

THE MOVEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION TOWARDS THE GLOBALISING APPROACH: COMPARING THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE DIPLOMA PROGRAMME AND THE INTERNATIONAL A-LEVELS

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Abstract: *One prominent trend in international education is the growth of commercial, profit-driven international schools all around the world, delivering an international curriculum to local students. The increase in such schools is complemented by the evolution of the “international curriculum” themselves. Two of the most common curricula that are used by international schools are the focus of investigation - the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) and the International Advanced-Levels (IAL). Through an analysis of the curricula history, curricula set-up, and the teaching and learning of the curricula, this paper argues that the IBDP can be seen as moving from an idealist and internationalist curriculum towards a more pragmatic and globalist curriculum, while the IAL has always been a strongly globalist curriculum. Completing the IBDP or IAL is increasingly seen simply as a pathway towards entry into an internationally recognised university.*

Keywords: *International Education; International Curriculum; International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme; International A-Levels; Internationalist; Globalist*

Introduction

In 2004, Cambridge and Thompson dubbed international education as “ambiguous and contradictory”. This fundamental dilemma is then solidified by the growth of international schools at rates never seen before to a clientele that was never the subject of research of international education (Bunnell, 2021). In fact, the main source of growth in international education today is through the increase in the number of commercial, profit-driven schools being set up around the world, delivering an international curriculum but serving local children/parents.

However, the focus of investigation of this paper is different from most literature on this topic as it focuses on the formal international curriculum used at the secondary level, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) and the International A-Levels (IAL). The scarcity of literature on the IAL in the discussion of this topic is even more pronounced than the IBDP and this paper intends to fill this epistemic gap. Even within the discussion of the current wave of neo-liberalisation in education, the analysis of these curricula is absent, in favour of more overt representations of neoliberalism such as the increased privatisation of schools themselves, the caps on national education budgets, and the usage of large-scale assessments results in global competitiveness rankings. From an academic perspective, understanding this will enable more

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clarity in developing an understanding of what an international education means. Understanding the IBDP's and IAL's historical and ideological contexts provides valuable insights into the evolving landscape of international education. This could consequently help with strategic planning, not just by profit-motivated firms and investors, but also by governments, accreditors, regulators, and other stakeholders in international education.

In fact, even within the field of international education itself, the tension of whether the purpose of education is utilitarian or intrinsic underscores the complexities of preparing students for a rapidly changing global society. Within the dichotomy of the “globalist” approach and the “internationalist” approach, it is argued that both these curricula are moving closer towards a “globalist” approach to International Education in the 21st century, despite the IBDP still having some “internationalist” tendencies.

International Schools and International Curriculum

The dilemma appears in trying to group the latest wave of schools which claim to be international but only meet some of the characteristics of an international school. For example, the many international schools springing up in Malaysia, today, totalling up to 160 across the country and the rest of East and Southeast Asia which cater to the local community but offer the IB or the International A-Levels (International Schools Database, 2023). Therefore, Hayden & Thompson (2013) have tried to group international schools into three types – Type A, B, and C, summarised in Figure 1 below.

Type	Clientele	Consumer Objectives	Producer Objectives	Examples
Type A - Traditional	Globally Mobile Expatriate Families	Pragmatic	Not-for-profit	International School of Geneva (Ecolint), International School of Yokohama, Alice Smith School
Type B - Ideological	The “Internationally Minded”	Ideological - Promoting World Peace	Not-for-profit	United World School, London International College (Spring Grove), Green Schools
Type C - Non-Traditional International Schools	Elites and “aspirational middle class” of the host country	To experience a different (higher quality) form of education from the national education systems	Mainly for-profit private businesses	Cognita Schools, Nord Anglia Schools, GEMS, Taaleem, and Bright Scholar.

Figure 1: Different Types of International Schools

Source: Adapted from Hayden & Thompson (2013); Bunnell et al., 2017

Type A schools are the original international schools which were started up to cater to expatriate families but over time has also evolved. In its most traditional form, these schools are simply national schools located outside the country of origin i.e., “national international schools”. While Type A International Schools cater to a clientele that has moved to a different country for other reasons besides education, Type B International Schools brought students from all over the world as their *raison d’être*. The idea behind this is that “if young people are able to live and study together with those from different national and cultural backgrounds with a view to breaking down

the barriers that so often arise through ignorance and prejudice” (Hayden & Thompson 2013, p.6). Type C schools seem to be a hybrid of national and international schools – a school catering to mainly one nationality but using an international curriculum and in some cases offering both the national and international curriculum in parallel (Hayden & Thompson, 2013).

In fact, Hill, back in 1994, was slightly ahead of the times when he cited Cole-Baker who notes that both national and international schools can offer an international education and getting an international education is more of a state of mind, a state of mind of international mindedness (Hill, 1994; Hill, 2012). According to Hill, in an international school, this is developed with the formal curriculum as a contributing factor alongside the more powerful contact with the diverse group of students and staff, but in a national school, due to the absence of this diversity, the formal curriculum becomes paramount (1994, p 8). Therefore, it is likely that Cole-Baker pre-empted the recent growth of the Type C International Schools when thinking about national schools which could promote an international state of mind, in a looser sense. In other words, most Type C international schools may struggle to establish their legitimacy as International Schools bar the usage of a formal international curriculum (Bunnell et al, 2017). It is the formal curriculum which is the main institutional pillar that could legitimise their claim as an international school and therefore the need to look at the formal curriculum is more important than ever now.

Theoretical Framework

As Cambridge and Thompson put it, “international education, as currently practised, is the reconciliation of a dilemma between ideological and pragmatic interests” (2004, p.164). On one side of the spectrum is the pragmatic approach, called the “globalist” approach, and on the other is the ideological approach, called the “internationalist” approach, summarised in Figure 2 below.

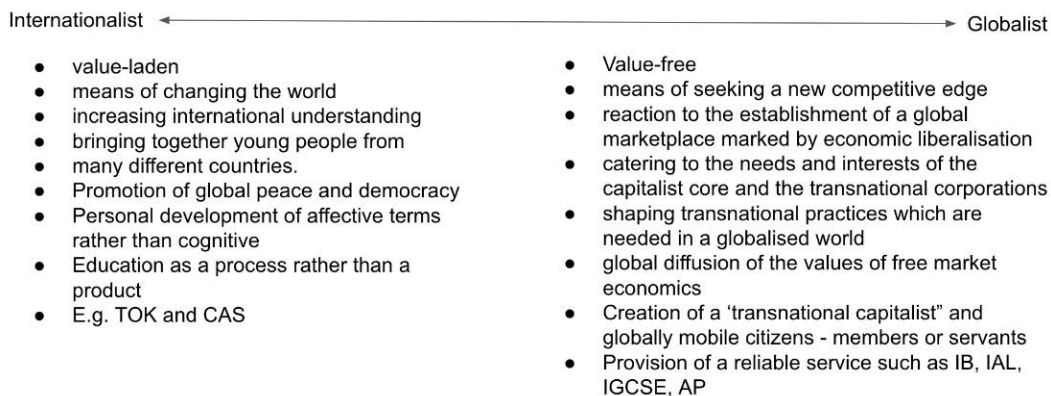


Figure 2: Dichotomy between Internationalism and Globalism in International Education

Source: Adapted from Cambridge & Thompson (2004)

The Globalist Approach

The globalist approach to international education is where international education is seen as a pragmatic response to societal changes brought about by globalisation in general and the spread of the ideology of neo-liberalism around the world (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; Machin, 2017). Globalisation is creating a world in which the social, cultural, and technological, political, and ideological aspects of life become increasingly homogenous and in which economic interdependence and growth are driven by the principles of free market and international education is an outcome of this homogenisation (Foskett & Maringe 2010, p. 24). Life all around the world is mainly based on the neoliberal idea that human value is based on the person’s contribution to the labour force,

i.e., human capital. Education, therefore, serves the purpose of developing the skills and knowledge of each individual who is a factor of production in the economy (Roebyns, 2006; Spring, 2015). Combined with the growth of the international marketplace and the pre-eminence of multinational corporations, education that develops skills and knowledge that is fit for purpose for the international economy becomes even more important.

In fact, the World Economic Forum (WEF) defines human capital as the knowledge and skills people possess that enable them to create value in the global economic system (2017, vii). The WEF, in 2017, also called for greater connection between education and the skills needed for labour markets and asserted that it was not just the cognitive skills which were important but also the behavioural and noncognitive skills, all in preparation for the fourth industrial revolution (Fraumeni & Liu, 2021). This view was also guided by the neo-liberal evangelisation of Bretton Woods institutions which most likely dictated domestic policies, such as the General Agreement of the Trade in Services (GATS) by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which also liberalised domestic markets for education. Machin (2017) pointed to a few watershed movements in Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, and India, that showed the national application of this multilateral agreement to domestic policies which then led to the establishment of more international schools and foreign participation in the education systems in these countries, which is also a result of the Most Favoured Nation clause of WTO membership. These privately funded and sometimes profit-motivated international schools offer governments a pragmatic response to the demands of the growing middle classes for quality educational provision without increasing government expenditure (Machin, 2017). These multinational institutions also promoted a simple new strategy that focuses on learning for a simple reason – to develop knowledge, skills, and competencies for growth, development, and poverty reduction (Spring, 2015; Sidhu, 2007). It is the application of knowledge that increases the level of productivity, not just for the individual, but for the overall economy, measured through Total Factor Productivity (TFP) levels (Spring, 2015).

This pragmatism is also echoed by parents, students, schools, and multinational corporations (MNCs). Originally, the movement of labour across borders has moved families across borders as well which meant that expatriate parents need to think about their children's education – schools which taught a curriculum which was transferable back to the home country were needed. This has led to the aptly termed “market-driven” international schools, by Matthews (1989), who argued that these schools arise from the needs of expatriate communities and upwardly mobile host national families (Hayden & Thompson, 2008). Unsurprisingly, many of these schools had parents heavily influencing the boards of such international schools. One of the oldest international schools in Malaysia, the Alice Smith School is so-named as it was founded by a parent, Alice Fairfield-Smith, who wanted to provide a high-quality British education to her children and the children of other expatriate families in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 1946 (The Alice Smith School, 2022). Therefore, this manifested in the form of schools that were teaching a British curriculum to British students abroad, a French curriculum to French students abroad, and so on and so forth. This evolved into a curriculum that met the demands for educational qualifications that are portable between schools and transferable between education systems (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). Instead of preparing students for different national systems that students may go back to, the alternative is to prepare students for one set of national examinations and then seek equivalency agreements with individual universities of different state systems (Tarc, 2009). With universities becoming more aware of some of the curricula used by international schools, some of these curricula then became the gold standard for entry into universities around the world, on both sides of the transaction, for the students and the universities. A quick survey of the entry requirements of universities around the world (Bocconi, University of Melbourne, London School of Economics, University of St. Gallen, Princeton, and University of Toronto) shows that the IB and A-Levels are usually on top of the list when outlining the “international” entry requirements for an undergraduate programme.

International schools consequently evolved into being the providers of qualifications that enabled graduates to enter universities around the world and get a job in the international labour market. It is the belief of both students and parents, that international schools, due to the quality

assurance through international accreditation and the spread of global quality standards, will enable social and global mobility (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). In economic terms, international schools represent a market correction which offsets the lower utility (often) found in government-provided education (Machin, 2017). The extreme reiteration of this would be the privately funded, profit-motivated, international schools, that sell international education as the best form of education for their consumers. As MacDonald (2022) puts it, the selling point of international schools has changed from “your child will not fall behind academically while overseas and will have an amazing experience in the meantime” to “your child will be attending one of the world’s best schools and will have a world of opportunity available after graduation.” This could translate into higher productivity and consequently higher wages for those who attained this education (Brown et al, 2008; Roebyns, 2006). The aforementioned Alice Smith School, today, is promoted as a school for students aspiring to get into top universities around the world (The Alice Smith School, 2022). This top university qualification would consequently turn into a good job in the international labour market where these workers will enter the transnational capitalist class, progressing their way forward into a “stubbornly neo-liberal” global world order (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; DeLong, 2022).

On one hand, in choosing to enrol their children into such international schools, both parents and students, are searching for symbolic capital that international qualifications can provide in order to further the social and economic advantage of their family by giving them access to a labour market that is becoming increasingly globalised, distinguishing them from their peers in national systems (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; Lowe, 2000). Ramirez (2003) went further and commented that this “embodied the triumph of a schooled world ‘credential society’, one in which an educational credential is necessary for acquired employment (Springs, 2015). However, on the other hand, if analysed from the human capital theory, parents and students could be seen as aiming to not just get the credentials but also the skills that are required for the international labour market, which the national curriculum cannot provide. It is not just in developing countries that this is happening but also in the UK and Germany where rising dissatisfaction with local curriculum has pushed parents to send their children to international schools (Schwindt, 2003; Hayden & Thompson, 2008, p.46).

The final stakeholders in this narrative of international education are the MNCs, the lynchpin in this neoliberal world order. Back in 2005, the United Nations estimated that there were around 64,000 transnational companies, a rise from 37,000 in the early 1990s and generated around 53 million jobs around the world (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2005). In addition to multinational or regional organisations, these MNCs were the ones who were moving families around, creating demand for international education for their children abroad. However, as the presence of MNCs increased around the world, more and more people aspired to join these corporations that are “the dominant agents within in the world economy” and enter the transnational capitalist class (Giddens, 1990, p. 71; Sklair, 2001; Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). It is therefore unsurprising that MNCs are influencing global school policies and pressuring national school systems to educate and shape human behaviours for the corporate workplace (Spring, 2014, p. xiii). These MNCs at the turn of the century have already complained that “the educational systems of their home country could not be relied upon to supply all the technical personnel needed to keep ahead in industries where constant innovation was matter not simply of success, but of survival” (Sklair, 2001, p. 161). For example, though China produces the largest group of engineers each year, not many of them are suitable to work in multinational companies (Wang, 2008, p. 150). In the eyes of an MNC, in a world of open and available knowledge, a school must work to inculcate rational, intelligent, efficient, and legal habits of consumption and use (Brown et al, 2008).

The Internationalist Approach

While the globalist approach to international education can be seen as serving the needs of the global free market, the internationalist approach to education has a very specific agenda of changing the world. Looking back at the three goals of education outlined by Labaree (1997), namely democratic

equality, social efficiency, and social mobility, we can conclude that while the latter two could be seen as the goal of those taking the internationalist approach, the former could sit within this internationalist approach, as long the concept of global citizenship is used instead of a citizen of a single nation-state. From this perspective, international schools should promote effective and responsible global citizenship – putting a strong emphasis on the creation of an individual who cares about solving global issues such as international conflicts, poverty, and environmental crises.

Even back in Victorian England, it was already noted that “while free trade has done much and will do more, towards breaking down the barriers between nation and nation, a barrier stronger to divide peoples than prohibitory tariffs is mutual ignorance” (Bibby, 1956, p.25). It was in this belief that the International Education Society was founded, which led to the creation of the London International College at Spring Grove, London and two other International Colleges in Chatou, France and Godesburg, Germany, all fully functioning by 1867. The school was created not just for students to go through a formal curriculum of natural sciences, social sciences, and languages, but also for the informal curriculum in a space where boys from all over the world can come together and learn from one another (Bibby, 1956). While the schools in France and Germany lasted only until the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the London school lasted about 20 years. The next reiteration of this approach to education came with Kurt Hahn, the founder of Schule Schloss Salem, Germany, and Gordonstoun School, Scotland (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004, p. 167).

While the globalist approach is based on self-interest, the internationalist approach is laden with value and embraces the moral development of the individual which would promote world peace (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004, p. 173). Schools that stick to this approach are few and significantly overshadowed by the faster growth in the other types of international schools. However, it is said that the two major networks of schools who are within this internationalist category, the International School Association (ISA) and United World Colleges (UWC) were instrumental in establishing the IBDP in the 1960s (Savvides & Bunnell, 2022, p. 3). Both, on their websites, focus on education as a force or instrument to unite people, promote peace, and build a better world. In fact, Cambridge and Thompson (2004) posited that the UWC was truly representative of an ‘internationalist’ approach to international education, right at the other side of the spectrum from the ‘globalist’ approach. The individual schools that are within this category are sometimes regarded as the first international schools in the world such as Ecolint and the International School of Yokohama. Ecolint today still boldly claims to be “educating for a better world”, with a mission “to educate for peace”, underpinned by their “humanitarian values” (Ecolint, 2016).

To achieve the goal of “changing the world”, these schools not only try to bring young people from many different countries together to foster understanding and promote the development of solutions to the problems the world is facing but also emphasise a lot on service to the community and the wider society (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). This is just as Hahn himself emphasised when he envisioned an educational system that would strongly commit to service, experiential learning, and character building (Price, 1970 as cited in Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). Education is therefore seen as a “process rather than a product”, which could be seen as the opposite of the globalist view where the final qualification after leaving high school is what is the most vital (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004, p. 167). It is therefore not uncommon to see lots of community service programmes in internationalist-leaning schools.

In addition, while the original idea of education as a force for peace came in the aftermath of World War I, the world today is also faced with another pressing international issue, environmental unsustainability, and this has led to another education movement that could be categorised within this internationalist approach, which is the Green Schools movement, the first which opened in Bali in 2008 and the fourth opening soon in Tulum, Mexico. There is a 20% local student quota in such schools, but the overall student and teaching body are very diverse (Hardy, 2010). It will not be unexpected to see more of such schools with the main goal of promoting sustainability in the next few years as the threat of an unsustainable environment becomes more real day to day. It is also unsurprising to see that ISA schools are also part of the Eco-Schools Programme, organised by the

Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), one of the world’s largest environmental education organisations.

The Formal Curriculum: IBDP vs IAL IBDP

The International Baccalaureate, originally only a 16-19 curriculum, is an example of a programme that was created from the first principles to become an international curriculum (Thompson, 1998). “With the establishment of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) in the 1960s, international schools gained autonomy from nation-states and national education systems and ‘International Education’ became defined in contrast to national forms of pedagogic authority” (Dugonjic-Rodwin, 2021, pp.332-333). The lack of national constraints allowed the founders to come up with something more progressive than what a national curriculum prescribes, and this included a strong humanistic attitude to education, to make a difference for the world, not just to prepare someone to be a responsible citizen of a nation. As of October 2023, the IB is present in 5700 schools in 159 countries (IBO, 2023). The most established IB schools were among the pioneers during the years 1954–1971 when the IB began and today views themselves as the guardians of a highly internationalised ethos - in the words of one of its founders, as an ‘experiment in international understanding’ (Peterson, 2003; Dugonjic-Rodwin, 2021, p.340). The mission statement of the IBO states that “the International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect” (IBO, 2023). IB’s global dreams of promoting “international understanding” come with a diffuse set of liberal-humanist, cosmopolitan visions and desires that emerge from longings for educational and social change (Tarc, 2009, p. 23). According to the IBO (2023), “an IB education aims to develop the awareness, perspectives and commitments necessary for global engagement”.

The IBDP, the original programme by the IBO, is a programme taken by students in their final two years of high school. To gain the final IB Diploma, students will need to study 6 subjects, from 6 different subject groups - 3 or 4 subjects at Higher Level (HL) and the rest at Standard Level (SL). Taking a subject at HL technically involves a student going into further depth of each subject which in practice takes the form of the difference in the number of teaching hours, number of content/topics covered, and/or the rigour of assessments. The subject groups and subjects within each group are outlined in Figure 3 below.

Subject Group	Subjects
Studies in Language and Literature (Studies in a language which the student is already competent in)	<p>Language A: Literature - available in 55 languages and, by special request, for any other that has sufficient written literature.</p> <p>Language A: Language and Literature, available in 17 languages.</p> <p>Literature and Performance - available in English, and by special request in Spanish and French.</p>
Language Acquisition (Studies in a new language or a language which student has experience in but not their main language)	<p>Modern Languages (nearly 80 different languages available)</p> <p>Language ab initio courses – for pure beginners</p> <p>Language B courses – for students who have some experience in the language studied.</p> <p>Classical languages</p> <p>Latin or Classical Greek</p>

Subject Group	Subjects
Individuals and Societies	Business Management Economics Geography Global Politics History Information Technology in a Global Society Philosophy Psychology Social and Cultural Anthropology World Religions
Sciences	Biology Computer Science Chemistry Design Technology Physics Sports, Exercise and Health Science Environmental Systems and Societies (ESS)
Mathematics	Mathematics: analysis and approaches Mathematics: applications and interpretation
The Arts	Dance Music Film Theatre Visual arts

Figure 3: Subject Groups and Subjects in IBDP

Source: Adapted from IBO (2023)

In addition, students will also need to complete the Diploma Programme (DP) Core, which is made up of an Extended Essay (EE) on a subject of their choice, a course in Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and a project relating to Community, Activity, and Service (CAS). TOK is intended to enable students to “reflect on the nature of knowledge, and on how we know what we claim to know” and CAS to “enhance their personal and interpersonal development by learning through experience” (IBO, 2023). Many schools use CAS as an opportunity to get the students closer to the local community or even work on global issues such as poverty, developmental issues, and environmental issues. The EE has a more value-free intention, as a “pragmatic preparation for undergraduate research” where students write a “mini-thesis” of 4000 words related to an IBDP subject of choice; however, one can also undertake an EE in World Studies where students are encouraged to “reflect on the world today in relation to issues such as the global food crisis, climate change, terrorism, energy security, migration, global health, technology and cultural exchange” (IBO, 2023). In terms of subjects that students must take, there is the requirement that students must not only study a language that they are competent in but also at least one other language in an attempt to promote “an understanding of another culture through the study of its language” (IBO, 2023). In addition, the Environmental Systems and Societies (ESS) subject intends to enable students “to adopt an informed personal response to the wide range of pressing environmental issues that they will inevitably come to face” (IBO, 2023).

The IB also promotes a progressive mode of education where education is seen as both a means and an end, often referred to as the “IB Way”. The IB Learner Profile is at the core of IB Education and teachers teaching any IB subjects are supposed to be linking back their entire teaching and learning process to the Learner Profile (Lominé, 2020). The 10 attributes that IB learners should strive to be are inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-

takers, balanced, and reflective. In a typical IB school, this list together with an explanation of each of the attributes is present in every classroom. This is then supported with the in-class activities as well, whatever the subject or content covered is. Various research has shown that awareness of the IB Learner Profile is high among IBDP students (Lineham, 2013; Wells, 2016; Rizvi et al, 2014). In a training session for new teachers in IB Business Management, for example, it was emphasised that whatever the topic being covered in class is, teachers should always ask “What am I doing, today, in this specific class, regarding the attributes of the learner profile?” (Lominé, 2020). This, according to the trainer, is what differentiates an IB Education from any other programme of study. The ultimate responsibility of an IB Educator is not just to prepare good mathematicians, good biologists, or good historians, but to prepare young people – the decision makers of tomorrow – to live in a complex multicultural society undergoing a rapid process of change and opening up a new world order (Renaud, 1991, taken from IBO, 2008).

Nevertheless, Hill, contended that in international education, the IBDP included, “very little is really new. It is repackaged, rethought, re-engineered” (2012, p. 256). The story of the creation of the IBDP, therefore, is not complete if the precedence to it is ignored. As noted in the previous section, international schools such as Ecolint started preparing all their students for one pre-university qualification to reconcile the different needs of universities around the world. Families that were enrolled in Ecolint simply wanted an international passport to higher education, which they saw the IB could provide (Hill, 2002). The massification of the IBO in the 1990s and the recent growth of Type-C international schools which has adopted the IBDP also prove that this is still the case (Rizvi, 2009, p. viii). This programme can be seen as providing students with the necessary skills and qualifications to enter a range of higher education institutions around the world, more than the other goal of increasing the student’s awareness and understanding of the connections between the academic disciplines they are engaged in every day and the real world. IBDP is sometimes promoted as a stronger passport to universities internationally, not limited to a specific country, unlike the IAL which is still perceived as a more relevant path for those who want to go to the UK specifically. In addition, instead of the IB Diploma, an IB Certificate can be awarded on a course-by-course basis to students who choose not to do the full IBDP and students who satisfactorily complete a course may be eligible for university credit (IBO, 2015).

Therefore, today, the IBDP is caught between two goals – recognition by universities around the world and fostering international understanding. If the IBO wishes to meet the former goal, the latter must be compromised (van Oord, 2007, p.216). With the IBDP, the IBO has given in to “the pressures of it being a means to an end, which is to enable access to the next level of education” (Tarc, 2009, p.24). On one hand, neoliberal reforms around the world have led to a rapid increase in the adoption of IBDP but it has also marginalised the humanist and progressive visions of the entire organisation (Rizvi, 2009, p.viii). This is supported by other allegations that the IB is good for business and the elite but not for the state and societal equity (Resnik, 2009). Students doing the IBDP do not even know the mission statement of the IB, but it is the rigour of the assessment and worldwide mobility that helps create the market currency of the IBDP (Lineham, 2013, p.273).

IAL

While the IBDP can be seen as being created specifically for international education, the origins of the International A-Levels are more nuanced. As Machin (2017, p.133) put it, “in a curious oxymoron, nearly 40% of the world’s (so-called) ‘international’ schools offer variants of the National Curriculum for England”. The origins of the International A-Levels were simply a case of ‘exportation’ to begin with when it was just the English curriculum being extended to students in schools outside the UK because of British colonisation, in their attempt to provide a British education to future colonial administrators, but then slowly ‘adapted’ to evolving global needs (Thompson, 1998). At the time of Thompson’s categorisation, there was only one examination board offering the International A-Levels but today four different boards are offering this qualification internationally. In addition to

Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) which was the first to offer the IAL back in the 1950s, Pearson Edexcel, Oxford AQA, and the Learning Resource Network (LRN) have also started offering this qualification. The latter is the most recent player in the game, as recent as 2021 when LRN's first IAL cohort started (LRN, 2022).

In a clear case of "Adaptation", Oxford AQA promotes its International A-Levels as "benchmarked to UK standards" and Pearson Edexcel promotes its qualification as "built on the UK Educational System" (Oxford AQA, 2023; Pearson Edexcel, 2022). In addition, Oxford AQA, Pearson Edexcel, and LRN's International A-Level modular system was adapted from the UK A-Levels modular system that was sat by candidates in the UK between the years of 2000 and 2016; while the CAIE International A-Levels is more aligned with the current UK A-Levels with its linear assessments and synoptic elements. UK ENIC (previously UK NARIC) which is the UK National Information Centre for the Recognition and Evaluation of International Qualifications and Skills, in three separate reports have confirmed the comparability of the International A-Levels offered by all three exam boards to the UK A-Levels (UK NARIC, March 2016; UK NARIC, June 2017; UK NARIC, November 2017). In addition, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the UK's shared admissions service for higher education, dubs the International A-Levels an example of "UK-generated qualifications designed for the global market" (UCAS, 2023).

In terms of the overall structure, the IAL also replicates the UK A-Levels. The typical student takes three different A-Level subjects in two years and the grades from these three will be their main passport to get into university. Some students do attempt to take more than three full A-Levels and in addition to taking more A-Level subjects, students sometimes complete an Advanced Subsidiary (AS) Level in a subject of choice (which is half of the A-Levels). The number of subjects offered varies between the different exam boards, but CAIE offers the most extensive selection with 55 different subjects (CAIE, 2023). One of the more unique subjects offered by CAIE at this level (and also at IGCSE) is a subject called Global Perspective and Research (GPR) which aims to develop learners' thinking skills of analysis, evaluation, and synthesis through the study of a range of global topics selected by the schools themselves, similar to IBDP's TOK (CAIE, 2020). In addition, Pearson Edexcel offers an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) which requires a student to complete a dissertation, an investigation/field study, a performance, or an artefact, not dissimilar to the EE in IBDP (Pearson Edexcel, 2019). Nevertheless, none of these are mandatory requirements, not even the three full A-Levels that students typically take, and students can get standalone certificates for each A-Level that they take which is sufficient for proof of successful completion of an A-Level subject. From an administrative point of view, the flexibility of the International A-Levels even allows schools to choose different exam boards for different subjects. Some schools also combine International A-Level subjects with UK A-Level subjects. For example, students may have two subjects which are International A-Levels and one which is a UK A-Level. There are also no specifically prescribed subject groups or subjects that students have to take which provides schools the flexibility to offer only subjects that they see fit and for students to only take subjects that they are interested in. Subject combinations therefore could be as narrow as Economics, Business, and Accounting or as diverse as Economics, Biology, and Art & Design. As CAIE (2023) puts it, the subjects can be offered in almost any combination and learners can specialise or study a broad range of subjects.

The IAL is a more result-oriented programme of study, focusing on the value of the qualification as a university entry requirement that it offers the students. Comparing the teacher training offered by Pearson Edexcel and IBDP, the one by Pearson Edexcel was focused on how the exams are assessed and what is covered in the specification. Even the introductory slide was focused on Pearson Edexcel being "the UK's largest awarding body" which "sets the standard for worldwide recognised qualifications" (Pearson Edexcel, 2022). In other words, Pearson Edexcel is unashamedly simple with regard to what it means to be a provider of international education - it sells itself simply as a qualification provider that is recognised internationally. CAIE did attempt to create a comprehensive curriculum to rival the IB with the Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE), but it failed to achieve the mass-market popularity of the IAL or IGCSE (Lacey, 2008). In the

official documentation, CAIE still tries to promote the Cambridge Learner profile with 5 attributes: engaged, confident, responsible, reflective, and innovative, but it still links these attributes to what universities value highly (CAIE, 2020).

The focus of the IAL in terms of giving students qualifications to enter university comes to no surprise as even from the origins of the A-Levels, this programme of study was created by universities to provide students with a more standardised passport to enter a British university. The humble beginning of CAIE was just the University of Cambridge's attempt to increase the standards of teaching in schools to consequently attract its share of the cream of the school leavers to the University of Cambridge and provide students with a "local" alternative to sit for the exams instead of going all the way to Cambridge (Leedham-Green, 2008; Watts, 2008). The history of the other exam boards that provide the International A-Levels, apart from LRN, also have very similar UK universities origins – Pearson Edexcel with its origins at the University of London and Oxford AQA with its origins in the universities in Manchester, Leeds, and Liverpool (Pearson Education Ltd, 2023; AQA, 2023).

Discussion

In examining the educational frameworks and characteristics of the IBDP and IAL, several fundamental distinctions come to light. The IBDP may seem like it embodies the internationalist approach to international education with its holistic, progressive approach to education free from national constraints as the curriculum focuses on fostering global engagement, critical thinking, and personal development through its core components, such as the EE, TOK, and CAS. The IB Learner Profile emphasizes attributes like inquisitiveness, open-mindedness, and caring, underpinning an ethos that transcends traditional subject-focused education, promoting the idealism of global citizenship and world peace. Together with the encouragement of multiple languages and engagement with various cultures, all these clearly represent the internationalist tendencies of the IBDP.

However, the same people who promote the internationalist virtues of the IB also contend that the IBDP can sometimes be prioritized as being a means to access higher education over fostering broader understanding and intercultural awareness (Hill, 2012; Tarc, 2009). A fundamental dilemma, therefore, arises for the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) in reconciling globalism with internationalism. As the IBDP gained popularity around the world, the desires of those who would be undergoing the IBDP also changed towards a more practical reason – the acquisition of intellectual and professional skills – seen not as the means and an end, but simply as a means. Instead of seeing education as a process, even the IBDP is succumbing to the "diploma disease of international education", as it is the product, the IB Diploma, that is emphasised when motivating students to do the IBDP (Dore, 1997). In practice, the internationalism of the curriculum gets further diluted. The TOK and EE offerings only take up less than 10% of a candidate's final IBDP score (3 out of 45) and these are sometimes seen as a chore by students. In addition, although passing CAS (which is graded on a Pass/Fail basis) is a requirement for gaining the IB Diploma, one very rarely fails this component - this is supported by messages posted on various online boards and the only instance of someone claiming to fail the CAS is due to the lack of a competent CAS supervisor in their school (Farbar, 2019). Underlying all of these is the IB Learner Profile, which although recognised by IBDP students, there is no clear evidence that students understand, appreciate, and embrace the values of the IB Learner Profile (Wells, 2011). The pressure to maintain the IBDP's status as a premier university entry passport sometimes compromises its core values, which also prompts criticisms of it catering to the global elite and reinforcing educational inequalities. Although less promoted, the IB can also be seen as giving in to internationalism by allowing students to take just a few standalone IBDP subjects in areas where they have a particular interest or strength, similar to the IAL subjects, to gain university credits.

On the other hand, the IAL, rooted in the British curriculum, is clearly globalist and retains a more straightforward mission and assessment structure, emphasizing subject-based achievement as the main criterion for university entry. This approach aligns with the historical origins of the A-Levels,

initially conceived by universities to standardize the university entry process. Unlike the IBDP, the IAL lacks a comprehensive superstructure and is more result-oriented, primarily serving as a qualification for university admission. The globalism demonstrated by the philosophy and implementation of the IAL is undeniable, despite having some token gestures towards internationalism such as CAIE's GPR. However, there is a risk that the IAL may be going too far to the globalist side of the spectrum and lose the balance between global market demands and maintaining educational standards, especially with the further growth in the number of IAL providers. It is possible that market competition amongst these providers will lead to grade inflation and a reduction in the vigour of assessments to ensure that schools, which are increasingly judged by the results of their students, continue to use a specific provider.

Nevertheless, not all is lost in the internationalist cause of international education, especially the IB. Although the fast growth of Type C schools may be due to the emerging global middle class and their desire to enter the global war for talent, most of these schools are also relatively homogenous, and therefore there should be a bigger role for the formal curriculum to play in inculcating the "international attitude" required. Hayden & Thompsons' 1995 study concluded that the formal curriculum and organisational features of international education are less important in the formation of an international attitude, but this is due to the exposure of students to different cultures within the school being the most important contributor. However, in the absence of students of different cultures in Type C schools, an international curriculum could be a bigger promoter of an international attitude.

Both the IBDP and IAL reflect broader shifts in the landscape of education, navigating the balance between being a means to an end and being an end in itself. Although the IBDP and IAL represent distinct approaches to international education, shaped by their origins, objectives, and historical contexts, the current wave of neoliberalism in the international economy has brought both the IBDP and IAL closer to one another on the globalist side of the spectrum (see Figure 4 below). These two internationally recognised qualifications are increasingly seen as the provider of symbolic capital needed to further the social and economic advantage of its holders to gain a place in an internationally recognised university, which would consequently give them access to an increasingly more lucrative globalised labour market, distinguishing them from their peers in national systems. The newer IAL boards are on the more extreme side of the spectrum, with one simple pragmatic purpose, to give students the qualification needed to get into internationally known universities.

The neoliberal tendencies of the entire field of international education are also supported by the increasing number of profit-making players in the IAL offerings around the world, who still see a gap in this market, challenging the hegemony of long-standing providers of international curricula such as CAIE and IBO. In fact, the field of international curricula today can be analysed as a market, which is increasingly taking an oligopolistic structure, where multiple suppliers of international curricula are vying for market power. In addition, it is also worth pointing out that even international education cannot escape from the neoliberal plague of inequality as access to these curricula remains in the domain of the more well-off in society. The only saving grace in this regard is the idealistic visions of Type B international schools and the potential that Type C international schools can grow their coverage far enough to be able to provide enough access for everyone in the host country to aspire towards joining the international labour market, not just for the upper middle class in each country, who are currently still the main consumers of these schools.

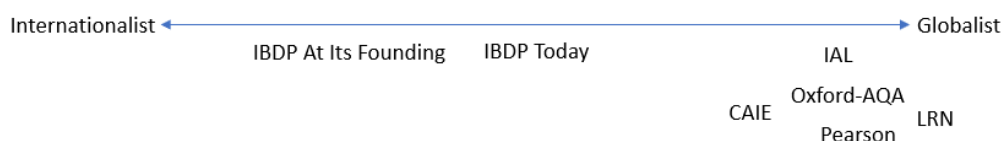


Figure 4: The Location of Different Exam Boards on the Scale between Internationalism and Globalism
Source: Figure created by the author

Limitations

It must be reiterated that this paper focused on the IBDP and IAL, two pre-university programmes of studies. Therefore, there may be a bias towards using such programmes solely as a passport to university. An in-depth study into the implementation of international curriculum for younger students such as CAIE's International General Certificate of Secondary Education, IB's Middle Years Programme or Primary Years Programme, Pearson's iPrimary, or the International Curriculum Association's Middle Years Curriculum or Primary Years Curriculum, for example, may render different conclusions. Research on most of these programmes of study is even more scarce and neglected by academic discussions, which on the other hand opens room for much more research.

In addition, the ever-evolving scene of international education, especially in terms of government regulation may render some of the arguments in this paper slightly outdated. For example, the fast growth of Type-C international schools is already causing some societal discontent, especially with regard to the perpetuation of increased inequality. The latest Chinese government crackdown on for-profit educational institutions is proof of a reaction to this and this has slowed down the growth of international schools in China whether or not this will reverse the trajectory of international education on a more global level is yet to be seen (McMorrow et al, 2021). In addition, at the time of writing, the conservative British government has just announced an overhaul of the British A-Levels system and the implications of how the IAL will be perceived is still unknown.

Conclusion and Implications of Study

It is clear that the IBDP was built upon an internationalist approach towards international education. On the other hand, the IAL is firmly on the globalist side of the spectrum. Unlike the IB, the IAL is not homogeneous and is currently being offered by more than one organisation. However, neoliberal forces have pulled even the IBDP closer towards the globalist side where the IAL is. The intended idealistic global peace and sustainability role of international education, although still somewhat evident in the IBDP, is now simply used as a shield to the changing scene in international education, while, in practice, the increasing attractiveness of international schools and curricula is a reaction to the growing competitive pressure of the global economy (Bunnell, 2022). This study of the IAL and IBDP confirms this, and it is, therefore, no surprise that the fast-growing non-traditional Type C international schools have mainly adopted the IAL and IBDP as their formal curricula.

This also shows that there are no signs that the global laissez-faire and neo-liberal regime is breaking down. In fact, it is the view of the author that one of the manifestations of neoliberalism in education is the expansion of international curriculum such as the IAL and IBDP which is governed not by a national entity, but an international one, such as the IBO, CAIE, or Pearson. More students are using the IBDP and the IAL as the first few steps towards getting a good enough qualification to enter the global labour force, by first getting into an internationally recognised university.

It is, therefore, time, if this has not already been done, for national education policymakers to pay more attention to the developments in such international qualifications as this may be one of the more efficient ways to achieve national development goals in this current neo-liberal era, where nations are competing amongst each other in the ever-expanding global economy. International schools offering an international qualification should be included in the national education and national development policy narrative, or at the very least, taking best practices from international qualifications to be implemented in the national curriculum, as this is where the demand lies. On a school policy level, schools should critically investigate the practicality of implementing the different programmes to ensure that it suits not only their mission but also the logistical and administrative constraints.

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