The Implementation of Cambridge Curriculum in Islamic School for English Language Learning: A Systematic Literature Review

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Article Info	Abstract
	This study aims to synthesize recent research on how Islamic schools in Indonesia integrate the Cambridge Curriculum into English language learning. In response to growing demands for internationally aligned education, these schools have begun adapting Cambridge-based instruction while maintaining religious and national frameworks. Using the PRISMA approach, eight peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2022 and 2025 were selected and analyzed thematically. The review finds that Islamic schools generally employ a hybrid model that aligns Cambridge content with national standards and Islamic values. Studies consistently report improvements in students' English proficiency and classroom engagement. However, recurring challenges appear, including limited teacher preparation, insufficient contextualized materials, and resource constraints. Schools have responded with initiatives such as bridging programs and targeted professional development, though their effectiveness varies. The novelty of this review lies in its specific focus on Cambridge Curriculum implementation within Islamic school settings—a context seldom explored in earlier literature. Rather than detailing every instructional technique, the synthesis highlights broader patterns of adaptation and institutional response. The review suggests that the core issue is not curriculum adoption itself, but how schools interpret and adjust it to fit their pedagogical, cultural, and religious environments.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, schools are expected to prepare learners for both local and global demands. For Islamic schools in Indonesia, this responsibility carries an additional layer: strengthening students' religious identity while enabling them to participate in internationally oriented academic pathways. One approach that has gained traction is the adoption of the Cambridge Curriculum in English language learning, particularly as national reforms such as *Kurikulum Merdeka* create more space for flexible and internationally aligned instruction.

Although the Cambridge Curriculum is often praised for its communicative and inquiry-based orientation, its integration into faith-based schools presents unique questions. Existing studies show that Islamic schools attempt to combine international standards with religious and cultural expectations, yet the literature remains fragmented and varies widely in context and method. Rather than providing a coherent understanding of how Cambridge-based English instruction is adapted, the current body of research offers isolated descriptions with little synthesis across cases.

These gaps indicate that two issues remain insufficiently understood: how Islamic schools operationalize Cambridge-aligned English instruction within their institutional and religious frameworks, and what patterns emerge regarding outcomes such as language proficiency, student engagement, and organizational alignment. The recurring references to curriculum hybridization suggest a broader trend, but the mechanisms, constraints, and variations of this process have not been systematically examined.

To address this gap, this study synthesizes peer-reviewed empirical research on the implementation of the Cambridge Curriculum in Indonesian Islamic schools. The review aims to clarify how schools adapt the curriculum, what forms of pedagogical and institutional negotiation occur, and what results have been documented across different contexts.

Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Islamic schools in Indonesia implement the Cambridge Curriculum for English language learning?
2. What adaptation strategies are reported in the literature?
3. What outcomes are identified in terms of student learning and institutional alignment?

This focused synthesis seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how global English language frameworks interact with the values and realities of Islamic schooling in Indonesia, offering a foundation for more informed educational policy and practice.

2. Method

This systematic review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to identify, screen, and synthesize empirical studies on the implementation of the Cambridge Curriculum in Islamic schools in Indonesia.

Search Strategy

A structured Boolean search was conducted across two major indexing platforms: Garuda and Google Scholar. The search used combinations of the following keywords:

- *"Cambridge Curriculum" AND "English"*
- *"Cambridge Curriculum" AND "Islamic school"*
- *"Dual curriculum" AND "Indonesia"*
- *"Cambridge English" AND "implementation"*

Searches were limited to peer-reviewed empirical articles published between 2022 and 2025, written in English or Indonesian.

Screening Procedure

The screening process followed four steps consistent with PRISMA:

1. **Identification** – All records retrieved from both databases were exported and duplicates were removed.
2. **Title Screening** – Articles clearly unrelated to curriculum implementation or English instruction were excluded.
3. **Abstract Screening** – Articles were screened for relevance to Islamic school settings or Cambridge-based English learning.
4. **Full-Text Screening** – Only studies providing empirical data on implementation, adaptation strategies, or learning outcomes were retained.

From the initial search pool, studies were progressively reduced until eight articles met all eligibility criteria. The PRISMA flow diagram (presented as Figure 1 in the Results section) visually summarizes this process.

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included if they:

1. examined Cambridge Curriculum implementation related to English learning,
2. were conducted in Indonesian Islamic schools or schools with comparable religious-based frameworks,
3. used empirical data (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods),
4. were peer-reviewed.

Studies were excluded if they:

1. discussed Cambridge Curriculum only conceptually,
2. focused solely on non-Islamic international schools,
3. examined subjects other than English,
4. were these, editorials, or conference abstracts.

Quality Appraisal

To ensure credibility, each article underwent quality appraisal using three criteria adapted from established CASP standards:

1. **Methodological clarity** – clear research design, data collection, and analysis procedures.
2. **Transparency of implementation context** – explicit description of school type, curriculum model, and participants.
3. **Reliability of findings** – coherence between data presented and conclusions drawn.

Articles that scored low in any of these core areas were excluded.

A second reviewer independently checked a sample of the appraisals to enhance inter-review reliability, with discrepancies resolved through discussion.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Relevant information from each selected article was extracted using a structured data extraction matrix that included:

1. study setting and school type,
2. form of Cambridge Curriculum adoption,
3. adaptation or contextualization strategies,

4. challenges reported,
5. learning and institutional outcomes.

A thematic synthesis approach was then applied. Coding began with descriptive labels—for example, *"hybrid curriculum model"*, *"teacher training needs"*, and *"student engagement changes"*. These codes were grouped into broader analytical themes such as curriculum alignment**,** pedagogical adaptation**,** institutional constraints**,** and learning gains**.**

Final themes were compared across studies to identify recurring patterns and contextual variations.

3. Result

This section presents the synthesized findings from eight empirical studies published between 2022 and 2025 on the implementation of the Cambridge Curriculum in Islamic schools in Indonesia. The themes reported below reflect patterns consistently identified across the studies, with frequency indicators showing how many studies contributed to each theme.

Summary of Included Studies

Comparative Overview of Eight Studies

Focus	Key Contexts/Schools	Main Findings
Curriculum implementation	8 studies across Islamic primary and secondary schools	Hybrid use of Cambridge + national curriculum; selective subject-based adoption
Adaptation strategies	Reported in 7 studies	Contextualization with Islamic values; bilingual scaffolding; bridging programs
Instructional approaches	Reported in 6 studies	Inquiry-based learning; project-based activities; digital tool integration
Academic outcomes	Reported in 5 studies	Increased English proficiency; higher engagement; stronger assessment performance
Implementation challenges	Reported in all 8 studies	Teacher readiness, materials gaps, variation in student proficiency
Institutional responses	Reported in 6 studies	Teacher training, Excellent Class programs, curriculum workshops

This summary table consolidates the recurring patterns from the eight articles without reproducing each study individually.

Patterns Identified in the Literature

1. Contextual and Adaptive Implementation (7 studies)

Most schools implement a **hybrid model** that blends Cambridge standards with the *Kurikulum Nasional* or *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This pattern appears consistently across cases, though the degree of integration varies. Common adaptations include limiting Cambridge to core subjects—primarily English, with occasional extension to Mathematics and Science—and embedding Islamic perspectives into lesson contexts. Variation appears in how deeply schools integrate Cambridge elements: some emphasize assessment standards; others emphasize instructional methods.

2. Alignment with Institutional Vision (6 studies)

Schools adopting Cambridge generally share a strategic aim: combining global competence with Islamic identity formation. Several studies—especially those examining Al-Azhar and MTsN-based institutions—highlight explicit mission statements linking English proficiency with moral and spiritual development. However, the intensity of this alignment varies: urban private Islamic schools tend to articulate this dual vision more explicitly than rural public Islamic schools.

3. Instructional Strategies (6 studies)

Across studies, teachers employ student-centered pedagogies, including inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and bilingual scaffolding. Digital tools appear in more resource-rich schools. Bridging programs are reported in three studies as a transitional mechanism for students unfamiliar with English-medium instruction. Although the strategies are similar, the extent of implementation depends heavily on teacher training and infrastructure.

4. Academic Outcomes (5 studies)

Five studies report improved English proficiency, higher classroom engagement, and better standardized test performance for students exposed to Cambridge-based instruction. However, one study notes that gains are uneven where students enter with low English proficiency or limited home support. Thus, while positive effects are common, they are not uniform across contexts.

5. Implementation Challenges (8 studies)

All eight studies identify multiple constraints:

1) **Teacher readiness**—insufficient training in Cambridge pedagogy
2) **Material alignment**—lack of Islamic-contextualized Cambridge resources
3) **Student proficiency gaps**—especially in underfunded or rural schools
4) **Limited instructional time**—difficulty balancing dual curricula

These challenges are consistent and recurrent, suggesting structural rather than isolated issues.

6. Institutional Responses (6 studies)

Schools respond with a range of initiatives:

1) **Professional development programs** (reported in 5 studies)
2) **Excellent Class tracks for high performers** (reported in 3 studies)
3) **Curriculum contextualization workshops** (reported in 4 studies)
4) **Participation in global assessments** such as Cambridge Checkpoint (reported in 2 studies)

These responses vary by resources: private Islamic schools generally report richer institutional innovations.

Interpretation of Findings

Across the eight studies, the Cambridge Curriculum emerges as feasible for Islamic schools when contextualized and supported by adequate teacher preparation. The patterns show consistent strengths—improved English outcomes and higher engagement—and consistent barriers related to teacher capacity and material alignment. Variations across contexts indicate that successful implementation is contingent on institutional resources and coherent curricular vision rather than the curriculum model alone.

These synthesized findings provide a consolidated understanding of how Islamic schools negotiate global curriculum frameworks within faith-based educational environments, advancing both practical and theoretical insights into curriculum hybridization in Indonesia.

4. Discussion

The review indicates that the integration of the Cambridge Curriculum in Islamic school settings produces a distinctive model of curriculum hybridization—one that does not merely juxtapose international standards with local religious mandates, but actively negotiates meaning between them. Rather than reiterating the empirical findings, the key implication is that Islamic schools demonstrate a form of *curricular mediation* in which global academic benchmarks are filtered through faith-based norms, linguistic contexts, and institutional histories. This process refines existing theories of international curriculum integration by showing that religious schools do not fit neatly into conventional "global vs. local" binaries. Instead, they enact what the literature increasingly describes as *purpose-driven glocalization*, where international frameworks are deliberately reshaped to serve moral, communal, and spiritual aims.

Compared with non-Islamic schools implementing the Cambridge Curriculum—where adaptation generally focuses on language proficiency, technological readiness, and alignment with national assessments—Islamic schools face an additional layer of negotiation. The need to harmonize Cambridge learning materials with Islamic values compels these institutions to invest more heavily in culturally responsive pedagogy and teacher mediation. While both school types engage with inquiry-based and technology-integrated learning, Islamic schools tend to embed these innovations within character formation agendas, illustrating how international curricula can be recontextualized in environments where moral education is central rather than peripheral.

Several structural constraints, however, temper the transformative potential of this integration. Teacher readiness remains uneven, especially in mastering English-medium instruction and in adapting Cambridge learning materials to faith-based contexts. Resource limitations—ranging from the availability of digital tools to the suitability of textbooks—further shape implementation quality. The evidence base also suggests that institutional leadership plays a decisive role: schools with a coherent vision that links global competencies with Islamic values navigate the tensions of dual curricula more effectively than those adopting the program for market-driven reasons.

Limitations

This review has three key limitations. First, it draws on only eight studies, which narrows the generalizability of the conclusions. Second, the evidence is heavily concentrated in Indonesia, limiting insights into how Islamic schools in other cultural contexts negotiate the Cambridge framework. Third, potential publication bias may be present, as available studies tend to highlight successful models, with less documentation of failed or incomplete implementations.

Policy Recommendations

Policymakers and school leaders can strengthen implementation by:

1. investing in targeted teacher training, particularly in English-medium pedagogy and culturally responsive instruction;
2. supporting the development and localization of learning materials that bridge Cambridge competencies with Islamic moral content; and
3. ensuring adequate resource provisioning, especially digital infrastructure, to sustain inquiry-based and technology-enhanced learning.

Future Research Directions

Future scholarship would benefit from longitudinal studies that trace how students in Islamic Cambridge schools negotiate identity, character development, and intercultural competence over time. Comparative research is also needed—both between Islamic and non-Islamic Cambridge schools and among Islamic schools in different countries—to uncover variations in adaptation strategies, leadership models, and student outcomes. Such studies would deepen theoretical understanding of how global curricula evolve when embedded in values-based educational environments.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review concludes that the implementation of the Cambridge Curriculum in Islamic schools offers both promise and complexity. It demonstrates that international education frameworks can coexist with faith-based systems when supported by adaptive strategies, strong institutional leadership, and ongoing professional development. While Islamic schools in Indonesia have made considerable progress in integrating the Cambridge Curriculum, challenges related to teacher qualifications, resource availability, and cultural contextualization remain pressing.

The review highlights that successful implementation is not merely a matter of curriculum adoption but requires strategic alignment between vision, pedagogy, and values. Islamic schools that have embraced innovation such as Excellent Class programs, English bridging courses, and digital platforms serve as promising models for others. However, to achieve a holistic educational experience, further efforts are needed to ensure that global competencies are cultivated without compromising religious identity. In closing, this review offers valuable implications for educators, curriculum planners, and policymakers who aim to develop culturally grounded yet globally oriented educational models. The experience of Islamic schools implementing the Cambridge Curriculum suggests that global education can be inclusive, equitable, and responsive when adapted with sensitivity, purpose, and vision.

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