

## **Integration of Cambridge and Merdeka Curricula as a Model of Sustainable and Moderate Islamic Education in the Global Era**

Siti Choiriyah

Tribakti Lirboyo Islamic University, Kediri

[Sitichoiriyah828@gmail.com](mailto:Sitichoiriyah828@gmail.com)

Isma Aina Salsabila

Tribakti Lirboyo Islamic University, Kediri

[ismaainasalsabila625@gmail.com](mailto:ismaainasalsabila625@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The globalization of education requires Islamic institutions to adapt to global standards while maintaining local wisdom and religious identity. This study explores the integration of the Cambridge and Merdeka curricula at SDI Islamic International School PSM Grogol Kediri as a model of sustainable and moderate Islamic education. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis of lesson plans and curriculum guidelines. The findings reveal that integration is achieved through collaborative mapping of global and national competencies, contextualized lesson planning, and competency-based assessments emphasizing spiritual, cognitive, and affective dimensions. This process not only enhances learning quality and critical thinking but also nurtures tolerance, collaboration, and environmental awareness among students. The study concludes that integrating global and local curricula represents an Islamic eco-pedagogical approach that harmonizes faith, knowledge, and sustainability embodying the spirit of rahmatan lil 'alamin in the educational sphere.

Keywords: sustainable Islamic education, curriculum integration, eco-pedagogy, Cambridge curriculum, Merdeka curriculum

### **INTRODUCTION**

Islamic education in the global era faces new dynamics related not only to technological developments and 21st-century competencies but also to the demands of sustainability and moderation in socio-religious life. The paradigm of Islamic education needs to be strengthened by spiritual values and ecological awareness as part of Islamic sustainable education. (Rohman et al., 2024) This concept positions students as individuals capable of integrating global skills with moderate Islamic ethics and environmental responsibility. (Hajar, n.d.) In this context, curriculum reform is key to ensuring that Islamic education remains relevant to global challenges and the needs of local communities.

The context of globalization demands that Islamic schools integrate international standards with local values. Integrating the Cambridge Curriculum, which emphasizes global competency, scientific literacy, and international assessment, with the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes character, learning flexibility, and the Pancasila Student Profile, is a model that is increasingly being implemented. (Fogarty, 1991) Research by Laili & Rizkiyah shows that implementing Cambridge can improve language literacy and student confidence in English learning. (Laili & Rizkiyah, 2024) Meanwhile, the Independent Curriculum provides space for strengthening Islamic spiritual values and character in

learning. (Woro Yustia Pratiwi et al., 2025) The integration of the two creates a collaborative space between global competency and Islamic moral values.

Various previous studies provide a basis for the urgency of this curriculum integration. Syayidah & Pratomo found that aligning the Cambridge Curriculum with the Independent Curriculum in high school Physics learning effectively improves students' conceptual understanding and problem-solving abilities (Dinurrohmah & Pratomo, 2023) . Salsabila Arifuddin & Minabari showed that the integration of the two curricula at the elementary school level has an impact on increasing students' critical thinking skills and creativity (Salsabila et al., 2025) . In the context of Islamic education, Achmad Abdul Azis (2023) emphasized that the Independent Curriculum has included the value of religious moderation as part of strengthening moderate Islamic character (Abdul Azis, 2024) . Furthermore, Nasir showed that science learning based on the Independent Curriculum contains spirituality and moral values as part of the integration of science and religion. (Nasir, 2024) These findings provide an important foundation for this research.

However, there is a significant research gap. First, the majority of studies on the integration of the Cambridge Merdeka curriculum still focus on the technical aspects of learning, not on the perspective of sustainable Islamic education that emphasizes the values of moderation, environmental ethics, and Islamic character. Second, research at the Islamic elementary school level, especially international-based schools, is still very limited, so there is no integrated model that specifically combines global competencies, Islamic character, and sustainability principles. (Albar et al., 2024). Third, no studies have been found that examine how the integration of the two curricula is used as a framework for Islamic pedagogy, especially regarding attitudes of ecological responsibility in children's learning.

Therefore, this study is crucial to analyze how the integration of the Cambridge Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum is implemented at SDI Islamic International School PSM Grogol Kediri, particularly within the framework of strengthening the values of moderation, Islamic character, and sustainability. This study also examines the strategy for aligning Cambridge core competencies with the learning outcomes of the Independent Curriculum, the design of teaching materials, learning methods, and authentic assessments used in the school. The results of this study are expected to serve as a model for implementing national international curriculum integration in elementary Islamic education that is responsive to global challenges while strengthening religious identity and ecological responsibility.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study to understand the phenomenon of the integration of the Cambridge Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum in depth in the context of elementary Islamic schools. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine reality in a naturalistic and contextual manner in accordance with Creswell's view (John W. Creswell & Cherly N. Poth, 2018) that qualitative research focuses on the exploration of meaning and processes in natural settings. (John W. Creswell & Cherly N. Poth, 2018) The case study design was used because the research attempts to comprehensively portray the process of curriculum integration in one system unit as explained by Yin that case studies are appropriate for research that requires an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena. (O'Connor & Gibson, nd)

This research was conducted at SDI Islamic International School PSM Grogol Kediri, an internationally-based Islamic school that integrates the Cambridge Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum. The research informants consisted of the principal, the vice

principal for curriculum, a Cambridge teacher (English, Mathematics, Science), a class teacher, and an Islamic Religious Education teacher. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, as recommended by Sugiyono, who recommends that qualitative informants be selected based on their involvement and competence in the phenomenon being studied. (Sugiyono, 2024)

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation studies. Interviews were used to explore teachers' knowledge and experiences regarding curriculum integration strategies, while observations were used to observe actual learning practices. The documentation study included analysis of curriculum documents, teaching modules, Cambridge syllabi, and assessment instruments. This technique aligns with the guidelines of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (Millah et al., 2023), which emphasize the importance of using multiple data sources to strengthen the accuracy of qualitative findings. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive analysis model, which includes three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation was carried out by selecting, simplifying, and grouping field findings. Data presentation was presented in the form of thematic narratives and matrices to facilitate researchers in seeing patterns, relationships, and structures of the findings. The verification process was carried out repeatedly to ensure conclusions were accurate, supported by data, and consistent.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the data, this study employed source and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from Cambridge principals and Independent Curriculum teachers, while method triangulation was conducted by checking the consistency of interview findings, observation, and documentation. This technique refers to Moleong and Patton's opinion that triangulation is an important strategy for addressing bias and increasing the validity of findings in qualitative research (Patton et al., 2015).

## RESULTS

### **Local-Global Curriculum Integration (Cambridge & Merdeka)**

The integration of the Cambridge Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum at the Islamic International School PSM Grogol Kediri Elementary School is an effective synergistic process, based on three main priorities, including: achieving international standards (Math, Science, English), strengthening the Islamic environment (character and Qur'anic), and insight. (F. Sasongko, personal communication, 2025). The integration of the Dual Curriculum at the Islamic International School PSM Kediri Elementary School aims to produce a generation that has a "global insight" (A. Yunanto, personal communication, 2025) but also has a strong Islamic background. This process is carried out through careful planning and implementation in the classroom that combines two curriculum standards.

1. Curriculum Competency Planning and Mapping are conducted at the beginning of each semester. The school holds a workshop to map the Cambridge Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum to identify overlapping topics. The results of this mapping are standardized in a Scheme of Work (SOW) document and then incorporated into a Lesson Plan (LP) document as a guide for teachers in daily learning. The science teacher emphasized that there is only one SOW for each subject, the contents of which are the results of the mapping of predetermined topics and the integration plan in learning and achievement objectives. This SOW explicitly lists the learning objectives of both curricula and links them to character development. (Y. Purnamasari, personal communication, 2025)

2. Implementation of curriculum integration in the classroom is realized through the use of two learning resources (dual curriculum books) and bilingual teaching methods on the same topic. Synergy of core material is seen when teachers of subjects, such as Science/Science combine discussions that align with the international and national curriculum. In the topic of "Light and Vision," for example, the material is taught in an integrated manner so that students are able to master academic terminology in English and Indonesian simultaneously. This bilingual learning approach produces effective language output, where students not only understand concepts comprehensively, but are also able to answer questions and explain the material using both languages well.

Thus, the integration of these two curricula not only strengthens mastery of the material but also accelerates the development of students' communicative abilities in the context of global learning.

### **Impact of Improving the Quality of Learning and Character**

This dual curriculum integration has a significant impact, especially in cognitive aspects and character formation.

1. Improving Global Competence: IIS Kediri graduates were rated significantly superior in English language skills and fluent in all aspects of personal dialogue tests compared to comparable national schools. This demonstrates the achievement of international competency targets.
2. Cultivating Critical and Collaborative Characters: Learning quality is improved through the adoption of critical thinking-oriented strategies (Cambridge-style Inquiry-Based Learning) synergized with the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Critical Reasoning and Mutual Cooperation are explicitly measured and written in the SOW as targeted competencies.

Research findings reveal that curriculum integration has a significant impact on improving the quality of learning. Teachers report that students demonstrate progress in critical thinking skills, scientific literacy, problem-solving skills, and English communication skills on student reports. Classroom observations indicate that learning becomes more interactive through the use of project-based learning models, group discussions, and science experiments that require students to connect global concepts with local realities. Students also appear to be able to express their opinions more confidently and actively participate in class activities. This learning process not only improves material absorption but also fosters deeper and more meaningful learning patterns. (Mustadi & Junaidi, 2024)

Curriculum integration not only results in academic improvements but also has a positive impact on student character development. Field findings indicate that students demonstrate more tolerance, cooperation, and concern for the school environment. In various project activities, students are directly involved in activities that encourage social empathy, such as public service activities, environmental cleanliness activities, and community-based programs. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and Cambridge teachers both emphasize the importance of honesty, politeness, and discipline in every learning activity. In addition, routine activities such as Dhuha prayer, Quran memorization, reciting prayers, and practicing daily morals strengthen the spiritual dimension in character development. This integration of academic, spiritual, and social values is the main strength of the curriculum model in this school. (Hajar, nd-b) as summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Integration of Islamic Curriculum &amp; Education Model Based on Eco-Pedagogy

Component	Key Findings	Form Process/Practice	Impact/Outcome
Cambridge-Merdeka Curriculum Integration	<b>Global-local competency alignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Mapping Cambridge Learning Objectives with CP Merdeka</li> <li>❖ Preparation of integrated teaching modules</li> <li>❖ Combination of Cambridge formative assessment + Merdeka diagnostic assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The learning structure is more focused and integrated</li> <li>❖ Learning relevant to global and local contexts</li> </ul>
Collaboration between Teachers & Curriculum Team	<b>Cross-curriculum collaboration</b> (Cambridge-Merdeka-PAI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Regular curriculum meetings</li> <li>❖ Collaborative teaching tool development</li> <li>❖ Coordination of assessment and learning strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The learning system is more consistent</li> <li>❖ Integration of Islamic values in all subjects</li> <li>❖ Efficiency of planning and implementing learning</li> </ul>
Impact on Learning Quality	<b>Increasing academic competence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Project-based learning (PBL) Science experiments and group discussions</li> <li>❖ Context-based English activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Improving critical thinking, problem solving, scientific literacy and English language skills</li> <li>❖ More active student involvement</li> </ul>
Impact on Student Character	<b>Strengthening the character of moderate Islam</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Habitual worship (Dhuha prayer, prayer, Tahfidz)</li> <li>❖ Social projects &amp; environmental cleanliness Instilling manners &amp; ethics in all lessons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Students are more tolerant, disciplined, cooperative</li> <li>❖ Growing empathy and social-environmental concern</li> <li>❖ Balance of spiritual, social and academic aspects</li> </ul>
Eco-Pedagogy Based Islamic Education Model	Integration of faith, science & environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Science learning is linked to environmental issues</li> <li>❖ Discussion of the role of humans as caliphs on earth</li> <li>❖ Natural phenomena analysis activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The emergence of ecological awareness (eco-awareness)</li> <li>❖ Responsibility for protecting nature increases. Learning reflects the principle of rahmatan lil 'alamin.</li> </ul>

The table above summarizes the main research findings on the curriculum integration process at SD Islamic International School PSM Grogol Kediri. The table shows the relationship between the curriculum integration and collaboration process, learning implementation, academic and character impacts, and the outcomes of the eco-pedagogy-based Islamic education model.

### Sustainable Islamic Education Model Based on Eco-Pedagogy

The educational model born from the synthesis of the Cambridge Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum is Islamic Eco-Pedagogy which unites faith, knowledge, and sustainability.

The implementation of Islamic Eco-Pedagogy is realized through the P5 Project themed Sustainable Lifestyle, which involves practical activities such as processing waste and growing vegetables in the garden, developing students' ecological awareness (eco-awareness) as a form of responsibility towards nature. Learning in this school actively connects academic material with environmental issues and social responsibility, instilling in students an understanding of their role as "khalifah fil ardh" in preserving the earth. This is evidenced by various real-life activities in the field:

1. Planting/Gardening Activities: Students actively participate in planting and caring for plants around the school. This activity not only teaches conservation practices but also fosters a sense of responsibility and cooperation.
2. Recycling Activities: "Reuse and recycle" activities are carried out, even from preschool level, to introduce the importance of waste management and waste reduction.
3. Nature Exploration: The "Nature and History" activity at Mount Klotok engages students in direct observation of the natural environment, encouraging them to observe and learn about ecosystems firsthand.
4. Communal Work: Teachers are also involved in "Communal Work" activities such as tidying up the environment, providing direct examples of concern for cleanliness and sustainability.

Therefore, this model successfully transforms religious dogma about preserving nature into practical responsibility and direct student experience. These activities, which are routinely documented, serve as concrete evidence of the application of Islamic Eco-Pedagogy, which integrates Islamic teachings on preserving nature with the practice of sustainability education.

### **Implementation of Moderate Islamic Educational Values**

Moderate Islamic education is realized through the instillation of character values integrated into every learning activity and reinforced by the teacher's personal approach. Values such as tolerance, mutual cooperation, empathy, and adaptability are consistently instilled across various subjects. The Scheme of Work document for the Natural Sciences subject explicitly lists "Character Building / Pancasila Student Profile," which includes Independence, Critical Thinking, and Mutual Cooperation. The implementation of moderate character is demonstrated through the following learning activities:

#### **Character Building through Cross-Curriculum**

1. Collaborative Science Learning: Students conduct "Science Experiments" such as dissolving materials in water in groups, encouraging cooperation and critical thinking.
2. Joint Social and Environmental Activities: Activities such as planting and communal work involve collaboration between students and teachers, reinforcing the values of mutual cooperation and shared responsibility.
3. activity demonstrates the collective instillation of spiritual and national values, reflecting a moderate and inclusive Islamic identity.

#### **Personal Approach (Contact Time)**

Student character development is strengthened through the school's unique program, "Kontak Time," a weekly one-hour personal mentoring session outside of the formal

classroom schedule. This program is designed to provide a safe space for students to build emotional bonds with their teachers.

The main goal of this program is to foster a bond between teachers and students, making them feel more comfortable and happy in the school environment. Through relaxed dialogue, students can share experiences and everyday challenges, including the dynamics of friendship. This interaction not only strengthens the teacher-student relationship but also serves as a means of instilling empathy, social skills, and a moderate and tolerant attitude in interactions. Thus, Contact Time is an effective strategy in supporting the development of moderate and tolerant character.

#### Graduate Competency Outputs in the Global Era

This curriculum integration model produces graduates with balanced competencies to face the demands of the global era. In terms of global readiness, students demonstrate superior English language skills and fluent communication in personal dialogue, as conveyed by the Principal. Furthermore, they are also prepared to face international exams such as the IPT and Checkpoint Cambridge, as explained by the Deputy Head of Curriculum. Overall, this integration model produces a holistic outcome, combining a global educational orientation with Islamic values and local wisdom. This is evident in the strengthening of characters of tolerance, collaboration, and environmental awareness. Experiential activities such as the Trip to Dhoho Airport also broaden students' insights into modern facilities and prepare them for mobility and competition at the global level.

## DISCUSSION

### **Curriculum Integration as a Practice of Moderation and Sustainability**

The integration of the Cambridge Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at the Islamic International School PSM Kediri Elementary School is not merely a technical process of aligning materials but a strategic, moderate Islamic educational practice. This integration results in a synthesis between the demands of a global perspective, as characterized by the Cambridge curriculum, which emphasizes international academic competence, and the strengthening of Islamic identity and local values, as the focus of the Merdeka Curriculum. This integrative approach aligns with Robin Fogarty's theory of the connected and shared curriculum model, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of materials and collaboration between teachers in designing cross-curricular learning. (Fogarty, 1991)

This approach serves as a sustainable education strategy because it not only strengthens academic competencies but also forms the foundation of character and spirituality needed by the Muslim generation in the global era. These findings align with Rohman et al., who assert that contemporary Islamic education needs to combine 21st-century skills with ecological awareness and the value of moderation to remain relevant. (Rahmawati et al., n.d.) Therefore, the integration of Cambridge-Merdeka at SD IIS PSM can be seen as a concrete implementation of education for sustainability from an Islamic perspective.

### **Ecotheological and Social Dimensions in Learning**

The curriculum integration at this school extends beyond the cognitive aspect to the ecotheological dimension, namely the understanding that environmental protection is part of faith. This approach is evident through various learning activities that connect science,

Islamic values, and ecological experiences, including the P5 Sustainable Lifestyle project, gardening activities, organic waste recycling, and the "Nature & History" nature exploration program.

This ecotheological dimension reinforces the idea that students are *khalifah fil ardh* (guardians of the earth), so that every act of caring for the environment becomes part of a religious mandate. This aligns with the literature on eco-theology in Islam (Nasr.; Khalid, ), which emphasizes the integration of spirituality with nature conservation. (Nasr, 1996) (Khalid, 2010) This approach also fills the gap in previous research which generally only highlights eco-pedagogy in Islamic boarding schools and has not provided concrete examples of implementation at the elementary school level based on an international curriculum (e.g. research by Albar et al., 2024).

The thematic activity "Caring for the Earth is Caring for Faith" is an important innovation because it not only teaches conservation but also connects students with the Islamic values of *ihsan*, *amanah*, and ecological responsibility. Students plant trees, recycle organic waste, and discuss the meaning of preserving nature as an act of worship. Teachers emphasize the connection between ecological action and Islamic values, so students understand that the environment is not just an object of learning but an integral part of spirituality. Other social activities, such as Charity Week and Community Clean-Up Day, emphasize the strengthening of socio-religious values. These two activities not only foster empathy and solidarity but also instill social moderation through direct practice. This model reinforces the theory of experiential moderation (Arinda Firdianti et al., 2025) , which emphasizes that moderate attitudes are more effectively formed through social experience than through cognitive learning alone.

### **Contribution to Sustainable Islamic Education**

This Cambridge-Merdeka curriculum integration model makes a significant contribution to the development of moderate and sustainable Islamic education practices. Compared with previous research that tends to focus solely on technical aspects of learning or the national curriculum (e.g., Dinurrohmah & Pratomo; Salsabila et al.), this study demonstrates that integrating the two curricula can serve as a strategic framework for building a global Muslim student identity that is firmly rooted in Islamic values. (Dinurrohmah & Pratomo, 2023)

The academic contribution of this research lies in three aspects:

1. **The Novelty of the Islamic Eco-Pedagogy Model in Two-Curriculum Elementary Schools**  
There is little previous research examining Islamic eco-pedagogy in internationally curricula elementary schools. This research shows that activities such as "Caring for the Earth is Caring for Faith," Charity Week, Community Clean-Up Day, and the P5 Sustainable Lifestyle Project.  
It is not just a routine program but is a pedagogical structure that is integrated in the SOW (Scheme of Work) and Lesson Plan (LP) so that ecologically oriented learning runs systematically and measurably.
2. **Measured and Integrated Religious Moderation**  
Different from previous research that placed moderation as a normative vision, this school integrates moderation indicators into: SOW documents, character assessments (spiritual-environmental), cross-curricular learning, communal activities, Contact Time as a personal approach.

This shows that moderation can be operationalized and evaluated, not just an abstract value.

### 3. A Practical Blueprint for Integrative Islamic Schools

This research produces a practical model in the form of: a single SOW for Cambridge-Merdeka integration, structured dual curriculum books, bilingual learning on the same topic, character strengthening based on ecological and social activities, character assessment that includes moderation indicators.

This finding serves as an important reference for other Islamic schools that wish to adopt global-local curriculum integration from an Islamic perspective.

## **Implementation of Moderate Islamic Educational Values**

In this study, religious moderation is operationalized through four main dimensions: tolerance, balance, social inclusion, and environmental responsibility. These four values are clearly reflected in the learning practices at SD IIS PSM Kediri. The integration of moderation values is not only carried out through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects but also appears in cross-subject SOW (Social Sciences, English, Mathematics), project activities, character assessments, and communal activities. This cross-curricular approach aligns with religious moderation guidelines (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021) and research by Sirojuddin et al., which emphasizes the synergy between formal learning, habituation, and social experience in shaping moderate values. (Sirojuddin et al., 2025)

The Contact Time program is a unique finding because it provides a safe space for students to engage in dialogue about social issues, friendships, and daily life dynamics. Teachers emphasized that this program creates emotional bonds that strengthen empathy and mutual respect. This approach aligns with Patton's findings that personal dialogue is effective in fostering tolerance and emotional regulation in students. (Patton et al., 2015) Communal activities such as Prayer for Indonesia, community service, and environmental projects strengthen the integration of spirituality, nationality, and tolerance. Compared to previous research that only highlighted moderation in Islamic Religious Education learning spaces, this study offers an example of the implementation of systematic, measurable, and cross-curricular moderation.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that the integration of the Cambridge Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at the Islamic International School PSM Kediri Elementary School is a model of moderate and sustainable Islamic education relevant to the demands of the global era. This integration is achieved through a systematic planning process, cross-curricular competency mapping, bilingual learning implementation, and the use of an integrated Scheme of Work that combines international academic standards with Pancasila and Islamic character values.

In terms of learning quality, this model strengthens cognitive and language skills, encouraging participatory learning, critical thinking, and collaboration. Meanwhile, in terms of affective and spiritual dimensions, this curriculum integration fosters moderate character through value-based activities such as the P5 Project, eco-pedagogy ("Caring for the Earth is Caring for Faith"), Charity Week social activities, and Community Clean -Up Day, which instills the values of empathy, mutual cooperation, and environmental awareness.

This model has also been proven to create graduates who are globally competent yet rooted in Islamic values and local wisdom, including strong English language skills, readiness for international assessments, and a tolerant and adaptive character. Therefore, this

research provides a new contribution, demonstrating that local-global curriculum integration is not only effective in improving academic competence but can also serve as a framework for sustainable Islamic education that integrates spirituality, ecology, and religious moderation. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for developing curriculum innovations in other Islamic schools seeking to address the national-international education dichotomy.

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