# Teaching English through the Earliest Language Fragment to Students at Islamic High School Miftahul Islah Tembelok Sandubaya District-Mataram

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Sribagus [a]
Sahuddin [b]
Lalu Nurtaat [c]

**Abstract**

Teaching and learning English at all levels of education under Diknas or Depag is still a serious problem. English at the traditional Islamic schools (Madrasah Miftahul Islah Tembelok, in particular) still gives a negative impression, threatening, frightening, boring, difficult, and decreasing learning motivation. So many efforts have been made to increase the professionalism of the teacher/Ustaz such as in-service training, workshop, but show no significant result. This article offers an alternative way out. Successful teaching and learning foreign language should begin from the earliest fragment of language: acquiring vocabularies.

*Author correspondence:*
Sribagus,
Majapahit Street No.62, Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara (83115),
Mataram University – Indonesia
*Email address*: *sribagus@unram.ac.id*

## 1. Introduction

English is one of an essential subjects in Indonesian schools as it is taught from Junior High School level to University level. It is the first foreign language to be taught as a compulsory subject. The unpopular subject of most students is taught twice a week. The teachers of English try hard to teach this subject. It can be seen from their efforts to upgrade their knowledge and teaching skills. All teachers, either junior teachers or senior teachers join several workshops and also training. These efforts seem to be unsuccessful as the students' achievement in many schools were reported less encouraging than the teachers' achievements after joining workshops or training. Conversely, the issues and students' impression of English subject remain the same long before the terms teacher upgrading, workshop, in-service training, etc. exist.

[a] Mataram University, Indonesia
[b] Mataram University, Indonesia
[c] Mataram University, Indonesia

This failure does not fade the spirit of English teachers. They keep trying to improve.  Later, the attention shifted to improving facilities such as language laboratory, library, etc. The effect of this effort does not last long because the students are only interested in physical appearances. It would last for two until three weeks only, after that they would be back to their first mode. It can be said that the government and the teachers' efforts have not reached the target. Unfortunately, the repair of facilities and services only happen to State Schools in the city. Meanwhile, the schools outside the city especially the private schools have to bite their fingers, far from the reality.

The educators, as well as the teachers of English, do not give up because of the failures. They keep trying and the last choice they make is that they focus on what to teach instead of how to teach. War of opinion among language experts and theories from language researcher come to the surface each year as the responses towards this issue. Language experts in the country try to pay attention and follow the results of research from developed countries. It is estimated that there are ten types of learning models that have been adopted through the introduction, workshop, training, and long-term training. The participants enhance their knowledge through various ways such as continuing their education inside the country, joining training or workshop in national and regional level, even going to the bookstores or browsing the internet.

The stakeholders really pay attention towards English as the use of this language is getting massive in the world outside schools. The office workers have been able to use English. Hotel staffs, as well as businessmen, are also demanded to master English skills. Looking at these things, it cannot be denied that English has become the center of attention in schools. It leads the English teachers to search for the best way to teach their students. Schools become the only hope to learn English. So, teachers are given full authority to introduce and to teach English.

What makes it hard to believe is that the fact that the government demands all kinds of schools either under the auspices of National  Education Department or Religious Department, not only public schools but also private schools to have a similar level of English competence. However, the facilities, human resources in this case English teachers are treated differently. It can be seen from what is happening in today's world.

The overall evaluation shows that the emphasis on the strategy "what to teach" aforementioned has not been fully successful. It might be caused by the high demand (students are expected to not only master the abstract concept but also make use of the real situation). It seems that English has not been in the students' hearts, especially for those at the regional level. The strategies and methods only seem to peel the surface of the solid thing, but cannot penetrate into the body. English has not been fully desirable and likable, it still seems to be scaring for students from elementary to university level.

Looking to these facts the writers think there will be no much effect if we as English teachers are too fascinated by strategies, methods, or syllabuses from foreign countries which later make us adopting and trying to apply them in our classroom. Do not blame the results of a thing without knowing what happened in the process. Furthermore, the one who involves in the process is the teacher, the one who knows the students' character and culture, it does not come from other people. If we try to make the process running based on the situation, the outcome will be steady following the process.

This article attempts to suggest that a learning model is adjusted to the learners' ability and local needs. It is true that it cannot be separated from *what* and *how*, but we have to separate our dose from foreign dose which is close to standard dose. Name or level of schools institution may be similar in the whole region of this country, but the quality must be different. School in the city may have similar curriculum and syllabus to the schools in the suburban, however, the indicator of success must be different.

To limit the gap of different ability and skills in English between different schools aforementioned, the writers do a kind of breakthrough leading to the enhancement of students' learning motivation by composting materials and the way to deliver them with the easiest way. It is important to note that learning language cannot happen if the learners are not feeling secure or they are under forced/pressure. It will be useless to teach English to the students who have already had a negative attitude towards the teachers whom they think are frightening. Hence, the writers together with 3 colleagues from Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Mataram University went to Islamic Schools conducting treatment/activities in front of students and teachers to show what to teach and how to teach. The chosen school was a private school in the suburb, Islamic High School NW Miftahul Islah Tembelok, Sandubaya District, Mataram.

The most bothering problems that inhibit students' understanding and skills of English are that their impression, attitude, and interest which are negative. Moreover, the inadequate teaching ability of English teachers compared to those who teach at schools or Islamic schools which meet their needs in terms of physical means, facilities, human resources, and learning environment. Furthermore, student's attitude towards certain subjects also determines the level of success in learning. If someone sees English as a bad language because of the history, he/she is indicated to

be failed on the subject. The negative attitude will affect their interest directly. Their hatred, fear, anti, underestimate, etc. are what that are mostly found in most secondary school level.

Another issue besides attitude is professionalism. The unprofessional teachers will not be able to make their students having maximum achievements in the classroom/school. Professionalism is related to the ability of teachers to attract students' interest towards what is offered/taught. Being a teacher is a seller of goods who have to attract the buyers' interests to see, listen, be fascinated then buy. Teachers are demanded to make the students interested, benign, feeling at home, and being curious. Teachers' ability should be balanced in terms of competencies and performances. Besides, they have to be able to manage and create materials as well as supporting the learning environment.

Teachers at Islamic High School Miftahul Ihlas do not have professional English language teaching certificate. They only have a certificate for teaching Arabic. In short, most teachers here teach multiple subjects. As a consequence, they do not work professionally. They do their job with half ability, half-hearted, and less motivation. These things will definitely affect the learners' motivation for English.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This research employs descriptive qualitative approach focusing on investigating a language phenomenon. The research subject was the students at Islamic High School Miftahul Islah at Sandubaya District, Mataram. The research object was teaching English through the earliest language fragment towards students. Data was collected from the field which means the researchers did the observation and documentation directly from the research site. The data analysis was done carefully through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. The data is presented in both formal and informal way to describe the whole research.

## 3. Results and Discussions

The success and failure of teaching always attract our minds to be either doubt or confident. The level of doubt and confidence cannot be separated from teaching experiences in the field, sharing and discussion with colleagues, or stories from another teacher or information from books or articles journal. There is also an underlying argument with an almost perfect hypothesis. The writers' arguments in this article are the compilation of those.

Mostly, the object of debate on the topic of success and failure in learning language is the teenagers, in this case, the students of Junior High School and Senior High School. It does not merely mean that the adult learners as language learners are not included in this case.

Commonly, many Indonesian schools, either under auspices of National Education Department or Religious Department have been applied a number of methods, approaches, and techniques of English teaching. Government instructs and promote certain methods or techniques to be employed at schools. In an extreme way, it can be said that what to teach and how to teach are nationalized through syllabuses or curriculum standard. Each level has its own syllabus.

Although there are differences, implicitly we can see the similarities that students are demanded to master skills of English. It is the teacher obligated to conduct what the syllabus tells. The government expectation is quite far from reality as schools in national scope do not show similar progress. There comes speculation of why this problem appears. There is "something" behind the case which teachers of English do not want to reveal what really happens out there. Consequently, there is what so called as the final product differs from the evaluation standard known as success and failure.

Most failures of reaching the maximum target of learning happen at schools under auspices the Religious Department. Teachers might have tried their best to apply various techniques and approaches to teach English, however, the maximum outcomes could not be reached because of some factors aforementioned. Hence, the writers attempt to propose basic keywords which might be forgotten to teach the students.

Learning English or any languages must be started from words. Without knowing the words, logically the utterances cannot be formed, either monologue or dialogue. There is no method or approach which will be successful if the students do not have enough vocabularies of the language learned. It is impossible if what the encoder (teacher) delivers cannot be understood by the decoder (student). Moreover, a student as encoder cannot express his/her utterances in English to the addressee (decoder) because of the absence of lexicon.

To build a communication, vocabularies is essentially needed. It cannot be denied that to reach the complex phase of knowledge and skills, we need to start from the lowest level in this case vocabulary when talking about learning a language. This statement is quite relevant to foreign language learners in general.

The language observers, as well as the English teachers, must agree that the smallest fragments that build communication are called vocabulary. Encoder and decoder must be linked with words. Furthermore, the news reporter and the resource person must be in accordance with the words they use. The teachers' explanation would be understood by the students because they share common words that both of them already acknowledged. Those who are confused in communicating their words must be caused by vocabulary or words. Thus, to overcome the problem, it must be begun from the word level.

Victor who was found in the France jungle could not communicate perfectly because he was isolated from the words used during 12 years. Another example is Geni who had been locked up by her father in a dark room in their house during 11 years still could not communicate, although a specialist doctor, Susan Curtis, worked really hard in a long period of time to make her speak. It is caused by the words/vocabularies.

Those 2 cases are the proofs that the smallest language fragment (words) hold essential role to express thought or desire of a speaker to the addressee. A good discourse might be in chaos if the user chooses the wrong words, so does with the sentence.

Although we already have the words to say, the problems to communicate still exist. According to the linguists' view, we can still communicate although our words are in chaos or the words cannot be expressed perfectly, or our words are morphologically defective. However, communication often completely failed if we do not use appropriate words. Although the circumlocutory and gestures can take over the role, still the essential functions of the words cannot be ignored.

> "... We can communicate by using words that are not placed in the proper order, pronounced perfectly, or marked with the proper grammatical morphemes, but communication often breaks down if we do not use the correct word. Although circumlocution and gestures can sometimes compensate, this importance of vocabulary can hardly be overestimated" (Patsy Lightbown & Nina Spada, 2013)

Robin & Thomson (1994) state the vocabulary mastery is an essential part of learning a foreign language. "One cannot speak, understand, read or write a foreign language without knowing a lot of words. Vocabulary learning is the heart of mastering a foreign language". Furthermore, Read (2000) in Lestary (2015) agrees with the aforementioned statement by Robin and Thomson, here is the statement:

> "Vocabulary is one of the essential language components in studying English. It is necessary for the sense that words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which large structures such as sentences, paragraphs, and whole texts are found"

Furthermore, Jill Hadfield & Charles Hadfield (2008) emphasize that vocabulary must be learned as well as the other elements of English.

> "Language learning is an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. And examples of language learning include memorizing new vocabulary, initiating conversations with native speakers, and grammar"

Mehta (2009), a language teacher in Institute of Chartered Accountants of India surely explains that vocabulary mastery is positioned in the first place to acquire language and to reach the goal, sufficient practices are needed.

> "Vocabulary is the first and foremost important step in language acquisition. ... language learning can be made interactive and interesting with the introduction of appropriate vocabulary exercises"

Moreover, vocabulary mastery is so essential that to learn it teachers' involvement is needed to help the students reach it.

> "Vocabulary is a necessary ingredient for all communication. Language learners encounter vocabulary on a daily basis and must be able to acquire and retain it. As a language teacher, one of your main tasks is to help students develop a rich and useful vocabulary inventory".

> http://coerll.utexas.edu/methods/modules/vocabulary/01/teaching.php,retrieved19/1/2015

Based on previous research, there is new paradigm appear which states vocabulary is more needed to build communication instead of the other language elements.

"For years, the popular methodology for learning a second language was to focus on grammar and sentences first and then on vocabulary. Recently, however, there has been a shift toward recognition that learning vocabulary first leads to more success. Having a base of vocabulary to draw from makes learning grammar and sentence structure easier". http://www.transparent.com/white-papers/second-language.html retrieved 11/5/2015

Based on an argument which states an essential thing in teaching and learning English is the vocabulary, then we have to determine and group the vocabularies based on the context to be used in teaching and learning. So, the skill of teachers in determining which vocabularies to be used is so much important. Teachers have to distinguish which vocabularies are categorized as urgent, survival, basic, and contextual. However, teachers have to note that the vocabulary must be proper with the students' level and to decide which ones to give for the next session.

"Vocabulary can be divided into two types, e.g. active vocabulary and passive vocabulary. Active vocabulary consists of those words over which one can use in his speech and writing. Active vocabulary refers to the productive side of language. It consists of the words one uses confidently because he understands their meanings and usage. Passive vocabulary consists of the words, the meaning of which can be understood when they appear in speech or writing of others but which we cannot use in our own speech and writing because we are not fully familiar with them. (Gogoi, 2015).
"When you say you know a word or phrase, you could mean one of two things. First, you could mean that if someone says the word to you, you know what it means. This is passive knowledge. The second way of knowing is that you can recall and use that vocabulary appropriately. This is active knowledge. This isn't anything to do with an active or passive voice in grammar. It's about how you store your memory of a word for later use, and there's a large, important difference.
With passive vocabulary, you can listen and understand. Hearing the vocabulary used prompts you to recall its meaning. In other words, you are being made to recall it. So it's passive vocabulary.

Active vocabulary, on the other hand, is vocabulary that you can recall and use at will when the situation requires it. You are choosing to use the word and actively retrieving it from memory". https://eastasiastudent.net/study/active-passive-vocabulary/retrieved13/1/2017
What is active and passive vocabulary? A learner's passive vocabulary is the words that they understand but doesn't use yet. Active vocabulary, on the other hand, is the words that learners understand and use in speaking or writing. http://blog.thelinguist.com/active-and-passive-vocabulary, Rretrieved 13/1/2017

After choosing which materials to teach, the teachers have to choose the simplest strategy or method to be used. Simple does not mean short, but easy to apply and successful, although it only needs a bit of effort. The fact is that there is no teaching method categorized as the best one in the teaching world. During this time, the indicator of a good teaching method is claimed based on its success. To note that there is no unsuccessful method. The standard is on how effective or efficient that method is.

Related to the materials selection in terms of teaching, teaching vocabulary must come first then the other elements may follow (if it is necessary), here are some techniques to teach vocabulary to students:

1. Visual Technique: In teaching vocabulary, there are visual techniques, verbal technique, and translation. The visual technique is where reality or picture as media to teach vocabulary, especially in elementary school. The verbal technique is teacher gives explanation through speech. Giving example, giving an illustration, giving definition are ways in verbal technique. And translation is where the teacher translates vocabulary into the mother tongue (Campille, 2002). Campille emphasizes that difficult words are taught to the students by using visual aids such as pictures. Teachers are showing the picture while giving the translation meaning of the word represented by the picture. This technique seems to be basic, but it may avoid misinterpretation.

2. Key Strategies: Some of the key strategies to unfold the information and meaning of a new word to a class are as follows: Definitions, antonyms, synonyms, dramatization, picture and drawings, Realia, reading the word (Mehta, 2009), The Internet TESL Journal, vol.xv, no.3, March, http://itslj.org/Techniques/mehta-Vocabulary.html,retrieved5/1/2015
   There is an emphasis here, if the antonym or synonymy make the students thinking too hard or too abstract that will result on misinterpretation, teachers can make use of dramatization (e.g. verbs) or by using realia (if there is no picture prepared).

3. Repeat: Nation (2001: 80) argues that vocabulary words must be repeated in different contexts because contexts-of-use are associated with different cognitive processes during languagelearning.http://coerll.utexas.edu/methods/modules/vocabulary/01/teaching.php,retrieved19/1/2015
   The use of repetition is meaningful as new words of a foreign language are slightly different from the students' first language. The teachers have to introduce the words carefully with repetition. Moreover,

teachers need to pay attention to the way to pronounce the words in order to avoid misunderstanding of the meaning.

4. Direct and indirect vocabulary teaching: Most researchers and vocabulary experts believe that the best methodology employs both direct and indirect teaching and provides opportunities for both receptive and productive learning to occur. Thus, vocabulary teaching can fit into any course that involves language learning, not just reading or language arts classes. https://www.zaner-bloser.com/news/research-behind-importance-teaching-vocabulary,retrieved 5/1/2015.

New vocabularies can be introduced in any subjects, not only English. Memorizing the words separated from the text is not suggested. However, learning new words in an integrative way may help because they may appear on the other subjects, not limited in English.

5. Multiple exposures in multiple contexts: " ... There is a great improvement in vocabulary when students encounter vocabulary words often (National Reading Panel, 2000). According to Stahl (2005), students probably have to see a word more than once to place it firmly in their long-term memories. This does not mean mere repetition or drill of the word but seeing the word in different and multiple contexts. http://www.readingrockets.org/article/teaching-vocabulary, retrieved19/1/2015.

The more frequent the words are used or seen, the quicker they will be memorized and last in the students' long-term memory. They can find them when reading texts. They also listen to them when the teachers use them in short or simple conversation. Importantly, the students can see it every day on the wall or wall magazine.

## 4. Conclusion

The success of teaching and learning a foreign language does not always come from a method or teaching technique. It is a big mistake for language teachers in elementary or secondary level to follow completely what other teachers in other places use and do. The success and failure of learning are the difference in each school in the world. Environment, culture, tradition, interest, and children motivation in learning English cannot be generalized. If every student or every school has a similar problem, then the solution for all school will be similar, however, the reality is different.

The method is frequently claimed to be a defining factor to determine the success of teaching and learning English in schools. This claim is not fully wrong, however, a method is not the only factor determining a successful learning. Teachers in the more advanced schools which have complete facilities might not work really hard and they may also employ simple teaching method or technique. In the other schools, teacher might also combine various methods or techniques to get the better results. Meanwhile, in Islamic Boarding Schools, teachers are not only demanded to choose appropriate teaching methods or techniques but also demanded to materials selection to teach.

Learning model and materials which produce expected outcomes come from those who teach learning material in form of the earliest language fragment, in this case, the vocabulary. So, by showing something easy to the students, it can attract their interests, later they can be given the concept. On the other words, teachers show something in the real form to the students (materials in form of vocabulary), then the teacher will explain how to make the meaning. This is how the concept of what to teach followed by how to teach works. Furthermore, the students' ability will develop unconsciously through the process. The final outcomes in form of ability or English skills are determined by the school standard, not from another school standard.

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**Biography of Authors**

Drs. Sribagus, M. A. was born in Teruai, Central Lombok on December 31st, 1957. He finished his Elementary to Secondary School level in Central Lombok. In 1983, he pursued his undergraduate study in IKIP Malang majored in English Education Program. He obtained his Master degree in Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia in 1995. He is currently a permanent lecturer in English Education Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mataram University.
*Email: sribagus@unram.ac.id*

Drs. L. Sahuddin, M. A. was born in East Lombok on December 31st, 1959. He finished his Elementary to Junior High School level in East Lombok. Then he pursued his Senior High School level in Islamic High School Mataram. In 1986 he continued his undergraduate study in English Education Program, Mataram University. He obtained his M.A. degree in Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia in 1997. He served as the Head of Language Center Mataram University for several years and currently teaching in English Education Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mataram University.
*Email: sahuddin@unram.ac.id*

Drs. Lalu Nurtaat, M. A. was born in Rebile, Central Lombok on August 13th, 1964. He finished his Elementary to Secondary School level in his homeland, Central Lombok. In 1987, he pursued his undergraduate study in Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mataram University, majored in English Education Program. He obtained his Master degree at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. He currently serves as a permanent lecturer in English Education Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mataram University.
*Email: lalunurtaat@unram.ac.id*

*Sribagus, -, Sahuddin, -, & Nurtaat, L. (2017). Teaching english through the earliest language fragment to students at Islamic High School Miftahul Islah Tembelok Sandubaya District-Mataram. International Research Journal of Engineering, IT & Scientific Research, 3(4), 126-133. https://sloap.org/journals/index.php/irjeis/article/view/558*