

Research summary

The International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP) in the UK

Based on a research report prepared for the IB by:

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Background

The International Baccalaureate (IB) aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. The IB offers a continuum of international education for students between the ages of 3 and 19 years. The Primary Years Programme (PYP) is designed for students aged 3 to 12; the Middle Years Programme (MYP) serves students aged 11 to 16; and the Diploma Programme (DP) and IB Career-related Certificate (IBCC) are challenging 2-year curriculums primarily aimed at students aged 16 to 19. Founded in 1968, the organization currently works with more than 3,400 schools in over 140 countries to develop and offer challenging programmes to about one million students, aged 3 to 19 years.

Commissioned by the IB, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) conducted an investigation into the teaching and learning benefits of the MYP in the UK. The aim was to provide a rich qualitative picture of the programme's implementation in the UK using a range of existing data sources, with a particular focus on comparative analyses. A further aim was to provide a baseline for future longitudinal studies to monitor the progress of the MYP in the UK.

Research design and data collection

The study consisted of two parts. The comparative phase contrasts the curriculum, assessment and philosophical underpinnings of the MYP, the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education). The second phase provides a comprehensive picture of the MYP in UK schools and explores the successes and challenges of its implementation through surveys and interviews with IB teachers, parents and students¹, as well as classroom observations.

At the time of this study, there were 11 schools with the MYP in the UK. Six of these participated in this study, and four were used as case studies. Online surveys were sent to teachers, students and parents in the six participating MYP schools. Teacher interviews, student focus groups and class observations took place at four of these schools. The schools that were involved in the research, although typical of MYP schools in the UK, were primarily fee-paying independent schools, and some were international schools. The students in this population were generally from a higher socio-economic status and many had parents who were not born in the UK. Therefore, the samples of students, teachers and parents may not be representative of UK population in general.

Key findings

Curriculum comparison

A comprehensive documentary review of the curriculum specification and assessment documentation for the MYP, GCSE and IGCSE found that although there were a number of similarities between the three qualifications, there were also some clear differences. The GCSE is the standard school-leaving certificate and has a wide level of public understanding. However, currently the MYP is largely unknown by the British public and not accredited by any regulator in the UK for use in state schools. Currently, MYP subjects are assessed entirely by teacher judgement, whereas nearly all GCSEs/IGCSEs involve some form of external examinations. Students complete a personal project as part of the IB; for which there is no equivalent in the GCSE/IGCSE. The MYP subject guides allow for greater flexibility of content than is used within the GCSEs/IGCSEs, and the MYP requires greater interdisciplinary studies.

Key similarities and differences in regard to the content of the programmes are as follows.

- Content across MYP, GCSE and IGCSE specifications were broadly similar. The MYP covered all the main areas of the other two and in some cases included additional areas.

¹ Some comparisons between the MYP sample and existing data sets such as IEA ICCS; OECD PISA and DFID GSPP.

- The focus on non-scholastic attributes such as international- and civic-mindedness were more pronounced within the MYP, as was the expectation to develop higher order thinking skills.
- The content of the three subjects explored (science, mathematics and English) saw a relatively good match across the different qualifications:
 - Science and mathematics specifications for GCSE/IGCSE are more prescriptive than the MYP.
 - In science, all three cover the traditional subjects (biology, chemistry and physics), and assess practical work. However, there are elements of the MYP specifications not included in the GCSE/IGCSE.
 - In mathematics, each covers broadly similar subject/topic areas, but discrete mathematics is not included in the GCSE/IGCSE specifications, and calculator work is not mentioned as a specific content area in the MYP.
 - In English, all three qualifications make reference to the study of texts from a variety of cultures and all three cover the same content skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) across a range of multi-modal texts. The MYP also includes “visual communication skills” (viewing and presenting).

Teacher surveys and interviews

Surveys were completed by 74 teachers; 11 were interviewed and 10 lessons covering a range of subjects were observed. Teachers responding to the survey were balanced in terms of gender, and covered a wide age range, with the majority being 30 to 49 years old. Half (50%) of the respondents had been teaching for between 3 and 10 years, and 22% had been teaching for more than 20 years. Most teachers also taught the DP (76%) or the PYP (3%). In addition, the majority (85%) were also currently teaching a non-IB qualification, or had done so the past. Surveys and interviews with teachers (with responses supplemented by lesson observations) were designed to explore:

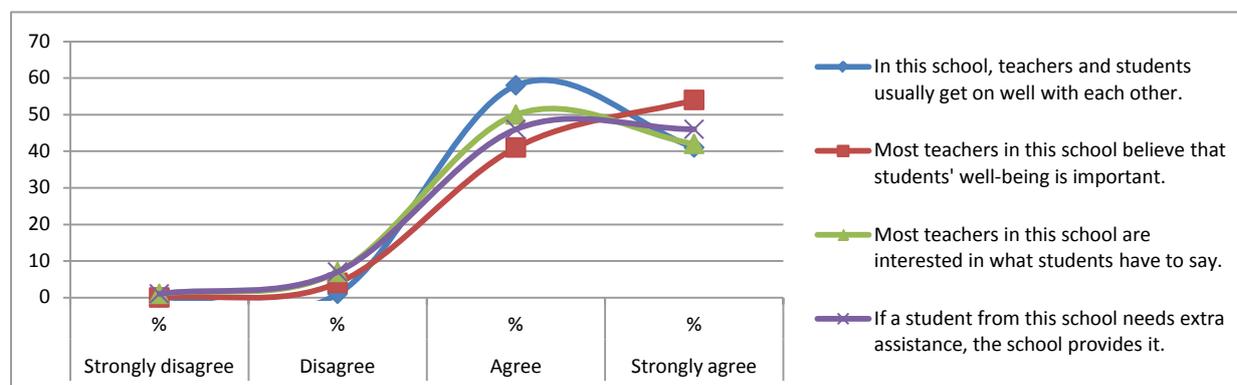
- beliefs about personal effectiveness as a teacher
- views on the school climate
- beliefs about aspects of teaching
- involvement in planning, professional development and collaborative activities
- classroom practice
- assessment practice.

MYP teachers demonstrated a good understanding of the underpinning values of the MYP and were, overall, extremely positive in their responses. The following common themes emerged from the teachers' responses.

- In general, MYP teachers were very positive about the impact of the MYP on students as learners. The vast majority agreed that the programme is a broad, holistic and engaging approach that develops civic- and international-mindedness.
- They held positive views about their school climate, in particular the extent to which the school is student-centred.
- The teachers were very confident in their own abilities and effectiveness as teachers. Although frequent use of traditional classroom practices was reported, approaches more associated with the MYP were equally common.
- Beliefs about teaching were broadly in line with the core elements of the MYP (ie independent problem-solving, thinking and reasoning skills, and facilitation of student inquiry).

- Twenty-seven per cent had participated in external training provided by IB, while 66% reported attending internal training based on IB training in the past 18 months, suggesting that it is common for external IB training to be subsequently cascaded to colleagues. Teachers were generally positive in their assessments of training.
- Identified challenges included offering the MYP alongside the National Curriculum, the lack of recognition in the UK and by universities, and confusing assessment criteria.

Figure 1. Teachers' views on aspects of school climate



“I find the students quite engaged ... definitely more than the National Curriculum, where they seem to feel forced to be there. There’s much more of a feeling of ... going out and learning and trying it ... I guess it’s because we’re more able to give them that opportunity ... They’re definitely more willing to try something new.”

Source: Teacher interview

Parent survey

Fifty-eight parents completed a survey which consisted mainly of open response questions and some rating scales. The parents in this study were asked to comment on the benefits and drawbacks of the programme and its impact on their children. Just over half of parents surveyed had children in year 11 (grade 10), while a third had children in year 9 (grade 8). Forty-one per cent reported that their children had joined the programme in year 7, but over half of the parents reported that their children had joined the MYP later, mostly in year 9.

Parents demonstrated a good understanding of the underpinning values of the MYP and were, overall, extremely positive in their responses. The majority of parents had actively chosen the MYP for their children because of its focus on developing independent thinkers and active inquiring learners, and less focus on rote learning and examinations. Common themes expressed included the following.

- The MYP offered better preparation for future independent study, university and life in general.
- The development of research, evaluation and thinking skills.
- The holistic approach and broad “all-round knowledge” subject base.
- The MYP was “exciting”.
- The flexibility of the curriculum.

The main concern expressed by parents related to uncertainties or possible risks surrounding the unproven record of the MYP in the UK. Although parents had faith in their choice and valued the principles promoted by the IB, many felt that the qualifications were, as yet, largely unrecognized by universities in the UK. Some parents also felt that the MYP assessment criteria were difficult to understand.

Student surveys and focus groups

Three hundred and nine students completed a survey that consisted of both closed and open response questions, and around 48 students from years 9 and 11 (grades 8 and 10) participated in focus groups. The surveyed MYP students, while representative of the MYP population, were not representative of students in the UK in general. Such background factors could underpin the values and beliefs demonstrated by the MYP students, and the results should therefore be interpreted with some caution.

Students were asked a comprehensive range of questions about their perceptions of the MYP: how they felt it impacted on them and their learning, what they enjoyed and did not enjoy about the programme, and about their views on school in general. In order to compare the “non-scholastic” attributes promoted by the MYP with those of other, non-IB students, the online questionnaire included a selection of questions replicated from a number of international and UK national studies². These questions were specifically selected to explore students’ beliefs and values in terms of a variety of global issues, civic participation and self-efficacy. Further insights into pupil attitudes on these themes were also gained during the case study investigations. Overall, MYP students in the UK clearly demonstrated many of the ideas and principles that the programme sets out to promote: international- and civic-mindedness, global awareness and active citizenship.

The majority of students said they enjoyed participating in the programme and acknowledged the benefits of its focus on critical thinking and reflection. Key IB teaching and learning principles of collaborative inquiry, discussion and debate were cited (and observed), and students felt these helped them to learn. Students generally felt that the IB culture fulfilled their intellectual needs, their views were considered in relation to what was taught, and they were encouraged to express their views openly and to make up their own minds. Although the majority of MYP students reported good relations with their teachers, some students felt they would prefer more support for their learning. A number of students felt that too much reflection was required and some felt that the assessment criteria could be clearer. Students, unlike parents and teachers, expressed less concern over the MYP as a recognized qualification.

“I think the IB is really good at teaching you how to learn ... Sometimes you’re aware that you’re learning a specific skill and sometimes you’re not. Everything that you do contributes towards—I don’t know how to say it besides—learning how to learn. You know how to approach things even if it’s something completely foreign to you ... Learning how to learn comes first and the facts ... are secondary.”

Source: Year 11 student

In keeping with the IB ethos to develop internationally minded citizens, students were probed about their attitudes towards a range of global citizenship issues. MYP students reported high levels of awareness of and belief in the importance of global issues such as diversity, social justice, human rights, sustainable development, conflict resolution and interdependence, as well as understanding how cultural values and assumptions shape behaviours. Although “self-reported” and therefore to be interpreted with some caution, the awareness levels of MYP students were significantly higher than those of students in non-IB schools.

Students were asked a number of questions concerning civic participation at school and in the future. MYP students demonstrated more strongly positive views in terms of “self efficacy” in relation to global issues and citizenship (identified as a driver of participatory citizenship in adulthood), being significantly more likely to state that they would be politically and socially active, argue about important controversial issues, get along with people from other cultures and help others that were being treated unfairly. When asked about actions they might become involved in the next few years, MYP students were more likely to report that they would volunteer time to help people in the local community, talk to others about their views on political and social issues, and join an organization for a political or social cause. It could be argued that IB students, because of their (more privileged) home backgrounds, are likely to be more confident generally. However, even when compared with students in independent schools (whose background profiles are very similar), MYP students scored higher on these scales.

² IEA ICCS; OECD PISA; DFID GSPP.

Table 1. Student beliefs and values (attitudes and behaviours concerning global issues)

(all IB and non-IB secondary students; *** = significant difference 1%)

How much do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
I treat everyone the same no matter what their background	40	48	7	5	100
*** <i>Non-IB students</i>	27	56	13	4	
I try to help people if they are being treated unfairly	33	56	6	5	100
*** <i>Non-IB students</i>	24	59	13	4	
I encourage others to respect people from different backgrounds/ to be good neighbours	32	53	10	5	100
*** <i>Non-IB students</i>	20	53	22	5	
I think how my actions might affect the future	30	49	15	7	100
*** <i>Non-IB students</i>	20	50	23	7	
nsd I always try to listen to both sides of an argument	31	53	11	5	100
nsd I always find out as much as I can before making assumptions about people	24	53	17	5	100
nsd I really try to do things to make a difference in this world	16	53	26	6	100

N = IB MYP 298; non-IB students 2539 (max 3.6% missing)

A series of single response questions. Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.

When asked in an open response question what aspects of the MYP they least enjoyed, the most common answers included:

- heavy workload (62)
- too much reflection (59)
- assessments all come at the same time (20)
- restricted choice of subject/some unwanted compulsory elements (20)
- marking criteria/grading confusing (20).

The results of the MYP student survey were confirmed and supplemented by the case study data. All of the non-scholastic attributes displayed by MYP students and discussed above reflect the IB ethos and demonstrate that the students espouse the values the MYP strives to promote.

Supplementary analysis

The original study was extended so that further, more detailed analysis could be carried out on the quantitative student survey data. A factor analysis was completed on all of the questionnaire items relating to the international- and civic-mindedness constructs in the student survey. Multiple multilevel models were created using the factors as outcomes, in order to control for background variables at student and school levels. These factor scales represent more robust and reliable measures than the individual questionnaire items which were used in the original study and can be used to make broad comparisons between IB and non-IB students.

On all factor scales relating to international-mindedness, IB students had significantly higher mean scores than non-IB students. This distinction was significant even when controlling for extraneous variables such as gender, native language and nationality. Although multilevel modelling does not prove causality, it is

clear that being involved in the MYP in the UK was significantly associated with higher scores on the international-mindedness scale³.

On all factor scales relating to civic-mindedness, IB students again had significantly higher mean scores than non-IB students. Being an MYP student was also significantly associated with higher levels of expected civic participation in the future, such as community volunteering and involvement in social and political issues. When the number of books at home (used as a proxy for SES) was included, the distinction between MYP and non-IB students became borderline significant.

Conclusion

The results of the quantitative and qualitative strands of the research proved to be complementary, and a number of recurring themes was observed. Overall, the vast majority of teachers, parents and students gave extremely positive responses when asked about their experiences with the MYP. The research findings showed that each group was aware of and held many of the values and principles that underpin the IB philosophy of education. Teachers, parents and students described a broad, holistic and engaging approach to learning, linked to real-life situations and delivered through collaborative inquiry and critical debate—an approach that was universally valued. In many ways, this is not surprising as the majority of participants in the MYP have chosen to be involved in it.

While participants in the research were largely positive about the MYP, a number of concerns were expressed. Teachers and parents particularly had some reservations about the lack of recognition of the MYP and its associated qualifications in the UK. Teachers valued the opportunities within the MYP to work collaboratively with colleagues and to have creative input into the curriculum. Many, however, expressed a wish for more collaboration between IB schools and for teacher networks to have a degree of accreditation from IB. The heavy student workload of the MYP was recognized by students, teachers and parents, and some students felt that their teachers did not always offer help when needed. Each group also cited somewhat confusing assessment criteria as a concern.

A number of “non-scholastic attributes” are explicitly promoted within the MYP, including critical thinking and international- and civic-mindedness. MYP students exhibited more positive attitudes in a number of areas relating to global- and civic-mindedness and citizenship self-efficacy. Some significant differences were identified between the attitudes of MYP students and students in non-IB schools, including subsamples of students from broadly similar backgrounds. The differences observed reflect the IB ethos that aims to produce young people who are internationally minded and strive to create a better, more peaceful world. The supplementary research strengthens and offers further quantitative support for these conclusions. Although the statistical models do not prove causality, they offer a clear distinction between IB and non-IB students and present support for the authentication of the IB mission statement. In terms of international- and civic-mindedness, MYP students demonstrated positive attitudes and behaviours that differentiated them from students in other learning environments.

³ Attending independent schools and/or international schools was also positively associated.

This summary was developed by the IB Research Department. A copy of the full report, prepared by the National Foundation for Educational Research, is available at <http://www.ibo.org/research>. For more information on this study or other IB research, please email research@ibo.org.

To cite the full report, please use the following:

Sizmur, J and Cunningham, R. 2012. *International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP) in the UK. Slough, Berkshire, UK. NFER.*

Supplementary analysis:

Sizmur, J, Bradshaw, S and Yeshanew, T. 2012. *International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP) in the UK, Supplementary Analyses. Slough, Berkshire, UK. NFER.*