Research summary

Study of International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (DP) and Career-related Programme (CP) school readiness for, and perceptions of, on-screen examinations

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Background and design

This study aimed to identify the perceptions, potential challenges and implementation needs of International Baccalaureate (IB) World Schools as they plan for the transition to on-screen examinations in the Diploma Programme (DP) and Career-related Programme (CP). To investigate these areas, the researchers employed a mixed-methods design with three distinct phases. Phase 1 consisted of a literature review on transitioning to on-screen examinations, discussions with IB staff on their experiences with implementing on-screen examinations in the Middle Years Programme (MYP), and the development of a typology of archetypal DP and CP schools. Phase 2 involved individual and group interviews and observations at representative case study schools based on the archetypes. Phase 3 tested the generalizability of the case study findings by surveying DP and CP school heads and programme coordinators (*n* = 2,748).

Findings

Benefits

The study revealed that school personnel believed there could be a number of possible benefits to on-screen examinations. Perceived benefits of transitioning to on-screen examinations included the following.

- **Benefits to students:** A modern, 21st-century approach to assessment; more authentic or enhanced assessments; mitigation of the effects of poor handwriting; quicker and higher-quality feedback
- **Benefits to teaching and learning:** Integration of technology; improved student preparation and learning
- **Benefits to teachers and schools:** Administrative convenience; lower exam-related costs

Supporting these perceived benefits, the school survey results illustrated moderately positive perspectives towards on-screen examinations (based on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree).

Taking DP/CP on-screen examinations will help to prepare IB students for technologies they will use in the workplace.	4.57
IB students will benefit from the authentic and engaging tasks/questions that can be provided using on-screen examinations.	4.64
Teaching and learning will benefit from the authentic and engaging tasks/questions that can be provided using on-screen examinations.	4.53

Table 1. Positive attitudes towards on-screen examinations

Concerns

Study participants also noted some potential concerns about the transition to on-screen examinations. School personnel primarily had concerns about the possible loss of student work, lack of user-friendliness of the examination interface and prohibitive costs. The survey highlighted similar concerns (see table 2). The barriers that schools most highly rated as concerns were logistical, technological and support issues (ratings are based on a Likert scale from 1 = not at all concerned to 5 = extremely concerned).

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Logistical problems of loading files on to students' own devices just before examinations.	3.59
Insufficient or untimely support from IB (for example, responding to log-in issues or resolving software errors).	3.54
Technological failures resulting in a loss of student work.	3.58
Length of time/logistical problems setting up the on-screen examinations on every computer.	3.56

Table 2. Concerns about on-screen examinations

Receptivity

Overall, respondents were moderately receptive to transitioning to on-screen examinations. On a scale of 0 = not at all receptive to 100 = very receptive, the average receptivity rating was 67.4. Although respondents overall were somewhat positive, receptivity ratings varied. Receptivity appeared to differ by school status, language and programme—with candidate schools, Spanish-speaking schools, private schools and schools offering only the CP showing somewhat greater receptivity to on-screen examinations.

In an additional survey question, respondents predicted that school leaders and students would be somewhat more receptive to the transition to on-screen examinations than teachers and parents/guardians (see figure 1).
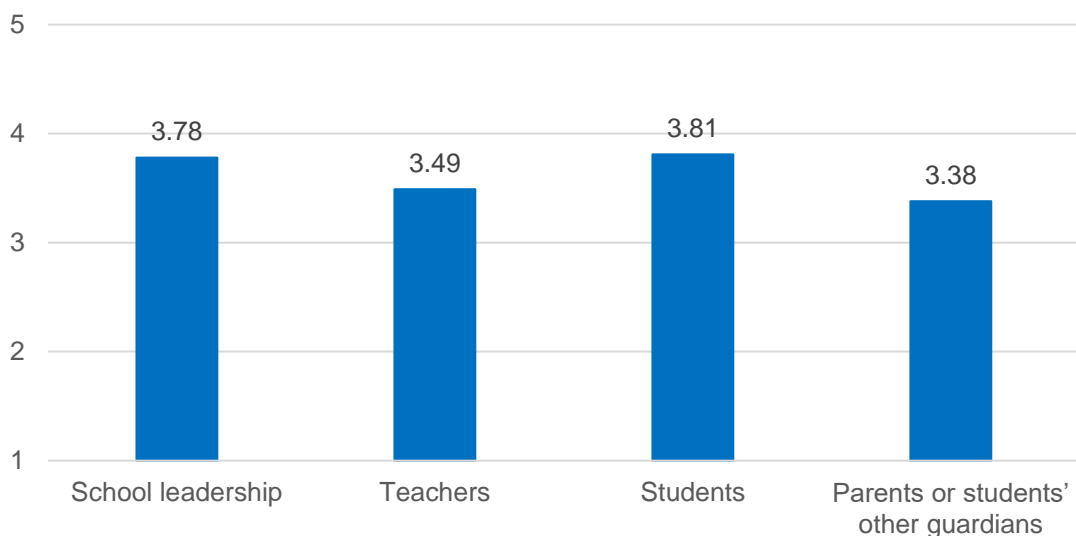

Figure 1. Respondent perceptions of school community support for on-screen examinations

Timing

Nearly 80% of survey respondents reported that they would need between six months and three years to prepare for the transition. Approximately 15% of respondents stated a need for more than three years to prepare. Those who expressed the desire for more preparation time were particularly concerned about costs and perceived barriers to implementation. Comparatively, those who reported needing less time noted factors that were already in place to support school-level implementation.

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Likelihood of continuing to offer IB programme(s)

In the survey, 75% of schools said it was unlikely they would stop offering the DP or CP if on-screen examinations became the only option for final external assessment, with a further 15.4% being neutral. The remaining 9.6% indicated they were somewhat or extremely likely to stop offering the DP and/or CP. Half of those who reported a likelihood to cease IB programmes were mainly from state-funded schools in the United States, Ecuador, the United Kingdom and Canada.

Feedback from schools

Schools expressed a desire for opportunities for students and faculty to become familiar with the on-screen environment, especially by allowing teachers to create formative classroom assessments in the on-screen environment. School leaders wanted more information about the examinations themselves, inquiring about hardware/software compatibility, on-screen tools (such as those for editing, graphing, drawing and writing equations), and the overall look and feel of the examination environment. Respondents also asked about the availability of technical support, examination space policy changes, and procedures for technical difficulties leading to data loss. These questions highlight the need for clear and accurate communication from the IB, extensive testing of the new platform to work out any bugs, and sufficient lead time to allow teachers and students to become comfortable with on-screen examinations.

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