

The Cambridge Curriculum

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Background information:

The Cambridge curriculum is implemented in 160 countries and 10 000 schools internationally. There are also 113 non examination assessment branches. Quality assurance is by Cambridge University.

The first Cambridge examination, written in 1858, had a very different focus to the kind of emphasis in Cambridge examinations today. It is analytical and thinking skills that underpin the ethos of what the Cambridge curriculum stands for at present.

Cambridge Programmes:

IGCSE, AS Levels and A Levels are written between sixteen years and school leaving age. These examinations are based on the English State curriculum but the international assessments go through a very rigorous processes in order to integrate cultural differences into the examination process.

The **Cambridge Primary Programme** was introduced in 2008 and was designed to assist foundation level students in English, Science and Mathematics. The basis of the curriculum is to introduce the application of thinking skills to problem based issues, with the teacher acting as a facilitator in reaching the end product.

The South African focus in education is on high levels of assessment whereas the Cambridge approach focuses on thought processes, with student's being required to demonstrate **how** they came to their conclusions. The function of the teacher is in the translation of the written syllabus into the learnt curriculum. Cambridge requires that the curriculum is not rigid as all knowledge is relevant and therefore does not have specific textbooks, but has endorsed many publications including the South African CAPS textbooks. Textbooks are seen as a means of helping the education process, supporting what happens in the classroom and not as prescriptive material. Cambridge students are trained to challenge the "how, where, what, when and why" of issues rather than the rote learning of facts. Active learning is emphasised rather than passive response.



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Problem solving is a life skill – Cambridge students are taught skills which will enable them to learn independently. Without these skills there are high “drop-out” rates from tertiary educational institutions.

Testing at Primary level is according to international benchmarks (Checkpoint examinations) which show areas of strength and weakness rather than a Pass or Fail result. Student’s progress is assessed by comparison, within an age group, to results for the rest of the world. Remedial action would need to be implemented where there are weaknesses in subject components. It is only from the IGCSE Level (Grade 10) onwards that a pass or fail result would be issued.

In order to ensure the quality of teaching in Cambridge schools Cambridge University invites all teachers to attend professional development conferences (held regularly in centres worldwide), runs face-to-face and online training courses, has a website pertaining to all syllabuses available to staff at registered Cambridge institutions and is available at all times for queries.

Qualifications:

The Cambridge curriculum qualifies a student to attend university provided the specific course criteria are met. The language endorsement states that a student must pass their first language (any) and obtain a “C” symbol for another language at IGCSE level. The South African Grade 12 level is equivalent to the Cambridge AS-Level. A-Level grades, which are required to attend overseas universities, have higher Admission Point Scores than those for the National Senior Certificate eg the maximum A-Level APS is 10 whereas the maximum NSC APS is 7.

Conclusion:

The Cambridge curriculum is not a system of education, it is the provision of skills and content to students to ensure that they are “well-rounded” adults who have the wherewithal and desire to learn throughout their lifetime. It is the preparation of students for life.



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