

# Research summary

## *Additional language teaching and learning in International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme schools*

**Based on a research report prepared for the IB by:**

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## Introduction

This research is based on the belief that language is the vehicle of instruction, rather than a merely a subject. It focuses on additional language (AL) teaching and learning in a diverse range of Primary Years Programme (PYP) settings and languages. The research explores and documents practices in relation to school language policies, cultural influences, teacher beliefs and practices, teacher training, materials, assessments, and student learning outcomes and their alignment with PYP principles and practices. The research questions are as follows.

1. What are the national or local factors influencing a school's implementation of the PYP in relation to AL teaching and learning?
2. How do AL teachers' perceptions of the PYP bring about changes in their beliefs and paradigm shifts in their daily practice, including knowledge and skills, as a result of teaching within the PYP?
3. As a vehicle for learning in the PYP, how do AL teachers use structured inquiry to help students build meaning and refine understanding?
4. To what extent do changes and paradigm shifts of AL teachers influence the effectiveness of AL learning and the cultivation of international-mindedness as an intended learning outcome for students?
5. How is the PYP language scope and sequence used? To what extent is it helpful to the teaching of the school's AL and in assessing and reporting on student progress? Are there elements that could be developed further and improved?

A qualitative case study approach provided an opportunity to collect rich and meaningful data in six PYP schools in six different countries: two from the IB Americas region; two from the IB Asia Pacific region; and two from the IB Africa, Europe, Middle East region. Three of the schools taught in a dual immersion format, and most schools offered a third language. All six schools offered a "child-centred" approach to language learning. Researchers interviewed school principals, PYP coordinators, additional language teachers (ALT) and parent representatives, transcribed the data and conducted analyses. Considering the low number of schools involved in this study, findings may not be generalizable to other schools in different contexts.

The research findings provide insight into the effectiveness of AL teaching and learning in PYP schools, demonstrate how PYP language policy documents might be used to support planning for the AL curriculum, and inform the development of policy documents and materials to provide support and guidance to IB teachers.

## Overview of findings

The overview of findings from this case study is presented according to the following themes in question.

### 1. Contextual factors

Variables influencing the study included: teacher experience and professional development; local resources and constraints; parental expectations and support; and school environment and leadership across countries. A number of context-specific and IB-related factors were found to be important in shaping approaches to AL teaching in the case study schools:

- The selection of the additional language(s) was influenced by: the academic needs of students; requirements of the local or regional councils; decisions of the school's governance body; a vocal group of parents; and the need to internationalize students with 21st-century languages.
- Support for the mother tongue was influenced by the notion that some languages are seen as more useful than others internationally (Reagan 2005) and the belief that the development of the mother tongue is needed to build capacity in acquiring additional language skills.
- IB-related influences included: the cultivation of bilingual, internationally-minded students; the philosophy of the school board; and the subject matter resources for the additional languages.
- Teacher influences included credentials required, hourly versus full-time employment, language learning training and perspectives of faculty members.
- National and local testing influences included: a reduction in time for subjects and lessons that are not tested, a change in pedagogy from inquiry to memorization of facts, and pressure from parents for student success.

### 2. Integration of AL in programs of inquiry

The study found two major models of AL integration. In the first scenario, the AL is treated as a single subject, connecting the AL with the programme of inquiry when appropriate. In the other model, the AL serves as a medium for instruction that aligns fully with the PYP programme of inquiry.

Strategies for such integration included: taking a selective and flexible approach to integration so as to balance the transdisciplinary and disciplinary considerations; expanding integration beyond the topic level to explore integration at the meta and macro levels; strengthening cross-discipline co-planning at the school level by setting aside time for co-planning between homeroom teachers and single-subject teachers, and by assigning single-subject teachers a leading role in transdisciplinary curriculum development.

Schools encountered a number of challenges in integrating ALs. Some of these challenges included: a lack of opportunities for single-subject teachers to collaborate with homeroom teachers due to scheduling conflicts; an unwillingness on the part of some teachers to collaborate; a lack of support and resources and, in some cases, pushback from teachers and parents regarding AL instruction.

### **3. Perceptions and teaching approaches of ALT**

Most of the language teachers in the case study schools had worked at their school since the inception of the programme and represent a range of birth countries, languages spoken and teaching expertise. All of the teachers had been trained in IB instruction and philosophy through IB workshops and/or other professional development opportunities, such as attending conferences, government-sponsored training and collaboration with other schools that offer the same additional language(s).

The research suggests that teacher perceptions and beliefs have been impacted by participation in the PYP and have influenced their daily practices in relation to:

1. structured collaboration
2. creating new materials
3. alternative assessments and reporting
4. student differentiation
5. use of inquiry and problem based teaching
6. reflecting and revising
7. attending more frequent training and professional development
8. giving students more voice.

However, the findings also revealed the conflicting tensions, connections and disconnections associated with the contested and ambiguous construct of AL learning and teaching as well as the issue of how teachers and schools translate PYP policy into practice. The findings confirmed that although the IB considers all subjects to be equal and promotes all teachers as teachers of language regardless of language type, a sense of difference between languages and other subjects still prevails in both the literature and practice, which has consequences for the IB, schools, teachers, parents and students.

### **4. AL and inquiry-based learning**

The debate between skills-based and inquiry-based instruction impacted some contexts more than others, especially the case study schools in Asian contexts. The challenges ALT encountered included:

- students' limited proficiency in the additional language(s) hindered their ability to research, engage in inquiry, communicate and reflect in additional language(s)
- limited instructional hours and resources impeded the development of language skills through an inquiry approach
- the inquiry approach was not compatible with some teachers' beliefs and prior professional training and experience.

In order to address some of these challenges, teachers adopted a variety of strategies. Teachers used students' prior knowledge and provided various scaffolds (such as offering language support, enhancing inquiry skills, using front-loading experience) to support the inquiry experience under the constraints of limited proficiency.

### **5. Impact on students' learning**

Learning additional language(s) makes a number of contributions to student learning. Many of these factors have a direct correlation to the attitudes and learning approaches advocated by the IB. In particular, AL learning can help to improve students' overall communication skills, encourage an active role in learning and critical reflection, cultivate attitudes of respect and tolerance, and promote different learning strategies. Learning additional languages can also help students to better understand their own local community, to appreciate other cultures, to become more internationally minded and to better reflect attributes of the IB learner profile, such as being communicators, inquirers, risk-takers and open-minded individuals.

## 6. Use of the PYP *Language scope and sequence*

The PYP *Language scope and sequence* (2009) serves as a guide for teaching and assessing the main language of instruction. It is used often as a framework for writing school-based language scope and sequence documents. For example, some teachers have used it for building linkages to the IB Middle Years Programme language B phases' criteria, indicating different milestones for each pathway. The PYP scope and sequence is complemented by other benchmarks from around the world, such as Bavarian Standards, Virginia State Standards, Spanish curriculum, Key Stages from the UK, Victorian Standards from Australia, European Framework of the languages, and First Steps. It is suggested that the PYP *Language scope and sequence* should include more detail for AL, for example:

- the distance between one phase and another is very large and is only accessible for a native speaker
- it doesn't take into account the variation of the language programme and different pathways followed in each school
- the PYP *Language scope and sequence* document is more appropriate for phonetic languages than for logographic languages
- certain aspects of reading and writing are more appropriately learned in their own right
- there are literacy expectations at each grade/year level and benchmarks for each subject area regarding language acquisition.

## Recommendations for practice

Although the schools in this case study all follow the same IB framework for teaching additional language(s), the framework is a general guide that offers flexibility within the local and national context. AL instruction is not the same in any two schools, or even in any two classrooms. There are both similarities and differences in the knowledge and expertise of curricular development and implementation across the schools in the different countries. Therefore, the research findings have generated a range of recommendations that are categorized according to the IB *Programme standards and practices* (2010) used to "ensure quality and fidelity in the implementation of its programmes", as follows.

### Section A: Philosophy

#### *Recommendations*

- Cultivate an understanding of language acquisition skills among all IB teachers, not just ALT.
- Provide an online community of practice for ALT to enhance their understanding and develop skills in structured inquiry in AL teaching.
- Help ALT to explore ways to balance AL teaching and inquiry.
- Develop support services for parents to share and increase understanding of the PYP's philosophy toward additional language.

### Section B: Organization

#### Standard BI. Leadership and structure

#### *Recommendations*

- Design performance management in schools that focuses on the self-efficacy of all teachers, including ALT, in regard to language acquisition skills, knowledge and understanding.

- Provide clear connections between first and second language programs, including planning, teaching and assessment.
- Raise the status of ALT at the school and foster ALT leadership in curriculum development.

## **Standard B2. Resources and support**

### *Recommendations*

- Provide additional time, space and PYP coordinator support to ALT.
- Create workshops specific to ALT/leaders who are designing language programs.
- List the additional language(s) of each school on the IB school locator or in a directory to enable schools to network with alike schools and models more easily.
- Post models on the IB website of adapted language scope and sequence documents from different additional language models and pathways.

## **Section C: Curriculum**

### **Standard C1. Collaborative planning**

#### *Recommendations*

- Incorporate ALT into collaborative planning sessions to develop a balanced contribution to PYP units of inquiry, inquiry, transdisciplinary and concept driven instruction.
- Enhance homeroom teachers' and AL teachers' willingness to collaborate by creating incentives and facilitating conditions for collaboration.

### **Standard C2. Written curriculum**

#### *Recommendation*

- Expand integration of AL in the PYP units of inquiry beyond the central idea level, to explore integration at the meta and macro levels.

### **Standard C3. Teaching and learning**

#### *Recommendations*

- Include language acquisition in all PYP documents so that the philosophy driving language studies is embedded throughout the PYP.
- Support schools in developing teaching and learning policies to document the variety of teaching strategies used in classrooms and support metacognition in PYP students.

### **Standard C4. Assessment**

#### *Recommendations*

- Develop an assessment regime to show growth and depth of language skills and knowledge that are effective, moderated and easy to monitor for individuals, classes and schools.
- Develop tools such as a database of references of oral and written language proficiency tests that could be used to identify student language levels in the AL, for determining student pathways and measuring student progress each year.

## References:

International Baccalaureate. 2009. *Primary Years Programme: Language scope and sequence*.

International Baccalaureate. (2010). *Programme standards and practices*. Cardiff: IBO

Reagan, T. (2005). *Critical questions, critical perspectives: Language and the second language educator*. Greenwich, CT: IAP--Information Age Pub.

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