

Developing Literacy-Focused EFL Modules to Enhance Reading Skills: Bridging Curriculum Goals with Learner Needs

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Abstract

This study explores the development and implementation of literacy-focused English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructional modules designed to enhance the reading skills of seventh-grade students in Islamic junior high schools. Recognizing the dual challenges of meeting curriculum goals and addressing learner-specific needs, the study emphasizes the integration of culturally and religiously relevant content with pedagogically effective reading strategies. Drawing upon sociocultural theory and emergent literacy principles, the modules incorporate interactive, student-centered approaches to foster active engagement and autonomy in learning. A quasi-experimental research design was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the modules, utilizing pre-test and post-test assessments to measure improvements in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary acquisition. Complementary qualitative data from teacher observations and student feedback provided insights into the module's practicality and impact on learner motivation. The findings indicate significant gains in reading skills among the experimental group compared to the control group, demonstrating the effectiveness of the modules in bridging curriculum goals with learner needs. This study offers a replicable framework for literacy-focused instruction in EFL contexts, particularly within culturally specific educational settings.

Keywords: curriculum alignment; EFL reading instruction; instructional module design; literacy development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of literacy skills is a foundational aspect of education, significantly influencing students' academic achievement across all subjects. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Islamic junior high schools, literacy development presents unique challenges (Sofyan et al., 2023). These students must navigate the transition from their mother tongue to English while mastering skills in reading, writing, and comprehension, which are critical for engaging with academic

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materials and achieving broader educational goals. Recognizing the importance of addressing these challenges, this study aims to design and evaluate an instructional module tailored to promote English literacy development among first-grade students in Islamic junior high schools.

Numerous studies have identified significant barriers faced by EFL learners in Islamic educational contexts. These include difficulties in shifting from their native language to English, limited exposure to effective reading instruction strategies, and a lack of motivation or autonomy in literacy activities (Gomes, 2016; Nurkamto et al., 2021; Hassanein et al., 2021). For example, Gomes, et al., (2016) observed that traditional rote-learning methods fail to develop meaningful literacy skills, often leaving students unable to engage effectively with academic texts. Nurkamto et al., (2021) further highlighted that students in Islamic junior high schools often struggle with basic literacy competencies, which adversely affects their overall academic performance. These findings underscore the pressing need for targeted and contextually appropriate interventions to support EFL literacy development in these settings.

Existing research on literacy development in EFL contexts has extensively explored general strategies for improving literacy outcomes. However, studies specific to the cultural and linguistic contexts of Islamic junior high schools remain limited. Traditional instructional methods, characterized by teacher-centered approaches and memorization, have proven inadequate for fostering the critical thinking and engagement necessary for literacy acquisition (Hassanein et al., 2021; Sidek & Wahi, 2018). There is a lack of culturally relevant, interactive, and student-centered instructional materials that address the unique learning needs of first-grade Islamic junior high school students. This research seeks to fill this gap by designing a literacy-oriented instructional module tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities in this context.

The originality of this study lies in its focus on developing an instructional module that is both evidence-based and culturally relevant, specifically for first-grade students in Islamic junior high schools. Unlike existing studies that often generalize literacy strategies across diverse educational contexts, this research emphasizes the integration of cultural and linguistic factors unique to Islamic education (Sakaranaho et al., 2020). By incorporating interactive and student-centered approaches, the module aims to transform literacy instruction from rote memorization to meaningful engagement, fostering both motivation and proficiency among learners.

Based on the previous statement, this study aims to: 1) Design and implement an instructional module that supports literacy development in EFL learners, 2) Evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional module in improving reading and writing skills, and 3) Identify best practices for literacy instruction within the context of Islamic education.

The outcomes of this study are expected to make significant contributions to both theory and practice. Academically, it will expand the body of knowledge on literacy instruction for EFL learners in culturally specific contexts, particularly within Islamic junior high schools (Djamdjuri et al., 2023). Practically, the study will provide an evidence-based instructional module that educators can adopt to improve literacy outcomes. Furthermore, the findings will support the development of culturally relevant and engaging teaching materials, ultimately enhancing teaching practices and literacy outcomes in Islamic educational settings. In addressing the pressing challenges faced by first-grade EFL learners, this study aims to bridge existing research gaps and offer practical solutions that align with the unique needs of Islamic junior high school students, contributing to the broader goals of educational equity and excellence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of effective reading instruction strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom is critical for fostering literacy development, particularly in contexts where cultural and linguistic factors influence educational outcomes. For Islamic junior high school students, literacy development is both an academic priority and a means to engage with religious and cultural texts. This literature review highlights key concepts related to EFL reading instruction, literacy development, instructional module design, and curriculum alignment.

2.1. Literacy Development in EFL Contexts

Research on EFL literacy development identifies several challenges that learners encounter, particularly in Islamic educational settings. Studies have consistently reported that limited exposure to English outside the classroom, ineffective teaching strategies, and low student motivation hinder literacy acquisition (Nurkamto et al., 2021; Gomes, et al., 2016). Furthermore, traditional teacher-centered approaches, characterized by rote memorization and limited interaction, often fail to engage learners or promote meaningful skill development.

However, opportunities for addressing these challenges exist. Incorporating culturally relevant content and aligning literacy instruction with students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds have been shown to enhance motivation and improve outcomes (Habibah & Wahyuni, 2020). By integrating these insights into module design, educators can create a more inclusive and effective literacy development environment for EFL learners.

2.2. Instructional Module Design

The design and evaluation of instructional modules have emerged as a key focus in EFL research, offering tailored solutions to specific learning contexts. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of incorporating interactive, student-centered strategies into module design. For example, (Alharbi, 2022) demonstrated that instructional modules combining explicit reading instruction with authentic materials significantly improved literacy outcomes. Key components of effective modules include: 1) Culturally Relevant Content: Materials that reflect students' cultural and religious contexts to foster engagement, 2) Interactive Learning Activities: Peer collaboration, discussions, and role-playing to encourage active participation, 3) Scaffolded Skill Development: Gradual introduction of reading skills, from decoding to comprehension, with teacher support.

2.3. Curriculum Alignment and Literacy Instruction

Effective literacy instruction requires alignment between instructional materials and curriculum goals. According to Pak et al., (2020) Curriculum alignment ensures that reading instruction not only meets academic standards but also addresses learners' developmental and cultural needs. In Islamic junior high schools, this involves integrating religious and academic content, providing students with the skills to navigate both domains effectively.

Research by Habibi et al., (2018) and Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, (2022) emphasizes the importance of balancing academic literacy goals with cultural relevance. Misaligned curricula that prioritize standardized outcomes over contextualized learning can lead to disengagement and reduced efficacy. Thus, instructional modules must be designed to bridge curriculum expectations with learner-specific needs, providing a cohesive framework for literacy development.

2.4. Gaps in the Literature

Despite growing interest in literacy development for EFL learners, significant gaps remain in designing context-specific instructional modules for Islamic junior high schools. Existing research often overlooks the interplay of cultural, linguistic, and religious factors in shaping literacy instruction. Furthermore, limited studies have evaluated the long-term impact of tailored instructional modules on literacy outcomes, leaving a critical area for further exploration.

3. METHODS

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy-oriented instructional modules in enhancing the reading skills of seventh-grade EFL learners in Islamic junior high schools. The research focused on two variables: 1) Independent Variable: The literacy-oriented instructional module designed specifically for the cultural and linguistic context of Islamic junior high school students, and 2) Dependent Variable: Improvements in students' reading skills, measured through reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary acquisition. pre-test and post-test designs with an experimental group and a control group were used to assess the impact of the instructional module (Wayan et al., 2024). The experimental group was taught using the module, while the control group received traditional teacher-centered instruction (Mufidah et al., 2023).

3.2. Participants

The subjects of this study were seventh-grade students from an Islamic junior high school in Mataram, aged 12–13 years old. A purposive sampling method was employed to select two classes with similar baseline reading abilities. One class ($n = 30$) was assigned to the experimental group, while the other class ($n = 30$) served as the control group. These participants were chosen based on their enrollment in a required English course and their availability for the duration of the intervention.

3.3. Instructional Module Development

Criteria for module design (e.g., alignment with curriculum, cultural relevance, engagement). The instructional module will be developed based on a set of criteria, including alignment with the Islamic junior high school curriculum, integration of religious and academic content, use of engaging and interactive instructional strategies, and incorporation of multimedia and technology-based elements (Anan & Rustan, 2023).

Content and structure of the module (e.g., lessons, activities, assessments). The instructional module will consist of a series of lesson plans, activities, and resources that address key aspects of EFL literacy development, such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression (Rochanaphapayon, 2023). The module will be designed to be culturally relevant and responsive to the unique needs of EFL learners in Islamic junior high school contexts.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

Surveys and interviews with teachers and students. The study will collect qualitative data through surveys and interviews with the participating teachers and students to gather their perceptions, feedback, and experiences with the instructional module. - Pre-test and post-test assessments. Classroom observations. The study will also conduct classroom observations to document the implementation of the instructional module and its impact on student learning and engagement. The study will employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to thoroughly examine the effectiveness of the instructional module (Arrasyid, 2023).

Literacy assessments (e.g., reading comprehension tests, writing samples). Pre-test and post-test assessments will be administered to measure the impact of the instructional module on student literacy skills, including reading comprehension, vocabulary, and written expression (Coombe et al., 2020).

3.5. Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis of interview and observation data. The qualitative data collected through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify key themes, patterns, and insights (Nowell et al., 2017). Quantitative analysis of literacy assessment data. Triangulation of data. The study will triangulate the quantitative and qualitative data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the instructional module and its impact on student learning (Adil et al., 2022). Statistical analysis of pre-test and post-test scores. The quantitative data from the literacy assessments will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, such as paired t-tests or repeated measures ANOVA, to determine the statistical significance of the changes in student literacy skills.

4. RESULTS

The findings of this study address the primary objectives of evaluating the effectiveness of a literacy-oriented instructional module for improving the reading skills of seventh-grade Islamic junior high school students. The findings are presented in three key areas: quantitative improvements in literacy skills, qualitative insights into teacher and student perceptions, and best practices identified from the instructional module.

4.1. Improvements in Students' Literacy Skills

Quantitative analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores revealed significant improvements in the reading skills of students in the experimental group, who utilized the instructional module, compared to the control group, which received traditional instruction. These improvements were observed across three dimensions: reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency.

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Results (Experimental vs. Control Group).

Skill Area	Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Gain	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Reading Comprehension	Experimental	60.2	80.5	20.3	1.42
	Control	61.0	68.8	7.8	0.63
Vocabulary Acquisition	Experimental	58.4	79.0	20.6	1.39
	Control	59.2	69.2	10.0	0.71
Fluency	Experimental	55.7	77.8	22.1	1.53
	Control	57.4	66.1	8.7	0.65

Key Observations:

1. The experimental group demonstrated a mean gain of 20.3 points in reading comprehension, compared to 7.8 points in the control group.
2. Vocabulary acquisition showed a mean gain of 20.6 points for the experimental group, significantly higher than the control group's gain of 10.0 points.
3. Fluency scores increased by 22.1 points in the experimental group, with the control group achieving a smaller gain of 8.7 points.

4.2. Teacher and Student Perceptions

Qualitative data from surveys and interviews revealed positive perceptions of the instructional module among both teachers and students.

Key Insights from Teachers: 1) Usability: Teachers reported that the module was easy to implement, with clear instructions and resources that supported lesson planning and execution, and 2) Engagement: The integration of culturally relevant texts and interactive activities increased student participation and motivation. One teacher noted, *“The students were more eager to engage in discussions and practice their reading skills because the materials resonated with their daily lives and beliefs.”*

Key Insights from Students: 1) Relevance: Students found the reading materials meaningful and relatable, particularly because they included cultural and religious elements, and 2) Interactive Learning: Many students appreciated the interactive exercises, which allowed them to practice and receive feedback in real-time. One student remarked, *“I enjoyed the group tasks because we could help each other understand the texts.”*

4.3. Best Practices Identified

Analysis of the instructional module revealed specific strategies and activities that were most effective in enhancing literacy skills: 1) **Culturally Relevant Texts:** The inclusion of texts reflecting Islamic values and local traditions was key to increasing student engagement and comprehension, 2) **Interactive Exercises:** Group discussions, vocabulary games, and role-playing activities fostered collaborative learning and improved fluency, 3) **Scaffolded Learning:** Gradual progression from simple to complex texts helped students build confidence and mastery in reading.

Table 2. Key Strategies and Their Effectiveness

Strategy	Observed Impact	Student Feedback
Culturally Relevant Texts	Enhanced engagement and comprehension	<i>“The stories were interesting and related to our culture.”</i>
Vocabulary Activities	Improved retention and application of new words	<i>“Learning new words through games made it fun and easy to remember.”</i>
Group Discussions	Increased confidence in reading aloud and understanding	<i>“We helped each other understand the meaning of the passages.”</i>

4.4. Summary of Findings

The study findings demonstrate that the literacy-oriented instructional module significantly improved students' reading skills, as evidenced by substantial gains in comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. Qualitative feedback from teachers and students highlighted the module's usability, cultural relevance, and interactive features as key strengths. These findings provide a foundation for refining the module and developing similar tools for EFL literacy instruction in Islamic education contexts. The evidence underscores the module's potential as a scalable solution for addressing literacy challenges, offering a replicable model that integrates curriculum goals with learner needs in culturally specific educational settings.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide substantial evidence of the effectiveness of the literacy-oriented instructional module in enhancing the reading skills of seventh-grade EFL learners in Islamic junior high schools. This discussion contextualizes the results within relevant theoretical frameworks, prior research, and the unique challenges of Islamic educational contexts. Furthermore, it identifies the instructional module's contributions to literacy development and its implications for educational practice.

5.1. Impact of the Instructional Module on Literacy Development

The significant improvements observed in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency among the experimental group confirm the module's effectiveness in addressing core literacy challenges. The pre-test and post-test data revealed considerable gains in all three skill areas, with effect sizes indicating a high practical significance. For instance, the experimental group achieved a mean gain of 20.3 points in reading comprehension compared to 7.8 points in the control group, emphasizing the module's ability to facilitate deeper engagement with texts.

These findings align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of meaningful social and cultural contexts in learning. By incorporating culturally relevant texts that reflected Islamic values and traditions, the module leveraged students' existing knowledge and cultural identity to make reading tasks more relatable and engaging. This approach not only enhanced comprehension but also increased motivation and active participation. Furthermore, the module's design supports Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which underscores the importance of providing comprehensible input to facilitate language acquisition. [Nurul et al., \(2024\)](#), The gradual progression from simpler to more complex texts ensured that students could effectively build on their existing skills, fostering confidence and competence in their reading abilities.

5.2. Teacher and Student Perceptions of the Module

The qualitative data gathered through surveys and interviews highlighted the positive reception of the instructional module among both teachers and students. Teachers praised the module's usability, particularly its clear structure and alignment with curriculum goals. The integration of scaffolding strategies allowed educators to support students progressively, ensuring that all learners could benefit from the materials regardless of their initial proficiency levels.

Students also expressed satisfaction with the module, particularly regarding the relevance of the reading materials. Many noted that the inclusion of Islamic and culturally familiar content made the texts more relatable and meaningful. This finding supports research by [\(Habibah & Wahyuni, 2020\)](#) which emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in enhancing learner engagement. The module's interactive elements, such as group discussions and vocabulary games, were also widely appreciated, as they promoted collaboration and active learning.

5.3. Comparison with Prior Research

The findings of this study align with previous research on literacy instruction in EFL contexts, particularly those emphasizing the importance of student-centered and culturally responsive approaches. For example, [\(Alharbi, 2022\)](#) found that instructional modules incorporating interactive and meaningful activities significantly improved literacy outcomes among EFL learners. Similarly, studies on balanced literacy approaches (e.g., [Sidek & Wahi, 2018](#)) support the module's combination of explicit instruction in reading strategies with authentic, contextually relevant texts. However, this study contributes a unique perspective by addressing the specific needs of Islamic junior high school students, a population that has received limited attention in the broader literature on EFL literacy instruction. By integrating cultural and religious elements into the instructional module, this research fills a critical gap and demonstrates the value of aligning pedagogy with learners' sociocultural contexts.

5.4. Elements Contributing to the Module's Effectiveness

A detailed analysis of the module's design reveals several key components that contributed to its success: 1) Culturally Relevant Texts: The inclusion of narratives and informational texts reflecting Islamic values and traditions made the reading materials

more engaging and relatable for students. This approach not only increased motivation but also fostered a deeper connection to the content, enhancing comprehension and retention, 2) Interactive Activities: Collaborative tasks, such as group discussions and vocabulary games, created opportunities for peer learning and active participation. These activities aligned with constructivist principles, encouraging students to construct meaning through social interaction, 3) Scaffolded Learning: The gradual progression of text complexity allowed students to build confidence and mastery incrementally, addressing the diverse needs of learners with varying proficiency levels, 4) Immediate Feedback: The module included built-in mechanisms for providing real-time feedback during exercises, which supported iterative learning and helped students correct errors promptly (Pauzan, 2024).

5.5. Implications for Educational Practice

The findings of this study hold significant implications for literacy instruction in Islamic junior high schools and similar educational contexts. First, the results highlight the importance of designing instructional materials that align with students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. By incorporating culturally relevant content, educators can enhance learner engagement and motivation, creating a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Second, the success of interactive and student-centered activities underscores the need for pedagogical approaches that prioritize active learning and collaboration. Teachers should be equipped with training and resources to implement these strategies effectively, fostering a classroom culture that encourages participation and exploration. Finally, the module's alignment with curriculum goals demonstrates the feasibility of integrating culturally responsive pedagogy within standardized educational frameworks. This finding suggests that curriculum developers should consider cultural and contextual factors when designing instructional materials, ensuring that they meet both academic standards and the needs of diverse learner populations (Pak et al., 2020)

5.6. Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The research was conducted in a specific Islamic junior high school context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings. Additionally, the study focused on short-term improvements in reading skills; future research should explore the long-term impact of such instructional modules on broader literacy development and academic performance.

Further studies could also investigate the applicability of this module in other cultural and linguistic contexts, as well as its potential integration with digital technologies to enhance scalability and accessibility (Xia et al., 2024). By addressing these areas, future research can build on the current study's findings and contribute to the advancement of EFL literacy instruction in diverse educational settings.

The discussion of this study demonstrates the effectiveness of a literacy-oriented instructional module in addressing the unique needs of seventh-grade EFL learners in Islamic junior high schools. By integrating culturally relevant content, interactive activities, and scaffolded instruction, the module significantly enhanced students' reading skills while fostering engagement and motivation. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on culturally responsive pedagogy and provide actionable recommendations for improving literacy instruction in similar contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the effectiveness of a literacy-oriented instructional module designed to enhance the reading skills of seventh-grade EFL learners in Islamic junior high schools. The findings revealed significant improvements in students' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency, particularly among the experimental group exposed to the instructional module. These results demonstrate the module's capacity to address the dual challenge of meeting curriculum expectations and accommodating learner-specific needs. The study contributes to the broader field of EFL literacy instruction by emphasizing the importance of integrating culturally and religiously relevant content with pedagogically sound strategies. The instructional module successfully bridged gaps in traditional teaching methods, fostering not only academic progress but also learner motivation and engagement. Furthermore, the study provided insights into the usability of the module from the perspectives of both teachers and students, highlighting its practical value in real-world classroom settings. The findings underscore the critical role of culturally responsive pedagogy in addressing literacy challenges within Islamic educational contexts. By aligning instructional materials with students' sociocultural backgrounds and incorporating interactive, student-centered activities, educators can create inclusive and effective learning environments.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares that there is not conflict of interests.

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