

Research summary

Factors affecting uptake of the arts in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

Summary developed by the IB Research department based on a report prepared by:

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Background

This study was designed to understand the uptake of arts education at schools authorized to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP). The study had two main goals. The first was to develop a global demographic profile of DP arts students and to determine the student-level and school-level factors associated with elective uptake of the arts within the DP. The second objective was to understand the broader climate and context for arts education in IB World Schools.

Research methods

The researcher conducted a thorough analysis of de-identified administrative data from the IB Information System (IBIS) on arts course and examination registrations spanning the time period between 2010 and 2017. The IBIS dataset included information on $N = 1.1$ million students. Internal data analyses were supplemented with a survey of IB coordinators, randomly selected to respond to a questionnaire asking about the status of arts education at the school, both within and beyond the DP curricula.

Categories of DP students and school arts offerings

At the DP level, separating candidates by type—that is, as “full DP” candidates or as individual “course-only” students—has important ramifications for the idea of arts uptake within the DP. Individual course candidates face fundamentally different kinds of choices with respect to the DP courses they elect when compared to full DP candidates. Course-only students have much more freedom to pursue whichever subjects they feel are most interesting or valuable, while full DP candidates must choose from among the courses offered in each subject group. At present, the only true option with respect to broad disciplines elected by full DP candidates is the choice of whether to pursue arts study or to opt for two courses from another subject group. Uptake estimates must also take into account accurate measures of access—counting uptake rates only among those students who were presented with a legitimate choice for arts study by virtue of their school making DP arts courses available to students.

Findings

Uptake of DP arts courses

This section describes study findings based on IBIS data of DP arts uptake. Over the time period examined in this study, 26% of full DP students and 11% of course students elected to take a DP arts (group 6) course.

Availability of DP arts courses

DP courses in the arts are not universally available to DP students globally. Approximately 25% of IB World Schools authorized to offer the DP do not have an opportunity for students to elect a group 6 course as part of their programme. Over the time period

examined in this study, 9% of all IB students—both full DP and course students—attended a school with no provision for group 6 courses. Among full DP candidates, 11% attended an IB World School with no provision for group 6 courses.

School legal status and regional factors

Certain school characteristics were related to the likelihood that a school would offer group 6 courses. Specifically, these characteristics were: school legal status, school size and geographic region. Private schools, larger schools (with larger DP cohorts) and schools located in certain regions (such as Oceania, Asia and Africa) were more likely to offer DP arts courses.

Human Development Index

Additionally, the researcher compared the arts uptake of schools located in nations with varying United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) values. HDI is a standardized measure of a nation's economic growth and human capabilities on the dimensions of health, knowledge and standard of living. The study found that schools located in nations with higher HDI values had a greater likelihood of offering the arts.

Student and school-level characteristics

Particular student and school-level characteristics were related to individual DP arts course uptake. These characteristics were: gender (birth-assigned sex), nationality and, for students attending schools in the United States (US), race/ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch¹, and English language learner status. In contrast to much of the US-based research in arts education, within the DP students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, were students of colour (ie, non-white), or were English language learners were more likely to pursue an arts course than were students who were not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, were white, or were proficient speakers of English.

Climate of arts education in IB World Schools

This section was based on a survey to randomly-selected DP coordinators ($n = 479$) from all regions about the status of arts education within their IB World School. DP coordinators reported that, for the most part, the arts are valued within their schools. However, they identified several key countervailing forces to increased uptake of the arts. These countervailing forces included: optionality of the arts within the DP model, low perceived status of arts coursework in university admissions, perceived flaws in the IB arts curricula, and lack of adequate school resources devoted to arts facilities and arts instruction. It is clear from the study that the arts are viewed by some students, some school leaders and some parents as less important than the other components of the DP model.

¹ This measure is often used in US educational research as an available, yet imperfect, proxy for student socioeconomic status or the level of concentrated poverty within a school.

Recommendations

The study indicates that recommendations for improving the status of the arts can be enacted at both the student and the school policy level. At present, the arts subjects are viewed by some IB stakeholders as less rigorous, less important and less applicable than other subjects comprising the DP model. IB World Schools should consider how they engage students in the arts and the role that IB arts can play as a complement to other DP coursework.

This summary was developed by the IB Research department. A copy of the full report is available at: www.ibo.org/en/research/. For more information on this study or other IB research, please email research@ibo.org.

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