

The role of International Baccalaureate Assessment and Education Methods in modifying the Japanese University Entrance Examination System

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The main mission of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) is to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people worldwide, who can help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. The International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program (DP) was established in 1968, by teachers at the International School of Geneva. The DP program provides students with a balanced education, and promotes international understanding. The program is taught to students aged 16-19. As of 22 May 2015, there are 2,795 schools offering the DP, in 143 different countries worldwide. The National Test for University Admissions in Japan, often referred to as the “center test,” (CT) is made up of standardized exams that are required for applicants to the 82 national universities and 74 municipal universities as the first stage of the screening process. With the ongoing reformation of the CT and Japanese high school education, it is interesting to learn about the IBDP assessment process as a standardized global educational program.

Diploma Program assessment—aims and approaches

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) assessment is designed to record student achievement at, or towards the end of the DP course. Students who go through the rigorous and challenging assessment system are encouraged to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand and accept diversity. The IB sets tasks that require the student to analyze, evaluate and create situations by themselves. It also encourages students to inquire and reflect upon real world situations, which lead to ethical debates and sow the seeds of international

mindedness. The IBO assessment system puts emphasis on the IB learner profile and aims to yield meaningful results by assessing the whole capacity and personality of individual students through valid and reliable assessment methods. The IBDP assessment system also makes sure that the standards of good teaching are maintained without becoming too slow or absorbing too much of the available educational resources. The assessment standard has three aspects: curriculum standards, assessment standards and performance standards. In order to set and maintain standards of assessment, consistent marking by checking and moderating examiners who carry out the process of marking and also by setting robust

grade boundaries by judging against grade descriptors and comparing outcomes with previous years. Quality control is done by practicing examples of marking to explain correct approaches, and by including pre-marked scripts in examiners as seeds to assure that examiners are marking up to standard. The IBDP assessment is based more on criteria rather than comparing the results of examinees. Student performance is measured through a variety of methods such as “Grade descriptors” which measures the characteristics of work expected from each grade level and which reflects the aims and objectives of each subject. Each subject marking undergoes a process of moderation, where a sample of the suggested marks from a teacher for individual student work, is sent to IB. After IB ensures that the teachers marking is up to global standards, the teacher marks are adjusted and the final student marks are used to award grades. If the teacher marking appears to be too generous or too strict, IB applies mathematical corrections to all student

marks, including the sample.

In order to adopt and implement certain aspects of this unique system into the Japanese University Educational Reform, it is first important to recognize the main differences in the teaching methods between the Japanese High School Education (JHSE) system and the IBDP education system, as the JHSE forms the base of the testing exam for university admission (Table 1).

Next, focus should be next placed on the differences between the present Japanese Center Test (JCT) and ongoing the IBDP testing method (Table 2).

Once the educational methods and testing methods are clearly defined, it is possible to modify, adopt or abort certain schemes to set up a new university admission testing method which has a greater global application.

JHSE Education	IBDP Education
3 year course preparing students for Admission into Japanese Universities	Comprehensive 2 year course preparing students for Admission into Universities Worldwide
Standard course focused on passing the JCT	Standard course also focusing on Communication and Research Skills
Promotes deeper learning of specific subjects	Promotes deeper learning of specific subjects + student engagement
Challenges students to pursue academic excellence	Challenges students to pursue academic excellence + passion outside the classroom
Career oriented realistic approach	Holistic Approach
Students master knowledge without challenging it	Students acquire knowledge by asking questions and considering multiple viewpoints
Students concentrate on their main academic goals	Students concentrate on academic goals + how their actions can have an impact on themselves and their surroundings

Table 1 Differences between Japanese High School Education (JHSE) and IBDP Education

JCT	IBDP
Standardized exam as a first step for entrance into 82 National and 74 Municipal Universities in Japan	An internationally recognized program designed with basic academic skills and life skills for University admission globally
Students are tested on 5 subjects as well as sub-topics:	Students are required to study six subjects and a curriculum core
Total Score is 900. There is no passing score. *Minimum scores required for entrance into University is decided by each individual University	Total score is 45. The passing score is 24. *Minimum scores required for entrance into University is decided by each individual University
Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ) only	No Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ)
Content based. Memorization skills are also necessary.	Emphasizes academic, athletic, cultural and social skills.
No long answers; no essay	Involves more writing and includes a compulsory 4000 words essay
Held once a year in January	Given twice a year in May and November
Challenges students in the areas of strength	Challenges students in the areas of strength and weakness

Table 2 Differences between Japanese Center Test (JCT) and International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBDP)

Stages of DP Assessment Process

- 1 Internal Assessment
- 2 Marking
- 3 Standardization
- 4 Markbands
- 5 Moderation of External Assessment
- 6 Moderation of Internal Assessment
- 7 Grade awarding and Aggregation
- 8 DP Scores and Grading
- 9 Final Award committee
- 10 Publication of Results

Table 3 IB Diploma Program Assessment Process

1. Internal Assessment

Internal assessment can be an oral presentation or a discussion of research work and investigations. The assessment task reflects the purpose of the internal assessment, and emphasizes the skills involved. Internal assessment is a part of normal classroom teaching, which focuses on skills, not subject content. Activities used for internal assessment can be used to develop skills, and also contributes to the final assessment outcome.

2. Marking

The main aim of the IBO assessment process is to provide almost the same mark to a piece of work, regardless of which examiner marked it. Assessment is done in three main steps. First by appointing examiners who can mark consistently and objectively. Second, by checking the markings of all examiners in every examination session except the senior examiner. This is called “moderation”. The third method is by providing instructions to examiners through

prior training about the administrative procedures to be followed and how to allocate marks.

3. Standardization

To reduce global bias arising from educational cultures and teaching styles around the world, senior examiners meet and review the scripts of a selection of candidates. This is called a standardization meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to make a small number of final additions and amendments to ensure that senior examiners have agreed to a certain interpretation of how the marks should be applied. The final decision is then passed on to all assistant examiners.

4. Mark bands

When it is not possible to recognize separate assessment criteria, or when the work being assessed is variable, an approach is adopted called “Mark bands”. These are used instead of separate criteria. Each mark band level corresponds to a number of marks. For example, one mark band level may cover the range 6 to 10 marks. The examiner gives a mark from that range based on how well the work fits the level within the mark band scale. Research shows there is little difference between the reliability of marking through mark bands or assessment criteria.

5. Moderation of External Assessment

Moderation is a process of ranking. The purpose of moderation is to ensure that candidate marks, on the whole, are adjusted

to more appropriate levels. External assessment is conducted by a team of examiners. The principle examiner (PE) for a subject is often the chief examiner or deputy chief examiner or a former team leader (TL). Generally, a PE may also be the author of the examination paper or was greatly involved in setting that paper. A TL is an examiner who has past experience in marking consistently and accurately. For each subject, there is also an assistant examiner (AE). Each TL oversees up to 10 (AE). Every AE is allocated a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 20 scripts. After marking, the AE sends a sample of their marking to the TL, and not the PE, This sample is re-marked by the TL and a statistical comparison of the paired set of marks determines whether the original examiner’s marking is acceptable.

6. Moderation of Internal Assessment

The moderation of internal assessment, where the original marking is done by classroom teachers, has a slightly different approach. All internally assessed scripts are marked by applying assessment criteria. Moderators for most internal assessment components, except for language orals, are asked to judge whether the teacher’s marking seems appropriate, rather than re-mark the marks awarded by the teacher. Teachers’ marks are altered only when the moderator is sure they are inappropriate.

7. Grade awarding and aggregation

The grade awarding is the final stage of the assessment process for each component,

which takes place about 35 days after the date of the examination. The team reviews the assessment components for the session, sets the grade boundaries for each of the higher level and standard level courses, and resolves outstanding issues. The first task is to reflect on the operation of each component. Senior examiners review the comments formally submitted by teachers about the examination papers and the reports. Following this, the team takes into consideration each component for every session. The boundaries for internally assessed components, and externally marked non-examination components, are not revised each session. They are normally set only once, but new boundaries are set for each examination paper at each session. The change in boundary marks is normally slight because effort is made to construct a new examination paper at the same level as the previous one.

8. DP Scores and Grading

The IBDP assessment has internal and external components. Students are graded for the internal components from 7 (highest) to 1 (lowest) for each subject. Grade 1-7 reflects (poor, little, basic, good with some gap, sound, very good and excellent), respectively. The maximum possible total diploma score is 45 (6 courses x 7 points) in addition to 3 points for successful completion of the external components namely, Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and Extended Essay (EE) through written examinations at the end of the DP course. The other main core

element Creative Action Service (CAS), is compulsory, but does not contribute to the total point score. Students who gain at least 24 points are awarded the DP. About 80% of students receive the DP with an average score of 30 points. Although Higher level (HL) and Standard level (SL) courses offered in IB differ in scope, the IB philosophy is to assess both HL and SL against the same grade descriptor and are awarded the same number of points. A bilingual DP is awarded to either students who receive a grade of 3 or higher in 2 languages from language and literature studies or to students who receive a grade of 3 or higher in studies in language of literature and a grade of 3 or higher in an individual social or science subject in another language.

9. The final award committee

The final award committee meets after all the grade award meetings have been held and just before the results are issued in early January/early July. This committee formally awards diplomas and certificates to those candidates who have met the requirements. It also authorizes appropriate action special cases.

10. Publication of Results

Diploma and certificate results are published to schools and university admission systems on 5 January and 5 July each year for the two examination sessions. The results are sent electronically.

Methods suggested for adoption from IBDP

Finally, after getting a clearer picture of the IBDP assessment process, the following methods can be suggested for adoption in making the JHSE and the JCT more in par with global standards and internationalization at a deeper level (Table 4).

Conclusion:

Educators in Japan can help Japanese students benefit from the strengths of both programs (JHSE and IBDP), through integrated learning and encouraging students to understand issues from multiple perspectives, which in turn can promote global thinking and ensure world peace in the long run. Nevertheless, the students’ final choice eventually depends on the students’ individual academic goals.

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It can introduce testing methods to determine student expression and thought
It can include long questions in addition to the existing MCQ Questions
It can expect long written answers from students
It can nurture skills for a Global Age by adapting teaching methods from the IB education system
It can modify the present high school student conception of "Being Taught" towards "Acquiring Knowledge"
High Schools can help students enhance their Academic Skills + teach them the "zest for life"

Table 4 How the IB Education and Assessment Method can influence the JCT towards a global approach