

Enabling holistic learning, the 'IB' way

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I was teaching undergraduate students of an American university in their India centre and also postgraduate students in an Indian institute. The experience of teaching Indian and American students, often on the same day, was a study in contrast. American students were keen and active listeners, with a knack of asking the right, insightful questions. You teach them a concept or illustrate an idea and before you proceed, there are hands raised and questions asked. Then a series of interconnected questions arrive one after another, until their final question is answered. The experience of teaching to Indian students, was quite disappointing due to a low classroom interaction. I was pleased to know then, that the American students had done their secondary schooling with IB syllabus. Thinking and learning methods are indeed different across societies but their education contributes to this more than anything else.

Over the last decade or so, several international schools have come up in every major city, teaching internationally acclaimed curriculums. These schools are established with principles that are different and follow a curriculum that's quite different from other curriculums, set up by our state / CBSE/ICSE boards.

What's in IB curriculum?

International Baccalaureate (IB) organization is a global entity with over 5000 schools worldwide, teaching what's popularly known as IB curriculum for students of entry level or Primary Years (children of KG-5th grade) Programme, Middle Years (children of 6th-10th grade) Programme to Diploma (children of 11th and 12th grades) Programme and also a Career related Programme (CP).

IB syllabus is designed with a unique, challenging and diverse education, enabling critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

What's noteworthy in the PYP is that's it's organized and framed by six transdisciplinary themes:

- Who we are?
- Where we are in place and time?
- How we express ourselves?
- How the world works?
- How we organize ourselves?
- Sharing the planet.

These transdisciplinary themes together provide children with authentic learning experiences that are not confined to the boundaries of traditional subjects in other curriculums.

The MYP programme builds further and empowers students to inquire into a wide range of issues and ideas of significance locally, nationally and globally. The result is young people who are creative, critical and reflective thinkers.

The design of the DP is innovative and consists of six diverse subject groups:

- Studies in language and literature.
- Language acquisition (French, Sanskrit, Hindi etc.).
- Individuals and societies (Economics, History, Civics etc.).
- Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology etc.).
- Mathematics (Algebra, Trigonometry, Statistics, Arithmetic etc.).
- The arts (Visual arts etc.).

In addition, students must complete three elements of the DP core: theory of knowledge; extended essay; and creativity, activity, service (CAS).

As a result of their engagement with diverse subjects, critical thinking and unique learning systems, IB students develop:

1. Time management skills and a strong sense of self-motivation.
2. A keen interest in civic engagement.

3. Notable academic ability.
4. Strong research and writing skills.
5. Critical thinking and questioning abilities.
6. An international outlook.

From my own experience of teaching students with IB background, I concur. Further, teaching a group of active and interested students is a rewarding learning process that reinforces the belief that, “To teach is to learn”. Therefore, it’s no wonder, that in view of holistic development of personality, universities worldwide, prefer IB students for undergraduate and higher studies.

Why IB is expensive?

Despite all the merits of IB, the costs are prohibitively expensive for middle-class families. Cost of qualified faculty, high faculty-student ratio, superior infrastructure and royalty fees etc., add up to make the expenses on a higher side, as compared to other curriculums. However, the costs are similar as compared to IGCSE syllabus, another popular variant of international curriculum offered by Cambridge International Examinations (CIE). Both IB and IGCSE are broad-based, holistic and tougher as compared to CBSE/ICSE. However, IB and IGCSE, makes sense for students with a plan to study overseas for an undergraduate degree.

Overall, students mustn’t look at the costs of international curriculum in isolation, but consider it as an investment in the process of building a passionate career.

Career perspective

Consider this: most of the jobs in demand today didn’t exist a few years back, and some jobs of today will not exist tomorrow. Career experts opine that, while each profession requires a dominant knowledge and skills to perform, one can perform better only with related skills and knowledge. Further, future jobs will need radically changed skill sets. Therefore, universities have been combining two or more disciplines, like for example, technology and liberal arts, to offer new programmes. In fact, this is the spirit of the New Educational Policy (NEP), under which university students can now select subjects of their interest from different disciplines.

The IB curriculum provides such an opportunity to students to study diverse subjects while in school itself, thus enabling them to identify and pursue their passion in the universities.

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