



READY FOR CHANGE

With an eye on what is best for its students now and in the future, Bonn International School decided to implement MYP eAssessments.

In 2016, Bonn International School (BIS) in Bonn, Germany, was among the first IB World Schools to offer MYP eAssessments. Much thinking and discussion went into the decision to use the digital exams.

“We wanted to give students the opportunity to take advantage of what the IB created with research and cutting-edge technology,” says BIS Middle Years Programme (MYP) coordinator Cijith Jacob. “We were keen to be at the cutting edge of assessments because change in education is unavoidable and one has to see what’s out there.”

Jacob adds, “Students are citizens of the digital world. Allowing students to write their responses on the computer enhances their ability to communicate their understanding.”

Moreover, in order to get local certification of the completion of grade 10, students have to earn the MYP certificate. As eAssessment is a requirement for the MYP certificate, the school feels it is important to provide the full range of on-screen exams. For the first two years, BIS made MYP eAssessment optional; this past school year, the exams were required. Even in the initial year, approximately three-fourths of grade 10 sat for the exams.

As the school contemplated offering MYP eAssessment, it made a point of communicating with all stakeholders—students, parents, teachers and the leadership team. Both merits and challenges were discussed, Jacob says. Parents told him they enrolled their children at BIS in order for them to be at the forefront of education, he says, and they saw the value of eAssessment as a testing method that was beyond regurgitating knowledge.

While not all teachers were immediately ready to try eAssessment, Jacob focused on the ones who were. His strategy, he says, was to invest in those teachers and show their success to the others.

Bonn International School (private): Early Years through grade 12

First offered the Middle Years Programme: 1999

Total number of students: 716

Middle Years Programme coordinator: Cijith Jacob

School director: Patricia Baier

“*You can’t stay away from this digital world, digital tools, digital assessment. It’s a matter of when, not whether, you should [change].*”

—CIJITH JACOB, MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME COORDINATOR, BONN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

During the first year, the pilot software was shared with students to help them prepare; for the following years, the school shared the previous year's exams plus pre-release material for the interdisciplinary exam (Pre-release material comprises carefully selected relevant multimedia stimuli and case studies.). In addition, Jacob and several colleagues created an online interdisciplinary test that assessed language and literature, arts, individuals and societies, language acquisition and design to help their students feel comfortable with interdisciplinary learning.

"We started brainstorming ideas," he says, "and what came out of that is this on-screen test possibility." The teachers involved in the brainstorming process reached out to colleagues, ensuring that a number of people contributed and had a say in what was happening with eAssessments and preparing BIS students for them.

"I'm one of those people who believes you give responsibility to teachers, trust them, give them ideas, support them, and they come up with great possibilities," Jacob says. "You need to have that buy-in rather than saying, 'This is how I want you to do it.'"

Curriculum material from language and literature, arts, individuals and societies, language acquisition and design was woven together for the two-hour interdisciplinary test on a Google platform. "We were looking at how the students would be able to synthesize their knowledge and show that understanding in an online setting," Jacob explains. "Knowledge is not assessed by electronic device or pen or pencil. It's how [students are] able to communicate with them." The school tweaks the practice exam every year.

Its exam works so well, Jacob says, that BIS created a simplified version for grade 9. "We found it very helpful for grade 9 students," Jacob says. When MYP eAssessment "actually happens in grade 10, it's not new to them." This year, students had three- to four-hour sessions on the prerelease material and access to the previous year's exams.

Additionally, in several subjects, some tests during the year for grade 9 are done on-screen with questions formatted much like MYP eAssessment questions. For language and literature, for example, students are asked to type 350-word essays.

Beginning to familiarize students with eAssessment practices in grade 9 has worked so well that BIS is considering creating on-screen exams for grade 8, possibly in a shorter version.

With MYP eAssessment in place, Bonn International School has made related changes in subject content and how it is taught and assessed throughout the school year. The IB provides a topic list for each exam, and BIS ensures that the topics are covered in grades 9 and 10. "We spread it out so students are able to get all the knowledge and understanding that is required to sit the exam," Jacob says. BIS eAssessment results for 2018 were above worldwide averages.

After the first year of MYP eAssessment, the school looked at the exam results and decided that students would learn history and geography better if the subjects were taught separately instead of integrated, as they had been. Similarly, biology, chemistry and physics had been integrated but were taught separately after 2016. "This is the right thing for our school because students get that deeper understanding of subject areas that they wish to pursue in grades 11 and 12," Jacob says.

In addition to the on-screen exams, MYP eAssessment includes ePortfolios, which permit assessment of students' coursework in language acquisition, arts, physical and health education and design. The portfolios are internally marked by BIS teachers and then moderated to international standards by the IB. "The IB gives the framework for the unit, which helps schools have an overall standard across the world," Jacob says.

Introducing MYP eAssessment and building it into the middle years experience at BIS has been a "very interesting journey," Jacob says. He sees the changes as essential for students, "making the children experience the current learning environment and preparing them to face the future." To parents and teachers, he says, "You cannot compare this with what you have done before because something like this hasn't happened before."

For more information about MYP eAssessment visit: www.ibo.org/e-assessment

