

Exploration and analysis of the future introduction of the International Baccalaureate in Taiwan

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Abstract: This study explores the feasibility and impact of integrating the International Baccalaureate (IB) program into Taiwan's national education system. While Taiwan's current international education policies primarily focus on language acquisition, the IB curriculum emphasizes global awareness, cultural understanding, and critical thinking—key competencies in a globalized world. This study uses the seven dilemmas of educational reform as an analytical framework, which are: Orientation Dilemma, Paradigm Dilemma, Financial Dilemma, Resources Dilemma, and Knowledge Dilemma. The findings indicate that the integration of the IB program can balance the needs of globalization and local education, align with Taiwan's lifelong learning policies, enhance educational equity through public school implementation, and provide students with dual diploma opportunities. With appropriate policy support and resource allocation, the IB program has the potential to strengthen Taiwan's international competitiveness while promoting educational diversity and equity.

Keywords: *International baccalaureate, IB.*

1. Research Motivation

In the era of globalization, the educational philosophy of mutual respect, understanding, and international peace has gained prominence worldwide [1]. Additionally, with the increasing demand for cross-border talent mobility, enhancing international competitiveness has become a crucial value consideration for many nations [2]. The level of international competitiveness is closely tied to the possession of international capital. As a result, both individuals and nations aspire to acquire or accumulate greater international capital through education. In other words, international education serves as a means to cultivate the competencies required in the contexts of globalization and internationalization, which include general key competencies as well as specific global and international literacy. The former encompasses foreign language proficiency, information technology skills, lifelong learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability, while the latter emphasizes values related to global interconnectedness and cultural diversity, such as understanding and respecting different ethnic and cultural groups and recognizing the responsibilities of global citizenship [3].

There are various approaches to promoting international education, with Taiwan's most prominent initiative being the "2030 Bilingual Policy." This policy aims to enhance national English proficiency as a means to improve international competitiveness. However, considerable skepticism remains regarding whether this educational reform can effectively elevate the country's competitive standing [4]. As Hong and Wen [3] have noted, international education should not be limited to the cultivation of language skills; it should also emphasize information technology literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to adapt to rapid social changes. Furthermore, it should foster students' awareness of global unity, encouraging them to transcend ethnocentrism and develop an appreciation for and respect toward diverse cultural groups. Only through such an approach can a more peaceful and harmonious world be realized.

However, Taiwan's current bilingual policy appears to be primarily focused on improving students' English proficiency, lacking elements that promote cultural understanding and respect for other ethnic groups, let alone critical analysis of international affairs. As such, it does not fully align with the fundamental principles outlined by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) [5] which emphasizes that international education curricula should cultivate students' knowledge, character, perspectives, and essential skills.

The increasing global demand for international education has led to a significant rise in the number of international schools worldwide. Various criteria have been used to classify these institutions. Given that societal needs for international education have evolved over time, Hayden and Thompson [6] categorize international schools into three types: traditional international schools, ideological international schools, and new international schools [3, 7]. Additionally, Yeh and Lin [4] synthesized the perspectives of multiple scholars and proposed a fourth category: "internationalized schools within national education systems." This classification reflects the growing trend of public high schools, particularly in the United States, implementing the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). Notably, by 2008, the number of students enrolled in IBDP courses within public schools had already surpassed that of students in traditional international schools (Hayden & Thompson, 2008, cited in Yeh and Lin [4]). Moreover, from 2016 to 2020, the global number of IB programs increased by 33.3% (IBO, 2022, cited in Wang [8]). These trends highlight the continuous expansion of international education within national education systems, solidifying its status as a global phenomenon. Given this context, the present study seeks to explore the feasibility and appropriateness of integrating IB curriculum into Taiwan's national education system.

2. The Relationship Between the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Taiwan's 12-Year National Education

Taiwan's 12-Year National Education serves as the central framework of the country's current educational development. Therefore, any proposed educational reform must align with the core values and educational philosophy of this system rather than contradict them.

According to the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) [9] the IB curriculum aims to cultivate students as empathetic, proactive lifelong learners who, through their studies, develop an understanding of and respect for diverse cultures, ultimately contributing to the creation of a better and more peaceful world. This vision aligns closely with the objectives and core competencies of Taiwan's 12-Year National Education. The latter emphasizes the development of human-centered lifelong learners, where the principle of "initiative" corresponds to proactive engagement, "interaction" aligns with cultural understanding and respect, and "common good" reflects the aspiration to create a better and more peaceful world.

Furthermore, the curriculum design of Taiwan's 12-Year National Education is deeply rooted in the philosophy of holistic education, which emphasizes the comprehensive development of individuals across multiple dimensions. Since individuals cannot exist in isolation from society, holistic education also places great importance on their relationships with the surrounding social environment. In other words, holistic education values both individual and societal well-being and posits that knowledge, much like real-world affairs, is inherently interconnected. Consequently, holistic education advocates for the interdependence of different academic disciplines, rather than treating them as isolated and independent fields of study [10, 11].

The IB Primary Years Programme (IBPYP), for instance, offers curricula spanning six subject groups and mandates that IB schools integrate global and local issues across these disciplines, encouraging students to engage in transdisciplinary learning. This approach is highly consistent with Taiwan's 12-Year National Education, which promotes interdisciplinary teaching and collaboration among educators across different subject areas.

In summary, as Li [1] has noted, many of the educational principles embedded within the IB curriculum align closely with those of Taiwan's 12-Year National Education. Therefore, this study

argues that the integration of IB curricula within Taiwan's current educational framework is harmonious, appropriate, and feasible.

3. Overview of the International Baccalaureate (IB)

3.1. *The Meaning and Purpose of the International Baccalaureate*

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is a globally recognized diploma acknowledged by major universities in many of the world's leading nations. The IB operates independently and is not affiliated with any single country or international alliance (Tarc, 2009, cited in Tzou [12]). Consequently, the education it provides does not necessarily correspond entirely to the local educational systems of IB schools' host countries. However, due to its high level of international recognition, obtaining an IB diploma serves as a valuable qualification for students seeking admission to top universities in Europe, North America, and other global institutions.

The IB aims to cultivate young individuals who are empathetic, intellectually curious, and knowledgeable through its challenging international education programs and rigorous assessment frameworks. Moreover, IB programs foster students' cross-cultural understanding and respect, ultimately striving toward the highest educational goal—the creation of a better and more peaceful world (IBO, 2022).

3.2. *The Origins and Evolution of the International Baccalaureate*

In 1962, a group of educators in Switzerland identified a significant challenge faced by the children of diplomatic and expatriate families, who, due to their parents' frequent international relocations, struggled to maintain a coherent and continuous educational trajectory. In response, the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) was established in 1968 as a non-profit educational foundation, with the initial goal of designing a curriculum suited for these "third-culture children" attending international schools in multiple countries. However, at its inception, the IB only offered the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP), which was designed as a pre-university curriculum.

As the IBDP gained widespread international recognition, the program expanded downward to cater to younger students. In 1994, the Middle Years Programme (IBMYP) was introduced, followed by the Primary Years Programme (IBPYP) in 1997. Finally, in 2012, the IB established the Career-related Programme (IBCP) to accommodate students pursuing vocational and professional pathways [1, 13].

The origins of the IB curriculum can be explained from both a practical and an ideological perspective. From a practical standpoint, the IB was developed to address the educational discontinuity experienced by highly mobile international students. However, from a philosophical and educational perspective, the IB was created to transcend nationalism and embrace internationalism. By integrating a globally oriented curriculum, the IB aspires to help students respect, appreciate, and engage with diverse languages and cultures, ultimately shaping them into individuals with a global mindset and an international outlook [11].

3.3. *The Core Components of the International Baccalaureate Curriculum*

The researcher has synthesized the key components of the IB curriculum, which are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.
IB Curriculum Content

Project	Age	Subjects	Education Objectives
(IBPYP)	3-12 years old	Language, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Arts, Health Social and Personal Education.	IB schools should incorporate interdisciplinary themes across six major subjects into their curriculum, guiding students to engage in learning that transcends traditional subject boundaries.
(IBMYP)	11-16 years old	Language Acquisition, Language and Literature Studies, Individuals and Society, Science, Mathematics, Arts, Physical and Health Education, Design	Considering that students are at a critical transitional stage in their personal and intellectual development, the aim is to cultivate their creativity and critical thinking, helping them become reflective thinkers with the ability to critique and self-reflect.
(IBDP)	16-19 years old	Language and Literature Studies, Language Acquisition, Individuals and Society, Science, Mathematics, Arts	Strengthen multiple intelligences and professional subject skills, enabling students to successfully enter both academic fields and the global society in the future.
(IBCP)	16-19 years old	Same as IBDP	In addition to subject groups, vocational orientation elements should be included to allow students aspiring to pursue technical and vocational education to explore specific careers.

Source: Wang [14].

3.4. Development Status of the International Baccalaureate (IB)

3.4.1. Global Development of IB

IB courses are offered in 160 countries worldwide, with over 5,400 IB schools, and more than 7,500 International Baccalaureate educational programs [8].

3.4.2. Development of IB in Our Country

According to the IBO official website, as of 2023, there are 16 schools in our country offering IB programs, most of which are private schools, and none have implemented the IBCP program, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
List of IB Schools in Taiwan.

Name of the School	IBPYP	IBMYP	IBDP	IBCP	Languages Used in Lectures
Kaohsiung I-Shou International School	✓	✓	✓		Chinese, English, others
Kang Chiao International School((Xiugang Campus)		✓	✓		Chinese, English, others
Kaohsiung American School		✓	✓		English
Taichung Mingdao High School International Department.		✓	✓		Chinese, English, others
Taichung Starlight International Kindergarten	✓				Chinese, English, others
Taichung Starlight International Kindergarten (Hui Wen Campus)	✓				Chinese, English, others
Taichung Starlight Experimental Edu Inst.	✓	✓			Chinese, English, others
Taipei American School			✓		English
Taipei European School			✓		English
Taipei Kuei Shan School	✓	✓	✓		English
Taipei Municipal Binjiang Experimental Junior High School		✓			Chinese, English, others
Taipei Municipal Xisong High School			✓		Chinese, English, others
Taoyuan Municipal Dayuan International Senior High School			✓		Chinese, English, others
Yunlin Victoria Academy			✓		Chinese, English, others
Juntou International School of Experimental Education	✓				Chinese, English, others
Taipei Municipal Zhong Zheng Senior High School			✓	✓	Chinese, English, others

Source: IBO website (<https://www.ibo.org/programmes/find-an-ib-school/>)

4. Analysis of the Integration of the IB Program into the National Education System

Given the current international context and geographical location of our country, it is essential to cultivate a higher level of sensitivity to international affairs. To enhance international literacy, besides language proficiency, the ability to understand and respect foreign cultures, and even the capacity to analyze international situations [7] should be prioritized in our national development of international education. At present, the implementation of international education in our country is incomplete, with an emphasis on acquiring language skills while neglecting the cultivation of national sentiment and the critical analysis of international issues.

From the core values and objectives of the IB (International Baccalaureate) program, we can understand that its curriculum design balances knowledge, character, perspectives, and skills. In addition to the ability to communicate effectively in a language, the program emphasizes the cultivation of students' international awareness, guiding them to appreciate and affirm traditional values and their own culture, while simultaneously learning to understand and respect the cultures of other nations with an open mind. It also aims to inspire students' global consciousness and make them aware of their responsibilities as global citizens [15]. Therefore, the researcher believes that integrating the IB curriculum and its philosophy into our education system could become a trend in the development of international education in the future.

The following analysis examines whether this initiative is appropriate and its potential impacts by applying the seven dilemmas of educational reform mentioned in the article *Education reform phenomenon: A typology of multiple dilemmas* to the integration of the IB program into our educational system.

4.1. Orientation Dilemma (Globalization vs. Local Concerns)

To cultivate international sentiment in students, the IB curriculum starts from a global perspective, enhancing their cross-cultural understanding and respect while also strengthening students' understanding of local culture [16] guiding them to reflect on local issues. When the IBO (International Baccalaureate Organization) collaborates with schools and governments of various

countries, it takes into account the local historical, cultural, political, social, and educational contexts and makes appropriate adjustments to the IB curriculum [17, 18].

From Li [1] analysis of Singapore and Hong Kong, we can see that IB curricula in different countries indeed reflect local development contexts. For example, at Xisun High School's International Baccalaureate program, although the curriculum is primarily based on the IB framework, the school also considers the national requirements for high school graduation credits and hours. Additionally, Yida International High School offers an IB program that balances international awareness with the national curriculum through a bilingual curriculum [4]. Both theoretical and practical experiences confirm that the IB program has the characteristic of "balancing internationalization and localization." Thus, the researcher believes that integrating the IB curriculum into our national education system will strike a balance between globalization and localization, without falling into the "globalization trap" of international education.

4.2. Paradigm Dilemma (Shift of Concepts Amid Educational Reform Waves)

The third-wave educational reform paradigm assumes lifelong learning and diversified development, advocating for providing students with content that is globalized, localized, and differentiated. This aligns with the spirit and philosophy of our twelve-year national education policy.

The IB's objective is to cultivate students as proactive "lifelong learners," and its curriculum design "balances both globalization and localization." Therefore, the researcher believes that integrating the IB into our education system will not lead to conflict within the paradigm dilemma.

4.3. Financial Dilemma (Market Forces vs. National Goals)

The implementation of the IB program requires significant human, material, and financial resources. This is one of the primary reasons why most of the IB programs in our country are offered in private schools. Cai [19] believes that if there is consensus among the political parties, the IB curriculum could be introduced into public schools, with ample and stable resources to support its implementation. This would help alleviate the perception that the IB program is primarily available to children from affluent families. However, national financial allocations inevitably involve fairness concerns. The allocation of government resources must be carefully considered, as it relates to whether the educational reform aims at equity or excellence. Wang [20] suggests that the government should prioritize providing subsidies to public schools in less prominent or remote areas to transform them into IB schools, thus narrowing the educational resource gap between urban and rural areas.

The researcher agrees with Wang [20] suggestion. If the government can introduce the IB program into public schools with fewer resources, it will not only enhance educational quality but also ensure a more equitable distribution of educational resources and address issues of social equity, balancing fairness and educational quality.

4.4. Resources Dilemma (Unlimited Desires vs. Limited Resources)

The severe issue of low birth rates, along with doubts about the quality of education, has led to a loss of student enrollment in private high schools, resulting in decreased school revenues. Wu [21] offers several strategies in response to this dilemma, one of which is for schools to "grasp social development trends and establish a clear development focus."

In the context of globalization, proficiency in foreign languages and an understanding and respect for other cultures are essential. Additionally, the government is actively promoting the 2030 bilingual policy to enhance citizens' English proficiency and improve national competitiveness [20]. The researcher believes that if schools recognize that "foreign language skills and cross-cultural thinking are crucial for the development of global society," they will prioritize the introduction of the IBDP curriculum within the national curriculum as an option for school transformation. This will prevent overloading teachers with excessive transformation changes and maintain a balance between various reform strategies.

4.5. Knowledge Dilemma (*Knowledge Gap Between Planning and Implementation*)

Wang [22] has suggested that promoting bilingual education will effectively address the difficulties that citizens face when trying to express themselves fluently in international settings. However, as mentioned in the literature, actual implementation is not straightforward. The government has indeed been promoting the "2030 bilingual policy," integrating bilingual education into the national education system, but as indicated, this reform is not easy. English has no significant historical context as an official language in our country, and non-English subject teachers often lack the ability to teach academic subjects bilingually, leading to controversy in the execution of bilingual education.

The IB PYP and MYP programs are flexible and compatible with national curricula, and schools can teach in their native language, English, or bilingually without restrictions. Additionally, bilingual teachers can collaborate with the IBO for professional training. Therefore, the researcher believes that if the government treats the integration of the IB curriculum into our education system as part of the bilingual education initiative, it could bridge the knowledge gap between planning and execution, balancing this dilemma.

4.6. Political Dilemma (*Multiple Stakeholders and Conflicting Interests*)

Children of diplomats who frequently move across countries are known as "third-culture kids" [23]. They represent a different set of educational stakeholders compared to other students, and the IB program was originally designed to meet the unique educational needs of these third-culture children, helping them adjust to incompatible educational systems in different countries. Therefore, the researcher believes that the IB program can already balance the political dilemma of serving multiple educational stakeholders.

From another perspective, if the IB program is introduced into non-prominent high schools, it may transform these schools into a type of "star" high school, attracting a certain group of students. This will not undermine the prominence of traditional "elite" schools, as the goal of entering top local universities will still exist. From this angle, the researcher believes that integrating the IB program into our education system can meet the needs of different stakeholders, balancing political dilemmas.

4.7. Functional Dilemma (*School Autonomy vs. Central Authority*)

If the government integrates the IBDP into non-prominent high schools, it would attract students and parents by offering more educational choices, thus reducing the pressure of competition for spots in elite schools and breaking the myth of elitism in our educational system. This initiative can help develop the IB program into a distinctive feature of schools, with the support of the state [24].

Additionally, taking Xisun High School's IB program as an example, while the school's curriculum significantly differs from the national curriculum, it still meets the national graduation credit and hour requirements. As a result, students completing the 3-year IB program also meet the graduation requirements for the national high school diploma. If students pass the IB global exams, they can earn the IBDP. Achieving dual diplomas will benefit their applications to both domestic and international universities.

Therefore, the researcher believes that if the government introduces the IBDP into non-prominent high schools, making it a distinctive feature of the schools, there is no need to worry about the imbalance between school autonomy and central authority. Schools can follow Xisun High School's approach, allowing students to earn dual diplomas and offering more diverse pathways for further education.

Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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