
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Values Education in English Language Teaching: A Narrative Literature Review

Dr. Osman Erdem Yapar¹ and Dr. Haroun Mohammed Abdullah AL-Balushi²

¹ Assistant Professor, Dhofar University, Oman

² University of Technology & Applied Sciences, Oman

Corresponding Author: Dr. Osman Erdem Yapar, **E-mail:** osmanyapar@du.edu.om

| ABSTRACT

This narrative review examines values education in English Language Teaching (ELT), analysing peer-reviewed articles, books and book chapters. In ELT, language teaching inherently involves values, often creating pedagogical and cultural tensions, particularly between Western and Muslim-majority contexts. The review highlights a discrepancy between universal and context-specific approaches, suggesting future research focus on international comparisons, long term studies, and effective professional development for educators.

| KEYWORDS

English Language Teaching (ELT), moral education, values education, teacher education

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introduction

It is increasingly clear that a modern education system that sidelines values has played a part in the global issues and conflicts we are witnessing today. This is largely because self-interest seems to have taken precedence over ethical considerations in politics, business, and finance (Rafikov et al., 2021). Values education, which includes moral, ethical, spiritual, cultural, and civic principles, is crucial for developing well-rounded individuals and responsible citizens (Gardner, 2004). Beyond academic success, education must cultivate moral growth and embed ethics within curricula (Kour et al., 2025).

Within English Language Teaching (ELT), there's a growing critique of the current emphasis on purely technical skills. Many scholars are advocating for a more humanistic approach that acknowledges and addresses the emotional and psychological needs of learners (Fitriyana & Aprison, 2025; Amini et al., 2025). However, a significant challenge is that teacher training programmes often fall short in providing adequate preparation for embedding values education. This leaves many educators feeling unprepared to integrate these vital aspects into their teaching (Thornberg, 2008). Consequently, ongoing professional development is essential to equip teachers with the skills and confidence to effectively incorporate values into their classroom practices (Gardner, 2004; Rohmana, 2020; Thornberg, 2008).

This paper seeks to explore the core arguments and existing research surrounding values education within ELT, positioning it as a distinct and important field of study and practice. The goal is to establish a solid theoretical foundation that can guide the practical implementation of values education in real-world teaching contexts.

In order to achieve the above objective, the following research question was adopted:

What are the main considerations related to the implementation of values education in ELT contexts?

Methodology

This study employed a narrative literature review, a method suited to explore theoretical underpinnings (Jahan et al., 2016). The methodology was structured into five phases: definition of scope, development of search strategy, selection of sources, thematic analysis, and quality assurance.

The review aimed to identify key research related to values education in English Language Teaching (ELT). Sources included peer-reviewed articles, books and book chapters from both Western and Eastern contexts, while conference proceedings and publications without full text were excluded. A systematic search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and the university library catalogue. Terms such as *values education*, *moral education*, *citizenship education*, and *English Language Teaching* were combined using Boolean operators. Search results were screened by title and abstract against inclusion criteria. Full texts were then assessed for eligibility, resulting in a final corpus of twenty-nine sources. Data were extracted iteratively, capturing details such as author(s), year, theoretical framework, methodology, and key findings. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, which were organised into higher-order themes to highlight areas of consensus, divergence, and theoretical gaps. The final manuscript was assessed using SANRA (Baethge et al., 2019), which evaluates explanation of the review's importance, statement of aims, description of the literature search, referencing, scientific reasoning, and presentation of data, ensuring validity and trustworthiness.

Results

Definition of Values Education and Related Terms

In the realm of values education, terms like character, moral, and citizenship education are frequently used interchangeably, yet a clear distinction is necessary (Mills, 2021). Character education centres on nurturing virtues such as honesty and empathy, often aligning the concept of a 'good citizen' with that of a 'good person' (Nucci, 2014). Moral education, on the other hand, focuses on imparting ethical principles and fostering harmonious coexistence, typically through indirect means like role modelling and the internalisation of norms (Mills, 2021; Lovat et al., 2010; Gardner, 2004). Citizenship education takes a more collective approach, blending moral and political aspects to cultivate informed and critically engaged individuals (Mills, 2021; Nucci, 2014). This requires a solid grounding in political literacy and the ability to engage in critical discourse (Gardner, 2004). Although there are overlaps, character education primarily addresses individual moral qualities, whereas citizenship education extends to wider societal and political issues (Mills, 2021). Traditionally, character education relies on a top-down transmission of values, contrasting with citizenship education's emphasis on rational autonomy and deliberative participation (Nucci, 2014).

Relevance of Values Education in ELT

Teaching a language is not just about grammar and vocabulary; it is deeply connected to culture and morality. Educators constantly make choices influenced by their own values, beliefs, and even government policies. Their job goes beyond simply teaching the language; they also have to consider the bigger picture of living in a world with many languages and cultures (Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016).

Language education is also a political act. It can reinforce existing cultural and social norms through the ideas it promotes. This is why critical pedagogy is so important. It helps teachers and students understand these underlying messages and empowers them to bring about positive change in society. English language teaching, in particular, should aim for more than just making students good communicators. It should also help them develop critical thinking skills, empathy, and the ability to handle disagreements and different perspectives in an ethical way. Achieving these goals hinges on how students perceive knowledge, authority, power, and societal values (Widodo et al., 2017).

It is suggested that moral values should be woven throughout the entire educational experience, not just tucked away in a few specific subjects (Musling et al., 2022). Therefore, language curricula shouldn't just concentrate on learning the language itself or its use in academic and professional settings. They must also include moral values to foster the complete development of individuals, aligning with the principles of the National Education Philosophy (Musling et al., 2022).

Challenges to Integrating Values Education in ELT

Integrating values education into English Language Teaching (ELT) presents a number of significant hurdles. These challenges primarily stem from educators' viewpoints, practical constraints within the classroom, and the specific teaching methodologies employed. A key impediment lies in the attitudes of teachers themselves. A notable proportion of educators prioritise language proficiency as the paramount objective of ELT, viewing the impartation of values as secondary or even tangential to the core aims of English lessons (Chung & Ho, 2025). This perspective can profoundly influence the willingness and efficacy with which

values are incorporated into the curriculum. Consequently, the integration of values education is not merely a matter of curriculum design but is also deeply intertwined with the pedagogical beliefs and priorities of the teaching staff.

Practical constraints may also pose difficulties related to values education integration into ELT classes. Chung & Ho, (2025) identified tight lesson schedules, leading to a perception of reduced time for language instruction; Insufficient training and resources leave educators without the necessary pedagogical frameworks for integration (Chung & Ho, 2025).

Curriculum and assessment structures for values education in ELT remain weak, the abstract nature of many values requires teachers to use varied and nuanced strategies to convey such concepts to young learners. Finally, careful lesson planning while addressing diverse learning needs may prove to be demanding (Chung & Ho, 2025).

Cross-cultural factors introduce further complexity, particularly when tensions arise between the broader educational culture and the cultural dimensions inherent in teaching English as a second language, especially where differing values and societal expectations intersect (Widodo et al., 2017). Addressing these interconnected issues is therefore critical for the successful integration of values education into ELT.

Different Cultural and Religious Backgrounds

ESL instruction in Western contexts focuses on practical communication and fluency, which can conflict with non-Western cultural values (Johnston, 2003).. Teachers' cultural perspectives influence pedagogical choices, highlighting ethical complexities in ELT (Chung & Ho, 2025).

In Islamic contexts, morality is tied to faith, with ethical duties derived from religious sources. Islamic morality includes concepts like *akhlāq* (character and morals) and *adab* (etiquette), emphasizing legal duties, conduct, and character development. Unlike Western frameworks, Islam prioritizes divine principles, religious law, duty-based rights, and spiritual rewards. Islamic moral education stresses family, the Prophet Muhammad's example, and internal/external motivations, acknowledging cross-cultural challenges and advocating for dialogue (Halstead, 2007).

Values-related Dilemmas in the ELT Classroom

Johnston (2003) classifies the inherent pedagogical dilemmas faced by educators in values education into three main areas: pedagogy, teacher-student relations, and beliefs and values. Within pedagogy, teachers grapple with balancing content and form, such as ensuring language instruction remains meaningful while maintaining linguistic accuracy, which ties into the communicative language teaching paradox where communication can overshadow substance. Additional pedagogical tensions include fostering conventions versus nurturing individual expression, respecting a student's right to speak alongside their right to silence, conducting fair and objective evaluation, and justifying methods without conclusive scientific evidence. In teacher-student relations, educators must balance authority with fostering student responsibility, maintain professional authority while building solidarity, and reconcile their individual roles with institutional responsibilities. Regarding beliefs and values, teachers confront the political dimensions of TESOL, navigate the influence of personal religious and spiritual beliefs, respond to intolerance while upholding tolerance, and reconcile their professional identity with the practical realities of diverse global contexts. Balancing these ethical considerations ultimately demands ongoing reflection and adaptation to foster inclusive, respectful learning environments that honour both moral principles and practical teaching demands.

A Universal Framework for Values Education in ELT

Mangubhai (2007) suggests that one responsibility of teacher educators may be to establish a framework for understanding how moral beliefs, alongside other beliefs and knowledge, shape teacher actions in the classroom. Just as crucial is examining how students themselves interpret instances of moral instruction and what impact they believe such teaching practices have on them. In this review, two such frameworks were identified.

Shaaban (2005) proposes a framework to integrate moral education into ESL/EFL classrooms, combining language learning with character development, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. The goal is to create proficient language users who are also informed, responsible global citizens. The framework has seven components including message, language skills, methods, outcomes, activities, resources and assessment. It balances learner autonomy with teacher facilitation, promoting civic values and intercultural communication without religious bias (Shaaban, 2005).

In another study, Musling et al. (2022) discuss the necessity of integrating Universal Moral Values (UMV) into language teaching and learning. There are four central aspects consisted of (1) commitment to something greater than oneself, (2) self-respect, coupled with humility, self-discipline, and acceptance of personal responsibility, (3) respecting and caring for others, and (4) caring for other living things and the environment. Four themes were found based on the systematic reviews in terms of ways to

instil UMVs in language teaching and learning, namely the roles of language teachers toward students, the curriculum, activities, and interactive multimedia (Musling et al., 2022).

Contextual Approach to Values Education

In Islamic educational contexts, mainly in South-East Asian countries, integrating values into English Language Teaching (ELT) helps to preserve cultural and religious identity. While some argue for universal values education, there is usually emphasis on Muslim identity, often influenced by national agendas.

Integrating moral education into language classes improves students' moral understanding, language skills, and cultural awareness, viewing language as a tool for communication and ethical reflection. Values-based activities enhance empathy, moral consciousness, and communication skills, contributing to Value-Based Language Education (VBLE) by linking moral dialogue, language use, and intercultural empathy (Yenuri, 2025).

Humanistic approaches in language teaching foster interpersonal and moral values like empathy and respect. Through collaborative activities and discussions, teachers create inclusive, safe environments that encourage self-expression and ethical interaction. Students in humanistic classrooms show better mental health, autonomy, and moral awareness, correlating with academic success (Amini et al., 2025).

Humanistic methods also boost cognitive and linguistic development via active learning. Collaborative projects enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, and language proficiency, supporting intellectual growth and emotional intelligence. These experiences build student confidence for academic and real-world success (Amini et al., 2025).

In a study conducted in the Turkish context, prospective English teachers demonstrated awareness of their multiple identities, prioritising their Turkish and Muslim identities while viewing learning English as a means to understand cultural differences and develop personal qualities such as flexibility and tolerance. They also emphasised the significant role of teachers in accurately presenting Western values during language courses (Atay & Ece, 2009).

A study in Malaysian context (Sidhu et al., 2017) found ELT materials, particularly literature, offer cultural insights into moral perspectives. While moral values were integrated into lessons, cultural values were challenging due to teacher inexperience. The research stresses the need for cultural sensitivity, comparative analysis, and local content to strengthen student identity, advocating for teachers skilled in both language and cultural understanding (Sidhu et al., 2017).

Chamisah (2025) in Indonesian context found that while some institutions effectively integrate Islamic values (honesty, kindness, fairness, monotheism) into ELT using appropriate content and methods, many face barriers like insufficient teacher training, lack of materials, and weak policy structures.

Researchers in Islamic schools critically evaluate materials to shield students from perceived negative influences like Westernization or missionary agendas (Hidayati, 2017; Rohmana, 2020; Hasyim & Suyono, 2017). Despite acknowledging English's importance for global engagement, concerns exist about eroding cultural and religious identity through English and Western materials (Irawan, 2020). Consequently, there is a push for curricula and materials aligned with Islamic values, often using thematic approaches (Gumelar & Jubaedah, 2025; Hidayati, 2017; Irawan, 2020). This integration helps avoid conflicts with sensitive local beliefs, as seen in an intervention combining Islamic values and Jambi culture (Nafiah, 2020). Ultimately, this integrated approach aims to strengthen Muslim identity by using English to disseminate knowledge rooted in Islamic principles, aligning language acquisition with the preservation of religious and cultural heritage (Hasyim & Suyono, 2017; Irawan, 2020).

Teachers in Islamic settings are expected to be role models, integrating Islamic values creatively through practices like using quotes from religious sources, designing value-based activities, and starting/ending lessons with prayers (Rohmana, 2020). However, this type of integration requires strong Islamic background and pedagogical skills (Irawan, 2020). Madkur and Albantani (2018) emphasize the need for ongoing teacher professional development in descriptive, modelling, and demonstrative methods to effectively integrate Islamic values into lessons.

Conclusion

This narrative literature review had two objectives: to identify key arguments and research on values education in general education and teacher education, and to examine English Language Teaching (ELT) as a distinct domain of values education practice and research. Synthesising sources from diverse contexts, the review aimed to establish a theoretical foundation for future empirical research. The review highlights the value-laden nature of ELT, shaped by cultural and power dynamics between L1 and L2 contexts, pedagogical dilemmas faced by teachers, and varying priorities across cultural and religious settings. Research from Muslim-majority contexts emphasises aligning language instruction with Islamic values, contrasting with Western contexts that often prioritise communicative competence and critical engagement. There is also some tension between

universalist and contextualist approaches. Future research directions emerging from this review include international comparative studies on values education in ELT across cultural settings; longitudinal and discourse-analytic research on how moral values are negotiated in classrooms and materials; and targeted professional development programmes to equip educators with practical strategies and reflective capacities for integrating values education effectively and ethically into language classrooms.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies

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About the authors:

Dr. Osman Erdem Yapar

Dr. Osman Erdem Yapar is an experienced practitioner who has worked in the UK, Turkey and Oman teaching English to adult learners in various higher education institutions. His academic background is in English Language Teaching and distance education. He is currently based in Dhofar University as an Assistant Professor teaching academic English courses as well as carrying out research. His research interests include online learning, teacher training, moral values education, intercultural communication and English language teaching. He has published in these fields which are accessible under his ResearchGate profile.

ORCID: 0000-0002-3400-083X

Dr. Haroun Mohammed Abdullah AL-Balushi

Haroun M. Al Balushi is an English language lecturer at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Oman. He has extensive experience with the Ministry of Education as an English language teacher, supervisor and a senior supervisor. He holds a Master degree in ELT from the European University of Lefke and a Ph.D. from USIM.

ORCID: 0000-0002-0498-847X

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