

Empowering Independent Inquiry in Sierra Leone

School: British International School and Montessori Education
Location: Sierra Leone, Africa
Partner: Britannica Education



HISTORY

A Commitment to Cambridge Excellence

BISME is a distinguished international institution in Sierra Leone, dedicated to providing a high-calibre education to a diverse student body. Central to the school's academic identity is its Cambridge offering, a curriculum that demands rigorous critical thinking, global perspectives and a high degree of student autonomy.

In 2024, school leadership, led by Principal Jenny Condron, identified a strategic need to modernise BISME's resource library. While physical textbooks provided a foundation, the school sought to evolve its digital ecosystem to better reflect the sophisticated research requirements of the Cambridge approach and ensure BISME learners remain competitive in a digital-first world.

CHALLENGE

The Resource Gap & The Risk of Unreliable Data

Prior to March 2025, the BISME Humanities department faced three significant hurdles:



Teachers struggled to provide the depth and variety of content needed to engage students in complex, abstract humanities topics.



Without a dedicated digital library, students often turned to unverified open-web sources. The use of unreliable information was a major concern for a department that places a strong emphasis on academic integrity.



In a diverse international community, bridging the gap between varying language proficiencies while maintaining academic rigor was becoming increasingly difficult for staff to manage manually.

SOLUTION

The Empower Suite

In March 2025, BISME became a pioneer as one of the first schools globally to adopt the **Britannica Education Empower Suite**. The complete digital content library model was the primary selling point for leadership. Other key decision drivers were:

- ✓ **Safe & Verified Content:** A secure environment that removes the risk of misinformation.
- ✓ **Curriculum Alignment:** Content designed to mirror the Cambridge approach, specifically supporting independent research and critical thinking.
- ✓ **Integrated Multimedia:** A shift beyond static text to include interactive, structured research tools that make challenging topics accessible and engaging.
- ✓ **Built-In Differentiation:** Accessibility features that allow educators to manage inclusive teaching across different cultural and linguistic backgrounds within a single platform.



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RESULTS

A Transformation in Independent Research

After the onboarding sessions, the impact on student engagement was immediate and measurable. The Humanities department reports a significant rise in independent student inquiry, with learners now taking the initiative to begin research both in class and at home.

As a Humanities teacher, I place a strong emphasis on academic integrity and the reliability of the resources our learners use. One of the main reasons I felt confident using the Britannica Education Empower Suite was the credibility and quality of its content. The materials are thoughtfully clearly referenced, and regularly updated, which is very important to us. We also appreciate how well the platform supports critical thinking and independent research, both of which are central to the Cambridge approach to learning.

I have already seen a positive impact on learners' engagement, especially when tackling more complex or abstract topics. The combination of multimedia resources and structured research tools makes learning more interactive and accessible. What I particularly value is that learners can work at their own level while still being appropriately challenged. It has also encouraged more independent inquiry, both in class and at home, as most of my learners feel confident using a trusted and academically sound starting point for their research.

In our diverse international community here at BISME, the platform has also helped bridge differences in language proficiency and cultural background. The clear and accessible language, along with the built-in support features, allows learners to engage more confidently with academic content. For me personally, it provides dependable resources that make differentiation and inclusive teaching more manageable and effective.

Humanities Teacher, BISME



Britannica works with Cambridge schools worldwide to:



Deepen subject knowledge across all pathway stages beyond the textbook.



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OUTCOME

Bridging Learning Gaps, Elevating Achievement

By moving away from relying purely on physical textbooks, BISME has successfully bridged the gap between language proficiency and academic content. Students are now working at their own level while remaining appropriately challenged, ensuring that every learner in the classroom meets the Cambridge standards of excellence.



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