

SEEKING AN INTEGRATION OF ENGLISH AND ISLAMIC STUDIES A CASE OF ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

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Islamic pedagogy in the West is an area of increasing importance. However, literature specifically dealing with Islamic pedagogy is still in its infancy and one way to contribute to the growing scholarship in Islamic pedagogy is to explore the pedagogical practice of teachers. By doing this, this paper seeks to further develop and contribute to the scholarship around Islamic pedagogy, in the context of Australian Islamic schools. The main purpose of this paper is to hold up one example of Islamic pedagogy in practise, to then precipitate through future empirical research, the exploration of the many ways teachers in Australian Islamic schools integrate Islamic values and ideas within the subject of English (and ultimately many mainstream subjects). Indeed, this aim is shared by a growing number of Australian Islamic educators and even serves as part of the aim for the University of South Australia's Centre for Islamic Thought and Education, 'Our philosophy is to promote empirical research informed by Islamic methodologies, philosophies and pedagogies, cognisant of the unique Australian context.' (Centre for Islamic Thought and Education, 2018) The first section focuses on Islamic pedagogy in practice and will provide a practical example of integrating the subject English with Islamic Studies in the context of a Secondary English lesson at an Australian Islamic school. The second section will lay the foundations for future research by emphasising the collation of examples Islamic pedagogy within empirical research and will outline the way in which a qualitative survey targeting teachers of English in Australian Islamic school can potentially collate a myriad of approaches to teaching Islam within English lessons.

There are many impediments to implementing authentic Islamic pedagogy in a Western context. Mabud (2018) points to the dichotomy within the identity of Islamic Schools torn between two conflicting systems of education—the Western and the Islamic. Ali (2018) discusses the commodification of Islamic Schooling in the context of a neo-liberal paradigm extant within Western societies that ultimately devalues Islamic education as tokenistic offerings within a marketing strategy of Islamic Schools. Jones (2018) explores the limitations of teaching mainstream subjects in Islamic schools. When looking specifically at English, Jones discussed problem posed by the limitation in the selection of appropriate texts, which is an area that is overcome by selecting Islamic texts that still meet syllabus requirements, as shown within this paper. Islamic education in Australian school is currently limited to a few hours a week of discrete instruction and is comprised of learning the Quran, Islamic jurisprudence, theology, exegesis and history. Due to the requirements of the Australian curriculum, there isn't much scope to increase the amount of time dedicated to Islamic studies and so integrating Islamic Studies with mandatory subjects presents an exciting opportunity. The potential to explore issues impacting Muslim students in their everyday lives during English lessons highlights the synergy possible between English and Islamic Studies if taught in an integrated way. There is already scope to explore English in an integrated way as detailed in Figure 1 below. For example, under the General capabilities heading, the area of Critical and Creative thinking can be applied to exploring the exegesis of the Quran, which will be detailed further in Section 1.








LEARNING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM ICONS

Learning across the curriculum content, including cross-curriculum priorities, general capabilities and other areas identified as important learning for all students, is incorporated and identified by icons in the *English K–10 Syllabus*.




Cross-curriculum priorities

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
	Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
	Sustainability

General capabilities

	Critical and creative thinking
	Ethical understanding
	Information and communication technology capability
	Intercultural understanding
	Literacy*
	Numeracy
	Personal and social capability

Other learning across the curriculum areas

	Civics and citizenship
	Difference and diversity
	Work and enterprise

* Literacy is embedded throughout the *English K–10 Syllabus*. It relates to a high proportion of the content descriptions across K–10. Consequently, this particular general capability is not tagged in this syllabus.

Figure 1. An integrated approach in the *English K-10 Syllabus*. (Board of Studies NSW, 2012, p. 8)

The English subject is the focus here as there are numerous and clear opportunities to integrate it with Islamic Studies; as well as the fact that the researcher is themselves a current secondary English teacher. As showcased by Figure 1, the English syllabus has the potential to explore Islamic Studies through wide net of General Capabilities where alongside the Critical and Creative thinking general capability, for example, Intercultural Understanding can be achieved by exploring the context of revelation of Surah Al Fil thereby exploring Arab culture. Strengthening the Islamic identity of students can thus be achieved more broadly by studying literature, multiculturalism, media studies, exegesis in studying the Quran as text and even the option of looking at literary theory like post-colonialism (Orientalism) in later years.

Section 1—Integrating English and Islamic Studies

Both an Islamic Studies researcher and a secondary English teacher at an Islamic school in Sydney, the author can reflect on their experiences of merging English and Islamic Studies during a lesson exploring a chapter of the Quran, Surah Al Fil. Detailing the planning and delivery of this lesson explores, amongst other things, the intricacies of meeting English syllabus requirements and the exciting opportunities of incorporating the tafsir (exegesis) of Surah Al Fil. This section recounts the experiences of the author in delivering an English subject lesson that integrated Islamic Studies. This was achieved by conducting an English lesson on textual analysis that focused on the exegesis of Surah Al Fil. The lesson was conducted for a Year 8 English class within an independent Islamic school in Sydney. Independent schools in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) are mandated to follow the curriculum set by the government education authority, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), which is the current name of the NSW Board of Studies. The NSW Board of Studies changed its name to NESA in 2017. Like any other subjects, teaching English is governed by the requirements of the NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum. As such, the opportunity exists for Islamic Schools in Australia and more broadly the West, to both meet state educational requirements and still teach Islamic Studies within mandatory subjects.

The growth in the number of independent Islamic schools in Australia has reached a stage that makes empirical research that draws on an adequate sample size possible. This has also paved the way for Muslim social integration where, the proliferation of state funded, formally registered Islamic schools have borne the fruits of ‘promoting social inclusion and civic participation among Muslim students’ (Peucker & Akbarzadeh, 2014, p. 157). Indeed, this can be achieved through the subject English by consolidating pedagogical approaches by English teachers in Islamic schools that integrate Islamic Studies. Jones specifically looked at what was being taught in Australian schools and found that it was very fragmented in terms of how the approaches and understanding towards Islamic studies carried widely between Islamic Schools (Jones, 2013). This underscores the need to collate pedagogical approaches for the sake of cohesion so that a collection of pedagogical approaches will not only inform future practise but will help ameliorate this fragmentation by way of sharing resources.

Surah Al Fil was chosen as the text to study within the English lesson due mainly to its accessibility. It is a short chapter of the Quran that most students would be familiar with by the time they are in high school. Indeed, most young primary school students would know this chapter and moreover it would likely be among the first chapters of the Quran they would memories at a very young age. This is helpful as it can basically be taken as assumed knowledge. This is important as the focus of the lesson will eventually take on a close textual analysis of Surah Al Fil and a good understanding and prior knowledge of the Surah will help support this. Indeed, a great way to begin the lesson will be to ask students ‘How much do you know about the story behind Surah Al Fil?’.

The lesson is separated in to three segments. The first segment covers the Context of Surah Al Fil and helps support the student’s personal understanding of the story. It comprises of a highly engaging video clip that has high production value as it uses high quality 3-dimensional animation coupled with a clear, English narration with subtitles. This directly draws in students to the context and background of the chapter. Depending on the level and needs of the students, practical activities can be set for students in response to viewing the video like writing a summary of the video, completing a cloze passage or answering a set of comprehension questions. The second segment covers the Tafsir or exegesis of Surah Al Fil and adds a level of interpretation to enhance student understanding of the chapter. The narrator is Nouman Ali Khan who is an articulate speaker and well known. His exegesis of the Quran is accessible to students as it is clear and is delivered in language that high school students will not only understand but relate to e.g. “sniper strike”. As this video contains more sophisticated and nuanced views and interpretations of the chapter, perhaps a summary or a dot point list of striking features of the video could be produced by students in response to viewing the video. Together, these first two video will provide the analytical foundation for students to closely analyse Surah Al Fil. These first two segments will then lead into the third segment being a close textual analysis of Surah Al Fil the students will carry out. One important aspect of these first two segments is that they are video resources that are short, but visually engaging. This is important pedagogically, as contemporary students are engaged more effectively as visual learners. These three segments are detailed in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 Segments of the lesson

The textual analysis focus of segment three is really where the English subject aspect of the lesson comes to the fore and where the integration with the Islamic Studies component in the form of an exegesis of Surah Al Fil is actualised. Providing students with an English translation of the 5 short verses of Surah Al Fil will enable textual analysis. Figure 3 provides a visualisation of this and provides the scaffolding for students that a teacher can provide to guide their analysis.

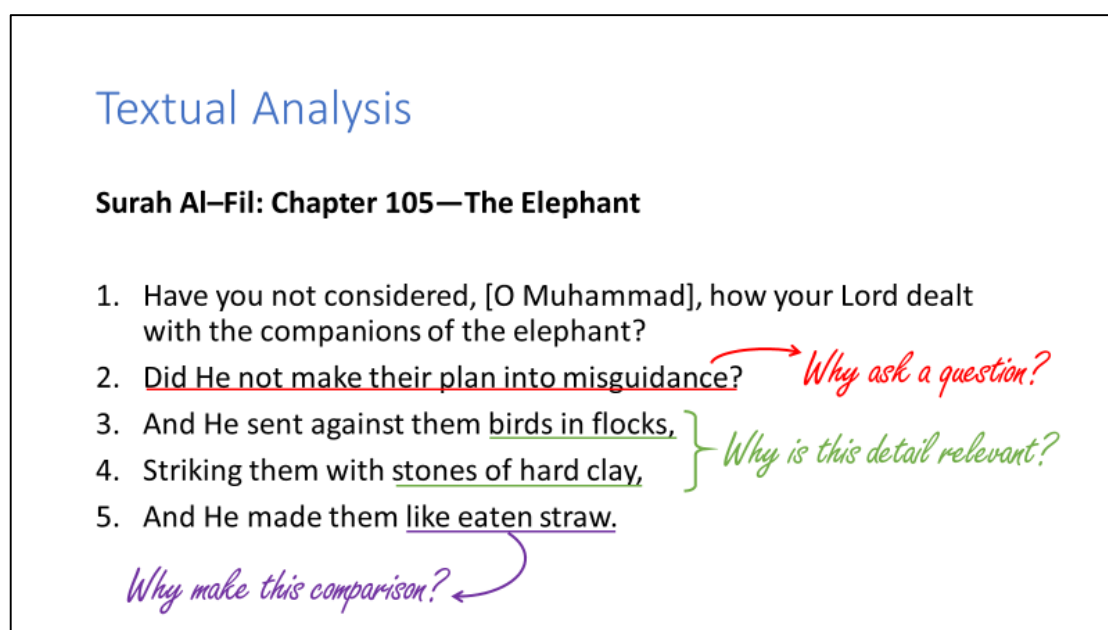


Figure 3 Textual Analysis of Surah Al Fil

The analysis undertaken by the class will need to match their ability level. If students are not very familiar with literary devices, then the teacher may need to first revise these or use this opportunity to explicitly identify literary devices evident in the ayah. Indeed, this is clearly an example of English and Islamic Studies being authentically integrated. From here, the students will need to flesh out their analysis, which can be done in a TEE (Technique Example Effect) Table, as shown in Figure 4. The analysis ultimately made in the effect column may be guided by

the teacher or preferably left to the students if they are capable, but this is the product of interpretation and therefore of each student's personal exegesis.

Technique	Example	Effect
Rhetorical Question	Did He not make their plan into misguidance?	Invites the reader to think about the possible answers of this question.
Imagery	Birds in flocks / stones of baked clay	Evokes a fierceness of the birds in their sheer number as well as the 'missiles' they carry.
Simile	like eaten straw	Shows the intensity of the outcome: the army was completely wiped out as though a field of wheat was consumed. This is a striking simile as straw is quite tall and dense as a plant and to see it eaten up highlights the degree of destruction.

Figure 4 TEE Table

This analysis can be ultimately synthesised within an essay to truly and authentically integrate the subject English with Islamic Studies. For beginner students an analytical essay fashioned as something like '*Analyse the meaning of Surah Al Fil*' will allow students to synthesise their analysis in a written piece. However, to truly showcase their scholarly spirit, what should be pursued at the culmination of the lesson is a critical analysis essay that is fashioned somewhere along the lines of '*Critically compare and contrast your understanding of Surah Fil with a Scholar's interpretation.*'. This critically analytical essay can draw on the Tafsir video by taking Nouman Ali Khan's interpretation of the Surah as an opinion to be critically evaluated and compared and contrasted with the student's/class's interpretation. In doing so, the culmination of an English/Islamic Studies integrated lesson draws clear links in meeting the English syllabus outcomes for Stage 4 (Year 8):

EN4-1A: responds to and composes texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis, imaginative expression and pleasure
EN4-3B: uses and describes language forms, features and structures of texts appropriate to a range of purposes, audiences and contexts
EN4-5C: thinks imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically about information, ideas and arguments to respond to and compose texts
EN4-8D: identifies, considers and appreciates cultural expression in texts


Adapted from Board of Studies NSW (2012)

The four English outcomes above have been highlighted to emphasise the way in which this English/Islamic Studies integrated lesson specifically meets the outcomes through an exegesis of Surah Al Fil culminating in critically analytical essay with the directive of '*Critically compare and contrast your understanding of Surah Fil with a Scholar's interpretation.*'. The textual analysis as well as the critically analytical essay both meet EN4-1A as they build students understanding and interpretation of Surah Al Fil whilst requiring them to be critical of the Tafsir video. Similarly, EN4-5C is also met as the interpretive and critical thinking of students results in them responding to both Surah Al Fil as a text and the Tafsir video as an interpretation, whilst the critically analytical essay requires them to compose their own text. EN4-3B is met as the textual analysis segment requires students to use and describe language forms and features as evidenced by the TEE table. Finally, EN4-8D is met through both videos, as Arab culture is identified, detailed and explained in both videos, which will then inform the student's analysis of the texts in their analysis and essay. As such, this is but one practical example of an English lesson that integrates Islamic Studies (specifically exegesis). Section 2, that follows, will in essence make a call for many more examples such as this so that a growing corpus of Islamic pedagogy can be collated to enhance and unify attempts to develop Islamic pedagogy.

Section 2: Survey

It is hoped this survey, whilst still in progress, can at its completion inform future practice for embedding Islamic values and embedding Islamic pedagogy to make Islamic studies more authentic and more engaging within teaching English. This empirical project modelled here utilises a semi-structured qualitative online survey to collate pedagogical practice. The qualitative nature of the survey aims to capture the richness of each teachers nuanced teaching experiences and practices as they pertain to Islamic pedagogy. Ultimately, one of the greatest hurdles of Islamic pedagogy is the lack practical resources that support teachers in integrating Islamic studies with the curriculum mandated subjects in a way that is engaging for the contemporary classroom. By focusing specifically on the English subject in the primary and secondary Australian curriculum, the aim is to collate a rich myriad of engaging practical approaches that successfully integrate the two subjects. Whilst still in the data collection phase with little data to report on to date, a snapshot of the survey will emphasise its importance in developing Islamic pedagogy as illustrated in Figure 5. Teachers in Australian Islamic Schools can access this survey anonymously to share their views and teaching practices regarding Islamic pedagogy.

In conclusion, the infancy of Islamic Pedagogy is an area that can be addressed with the input of teachers in Islamic Schools. Moving into the 21st century means that traditional means of teaching Islamic studies need to be revamped and integrated with modern educational practices, if Islamic Studies is to be meaningful and engaging. One way this can be achieved, especially in a Western context, is by integrating it with mandated subjects. This paper has shown how this is quite possible in an Australian context by integrating English with Islamic Studies. The survey presented in Section 2 seeks to collate a corpus of Islamic Pedagogical approaches, an example of which provided in Section 1, which then serves as a de facto illustrative example from where further example can build upon on it. Ultimately, the formulation of a database of Islamic pedagogical approaches that will help spur practical resources and approaches that support teachers in integrating Islamic studies with the curriculum mandated subjects in a way that is engaging for the contemporary classroom. The advantage to teachers, principals and academics in the area of Islamic education is the multiplicity of pedagogical approaches that are possible as a result.



Seeking an Integration of the subject English and Islamic Studies - A Case of Islamic Schools in Sydney

Survey Questions

* 1. What is your understanding of Islamic pedagogy?

Islamic Pedagogy means *the infusion of an Islamic Worldview, principles, and values within mainstream English lessons (primary and/or secondary)?*

* 2. In what way(s) do you implement Islamic Pedagogy within the classroom?

* 3. How consistently is Islamic pedagogy implemented in your English lessons (primary or secondary) in your school?

Never	Inconsistently	Sometimes	Consistently	Always	N/A
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	○

* 4. Why did you give this score in Question 3?

Figure 5 A snapshot of the survey

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