

A Comparative Analysis of Western and Islamic Humanistic Values in Higher Education

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Abstract: This study explores the integration of Western and Islamic humanistic principles in English language education, focusing on students' perceptions and experiences within Community-Based English Education Programs in Makassar, Indonesia. Grounded in both Kantian ethical philosophy and Islamic educational concepts such as *adab* and *fitrah*, the research investigates how humanistic values such as empathy, ethical responsibility, and community engagement are understood and practiced in a higher education context. Employing a mixed-methods design (QUAN-QUAL), quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire administered to 120 students, followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews with 12 purposively selected participants. Findings reveal that a significant majority of students (72%) view humanistic values as essential in language education, with 75% highlighting empathy as a core pedagogical element and 68% reporting enhanced ethical awareness through community-based learning. Qualitative analysis further uncovered themes of empathetic teaching, ethical role modeling, and the importance of community engagement in shaping holistic learners. These results suggest a growing alignment between students' educational expectations and the philosophical synthesis of Western critical humanism and Islamic ethical pedagogies. The study concludes that English language education in Indonesia can be enriched through a more deliberate integration of humanistic values that prepare learners to be linguistically competent, ethically grounded, and socially responsible.

Keywords: Islamic humanism, Western humanism, education, holistic development, intercultural understanding, ethical reasoning

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, English language education in Indonesia has experienced a significant shift from a purely linguistic-centered approach toward one that increasingly prioritizes the integration of humanistic values and community-based learning. This transformation reflects a growing awareness of the need to cultivate empathy, social responsibility, and cultural understanding alongside language proficiency (Lau & Shea, 2024; Blau, 2024; Kyeongjae et al., 2025). Educators are now encouraged to design lessons that connect linguistic competence with real-world issues, fostering learners' critical thinking and civic engagement (Song et al., 2024; Le et al., 2024; Yaumi et al., 2023).

This shift emerges from a growing recognition that language learning is not simply about developing communicative competence but also about cultivating ethical awareness, empathy, and social responsibility in learners. Such perspectives echo the philosophical views of thinkers like Immanuel Kant (1785), who emphasized the importance of treating individuals as ends in themselves—an idea that has deeply influenced modern humanistic educational theories. In the Indonesian context, this approach resonates with cultural and spiritual traditions that view education as an instrument for moral and communal development.

Despite the relevance of these humanistic and community-oriented paradigms, empirical studies that explore how students perceive and experience these values in English language learning contexts, particularly in higher education, remain limited. This gap is especially prominent in programs that integrate community-based experiences with classroom instruction—like Community-

Based English Education Programs. These programs offer a unique context for examining how humanistic educational values are interpreted and embodied in real-world teaching and learning scenarios.

Based on this background, the present study aims to (1) examine students' perceptions of humanistic values—such as empathy, ethical responsibility, and respect for individuality—in English language education, and (2) explore how community-based learning experiences influence their understanding of language education as a socially grounded and morally guided practice. The importance of this study lies in its potential contribution to the ongoing development of ethical and culturally responsive English language teaching in Indonesia. Through the use of a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how English education can be designed not only to foster linguistic proficiency but also to shape responsible and humane educators.

By aligning classroom instruction with humanistic and community values, this study highlights a promising pedagogical shift that could significantly enhance the relevance, inclusivity, and impact of English language education—both within and beyond the walls of the university.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation of Western humanism is rooted in the Renaissance and Enlightenment traditions, which emphasize reason, individual autonomy, critical inquiry, and the dignity of the person. Classic formulations from thinkers such as Immanuel Kant (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785) give ethical priority to treating humans as ends in themselves, and later humanistic educational theorists (e.g., Rogers, Dewey) translate those ethical commitments into pedagogical practices that foreground learner autonomy, empathy, and experiential learning. Contemporary scholarship continues to highlight how these humanistic principles shape assessment, classroom interaction, and civic aims of schooling—for example, recent work on humanistic approaches in tertiary English instruction stresses formative, learner-centered assessment aligned with human dignity and emotional well-being.

Western Humanistic Values emphasize the inherent dignity, autonomy, and rational capacity of human beings. Rooted in Renaissance and Enlightenment thought, these values emerged from philosophical traditions that highlight reason, critical inquiry, and the development of the individual as a moral and intellectual agent. Thinkers such as Immanuel Kant (1785) argued that humans should be treated as “ends in themselves,” not as means to an end, which laid the ethical foundation for modern humanism. Later educational theorists like John Dewey (1938) and Carl Rogers (1969) translated these philosophical ideals into pedagogy, advocating for experiential and learner-centered approaches that encourage creativity, empathy, and self-actualization. In language education, these principles promote classrooms that respect learners' voices, emphasize democratic participation, and view education as a process of personal and social growth rather than mere skill acquisition.

Islamic Humanistic Values, meanwhile, center on the belief that human dignity and ethical responsibility are derived from divine guidance. Scholars such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1980) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1981) assert that education in Islam is not only about intellectual formation but also about cultivating the moral and spiritual dimensions of the human being. Core concepts like *fitrah* (innate human goodness), *adab* (ethical conduct), and *insān kāmil* (the complete human) define the goal of education as achieving harmony between knowledge (*‘ilm*) and righteous action (*‘amal*). Within this framework, learning becomes an act of worship and moral refinement—integrating intellectual pursuits with compassion, humility, and community service. In contemporary contexts, Islamic humanistic education emphasizes the balance between spiritual values and modern knowledge, aligning moral integrity with intellectual excellence to produce socially responsible and ethically grounded individuals.

Islamic humanism, by contrast, situates human dignity and ethical responsibility within a

theistic and revealed framework. Core concepts such as *fitrah* (innate human disposition), *adab* (moral conduct), and *insân kâmil* (the perfected human) bind knowledge to moral and spiritual ends; thus, education in this tradition is not only cognitive formation but also character and spiritual cultivation. Foundational authors (e.g., al-Attas, Nasr) and contemporary expositions argue that the integration of knowledge (*‘ilm*) with ethical action (*‘amal*) is central to an Islamic pedagogy and that moral formation, community responsibility, and spiritual awareness are non-negotiable aims of schooling. Recent Indonesian and regional literature documents the ongoing reinterpretation of these principles in modern curricula, including moves to combine spiritual formation with contemporary pedagogies.

A growing body of recent empirical studies (2020–2025) explores the possibilities and challenges of bringing Western and Islamic humanistic values into conversation within formal education. Rahman and Abdullah (2021), for instance, demonstrated that inquiry-based English teaching infused with Islamic ethical principles in Indonesian madrasahs enhances students’ empathy and moral reflection, echoing the integrationist spirit observed in the present study. Similarly, Latief and Putri (2022) found that community-based learning grounded in humanistic and Islamic ethics within Southeast Asian universities promotes civic consciousness and a sense of social responsibility—closely aligned with this study’s emphasis on linking language learning with moral and community development. Meanwhile, Yusuf and Karim (2024) designed a hybrid curriculum that merges Western reflective inquiry with Qur’anic moral education, revealing measurable gains in students’ ethical reasoning and intercultural awareness, which parallels the present research’s interest in balancing global and faith-based values. In contrast, Hidayat and Fatmawati (2025) focused on techno-humanistic approaches in Islamic higher education, highlighting digital innovations and ethical digital citizenship—an area that differs from this study’s emphasis on in-person community engagement but complements it through the lens of technology-mediated ethics.

Despite these convergences, a key difference lies in the methodological and contextual scope: while previous studies primarily focused on small-scale implementations or digital adaptations, the current study seeks to move beyond descriptive analysis toward developing a more comprehensive curriculum model that systematically synthesizes Western critical inquiry with Islamic humanistic principles. Both the reviewed studies and this research share a common goal of fostering empathy, ethical awareness, and civic responsibility, yet they diverge in focus—earlier works exploring specific pedagogical experiments, whereas this study aims to contribute a scalable framework for integrative humanistic education in the Indonesian context.

III. METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches (QUAN-QUAL) to investigate students’ perceptions of humanistic values and community engagement in English education. The quantitative phase involved administering a structured questionnaire to 120 students enrolled in English Education and Community-Based Learning Programs at three universities in Makassar. The questionnaire consisted of 20 closed-ended items using a 5-point Likert scale, designed to measure students’ attitudes toward humanistic learning, empathy in teaching, ethical responsibility, and community involvement in language education. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine percentages, means, and frequency distributions.

Following the quantitative phase, the qualitative phase was conducted to deepen the understanding of students’ responses. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a purposive sample of 12 participants selected based on their high engagement in community-based education activities. The interviews aimed to explore themes related to humanistic values, pedagogical empathy, and community impact—identified in the initial survey findings. Data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through thematic analysis to uncover recurring patterns and contextualize the survey results.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, this mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive insight into how students perceive and internalize humanistic and ethical values within the context of English language education, while also highlighting the role of community-based learning in shaping these perceptions.

IV. RESULTS

A. Respondent Profile

A total of 120 students participated in this study from three universities in Makassar offering Community-Based English Education Programs. As shown in Table 1, most respondents were female (65%, $n=78$), while males made up 35% ($n=42$). Regarding academic level, 40% ($n=48$) were in the fourth semester, 35% ($n=42$) in the sixth semester, and 25% ($n=30$) in the eighth semester.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Category	Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	78	65
	Male	42	35
Semester	4th	48	40
	6th	42	35
	8th	30	25
Total Respondents		120	100

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the study's respondents. Out of 120 participants, the majority were female (65%), while males accounted for 35%. In terms of academic level, 40% were fourth-semester students, 35% were in their sixth semester, and 25% were in their eighth semester, indicating a balanced representation across different stages of study.

B. Quantitative Findings

Quantitative data from the questionnaire revealed that students generally showed strong agreement toward the inclusion of humanistic and community-based values in English education. As summarized in Table 2, 72% of respondents agreed that integrating humanistic philosophical principles, such as respect for autonomy and empathy, is essential in language instruction. Meanwhile, 68% reported that participation in community-based programs improved their ethical awareness and social responsibility.

Additionally, 75% of respondents emphasized the importance of empathy as a key pedagogical principle in teaching, while 60% agreed that community engagement should be an integral part of English learning. Finally, 55% of students believed that ethical responsibility should be valued equally with linguistic competence.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of Humanistic and Community-Based Education

Statement	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)	Neutral (%)
Humanistic principles are essential in English education	72	15	13
Community-based learning increases ethical awareness	68	20	12
Empathy is crucial for effective language teaching	75	10	15

English learning should include community engagement	60	25	15
Ethical responsibility equals linguistic competence	55	30	15

The qualitative interviews reinforced the survey results and provided deeper insights into students' experiences and beliefs. Three dominant themes emerged:

1) Empathy as a Pedagogical Core Students highlighted that empathetic interaction between teachers and learners creates a supportive classroom atmosphere. They believed that understanding students' emotions enhances motivation and engagement. One respondent stated, "A teacher who understands our difficulties encourages us to try harder. It makes learning feel more human."

2) Community Engagement Beyond the Classroom Participants reported that community-based projects, such as English teaching in local communities, fostered a sense of belonging and real-world relevance. Many expressed that this approach made them realize that language learning should benefit not only the individual but also society. 3) Ethical Responsibility in Teaching Practice Respondents emphasized that teachers must serve as ethical role models. They associated professionalism in teaching with moral behavior, respect, and sincerity—values that resonate with both Western and Islamic humanistic traditions.

C. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate a strong alignment between student perceptions and the core tenets of humanistic and community-based education, suggesting that the incorporation of these values can significantly enhance the quality and relevance of English language learning within higher education. The majority of participants—72%—acknowledged the importance of embedding humanistic values such as autonomy and respect in the teaching-learning process. This finding aligns with Kant's (1785) argument that education must treat individuals as ends in themselves, valuing their inherent dignity rather than using them as mere instruments of academic achievement. Such ethical considerations remain relevant in modern teaching frameworks, where students are not passive receptors but active contributors to their educational journeys.

The emphasis on empathy as a pedagogical tool, as supported by 75% of respondents, is consistent with Rogers' humanistic theory (1959), which stresses the role of emotional understanding in fostering meaningful learning experiences. Moreover, the theme of emotional connectedness emerging from qualitative data reflects the current trends in English Language Teaching (ELT) research, where teacher empathy is linked to increased student engagement and inclusivity in language classrooms (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

The role of community engagement, as affirmed by 60% of respondents, underscores the relevance of experiential and service-based learning in fostering social and linguistic competencies. This supports Dewey's (1938) belief that education should be grounded in real-life experiences, connecting classroom knowledge with broader social contexts. These findings resonate with more recent studies such as Nguyen (2021), who argues that community-based language education enhances students' sense of belonging and contextual identity, reinforcing their role as active social agents rather than mere learners.

Furthermore, the recognition of ethical responsibility in teaching—as emphasized by 55% of participants—reflects a shift in the perception of English education from a solely cognitive activity toward a broader moral and social enterprise. This corresponds with the growing body of scholarship on ethical ELT, which advocates for a pedagogy that not only teaches language but also cultivates moral values and intercultural awareness (Hawkins, 2022).

Collectively, the integration of quantitative data and qualitative insights suggests that the implementation of humanistic, empathetic, and community-responsive teaching practices may lead to

more holistic language education. This is crucial in the Indonesian context, where education is not only a means of acquiring skills but also a pathway to nurturing ethical citizens rooted in cultural and spiritual values. Consequently, this study provides empirical evidence supporting a pedagogical shift toward a more ethical, reflective, and community-oriented ELT framework—one that honors both Western humanistic principles and local socio-cultural traditions.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a meaningful convergence between Western and Islamic humanistic educational principles within the context of English language teaching in Indonesia. Through mixed-methods analysis, it is evident that students not only value humanistic concepts such as empathy, respect for individual dignity, and community responsibility, but also experience their practical application through participation in community-based learning programs. This convergence underscores the potential for designing an English education curriculum that is both academically rigorous and morally grounded.

The implications of these results extend beyond language proficiency to the broader goal of cultivating responsible and reflective individuals—an educational aim shared by both Kantian and Islamic traditions. The integration of these perspectives, supported by empirical evidence from this study, suggests that humanistic English education can thrive when it embraces intellectual autonomy, ethical formation, and community engagement.

However, for such integration to be sustained and scalable, further curriculum development and longitudinal research are needed. Future studies could examine teacher training processes, assess the long-term impacts of humanistic pedagogy on student character and performance, and explore cross-cultural applications in diverse educational contexts. Ultimately, this study contributes to growing scholarly and practical interest in humanizing English education and reaffirms that ethical and empathetic teaching is not only desirable but essential in shaping the global citizens of tomorrow.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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