



# Bringing English to Life: The Implementation of the Cambridge Curriculum in SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi

Mar Atus Shalihah<sup>1\*</sup>, Nesi Ramadani<sup>2</sup>, Yuyud Andam Mellian<sup>3</sup>, Arifmiboy<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1234</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi

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\*Correspondence: Mar Atus Shalihah

Email: [shalihahma@gmail.com](mailto:shalihahma@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** The currently curriculum in Indonesia education is Merdeka curriculum while in one of private school in Bukittinggi used Cambridge curriculum in learning English. This school used Cambridge text book in teaching English at 7 – 9 grade. This research conducted a qualitative research with a case study. The research aims to find out the implementation of Cambridge curriculum based textbook, the inhibition of the using the textbook and the differences between others English textbook that apply in others curriculum at school in teaching English. The data collected through depth interview with the English teacher in the school and the data is analyzed use thematic analysis toward the data. The finding of the implementation of the Cambridge Curriculum at SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi supports the school's aim to produce confident English speakers by emphasizing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. However, challenges arise due to differences with the Indonesian curriculum, students' varying levels of proficiency, and the complexity of British English materials. Despite limited resources and a heavy academic workload, the teacher uses innovative methods to motivate students and integrate English into their daily lives.

**Keywords:** Bringing English, Implementation, Cambridge Curriculum

## Introduction

English is one of the subjects that should be learned by the students in the school. From the elementary school event to the university level the subject of English still become a duty to be learned by the students. There are many reasons why English is learned by the foreign language especially in Indonesia. Moreover English is not a first language so that the Indonesian learner has to learn English as foreign language so that the Indonesian learner can communicate with people from different countries. As stated by Johnson (2007) the various reasons why people should learn English as foreign language is consist of for study purpose, adapting to the new culture of the country, for communicating with international people. To support these reasons there are other component to achieve that such as strategy in learning, objective of learning, supporting material during the learning process. There is a clear tension between maintaining cultural and religious values and meeting international educational standards, which raises questions about curriculum adaptability and contextual relevance (Ahmed et al., 2023). These components are part of

curriculum Sukmawati (2017) said that the components of curriculum are divided into purpose of learning, material, learning strategy and evaluation. In fact, curriculum plays main role in achieving the learning especially English learning.

In other side, the currently curriculum in Indonesia is Merdeka curriculum which each school can allows to adapt foreign curriculum too make the successfulness of the learning process in the classroom activity. In fact, in one of private school Bukittinggi is adapted curriculum Cambridge based text. Cambridge Curriculum is an international curriculum of the University of Cambridge. Cambridge International website (2017) describes that Cambridge curriculum offers the learning of several subjects such as science, mathematics, and English for primary or elementary schools, and focuses on the development of knowledge and skills in the English subject, which provides a good foundation for the next level of education. Furthermore, teachers' ability to fully utilise the Cambridge Curriculum is often hindered by resource constraints and limited exposure to global best practices (Suryadi & Rahman, 2021). Studies prove that globally oriented curricula improve students' English proficiency and cultural competence, preparing them for higher education and global careers (Harmer, 2020). Research by Qassrawi et al. (2023) rightly emphasizes the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in EFL contexts. However, it fails to address the specific challenges of blending Islamic education with global curricula. However, the application of such curricula in Islamic high schools often encounters resistance due to cultural dissonance and perceived threats to religious identity (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2020). Furthermore, integrating global educational standards with Islamic values provides students with a unique opportunity to engage with the modern world while remaining rooted in their cultural and religious identity (Yusuf & Abdullah, 2022).

In Bukittinggi, there are a number of private schools which is one of the Islamic junior high school level implement Cambridge curriculum that is collaborated with the national Cambridge curriculum. The school is SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi. This school used Cambridge curriculum based text book at all level since seventh grade until ninth grade for language learning (Didau, 2024).

Moreover, every school has the standards to achieve the good outcomes of learning especially in learning English subject where the students is expected to shows their ability to accepting and presenting English language. Based on this standard, one of private school chooses to implement another curriculum so that the students can acquire and present the English language in a good way. The selection of the curriculum for the teaching of English will be customized by the school committee in relation to the learning purposes and needs.

The collaboration between the Islamic High School in Bukittinggi and the Cambridge started for years. This school was able to implement the curriculum in the classroom. Cambridge curriculum generally is implemented for science, mathematics and English subjects for most school in Indonesia. In recent implementation, Islamic High School in Bukittinggi implement Cambridge Curriculum for English subject as the main point to

improve the students' ability in English and achieve the institution's vision to be world class. (*Program Kurikulum Cambridge*, Islamic High School, 2020).

Since Cambridge curriculum is the international school that is definitely affects teachers in teaching English with the textbooks, supporting materials and appropriate method to the class. Teachers' competencies also need to cope with the curriculum, as the teaching method for English class is treated differently with the Cambridge curriculum. As Whitaker (1979) in Chaudhary (2015) claimed that teachers see their role in curriculum implementation as an autonomous one. They select and decide what to teach from the prescribed syllabus or curriculum. Since implementation takes place through the interaction of the learner and the plan learning opportunities, the role and influence of the teacher in the process is undeniable. Teachers in Islamic high schools must undergo significant professional development to transition from traditional teacher-centred methodologies to the more interactive and student-centred approaches advocated by the curriculum (Nurhayati, 2021). Malik et al. (2020) highlight the importance of aligning international frameworks with local values (Tai, 2020).

As English subject that is part of curriculum that also has purpose and competencies that is needed to be achieved. The achievement of the curriculum is can be depend on how the Teacher teaching English in the classroom. In teaching English by using Cambridge curriculum textbook might be a challenging for the teacher. Because all the material is adapted from the material whose not from local curriculum. Based on the uniqueness of phenomenon in Bukittinggi, the researcher interested to investigate the phenomenon in SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 bukittinggi with these research questions:

1. How is Teaching English Using Cambridge Curriculum Based Textbook?
2. What are the differentiating with the currently curriculum based English textbook?
3. What are the obstacles in implementation Cambridge curriculum based textbook?

## Methodology

This research is conducted with a case study approaches. This approach was selected to know how does the phenomenon dealing with the teacher's in implementation of Cambridge curriculum while taking place in Indonesia in learning English. In this study, one of the teacher in private school at Bukittinggi is the only teacher that teaching English so that the teacher choose to be participant.

In collecting the data from the English teacher, the researchers used deep interviewed to gain information. The interviewed section is divided into a semi- structured .In this study, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Creswell (2009) defined that there are six steps in thematic analysis. The steps consist of; organizing and preparing the data, reading through all the data, analyzing in data, analyzing the data in detail with a coding process, creating a description of the data, transforming the themes into a qualitative themes into a qualitative narrative, and interpreting the data. In analyzing teachers' perceptions of the implementation of Cambridge Lower Secondary English, the researcher followed several steps. They were: First, we prepared information about the interview, transcribed it, and then took notes on the interview material. Second, the researcher read

all the data carefully so that the researcher could find a general meaning. Third, the researcher analyzed the data and labeled the categories. In other words, it was called coding. Fourth, we generated the description through coding, and then it was categorized into themes. Next, we presented the themes in the qualitative narrative. In other words, the researcher described the information that was analyzed. It was related to the research question. Finally, researchers interpreted teachers' perceptions of the Cambridge curriculum.

## **Result and Discussion**

Based on deep interview with the participant as one of the only teacher who teach English at SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi. The interview is started by asking some question related to teaching English using Cambridge curriculum based text book. The information that is gain is divided based on the question of the research the data is following below. The implementation of the Cambridge Curriculum at SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi supports the school's aim to produce confident English speakers by emphasizing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. However, challenges arise due to differences with the Indonesian curriculum, students' varying levels of proficiency, and the complexity of British English materials. Despite limited resources and a heavy academic workload, the teacher uses innovative methods to motivate students and integrate English into their daily lives.

### **1. How is Teaching English Using Cambridge Curriculum Based Textbook**

The objective of teaching and learning English at SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi is to make students be able to speak English confidently and spontaneously. Students are hoped to understand grammatical rules in English, make students know the use of vocabularies and make students familiar with culture, news and well-known people around the world. As the teacher has explained before, Cambridge curriculum is using higher grammar in teaching and learning process. Because of used to learn in higher level grammar, students easier in understanding standard grammar. Cambridge curriculum also concern on vocabulary, culture, news and well-know people around the world, that is related with the objectives of teaching and learning English in Al-Azhar.

YPI Al-Azhar (Al-Azhar foundation) decides to use Cambridge curriculum in teaching and learning process. Al-Azhar chooses this curriculum because Cambridge curriculum in line with objectives of teaching and learning English at Al-Azhar foundation. Al-Azhar also chooses this curriculum because Al-Azhar hopes to bear excellent students. Students are forced to learn higher level material to make them used to solve complicated problem. YPI also wants to differentiate Al-Azhar students' level with other students, because Al-Azhar students have higher knowledge, ability and experience than other students.

To apply Cambridge curriculum, the teacher divided the process in skills. For listening skill, the teacher asks students to listen an audio in British accent. The teacher asks students to pay attention at the pronunciation so students know and repeat vocabularies in good pronunciation. For speaking skill, the teacher asks students to speak

based on material that they learned. The teacher asks students to speak freely without pay attention at grammatical rules. So, students can speak fluently because they do not have to worry at their grammar error. For spontaneous speaking, students can mix their language in speaking to make they speak confidently. The teacher also asks students to make video for their speaking tasks to improve students creativity in design and presentation. This video task can introduced students of work world, where they have to design and present their product or service. For reading skill, the teacher asks students to read texts that provided in students' book. The teacher also asks students to find out difficult words, so students understand what does the text tells about. In teaching writing skill, the teacher asks students to write a text or dialogue related to the material. Students can use dictionary to help them in finding new words. Before ask students to write, the teacher tells students to make a plan of their writing, so students can write easily in writing process.

In teaching process the teacher uses students' book to help her in assigning tasks for students. All students have to have the book so they can learn independently in their house. The book provided with a lot of tasks that can be done by students. The teacher also asks students to solve the tasks as their additional exercises.

Before implementing Cambridge curriculum, all of English teacher in Al-Azhar have to attend a training that organized by YPI. YPI Foundation coordinated with a representative of Cambridge curriculum, so teachers could learn about Cambridge curriculum directly from the expert. In the training, teachers also learned about the use of book that provided by Cambridge curriculum. This training aimed to make English teachers know about Cambridge curriculum, so they can implement it in the classroom.

The book that used in Cambridge curriculum has 12 units. The teacher tries to do 1 unit in a month. Teacher has to finish 6 units in one term, because the assessment is made per 6 units. The teacher has to sort the materials to make students master the 6 units in a term. In teaching and learning process, the teacher focuses only on one skill in a meeting. By doing this way, the teacher can complete all the material in Cambridge curriculum in time for the last two years.

As stated by the teacher before, the objective of teaching English in SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi are to make students able to speak English confidently and spontaneously. The teacher still tries to achieve this objective by finding out the appropriate methods and techniques in teaching and learning process, to make students able to communicate in English well. Until now, there are only a few students that still need more attention to achieve this objective.

## **2. What are The Differentiating With The Currently Curriculum Based English Textbook**

The teacher thinks that Cambridge Curriculum is not the same as Indonesian curriculum especially *KuMer*, because Cambridge is an abroad curriculum. We know that the ability of Indonesian students are different with students in Cambridge, this makes the students get difficulties in following this curriculum. This curriculum set the content based



on Cambridge students' ability, so Indonesian students especially West Sumatera students difficult to solve the questions in the book from Cambridge curriculum.

Besides, Cambridge curriculum has different material with *KuMer*. For example, for the ninth grader students, in *KuMer* the students learn genre text like narrative text, while Cambridge curriculum focusing on students' grammar with higher level. Cambridge curriculum also provides text and vocabulary that tell about culture, well-known people and news around the world that can make students know information in global era. But, it also makes them do not aware in their own culture and lack of vocabularies related to their culture.

Cambridge curriculum is using British accent for the listening skill. Some students get difficulties while doing the listening task, because they are familiar with American accent than British accent. To overcome this struggle, the teacher tries to use British accent in speaking with students to train students' listening skill and make them used to British accent. The teacher also asks students to speak using British accent while doing speaking task. The efforts that have been doing by the teacher are to help students in mastering skills according to Cambridge curriculum. Besides listening and speaking, there are also writing and reading skills that have to be mastered by students.

For the method in teaching, the teacher uses various methods based on students' ability and materials that they are learning. Because of Cambridge curriculum using CEFR in scaling students' score, the teacher does the assessment based on questions that provided by the curriculum. But some questions higher than students ability that make students difficult in doing the assessment.

For the assessment, some subjects including English have the same assessment for all over Al-Azhar in Indonesia. Teacher has to follow all procedures in the book, because the book used by all Al-Azhar students and as the reference in making the assessment. To prepare students with the assessment, the teacher has to apply students' book correctly. Teacher has to improve students' ability based on the needs of the curriculum, so students can do the assessment well.

### **3. What are The Obstacle In Implementation Cambridge Curriculum Based Text Book**

To achieve the objective well, the teacher needs supporting factors from all aspects. Cambridge curriculum uses British accent, while the teacher used to American accent. The teacher is still not fluent in using British accent, so the teacher hopes there will be native speaker that can help students in familiarizing British accent. Besides, communicating with native speaker can improve students' motivation in speaking.

There is camp Qur'an program in SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi. The teacher also hopes that there will be language camp program in that school. Students will have camp for 3 days 2 nights, they have to use Arabic and English languages during the camp. The teacher hopes that this camp can make students used to use English in their daily activity.

Malcolm Gladwell (2009) stated that practice makes perfect. The more practice, the more master in something. In mastering English, students have to practice more to make it perfect, start from minor area, especially in the classroom. Students have to speak English

in English period with their friends and the teacher. Students also have to speak English every time with the English teacher. The teacher hopes by practicing English with their peer and the teacher, it will improve students' ability in communicative skill. These factors are in line with the objective of teaching and learning English in SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi, which students able to communicate in English, at least in their daily life.

There are some factors that inhibit the implementation of using Cambridge curriculum. All subjects have target that have to be fulfilled by students. Because there are a lot of requirements that have to be done, students are difficult to focus in fulfilling the tasks that given by the teacher. Students can't give their full attention at communicating in English. The teacher has stated that native speaker can motivate students in speaking English. But there are many difficulties in inviting native speaker to a school. The school has to have much money to supply the native speaker during in Indonesia. To invite native speaker also need link and information. SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi doesn't have too much money and information to invite native speaker to the school that become an obstruction in teaching Cambridge curriculum.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum at SMP Islam Al-Azhar 39 Bukittinggi aligns well with the school's objective of fostering confident and spontaneous English speakers. By focusing on skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the curriculum aims to equip students with a higher level of English proficiency, emphasizing global knowledge and cultural awareness. However, challenges arise due to the differences between the Cambridge and the Indonesian curriculum, as well as the students' varying levels of English proficiency. Additionally, the use of British English and the higher complexity of materials sometimes create difficulties for students, particularly in areas such as listening comprehension and grammar.

The obstacles faced in implementing the Cambridge curriculum include the teacher's struggle with fluency in British English, the need for native speakers to motivate students, and the lack of financial resources for programs like language camps or inviting native speakers. Moreover, the heavy academic workload can also distract students from fully focusing on improving their English communication skills. Despite these challenges, the teacher continues to seek innovative methods to support students, such as encouraging more practice and introducing activities that integrate English into daily life. Ultimately, the success of the Cambridge curriculum depends on overcoming these barriers and ensuring students have the necessary support and motivation to master English.

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