



Teachers' and students' perceptions on the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in English subject

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Abstract

This study aimed to describe the teachers' and students' perceptions of the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in English subjects along with the obstacles experienced and alternative solutions to these obstacles. This study used a qualitative method with a case study approach. This research was carried out in the following stages: initial research and data collection, transcription of conversations and interview results, data analysis, and reports. Data collection techniques in this study were observation, interviews, and documentation, with research subjects consisting of eight students, two *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) English teachers, and one representative from *Assalaftiyyah* Language Center (ALC) who oversaw the implementation of the Cambridge Curriculum at MTs *Assalaftiyyah*. To analyze the data, this research used Miles and Hubberman's cycle. The results of the study show that teachers and students have positive and welcoming perceptions of the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum at MTs *Assalaftiyyah*. However, there were obstacles experienced related to delivery, the materials, and the facilities. Then the proposed alternative solutions can be implemented by increasing teacher training, giving students opportunities for extensive learning, and providing some required facilities to maximize the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in MTs *Assalaftiyyah*.

Keywords: perception, Cambridge curriculum, English subject

INTRODUCTION

The quality of a country's educational system is crucial to its progress. In general, the quality of education is influenced by the quality of the learning process, while the quality of the learning process is determined by various components that are interconnected with each other. These educational components are determinants of the quality of education (Triwiyanto, 2021). Development and learning go hand in hand so the two are inseparable. The improvement of a country's human resources and its economic infrastructure go hand in hand with one another since the two are inextricably linked (Hamalik, 2015). According to the Education Index issued by Human Development Reports in 2017, Indonesia is in seventh place in ASEAN with a score of 0.622 (Fathurrahman et al., 2022). This means the education index in Indonesia is still low. In this case, education is important to improve the quality of human resources to meet the needs of individuals or even states (Huwaida et al., 2023). With education, humans can compete, become civilized, and be able to change the world (Zulpaini et al., 2020). Also, education will create human resources who have competence in facing challenges and competition in an era like this. The quality of a country's education is one of the indicators to see whether the country's category belongs to developed, developing, or poor countries. Therefore, there are important tools that must be owned by an educational institution to create education that is relevant to the progress of society. The tool is in the form of a curriculum.

The curriculum is defined as a set of plans and arrangements regarding objectives, contents, and learning materials, as well as methods used as guidelines for organizing learning activities in accordance with the requirements of Law Number No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. Simanjuntak (2020) said that a curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding the purpose, content, and learning material and methods used as guidelines for carrying out learning activities to achieve certain educational goals. It is also stated that curriculum development is carried out with reference to national educational standards to realize national educational goals (Elfrida et al., 2020). All activities that are sanctioned by the school and participated by students are considered part of the curriculum. The curriculum is a very important component because it concerns not only the goals and direction of education but also the learning experiences that each student must have and how to organize the experiences themselves (Kristiawan, 2019). What students learn, as well as how they learn it, with the assistance of their teachers and the use of various supplementary resources, assessment strategies, and learning environments, are all part of this (Livingstone, 2019).

The curriculum greatly determines the process and results of an education system; it is also considered a bridge between a teacher and his students (Kazemi et al., 2020). The integration of education is not possible without the curriculum. Educational objectives may be more effectively implemented with the help of a well-thought-out strategy. An educational curriculum's presence is crucial in defining the development of education, from the theoretical to the practical. In this context, the curriculum serves as both a blueprint for what students will learn and how instructors should present that information (Sukatin & Pahmi, 2020).

It is common to know that Indonesia has experienced a lot of shifting in terms of curriculum regulation. In their article, Abidin et al (2023) describe that since Indonesia's independence in 1945, the curriculum in Indonesia has changed or revised at least 10 times, namely in 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, the 2013 curriculum, and

most recently, the independent curriculum. There was a shift in the curriculum because of changes in the political, social, cultural, economic, and scientific and technological structures of the country and state. Besides, several schools in Indonesia, both public and private are also implementing an international curriculum. Commonly, the language of instruction used in learning using the international curriculum is English since it is the worldwide language used by the global from different parts of the world in communication (Kurniasih & Lisan, 2023).

One type of international curriculum commonly applied in Indonesia is the Cambridge International Curriculum or the Cambridge Curriculum. The Cambridge International Examination (CIE) curriculum is widely used as an international standard in Indonesia. The Cambridge International Examination (CIE) is run by the Cambridge Assessment Group of the University of Cambridge. Over 150 nations have made use of this network of curriculum system operators. From elementary school onwards, this program is designed to be as adaptable as possible. Over 10,000 schools in 160 countries use the Cambridge curriculum (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2018), making it the most widely used curriculum in the world. The Cambridge curriculum not only develops students' abilities but also asks students to draw on their understanding, so they can analyze and evaluate the knowledge gained (Christiana et al., 2022). Active learning is also key to the development of the students in applying Cambridge Curriculum where the students would get more opportunity to practice the acquired language. Cambridge's curriculum has received worldwide recognition. This curriculum can foster students' insight, understanding and abilities, as well as provide flexibility for school corporations to be able to innovate and develop certain programs in accordance with the school's goals (Sari, 2020). This curriculum is one of the curricula that is seen as capable of improving educational standards and can improve the quality of its graduates (Fitriana & Utama, 2021)

According to Sumanto (2014), perception is the process of understanding or giving meaning to information to a stimulus. Stimulus is obtained from a process of sensing objects, events, or relationships between symptoms which are then processed by the brain. With perception, the individual will be aware of the circumstances around him and his own state. According to Walgito (2002, as cited in Amaliah, 2021), perception is divided into two types, namely: perception of objects (physical environment) and perception of humans or social. Perception of humans is more difficult and complex because humans are dynamic. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that an event that occurs will greatly affect a perception, which will then affect a person's attitude and behavior towards something in their environment. The perceptions of teachers and students regarding the implementation of a curriculum are very important because it leads a significant impact on learning practices in the classroom. Both teachers and students are key actors in the implementation of a curriculum. Thus, it is necessary to study the perceptions of teachers and students towards the curriculum.

In discussions regarding the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum, there are several related studies. Nafisah (2018) did her research on the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum at SD International Al-Abidin Surakarta and SD Integral Walisongo Sragen. The result shows that both schools are successfully implementing the Cambridge curriculum. In particular, a unique workshop for educators was held prior to the start of instruction, allowing educators of various experience levels to participate in the program. Laili & Soedjarwo (2019) also studied the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in the learning system at MI

Muslimat NU Pucang Sidoarjo. Their research aimed to document how MI Muslimat NU Pucang Sidoarjo incorporated the Cambridge curriculum into their teaching methodology. The results show four main findings which include: (1) the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum using an adaptive adoption system, (2) supporting factors in the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum, (3) the inhibiting factors in the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum, and (4) efforts to overcome obstacles by using intensive approaches to related parties. Prayogo & Zulfitria (2024) analyzed the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum and Project-Based Learning (PBL) method to develop students' critical thinking. The study indicates that the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum and PBL positively influences students' learning outcomes. From those studies, it can be seen that they only focus on implementing the curriculum while this research aimed to go deeper into investigating the teachers' and students' perception toward the Cambridge curriculum especially in the English subject.

Therefore, two research questions were formulated. They are: (1) what are the teachers' and students' perceptions on the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in English subjects? and (2) what are the obstacles felt by them on the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in English subject and the alternative solutions to the obstacles? The aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions and obstacles from the teachers and students on the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in English subject. Teachers' perception plays a significant role in the teaching and learning process since they not only influence teachers' decision-making and teachers' actions, but also provide significant insights into many aspects of education (Nurhayati & Samiati, 2018). The perceptions of teachers and students regarding the implementation of a curriculum are very important because they will have a significant impact on learning practices in the classroom. Both teachers and students are key actors in the implementation of a curriculum in educational institutions. Thus, it is necessary to study the perceptions of teachers and students towards the curriculum.

RESEARCH METHOD

This investigation used a case study approach, which is a qualitative method. This qualitative study was conducted because the researchers aimed to investigate how the teachers and students felt about the transition to the Cambridge curriculum for the English subject and its implementation. In addition, the researchers also wanted to investigate the problems that arose during the implementation and propose some feasible solutions.

Afrizal (2016) defines qualitative research as a technique used in the study of the social sciences that does not attempt to calculate or quantify the qualitative data that have been obtained and, thus, does not analyze the numbers. To learn more about a specific program, event, or activity at the level of a person, group of individuals, institution, or organization, many researchers used the case study technique (Rahardjo, 2017). In general, the triangulation method is used to verify the reliability of data and discover the absolute, unbiased truth. When applied to the study of specific occurrences at specific locations and times, this methodology is the most possible to apply.

Two kinds of data were used in this study: primary data and secondary data. Data collection techniques in this study were observation, interviews, and documentation. People

who were interviewed and whose behaviors were observed were the study's major data sources. They were 8 *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) students, 2 MTs English teachers, and the head of *Assalafiyah Language Center* (ALC) who oversaw the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum at MTs *Assalafiyah*. The secondary data were the documentation of observations and interviews in the field and some research or other references that have relevance to this research. The gathered data were collected and analyzed to draw the result of the research.

The researchers used triangulation strategies for data sources and procedures to ensure the reliability of the findings. To analyze the data, this research used Miles and Hubberman's (Syam et al., 2023). The analysis consists of three streams of activities that occur simultaneously, namely: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. In collecting the data, the researchers gathered the primary data supported by the secondary data. The next step was data reduction and data display to select the data needed and the last was drawing a conclusion.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This part presents the results of the research that has been conducted and the discussion. In accordance with the data collection method described, the researchers collected data by interviews and documentation techniques. Based on observations made by researchers, it is true that the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in English subjects is not completely ideal, due to limitations, e.g. the use of learning technology such as projectors and LCDs. Furthermore, some students were sometimes less enthusiastic because they did not understand the material which was entirely in English. However, they also looked happy and quite enjoyed learning. Apart from the fun method used by the teachers, they also occasionally learned to use a tablet to open the MyOn application to read English stories and do existing practice questions. Therefore, in this part, the researchers try to answer the research questions previously mentioned.

1. The teachers' and students' perceptions on the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in the English subject

This part is divided into two. They are teachers' perceptions and students' perceptions on the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in the English subject. The results are obtained from two MTs English teachers (AM and SB) and one *Assalafiyah Language Center* representative (EK).

a. Teachers' Perceptions

The existence of a change in the curriculum with all the circumstances and conditions certainly raises many different perceptions for each individual who experiences it. One of the reasons why the school chose the Cambridge curriculum, which was expressed by one of the speakers, was that this curriculum was felt to be the most mature in all of its aspects. They include the teacher training, the textbooks, the teaching methods, the material development, and the assessment. Moreover, the private schools in Indonesia rarely use the national curriculum. On average, they switch to implementing the international curriculum, namely the Cambridge curriculum as also said by the teacher during the interview.

The interviews with the teachers, AM and SB, revealed that even though the Cambridge curriculum was quite difficult, the teachers liked it. It was because in the Cambridge curriculum, the materials are packaged as if students are not studying. It does not go straight to the point in the materials, but there is a bridging sequence before entering the main material. Therefore, the students can enjoy and relax while studying English and become more active in asking questions, giving opinions, and thinking critically. Apart from that, the teachers also stated that they received training in implementing this curriculum from publishers (Mentari Groups) and the school. In terms of materials, the learning packages or materials designed by the Cambridge curriculum were lighter than the national curriculum because they prioritized the process rather than the results. However, it was difficult for grade 9 because they did not follow the Cambridge curriculum learning steps from the start and immediately studied at a high level. Therefore, students found it difficult to adapt. Because the education system in Indonesia has a Regional Education Standardization Assessment (ASPD) and of course, it uses the national curriculum, in the final semester, teachers and students must catch up on material to prepare for the ASPD exam.

Besides, based on the interviews, it can be said that the positive side is the teachers are motivated to speak in English during the class. They were willing or did not need to adapt to use English, especially in speaking since all of the materials are in English. This was also in line with the previous research's result stating that teachers' perception would definitely influence the way they teach English class, hence the teachers should believe that they can deliver the materials in English (Nurhayati & Samiati, 2018). However, sometimes they needed to translate the materials if the students got stuck on some points and they needed to be clarified so the objectives of learning could be delivered well in the class.

b. Students' Perceptions

The majority of the students enjoyed learning English using the Cambridge curriculum, despite facing some obstacles. This enthusiasm was evident from interviews with the students, who expressed their preference for the Cambridge curriculum over previous methods. They mentioned that the implementation of this curriculum should continue, as it made studying English feel like playing. With textbooks written in English, students became more familiar with the language and were motivated to independently discover the meanings of sentences or materials being studied, leading to a quicker and deeper understanding and mastery of English.

Moreover, the students highlighted the active role of their teachers in creating a fun and engaging classroom atmosphere. The teachers' dynamic approach to teaching further enhanced the learning experience, making students more eager to participate and enjoy their lessons. This combination of engaging materials and enthusiastic teaching methods significantly contributed to the students' positive perception of the Cambridge curriculum, reinforcing their belief in its effectiveness and potential for continued use.

However, many of the students were still having low proficiency in English and many found it difficult to follow full English delivery in the class. Furthermore, in general

students found difficulties in wide arrays of English vocabularies (Trimadona et al., 2020). This leads to the lesson objective which cannot be fulfilled completely, subsequently, the students cannot understand the lesson optimally. This would also become a serious concern where the teacher and school should provide an appropriate bridging in terms of implementing the Cambridge curriculum optimally. The positive perspective of the students would play an essential role in eliciting more motivation to learn and use English as applied in the Cambridge curriculum (Marleni et al., 2022).

2. The obstacles felt by teachers and students on the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in the English subject and the alternative solutions to the obstacles

This part is divided into two. They are teachers' and students' obstacles to the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in the English subject and the feasible solutions to the obstacles.

a. Teachers' and students' perceptions on the obstacles and challenges in the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in the English subject

EK as the teacher said that the obstacles and challenges in implementing the Cambridge curriculum lay in how to change the mindset and habits there. Meanwhile, AM said that the obstacles and challenges she experienced were with her students because she taught grades 7 and 9. The grade 7 students came from different schools and had different abilities. Meanwhile, the students of grade 9 used the national curriculum for the previous 2 years. Furthermore, she said the challenge of teaching with the Cambridge curriculum was teachers must be active because teachers must always stimulate students to ask questions and opinions. Besides, they must be able to lead students towards the material. In contrast to EK and AM, according to SB, the obstacles and challenges he experienced required him to learn more. He said that many things were not understood especially related to the instruction. For instance, in the learning sequence, the students should listen or do something else first, even though there were already instructions in the book. Another example is in the speaking activity, the teacher sometimes got confused about how to start because he/ she did not really comprehend the rules or sequences of the activity.

This is also in line with the results of research by Kadariah et al (2020) that some teachers admit that when teaching in the classroom there are many challenges and difficulties experienced during the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum. Challenges in education require teachers to have and instill some self-competence in developing learning with the curriculum (Suhandi & Robi'ah, 2022). The results of this study confirm that in addition to the challenges and difficulties of teachers in adjusting methods or materials that are following learning. Competence is important for teachers to have to help develop learning using a curriculum that suits the needs of students. The changing of the curriculum in the English subject at *MTs Assalafiyah* more or less certainly raises obstacles and challenges experienced by teachers and students. Besides, obstacles experienced by teachers are about teaching methods and materials. Since the curriculum changes, the methods and materials must also change, so teachers must adapt and learn a lot about the new curriculum and how to deliver the materials properly, so it can be grasped by the students optimally based on the Cambridge curriculum syllabus.

Additionally, the students also complained about the contents of the printed books given because they were all in English. The students often found it difficult to understand the materials in the book. The students often found it challenging to comprehend the materials entirely in English, which could lead to frustration and disengagement from learning English.

Related to the insufficient facilities, the school still lacks proper accommodations to support running Cambridge's curriculum optimally. EK said that in implementing the curriculum, each class had facilities such as projectors, LCDs, and speakers. However, they were not yet fully available since many classes have not been equipped with the facilities yet. It disturbed the process of learning using Cambridge in the class since it sometimes also used the online application or LCD, etc. She also said that another obstacle they experienced was that the internet network provided by the school often had problems. Thus, it really hinders the learning process of students when they must access the internet.

b. The alternative solutions to the obstacles based on teachers' and students' perceptions towards the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in the English subject

To overcome some of the parties that influence others in terms of implementing the Cambridge curriculum in English language learning, the ALC team, as said by EK, continues to try to invite discussions with all school principals under the foundation including the head of *MTs* that the Cambridge curriculum has good prospects and later teacher welfare will increase with the Cambridge curriculum. EK hopes that *Assalaifiyyah* will build a culture of speaking English in the school so that students can speak better or even have conversations during their studies. Even, in the future, they can be more optimistic about continuing their studies abroad, e.g. in European countries or others. This was also stated in the previous research's result which focused on helping the teacher enforced the students and conducted a supporting environment for the students to feel comfortable and enjoy learning and practicing their English (Holandyah et al., 2022).

According to AM, an alternative solution to the problems was that there should be a lot of training so that teachers could continue upgrading their teaching skills using the Cambridge curriculum. This program is very essential to build continuous professional development for the prepared teacher in applying the Cambridge curriculum (Ahmad & Shah, 2022). In addition, the teachers who join the school will also be chosen according to the criteria to be able to follow the goals of the foundation especially related to the success of the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum. It is hoped the learning activity of the class will be more effective. Then SB added some alternative solutions. He said that supervision was necessary. A native speaker expert or someone proficient in the application of the Cambridge curriculum should be the speaker or resource person in the training, ensuring that it is truly contextual and can be effectively absorbed by the teachers, particularly in terms of classroom teaching using the Cambridge curriculum. Besides, it should also be followed by a continuous

evaluation to improve over time. According to him, if it was just a workshop for the teachers, it might not work well, because there was no guarantee the teacher would do it or not. Therefore, practical training or peer-teaching would be essential for the teachers. Subsequently, there should also be continuous evaluation in monitoring the progress of this activity. This aligned with Nafisah (2018) stating in her research that the practical workshop on teaching and learning would give the teachers a clear understanding of applying the Cambridge curriculum in their classroom.

To overcome the obstacles experienced by students in learning and understanding the English content in the book, the students need to pay more attention to the teacher's explanations and look for the meaning of words or sentences that they find difficult. The teacher should also provide supplementary materials including the essential vocabularies and tutoring for those who need this treatment. The students hope that there will be an English extracurricular to improve the English skills of the students. This would also be more impactful for the students in terms of doing practices to get used to speaking in English. Similarly, the research by Armita (2019) and Ginosyan et al (2020) also shows that through this way, students would get more opportunities in terms of rehearsal and build their confidence in speaking English.

In addition, in terms of facilities, the school needs to upgrade the infrastructure or seek funding or partnership to equip the school with required technology such as adequate projectors and tablets, and to improve the internet connectivity and stability. Qomariyah & Khasanah (2023) said that these are significant factors to equip the teacher in applying the Cambridge curriculum. Besides, they also said that teaching supported by facilities such as laptops would make it easier for them to understand the materials in printed books or do other tasks related to the implementation of this curriculum. This was also in line with the previous research conducted in an elementary school where the laptops would play a key role in implementing the Cambridge curriculum in the classroom (Kusumawati, 2019).

Based on the provided findings above, the main points related to the obstacles and possible solutions to the obstacles in the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum are summarized. They can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Obstacles and Challenges Faced by Teachers and Students along with their Solutions

NO	OBSTACLES & CHALLENGES	SOLUTION
1.	How to change the mindset and speaking English habits	Discuss with the madrasah principals under the foundation that the Cambridge curriculum has good prospects and builds speaking English culture.
2.	Teaching methods and learning materials	Provide extensive training to upgrade the teaching skills and conduct direct training from native speakers, peer-teaching, supervision, and evaluation.

3.	The printed book using English	Pay more attention to the teacher's explanation, look for the meaning of English words or sentences that students do not understand independently, and also provide integrated vocabulary-building exercises or tutoring.
4.	Facilities (Projector, LCD, Speaker, Internet Signal)	Upgrade and build proper required facilities which support the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum such as adequate projectors, tablets, and internet connectivity and stability.

It can be said that the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in English subjects at *MTs Assalafiyah* reveals both positive outcomes and significant challenges. From the research, it was found that while the use of learning technology like projectors and LCDs was limited, the interactive teaching methods employed by teachers helped maintain student engagement. Despite some students feeling less enthusiastic due to the all-English materials, they generally enjoyed the learning process, especially with the integration of tablets and the MyOn application for reading and practice. This is also in line with the results of research by Syafaati & Widodo (2023). Teachers use LCD projectors and audiovisual equipment according to learning needs. The selection of learning media can improve student understanding well. The selection of appropriate learning media is very important to help the learning process run well and smoothly.

Teachers' perceptions of the Cambridge curriculum were largely positive. They appreciated its comprehensive nature, which includes thorough teacher training, well-developed textbooks, and effective teaching methods. This curriculum encourages a more relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, promoting critical thinking, and active participation. However, the transition to the Cambridge curriculum was particularly challenging for students in higher grades who did not start with it from the beginning, making adaptation difficult. In addition, teachers and students have to balance preparing for the ASPD exams, which follow the national curriculum, adding complexity to their efforts.

Students also had a generally positive view of the Cambridge curriculum, finding it enjoyable and engaging. They appreciated the English immersion, which helped them become more accustomed to the language. However, they faced challenges in understanding the materials entirely in English and dealing with inadequate internet access, which was necessary for using online resources and applications. These challenges highlight the need for improved infrastructure and ongoing support to maximize the benefits of the curriculum.

To address these obstacles, various solutions have been proposed. Building a culture of speaking English within the school and providing extensive teacher training are essential steps. Practical training methods, such as microteaching with native speakers and continuous evaluation, can help teachers adapt more effectively. For

students, additional support through extracurricular activities and better learning facilities, such as reliable internet access and adequate classroom technology, can significantly enhance their learning experience. By implementing these solutions, *MTs Assalaifiyyah* can better navigate the challenges and fully realize the potential of the Cambridge curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this research highlights that the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in English subjects at *MTs Assalaifiyyah* holds great potential for enhancing the quality of education, despite facing several challenges. Therefore, collaborative efforts among teachers, students, and the school administration are essential to ensure the successful implementation of the Cambridge curriculum and to maximize its potential benefits for students' academic development and English language proficiency. While this study provides valuable insights into the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum at *MTs Assalaifiyyah*, several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample size was small and limited to one school, affecting the generalizability of the findings. The data collection methods, relying heavily on interviews and documentation, focus primarily on perceptions and self-reported data from teachers and students. The short duration of the study may not reflect the long-term impact of the curriculum on students' language proficiency and academic performance, and it did not account for varying levels of English proficiency among students, which could significantly influence their experiences. Additionally, while highlighting the importance of infrastructure and technological support, the study lacks a detailed analysis of the financial and logistical challenges schools might face in upgrading their facilities. Future research should consider a broader, more diverse sample, use objective measures of curriculum effectiveness, and explore long-term impacts and resource constraints related to implementing the Cambridge curriculum.

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