

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction to the research. It covers the background of the study, the research questions, the research purpose, the research scope, the significance of the research, the clarification of key terms, and the organization of the thesis.

1.1. Introduction

Despite not being an Islamic state, Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, with approximately 231 million Muslims (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022). A significant proportion of the country's population, roughly 95%, acknowledges the significance of religion in their daily lives (Theodorou, 2015). Furthermore, over 80% of the population believe that religion has a more substantial impact on their nation today than it did two decades ago (Pousher et al., 2019). Islamic values have a strong presence in the country due to the majority of the population being Muslim (Mohd-Asraf, 2005) and the preservation of these values through Islamic education. In particular, Islamic values and cultures are taught and instilled in an integrated Islamic school, a specialized institution that also teaches specific Islamic subjects such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *akhlaq* (Islamic ethics), and *aqidah* (Islamic theology).

In addition to learning Islamic values and cultures, students in integrated Islamic schools in Indonesia are also expected to achieve academic competence in a variety of subjects, including English. English is a mandatory subject in educational curricula in many countries of the world, including in Indonesia. Students in Indonesia formally learn English as their foreign language (EFL) from elementary to university level.

In the context of learning English as a foreign language, there are some people who are concerned with the possibility that there might be friction between Islamic values and the values that are inherent to English as a foreign language. The exposure to English provides students with a unique opportunity to engage with different cultures and worldviews, which may help broaden their perspectives and understanding of the world. However, the exposure also raises questions about the potential influence of foreign cultures on Islamic values and practices (Chowdhury, 2017; Chowdhury, 2019; Haggan, 1998; Mohd-Asraf, 2005). Therefore, there is a need for further research into the complex interactions between Islam and English in the Indonesian context, particularly in terms of their impact on religious identity formation among Muslims.

The situation may add a burden to the teaching because of the friction between Islamic values that are different from foreign cultures and values brought through English learning, which might lead to resistance from both teachers and students. Ozóg (1989), in his study, found that some Muslim people reject the Western cultures and values brought by the English language teaching. They believe that those foreign cultures and values are not aligned with those of Islam. Similar perceptions about English teaching in Muslim communities were also found in the studies conducted by Obediat (1997), Haggan (1998), and al-Harbi (2002). From their studies, some Muslims were concerned about the cultural implications of English in the way that learning English might make the students deviate from their own cultural norms. Additionally, learning English is stereotyped as being oriented toward worldly life pursuits with no benefits in the hereafter. In those cases, not only do the teachers have to facilitate effective English teaching, but they also carry the moral responsibility of having to safeguard the students' values so that they would not be influenced by the different values and cultural norms that are inherent in English teaching. Therefore, teachers, especially in integrated Islamic schools, are faced with problems in ensuring effective EFL learning and, at the same time, making an effort to ensure that the values in English teaching are not in conflict with their own.

In an attempt to investigate the issue, I conducted a study in an integrated Islamic high school in Indonesia. The study was initiated by an interview with an English teacher in the school to find out whether she experienced any conflicts regarding the matter. From the study, it was found that there are conflicts of values related to faith issues in stories, opposite gender interaction and relationships, and the etiquette of clothing and dressing. In dealing with such conflicts, the teacher coped by adding Islamic cultures to the learning materials and replacing some materials believed to be irrelevant with materials about Islamic cultures and information. In the interview, she also stated that her actions in dealing with the conflicts were navigated by her religious beliefs.

The teacher's stated understanding and her actions in dealing with the conflicts have drawn my interest in exploring how her professional identity has been shaped by her religious beliefs. To understand the teacher's decisions and actions, it is important to find out how she forms a sense of herself and her identity in relation to ways of inhabiting roles, positions, and cultural imaginaries that matter to the teacher (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). One of the aspects which are closely linked to identity is one's religious beliefs. Religious beliefs have been considered a dimension of one's identity. Baurain (2016) states that religious beliefs shape a person's identities, actions, views of self and others, ambitions, relationships, and moral values. Ethical and moral values instilled by religious beliefs empower humans to develop theories and knowledge that promote social justice, cultural diversity, environmental sustainability, and an improved quality of life (Canagarajah, 2018). Canagarajah continues by arguing that teachers' religious beliefs also shape their perspectives on how they view many dimensions of life, including professional life, which, in this case, is related to effective teaching. In the same vein, Kubanyiova (2013) and Wong (2013) also regarded religious beliefs as potentially central influences on teacher identity as they are one of the most essential sources for teachers to construct images of good teaching. However, despite its significant role in teaching, teacher's religious beliefs as a part of personal beliefs have not been deeply investigated. Therefore, this study aims to explore how a

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN AN EFL TEACHER IDENTITY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia | repository.upi.edu | perpustakaan.upi.edu

teacher's religious beliefs may shape her identity as an English teacher and, at the same time, spark conflicts with her English Language Teaching (ELT) practices.

1.2. Research Questions

This study is conducted to answer the following research questions.

1. How do the religious beliefs of one particular teacher teaching in an Islamic school shape her understanding of English and her teaching practices?
2. How does the teacher deal with the conflicts arising from her religious beliefs in her classroom?

1.3. Purpose of the Research

By exploring the role of an EFL teacher's religious beliefs in her identity, this study is conducted to find out the following purposes.

1. How the religious beliefs of one particular teacher teaching in an Islamic school shape her understanding of English and her teaching practices.
2. How the teacher deals with the conflicts arising from her religious beliefs in her classroom.

1.4. Significance of the Research

The result of this study is expected to contribute:

1. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the existing research in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher identity, specifically in relation to the role of religious beliefs.
2. Empirically, this research is expected to provide insightful contributions for the readers concerning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher identity, specifically in relation to the role of religious beliefs.

Nabila Hasri Ainun, 2024

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN AN EFL TEACHER IDENTITY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia | repository.upi.edu | perpustakaan.upi.edu

3. Practically, this study may contribute to developing the awareness of English teacher identity, specifically in relation to the role of religious beliefs.

1.5. Clarification of Key Terms

Religious Beliefs	: Religious beliefs refer to the specific beliefs, values, and convictions that an individual holds about their religion.
Teacher Identity	: Teacher identity refers to the multifaceted and evolving sense of self and professional role that teachers develop as they engage in their teaching practice and interact with their students, colleagues, and the broader educational context. It encompasses various aspects of teachers' self-perception, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that shape their teaching approach and impact their students' learning experiences.
Integrated Islamic School	: An integrated Islamic school is an educational institution that combines traditional academic subjects with Islamic studies and values. These schools are designed to provide students with a well-rounded education incorporating academic and religious teachings within an institution.

1.6. Scope of the Research

This study focuses on exploring the role of an English teacher's religious beliefs in constructing her identity as a teacher in an Islamic school. The data were collected from interviews, observations, and documentation. This study involves an EFL teacher in a private Integrated Islamic high school in Indonesia. The research concerns the role of an English teacher's religious beliefs in her identity as a teacher in an Islamic school.

Nabila Hasri Ainun, 2024

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN AN EFL TEACHER IDENTITY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia | repository.upi.edu | perpustakaan.upi.edu

1.7. Organization of the Thesis

This research consists of five chapters, which provide different parts of the research. More detailed explanation of each chapter is provided as follows:

-Chapter I: Introduction

It is an introductory chapter which provides the background of the study, the research questions, the purposes of the research, the scope of the research, the significance of the research, clarifications of the key terms, and the organization of the thesis.

-Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study along with the literature review and the report of several previous studies in the same field. The theory of students' motivation in learning a foreign language and its relationship with their religious identity are described further in this chapter.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

This chapter covers an explanation of the research methodology employed in this current research. This chapter also presents the subject of the study, the instruments used to collect the data, the data collection, and the data analysis.

Chapter IV: Findings and Discussion

This chapter provides the findings and some relevant discussions about the result of the data analysis obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and documents. The discussion of the role of the Islamic school teacher's religious beliefs on her identity as an English teacher is elaborated further.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter covers the conclusions of the research and some suggestions for teachers and future researchers interested in conducting research in this area.

Nabila Hasri Ainun, 2024

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN AN EFL TEACHER IDENTITY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia | repository.upi.edu | perpustakaan.upi.edu

