

Research Summary

How schools evaluate the success of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP)

Extracted from a research report prepared for the IB by:

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The study

The aim of the study was to investigate how schools define and measure the success of the IB Primary Years Programme. The study was conducted between October 2012 and May 2013 and was designed for use within the IB to inform programme development and school and professional development services. The study provides an understanding of those aspects of the Primary Years Programme (PYP) that are most valued by stakeholder groups within schools and seen as contributing to the success of the programme in the school context, and the indicators that these groups use to explain successful programme implementation. The study asked schools to suggest areas for future programme development and give recommendations on how this development could be approached.

Research questions

The following guiding questions were used.

1. What are schools' definitions of the "success" of the PYP? Do schools' definitions of "success" vary by school type or geographical location?
2. How do schools evaluate their definitions of the "success" of the PYP? Specifically, what evidence is identified, collected, interpreted, and recorded to provide indicators of "success" in the following areas?
 - school leadership
 - teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices
 - parent satisfaction with the PYP
 - student learning outcomes
 - how students demonstrate the attributes of the IB learner profile
 - development of international-mindedness within the school community
 - school ethos and culture.
3. What do school stakeholders (including teachers, PYP coordinators, school leaders and parents) perceive is needed for future development and to ensure the continued success of the programme?

Research design and method

The study used a two-stage qualitative mixed method design. An electronic questionnaire was sent to all PYP schools that had undergone a programme evaluation visit. The questionnaire used open-ended questions that focused on perceptions of programme success and on suggestions for future development of the programme. Each school was requested to convene three focus groups—administrators, teachers and parents—to respond separately to the questionnaire. Data from the questionnaire was analysed using qualitative techniques—coding and sorting—to provide answers to the research questions. Six volunteer schools were selected to provide case studies. Case studies were constructed to gain an in-depth understanding of schools' journeys to successful programme implementation, to place the perceptions of success in the context of the school, to understand how context influenced perceptions of success for different stakeholder groups in the schools, and to examine the effects of school type (public and private) and geographic location. Cross-case analysis was used to look for, confirm, explain and add depth to patterns emerged from the analysis of the case study data.

Key findings

School indicators and measures of success

School communities that consider the PYP successful note the following indicators and measures of success.

1. Enhanced student learning outcomes and demonstration of the attributes of the IB learner profile in schools, specifically the following student outcomes.
 - Students showed an enjoyment of learning demonstrated by their willingness to be involved in school activities.
 - Students demonstrated confidence in assemblies, class presentations and discussions.
 - Students demonstrated mastery of inquiry learning skills through questioning and problem solving.
 - Students were willing to take control of their learning, and to take action
 - Students demonstrated moral and ethical decision-making when interacting with the school community.
 - Students showed an awareness of local and global issues, and the links between the two.
2. Enhanced school community, the programme is perceived to be successful in creating a shared vision of learning that extends from leadership to teachers, learners and their parents and beyond into the larger community—a community of learners. The indicator of success in this area is a sense of unity, coherence, common purpose and ownership of the programme among all stakeholder groups in the school. Specifically, schools note the success of how the PYP supports the following.
 - The use of the learner profile to guide all aspects of school action and decision-making, and provide a defining ethos for the school.
 - The use of common PYP terminology and vocabulary by all members of the community, extending the ability to communicate about the programme with the larger IB community.
3. Enhanced international-mindedness in the school community, the PYP's international-mindedness focus is seen as successful by the case study schools in challenging the schools to make connections with the wider community and bring global issues into the schools.
4. Enhanced teacher pedagogical beliefs and practices, the programme is viewed as successful because it allowed teachers to:
 - have a direct input into curriculum design and delivery as measured by the school's programme of inquiry and curriculum documents
 - improve their teaching through targeted professional development and reflection on practice, as measured by classroom observations and teacher evaluations
 - collaborate with other teachers throughout the PYP programme in the development of the programme of inquiry
 - demonstrate their own enjoyment of learning and an improved confidence in their approach to teaching

- gain direct help from the programme coordinator leadership in finding resources and providing feedback
 - see enhanced learner outcomes in student approaches to learning and social interactions, as measured by indicators of academic achievement and daily behaviour.
5. Enhanced school leadership, the PYP is perceived as successful because it ensures school leaders can:
- focus their decision-making regarding the allocation of financial and human resources. This includes the hiring of teachers with PYP or inquiry learning experience, the provision of appropriate professional development opportunities, the allocation of school time for planning and collaboration, and the development of school facilities, such as the library, to support the programme. Thus, the programme contributes to more efficient use of school resources.
 - meet parent expectations, as evidenced by positive feedback from parent surveys
 - attract students to the school, as shown by parents and students choosing the school above others.
6. Enhanced parent involvement, the programme is regarded as successful by and for parents because they can:
- see their children's pride in their work and confidence in their ability to demonstrate their learning
 - see their child wanting to share school experiences with them, to work on school projects at home, and to have their parents involved in school activities
 - feel satisfied that their children are being well-prepared for future.

School context

The study looked for different definitions of success in schools sharing common contextual features and found that school context interacted with programme implementation in influencing success in complex ways. Some factors common to several case study schools include the following.

- The need to accommodate state or national curriculum requirements that required students to learn specific content or educators to prepare students for tests.
- Availability of financial resources increased or limited the experiences that could be provided for children and the professional development opportunities for teachers.
- Geographic isolation from other members of the IB community limited access to seeing the implementation of the PYP in other school contexts.
- Previous teacher training and teacher mobility affected schools' abilities to develop a common understanding of inquiry learning.

No consistent pattern of interaction of the PYP and school context was found with regard to school type or geographic location.

Recommendations for future programme development

Flexibility, innovation and simplification in the curriculum framework

Schools seek the flexibility to adapt and innovate within the curriculum framework and made the following recommendations.

- Allow “master schools” to have the flexibility to experiment and innovate with different numbers of units and time allocation to specific inquiries.
- Review number of units for schools integrating other curriculum models.

Align the IB programmes and terminology

The following recommendation was made regarding current differences in the programme models and terminology between the three programmes for students.

- Consistency in terminology and approach across all programmes would help IB World Schools to create a seamless curriculum sequence.

Enhance professional development

Schools want to improve teaching and learning in their schools and seek exemplars of curriculum development and delivery. The following recommendations were made.

- Set up regional centres, designate “schools of excellence” for live or virtual visits.
- Annotated videos of experts teaching whole units would provide useful in-school training materials and a focus for in school discussions as well as giving all schools a common understanding of best practice with regard to PYP instruction.

Build community

Schools value and seek more interaction with IB staff, and want to connect with other PYP schools in different contexts for guidance and support. The following recommendations were made.

- Develop helplines staffed by professional trainers.
- Use scholarships to help teachers from schools with limited funds to visits to other schools

Conclusion

This study offers strong evidence that the PYP operates successfully across all PYP school contexts. In keeping with the research literature of successful schools as learning communities focused on enhancing student outcomes, the PYP schools in this study based their assessment of the success of the programme on developing student understandings of attitudes, values and skills seen as equipping them for lifelong learning, involvement and contributions to local and global communities. The schools acknowledged the important relationships that exist between teaching and student outcomes, and the contributions of leadership and parents in creating a favourable climate and culture for learning. The enhancement of all of these relationships through the PYP framework and requirements made it a successful programme for the schools in the study.

The PYP schools in the study offered insight into the areas they perceive as needing additional support from the IB. The schools' recommendations provide a "jumping off point" for further development and innovation in the IB community. Schools define the success of the programme in terms of building a successful learning community and placing their learning community within the context of the larger IB community. Schools are focused on the continual cultivation and enhancement of their learning communities and the suggestions made are concerned with building on successful aspects of the PYP, rather than changing the PYP.

This summary was extracted by the IB Research Department. A copy of the full report 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:

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