siti Asmiyah✉

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Jl. A. Yani 117, Surabaya, Indonesia

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Abstract

In the context of teaching English for Islamic studies, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is the prevalent approach. Students' needs for their preparation toward their professional practice are central considerations in ESP. Understanding professional practices is, therefore, inevitable. Corpora of academic sources in the discipline can serve as a firm reference for English for Islamic studies. This study explored corpora of English article abstracts from the international journal of Islamic studies and from reference books on English for Islamic studies. The abstracts were collected from international journals in Islamic studies, while the books served as references at three universities in Indonesia. The corpora were analyzed using AntConc. The study further compares the existing corpora from the two sources and evaluates their conformity. The study examines the extent of conformity regarding the adequacy of reference books in preparing students for future professional discourse. The findings of this study are significant not only as a reflection on current practice in English for Islamic studies in the context of Indonesian ESP, but also as a foundation for further improving the course's teaching to better cater to students' needs.

INTRODUCTION

To learn a language is to understand the vocabulary of the language. Hence, providing students with sufficient exposure to corpora is deemed crucial in English Language Teaching (ELT). Findings by Rimaza and Inshaf Iqbal (2022) suggest that among the factors hindering the development of English proficiency among Sri Lankan students is a lack of vocabulary knowledge. These findings from Sri Lanka may resemble challenges in ELT here in Indonesia. Sofyan et al. (2023) found that linguistic aspects continue to pose a challenge for students in developing their English proficiency, particularly in Islamic schools. Such problems may stem from the lack of focus on vocabulary materials. Al-Jarf (2021) found that the ESP book for Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia provides only a few vocabulary items. Wisran et al. (2025) also claim that existing English materials for students pursuing Islamic majors in higher education lack contextual relevance. Hence, the resources may fail to foster students' linguistic competence.

To better facilitate students' linguistic competence, there should be a particular emphasis on specific vocabulary skills relevant to the discipline (Al-Jarf, 2021). Focusing on vocabulary can also meet students' needs. Armouz and Elotmani (2023) found that Moroccan students favor grammar and vocabulary exercises when learning English for Islamic studies. Additionally, to better provide relevant and contextual material for students taking Islamic studies, the use of Islamic materials should be emphasized, as they have the potential to increase students' motivation to learn English (Mustafa, 2018; Siswoyo & Yuniarti, 2023). These studies underscore the importance of providing students with materials relevant to their discipline and potential future professional practices.

In fact, several previous studies have been conducted in the context of English for Islamic studies. Investigation covers areas of the use of particular teaching strategies (see Amrizal et al., 2020), selection of learning materials and media (Bulqis et al., 2025; Marzuki et al., 2023; Muzammil, 2019; Saputra, 2022), students' challenges in learning English at the department of Islamic studies (Rimaza & Inshaf Iqbal, 2022), translation of Islamic terms (Moris, 2023; Randa et al., 2024), students' preference on the language skills and language aspects (Suwandi, 2023), integration of Islamic values in English teaching (Pelu et al., 2022; Saputra, 2022), English teaching in madrasas (Khan, 2021), students' perception on the significance of the learning of English for Islamic studies (Putri et al., 2021). These studies focusing on the pedagogical aspects of English for Islamic studies seem to outnumber studies on the linguistic aspects. Meanwhile, Rimaza and Inshaf Iqbal (2022), Sofyan et al. (2023), Al-Jarf (2021), and

Wisran et al. (2025) indicate that there is also a need for a strong emphasis on language aspects when teaching English for Islamic studies.

Few studies focus on the linguistic aspects of English for Islamic studies. In a study on vocabulary in the English for Islamic studies material, Fadlilah (2017) focuses solely on cohesive devices. While such a study focuses on linguistic aspects, particularly vocabulary, it does not explicitly capture the discipline-specific vocabulary. This is because cohesive devices may fall into the categories of general vocabulary. There is also a study exploring corpora of terms in the textbooks of English for Islamic studies (Simbuka et al., 2019). Conducting a needs analysis, Farah (2020) found that English for Islamic studies in Indonesia should focus on Islamic characters and morality (*akhlak*), monotheism (*tawheed*), Islamic history, and hadith.

Another need analysis, though, reveals slightly different needs. Sulaiman et al. (2024) found that exegesis (*tafseer*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and Islamic theology were the main themes for materials on this ESP. A corpus study conducted by Simbuka et al. (2019) concludes that several topic categories are discussed in English materials for Islamic studies. These include studies of the Qur'an and Hadith, law and jurisprudence, mysticism and theology, and philosophy and theology (Simbuka et al., 2019). Producing a model test of English for Islamic studies, Suaidi et al. (2020) covered topics such as the Qur'an and Hadith, morality, monotheism, characters and morality, the jurisprudence of commercial transactions (*muamalah*), and Islamic governance (*siasah*). These studies indicate differences in the focus of the material on English for Islamic studies. That is, inconsistencies in ESP content occur across study programs and universities (Sulaiman et al., 2024). This is understandable as different universities and study programs may have different needs.

However, when Islamic studies is the umbrella discipline for English for Islamic studies, the range of themes should not be too broad. The selection of themes should not rely solely on the internal needs of students and universities. The coverage of the themes should also consider the disciplinary or professional discourse. This can be done, among other ways, through understanding the corpora circulating in the professional and academic communication of Islamic studies. Hence, studies on the corpora, including both reference books and journal publications, are essential.

This article presents findings on a corpus study of two sets of corpora circulating under the umbrella of English for Islamic studies. One is a corpus from reference books, and the other is a corpus from academic publications in Islamic studies. The aim is to evaluate whether the reference books used in teaching English for Islamic studies have provided vocabulary relevant

to the professional discourse of the discipline. That is, whether the materials have prepared students for their professional practice in the future.

METHOD

The corpus data for the study were collected from three reference books of English for Islamic studies used at three Islamic universities in Indonesia and from English article abstracts from five internationally indexed journals of Islamic studies. The corpora were processed using AntConc software (Anthony, 2025). The corpora provided textual resources from both sources and were then analyzed using the multidimensional analytical perspective of genre analysis proposed by Bhatia (2014). Within this textual perspective, lexical items were counted, and any lexis relevant to themes in Islamic studies were identified from both sources. The results from both data sets—the lexical items from the reference books and the abstracts—were then compared to assess the consistency of the themes across the sources. The result of this analysis informs the findings of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Corpora of the English Abstracts of the International Journal of Islamic Studies

Data from 208 abstracts, comprising 125 from two Indonesian Islamic studies journals indexed internationally and 83 from Europe and the US, reveal 5,529 types. The difference in the number of abstracts from Indonesia and outside Indonesia is due to the varying numbers of volumes and editions for each journal. Despite such a difference, it is understandable that Indonesia has more publications, given the fact that Indonesia has the largest number of Muslims. The types comprise 68 key content words, or 10% of the total keywords generated by AntConc.

Further close analysis of the key content words suggests that corpora of Islamic studies from academic publications by the professional community in the discipline can be categorized into four distinct groups. The first is politics as the main topic shaping the professional community's socio-cognition. Words such as "political," "parties," "state," and "leaders" fall into this first category. The second group is topic-related to radical Islam as reflected in the words "Islamist," "violence," and "movement." There are instances of the words "women" and "identity," instantiating gender and identity as circulating topics within the discipline. The corpora also indicate Islam's exoteric dimension. This conclusion is generated from the existence of the words "social," "society," "people," "group," "community," "values," "practices," "tradition," and "culture." An interesting classification is on the words "local,"

“Aceh,” “Malay,” “*pesantren*,” and “Indonesia,” highlighting the local discourse within the discussion of Islam in global academic publications.

The first group of corpora under the theme of politics is indicated by 20 occurrences of the theme politics in the abstract and 14 co-occurrences with other related themes, such as politics and history, culture, education, law, art, literature, power, and gender. The theme identity appears 22 times across four-year publications. The theme of radical Islam circulates in the professional discussion through academic articles as many as 19 times and gender as many as 16 times. The number of topics outside these four major groups ranges from 2 to 7 across the years.

Given the discourse of politics as the main theme, the abstracts’ corpora reflect the socio-cognition of the professional community in Islamic studies. The consistent discussion of the theme across the years of publication in the four journals reflects the construction, co-construction, and maintenance of socio-cognition (Giddens, 1984, p. xxiii). Such an idea is also highlighted by Green and Searle-Chatterjee (2008, p. 13) in that ‘religion...is part of the politics of everyday life.’ (Chilton, cited in El Nagggar, 2012, p. 77) also states that the discourse of religion often overlaps with that of politics. The other themes related to women, identity, society, and social practices, which reveal the exoteric dimension of the religion, seem to agree with Istikomah (2012, p. 270) in that Islam primarily regulates people’s way of life.

While the corpora reflecting the themes may, in one way or another, align with some of the experts’ main topics, other themes seem less popular. Martin (1980, quoted in Umam, 2012, pp. 78–79) and Adam (2002, quoted in Musyarrofah, 2012, p. 9) state that Islamic studies may cover not only the Qur’an and hadiths but also rituals, social reality, culture, and politics, as well as law, philosophy, tasawuf, sects, and history. The corpora indicate more discussion of politics and society, and of social reality, with culture discussed more and less on the other topics.

Corpora of the Reference Books of English for Islamic Studies

Another focus of this study is reference corpora of English for Islamic studies. Data collected from the three books indicate that the themes primarily focus on the esoteric dimension of Islam. Across the three books, Islam and Muslim are the main themes, with each occurring 294 and 180 times, respectively. In third place is the word “prophet” (175), followed by “Muhammad” (130). This may happen when the prophet referred to in the occurrences is not always Muhammad, or when Muhammad is referred to with words other than “prophet”, such as “he” or “him”.

The words “Allah” and “god” are fourth and fifth in the list, with each making 169- and 164-word occurrences. There is only a slight difference in the number between these two words, compared to the difference between the words prophet and Muhammad. This finding aligns with the topic of theology and monotheism, as discussed by Suaidi et al. (2020), Simbuka et al. (2019), and Farah (2020). The rest of the list covers the topics of the Qur’an (98-word occurrences), religion (64-word occurrences), and fasting (41-word occurrences).

The above corpora show that the topics covered in the reference book are less varied compared to those in the abstracts of international journals of Islamic studies. There are fewer topics covered compared to those proposed by Martin (1980, quoted in Umam, 2012: 78-79) and Adam (202, quoted in Musyarrofah, 2012:9), as well as those found in Suaidi et al. (2020), Simbuka et al. (2019), and Farah (2020). Several possibilities may cause this issue. First, the reference books have different purposes from the article abstracts. Within the umbrella of ESP, the books serve as learning materials for English rather than as content for discussion.

Hence, the topics covered may be less varied than those in the article abstracts. Article abstracts primarily summarize the results of critical thinking, investigation, and studies, with the primary objective of sharing ideas and knowledge. English is the tool for such sharing. Second, the English for Islamic studies course may not be offered only to students majoring in Islamic studies, but also to students in other majors. Therefore, ‘heavy’ topics may be less preferable. Third, the authors of the abstracts can be professionals in the discipline with various interests.

Meanwhile, the reference book may be developed with consideration that ‘hard topics’ such as politics may be too complex for the students to discuss and even hinder their English learning. Hence, the esoteric dimension of the religion can be less threatening and easier to discuss because it is more familiar and less dynamic than other exoteric dimensions. However, as the purpose of ESP is to prepare students for future professional practice, this difference between what is presented in textbooks and real professional practice needs to be taken into consideration when designing the teaching of English for Islamic studies.

Implications for the Teaching of English for Islamic Studies

The two sets of corpora presented in the previous subsections suggest an inconsistency between what is taught in the classroom under English for Islamic studies and what actually occurs in the discipline’s real-world practice. This finding confirms those of Sulaiman et al. (2024) and indicates that inconsistencies persist across departments and universities. While

possible causes of this variability have been presented in the previous section, action is needed to better prepare students majoring in Islamic studies for their professional lives. Hence, some implications of the findings are presented.

First, the selection of topics should be well-informed by the circulating discussion within the professional communication of the discourse community in the discipline of Islamic studies. This is to ensure that, while basic topics such as theology, Islamic beliefs, the pillars of Islam, jurisprudence, and other ritual-related topics are covered, current issues central to the discipline's community are also taken into account. To do this, teachers can continually update the corpora from existing professional works. Teachers can also help students find and analyze corpora from authentic materials relevant to the topics. This can serve as a form of induction into professional discourse for students.

Second, there should be thorough assessments of students' needs. That is to say, there needs to be curriculum diversification across different study programs. In Islamic-based institutions in Indonesia, for example, universities offer English for Islamic studies as a compulsory subject across disciplines. In this case, the needs of the Islamic studies department and the non-Islamic studies department may vary; hence, the materials need to be diversified. Therefore, challenges in learning, such as those identified by Rimaza & Inshaf Iqbal (2022), can be reduced. Additionally, teaching strategies, as reflected in studies such as Amrizal et al. (2020), and the selection of teaching materials and media (Bulqis et al., 2025; Marzuki et al., 2023; Muzammil, 2019) have also been improved.

Third, if possible, there can be collaborative teaching between a language teacher and an Islamic studies teacher. This collaboration will enable each expert to conduct a more thorough needs analysis in content and language through collaborative teaching. The content expert has the capacity to select the crucial topics within the discipline among the broad ranges of topics as presented by Farah (2020), Simbuka et al (2019), Martin (1980, quoted in Umam, 2012: 78-79) and Adam (202, quoted in Musyarrofah, 2012:9). The language expert can focus on the selection of language aspects to facilitate the students to discuss the topics from the content experts. Hence, the teaching of English for Islamic studies can be designed within the discourse of Islamic studies, while simultaneously developing the students' English capacity and proficiency.

CONCLUSION

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes must have a clear foundation for teaching and learning. Such a purpose can be derived from the language used in professional practices.

This need can be well-informed through the identification of corpora in professional communication and the teaching materials. This corpus study found inconsistencies between the topics discussed by the professional community and those presented in the learning materials. This gap can be filled by implementing corpus-based ESP, conducting thorough assessments of students' needs for curriculum development, and collaborating on the teaching of English for Islamic studies.

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