

The Implementation of The Cambridge Curriculum in Indonesian EFL Contexts: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: This systematic literature review examines the application of the Cambridge curriculum in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia and discusses how to integrate international educational frameworks with local systems to enhance language proficiency and global competencies. Referencing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the 2018-2025 Curriculum Adaptation Theory, this study integrates empirical and theoretical insights to identify processes, challenges, benefits, and outcomes. Using the PRISMA 2020 model, a qualitative systematic review was conducted via PubMed, ScienceDirect, Mendeley, and ResearchGate. After scrutinizing 85 records using keywords such as “Implementation” AND “Cambridge Curriculum” and “Cambridge Curriculum” AND “Indonesian EFL,” 10 studies were extracted. The findings reveal that learner-centered educational strategies, such as project-based learning and the use of digital tools, promote student engagement, confidence, and critical thinking. While particularly evident in private and Islamic schools, challenges exist, including resource constraints, the need for teacher training, and cultural mismatches. The discussion relates this to theoretical frameworks, emphasizing the importance of contextualizing national curricula (such as Merdeka) and effective hybrid models. In conclusion, the Cambridge curriculum holds significant potential to advance EFL education in Indonesia through adaptive implementation. Policy makers are recommended to prioritize professional development and ensure equitable resource allocation to optimize learner outcomes across diverse settings.



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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has long been a cornerstone of the national curriculum, with the goal of giving students the tools they need to communicate globally in the face of growing internationalization. Nevertheless, Indonesia's traditional curriculum, including the 2013 Curriculum and the new Merdeka Curriculum, have frequently come under fire for their inflexible forms and scant focus on real-world language use, which typically lead to lower learner competence levels. The Cambridge Curriculum, created by Cambridge foreign Education, has been adopted by numerous Indonesian schools as a countermeasure, especially private and foreign schools. Through a more adaptable, skills-focused approach, this curriculum fosters the growth of critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) along with other international

standards are in line with this curriculum. It is very suitable for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings where English is not the main language of instruction since it places a strong emphasis on active learning, practical application, and the development of integrated language skills.

The objective of this systematic literature review is to explore the implementation process, challenges, advantages, and outcomes of the Cambridge Curriculum in Indonesian EFL settings, based on empirical and theoretical research. By synthesizing existing studies, this review aims to identify patterns in curriculum integration, teacher practices, and student achievement, ultimately providing insights for educators and policymakers to enhance the quality of EFL education.

This review draws from curricular adaptation theory, which suggests adapting international frameworks to local demands, as well as theoretical frameworks like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which prioritizes interaction and meaning over structure. The literature focuses attention to conflicts between national policies and international curriculum, and studies show that effective implementation necessitates resource allocation, cultural adaptation, and teacher preparation. The theoretical frameworks supporting these ideas, the PRISMA analytical methodology, important findings from the examined articles, in-depth discussions relating theory to practice, and conclusions are all covered in the following chapter.

Theories of curriculum design and language acquisition, especially that emphasize learner-centered approaches and adaptation from 2018 to 2025, are the foundation for the introduction of international curricula like Cambridge in the context of EFL. One important tenet is communicative competence, which was first put forth by Hymes (1972) and has since been expanded upon in EFL research. This means that language learning encompasses not only grammar but also sociolinguistic components, discourse, and strategic abilities. Research on curricular change in Indonesia demonstrates this. For instance, research by Agustin et al. (2022) examines the ideological shift in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instruction, emphasizing how teachers are moving away from rote learning and toward interactive approaches as a result of global influences. In a comparable way, Lee et al. (2023) support curricula that incorporate cultural awareness while examining intercultural communication abilities in Asian EFL courses. In Indonesian schools dealing with multicultural issues, this is consistent with Cambridge's philosophy that emphasizes a global viewpoint.

Fullan's (2018) change model, which emphasizes elements like clarity, complexity, and capacity development, is incorporated into the philosophy of curriculum implementation. Research on dual curriculum systems in Indonesia that combine national and Cambridge standards reflects this. Sukirjo et al. (2025), for instance, underline the significance of resilience through adaptive curricula in their discussion of transformation management in Indonesian schools overseas. This idea is applicable to domestic EFL contexts where teacher support is crucial. Habibah et al.'s (2023) empirical study on nationalistic integration in Islamic education emphasizes the necessity of striking a balance between local values and foreign curriculum in order to prevent cultural mismatches when implementing EFL.

Puranen and Taalas (2021), referenced by Soraya et al. (2025), claim that recent developments in digital integration are encouraging hybrid models in EFL and connecting the CEFR framework to task-based curricula. Muzaedah et al. (2023) discovered that audiovisual resources improve young learners' participation under Cambridge in Indonesia. Zein et al. (2020), which promotes professional capacity development in EFL policy reform, discuss issues like teacher capability. All things

considered, this strategy for 2018–2025 promotes a contextually dynamic implementation to optimize Cambridge's EFL potential in Indonesia.

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

Cambridge Curriculum

Cambridge International Education offers the Cambridge Curriculum, a comprehensive educational framework that is intended to give a globally recognized standard of learning that is acknowledged by colleges and companies all around the world. It was created with an emphasis on holistic development and includes elementary school through pre-university, highlighting essential phases that gradually foster abilities like research, critical thinking, and teamwork. This curriculum integrates language skills with subject-specific content in the framework of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and is in line with the CEFR to guarantee quantifiable proficiency outcomes. For instance, it encourages students to participate in discovery-based learning as opposed to passive learning, which allows them to use English on their own in authentic situations. Its adaptability to local situations while upholding international standards has been the subject of research from 2018 to 2025. Cambridge International (2025) states that inclusion, rigor, and relevance are the fundamental tenets of the curriculum. It is appropriate for a variety of EFL settings by incorporating multilingual methods and cultural awareness. Constructivist ideas like Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which assist language acquisition through interactive tasks, form the theoretical basis. The CEFR for syllabus design is linked to recent research, such as Soraya et al. (2025), which emphasizes communicative ability over rote memorization and overcomes frequent EFL limitations in non-native speaker situations.

The Implementation of Cambridge Curriculum in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the introduction of the Cambridge curriculum in EFL education often involves integration with domestic frameworks such as the 2013 Curriculum or the Merdeka Curriculum, creating a hybrid model that leverages international standards while complying with local regulations. Private schools and international schools have led this adoption, according to research from 2018 to 2025, with the goal of improving educational quality and students' ability to compete internationally. In order to address issues like teacher preparedness and resource inequities, researchers looked at an integrated model in 2025 that focused on matching competency-based learning objectives highlighted in Indonesia with Cambridge's skills-based assessment. In 2025 emphasizes aligning Cambridge's skill-based assessments with Indonesia's competency-focused outcomes, addressing challenges like teacher readiness and resource disparities. Curriculum adaptation theory serves as the theoretical foundation for this implementation, highlighting the necessity of contextualization to include Indonesian values and linguistic components. The EFL reform, which encourages the creation of standards involving numerous stakeholders, is another example of this. Audiovisual programs and bridging programs modify Cambridge for younger learners, increasing interest and performance, according to empirical findings from Muzaedah et al. (2023) and other studies. However, a study on English implementation in Palembang junior high schools also found that issues including curricular overload and cultural mismatch still exist. In order to optimize EFL results, its implementation is framed by change management theory, which encourages alignment between professional growth and policy.

METHOD

This study synthesizes previous research on the application of the Cambridge curriculum in the context of EFL in Indonesia utilizing a qualitative approach and a systematic literature review (SLR) technique. Following the 2020 edition of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, the SLR was selected as an organized method to reduce bias and guarantee thorough coverage of pertinent research. Instead of using quantitative meta-analysis, this review concentrates on qualitative synthesis by examining themes, patterns, and insights from particular studies. Information about implementation tactics, difficulties, and results were extracted.

Procedure

The literature search was conducted in December 2025 using PubMed, ScienceDirect, Mendeley, and ResearchGate. Keywords included “implementation” and “Cambridge Curriculum,” as well as “Cambridge Curriculum” and “Indonesia EFL.” Boolean operators (AND/OR) were strategically applied to optimize results and align them with the review's objectives.

Study Selection Criteria

At this stage, research selection must include multiple criteria. These criteria are divided into inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria: (1) Published between 2018 and 2025; (2) Empirical or theoretical research on the Cambridge Curriculum for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia; (3) Full text available in English; (4) Focus on implementation aspects. Exclusion Criteria: (1) Context outside Indonesia; (2) Focus outside EFL; (3) Duplicate or non-empirical reviews.

Study Selection

After following the procedures and based on the above-mentioned study selection criteria, this process is illustrated in the PRISMA flowchart as follows:

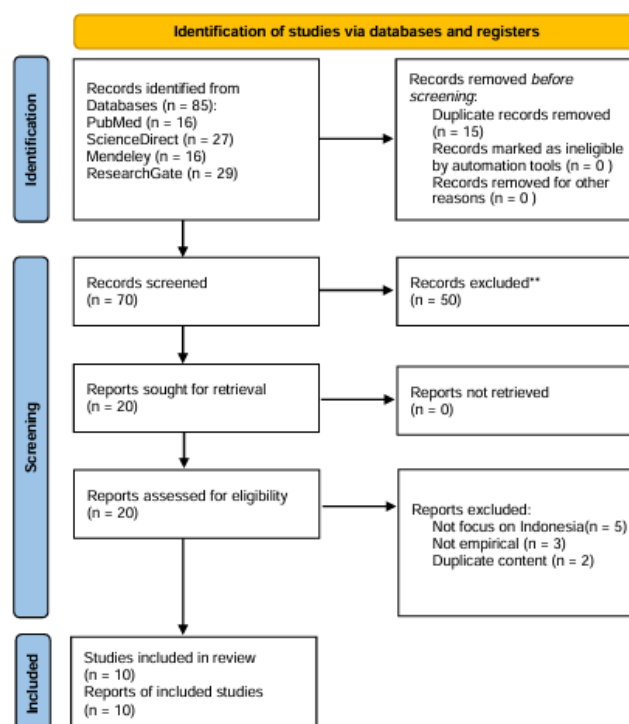


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart of selection process

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The reviewed articles reveal diverse approaches to Cambridge Curriculum implementation in Indonesian EFL. The table below summarizes key details:

Table 1. Summary and characteristics of the final studies selected

Author/Year	Main Characteristic	Variable	Study Design	Findings
Shalihah et al./2024	Examination of Cambridge textbook use in Islamic school alongside Merdeka Curriculum	Implementation barriers, skill focus (listening, speaking, reading, writing), student proficiency	Qualitative case study	Curriculum fosters confident speakers but faces challenges like resource limits and workload; innovative methods enhance engagement.
Pertiwi/2023	Application in third-grade elementary EFL at Islamic school.	Teaching goals, methods (Grammar Translation, Direct, Audio-Lingual) Media, Materials, evaluation.	Qualitative case study	Supports active learning and international perspectives; uses specific media and assessments for fluency and joyful engagement.
Wijipratiwi & Lolita/2023	Use of Instagram videos to boost speaking in Cambridge-based high school EFL.	Instagram video use, speaking skills (pre/post-test scores)	Quasi-experimental	Significant improvement in speaking ($p=0.000$); large effect size, effective for EFL under Cambridge
Fadhillah /2023	Classroom language in international program with English medium	Language forms (directions, questions), Indonesian use, Bloom's Taxonomy verbs.	Qualitative	Predominant English use with some Indonesian, need for teacher training too reduce native language reliance.
Ameliya et al./2024	Teachers' view on Cambridge at secondary school.	Strategies (student-centered), factors (supporting/challenging), outcomes (engagement, proficiency).	Qualitative case study	Promotes interactive methods, challenges include resources and training; positive impact on confidence.
Laili & Rizkiyah/2024	Integration with independent curriculum in junior high EFL	Phases (planning, implementation, assessment), strategies (PBL, LED)	Qualitative case study	Enhances critical thinking; challenges like teacher turnover; adapted to local culture.
Hasibuan & Agustina/2023	Comparison of Indonesian curricula in TEFL, with implication with international integration	Frameworks, competencies, approaches (scientific vs. project-based)	Theoretical/comparative analysis	Shift to communicative focus in recent curricula; adaptable for Cambridge to emphasize text-based learning.

Muzaedah et al./2023	Implementation in early elementary English	Methods (audio-visual, translation) materials (books, digital tools), assessment.	Qualitative case study	Tailored to young learners; fosters engagement through multimedia and cultural intergration
Soraya et al./2025	Syllabus design linking to CEFR in EFL	Syllabus types, CEFR levels, communicative competence	Qualitative library research	Hybrid models effective, challenge in teacher preparedness for global standars like Cambridge.
Agustin et al./2022	Ideological shifts in EFL instruction under global curricula	Language ideologis, instructional transformation.	Qualitative	Teachers adapt to interactive methods, Cambridge aids in overcoming traditional rote learning.

The findings from each of the ten studies that have been reviewed show the challenge is to apply the Cambridge curriculum in the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in Indonesia, showing both achievements and continuing difficulties that are consistent with the theoretical framework from 2018 to 2025. The curriculum's emphasis on learner-centered methodologies, such as Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Learning Experience Design (LED), is a recurring topic in numerous studies, including those by Shalihah et al. (2024) and Laili & Rizkiyah (2024). The tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are in line with this. Following Hymes' communicative competency paradigm (revised by Lee et al., 2023), this method fosters the interaction abilities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing while incorporating intercultural components to improve EFL results. In the view of Hasibuan & Agustina (2023), the move toward conventional grammar-focused approaches in the Indonesian setting attempts to address low proficiency by encouraging practical application. However, cultural adaptation is required to avoid disparities, as Habibah et al. (2023) discuss in relation to national integration. In Islamic elementary schools, for example, Pertiwi (2023) shows how techniques such as the grammar-translation approach and the audio-lingual method, when combined with Cambridge's worldwide perspective, facilitate engaging learning and enhanced language competency. However, in line with the constructivist theory highlighted in the Cambridge framework, this result depends on resources and evaluations that are adapted to the requirements of young learners.

Ameliya et al. (2024) and Muzaedah et al. (2023) both make reference to the issues that dominate the conversation: teacher workload, student ability diversity, and resource limitations. This is consistent with Fullan's (2018) idea of curriculum change, which places a strong emphasis on capacity building. For example, implementation is hampered by teacher turnover in Laili & Rizkiyah (2024), highlighting the significance of professional development promoted by Zein et al. (2020). Soraya et al.'s (2025) CEFR hybrid model is supported by digital integration, as demonstrated by Wijipratiwi & Lolita (2023), especially in light of the notable gains in speaking abilities through Instagram videos (big impact size, $p=0.000$). But it also draws attention to inequalities in infrastructure, especially in Islamic and rural schools, as demonstrated by Pertiwi (2023) and Fadhillah (2023). Here, Bloom's taxonomy verbs and audiovisual approaches encourage higher-order thinking; yet, Fadhillah (2023) points out that excessive usage of Indonesian implies ideological resistance, which is related to Agustin et al.'s (2022) findings on transformative language ideology. Bridging programs, which adapt Cambridge to the elementary level by including local language and cultural elements, can

help overcome this reluctance by improving overall EFL efficacy and promoting smoother transfers, as demonstrated by recent studies.

In regards to theory, Sukirjo et al.'s (2025) resilience framework is supported by its benefits, which include increased engagement, confidence, and the development of critical thinking, as shown in Muzaedah et al.'s (2023) study. This suggests that adaptable curricula foster school resilience. However, as Soraya et al. (2025) warn, shallow implementation runs the risk of turning Cambridge into a testing tool rather than a teaching instrument, which could worsen EFL access inequities. According to Hasibuan & Agustina's (2023) comparative analysis, this might be lessened and individualized learning could be encouraged by integration with the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, when applied correctly, the empirical influence on scholastic attainment examined in the 2025 project shows a good link with English competence. It highlights how important it is to match with Indonesia's credentials system and how stakeholders must be involved in standard-setting. While teachers view institutional support as a motivating feature in secondary contexts, issues like curriculum overload also surface, requiring optimization efforts for quality enhancement. Overall, the results support context-specific implementation: improving EFL competency in line with 21st-century demands and supporting more extensive educational reform through comprehensive training programs that increase teacher effectiveness, fair resource distribution, and policy changes that respect Indonesian values while utilizing Cambridge's global strengths.

CONCLUSION

A systematic review emphasizes that the Cambridge Curriculum offers significant potential for enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Indonesia by focusing on communication skills, critical thinking, and learner engagement. However, its success depends on addressing implementation challenges such as resource constraints, teacher training, and cultural integration. By synthesizing diverse studies, this research highlights the need for adaptive strategies that blend international standards with local contexts. It demonstrates the importance of cultivating confident, proficient English users prepared for global engagement in a connected world. Long-term benefits include improved academic performance and enhanced cross-cultural understanding. Furthermore, research highlights the role of stakeholder engagement in addressing challenges like infrastructure constraints and teacher mobility, revealing patterns of educational innovation and ideological shifts that could direct future curriculum reform. In the end, successful implementation closes ability gaps, promotes inclusive education that is in line with Indonesia's national objectives, and develops students who are capable of navigating a globalized world—producing long-term advantages like better academic achievement and increased intercultural competency.

This study recommends that policymakers prioritize ongoing professional development workshops to enhance teachers' competencies in hybrid curriculum models, that schools invest in digital infrastructure and culturally relevant teaching materials to reduce resource disparities, and that researchers conduct long-term studies to evaluate student learning outcomes over time, providing evidence-based guidelines for EFL improvement that can be widely applied across diverse settings in Indonesia.

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