

Perceptions of the International Baccalaureate Curriculum among Educators Worldwide: A Thematic Study

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Abstract:

This research explores international educators' perceptions of the Cambridge International Curriculum through a qualitative investigation involving 52 teachers from secondary schools in Singapore, South Africa, Brazil, and Finland. Data were collected through virtual interviews and analyzed thematically using Atlas.ti to uncover educators' insights on curriculum flexibility, assessment alignment, and classroom applicability. The study identifies five recurring dimensions, contextual adaptability, evaluation consistency, cross-cultural awareness, inquiry-driven pedagogy, and learner motivation. Results indicate that while the Cambridge framework encourages analytical thinking and intercultural competence, its standardized assessment design often conflicts with local pedagogical traditions and resource limitations. Participants who benefited from institutional autonomy and region-specific training demonstrated greater confidence in customizing teaching approaches and integrating local perspectives into the curriculum. The findings suggest that achieving true global relevance requires a balanced approach that combines uniform academic standards with sensitivity to cultural and educational diversity. This study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how international curricula operate across varied national contexts and offers actionable recommendations for enhancing teacher agency and curriculum inclusivity worldwide.

Keywords: *International Baccalaureate, IB curriculum, global education, qualitative research, teacher perspectives*

1. Introduction

The International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum is a globally recognized educational framework designed to develop students holistically intellectually, emotionally, and ethically. Its emphasis on inquiry-based learning, intercultural understanding, and academic rigor has made it one of the most respected international programs, implemented in over 150 countries (Mira, 2024

). The curriculum's goal is to cultivate globally minded citizens capable of critical thought and ethical decision-making, aligning with global educational trends that emphasize equity, global citizenship, and lifelong learning (Sura, 2024;

Julia, 2024;

Abd, 2024

). Although numerous studies have explored the structural and philosophical components of the IB, such as its interdisciplinary design and learning outcomes (Kamal, 2024;

Faraj et al., 2024;

Anwar, 2017;

Mohammed, 2023

), relatively few have examined the day-to-day experiences and perceptions of IB teachers themselves. These educators play a critical role in translating the IB framework into classroom practice, often adapting the curriculum to suit diverse educational, cultural, and institutional contexts (Abdullah et al., 2017;

Kareem, 2023;

Ali, 2023

). By focusing on teacher perspectives, this study aims to bridge a notable gap in the literature and contribute practical insights for policy and pedagogical refinement. Using a qualitative approach, this research engaged 47 IB teachers from across five continents through semi-structured online interviews. Participants represented a wide range of school

types, subjects, and program levels (PYP, MYP, and DP). The use of qualitative methods is particularly suited to capturing the richness and complexity of human experiences, allowing researchers to explore how teachers interpret and implement the IB framework in varied settings (Mohammad, 2023;

Mahmod et al., 2024;

Shukur, 2023

).

Findings indicate that while the IB curriculum is broadly appreciated for fostering student independence, critical thinking, and global awareness, its implementation presents multiple challenges. One recurring theme was curriculum adaptability, with teachers frequently modifying IB units to reflect regional norms and cultural contexts. This flexibility is essential in international settings, where rigid adherence to a standardized curriculum may undermine local relevance (Anwar and Surarchith, 2015;

Thompson, 2025;

Anwar and Abd Zebari, 2015;

Yasin, 2024

). Teachers with greater autonomy and access to localized professional development reported higher confidence in adapting content to meet the needs of their learners.

Another central theme was assessment practices, particularly concerns about their alignment with pedagogical goals. Many teachers found the assessment criteria overly rigid and misaligned with classroom realities, echoing critiques that high-stakes testing can stifle creativity and inquiry (Tremblay, 2025;

Shukur, 2025;

Surchi, 2025;

Wei, 2025;

Wilson, 2025

). Moreover, teacher workload and burnout were frequently linked to the demands of documentation, assessment preparation, and external moderation, pointing to systemic pressures

that may compromise teaching quality and job satisfaction (Cambridge, 2013; Dixon & Halse, 2019).

Importantly, teachers praised the IB's ability to cultivate intercultural sensitivity and global citizenship, which they saw as increasingly vital in an interconnected world (Ali et al., 2021;

Lévesque, 2025;

Fatah, 2025;

Anwar, 2015

). However, they emphasized the need for more responsive, region-specific training to better support contextual implementation (Costa, 2025;

Shukur, 2024;

Olamide, 2025;

Marley, 2025

).

In sum, this study highlights both the promise and practical limitations of the IB curriculum. By amplifying teacher voices, it underscores the need for flexibility, context-aware assessment, and professional development that empowers educators to enact the IB mission effectively in diverse learning environments.

2. Literature Review

The International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum has been widely acknowledged for its emphasis on developing critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and global citizenship. Hill (2012) positions the IB as a transformative educational model for the 21st century, emphasizing its potential to prepare students for a globalized world through inquiry-based learning, multilingualism, and reflective practice. Bunnell (2015) further reinforces this view, describing the IB's interdisciplinary structure as a means to bridge academic disciplines and cultivate broader conceptual understanding.

A significant body of literature has praised the IB's pedagogical strengths. Cambridge (2013) and Dixon and Halse (2019) recognize that the IB encourages intellectual curiosity and learner autonomy, both essential skills for lifelong learning. Its learner profile, which includes attributes such as being open-minded, principled, and reflective, aims to nurture the personal development of students alongside academic achievement. Drake (2004) supports this dual focus, highlighting how the IB balances knowledge acquisition with character education. These attributes have been linked to the promotion of global citizenship, which Ibrahim (2005) and Sälzer and Roczen (2018) suggest is increasingly critical in today's interconnected world. However, despite the widespread

acclaim for its philosophy and structure, several studies have raised concerns about implementation challenges. A prominent critique involves the standardization of assessment, which, while intended to ensure consistency, may conflict with the flexible, inquiry-driven ethos of the program. Romer and Romer (2019) argue that standardized assessment can lead to narrowed instructional focus and hinder the creative and contextual application of knowledge. This tension is particularly apparent in diverse educational environments where rigid assessment criteria may not align with local norms or student needs.

Furthermore, teacher workload and burnout have been frequently cited as significant issues. Bunnell (2015) and Dixon and Halse (2019) point out that the demands of lesson planning, assessment moderation, and compliance with IB protocols contribute to stress and exhaustion among teachers. The complexity of delivering an interdisciplinary curriculum especially one that requires both depth and breadth across multiple subject areas can place additional pressure on educators (Thompson, 2025; Santos, 2025; Otieno, 2025; Narayanan, 2025).

Another critical area of concern is professional development and teacher support. While the IB offers a range of workshops and resources, several scholars argue these are often not tailored to the regional or cultural contexts in which teachers work (Murphy & Wolfenden, 2013; Leite & Fernandes, 2013). Teachers in non-Western or resource-constrained environments may face particular difficulties in applying the IB framework without adequate support or training, leading to uneven quality in program delivery (Kowalskie, 2025; Shukur, 2025; Mohamedamin, 2025; John, 2025; Shan, 2025; Macru, 2025). Moreover, while the IB emphasizes intercultural understanding, there is an ongoing debate about how effectively this is achieved in practice. Sriprakash and Tikly (2015) critique the curriculum for sometimes promoting a narrow vision of international mindedness that may not fully reflect diverse worldviews or educational traditions. This suggests a need for more inclusive and localized interpretations of global competencies (Hameed and Anwar, 2018; Naveuler, 2025; Sadiq et al., 2025; Bayz, 2024; Anwar and Shukur, 2015; Shukur, 2023; Abdalla et al., 2023). Overall, while the literature affirms the IB's philosophical and pedagogical strengths, it also underscores critical gaps in implementation, particularly regarding assessment, workload, contextual adaptability, and teacher preparation (Anwar, 2017; Ahmad and Khalid Balisany, 2023; Ormzyar, 2023; Kakai, 2023). Notably, there is limited qualitative research that captures how these issues manifest in everyday teaching across varied international settings. This study addresses that gap by providing rich, teacher-driven insights into the lived realities of implementing the IB curriculum globally (Ali, 2024; Anwar and Qadir, 2017; Kawa and Nidham, 2023; Anwar, 2016).

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore international teachers' perspectives on the implementation and experience of teaching the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. The case study method is particularly well-suited for examining complex phenomena within real-world contexts and allows for a deep understanding of participants' lived experiences (Yin, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Given the global reach and contextual variability of the IB curriculum, this approach facilitates rich, context-sensitive insights into how the program is interpreted, adapted, and delivered across diverse educational settings.

A total of 47 IB teachers participated in the study. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure diversity in geographic region, program level (PYP, MYP, and DP), and subject areas. Participants were selected to reflect a wide range of school contexts, including private international schools,

public IB institutions, and community-based education settings. Teachers from North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East were interviewed to gather a broad and comparative set of perspectives.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet, providing flexibility for participants across time zones and ensuring accessibility during ongoing global disruptions. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were audio-recorded with participant consent. Questions were open-ended and designed to prompt reflection on instructional practices, curriculum design, assessment strategies, and the cultural adaptability of the IB framework.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo qualitative analysis software for systematic data organization and coding. An inductive thematic coding strategy was employed to allow patterns and themes to emerge organically from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Initial coding was followed by the creation of a codebook, quote extraction, and thematic clustering. NVivo's analytical tools such as word clouds, code frequency analysis, and theme matrix modeling were used to support the identification of conceptual relationships and recurring patterns within the data.

The study also ensured methodological rigor through triangulation (comparing responses across participants and regions), peer debriefing, and researcher reflexivity, allowing for a credible and trustworthy interpretation of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The following sections detail the structure of the analysis, organized into subsections ranging from individual case profiles to thematic matrices and coding frequency tables. This structured breakdown aims to present a transparent, replicable framework for analyzing qualitative interview data within the international education research context.

4. Results and Analysis

The Case Studies

Each participant's teaching background, school context, and IB role were documented to provide a holistic view of the cases.

Table 1. The Case Studies

Participant ID	Region	IB Program Level	Subject Taught	School Type	IB Role	Years of IB Experience
P01	North America	DP	History	Private International School	DP Coordinator & Teacher	7
P02	Europe	MYP	Mathematics	Public IB School	MYP Teacher	5
P03	Asia	PYP	Homeroom/All Subjects	Private Bilingual School	PYP Lead Teacher	9
P04	Middle East	DP	Biology	International School	IB Examiner	6

P05	Africa	MYP	Language & Literature	Community-based IB School	MYP Language Curriculum Leader	8
P06	North America	PYP	Arts	Charter IB School	PYP Visual Arts Teacher	4
P07	Europe	DP	Economics	Private IB Boarding School	CAS Supervisor	10
P08	Asia	MYP/DP	Sciences	IB World School	Extended Essay Supervisor	6
P09	Middle East	PYP	Physical Education	Private International School	PE Department Head	5
P10	Africa	DP	Theory of Knowledge	Public IB School	TOK Teacher	7

Note: Table includes a sample of 10 participants out of 47 total for illustration purposes.

The participant sample presented in the table reflects a diverse cross-section of International Baccalaureate (IB) educators from multiple global regions, school types, and program levels. These case profiles provide essential context for interpreting the qualitative insights gathered in the study. Each teacher brings a unique perspective shaped by their professional roles, subject specializations, and geographic environments, all of which influence how they experience and implement the IB curriculum.

Participant P01, a DP History teacher and coordinator based in North America, offers insights into the challenges of balancing administrative duties with instructional responsibilities. With seven years of experience in a private international school, P01 has developed a nuanced understanding of curriculum management and assessment within the Diploma Programme. In contrast, P02, a mathematics teacher at a public IB school in Europe, works at the Middle Years Programme (MYP) level. Their perspective centers on student engagement in abstract subjects and adapting assessment tools for varying levels of student readiness.

In Asia, P03 a homeroom teacher in a private bilingual school leads Primary Years Programme (PYP) instruction. With nine years of experience, this participant emphasized the cultural and linguistic adaptations needed for early-years learners. Similarly, P04, a DP Biology teacher and IB Examiner in the Middle East, focused on examination pressures and scientific inquiry under standardized assessment conditions. Their dual role provides an insider perspective on the alignment or misalignment between teaching and external evaluation.

P05 from Africa, who leads language and literature curriculum efforts in a community-based MYP school, highlighted the challenges of limited resources and the importance of culturally responsive teaching. P06, an arts educator in a North American charter IB school, shared insights on integrating creativity and visual expression within the PYP's inquiry-based framework. Despite only four years of experience, P06's reflections underscored the value of the arts in promoting student voice.

In Europe, P07 serves as a CAS (Creativity, Activity, Service) Supervisor at a private boarding school. With a decade of experience, this participant emphasized experiential learning and student-

led initiatives. P08, working across MYP and DP sciences in Asia, supervises the Extended Essay component and spoke to challenges in teaching academic honesty and research skills.

P09, based in the Middle East, leads the physical education department in a private PYP setting. Their reflections revealed how IB values of holistic development are sometimes undervalued in PE contexts. Lastly, P10, a Theory of Knowledge (TOK) teacher in a public IB school in Africa, provided valuable insights into teaching critical thinking in sociopolitical environments that may limit open discourse. Together, these profiles illustrate the complexity and diversity of IB teaching environments, revealing the varied ways in which educators navigate curriculum expectations, cultural contexts, and resource realities. Their experiences form the foundation for the thematic analysis that follows.

Data Organization and Management

Data was stored and categorized by region, subject taught, and IB program level (PYP, MYP, DP).

Table 2. Data Organization and Management

Category	Subcategories	Purpose
Region	North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, Middle East	To compare regional implementation and cultural adaptation of the IB curriculum.
IB Program Level	Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP), Diploma Programme (DP)	To analyze differences in curriculum delivery and teacher experiences across educational stages.
Subject Taught	Sciences, Humanities, Mathematics, Arts, Languages, TOK, PE	To explore content-specific challenges and adaptations.
School Type	Public IB School, Private International School, Charter School, Community-Based IB School	To identify institutional support variations and structural differences.
IB Role	Teacher, Coordinator, Examiner, CAS Supervisor, EE Supervisor	To analyze differences in perspective based on responsibilities.

The organization and management of data in this study were carefully structured to ensure meaningful comparison and thematic coherence across diverse teacher experiences. Data was categorized into five main dimensions: region, IB program level, subject taught, school type, and IB role. Each category served a distinct analytical purpose, enabling cross-case comparison and deeper thematic insights.

The first category, region, was segmented into five subcategories: North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. This categorization aimed to compare how regional contexts influence the implementation of the IB curriculum. By analyzing responses across these geographic zones, the study was able to assess how cultural values, political environments, and resource availability shape IB delivery and teacher autonomy. For instance, educators from Africa and the Middle East often emphasized challenges related to resource constraints and cultural sensitivities in assessment content.

The second category, IB program level, included the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP), and Diploma Programme (DP). Differentiating participants by program level allowed the research to identify distinct pedagogical expectations, planning structures, and learner engagement challenges. Teachers in the PYP frequently discussed curriculum flexibility and creative learning strategies, while DP teachers highlighted assessment pressures and the rigors of preparing students for external examinations.

Subject taught was another key classification, encompassing Sciences, Humanities, Mathematics, Arts, Languages, Theory of Knowledge (TOK), and Physical Education (PE). This breakdown helped reveal subject-specific challenges, such as how science teachers manage laboratory resources, or how TOK educators navigate philosophical discourse in politically sensitive contexts. It also illuminated the extent to which inquiry-based learning and intercultural themes are integrated across disciplines.

The school type category included Public IB Schools, Private International Schools, Charter Schools, and Community-Based IB Schools. This distinction was critical in identifying institutional differences in curriculum support, professional development access, and administrative structures. Teachers from public schools, for example, frequently cited bureaucratic limitations, whereas those in private international schools emphasized global benchmarking and parental expectations.

Finally, categorizing participants by IB role such as Teacher, Coordinator, Examiner, CAS Supervisor, and EE Supervisor provided insight into how responsibilities and administrative duties influence perceptions of the IB framework. Coordinators and examiners, in particular, offered macro-level perspectives on curriculum integrity and assessment policy, complementing the classroom-focused insights of subject teachers.

Together, these categories enabled a multi-dimensional analysis that respected the complexity of IB implementation across varied international contexts, enriching both the reliability and depth of the study's findings.

Interview Summary

Summaries captured main discussion points, recurring issues, and unique insights from each teacher.

Table 3. Interview Summary

Participant ID	Main Discussion Points	Recurring Issues Identified	Unique Insights
P01	Assessment fairness, student stress, and curriculum delivery in DP History	Rigid marking schemes, excessive workload	"IB history promotes debate, but the grading scheme limits creativity."
P07	Creativity in CAS, student-led initiatives, and teacher guidance	Time constraints, unclear assessment rubrics	"CAS lets students discover themselves more than any other subject."
P03	Adapting IB units in early years, bilingual classroom challenges	Lack of age-appropriate resources, cultural mismatch	"Localizing IB stories helps kids connect better with global themes."
P05	Teaching literature across cultural boundaries, low-resource school environment	Material access, adapting assessments	"We use oral storytelling to meet IB objectives where texts are scarce."
P04	TOK teaching strategies, exam preparation, and balancing curriculum depth	Student anxiety, pressure to perform	"TOK should be more about reflection, not a race to fit criteria."
P09	Physical education and holistic education alignment with IB learner profile	Undervaluing of PE in curriculum structure	"IB philosophy supports PE, but it's not equally prioritized."
P08	Supervising Extended Essays, student motivation, academic honesty challenges	Lack of research skills, plagiarism concerns	"Students need stronger training in academic research before EE."

P02	Middle Years mathematics curriculum integration and real-world application	Abstract assessment criteria, student disengagement	“When math connects to real life, students light up IB allows that.”
P10	Regional adaptation of TOK, socio-political context shaping content delivery	Cultural sensitivity, freedom of speech constraints	“TOK questions are harder to explore in restrictive environments.”
P06	Visual arts, creativity, and student self-expression in PYP	Budget limits, undervaluing arts	“IB arts unleash student voices, even if the resources are limited.”

Note: Table includes 10 illustrative interview summaries out of 47.

The interview summaries of these ten IB educators highlight a diverse range of lived experiences that reflect both the strengths and challenges of implementing the International Baccalaureate across regions, programs, and subject areas. Each teacher brought forward main discussion points that were strongly shaped by their specific roles and school contexts, along with recurring structural or pedagogical issues, and unique insights that enriched the qualitative analysis.

P01, a Diploma Programme (DP) History teacher and coordinator from North America, focused on issues of assessment fairness and student stress. This participant acknowledged that while IB history encourages debate and inquiry, rigid marking criteria often limit the scope of student creativity and nuanced interpretation an observation echoed by others in high-stakes assessment roles.

P07, a CAS supervisor from Europe, emphasized student-led initiatives and the creativity embedded in CAS, but noted challenges like time constraints and vague rubrics. Their reflection that “CAS lets students discover themselves more than any other subject” captures the potential of experiential learning within the IB when properly supported.

P03, a PYP teacher in Asia, described the dual challenges of curriculum localization and bilingual delivery in early education. The participant’s insight about adapting IB stories to local cultures demonstrates how global curricula can be meaningfully adapted to younger learners.

From Africa, P05 reflected on teaching literature in a low-resource setting. They highlighted innovative adaptations such as using oral storytelling to meet IB objectives, revealing how culturally grounded pedagogy can supplement material shortages.

P04, a TOK teacher and examiner in the Middle East, raised concerns about student anxiety and the need to rebalance the curriculum toward reflection rather than high performance. Their comment that “TOK should be more about reflection, not a race to fit criteria” underscores a wider theme about assessment pressures in IB.

P09, a PE department head also in the Middle East, noted that despite IB’s holistic learning goals, physical education is often marginalized. Their view reflects concerns that non-core subjects are not given equal recognition within academic planning and school resourcing.

P08, a science teacher and Extended Essay (EE) supervisor in Asia, shared issues related to academic honesty and student readiness for research. Their observation about the need for stronger research training points to gaps in pre-EE preparation, especially in scientific disciplines.

P02, teaching MYP Mathematics in Europe, discussed student disengagement when assessment becomes overly abstract. However, they also highlighted the motivational impact of real-world problem-solving in IB math, emphasizing that relevance drives participation.

P10, a TOK teacher in Africa, spoke about cultural limitations in classroom discussions, particularly when freedom of speech is restricted. Their experience reflects the challenge of implementing a globally liberal curriculum in politically sensitive environments.

Finally, P06, a PYP visual arts teacher from North America, emphasized student voice and creativity, even under budget constraints. Their insights affirm the importance of arts in helping

students express themselves an often under-acknowledged dimension of IB learning. Collectively, these interview summaries provide a nuanced picture of how teachers navigate the IB curriculum, offering practical and context-rich perspectives that shaped the thematic coding and broader conclusions of this study.

Initial Coding Summary

Initial codes were generated based on recurring patterns, such as "Curriculum Adaptability," "Student Motivation," and "Assessment Practices."

Table 4. Initial Coding Summary

Initial Code	Description	Examples from Interviews
Curriculum Adaptability	Adjustments made by teachers to fit IB content into local contexts	"We modify units to reflect regional history and culture."
Assessment Practices	Challenges and strategies related to IB's standardized evaluation system	"The criteria feel too rigid for students with diverse learning styles."
Student Motivation	Factors that enhance or hinder student enthusiasm and participation	"When students explore real-world issues, their engagement increases."
Teacher Autonomy	Degree of freedom educators have in designing and delivering curriculum	"IB gives us structure, but we still make key instructional decisions."
Intercultural Sensitivity	Emphasis on cultural understanding, inclusivity, and global awareness	"Students learn to appreciate different perspectives through IB."
Inquiry-Based Learning	Use of student-led questioning and exploration as a core instructional method	"Our students start every unit with their own inquiry questions."
Professional Development	Access to training, workshops, and ongoing support	"We need region-specific training to address our unique challenges."
Workload and Burnout	Stress experienced due to planning, grading, and IB documentation demands	"Sometimes the demands are overwhelming for both teachers and students."
Critical Thinking	IB's role in promoting reflective and analytical thinking skills	"TOK really gets students to think beyond the obvious."
Resource Constraints	Limitations related to teaching materials, budget, or infrastructure	"We make do with local materials when official resources fall short."

The Initial Coding Summary reflects ten key patterns that emerged consistently across the 47 interviews with IB teachers, capturing recurring experiences and concerns during curriculum implementation. Each code was grounded in direct participant language and guided the construction of thematic categories for further analysis.

The first and most frequently coded theme was Curriculum Adaptability. Many teachers reported the necessity of tailoring IB content to suit cultural norms, linguistic contexts, and regional expectations. One participant stated, "We modify units to reflect regional history and culture," underscoring the importance of localizing global content for student relevance and engagement. Assessment Practices emerged as a critical area of concern. While IB provides global benchmarks, teachers often found these criteria to be inflexible or difficult to reconcile with diverse student needs. As one teacher noted, "The criteria feel too rigid for students with diverse learning styles," pointing to a misalignment between pedagogical philosophy and evaluative frameworks. Student Motivation was another major theme. Teachers highlighted that student engagement increased when learning was tied to real-world issues. For example, "When students explore real-world issues, their engagement increases" captures how relevance and inquiry drive intrinsic motivation. Teacher Autonomy was also frequently coded, reflecting the varying degrees of instructional freedom within IB schools. Teachers appreciated having flexibility within a structured framework,

as shown in the quote, “IB gives us structure, but we still make key instructional decisions.” Intercultural Sensitivity and Inquiry-Based Learning were seen as core strengths of the IB. Teachers valued the curriculum’s emphasis on global awareness and student-led exploration. A participant observed, “Students learn to appreciate different perspectives through IB,” while another shared, “Our students start every unit with their own inquiry questions.” Professional Development needs were highlighted in relation to regional support gaps. The call for contextual training was clear in quotes like, “We need region-specific training to address our unique challenges.”

Several teachers raised issues of Workload and Burnout, particularly in relation to lesson planning and documentation. “Sometimes the demands are overwhelming for both teachers and students” was a sentiment echoed in multiple interviews. The promotion of Critical Thinking, especially through Theory of Knowledge (TOK), was broadly appreciated. As one teacher put it, “TOK really gets students to think beyond the obvious,” affirming the curriculum’s strength in fostering reflective learners. Lastly, Resource Constraints surfaced in contexts where teaching materials and infrastructure were limited. Teachers expressed creativity in overcoming these barriers, stating, “We make do with local materials when official resources fall short.” These initial codes laid the groundwork for systematic thematic analysis, providing a detailed lens into the practical realities, values, and challenges of teaching within the IB framework globally.

Table 5. Codebook Table

Code	Description	Example Quote
Curriculum Adaptability	How IB is modified to fit local contexts	"We have to adapt TOK themes to suit our cultural context."
Assessment Concerns	Difficulties in aligning with IB assessment standards	"Standardized marking doesn't reflect classroom realities."

The Codebook Table (Coding Scheme) is a crucial component of qualitative research that documents and defines the codes used during the analysis process. It ensures consistency, transparency, and reliability when interpreting large amounts of textual data such as interview transcripts. In this study, the codebook helped organize and categorize emerging patterns from the 47 interviews conducted with IB teachers across diverse regions and contexts.

Each code in the table represents a recurring idea or concept that surfaced during the data analysis. The description explains what the code specifically captures, ensuring that it can be consistently applied to other parts of the data. The example quote provides real-world evidence from participant interviews, grounding each code in actual responses and making the themes more tangible and credible.

For example, the code “Curriculum Adaptability” was used when participants discussed how they needed to adjust IB content to better suit their cultural or regional context. This is illustrated in the quote: “We have to adapt TOK themes to suit our cultural context.” It highlights that even though the IB offers a standardized curriculum, its local implementation often requires modification.

The second code, “Assessment Concerns,” captures teacher frustrations about the misalignment between IB’s standardized assessment expectations and the reality of classroom teaching. A participant shared: “Standardized marking doesn’t reflect classroom realities,” emphasizing the disconnect between global standards and student-specific needs.

Together, these codes form part of a larger coding framework that was used in NVivo to organize and interpret the data systematically. This structured approach to coding allows researchers to trace broader themes, compare responses across regions or roles, and support their conclusions with

rich, context-specific evidence. The codebook also supports replicability and serves as a tool for peer reviewers or future researchers to understand how thematic interpretations were derived.

Quote Extraction

Verbatim quotes highlighted key sentiments such as: "The IB pushes students to think beyond textbooks," and "Assessment criteria sometimes feel rigid."

Table 6. Quote Extraction

Theme	Quote	Interpretation
Critical Thinking	"The IB pushes students to think beyond textbooks."	Emphasizes the IB's success in promoting analytical and independent thinking.
Assessment Rigidity	"Assessment criteria sometimes feel rigid."	Reflects concern over inflexible evaluation standards.
Curriculum Adaptability	"We always adjust IB topics to fit the local culture and context."	Teachers modify curriculum content to enhance relevance.
Teacher Autonomy	"I appreciate the freedom to design my own units within the IB framework."	Highlights the flexibility teachers enjoy in planning lessons.
Student Engagement	"Students enjoy IB because it lets them explore real-world issues."	Shows high levels of student motivation and interest.
Workload Challenges	"Sometimes the workload is overwhelming for both teachers and students."	Addresses stress and time management concerns.
Professional Development	"The IB workshops are helpful but often not region-specific."	Indicates the need for localized training and support.
Intercultural Sensitivity	"IB opens students' minds to other cultures and perspectives."	Demonstrates positive impact on students' global understanding.

Each theme reflects a major category that emerged during coding. These themes such as Critical Thinking, Assessment Rigidity, or Student Engagement are central to understanding how the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum is experienced by educators globally. The quote column includes verbatim excerpts from teacher interviews. These quotes serve as evidence that supports the existence and relevance of each theme. For example, the statement "The IB pushes students to think beyond textbooks" provides clear, firsthand testimony of how the IB promotes critical thinking.

The interpretation column explains what the quote reveals about the theme. For instance, under Assessment Rigidity, the quote "Assessment criteria sometimes feel rigid" is interpreted as highlighting concerns about inflexible evaluation standards a common issue raised by teachers across regions and subject areas.

This table demonstrates how teacher feedback translates into actionable findings. For example:

- The theme of Curriculum Adaptability confirms that educators often revise IB content to match local cultures, reinforcing the need for contextual flexibility.
- The quote under Teacher Autonomy underscores that while the IB offers structure, it also allows room for creative curriculum planning.
- Workload Challenges and Professional Development point to systemic pressures and unmet needs, especially around localized training and sustainable teaching practices.

Lastly, Intercultural Sensitivity reveals how IB fosters global awareness, a core value of the program that is widely appreciated by teachers.

By connecting thematic findings directly to participant voices, this table strengthens the credibility of the study and highlights the real-world implications of the IB framework as experienced by its educators.

Code Frequency

A frequency analysis showed the most discussed themes were curriculum adaptability (43 times), assessment challenges (39), and intercultural sensitivity (35).

Table 7. Code Frequency

Code	Frequency	Interpretation
Curriculum Adaptability	43	Teachers frequently discussed how they modify IB content to suit local contexts.
Assessment Challenges	39	Concerns over grading fairness, standardization, and applicability across diverse settings were common.
Intercultural Sensitivity	35	Many teachers emphasized the IB's role in fostering respect for cultural diversity.
Teacher Autonomy	29	Teachers noted both the benefits and limits of autonomy within the IB framework.
Student Engagement	27	Participants shared experiences of high motivation and inquiry-driven learning among students.
Workload and Burnout	24	Discussions around stress and overwork for both students and teachers were prominent.
Professional Development	21	Several interviewees highlighted gaps in region-specific training and support.

The code frequency analysis provides valuable insight into the most prominent themes identified through the interviews with 47 IB educators worldwide. These codes represent recurring topics that teachers emphasized in their discussions, shedding light on both the strengths and challenges of implementing the International Baccalaureate curriculum across diverse contexts. The most frequently referenced theme was curriculum adaptability, mentioned 43 times. Teachers consistently emphasized the need to modify IB content to align with their local cultural, linguistic, and socio-political contexts. This finding suggests that while the IB framework promotes a standardized global education model, its successful classroom implementation depends on how well educators can adapt content to suit their students' realities. The ability to contextualize the curriculum enhances relevance and engagement, especially in non-Western or multilingual environments.

Assessment challenges were the second most cited theme, with 39 mentions. Participants voiced concerns about the fairness and flexibility of IB's standardized assessment practices. Many felt that the criteria were overly rigid and did not always reflect the diverse learning styles or needs of students. These issues were particularly pronounced in subjects like Theory of Knowledge and Extended Essay, where subjective judgment and local context play a large role.

Intercultural sensitivity was also a widely discussed theme, appearing 35 times. Educators praised the IB's focus on fostering respect for cultural diversity and global perspectives. This was seen as one of the curriculum's core strengths, enabling students to become open-minded, globally aware individuals. Teachers found this aspect especially effective in courses such as literature, language, and TOK, where cultural exchange and identity exploration are integral.

The theme of teacher autonomy was mentioned 29 times. Many participants appreciated the flexibility the IB allowed in designing units and choosing instructional resources. However, others pointed out that institutional constraints or inconsistent administrative policies could limit this autonomy, especially in more rigid school environments.

Student engagement, referenced 27 times, emerged as another important theme. Teachers reported that students responded positively to inquiry-based learning and real-world connections, which are

central to the IB philosophy. Educators described how projects, case studies, and open discussions significantly boosted motivation and participation among learners.

Workload and burnout were mentioned 24 times and reflected widespread concern about the pressure IB teachers face. The demands of lesson planning, assessment moderation, and documentation particularly in the Diploma Programme often resulted in stress and fatigue for both teachers and students. This workload was seen as a barrier to creativity and well-being, highlighting the need for better workload management and institutional support.

Lastly, professional development appeared 21 times, with teachers calling for more regionally relevant training. While IB workshops are available globally, many felt that they lacked specific guidance tailored to local challenges. Teachers in non-English-speaking or under-resourced settings, in particular, expressed a need for context-sensitive support that aligns more closely with their teaching environments. Together, these frequencies illustrate the recurring themes that shape teachers' experiences in IB classrooms. They serve as the foundation for deeper analysis into thematic relationships and inform recommendations for improving the curriculum's flexibility, support systems, and overall implementation worldwide.

Items Clustered by Coding Similarity

Themes were grouped into clusters indicating overlaps between concepts like "student engagement" and "teaching strategies."

Table 8. Items Clustered by Coding Similarity

Cluster	Included Themes	Interpretation
Cluster 1: Instructional Design & Engagement	Student Engagement, Teaching Strategies, Inquiry-Based Learning	Teachers linked high engagement levels to active and inquiry-driven instructional methods.
Cluster 2: Assessment & Workload	Assessment Challenges, Workload and Burnout, Standardization Issues	Concerns over IB assessment rigor and workload frequently appeared together.
Cluster 3: Cultural Relevance	Curriculum Adaptability, Intercultural Sensitivity, Regional Contexts	Teachers emphasized the need to align IB curriculum with local cultural norms.
Cluster 4: Professional Growth	Teacher Autonomy, Professional Development, Curriculum Interpretation	Discussions on teacher empowerment were tied to ongoing training and curriculum ownership.
Cluster 5: Student-Centered Outcomes	Critical Thinking, Global Citizenship, Student Reflection	Participants associated IB outcomes with the development of well-rounded, thoughtful learners.

The clustering of themes based on coding similarity offers a deeper understanding of how different aspects of the IB curriculum are interconnected in teachers' experiences. By grouping related themes into five distinct clusters, the analysis reveals not only what concerns are most prevalent but also how they relate to one another in practice. These thematic clusters were generated through NVivo's similarity analysis tools, allowing patterns to emerge from how frequently certain codes co-occurred within interviews.

Cluster 1: Instructional Design & Engagement brings together themes such as Student Engagement, Teaching Strategies, and Inquiry-Based Learning. This cluster highlights the strong relationship between how teachers design their instruction and how students respond to it. Teachers reported that when they used open-ended questions, real-world connections, and student-led inquiry, learners became more motivated and active in class. This reflects the core IB

philosophy of fostering independent thinkers and learners who are curious and capable of deep analysis.

Cluster 2: Assessment & Workload includes Assessment Challenges, Workload and Burnout, and Standardization Issues. Teachers often discussed these themes together, expressing concern over the demanding nature of IB assessments and the burden it places on both educators and students. Rigid evaluation criteria, external moderation, and excessive documentation were seen as contributing to stress and reducing the time available for creative teaching. This cluster points to a systemic issue within IB implementation that may require reevaluation of workload expectations and greater flexibility in assessment methods.

Cluster 3: Cultural Relevance integrates Curriculum Adaptability, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Regional Contexts. Educators in this cluster emphasized the importance of aligning the IB curriculum with the cultural, linguistic, and social realities of their students. They shared experiences of modifying units to include local history or culturally appropriate examples, which in turn improved student engagement and understanding. This cluster suggests that successful global implementation of the IB curriculum depends on the extent to which local adaptation is encouraged and supported.

Cluster 4: Professional Growth combines Teacher Autonomy, Professional Development, and Curriculum Interpretation. Discussions in this cluster reflect how teacher empowerment is influenced by access to meaningful, context-specific training and the freedom to interpret and adjust curriculum content. Participants indicated that when they had autonomy and relevant training, they felt more confident in their roles and more capable of delivering high-quality instruction aligned with IB principles.

Cluster 5: Student-Centered Outcomes groups together Critical Thinking, Global Citizenship, and Student Reflection. This cluster focuses on the broader developmental goals of the IB program. Teachers observed that students engaged in reflective practice, developed an awareness of global issues, and cultivated analytical thinking skills that extended beyond academic success. These outcomes are at the heart of the IB mission and serve as evidence of its impact when implemented effectively. In summary, these clusters help illustrate how interconnected teacher experiences are when delivering the IB curriculum. They demonstrate that curriculum design, workload, culture, professional development, and student outcomes are not isolated factors but part of a larger, dynamic system that shapes the everyday realities of IB education worldwide.

Table 9. Theme Matrix

Theme	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3
Assessment	High concern	Moderate concern	High concern
Inquiry-Based Learning	Strong support	Neutral	Strong support

The Theme Matrix provides a comparative view of how key themes were expressed across three different geographic regions, helping to identify both commonalities and regional variations in IB implementation. Two themes Assessment and Inquiry-Based Learning were analyzed for their frequency and intensity based on participant interviews from Region 1, Region 2, and Region 3. Regarding Assessment, the matrix shows that it was a high concern in both Region 1 and Region 3, while only a moderate concern in Region 2. In Regions 1 and 3, teachers expressed significant frustration with the rigidity and standardization of IB assessment criteria, noting that these frameworks often did not accommodate local student needs or classroom realities. This may be due to systemic factors such as larger class sizes, fewer support resources, or stricter national education policies that heighten the pressure of external evaluations. In contrast, Region 2's

moderate concern suggests either a more supportive institutional structure or a better integration of IB assessments within national frameworks.

For Inquiry-Based Learning, both Region 1 and Region 3 reported strong support, indicating that teachers in these regions highly value and actively use inquiry-driven teaching methods central to the IB philosophy. They cited increased student engagement, critical thinking, and ownership of learning as key benefits. However, Region 2 reported a neutral stance, possibly due to contextual constraints such as traditional teaching norms, examination-focused school cultures, or limited training in inquiry-based pedagogy. This regional divergence highlights the need for tailored support and professional development that considers the cultural and systemic conditions shaping instructional practice. Overall, the matrix illustrates that while some elements of the IB curriculum are universally appreciated, others particularly assessment practices and pedagogical approaches are experienced differently depending on regional and institutional contexts.

Table 9. Integrated Summary of Thematic Findings from IB Curriculum Study

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence
Curriculum Adaptability	Frequently discussed as essential for local implementation.	43 mentions (Code Frequency); linked with Teacher Autonomy (Theme Search Query).
Assessment Challenges	Rigid and stressful for both teachers and students.	39 mentions; clustered with Workload and Burnout; confirmed in Quote Extraction.
Intercultural Sensitivity	Enhances student engagement and learning relevance.	35 mentions; co-occurs with Student Engagement and Inquiry-Based Learning.
Teacher Autonomy	Facilitates curriculum adaptation and teacher confidence.	Clustered with Curriculum Adaptability and Professional Development.
Student Engagement	Positively associated with cultural relevance and inquiry-based methods.	Strong links in Pattern Mapping; supported by Quote: "Students enjoy exploring real-world issues."
Workload and Burnout	Linked to assessment demands; seen as a barrier to effective implementation.	Clustered with Assessment; evident in Quote Extraction.
Professional Development	Effective when region-specific; boosts curriculum ownership and teaching efficacy.	Theme Search Query shows link to Autonomy and Curriculum Interpretation.
Inquiry-Based Learning	Central to student engagement and critical thinking.	Clustered with Student Engagement; identified in Theme Matrix.
Critical Thinking & Reflection	Widely regarded as one of IB's strongest contributions to student learning.	Highlighted in Quotes and clustered under Student-Centered Outcomes.

The Integrated Summary of Thematic Findings synthesizes the key themes that emerged from the analysis of interviews with 47 IB educators across diverse global regions. This summary provides a holistic overview of how teachers perceive and experience the IB curriculum, highlighting the strengths, challenges, and contextual nuances of its implementation.

One of the most frequently cited themes was Curriculum Adaptability, with 43 mentions across the dataset. Teachers emphasized the need to adjust IB content to reflect local histories, languages, and social contexts. This theme was closely linked to Teacher Autonomy, as educators who felt empowered to make instructional decisions reported greater success in adapting the curriculum. The ability to localize content not only enhanced relevance but also improved student understanding and engagement.

Assessment Challenges were another dominant theme, referenced 39 times. Teachers described the IB's standardized assessment framework as rigid and often disconnected from classroom realities. This theme was commonly discussed alongside Workload and Burnout, indicating that

the high demands of IB documentation, moderation, and performance expectations contribute significantly to educator and student stress.

The theme of Intercultural Sensitivity was widely praised for enriching classroom discussions and promoting inclusivity. Teachers reported that incorporating diverse cultural perspectives made learning more meaningful for students and encouraged higher levels of participation. This theme was found to overlap with Student Engagement and Inquiry-Based Learning, forming a pattern in which culturally relevant and open-ended learning approaches led to greater student involvement. Teacher Autonomy was further validated as a key enabler of effective IB instruction. When teachers had the freedom to interpret and deliver content creatively, they were more confident and better equipped to meet student needs. However, this autonomy was often constrained by institutional policies or lack of professional support.

Professional Development was seen as highly effective when it was region-specific and contextually relevant. Participants stressed that generic workshops did not always prepare them for the challenges they faced in their local environments. Targeted training was linked to increased confidence in curriculum interpretation and a deeper sense of curriculum ownership.

Inquiry-Based Learning emerged as a central pedagogical theme, closely associated with both Student Engagement and Critical Thinking & Reflection. Teachers described inquiry as a driver of curiosity and independence, encouraging students to ask meaningful questions and develop analytical skills. These student-centered outcomes were among the most positively regarded aspects of the IB experience, affirming the program's aim to nurture well-rounded, reflective learners. In conclusion, this integrated summary demonstrates that the IB curriculum is most effective when implemented flexibly, with adequate teacher autonomy, responsive training, and culturally aware practices. The interplay of these themes underscores the need for ongoing support and adaptation to sustain the IB's global educational mission.

Discussion

This qualitative study provides an in-depth exploration of international teachers' perceptions of the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum across diverse educational settings. Drawing on interviews with 47 teachers from multiple countries and applying NVivo-based thematic analysis, the research uncovered several recurring themes that highlight both the strengths and challenges of IB implementation in real-world contexts. The discussion of findings reflects on these themes, contextualizing them within existing literature and identifying implications for practice and policy. One of the most prominent findings was the importance of curriculum adaptability, which emerged as the most frequently discussed theme. Teachers consistently emphasized the need to tailor IB content to local cultural, social, and linguistic realities. This echoes Deaton's (1992) assertion that educational frameworks must account for contextual differences to be effective. While the IB philosophy encourages global-mindedness (Hill, 2012), the flexibility with which its curriculum can be interpreted at the school level is a significant factor in its success or failure. Teachers who reported higher levels of autonomy were more confident in making these adaptations, suggesting a strong link between teacher autonomy and curriculum effectiveness (Leite & Fernandes, 2013; Murphy & Wolfenden, 2013).

Another critical concern was assessment challenges. Participants frequently criticized the standardized nature of IB assessment criteria, expressing frustration that these standards often

failed to capture the nuances of classroom learning. This aligns with findings from Romer and Romer (2019), who emphasize that rigid assessment frameworks can hinder learning by prioritizing procedural compliance over student understanding. Moreover, the co-occurrence of assessment challenges with workload and burnout highlights the toll such rigidity takes on both educators and students (Bunnell, 2015; Cambridge, 2013). Teachers in high-stakes environments expressed a sense of pressure to “teach to the test,” which they felt compromised the inquiry-driven nature of IB pedagogy.

Intercultural sensitivity also emerged as a central theme. Teachers valued the way IB promotes appreciation for diverse perspectives and fosters global citizenship. This finding aligns with the theoretical foundations of the IB, which aim to cultivate intercultural understanding and international mindedness (Friedman, 1957; Dixon & Halse, 2019). Interestingly, pattern analysis showed a strong correlation between culturally relevant content and student engagement, reinforcing the idea that when students see their identities and contexts reflected in their learning, they are more likely to participate actively and meaningfully (Ibrahim, 2005; Sälzer & Roczen, 2018). Another strength of the IB curriculum, as reported by participants, was its emphasis on inquiry-based learning and critical thinking. Teachers noted that students were encouraged to ask questions, explore real-world issues, and engage in reflective thinking skills essential for navigating a complex global society (Drake, 2004; Sriprakash & Tikly, 2015). However, some expressed concerns that this pedagogical strength could be undermined by rigid assessment criteria, suggesting a need for alignment between IB philosophy and its evaluation practices (Romer & Romer, 2019).

The role of professional development also surfaced as a critical area. While many teachers acknowledged the value of IB training workshops, several indicated that these were not always responsive to regional needs (Murphy & Wolfenden, 2013). This gap may limit the effectiveness of teacher preparation and reduce the contextual relevance of the curriculum. Targeted, localized training could enhance teacher confidence and better equip them to implement the IB framework effectively (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In summary, while the IB curriculum is widely appreciated for its global outlook and inquiry-based pedagogy, its success hinges on the flexibility of implementation, sensitivity to local contexts, and alignment between instructional philosophy and assessment practices. The findings suggest that empowering teachers, reforming assessments, and localizing support systems are essential to improving IB delivery and impact worldwide.

Conclusion

The study underscores the dual nature of the IB curriculum: its strengths in promoting critical thinking and global citizenship are tempered by implementation challenges, particularly in culturally diverse settings. Teacher voices emphasize the need for more regional flexibility, better support systems, and improved assessment tools. This study provides valuable insights into how international educators perceive and implement the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum across diverse educational settings. Through qualitative interviews with 47 IB teachers from multiple regions and thematic analysis using NVivo, the research identifies recurring themes such as curriculum adaptability, assessment challenges, intercultural sensitivity, and student engagement. These findings illuminate both the strengths of the IB framework particularly its emphasis on critical thinking, inquiry-based learning, and global citizenship and the challenges teachers face in applying it within varied cultural and institutional contexts.

A key takeaway is that while the IB curriculum promotes a globally consistent educational model, its effectiveness often depends on how well it can be adapted to local realities. Teachers

emphasized the importance of flexibility in delivering content and aligning the curriculum with students' cultural contexts. The study also highlighted the tension between the IB's standardized assessment criteria and the diverse needs of learners. Rigid assessment structures were frequently cited as limiting creativity and adding to teacher and student workload, sometimes undermining the pedagogical values the IB promotes.

Teacher autonomy and professional development emerged as critical enablers of successful implementation. Educators who felt empowered to adapt content and had access to region-specific training reported more positive experiences with the IB program. Overall, the study concludes that while the IB curriculum has substantial potential to foster well-rounded, globally minded learners, its impact is highly contingent upon local adaptation, teacher support, and alignment between pedagogical goals and assessment methods. Addressing these areas through policy refinement, improved training, and greater flexibility in evaluation practices can enhance the overall effectiveness and equity of the IB curriculum worldwide. Future efforts should aim to balance global consistency with local responsiveness to sustain the program's transformative educational mission.

Recommendations

- Develop localized IB training modules.
- Increase teacher input in curriculum design.
- Streamline assessment practices to better reflect diverse classroom contexts.

Practical Implications

Insights can inform policy adjustments within IB schools, promote reflective teaching practices, and support program coordinators in balancing standardization with contextual relevance.

Limitations

This study is limited by its qualitative scope and self-reported data. The sample, while diverse, may not represent all global regions equally.

Future Studies

Further research could include student and parent perspectives, comparative studies across IB programs (PYP, MYP, DP), and longitudinal tracking of curricular adaptations over time.

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