



Reading English Islamic Texts: Students' Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary Knowledge, and Religious Literacy

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Abstract This study examines students' comprehension of English Islamic texts by analyzing the role of vocabulary knowledge and religious literacy. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected through reading tests, vocabulary tests, and questionnaires. The findings show that understanding Islamic texts depends not only on English proficiency but also on students' religious knowledge. The study highlights the importance of developing English learning materials that are relevant to Islamic studies and students' needs.

Keywords: English Islamic Texts; Reading Comprehension; Vocabulary Knowledge; Religious Literacy; English for Islamic Studies

Abstrak Penelitian ini mengkaji pemahaman mahasiswa terhadap teks Islami berbahasa Inggris dengan melihat peran penguasaan kosakata dan literasi keagamaan. Penelitian menggunakan desain kuantitatif korelasional dengan tes membaca, tes kosakata, dan kuesioner. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa pemahaman teks tidak hanya dipengaruhi kemampuan bahasa Inggris, tetapi juga pengetahuan keagamaan mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pengembangan materi bahasa Inggris yang sesuai dengan studi keislaman dan kebutuhan mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci: Teks Islam Berbahasa Inggris; Pemahaman Bacaan; Pengetahuan Kosakata; Literasi Keagamaan; Bahasa Inggris untuk Studi Islam

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is widely recognized as one of the most fundamental academic skills in higher education because it enables students to acquire knowledge, develop critical thinking, and participate in scholarly discussions. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, reading is particularly important since English has become the primary language of scientific communication and international publications. For students in Islamic higher education, reading English texts is not merely a linguistic activity but also an academic necessity for accessing contemporary Islamic scholarship, educational research, and global religious discourse.

The increasing availability of Islamic literature in English has created new opportunities for students to broaden their perspectives beyond locally published references. Books, journal articles, conference proceedings, and digital learning resources discussing Islamic education, Qur'anic studies, Islamic history, ethics, and religious moderation are increasingly written in English. Consequently, university students are expected to possess adequate reading competence to understand these materials accurately while maintaining appropriate religious interpretations. This condition places reading English Islamic texts at the intersection of language proficiency and religious understanding.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that vocabulary knowledge is one of the strongest predictors of reading comprehension. Learners with broader and deeper vocabulary knowledge are generally better able to identify textual meanings, infer unfamiliar words from context, and construct coherent interpretations of academic texts. Nouri and Zerhouni (2016) reported a significant positive relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension among Moroccan EFL learners, indicating that lexical competence substantially contributes to reading success. Similar findings were reported by Karakoç and Köse (2017), who found that vocabulary mastery significantly predicted students' reading achievement and overall English proficiency. More recently, Hasan et al. (2022) demonstrated that depth of vocabulary knowledge is an important predictor of academic reading comprehension among tertiary EFL learners, suggesting that understanding semantic relationships among words is as important as knowing their meanings.

Research has also shown that reading comprehension is influenced by background knowledge and contextual familiarity. Students comprehend texts more effectively when they possess sufficient prior knowledge of the subject matter, enabling them to integrate new information with existing cognitive schemas. This perspective is particularly relevant in reading English Islamic texts because many passages contain religious concepts, Arabic loanwords, theological terminology, and culturally embedded expressions that require more than general English proficiency. Students may successfully decode linguistic forms but still encounter difficulties in interpreting the intended meanings when they lack adequate religious background.

Recent studies focusing on Islamic-based English learning materials further support the pedagogical value of integrating Islamic content into EFL instruction. Darmayenti et al. (2021) developed an EFL textbook based on religious values and local wisdom for Islamic higher education and found that contextualized learning materials improved students' engagement while strengthening both language competence and religious character. Likewise, research on English Islamic books indicates that integrating Islamic values into English reading materials enhances learners' reading comprehension, vocabulary development, motivation, and identity formation, demonstrating that faith-based content can support both literacy development and character education.

Empirical evidence also suggests that Islamic reading materials positively influence vocabulary acquisition and reading achievement. A recent experimental study found that short Islamic stories significantly improved novice EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition because contextualized religious narratives increased learners' exposure to meaningful lexical items. Similarly, studies employing Islamic narrative texts reported significant improvements in students' reading comprehension, vocabulary development, reading motivation, and engagement compared with conventional reading instruction. Furthermore, Jumatriadi (2025) found that reading interest and vocabulary mastery jointly contributed to students' ability to comprehend English Islamic texts, highlighting the combined influence of cognitive and affective factors on reading performance.

Although previous research has established the importance of vocabulary knowledge and demonstrated the effectiveness of Islamic-based English reading

materials, most studies have examined these variables separately. Existing research predominantly focuses on vocabulary acquisition, reading strategies, reading motivation, or instructional media without considering the role of religious literacy as an integral component of reading English Islamic texts. Religious literacy extends beyond familiarity with religious terminology; it encompasses the ability to interpret religious concepts, understand theological contexts, recognize diverse perspectives, and critically engage with religious discourse. Consequently, successful comprehension of English Islamic texts requires students to integrate linguistic competence with religious understanding.

This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive investigation into how reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and religious literacy interact within the context of English Islamic texts. Understanding these relationships is particularly important for students of English Education and Islamic Education because both groups are increasingly expected to access international academic resources while preserving accurate religious understanding. Such evidence will contribute not only to English language education but also to the development of English for Islamic Studies as an interdisciplinary field that bridges language learning and Islamic scholarship.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' reading comprehension of English Islamic texts by examining the relationships among reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and religious literacy. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on English for Islamic Studies and provide empirical evidence for developing reading materials and instructional practices that are linguistically effective, culturally responsive, and religiously meaningful for students in Islamic higher education.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationships among students' reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and religious literacy when reading English Islamic texts. A correlational approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to

investigate the degree to which vocabulary knowledge and religious literacy were associated with students' reading comprehension without manipulating any variables. The design also enabled the researchers to identify the relative contribution of each independent variable to students' reading performance.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at an Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia during the 2026 academic year. The participants consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education and Islamic Education programs. These students were selected because both programs require learners to engage with English academic texts while simultaneously developing an understanding of Islamic knowledge.

A total of approximately 150–250 students were expected to participate in the study. Participants were selected using proportionate stratified random sampling, ensuring that students from both departments and different academic years were proportionally represented. To be included in the study, participants had to (1) be active undergraduate students, (2) have completed at least one academic English course, and (3) provide informed consent to participate voluntarily.

Research Instruments

Three instruments were employed to collect the data.

Reading Comprehension Test

Students' reading comprehension was measured using a researcher-developed test consisting of authentic English Islamic texts adapted from academic articles, Islamic educational magazines, institutional websites, and English books discussing Islamic education, ethics, religious moderation, and Islamic civilization. The test assessed five dimensions of reading comprehension: 1) identifying main ideas, 2) locating explicit information, 3) making inferences; 4) interpreting vocabulary in context and 5) evaluating the author's message.

The instrument consisted of approximately 30 multiple-choice items, with one point awarded for each correct response.

Vocabulary Knowledge Test

Vocabulary knowledge was assessed using a **30-item test** focusing on English vocabulary commonly found in Islamic academic discourse. The test

covered both general academic vocabulary and Islamic terminology frequently encountered in English texts, including concepts related to worship, education, morality, Islamic civilization, and Qur'anic studies. Students were asked to identify word meanings, recognize appropriate word usage, and determine contextual meanings within reading passages.

Religious Literacy Questionnaire

Religious literacy was measured using a self-administered questionnaire adapted from previous religious literacy frameworks and modified for the context of Islamic higher education. The questionnaire consisted of approximately 25 Likert-scale statements ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The questionnaire measured four dimensions:

1. knowledge of Islamic concepts;
2. understanding of Islamic values;
3. contextual interpretation of Islamic issues; and
4. critical engagement with religious texts.

Higher scores indicated higher levels of religious literacy.

Instrument Validation and Reliability

Prior to data collection, all research instruments underwent expert validation involving three specialists in English Language Teaching, Islamic Education, and Educational Measurement. The experts evaluated the instruments in terms of content relevance, clarity, language appropriateness, and construct representation. Content validity was quantified using **Aiken's V**, with acceptable values set at **V $\geq$ 0.80**. A pilot study involving approximately **30 students** was conducted to evaluate the reliability of the instruments.

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with coefficients of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable. Item discrimination and difficulty indices for the reading and vocabulary tests were also analyzed before the instruments were finalized.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out in four stages. First, ethical approval and institutional permission were obtained from the participating university. Second, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and signed informed consent forms. Third, students completed the reading comprehension test,

vocabulary knowledge test, and religious literacy questionnaire during scheduled classroom sessions under researcher supervision.

Finally, all completed responses were checked for completeness before being coded and entered into the statistical software for analysis. Participation was voluntary, and participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and that the collected data would be used solely for academic research purposes.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, minimum scores, maximum scores, frequencies, and percentages, were first calculated to describe students' reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and religious literacy. Before conducting inferential analyses, several statistical assumptions were examined, including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity.

To answer the research questions, the following analyses were performed:

1. Descriptive statistics to describe each variable;
2. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to examine the relationships among reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and religious literacy;
3. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis to determine the extent to which vocabulary knowledge and religious literacy predict students' reading comprehension.

Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles governing educational research. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and respondents were free to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Personal information was anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and all research data were securely stored and used exclusively for scholarly purposes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 30 undergraduate students participated in this simulated study. The descriptive statistics of the three research variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables (Simulation)

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Category
Reading Comprehension	30	58	92	76.53	8.41	Moderate
Vocabulary Knowledge	30	55	94	78.20	9.13	Moderate
Religious Literacy	30	63	95	82.37	7.26	High

Table 1 shows that the students obtained a mean score of 76.53 (SD = 8.41) for reading comprehension, indicating a moderate level of comprehension when reading English Islamic texts. The average vocabulary knowledge score was 78.20 (SD = 9.13), suggesting that the participants possessed a moderate level of English vocabulary related to Islamic discourse. Religious literacy achieved the highest mean score (82.37, SD = 7.26), reflecting that most students had a relatively good understanding of Islamic concepts and values.

Assumption Testing

Before conducting inferential analyses, several statistical assumptions were examined.

Table 2. Assumption Testing Results (Simulation)

Assumption	Test	Result	Decision
Normality	Shapiro-Wilk	p = .276	Normal
Linearity	ANOVA Deviation from Linearity	p = .418	Linear
Homoscedasticity	Glejser Test	p = .537	Homoscedastic
Multicollinearity	VIF = 1.42; Tolerance = .705	Acceptable	No Multicollinearity

The findings indicate that all assumptions required for Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were met.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to examine the relationships among the variables.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix (Simulation)

Variable	1	2	3
Reading Comprehension	1		

Vocabulary Knowledge	.721**	1	
Religious Literacy	.648**	.593**	1

Note. $p < .01$

The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension ($r = .721$, $p < .001$). Religious literacy was also positively correlated with reading comprehension ($r = .648$, $p < .001$). Moreover, vocabulary knowledge showed a moderate positive relationship with religious literacy ($r = .593$, $p = .001$).

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive contribution of vocabulary knowledge and religious literacy to reading comprehension.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor	B	β	t	Sig.
Constant	18.214	—	2.51	.018
Vocabulary Knowledge	0.481	.563	4.37	< .001
Religious Literacy	0.326	.352	2.74	.011

Model Summary

R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	Sig.
.803	.645	.619	24.53	< .001

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 24.53$, $p < .001$). Vocabulary knowledge and religious literacy jointly explained 64.5% of the variance in students' reading comprehension. Vocabulary knowledge emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .563$), followed by religious literacy ($\beta = .352$).

The simulated findings suggest that vocabulary knowledge plays a substantial role in determining students' comprehension of English Islamic texts. Students with broader vocabulary knowledge tended to understand passages more accurately, identify key ideas more effectively, and infer implicit meanings from context. This pattern is consistent with previous studies reporting vocabulary knowledge as one of the strongest predictors of reading comprehension in EFL settings.

Religious literacy also demonstrated a meaningful contribution to reading comprehension. Students with stronger knowledge of Islamic concepts appeared better able to interpret theological terms, contextualize religious messages, and understand culturally embedded meanings. This suggests that reading English Islamic texts requires more than linguistic competence; it also depends on readers' familiarity with the religious content of the texts.

The combined explanatory power of vocabulary knowledge and religious literacy ($R^2 = .645$) indicates that both linguistic and disciplinary knowledge are important in comprehending English Islamic texts. These findings support schema theory, which argues that readers construct meaning by integrating textual information with prior knowledge. In this context, vocabulary knowledge represents linguistic schema, while religious literacy represents content schema.

From a pedagogical perspective, these simulated findings imply that English courses in Islamic higher education should integrate authentic Islamic reading materials with systematic vocabulary instruction. Such an approach may strengthen students' academic reading ability while simultaneously enhancing their understanding of Islamic concepts presented in English. Although these results are based on simulated data, they illustrate how quantitative findings may be presented in an academic article. Actual research findings should be derived from empirical data collected from participants and analyzed using appropriate statistical procedures.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study indicates that students' ability to read English Islamic texts is shaped by the interaction between linguistic competence and religious understanding. Vocabulary knowledge showed a strong contribution to reading comprehension, suggesting that students who possess broader and deeper lexical knowledge are more capable of identifying main ideas, interpreting contextual meanings, and understanding Islamic academic discourse written in English.

Religious literacy also played an important role in supporting students' comprehension. This indicates that reading English Islamic texts cannot be understood merely as a language activity. It also requires students to recognize

Islamic concepts, interpret religious messages, and connect textual meanings with relevant theological, cultural, and educational contexts. Therefore, successful comprehension of English Islamic texts depends on the integration of vocabulary knowledge, reading skills, and religious literacy.

The simulated regression result suggests that vocabulary knowledge and religious literacy jointly contribute to students' reading comprehension. This finding strengthens the argument that English for Islamic Studies should be developed as an interdisciplinary field that connects English language education with Islamic education. English reading instruction in Islamic higher education should not only emphasize general comprehension skills but also provide meaningful exposure to Islamic academic vocabulary, religious concepts, and authentic Islamic texts.

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