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Facing the Challenges of Globalization: Transforming Madrasah Education from Bilingual to International Classrooms

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Abstract

This study examines the process of transforming bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri Kendari and analyzes the community's response to the transformation. This article used a case study approach; the research involved in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The results show that this transformation involved significant changes in curriculum, pedagogical approach, and learning infrastructure. MTs Ummusshabri adopted the Cambridge curriculum integrated with the national curriculum and Islamic values. The main challenges include improving teachers' competencies, providing adequate facilities, and balancing international standards and madrasah identity. Community response, especially parents, has been generally positive, although there are concerns regarding tuition fees and academic pressure. The transformation has improved students' English proficiency, critical thinking skills and global outlook. MTs Ummusshabri's success in integrating international standards with Islamic values makes it a potential model for other madrasahs in Indonesia. This research highlights the importance of curriculum adaptation that considers local needs and religious values in the context of international education.

Keywords: International classroom, Education transformation, Bilingual Madrasah, Globalization.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji proses transformasi kelas bilingual menjadi kelas internasional di MTs Ummusshabri Kendari, serta menganalisis respons masyarakat terhadap transformasi tersebut. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus, penelitian ini melibatkan wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa transformasi ini melibatkan perubahan signifikan dalam kurikulum, pendekatan pedagogis, dan infrastruktur pembelajaran. MTs Ummusshabri mengadopsi kurikulum Cambridge yang diintegrasikan dengan kurikulum nasional dan nilai-nilai Islam. Tantangan utama meliputi peningkatan kompetensi guru, penyediaan fasilitas yang memadai, dan menjaga keseimbangan antara standar internasional dengan identitas madrasah. Respons masyarakat, terutama orang tua siswa, umumnya positif, meskipun ada kekhawatiran terkait biaya pendidikan dan tekanan akademik. Transformasi ini telah meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris siswa, keterampilan berpikir kritis, dan wawasan global. Keberhasilan MTs Ummusshabri dalam mengintegrasikan standar internasional dengan nilai-nilai Islam menjadikannya model potensial bagi madrasah lain di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya adaptasi kurikulum yang mempertimbangkan kebutuhan lokal dan nilai-nilai agama dalam konteks pendidikan internasional.

Kata kunci: Kelas internasional, Transformasi pendidikan, Madrasah bilingual, Globalisasi

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INTRODUCTION

The era of rapid globalization requires education to play an important role in preparing the younger generation to face global challenges (Adeoye et al., 2025; Dian et al., 2023; Wilson et al., 2009). One of the efforts made by education providers is the emergence of the idea of creating bilingual classes, which are classes that implement learning by using two languages as instructional mediums, usually the national language and a foreign language, such as English (Attaufiqi et al., 2024; Aziz et al., 2022; Jones Martin, 2007). The implementation of bilingual classes in various schools aims to improve student's language competence and prepare them to face global challenges (Barahona, 2016; Basri et al., 2024; Indasari et al., 2024; Ritonga et al., 2024).

According to Hommel, bilingualism provides cognitive advantages, such as more flexible and creative thinking (Hommel et al., 2011). In addition, bilingual students also have an advantage in the increasingly globalized world of work (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2020). In the institutional context, MTs Ummusshabri Kendari has been implementing bilingual class services for 8 (eight) years and has had a positive impact on the image of the madrasah in the community. The presence of foreign teachers as native speakers has also increased public trust. However, the madrasah education organizers do not stop at implementing bilingual classes, they want to improve the status of bilingual classes to become international classes through a transformation process. The transformation of bilingual classes into international classes is not only about changing the language of instruction from Indonesian to English or other international languages, but also involves fundamental changes in pedagogical approaches, curriculum structure, and school/madrasa culture.

English Medium Instruction (EMI) has become a rapidly growing global phenomenon today, especially at the higher education level, due to its ability to improve students' language competence and global competitiveness (Asse et al., 2023; Galloway et al., 2017; Rasidin et al., 2024). Therefore, the transformation of bilingual classes into international classes is a strategic step to prepare students for global challenges (Gunawan et al., 2022; Li, 2017). With the adoption of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and EMI models, and the implementation of effective strategies, schools can create a more inclusive and globally oriented learning environment (Maulidiya et al., 2024; Rauf et al., 2021). This transformation not only improves students' language competence but also equips them with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in the global community (Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015). However, how are the processes and stages of transformation carried out and how is the community or parents' response to the transformation of bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri Kendari? This is the focus of research and discussion in this paper.

This study aims to explore the process and stages of the transformation of bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri Kendari, as well as to analyze the response of the community or parents of students to the transformation. This research is expected to contribute to the development of knowledge in the field of education, especially related to the transformation of bilingual classes into international classes at the secondary school level. The novelty in this research is the focus on the process and stages of transforming bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri Kendari, as well

as analyzing the response of the community or parents of students. Previous research generally focuses on the comparison between bilingual and regular classes (Mattheoudakis, 2024), or the implementation of bilingual classes in general (Henderson, 2017). However, not many have examined the process of transforming bilingual classes into international classes and its implications for the community.

METHOD

This research uses a case study approach to explore the process and stages of transforming bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri Kendari and analyze the community's or parents' response to the transformation. Case studies were chosen because they allow researchers to conduct in-depth and comprehensive investigations into the phenomenon of transforming bilingual classes into international classes in a real-life context. (Creswell, 2010)

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies (Moeloeng, 2017). In-depth interviews were conducted to explore informants' views, experiences and understandings related to the process of transforming bilingual classes into international classes and the response of the community or parents. Participatory observation was conducted to directly observe the learning process in the bilingual/international classroom, as well as the interaction between the school, teachers and parents. Documentation studies were conducted to analyze related documents, such as curriculum, school strategic plans, and program evaluation reports.

The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis process included transcribing the interviews, coding the data, identifying the main themes, and interpreting the data (Emzir, 2014). Furthermore, data triangulation was carried out by comparing and confirming findings from various data sources to ensure the validity and credibility of the research results (Maimun, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study examines the implementation of the transformation of bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri Kendari. Through in-depth interviews with school officials, direct observation, and analysis of relevant documents, a comprehensive picture of the transformation's process, challenges, and impacts was obtained. The interview with the principal revealed that the decision to transform the bilingual class into an international class was based on a vision to prepare students to face global challenges. The principal stated: *"We realize that in this era of globalization, students need to be equipped not only with proficient foreign language skills, but also with an international perspective and globally recognized skills."*

In line with this, the vice principal for curriculum added that this transformation is a response to the demands of parents and the community for quality education and international insight.

Observation of the school environment revealed significant changes in infrastructure and learning facilities. International classrooms have modern multimedia equipment, including interactive projectors and high-speed internet access. The school library has also been

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enriched with a collection of English-language books covering various disciplines. The science and computer laboratories have been updated to meet international standards, allowing students to conduct more complex experiments and projects.

Analysis of the curriculum documents revealed that MTs Ummusshabri has adopted the Cambridge curriculum, which is integrated with the national curriculum and Islamic values. The documents show that the school has made careful adjustments to ensure that students meet international standards and remain rooted in local values and context. This is reflected in the lesson plans that include material from the Cambridge curriculum while retaining Islamic religious studies and local culture.

Interviews with teachers who teach in international classrooms revealed challenges and opportunities in the transformation process. An English teacher said: *"Initially, we felt overwhelmed by the demands of the Cambridge curriculum. However, after attending intensive training and workshops, we began to understand its philosophy and teaching methods."* Other teachers added that they had to adapt to a more student-centred and inquiry-based approach to learning, which is a hallmark of the international curriculum.

Observations of the learning process in international classrooms showed significant changes in teaching methods. Teachers were seen implementing a more interactive and collaborative pedagogical approach. Students are actively involved in group discussions, presentations and research projects. The use of English as the language of instruction is consistent, although teachers still occasionally use Indonesian to explain complex concepts.

Documentation of student learning outcomes shows encouraging improvements in English language proficiency and overall academic achievement. Students' average scores in Cambridge standardized examinations show a positive trend from semester to semester. In addition, records of student participation in international competitions and student exchange programs also show an increase, indicating students' broadening horizons and confidence in a global context.

Interviews with students revealed positive responses to this transformation. An 8th grade student stated, *"Studying in an international class opened my eyes to a wider world. I feel more confident speaking in English and discussing global issues."* Another student added that they felt challenged but also motivated by the higher academic standards. Observations of extracurricular activities indicate the addition of programs that support the school's international vision. Model United Nations, an English debate club, and virtual cultural exchange programs with schools abroad are integral to students' learning experiences. These activities not only improve students' language skills but also develop cross-cultural understanding and diplomacy skills.

Analysis of international cooperation documents shows that MTs Ummusshabri has established partnerships with several educational institutions abroad. These partnerships include teacher exchange programs, collaborative research projects, and opportunities for students to join summer programs abroad. These documents also reveal the school's plan to become a Cambridge exam centre in the Eastern Indonesia region, which will further strengthen its position as an international educational institution.

Interviews with parents revealed a high level of satisfaction with this transformation. One mother stated, *"We see positive changes in our child, not only in his English skills but also in his way*

of thinking which has become more critical and open.” However, some parents also expressed concerns about the rising cost of education and greater academic pressure on their children.

Observations of social interactions in the school environment showed an increased multicultural awareness among students and staff. The use of English as a lingua franca outside the classroom is becoming more common and students appear more comfortable interacting with foreign guests or teachers visiting the school. The school decor also reflects an international theme, with maps of the world, flags of different countries and information about global culture displayed in various corners of the school.

Analysis of the school's strategic planning document revealed a long-term vision to make MTs Ummusshabri a model of integrating Islamic education with international standards. The document outlines plans to expand the international program to the senior high school level and develop a fully integrated curriculum of Cambridge standards, national curriculum, and Islamic education.

Interviews with representatives from the Ummusshabri Foundation revealed that this transformation is part of a broader strategy to improve the quality of Islamic education in Eastern Indonesia. The foundation representative stated, “We want to prove that Islamic education can go hand in hand with international standards without losing its identity. MTs Ummusshabri is a pioneer in this vision.”

Observation of the student assessment and evaluation process indicates the adoption of a more comprehensive and competency-oriented assessment system. In addition to written exams, students are also assessed through research projects, oral presentations, and portfolios. This assessment system is in line with Cambridge standards that emphasize the development of higher-order thinking skills and the application of knowledge in real contexts.

Analysis of teacher training documents reveals significant investment in the professional development of teaching staff. The school has organized a series of workshops and trainings, both internally and in collaboration with Cambridge Assessment International Education. Training topics include inquiry-based teaching methodologies, formative assessment, and integration of technology in learning.

Tabel 1. Research findings about Transforming Madrasah Education from Bilingual to International Classrooms

No	Categories	Research findings
1.	Process of Transformation	a. The transformation decision was driven by the school's vision to prepare students for global challenges. b. The transformation is a response to the demands of parents and the community.
2.	Changes in Infrastructure	a. Classrooms are equipped with modern multimedia equipment. b. The library is enriched with a collection of English books

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Discussions

The transformation of bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri Kendari is a strategic step aimed at improving the quality of education and preparing students to face global challenges. The implementation of this international class is in line with global trends in education, where schools are shifting from a bilingual model to an international model to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge in the era of globalization (Adeoye et al., 2025; Dian et al., 2023; García, 2013).

The implementation of international classes at MTs Ummusshabri adopts the Cambridge curriculum, which is known to have high academic standards and global recognition. This is in line with the opinion of Cambridge International Examinations which emphasizes that their curriculum is designed to stimulate critical and analytical thinking (Lim, 2012). The choice of the Cambridge curriculum also provides the advantage of flexibility that allows schools to adapt the program according to local needs and contexts, as noted by Cambridge Assessment International Education (Basri & Abdullah, 2024; Holandiyah et al., 2022; Huda et al., 2024).

In its implementation, MTs Ummusshabri faced several challenges, including limited resources, internet access, and foreign language skills. These challenges are in line with Sasha Alexander Barab and April Lynn Luehmann's findings highlighting the need for support from the government and educational institutions to facilitate the curriculum adaptation process (Barab & Luehmann, 2003). To address the challenge of teacher competence, MTs Ummusshabri conducts special selection and ongoing training, which is in line with Canado's recommendations on the importance of intensive and ongoing training for teachers in the context of bilingual or international education (Pérez Cañado, 2016).

The pedagogical approaches applied in the international classrooms of MTs Ummusshabri include inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, collaborative learning, and technology-based learning. These approaches are in line with modern educational theories and best practices in international education. For example, inquiry-based learning, which according to Samuel Kai Wah Chu et al, encourages students to ask questions, explore problems and find solutions independently, helps develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are indispensable in a global context (Chu et al., 2021).

The use of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and EMI (English Medium Instruction) models at MTs Ummusshabri also shows the seriousness in integrating language learning with academic content. This is in line with the findings of Tarja Nikula et al which show that the CLIL approach can improve language skills and understanding of academic content simultaneously (Nikula et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the implementation of EMI is in line with the global trend noted by Kirkpatrick, where the use of English as the language of instruction is becoming increasingly common across different levels of education (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Another important aspect of this transformation is the effort to maintain the madrasah's identity as an Islamic educational institution. MTs Ummusshabri successfully integrates Islamic values with an international curriculum approach, ensuring that students not only acquire broad academic knowledge, but also maintain their spiritual and moral values. This approach is in line with the concept of holistic education discussed by Hayden and Thompson

(2013), where education does not only focus on academic aspects but also on character development and moral values.

The application of a multicultural approach in international classes at MTs Ummusshabri is also an important point. In accordance with the opinion of Keengwe, multicultural education aims to help students develop cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication skills, and the ability to participate effectively in a global society (Baguna, 2020; Keengwe, 2010; Rohmah et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant in the context of an international classroom, where students are prepared to face an increasingly connected and diverse world.

The transformation of bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri also provides significant benefits for students. Increased language competence, as described by Agudo, allows students to achieve a higher level of language proficiency compared to monolingual learning (Martínez Agudo, 2020). In addition, the cognitive advantage proposed by Baker, where bilingual students show better metacognitive abilities, is also an advantage for international class students at MTs Ummusshabri.

In terms of career opportunities, Cristina Alfaro and Lilia Bartolomé (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2023). findings of wider career opportunities for individuals with bilingual skills are highly relevant to the objectives of the international class at MTs Ummusshabri. Students who graduate from this program are expected to have a competitive advantage in the global job market, in accordance with the opinion of Grosse who states that bilingual ability provides a competitive advantage in the global job market (Grosse, 2004). The implementation of international classes at MTs Ummusshabri also reflects recent developments in global education. The use of technology in learning, as recommended by Peters, helps to create a more interactive and flexible learning environment. This is particularly important in the context of international education, where students need to be prepared for an increasingly digital and connected world (Peters, 2002).

The competency-based learning approach implemented at MTs Ummusshabri, as discussed by Rachel Fitzgerald, et.al, allows for more personalized and flexible learning (Fitzgerald et al., 2022). This approach is very much in line with the demands of modern education which emphasizes real learning outcomes and is relevant to real-world needs. The transformation of bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri also demonstrates an awareness of the importance of preparing students for higher education and international careers. As noted by Janette Ryan, the global recognition provided by the Cambridge curriculum is one of the key advantages that can provide advantages for students planning to pursue international studies or careers (Ryan, 2011).

However, it should be noted that this transformation is not without challenges. Limited resources, especially in terms of teachers experienced in international languages and adequate facilities, are significant barriers (Enes et al., 2024; Kango et al., 2021; Sutrisno et al., 2023). This is in line with previous research findings that emphasize the importance of teacher training and provision of adequate resources in the implementation of international education programs (Basari et al., 2023; Haidar et al., 2022).

MTs Ummusshabri's efforts in overcoming these challenges, such as conducting a selection of teachers' teaching competencies conducted by Cambridge and increasing internet

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network capacity, demonstrate a strong commitment to the success of this program. This approach is in line with Cambridge's recommendations on the importance of continuous training and professional support to ensure that teachers can teach effectively in an international context.

Another important aspect in this transformation is the effort to balance international standards with local needs and values. Kamran Namdar emphasize the importance of ensuring that international curricula are globally relevant and appropriate to local needs and values (Namdar, 2012). MTs Ummusshabri achieved this balance by maintaining the madrasah's identity as an Islamic educational institution while adopting international education standards. MTs Ummusshabri's experience in implementing international classes also provides valuable insights into the curriculum adaptation process. As suggested by García, adapting the national curriculum to match international standards requires significant time and effort. MTs Ummusshabri has shown that this adaptation can be done successfully with careful planning and support from various parties.

The pedagogical approaches applied in the international classrooms of MTs Ummusshabri, such as inquiry-based learning and project-based learning, align with best practices in international education. Kokotsaki emphasizes that project-based learning provides a relevant and meaningful context for students, (Kokotsaki et al., 2016) while Wale points out that inquiry-based learning encourages the development of critical and analytical thinking skills (Wale & Bishaw, 2020).

Implementing collaborative learning at MTs Ummusshabri, as discussed by Barkley, Cross, and Major, helps develop social, communication, and teamwork skills crucial in a global environment. This shows that MTs Ummusshabri is not only focused on academic achievement but also on developing the soft skills necessary for success in an increasingly connected world. The use of differentiated learning demonstrates MT Ummusshabri's awareness of the diversity of student learning needs. This approach allows for the tailoring of teaching methods to students' individual needs, interests and abilities, which is particularly important in the context of a diverse international class (Mullen, 2012).

The implementation of international classes at MTs Ummusshabri also reflects global trends in Islamic education. Like other examples in Indonesia, such as the International Class Program (ICP) at UIN Maliki Malang and the Cambridge Class at MAN 4 Pondok Pinang Jakarta, MTs Ummusshabri shows that Islamic education institutions can adopt international education standards while still maintaining Islamic values. However, it should be noted that the implementation of international classes in madrasahs is still relatively new and rare in Indonesia, especially in the eastern part of Indonesia. This places MTs Ummusshabri as a pioneer in integrating Islamic education with international education standards in the region. The experience of MTs Ummusshabri can serve as a model and source of learning for other madrasahs that want to implement similar programs.

Overall, the transformation of bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri demonstrates a comprehensive and strategic effort in improving the quality of madrasah education in Indonesia. By adopting the Cambridge curriculum, increasing teacher capacity, and providing adequate facilities, MTs Ummusshabri has created a learning environment that supports the development of students into globally competitive individuals,

while still maintaining Islamic values (Abidin et al., 2025; Latif et al., 2023; Nadif et al., 2023). Despite facing various challenges, the commitment and collaboration of all stakeholders have enabled this transformation to be successful, providing significant benefits for the future of students and the educational institution itself.

CONCLUSION

Based on research on the transformation of bilingual classes into international classes at MTs Ummusshabri Kendari, the most important surprising finding is the success of this madrasah in integrating the Cambridge curriculum with Islamic values and being a pioneer in Eastern Indonesia. This shows that Islamic educational institutions can adopt international standards without sacrificing their Islamic identity. This research confirms previous findings on the benefits of bilingual and international education while contributing a new perspective on its implementation in the context of madrasahs in Indonesia. The study also highlights the importance of curriculum adaptation, considering local needs and religious values.

Nonetheless, this study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. The study is limited to one case in one geographical location, namely MTs Ummusshabri in Kendari. This limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader context. In addition, the study focused on the junior secondary level of education, so it does not cover the variety of experiences at other levels of education. The data collection methods used, although comprehensive, may not capture the full complexity of all stakeholders' experiences. Therefore, further research is needed that accommodates a larger sample, covers different levels of education and involves more diverse geographical locations in Indonesia. Comparative research among Islamic education institutions implementing international programs would also provide a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding. With broader and deeper results, more appropriate policies can be formulated to support the internationalization of Islamic education in Indonesia, while maintaining important cultural and religious values.

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