

Harmonizing Standards: Implementation and Learning Challenges in a Dual-Curriculum System

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Abstract:

This research aims to describe the Cambridge Curriculum integration model at MTsN 6 Malang and identify challenges encountered during implementation. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, with data collection through interviews and classroom observations involving the Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs and International Class Program (ICP) teachers. Findings reveal that State Islamic Yunior High School (MTsN) 6 Malang adopts a selective-adaptive integration model by combining three core subjects—Mathematics, Science, and English—aligned with the national curriculum. Teaching employs a bilingual approach, using English as the primary instructional medium and incorporating active learning strategies to promote critical thinking and communicative skills. The assessment system integrates national standards with Cambridge Checkpoint to maintain academic consistency. Major challenges include students' readiness to comprehend foreign-language materials. The institution addresses these issues through English matriculation programs. This study provides empirical insights into how Islamic schools integrate international curricula while upholding religious and national values.

Keywords: Curriculum integration, Cambridge curriculum, Islamic education, bilingual learning

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum integration has emerged as a significant innovation in modern educational systems, including Islamic educational institutions such as *madrasahs*. This concept seeks to combine various educational elements—ranging from content, methods, and assessment to local values—into a cohesive, mutually supportive framework. The objective is to create holistic, contextual, and relevant learning that meets both learner needs and global demands. Curriculum integration enables learners to connect various cross-disciplinary concepts meaningfully, ensuring they not only memorize knowledge but understand its relevance to real-world contexts. This approach also strengthens students' critical thinking, reflective, and collaborative capabilities in facing the complexities of the modern world (Drake & Reid, 2018; Kumar, 2025)

Within the *madrasah* context, curriculum integration holds broader significance as it involves efforts to harmonize Islamic values with general knowledge and global competencies. *Madrasahs* are challenged to maintain their religious identity while remaining adaptive to twenty-first-century educational paradigm shifts—including digital literacy, project-based learning, and strengthening spiritual character through Islamic religious education (Amirudin, Muzaki, & Nurhayati, 2025). The primary challenge in *madrasah* integration lies in teachers' ability to translate curriculum into contextual and innovative learning practices (Malizal, 2025). Additionally, this process requires institutional support, flexible policies, and adequate learning facilities to support multidisciplinary and active approaches (Putri & Abdullah, 2024).

State Islamic Yunior High School (MTsN) 6 Malang exemplifies a *madrasah* taking strategic steps through implementing a selective-adaptive curriculum integration model. This *madrasah* not only adjusts curriculum content to global standards but also emphasizes the importance of local, Islamic, and nationalist values throughout its learning processes (Moslimany, Otaibi, & Shaikh, 2024). Implementation of the International Class Program (ICP) demonstrates how integration is systematically conducted—from student selection stages to implementing dual assessment systems combining national and international standards. Such integration models can enhance students' global competencies without diminishing the *madrasah*'s Islamic identity. Islamic education integration in modern curricula can shape religious character alongside twenty-first-century competencies needed in the Society 5.0 era (Dayusman, 2023). Thus, curriculum integration represents not merely administrative innovation but a paradigmatic transformation in building excellent, adaptive, and highly competitive Islamic education.

This study addresses the aforementioned research gap by providing empirical insights into the actual implementation processes of Cambridge Curriculum integration within an Islamic educational institution. Specifically, this research contributes to the literature by: (1) documenting the operational mechanisms of selective-adaptive integration in a *madrasah* context, including student selection procedures, bilingual teaching strategies, and dual assessment systems; (2) identifying context-specific challenges faced by Islamic schools in implementing international curricula, particularly linguistic readiness and teacher pedagogical competencies; and (3) analyzing institutional strategies employed to maintain equilibrium between global academic excellence and Islamic educational values. By examining MTsN 6 Malang as a representative case, this study offers practical frameworks that can inform policy makers and educational practitioners seeking to enhance *madrasah* competitiveness in the global educational landscape without compromising religious and national identity. Thus, curriculum integration represents not merely administrative innovation but a paradigmatic transformation in building excellent, adaptive, and highly competitive Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design focused on MTsN 6 Malang to deeply explore how Cambridge curriculum implementation operates within the madrasah context. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the vice principal for curriculum affairs as a key informant, given their position and responsibilities are relevant in explaining institutional policies and the adaptation process of international curriculum at the madrasah level. Sampling was purposive, selecting informants with direct knowledge and experience regarding implementation, with interviews audio-recorded and then literally transcribed (Johnson & Christensen, 2024)

The qualitative approach used in this research provides a strong foundation for understanding the dynamics of Cambridge Curriculum implementation at MTsN 6 Malang more deeply. Through interviews and exploring respondents' personal experiences, researchers can capture reality as experienced by the madrasah in running the curriculum integration program. This approach enables researchers to explore views, practices, and challenges emerging from program implementers' actual experiences. Therefore, discussion of curriculum integration in the following section derives from these qualitative findings, so the presented description is not only descriptive but also reflects meanings growing from informants' authentic field experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Efforts to strengthen educational quality at MTsN 6 Malang cannot be separated from the dynamics of implementing innovative programs previously discussed. Various findings regarding learning strategies, classroom management, and student readiness show this madrasah continuously adapts to modern educational demands. At this point, curriculum integration becomes an important foundation, functioning as a framework uniting all ongoing learning processes. Therefore, the following section more directly describes how this integration is designed and implemented, specifically through combining Cambridge Curriculum with the national curriculum as an institutional response to academic needs, global competencies, and Islamic character that forms the madrasah's identity.

Curriculum Integration at MTsN 6 Malang

Curriculum integration is an approach combining various educational components such as content, methods, assessment, and subjects into a unified, interconnected whole. The primary purpose of this integration is creating holistic, contextual, and relevant learning that meets learner needs and global challenges (Koul & Nayar, 2021; Moslimany et al., 2024). Curriculum integration helps connect concepts across disciplines so students can understand connections between theory and practice in real life. Integration models can take multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, or selective-adaptive forms, where schools select and adapt elements from national or

international curricula according to their local context (Morales, 2025; Mustadi & Junaidi, 2024)

Implementation of the International Class Program (ICP) at MTsN 6 Malang begins with a rigorous selection process to ensure students' academic and psychological readiness. This selection process consists of three main stages: initial academic tests, English language proficiency interviews, and emotional and learning readiness interviews. These stages are designed to assess not only cognitive intelligence but also students' affective readiness and communication in facing an international curriculum demanding independence, critical thinking abilities, and English proficiency. Initial academic tests aim to measure students' basic capabilities in science, mathematics, and language—core subjects in the Cambridge curriculum. Meanwhile, English proficiency interviews assess fluency, comprehension, and students' confidence in using English as the instructional language. The final stage, emotional and learning readiness interviews, focuses on assessing motivation, mental resilience, and adaptation abilities to learning environments different from regular classes.

MTsN 6 Malang implements a selective-adaptive integration model, with only three main subjects using Cambridge Curriculum: Mathematics, Science, and English. Selection of these three fields is based on strategic considerations that these subjects play important roles in developing students' critical thinking, logical, and global literacy abilities. This integration program is packaged in the International Class Program (ICP) focused on grades VII and VIII, while grade IX is still in preparation stages toward Cambridge Checkpoint. The learning structure is arranged by adding six lesson hours per week, with proportions divided between national and Cambridge curricula. This model shows the madrasah does not completely abandon the national curriculum but rather combines Cambridge global standards with Islamic and national values characterizing madrasah educational institutions.

Learning Implementation and Assessment System of Cambridge Curriculum at MTsN 6 Malang

Learning and assessment systems are two main components interconnected in effective and meaningful educational processes. In the learning context, approaches prioritizing active student activities such as discussion, self-reflection, peer-tutoring, and problem-based assignments have proven to increase student engagement and deeper understanding (Dayal, 2021; Dzaiy & Abdullah, 2024). Assessment systems have strategic functions not only as learning outcome measurement tools but also as means of regulating learning processes and providing student development feedback. Teachers and school systems must shift from traditional assessment that is summative and static to authentic, dialogical assessment approaches supporting learning processes (assessment for learning) rather than merely assessment of learning (Levy-Feldman, 2025; Meylani, 2024; Slade et al., 2022)

Learning implementation in International Class Program (ICP) classes at MTsN 6 Malang uses English as the primary instructional language. This language use aims not only to improve students' linguistic abilities but also to create learning environments supporting global communication. In classroom atmospheres, students are encouraged to actively use English in discussions, presentations, and collaborative activities, so speaking and thinking abilities in international contexts can develop naturally. Teachers' roles in ICP learning are no longer limited to information deliverers but as facilitators guiding and empowering students in learning processes. Through implementing active learning approaches, teachers direct students to be directly involved in explorative activities, problem-solving, and reflection. This strategy creates interactive learning atmospheres and develops critical thinking, creative, and collaborative skills among students. Active learning approaches in these environments prove effective in increasing students' confidence using English while strengthening conceptual understanding in subjects like Science and Mathematics.

In the assessment system, ICP classes at MTsN 6 Malang implement a dual assessment system, combining national assessment with Cambridge assessment. Three main subjects are tested through Cambridge Checkpoint with a 0-50 scoring scale, while national assessment still uses a 0-100 scale to meet Ministry of Religious Affairs standards. Consequently, students obtain two forms of learning outcome reports: national report cards and internationally recognized Cambridge certificates. This assessment system integration strengthens students' academic competitiveness while maintaining compliance with national regulations.

Challenges in Cambridge Curriculum Implementation at MTsN 6 Malang

Curriculum implementation in madrasahs often encounters various structural and operational challenges. One main problem is human resource unpreparedness – many teachers lack deep understanding of new curriculum concepts or are unfamiliar with active and collaborative learning strategies demanded in current implementation (Ngoasong, 2022). Curriculum adaptation and change processes often create value clashes and local contexts, especially in madrasahs that must combine Islamic values with general and global educational demands (Beribe, 2023; Moslimany et al., 2024; Mufarokah, Anwar, & Mudhofar, 2025).

Although curriculum integration runs effectively, implementation still faces several constraints. The main challenge lies in students' readiness to understand academic materials in foreign languages. To address this, the madrasah implements English matriculation programs for students before joining the ICP program. This program is conducted outside regular lesson hours, usually in the afternoon, aiming to strengthen students' linguistic abilities before following Cambridge-based learning. Matriculation activities include academic vocabulary enrichment, active communication practice, and habituation to reading and understanding scientific texts in English. Through

these selection and preparation stages, the madrasah ensures students joining ICP classes have optimal academic, emotional, and language readiness to follow international standard learning processes. These efforts show MTsN 6 Malang's high commitment to maintaining international curriculum implementation quality without neglecting religious and nationalist values.

CONCLUSION

Integration of National and Cambridge Curricula at MTsN 6 Malang represents a strategic step in presenting globally standardized madrasah education without abandoning Islamic and national values. The selective-adaptive integration model implemented enables the madrasah to combine international curriculum advantages in science, mathematics, and English subjects with contextual national educational character. International Class Program (ICP) implementation shows that using English as the primary instructional language and active learning approaches can improve students' critical thinking abilities, communication, and confidence in global contexts. Nevertheless, this curriculum implementation still faces several challenges, especially regarding human resource readiness, students' linguistic abilities, and balance between academic demands and religious values. The madrasah's efforts in conducting matriculation programs and teacher training become important strategies for bridging these gaps. Overall, this integration reflects adaptive madrasah educational innovation toward global dynamics, strengthening graduate competitiveness, and maintaining moderate and characterized Islamic educational identity.

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