

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Implementation and impact of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) in Spanish state schools



Summary developed by the IB Research department based on a report prepared by:

Javier M Valle, Maripé Menéndez, Bianca Thoilliez, Rocío Garrido, Soledad Rappoport and Jesús Manso

Autónoma University of Madrid

May 2017

The DP in Spain

IB programmes have been offered in Spain since 1977. There are currently 86 authorized schools in the country; the DP is the most widely implemented, being offered in 56 private schools and 27 state-funded schools. State-funded schools currently represent 32% of the total population of schools offering the DP in Spain. The growth of IB programmes in the state sector has been constant in recent years, with at least one new state-funded school authorized every year since 2005. Spanish state schools usually offer the DP in combination with the national curriculum, so some students undertake both programmes simultaneously (the national baccalaureate and the DP).

In the context of growing interest in the DP in Spain, a study was undertaken to investigate the impact of DP implementation, as reported by various stakeholders in 26 Spanish state schools. Moreover, with the aim of developing understanding of the medium- and long-term impact of the DP on students, the study also investigated the experiences and professional paths of DP alumni from Spanish state schools.

Research design

This study comprised two parts and employed a multi-method research design. Part I of the study focused on exploring the impact of implementing the DP in state schools, as experienced by school leaders, teachers, students and families. Three online questionnaires were administered across the 26 schools to three different stakeholder groups.

- Students (DP and non-DP; n = 1,718)
- Teachers (DP and non-DP; n = 352)
- Families of DP students (n = 475)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all heads from state schools that offer the DP (27 heads, including a former school head), focus groups were organized with 18 DP coordinators and three case studies were also undertaken. Each case study involved interviews with DP coordinators and focus groups with DP students, teachers and students' families at each school site.

Part II focused on developing understanding of the medium- and long-term impact of the DP on students. To investigate the experiences and professional paths of DP alumni from Spanish state schools, an online questionnaire with closed and open items was administered to DP alumni from two schools (n = 94). The survey was complemented by semi-structured interviews with a small sample of the questionnaire participants. A comparison of the Spanish university entrance examination results and university destinations of DP alumni was also conducted.

Findings

Drawing on the data collected in this study, the DP and its implementation in the context of Spanish state schools is perceived to have a range of positive outcomes and challenges for various stakeholder groups, including school heads, DP coordinators, teachers, students and families.

Identified positive outcomes

School climate and culture

Overall, the implementation of the DP in Spanish state schools is perceived by the study participants to be yielding positive outcomes. A beneficial shift in school culture and climate was reported by all groups. Heads of schools reported that imple-

menting the DP offered opportunities to consolidate institutional identity, or institutional reculturalization in some cases. Heads also reported enhanced teamwork among staff members, a sense of shared direction and a boost in the level of innovation in schools. Heads, teachers and students indicated improved interpersonal relationships, both between teachers and between students and teachers. Teachers and students noted pedagogical changes in classrooms, and teachers, specifically those who taught in both the DP and national programme, reported a shift in their teaching in non-DP subjects.

Heads, coordinators and teachers also indicated there are positive secondary effects of the DP among non-DP students. For example, a “contagious” learning atmosphere improved interpersonal relationships within the school community and encouraged a wider range of extra-curricular activities and higher participation on the part of both DP and non-DP students. In becoming a DP school, heads, coordinators and teachers acknowledged enhanced school visibility, prestige and recognition by the local and broader education community.

School leaders also reported improved school rankings, positive perceptions of the school on the part of students and families, and an increase in school admission applications for both the DP and the national programme. Families of DP students reported high satisfaction with the DP and the quality of their children’s education. They perceived the DP as a more up-to-date and global education model to prepare their children for higher education and their professional future.

Teaching and learning

Further, regarding a positive shift in school culture, teachers and school leaders reported the development of a stronger learning community among staff and renewed motivation in their work. Teachers appreciated engaging in IB workshops as part of their professional development. The implementation of the DP also allowed teachers more opportunities to use a variety of teaching approaches, promoted by the IB, which contributed to their renewed motivation and passion for their work. DP students reported that the pedagogical approaches and teaching methods employed in the programme were one of the main reasons they chose to undertake the DP.

DP and non-DP students were asked how often their teachers used a range of teaching methods. DP students reported that DP teachers were less likely to work from textbooks, more likely to use group work, more likely to engage students in discussion and debate, more likely to draw links to real-life

problems and more likely to ask questions. In contrast, non-DP students reported that their teachers were more likely to work from textbooks and less likely to use group work, engage students in discussion or debate, draw links to real-life problems and less likely to ask questions.

With regard to assessment, the use of external assessment in the DP is predominantly viewed as positive and objective by teachers and school leaders. An external assessment also altered the dynamic of the teacher–student relationship. Teachers were repositioned from the role of an assessor or examiner to that of a co-learner and guide to support students in performing successfully in the exams.



DP outcomes

Overall, DP students reported stronger agreement than non-DP students that their school experiences help them prepare for their future and careers. Around 75% of the DP students disagreed or strongly disagreed that “school has done little to prepare [them] for adult life”, compared to about 65% for non-DP students. More than 70% of DP students agreed or strongly agreed that “school has helped give [them] confidence to make decisions”, while the percentage drops to about 45% for non-DP students. Around 90% of DP students agreed or strongly agreed that “school has taught [them] things that could be useful in a job”, compared to about 80% of non-DP students.

DP student perceptions about the value of their experience in the programme and preparation for the future is supported by DP alumni responses. DP alumni emphasized that having completed the DP prepared them well for both university and work life. Both DP students and DP alumni reported developing specific competencies in undertaking the

programme, including time management, research, critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills.

DP alumni also recalled their learning experiences within the programme as providing a holistic education, involving both academic and non-academic competencies, with special mention of the theory of knowledge (TOK) course, the creativity, activity, service (CAS) component and research experiences (such as research projects and lab practicals). Alumni reported that an IB education influenced their attitudes and skills for lifelong learning as well as their values, beliefs and vision of the world.

In relation to university admission and degree selections, using records from two participating schools, DP students performed better than non-DP students in the Spanish university entrance test, *Prueba de Acceso a la Universidad (PAU)*. Interestingly, in contrast to the broader picture of the Spanish university system, the majority of DP students pursued a science-related degree, as opposed to a degree in social sciences or humanities. In one of the schools, nearly a quarter of DP alumni pursued university studies abroad while 2.5% of Spanish undergraduates reportedly plan to participate in an Erasmus programme, either studying or interning abroad, during the academic year.



Identified challenges

Increase in workload

A reported challenge in the implementation of the DP in Spanish state schools is an increase in unpaid work, particularly for DP coordinators and teachers. While the weight of responsibility varied by context, ranging from distributed functions to sole responsibility, coordinators were typically the “go-to” authority for IB programmes. Their responsibilities included a range of administrative tasks, coordinating DP teachers, organizing meetings, communicating with DP families (an uncommon practice in national schools but an IB requirement) and attending to the academic and non-academic needs of DP students. DP coordinators take on these additional responsibilities without additional remuneration.

Teachers who teach in the DP are required to undertake significant professional development and training, and also reported spending more time in planning their lessons. The additional workload is not offset by a reduction of teaching time or additional financial compensation. Furthermore, teachers who are new to the DP experience a degree of anxiety and uncertainty with new approaches to teaching and learning. Some concerns around the working conditions of DP teachers—as unfavourable when compared to national (non-DP) teachers—were also raised.

Poor grade equivalence

The main challenge reported about the implementation of the DP in Spanish state schools, at the time of the study, was the Spanish Ministry of Education’s poor equivalence of the DP’s grading and assessment systems. The grade conversion provided by legislation did not adequately reflect the demand of the DP in comparison to the national programme, and so disadvantaged DP students in accessing Spanish universities. Where students sought placements in competitive state university programmes (such as engineering and medicine) some schools advised students to enroll in a dual qualification to compete equally in state universities.

DP students who undertook a dual qualification reported experiencing a significant increase in their workload in having to balance two programmes. Students undertook additional hours for certain subjects and they also required additional time to participate in CAS-related activities. DP alumni recalled the demanding workload of a dual qualification and, for some, this was a negative experience.

Equity and access

As a result of strong interest in IB programmes, state schools offering the DP are employing an admission

and selection process that considers the demanding workload for both teachers and students while also attending to school capacity. This selection process has raised concerns around equity and access in a public education system. A selection or admission process also raises questions around whether IB programmes attract a particular kind of learner and, by the same token, a particular kind of teacher. Data from this study indicates that the DP, and the associated workload, tends to attract students with strong academic backgrounds, high motivation and more social maturity than their peers. Additionally, the DP seems to attract older and more experienced teachers, with 55.2% between the ages of 51 and 60 and more than 50% with more than 25 years of teaching experience.

Limitations

There are certain limitations of the findings from this study. In further research, involving a school that does not implement the DP may provide more accurate comparisons. The blending of DP and non-DP teachers, whereby there are teachers who teach both DP and non-DP students, is problematic in determining the impact of DP implementation in Spanish state schools. The study also calls for future research that does not rely predominantly on self-reporting measures and the perceptions of participants, but includes classroom observations to confirm the findings of this study. Future research in more settings, such as in other European countries, would allow for further comparisons to be developed and could potentially offer a regional vision.

Summary

In conclusion, based on the data collected in this study, the DP and its implementation in the context of Spanish state schools is perceived to have a range of positive outcomes and challenges. Overall, the implementation of the DP is believed to be yielding positive outcomes, including a beneficial shift in school culture and climate, a change in teaching and learning approaches and the development of specific competencies in students. The main challenges reported about the implementation of the DP in Spanish state schools included increased teacher workload and the Spanish Ministry of Education's poor equivalence of the DP's grading and assessment systems. Important questions around equity and access in a public education system were also raised.

Update: Following this study, as a result of the identified challenge around equivalence of the DP in Spanish universities, a new equivalency table has been negotiated, which now places DP students on equal footing with their non-DP peers.

This summary was developed by the IB Research department. For more information on this study or other IB research, please email research@ibo.org.

© International Baccalaureate Organization 2017

International Baccalaureate® | Baccalauréat International® | Bachillerato Internacional®