



International Baccalaureate
Baccalauréat International
Bachillerato Internacional

A Strategic Partnership to Transform Education in South Korea



Executive summary

Since 2019, the International Baccalaureate (IB) has been working in partnership with individual Offices of Education in South Korea. The partnership forms part of a wider strategy to evolve South Korea's education system at a national and local level. The Ministry of Education recognised the need to nurture students critical thinking skills, delivering an education which equips them with the skills and competencies they need to succeed in an increasingly technologically driven and globalised world. Since the partnership commenced, the IB has been adopted by 205 authorized and candidate schools. School leaders, educators, students, and parents have all noted positive changes in student outcomes, the quality of teaching, and student and teacher satisfaction.

Re-envisioning education in South Korea

In South Korea, the elected governors of the 17 regional Offices of Education have full autonomy to manage education policies, budgets, and programme implementation within their jurisdictions, enabling them to respond effectively to diverse local needs. The academic community had previously been engaged in researching the inquiry-based, concept-driven methodology of the IB. In 2017, the Provincial Offices of Education (POE) began to investigate its adoption in their jurisdictions. At this time, there was significant demand for a different approach to education: one that would prepare students for an increasingly technology-driven, interconnected world and effectively measure the development of skills for this world. In 2018, the Jeju Provincial Office of Education (JPOE) initiated discussions to collaborate with the IB to run a pilot program in South Korean national public schools. This led to an initial 18 month of discovery engagement, where the IB worked with the governor of the Jeju POE and Daegu Metropolitan Office of Education (DMOE) to understand the educational priorities for their regions, and assess the feasibility of the widespread implementation of the IB in the region. During this period, there was close collaboration between the governors and the Director General of the IB, with delegations from Chungcheongnam-do, Daegu and Jeju attending the IB's global conference in Singapore to experience the IB's approaches and meet its global network of education professionals.

In 2019, it was agreed that the IB and the two OEs would collaborate to deliver a programme of educational transformation in their respective districts. The project would use the IB's globally renowned approach to learning and teaching to evolve the local education systems, in order to prepare students for the demands of prestigious higher education destinations and an increasingly globalised workforce. The strategic objective of the project was to bridge the gap between the national education system and the wider world stage, ensuring the continued global competitiveness of South Korea in the global economy. To commence the project, a five-year Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) was officially signed, announcing the collaboration on the ambitious project to transform education in Daegu and Jeju from direct instruction and rote learning to inquiry-based, concept-driven learning that fosters student agency and self-direction. Jeju POE explained that it "chose to partner with the IB to lead changes in teaching and assessment methods and for balanced educational development, especially in town and rural areas, to enable revitalization of those regions."

To meet the IB's mandatory requirements for multilingual instruction and representation of international mindedness, educators must cultivate critical thinking, student agency and problem solving as part of their pedagogical approaches. In order to achieve this, a significant transformation was required from South Korea's existing system that placed a strong emphasis on the Korean language and culture. The IB's approach to assessment emphasises both formative and summative assessments and provides a framework for educators to master new assessment strategies that move beyond the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) and evaluate the development of competencies such as critical thinking.

Adopting a new educational framework across a network of public schools was not without its challenges. Building educator capacity to drive pedagogical transformation, developing and assessing the competencies outlined



in the national education system and attracting students, especially in rural areas, were all recognised as opportunities for transformation project to make an impact. To achieve the successful implementation of its programmes, the IB developed a comprehensive strategy of tailored support that relied on building deep relationships with each OE to understand its unique culture and context.

Implementing the IB

At the start of the partnership, the focus was on using the IB's Diploma Programme (DP) for 16 – 19 year olds as a vehicle for educational change. This was soon expanded to encompass the Middle Years Programme (MYP) for 11 to 16 year olds and the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for 3 to 11 year olds following the South Korean curriculum review in 2022, which focused on six core competencies reflected in the IB's programmes: self-management, knowledge-information processing, creative thinking, aesthetic emotion, communication and community. Educators at Gaesan Elementary School noted that "the IB encourages lessons built around children's own questions, discussions and real-life inquiry activities. This was especially helpful in addressing [South Korea's] ongoing challenge: how to meaningfully develop the competencies outlined in the curriculum."

In order to become an IB World School, a school must be authorised by the IB to offer one or more of its programmes to ensure that fidelity to programme standards is met. A supported candidacy phase enables a comprehensive pedagogical transformation for schools, evolving from traditional instruction to inquiry-based learning methodologies. During this process, educators in Jeju, Daegu and other jurisdictions developed

essential skills in curriculum design and assessment through a tailored programme of professional development and support from the IB's network of educators.

To ensure that educators are equipped with the pedagogical approaches to foster international-mindedness within their learning environments, the IB offered a wide range of resources. These included ongoing mentorship, teacher training workshops and peer observation. A suite of materials in the programme resource centre and curriculum mapping guidance was made available. Gaesan Elementary School educators highlighted the impact: "Collaborating with educators of diverse backgrounds from around the country during workshops inspired fresh inspiration and a renewed passion for teaching."

Before commencing the project, the IB worked closely with the governors of the OEs to identify the most relevant teaching and learning materials to be translated into Korean. A bespoke dual language programme - the Diploma Programme with subjects in Korean – was created thereafter, by translating four out of six subject groups and supporting materials. During the implementation stage, the need for bilingual resources to ensure the effective delivery of the programmes was clear and extended to educators, examiners and consultants. Each school was assigned a dedicated consultant whose deep knowledge of the IB and understanding of the Korean education system enabled them to provide personalised mentoring to help schools navigate the authorisation requirements. Additionally, opportunities to shadow bilingual consultants built prospective consultants' capacity and developed their skills, creating a sustainable pipeline of support for more schools to navigate the authorisation process. Following

authorisation, these same consultants are empowered to provide ongoing support to schools to ensure ongoing improvement.

Schools had to rapidly establish new organisational structures during this process including implementing the IB's learner profile, extended essay and Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS), all core to the DP. Yet, with sustained support from the IB, they emerged from the candidacy process authorised to deliver the DP in an accelerated timeframe: more than 22 schools now offer the DP, 28 schools offer the MYP and 46 schools offer the PYP.

Creating a culture of academic and personal development

Following authorisation, IB World Schools have noted that the student-centred, inquiry-based methodology of the IB has had a significant impact on students' personal and academic outcomes. Research by the Korean Educational Research Association showed that PYP students exhibit superior achievement and motivation in both Korean and Mathematics compared to their non-IB PYP peers (Lee, 2024). Academic research has also found positive outcomes in MYP students' "cognitive and affective domains" (Lee, Ryu, 2024). Educators at Jeju National University Middle School concurred: "Since introducing the IB, we saw an increase in our students' communication skills, collaboration and creativity. They have a desire to learn and it has raised their aspirations and motivated them to want to attend higher education or university."

Stakeholders also report enhanced self-directed learning in students, which is advantageous in preparing them for higher education. The first cohorts of DP students who have graduated from public schools participating in the project achieved high levels of academic success

and have gone on to study at prestigious institutions both in South Korea and overseas including Inha Medical University and Toronto University.

In South Korea, awareness of the DP amongst universities continues to grow with sustained efforts from both the IB and individual OEs influencing recognition of the programme in the region. Schools participating in the project report that students go on to study at a wide range of globally renowned institutions including Seoul National University and Yonsei University.

Research by the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which finds that DP students are **three times more likely to enrol in a top 20 university than their peers** and are 40 per cent more likely to obtain an honours degree, reinforces the benefits the DP programme delivers in preparing students for university. As OE adoption of the IB in South Korea continues to grow, it is anticipated that universities will continue to embrace the academic rigour of the IB and the evidence of extracurricular activities, community service and leadership embedded into the DP.

Research by the Korean Educational Research Association shows that IB students value the real-life applicability of their learning as well as increased global citizenship awareness (Lee., Cho, Kim, Khan, Song, Kim, Kim, Lee, 2025). The widespread integration of the IB into the national education system has enabled more Korean students to apply to overseas universities due to its global recognition, further raising the profile of the Korean education system on the international stage.

Parental perceptions of the value of an IB education during the pilot project have also driven an increase in people from other parts of Jeju Island and across South Korea moving to the Pyoseon-myeon area of Jeju Island to enrol their children in schools that offer the IB programmes, resulting in the expansion and reconstruction of these IB schools.

Building the foundation for pedagogical change: professional development

As well as reporting positive impacts on student outcomes, the IB's comprehensive professional development framework ensures that educators are equipped with the skills and tools that they need to transform their pedagogical practice. A mixed methods study found that teachers identified professional development as the most important benefit of implementing IB programmes, noting that it enhanced their professional practice in areas such as assessment skills. Access to innovative and diverse educational tools



provided by the IB was also highly valued by educators. The IB's emphasis on collaboration and reflection has been instrumental in enhancing educator expertise, with teachers reporting high levels of satisfaction in their roles and feelings of "growth" and subject "mastery".

Schools have also noted that the IB frameworks have bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in the classroom, enabling less experienced teachers to implement innovative teaching strategies more quickly.

Sustaining systemic change

The transformational impact of this educational partnership demonstrates the power of collaborative reform in education. Through systematic implementation across 12 operational entities in South Korea, the initiative has successfully evolved pedagogical approaches from traditional instruction to inquiry-based learning, directly enhancing both student and educator competencies, capabilities and outcomes.

The success of the partnership is rooted in its approach to change management. Educators have developed sophisticated collaborative curriculum design skills, innovative assessment strategies and deeper international mindedness through comprehensive professional development programmes. Students have benefited from rigorous, globally recognised education that nurtures the intercultural understanding, critical thinking and agency essential for navigating an interconnected world.

Most significantly, the flexible, relationship-driven methodology has proven that meaningful educational transformation can occur simultaneously locally and nationally. Since implementing the IB, schools have successfully transitioned from conventional

teaching systems while meeting national educational requirements.

Building on these proven outcomes, the IB has been closely collaborating with the Korean Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE), the Ministry of Education to further strengthen the support for IB programme integration in public education schools.

As both a trusted advisor and strategic partner, the IB has established a replicable framework for educational transformation that empowers educators, enriches students' learning experiences and creates sustainable pathways to develop future-ready global citizens equipped to lead in a complex world.

With thanks to our partners:

Busan Metropolitan Office of Education (BMOE)

Chungcheongbukdo Office of Education (CBOE)

Chungcheongnamdo Office of Education (CNOE)

Daegu Metropolitan Office of Education (DMOE)

Daejeon Metropolitan Office of Education (DJMOE)

Gyeonggido Office of Education (GOE)

Gyeongsangbukdo Office of Education (GBOE)

Incheon Metropolitan Office of Education (IMOE)

Jeju Special Self-Governing Provincial Office of Education (JPOE)

Jeollanamdo Office of Education (JNOE)

Jeonbuk State Office of Education (JSOE)

Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (SMOE)

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