

## Learning English Through Islamic Historical Content

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### Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of Content-based Instruction (CBI) for learning English. It was applied to facilitate students in learning English by providing them as much as language exposure on the content of a subject related to their major in Islamic education. The content deals with an Islamic history on the Hijrah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The activities were carried out in 3 major stages. The earlier activities were the vocabulary building and grammatical focus on the use of simple past tense. The second section was learning receptive and productive English skill activities covered reading comprehension, practices on speed reading and reading aloud as well as writing summary. At last, this instruction also revealed and discussed the moral values found in the passage about the Hijrah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

**Keywords:** Content-based Instruction (CBI), Islamic History, English Learning

### Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan menggambarkan penggunaan *Content-based Instruction (CBI)* untuk pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Pendekatan ini diberikan untuk memfasilitasi Mahasiswa dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris dengan input kebahasaan sebanyak mungkin tentang isi dari sebuah mata pelajaran yang berkaitan dengan bidang mereka dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam. Konten dari pembelajaran ini berkaitan dengan Sejarah Islam tentang Hijrahnya Nabi Muhammad SAW. Kegiatan pembelajaran dilaksanakan dalam 3 tahapan utama. Kegiatan awal berkaitan dengan Pembentukan Kosakata dan Fokus pada Aspek kebahasaan *Simple Past Tense*. Tahapan kedua adalah pembelajaran Skill Receptif dan Produktif Bahasa Inggris yang meliputi keterampilan membaca cepat dan pemahaman serta menulis ringkasan cerita. Pada akhir kegiatan, pembelajaran dilakukan refleksi tentang nilai moral yang ada pada isi bacaan tentang sejarah hijrahnya Nabi Muhammad SAW.

**Kata Kunci:** Content-based Instruction (CBI), Sejarah Islam, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris

### Introduction

Learning English can be delivered through various approach and strategy. One of them is by the use of Content-based Instruction (CBI) which gives students opportunities to learn English in integrated purposes and skills. They do not only receive the knowledge and information of a certain content or topic discussed but also acquire and learn the linguistic competence which also accommodate them to have other language learning activities and practices. Richards & Rodgers proposes that CBI deals with second language instruction that

is organized around the content or information that students will acquire, rather than linguistic or type of syllabus<sup>1</sup>. It shows that CBI enhances students to comprehend an informational content and to breakdown or analyze the English as the language acquisition and learning. Therefore, they catch two things in the same time, the first concern is the knowledge of the content and the second one is the language capability related to the content.

In CBI, the language plays a role as the medium of the instruction. As Brown argues that language becomes the medium to convey the informational content of interest and relevance to the learner<sup>2</sup>. It takes on its appropriate role as a vehicle to accomplish a set of content goals. In this case, English facilitates students to catch the information, ideas and knowledge from the passage on the Islamic history about the Hijrah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Students are required to comprehend the content of the passage which covers the main and supporting ideas of each paragraph, detailed or specific information in the passage such as the name of person, place and time signals found in the passage. Besides, they are also fostered to gain some English practices related to the both productive and receptive skills as well as to enrich their vocabulary and recognize the grammatical focus on simple past tense.

The selected content in this instruction is an Islamic history of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The topic of the passage is about the journey of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companion from Mecca to Yastrib or Madinah which is well known in an Islamic term *Al Hijrah*. The passage tells students about the night when Abu Jahl and his people would get rid of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) went to Yathrib for Hijrah. This content is chosen because it relates to students' field of learning which Islamic education. In specific, it explores and exposes students about Islamic historical knowledge and information. this history is also popular for students who study about Islam because it is often told by the teacher especially when the Islamic New Year celebration since the message of the story is also as the momentum of *Hijriyah* Calendar beginning. The passage was adopted from a book entitled *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)*. This book is written by Leila Azzam and Aisha Gouverneur and published by Islamic Text Society.

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<sup>1</sup> JC Richards dan TS Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> HD Brown, *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (San Fransisco: Longman, 2007).

This paper presents and describes the implementation of Content-based instruction (CBI) to learn English. It provides an Islamic historical content in English passages for the first semester students of Islamic Education department at Islamic Institute of Darullughah Wadda'wah. This article aims to discuss on how to integrate the CBI approach into English teaching and learning activities as well as to introduce some examples of practices on the English skills and components.

## **Discussion**

Islamic contents for English learning can be derived from various sources such as proposed by Elfi (2018) who proposes some sources in utilizing Islamic contents can be in the form of Islamic course books, Islamic authentic materials and Islamic song. In this case, the students can learn English skills as well as the Islamic norms. In addition, Saifuddin & Nurcahyani argues that the use of Islamic content learning material tends to ease students' language performance and it is also useful for their Islamic content understanding This paper discusses the integration of Islamic Content-based instruction to learn English in this paper will be drawn in 3 major steps of learning activities<sup>3</sup>. The first step is building the students' English vocabulary and analyzing the grammatical aspect. The next phase is learning the receptive and productive skills, and the last activity is having reflection on the moral values related to the content.

### **1. Vocabulary building and grammatical focus**

At this stage, students were introduced a short text which was adopted from the full passage of the content. There were hidden words that students need to fill in the blanks to complete the paragraph. To help students in order to catch the right answer, they were also provided by random options of the correct words. The short paragraphs and the vocabulary practices can be seen in the following picture.

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<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Saifuddin dan Dwi Nurcahyani, "Developing integrated English learning materials of Islamic content based on instructional analysis: Design-based research," dalam *English Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching in a Changing Era* (International Conference on English Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching (ICE3LT 2018), London: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1201/9780429021039>.

Fill in the blanks

The leaders of Quraysh **1** in the house of their ancestor, Qusayy, as was customary when they had an important decision to make. They had to find a way of getting rid of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), before he **2** able to join his friends in Yathrib. Each leader then **3** to put forward ideas about what should be done, but none of them could agree about which was best, until Abu Jahl **4** them his plan. This was that each clan should provide a strong, young warrior, each of whom would be given a sword. All the young warriors would then wait outside the Prophet's house and together attack him as he **5** out. In this way they would be rid of him but as the blame for killing him would fall on all the clans, the Prophet's family would not be able to seek revenge. The leaders of Quraysh then left to carry out their plan to murder the Prophet (pbuh).

told started came was assembled

DONE

Fill in the blanks

Before the night fell, the Archangel Gabriel came to him and said, 'Do not sleep tonight in your own bed.' The Prophet (pbuh) **6** what was going to happen, so he told Ali to lie in his bed and wrap himself in the blanket that the Prophet (pbuh) normally used, promising that no harm would befall him. With the coming of darkness the young men of Quraysh had **7** outside the Prophet's house, waiting for him to come out. After he had made sure that 'Ali was safe, the Prophet (pbuh) **8** the house. At that very moment Allah **9** away the sight of the warriors so that they could not see the Prophet (pbuh), who took a handful of dust, **10** it on their heads and recited these verses:

"Ya Sin By the Wise Qur'an, Thou art truly among those sent On the straight path; A Revelation of the All-mighty, the All-wise, That thou may warn a people whose fathers were never warned, so they are heedless. The Word has already proved true of most of them, yet they do not believe. Lo! We have put on their necks collars of iron up to the chin, so that they are made stiff-necked. and We have put before them a barrier; and We have covered them so they do not see".(Qur'an 36.1-9)

took gathered understood left sprinkled

DONE

There were two short paragraphs which contain 10 hidden words. In this case, the blank words are related to verbs used for past simple tense as the language focus of this meeting. The words are told, started, came, was, assembled, took, gathered, understood, left, sprinkled. These words were displayed in random order, so that students were required to answer and match it in the correct blank space. The correct answer of vocabulary exercises is 1) assembled, 2) was, 3) started, 4) told, 5) came, 6) understood, 7) gathered, 8) left, 9) took, 10) sprinkled.

After the students were invited voluntarily to answer one by one, then the teacher discussed and gave clarification on the students' answer. Students were also drilled to read and repeat the words in correct pronunciation. After all the hidden words revealed, the students then read aloud the short paragraph. Then the teacher described a brief explanation

about it to deliver some introductory ideas before students had the full passage reading activity in the next phase.

Before going to the reading comprehension of the full passage, students were facilitated some explanation and exercises on the grammatical focus related to the passage. The simple past tense use, formulas and examples were explained to the students. Then they did some practices on the formation of the regular and irregular verbs as well as the practices on sentence transformation from positive, negative, interrogative and WHQ type of sentences. The vocabulary building and grammatical focus learning activities were conducted for one meeting.

## **2. Learning the receptive and productive skills**

The second phase were learning the receptive and productive skills. In this occasion, the receptive skill was reading practice and the productive skill was in the form of writing. Previously, students were given the full passage about *Al Hijrah*, the journey of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) history as their preparation for reading section. The complete passage can be seen in the following paragraphs.

### **Al-Hijrah**

The Breaking of All Connections with One's Home, for the Sake of Allah Alone. After his companions had left for Yathrib, the Prophet (pbuh) stayed in Mecca, waiting for permission from Allah to leave the city. Abu Bakr and Ali stayed with him. There were also some Muslims whom Quraysh had not allowed to leave. Abu Bakr kept asking the Prophet (pbuh) to allow him to go to Yathrib, but the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) kept saying, 'Do not be in a hurry; it might be that Allah will give you a travelling companion.' The leaders of Quraysh assembled in the house of their ancestor, Qusayy, as was customary when they had an important decision to make. They had to find a way of getting rid of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), before he was able to join his friends in Yathrib. As they were busy arguing, the Devil appeared at the door in the form of a noble and handsome old man. When they saw this elderly gentleman standing there, they asked him who he was. He said he was a Shaikh from the mountains who had heard what they meant to do and thought he might be able to help or advise them. They thought he looked like a wise man, so they invited him in.

Each leader then started to put forward ideas about what should be done, but none of them could agree about which was best, until Abu Jahl told them his plan. This was that each clan should provide a strong, young warrior, each of whom would be given a sword. All the young warriors would then wait outside the Prophet's house and together attack him as he came out. In this way they would be rid of him but as the blame for killing him would fall on all the clans, the Prophet's family would not be able to seek revenge.

When he heard this, the Devil in the disguise of the old man, said, 'That man is right; in my opinion it is the only thing to do!' The leaders of Quraysh then left to carry out their plan to murder the Prophet (pbuh).

“And when the unbelievers plot against thee, to confine thee, or kill thee, or to drive thee out, they were plotting, But Allah was (also) plotting; and Allah is the best of plotters”. (Qur'an 8.30)

Before the night fell, on which Muhammad (pbuh) was to be killed, the Archangel Gabriel came to him and said, 'Do not sleep tonight in your own bed.' The Prophet (pbuh)

understood what was going to happen, so he told „Ali to lie in his bed and wrap himself in the blanket that the Prophet (pbuh) normally used, promising that no harm would befall him. With the coming of darkness the young men of Quraysh had gathered outside the Prophet's house, waiting for him to come out. After he had made sure that 'Ali was safe, the Prophet (pbuh) left the house. At that very moment Allah took away the sight of the warriors so that they could not see the Prophet (pbuh), who took a handful of dust, sprinkled it on their heads and recited these verses:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful “Ya Sin By the Wise Qur'an, Thou art truly among those sent On the straight path; A Revelation of the All-mighty, the All-wise, That thou may warn a people whose fathers were never warned, so they are heedless. The Word has already proved true of most of them, yet they do not believe. Lo! We have put on their necks collars of iron up to the chin, so that they are made stiff-necked. and We have put before them a barrier; and We have covered them so they do not see”.(Qur'an 36.1-9)

The young men waited the whole night and were furious when, in the morning, they saw „Ali instead of the Prophet (pbuh) coming out of the house. I They realised that their plan had failed completely. In the meantime, the Prophet (pbuh) went to Abu Bakr's house and told him, 'Allah has told me that now is the time for us to leave Mecca.' 'Together?' asked Abu Bakr. 'Together', the Prophet (pbuh) replied. Abu Bakr wept for joy, because now he knew that the travelling companion he had been promised was the Prophet (pbuh) himself.

Then he said, 'O Messenger of Allah, these are the two camels which I have kept ready for this.' And so, the two of them left for a cave in Thawr, a mountain to the south of Mecca where they intended to hide.

When they were out of the city the Prophet (pbuh) looked back and said, 'Of all Allah's earth, you are the dearest place to Allah and to me and if my people had not driven me out I would never have left you.'

When Quraysh found out that the Prophet (pbuh) and his companion had gone, they set out after them, searching in every direction. Three days later they finally reached the cave where the Prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr were hiding, but a strange and wonderful thing had happened. A spider had woven its web right across the entrance to the cave and a dove was nesting with her mate nearby. As the Meccans stood in front of the cave, with only the spider's web separating them from the fugitives, Abu Bakr began to fear for their safety. He whispered to the Prophet (pbuh), they are very close. If one of them turns we will be seen.' But he was comforted by the Prophet's reply: “What do you think of two who have with them Allah as their third? 'Grieve not, for verily Allah is with us”. (Qur'an 9.40) . After a few moments the search party decided that no one could have entered the cave recently, or the spider's web would not have been complete and the dove would not have nested there, and so they left without searching inside. Three days later the Prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr thought it safe to leave the cave. Abu Bakr's son, 'Amir, had arranged for three camels and a guide to help them continue their journey to Yathrib. 'Amir would ride behind his father. The leaders of Quraysh, meanwhile, returned to Mecca and offered a reward of one hundred camels to whoever captured the Prophet (pbuh). Among those who went in search of him was a famous warrior. He was, in fact, the only one to catch up with him, but whenever he came close, his horse would suddenly sink up to its knees in the sand. When this had happened three times, he understood that the Prophet (pbuh) was protected by a power stronger than anything he had known, and so he went back to Mecca. On arriving there he warned everyone against continuing the search, relating what had happened to him.

“If you do not help him, still Allah has helped him already, When the unbelievers drove him forth, (he second of two, When the two were in the Cave, when he said to his

companion, "Grieve not; surely Allah is with us." Then Allah caused His peace and Reassurance to descend upon him, And helped him with hosts you cannot see, And He made the word of the unbelievers the lowest; While Allah's word is the uppermost; Allah is Almighty, All-wise". (Qur'an: 9.40)

The Prophet's journey from Mecca is called the hijrah, or migration. It was really the first step towards the spread of Islam throughout the entire world, and Muslims begin their calendar from the year of the hijrah<sup>4</sup>

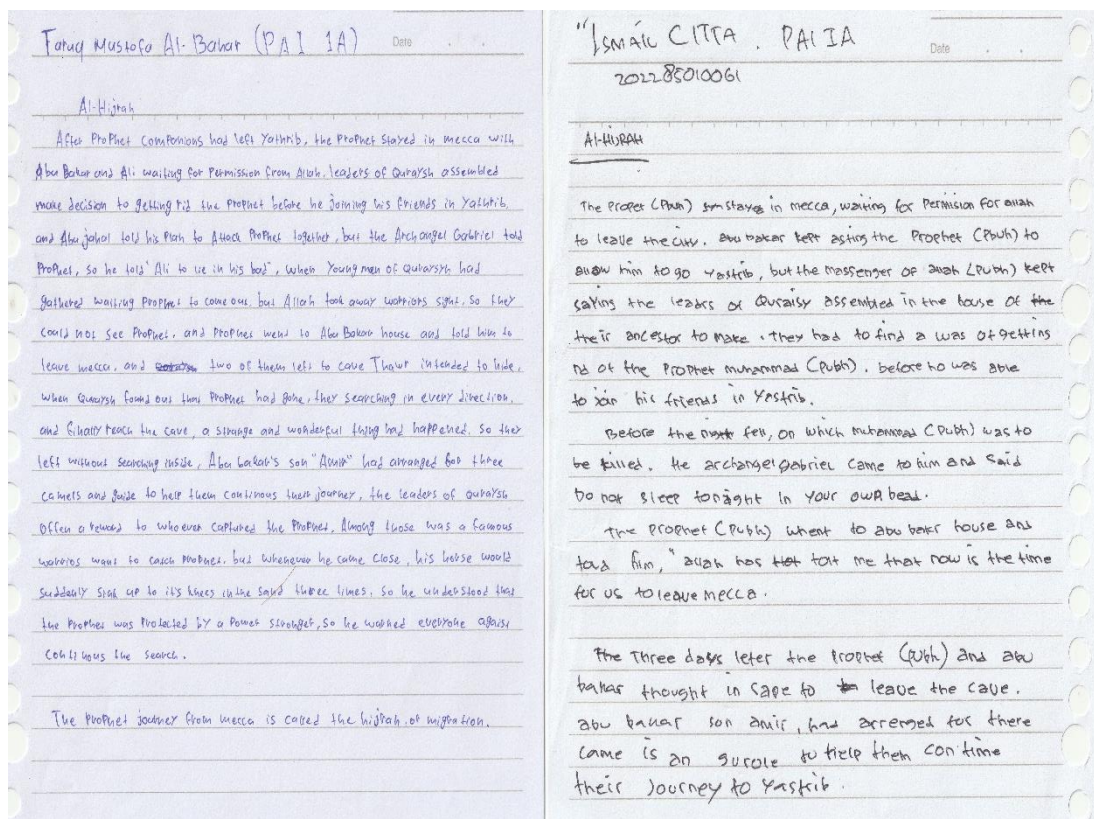
There were two activities for reading, those were speed reading and reading comprehension. Speed reading seemed to be like a brainstorming activity in which students were invited to read in front of the class to read aloud the passage in quick time. The teacher kept the times and students stopped reading when the time was over. The best reading participants were those who could read more paragraphs or sentences in the passage. This activity was conducted to give some joyful learning atmosphere before they had reading comprehension.

In reading comprehension, students were given time to read silently to get the ideas of each paragraph. They were also allowed to discuss with their friends to get different perspectives on what the texts were about. After reading session, students were given some guided questions to check their understanding and comprehension about the passage. These questions could also be the guidelines for writing summary. The guided questions were as follows:

- Answer the following questions based on the passage!
1. Where did the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) go for Hijrah?
  2. Who replaced the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to lie in his bed the night before going Hijrah?
  3. With whom did the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) leave Mecca for Hijrah?
  4. What happened in the entrance of the cave where the the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companion were hiding?
  5. What did the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) take and sprinkle to the warriors before leaving his house?
  6. How was the idea proposed by Abu Jahl to get rid of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)?
  7. What does the word "Grieve Not" mean?
  8. What did the Quraysh do after they found that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companion had gone?
  9. Who arranged for 3 camels and a guide to help the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)and his companion to continue their journey?
  10. What is Hijrah?

<sup>4</sup> Leila Azzam dan Aisha Geuverneur, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)* (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1999).

After reading comprehension had done, then students continued to learn the productive skill which was writing. In this section, students were required to write a summary in their own words about the passage that they had read. The summary was written in a paragraph which consisted 50 to 100 words. The results of the students' writing summary can be seen in the picture below.



### 3. Reflection on the moral values

The last activity was reflection section on the moral values related to the passage that they read. The history of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) when he went to Yathrib for Hijrah were already read and discussed. Then, students were required to find and catch some ideas on the lesson learned from the story. They reflected the values, character, lesson that they could apply in their daily lives especially on what they should do as an Islamic student now after they had comprehended and learned the history. Values are important for students as Septiyana<sup>5</sup>, argues that Reading English Materials on Islamic history can also support the

<sup>5</sup> L Septiyana, "Development of Islamic Text-Based Reading Materials with a Genre-Based Approach," *Pedagogy: Journal of English Language Teaching* 10, no. 2 (2022).



students to improve their English skills as well as to enrich their knowledge and values In this section, students were given two main reflective questions as the picture shows below

### Reflection

Tell your ideas and reflection on the Hijrah moment of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), you can use the guided question below to express your answers!

What have you learned from the Hijrah History of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)?

As a student, what would you like to do to apply the values or lessons that you have learned from the Hijrah moment?

The reflection section was delivered in chain spoken activities. The teacher invited students to raise his hand and express their ideas. In this section, the teacher also shared their point of view on the moral values that were related to the passage about the Hijrah History of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Values on how as human being, it is necessary to believe in God Guidance and help in every single step of our live activities. Besides, the commitment and consistency in doing everything that the God commands as well as to avoid what He forbids. Furthermore, as a weak creation, human should surrender his or her life in any situation with solid faith that Allah is going to send His ways to solve the problem that human being face. Therefore, as an academic, both teacher or students, it is necessary to keep doing the best on what we are responsible for, as well as to seek and ask for Allah's guidance in everything we do and experience in our lives.

### Conclusion

Content-based Instruction (CBI) on Islamic history about the Hijrah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was applied to deliver English learning for the first semester of Islamic Education students of Darullughah Wadda'wah International Islamic University. The activities were divided into three major sections. The first stage was vocabulary building by matching or filling the hidden words in the paragraphs before having the grammatical focus and practice on the use of simple past tense. The second phase was learning the receptive and productive English skills dealing with reading and writing practices which drilled students to have speed reading and reading comprehension, then students wrote a brief summary about the passage through some guided questions. The final activity was having reflection by sharing and discussing the moral values learned from the Hijrah history of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

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