Proceedings of International Conference on Islamic Education (ICIED)
Building an Inclusive and Sustainable Educational System
Volume 11, 2026 (p-ISSN 2477-3638 / e-ISSN 2613-9804)

International School and Social Justice: School's Effort and Student's Experiences of SD Muhammadiyah 4 Surabaya

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Abstract
The issue of internationalization has spread into the field of education. Many schools are striving to achieve the status of international schools. One of the efforts undertaken to obtain this status is the adaptation of international curricula. SD Muhammadiyah 4 Pucang Surabaya is one of that schools that adopted Cambridge curriculum. However, the schools do not rely on a single curriculum; rather, it implements two distinct curricula: the international and national curriculum. The implementation of these differing curricula necessitates a classed stratification based on the differing curricula. This study explores any efforts deliberated from school to minimize social injustice, as well as to examine student's experiences in relation to social justice. Using qualitative approach with phenomenological design, the researcher conducted interview with three policy makers and more than 15 students. the result stated that there are several efforts that has been implemented by school in order to minimize social injustice such us involving all students together in every school event, positioning classrooms within same building without physical segregation, and ensuring no disparities in physical facilities across different classroom. these efforts also resulted a social justice experience by students. moreover, students indicated that the differing curricula do not inherently create social injustice. Confirming the theory of Emile Durkheim's social solidarity, the school succeed to construct both mechanic and organic solidarity that dismiss the appearance of social injustice.

Keywords:
Social Justice; International School; Cambridge Curriculum; Social Solidarity

A. INTRODUCTION

In responding the era of globalization, many schools in Indonesia compete to be internationalized. In fact, the concept of internationalization remains excessively broad and sometimes ambiguous. Study on internationalization concept in Russia stated that many Russian schools questioned on precise characteristics of internationalization (Pevzner et al., 2019). Other studies specified many characteristics of schools called "international" such us the use of global material (Lin & Chen, 2013), direct international learning experience (Egekvist et al., 2017; Mok & Sawn Khai, 2024), the use of international language (Irham & Wahyudi, 2023), the adaptation of international curricula (Hameed & Lingard, 2025), international collaboration (Cheng et al., 2023), and many other characteristics.

These characteristics also adopted in Indonesian schools. Many Indonesian school characterized its education as 'international' labelled school by adopting one of these characteristics. The primary characteristic of Indonesian international school is the use

of international curricula (Anindya & Pamungkas, 2023; Ilma et al., 2025; Muzaedah et al., 2023). Another Indonesian school define the internationalization by the use of English as medium of instruction (Entrisnasari & Khuriyah, 2023; Irham & Wahyudi, 2023) and international collaboration (Sodikin, 2026). Beyond its broad and multiple characteristics of international school, this study selected the main characteristic of international school in Indonesia which is the use of international curricula in school as a site of study.

The Muhammadiyah Elementary School 4, Surabaya (MES 4) is one of the international elementary school which implemented the Cambridge International Curricula. Bringing the spirit of Muhammadiyah Internationalization, this school adapted the spirit of its affiliated organization which tried to spread *da'wa* in the international world (Hatmanto & Purwanti, 2021). On the other hand, this school positioned the principle of justice (*'adl*) and human dignity not just as an abstract societal goal, but as an indispensable religious obligation. Within the Muhammadiyah school context, the institutions operationalize this connection by embedding *'adl* and the protection of human dignity (*hifz al-nafs and hifz al-mal*) directly into their curricula and institutional practices—ensuring equal access to quality education, fostering civic responsibility, and cultivating progressive, critical-thinking believers. Ultimately, this approach transforms Islamic Education from mere theoretical instruction into an active engine for structural social reform, equipping students to embody faith through real-world service and justice.

Beside its international curriculum implementation, a problem appeared related to the correlation between international curriculum and national ethnic diversity and understanding. The international curriculum need to be assimilated with multicultural understanding (Heriansyah, 2014) despite Indonesian students diversity characteristic. Beside the issue of diversity, the implementation of International curriculum in MES 4 resulting to the emergence of two different classes; national and international class. national class implemented the national curriculum, while the international class implemented the Cambridge curriculum.

The existence of two different class category will lead to the more exploration on the social justice provided by school and experienced by students. its because the social justice in school can lead to the broader aspect in society, while the school provide social justice to all elements, it can create a social justice individual while living in the society (Rentzi, 2024). Social justice in other side will create a just society where everyone receives equal rights, opportunities, and access (Carlisle et al., 2006; Picower, 2012). By this definition, education will enable students to develop themselves to their fullest potential to be the agent of justice. This social justice should be manifested in the process of school education, policies, cultures, as well as the interactions among teachers and students in both different classes.

This study tried to answer the following questions: 1) how do school leaders and teachers support the implementation of social justice in term of policies and school cultures? And how students experience the social justice in the context of schooling with international classroom?

B. METHODS

This is qualitative study with phenomenological design which tried to explore the experience of students in responding the social justice prepared by leaders and teachers in the context of international classroom in MES 4, Surabaya. Phenomenological design was chosen because it tried to explore and understand the deep, lived experiences of individuals and the meaning they give to a specific event or concept (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 1996). The data of this study conducted in the period of June-July 2025. The study employed Focus Group Discussion and in-depth interview with 18 students, exploring their perspectives of social justice or injustice

based on their schooling experiences. The in-depth interviews also conducted with leader and two teachers teaching in both national and international classes. The selection of different element in school in order to get comprehensive perspective. The students as the main actors that need to be heard and sometimes define as the 'victims' of social justice or injustice. The leader and teachers need to be explored regarding to the efforts provided in order to create a social justice environment in school. The both data can be validated through the triangulation method and then analyzed through Miles and Huberman's data analysis (Miles et al., 2014).

C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

School's effort in Providing Social Justice in International School

In order to understand social justice, Jost and Kay identify three characteristic of social justice that can be implemented in school such us: distributive, procedural, and interactional (Jost & Kay, 2010). The distributive characteristic is concerned to how the things are contributed to the students. while the procedural related to the law provided by school in order to maintain the right of every students. the last characteristic was interactional is related to how the interaction among different characteristic of students emerge. The school efforts are related to these three characteristics. In MES 4, Surabaya, the leader and teacher fully think about the distributive aspect of class distribution. Although there are two different classes with different curricula, they housed them within the same building. Teacher stated that the building separation is not based on different curricula, but its designated for different grade due to the limited classes in the main building. Teacher stated:

> "there is no differentiation between Cambridge and non-Cambridge classes in term of class distribution. For example, grade 3 classes are in the second floor of the building. Both Cambridge and non-Cambridge classes of grade three are in that floor. That building in front of us is for grade 5 and 6. All classes are there. Without considering the different curriculum used" (FR, Interview, June, 2025)

Furthermore, the same grade levels following different curricula are located on the same floor to ensure that the distributive aspect is executed as effectively as possible. Beside the class location, the facilities and programs are designed for both classes. The school tried to consistently implement activities that engage all students regardless of curriculum differences. This statement ensures equitable distributives for supporting social justice and dismiss the potential feeling of injustice. Its exemplified by *Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) program highlighted in the statement below:

> "we ensure there are programs designed together for all classes, such as P5. All students are required to join the program without seeing the curricula. It's our effort to make them feel like family without differentiation" (AS, Interview, June, 2025)

The statement does not negate the necessity for all programs to be together. Teachers also acknowledge that certain programs inherent to the international curriculum are conducted separately such us language festivals. However, to eliminate the feeling of injustice, students are required and invited to support their peers during the activities. The same facilities, classes, and programs are designed to make the distributive element or characteristics of social justice inherently experiences by students. This distributive element is supposed to be very essential in providing social justice in school (Carlisle et al., 2006; Picower, 2012).

The second characteristic was procedural characteristic which manifested in the

form of law in order to maintain the right of every students. leader of school stated that there are specifics requirements to be Cambridge teacher which is English ability. This ability is driven by law that stated specific requirements for Cambridge teacher. But, beside these requirements, the other requirements are the same. The material mastery, the learning strategy mastery, the communication skill and others are also driven form the law of school. So that, the different characteristic that driven from law is not bring to the feeling of injustice. The teacher stated:

> "…the school have a policy requiring Cambridge teachers to be proficient in English. Because it's a medium of instruction. However, the other essential characteristics are equally emphasized for all teachers such us communicative ability, material and learning strategy mastery and expertise, it's ensured for all teachers in all classes" (AA, Teacher, Interview, June, 2025)

The different policy regarding the procedural aspect of social justice believed to be just and additional demand as an effect of the Cambridge curriculum implementation. Based on finding, this different policy did not signify to the procedural injustice as stated by several informant from teacher's side. The third aspect of social justice is interactional. The interaction aspect provided by leader and teachers already reflect a strong sense of social justice. The observation data revealed that teachers show a welcoming and friendly attitude toward all students without considering whether the students are from International class or not. The regular daily greeting and care also displayed by teacher which prove the positive teacher-student interaction. Furthermore, the observation data indicated that several teachers frequently greet unfamiliar students to show caring and welcoming attitude.

In term of student's interaction, leader stated that there was one principle internalized within every student in MES 4, Surabaya which is "we are one as MES 4 students". This term means to unite all students in school without considering class differentiation. This term believed in fostering strong positive interaction among students and with teachers. Additionally, the absence of physical or social barriers during break time further demonstrates the school's effort and commitment to provide equitable and justice social interaction, without considering student's class background, ethnic, or academic diversity. This opportunity provided by school can positively create a democratic student interaction. This democratic interaction became one aspect of the successful aspect of social justice in education (Echeverria, 2023). It's also stated that the role of leader and teachers positively important to provide positive environment that can create the strong social justice in the field education (Chaaban et al., 2025; Hosseini et al., 2024, 2026). This study therefore strengthens the previous studies stated that the leadership role and teacher's effort positively encourage and able to create a strong social justice in education.

The below table is the summary of the findings of this study correlated with social justice element.

Table 1. Elements of Social Justice (Jost & Kay) and its Implementation

Element of social justice	Focus	Implementation in MES 4, Surabaya
Distributive	Fair allocation and distribution of physical resources, facilities, classes, and school programs among all students.	**Classroom Distribution:** Housing both Cambridge and non-Cambridge classes in the same building, rather than separating by curriculum-based classes.

		Unified Facilities & Programs: Providing equal facilities and implementing joint activities. **Inclusive Participation**: Requiring and inviting non-Cambridge students to attend and support curriculum-specific events.
Procedural	Institutional laws, rules, and policies designed to protect rights and ensure fairness in standards and expectations.	**Transparent Teacher Qualifications:** Applying a specific English proficiency rule for Cambridge teachers due to instructional needs, while keeping all core professional requirements uniform across the entire teachers. **Fair Standard Enforcement:** Ensuring foundational standards (material mastery, pedagogical strategy, communication skills) apply equally to all teachers.
Interactional	Interpersonal treatment, daily communication, and quality of relationships among teachers, leaders, and diverse student groups.	**Inclusive Teacher Behavior:** Displaying welcoming, friendly attitudes, daily greetings, and care toward all students regardless of their class differences. **Unified Identity:** Internalizing the core motto "*We are one as MES 4 students*" to break down social barriers. **Democratic Spaces:** Eliminating physical and social barriers during break times to foster open, democratic interactions across academic, ethnic, and social backgrounds.

Students Experiences on Social Justice in School

After discussing school's effort in providing social justice in school, it's also important to hear the voice of the 'victims'; students who directly experience the justice or injustice in school. This study found two interesting finding regarding student's experiences during their schooling. The first is the emergence of Muhammadiyah Elementary School students Identity rather than the International student's identity. The second is the willingness to interact and collaborate with other student across different classes.

The first finding is the identity formation of Muhammadiyah Elementary School student. Several students stated:

"I am the student of this school" (HI, Interview, July, 2025)
"teachers teach us to be proud as student of this school" (AA, Interview, July, 2025)
"I am student of SD Muhammadiyah Pucang" (IID, Interview, July, 2025)
"I am love to be part of this school" (SR, Interview, July, 2025)

The emergence of this identity as student of the school proved that the distinction of different use of curriculum relatively dismissed. The strong identity emerged and formed by students is the identity of student without considering their study using Cambridge curricula. This identity is formed through their daily activity as student and by the guidance of their teacher. As stated by Hall's theory of identity which stated that identity as become can be constructed through daily activities and with whom does the

individual interact (Hall, 1990). This identity construction also reveal that identity can always changed overtime and its formed by environment where the individual live and interact with others (Rosi, 2026; Rosi & Yousif, 2024). This identity construction also proved that the principle internalized by school is relatively success in uniting the students with differ curriculum used in the context of international school.

The second finding is relation to the willingness to interact and collaborate with across curriculum student. The social justice experience by students also create a willingness to interact positively with students with diverse curriculum used. Several students stated:

> "I have many friends here, not just from my class, but a friend also in that building" (NA, Interview, July 2025)
> "teachers said that we are one so we need to be a friend of all and need to help others" (MM, Interview, July 2025)
> "I played in the first floor with everyone, from this class or other classes" (DS, Interview, July 2025)

These data confirmed that solidarity between each student are positively constructed. The willingness of helping others without considering the classes is a proof that solidarity has already constructed within student in International school. The sameness as part of the school without considering the classes can construct the mechanical solidarity, while the different task to promote the school with achievements regularly create an organic solidarity. The mechanical and organic solidarity in Durkheim's perspective seen as the main factor that can create solidarity within individual in a group of society (Filloux, 2001; Izzah et al., 2024; Yahya & Rosi, 2023). These findings can be concluded that based on student's experiences, the social injustice can be minimized through leader and teacher's role in school environment.

D. CONCLUSION

Muhammadiyah Elementary School 4, Surabaya (SD Muhammadiyah 4 Surabaya) has become site for the effective promotion of social justice among students based on the specific policy and effort provided by school. The three characteristics of social justice based on Jost and Kay's theory has already implemented, even the minor disadvantages have seen by the study. The marginalization of non-Cambridge student has unseen but the welcoming and care attitudes have already developed by teachers in the school environment without considering the different curriculum used. Besides, the engagement of students in the same programs without seeing the curriculum also seen as contributive factor in dismissing the social injustice among the students. the distributive factor of placement in the same building without physical segregation is also contributive in diminishing the potential appearance of social injustice. These efforts also successfully create student with no injustice attitude. The willingness of collaborate, interact, and giving reciprocal support to others indicated that social justice is already experienced in the schooling activities. The construction of the one identity as student of SD Muhammadiyah 4 also became the important factor of determining the absence of social injustice experienced by students in international school with two different curriculum implementations.

At last, the finding of this study can be a recommendation to provide social justice in the school with same characteristic, but this study also has its limitation with just seeing one school as a sample of study. The broader site of study can be crucial in formulating the most effective strategies in promoting social justice in international school. On another hand, the more deepen observation and interview can be done for getting the deepen data on students schooling experiences.

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