RESEARCH SUMMARY

Implementation and outcomes of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) in Spanish schools

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

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The MYP in Spain

IB programmes have been offered in Spain since 1977, with the first Spanish school authorized to provide the MYP in 1996. Currently there are 10 schools offering the MYP in Spain, all of which are private schools. Nevertheless, there is increasing interest in the MYP, including in the state sector, and a growing number of Spanish schools are undertaking the MYP authorization process. A study was conducted by the Autónoma University of Madrid in eight Spanish schools to explore the implementation and impact of the MYP in Spain, including school views on the relevance of the MYP as a framework for middle years education in Spain.

Research design

The study was comprised of two parts and employed a mixed-methods research design. Part I of the study focused on comparing the Spanish curriculum, *Educación Secundaria Obligatoria* (ESO–Compulsory Secondary Education), and the MYP. This involved a rigorous review of documents from the Spanish national curriculum and the MYP to identify areas of convergence and divergence between the two curricula.

Part II of the study investigated the perceived benefits and challenges experienced by schools in implementing the MYP in Spain, as reported by school leaders, teachers, students and families. Online questionnaires were administered across the eight participating schools to three different stakeholder groups, including: students (n = 1,441); teachers (n = 148); and families (n = 209). Focus groups were organized for IB coordinators in all participating schools and also with groups of teachers, students and families in each case-study school. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with school heads (n = 8) and IB coordinators from three case-study schools (n = 3).

Findings

Curriculum comparison (Part I)

The findings of the first component of the study acknowledge that areas of difference exist between the Spanish ESO and the MYP. The Spanish curriculum is content-based and disciplinary; it aims for content acquisition and predominantly employs written examinations in its assessment practices. In contrast, the MYP is concept-based, with a focus on interdisciplinarity, and it involves competence-based learning approaches and a wider range of assessment practices. However, despite these differences, the researchers posit that the MYP's openness and flexibility facilitates integration with the Spanish curriculum and provides the potential for substantial enhancements to the Spanish ESO.

The benefits of integrating the ESO and MYP include:

1. The MYP's concept-based learning approaches provide opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate more complex and interdisciplinary thinking beyond subject-specific facts or topics.

2. The learner profile can be employed as a framework for ensuring that non-academic student outcomes and key competencies, such as thinking skills, are given prominence in Spanish schools. Adopting the learner profile can also support the alignment of Spanish education with the European Commission's eight key competencies, including

social and civic competencies and, more broadly, with Europe 2020.

3. The variety and broader range of assessment practices of the MYP, including formative and non-disciplinary related assessment, offers the ESO a more comprehensive assessment system. The MYP's level descriptors, linked to assessment criteria and grading, can also provide stronger clarity and objectivity in the assessment process.

In addition to the benefits of integrating the ESO and MYP, the research team also identified some issues in delivering the two curricula simultaneously. For example, while the MYP provides the prospect of introducing a more holistic approach to assessment, challenges were also identified, with apparent gaps, overlaps and a lack of alignment with the assessment criteria of the two curricula. Specifically, the degree of alignment in the assessment criteria was reportedly high in fundamental cognitive skills (such as knowledge, understanding and application) but limited in higher-order cognitive skills (such as synthesis, reflection, evaluation and critical thinking). While the research team posits that the integration of the assessment criteria is achievable, this does entail a considerable amount of effort on the part of teachers and schools.

A further challenge for schools is the numerical grade equivalences between the two programmes. The Spanish ESO awards numerical grades from 1 – 10, with 5 as the passing mark; in contrast, the MYP awards numerical grades from 1 – 7, with 3 as the passing mark. To overcome these differences, researchers recommended that an official conversion table between the ESO and the MYP be drafted and approved by the Spanish Ministry of Education.

Impact of MYP implementation (Part II)

In the second part of the study, the researchers examined the perceptions of different school stakeholders regarding the impact of the MYP in Spanish schools. Taken as a whole, stakeholder groups, including school heads, MYP coordinators, teachers, students and families, reported that the MYP supported a range of positive outcomes within the participating schools. A cross section of outcomes that was perceived to have been generated by these changes are outlined below.

School culture and environment

School heads and coordinators indicated that the MYP's pedagogical approaches contributed strongly to school transformation. MYP approaches to teaching and learning introduced a wider range of pedagogical practices in the participating schools and also embedded interdisciplinary learning. Heads and coordinators also reported shifts in other classroom practices, for example, lower reliance on repetition of content and testing and, instead, a greater focus on competence development. Observations made by participants included that MYP pedagogical approaches are more practical, are linked to "doing", attend to "real-world" learning and are more strongly aligned to educational aims that prepare students to participate fully in contemporary society.

The shifts in pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning introduced through MYP implementation reportedly had positive outcomes for the wider school environment as well. Examples of this included that embedding interdisciplinary components into the school curriculum encouraged teachers to work in a more collaborative way. Implementation of the MYP also required the schools to undertake training and professional development, which some participants described as an institutional transformation that recast their school as a reflective and learning organization.

Teaching methods

In a survey component of the study, students at participating schools were asked how often their teachers used a range of teaching methods. Overall, students reported that their teachers most frequently employed the following: "testing assessment"; "checking exercise books or homework"; "using ICT (information and communications technology) for projects or class work"; "work from worksheets"; "using computers or the internet"; and "asking questions". Teachers were also asked how often they used a range of teaching methods in their classrooms. In general, teachers reported that they most frequently employed the following: "asking questions"; "using ICT for projects or class work"; "work from worksheets"; "using computers or the internet"; and "work in groups".

In comparing the perspectives of students and teachers around teaching methods, there are interesting observations and contrasts. Both students and teachers report frequent use of ICT, computers and the internet in teaching. Students perceive a higher use of testing assessment than teachers do, and teachers report a higher use of "work based on an everyday life problem" than students perceive. Teaching methods such as "work[ing] from worksheets", "testing assessment", "checking exercise books or homework" and "written tests" to assess student learning are typically associated with more traditional, teacher-centred approaches to education and are reportedly still frequently used in the classroom. However, it is significant to note that other teaching methods are also employed that con-

tribute to a broader range of learning experiences for students; for example, asking questions, working in groups and retrieving and analyzing information from different sources.

Assessment practices

In line with perceived changes in teaching approaches, teachers, students and families also reported a shift in assessment practices whereby there was more variety in assessment approaches and less reliance on examinations. Students were asked how often their teachers used certain types of assessment practices. Overall, students reported that their teachers most frequently employed the following: "written tests with open-ended questions"; "rubrics for activities"; "doing projects"; and "oral presentations". Teachers were also asked how often they used a range of assessment practices in their classrooms. Generally, teachers similarly reported that they most frequently employed the following: "rubrics for activities"; "doing projects"; "written tests with open-ended questions"; and "oral presentations".

Although there seems to be stronger consistency in perceptions of students and teachers on assessment practices, again students seem to perceive a higher use of written tests than teachers do. Even though the MYP has facilitated the introduction of new assessment practices, written tests possibly remain a frequently used method. This is likely to be due to the balancing of the requirements of the Spanish ESO and the MYP.

Development of key skills

In interviews, heads and coordinators conveyed how the MYP develops skills in students that are less supported in the national curriculum. The skills include autonomy, critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, inquiry skills, research skills, communication skills, ICT skills and learning how to learn. Heads and coordinators also described how the MYP, taking a constructivist approach to learning, positioned the student to take ownership of his or her learning and development process. A particular aspect of the MYP highlighted by many was the MYP year 5 personal project, which was often cited as developing students' ability to manage a research project and produce a creative product or outcome. In two of the three case-study schools, participants underscored how the personal project supported the development of research skills and research capacity in both students and teachers.

Student experience

To explore their experiences in the MYP, students were asked to respond to a number of statements on the student survey. Overall, student responses indicated

that their experience in the MYP was positive and aligned with the aims of the programme. Eighty-five per cent of students in the sample agreed or strongly agreed that the MYP "makes [them] think about how [they] learn" and that the programme "helps [them] connect [their] learning to real life situations". More than 80% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "[the programme] gives [them] broader learning than studying specific topics". Heads and coordinators explained that student cessation of schooling in the middle years is an ongoing challenge in Spain and so the positive student engagement achieved by the MYP was especially valued.

Generally, student families also reported a positive impression of the MYP, with nearly 90% of the respondents indicating that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the programme. Between 85% and 95% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "[the MYP] prepares my child for his/her future career" and "[the MYP] prepares my child for life as an adult".

Identified challenges

The introduction of a diverse range of teaching approaches and assessment practices with the MYP generated some concerns within the teaching community regarding the alignment between the Spanish curriculum and the MYP framework. The main challenges in the implementation of the MYP identified by schools relate to the open content in the MYP curriculum framework, the alignment of two assessment systems and workload concerns.

Open content

The openness and flexibility of the MYP framework can at times also create an implementation challenge. Schools reported that the open-content model and drawing content from a national curriculum provided limited guidance for teachers and schools in how to

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integrate the two curricula. Another reported curricular challenge is covering all of the required Spanish content while implementing the MYP framework, a framework which is underpinned by concept-based learning and competence development. Some participants argue that the MYP framework is better suited to covering fewer topics but in greater depth.

Dual programme requirement

The introduction of new assessment practices poses challenges at various levels. First, there is the challenge that comes with any new assessment system, and feelings of uncertainty and insecurity with change, reported by teachers, students and families. Second, the MYP assessment practices imply a significant shift from traditional assessment strategies (mainly written examinations), which the various groups are accustomed to. As noted previously (in "Curriculum comparison (Part I)"), teachers and students also perceive a lack of clarity in the MYP grade descriptors of levels of attainment and grading equivalences between the MYP and the Spanish grading system. This reflects the challenges in integrating the Spanish ESO and MYP around assessment criteria and grading identified in Part I of the study.

As schools need to comply with the National Ministry of Education's assessment policies, balancing the delivery of both programmes adds another layer of complexity. At the time of the study, the external assessment for the MYP–the eAssessment–was being piloted and was not mandatory for schools to undertake. Heads expressed concern around adding an external MYP assessment, as students already undertake the personal project and the ministry's examination. Students and families also reported a heavy workload for students.

Limitations

While providing valuable insight into the MYP in Spain, the researchers acknowledge a number of limitations of the findings from this study. Currently, only Spanish private institutions offer the MYP. In future, including state-funded schools and other types of schools in Spain in the sample (such as semi-private or foreign schools) would offer a more comprehensive view of the feasibility of the curriculum alignment and the impact of MYP implementation in the Spanish context. The study also calls for future research that does not rely predominantly on self-reporting measures and the perceptions of participants, but includes classroom observations with a focus on teaching in action. Comparing the pedagogical approaches promoted by the MYP and the pedagogical approaches employed by non-IB schools would also be informative.

Summary

In summary, the findings of Part I of this study acknowledge that areas of difference exist between the Spanish ESO and MYP; however, the research team contends that integration of the MYP into the Spanish curriculum provides opportunities that can significantly enhance the Spanish ESO. The identified benefits of integrating the ESO and MYP include introducing concept-based learning, the learner profile and a more holistic assessment system. Some of the challenges in integrating the two programmes and balancing dual programme requirements include assessment criteria, grading and workload.

Based on the findings from Part II of the study, the MYP's implementation in the context of Spanish private schools is perceived to support a range of changes. Implementation of the MYP required significant changes to the school environment, to teaching and learning, as well as to aspects of organizational management, all of which facilitated school transformation. Moreover, due to the implementation changes, specific programme outcomes were reported by participants, including the development of competencies such as research skills and critical thinking. The main challenges related to implementing the MYP include the open content of the MYP curriculum framework, balancing the two programmes, and workload concerns.