Research Paper

Growing Pains: Challenges and Opportunities for the International Baccalaureate (IB)

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Abstract

As globalization advances, international education has become increasingly important. The International Baccalaureate (IB) was created out of the necessity for a common curriculum and university credential that is universally accepted. In recent decades, the IB has grown exponentially; however, this growth has brought with it significant challenges. Through research on the existing literature and a S.W.O.T (strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats) analysis, this paper identifies these challenges and offers recommendations in order to achieve sustainable growth for the IB.

Key words: the International Baccalaureate (IB), international education, international curriculum, wider access, greater impact, growth, challenges, globalization.
Objective

Since its inception in 1968, the International Baccalaureate (IB) – an international curriculum – has been growing rapidly. While this growth is a clear manifestation of the value of the IB, it has brought with it many problems that will hinder the IB’s continuous growth if not dealt with appropriately. Over the years, many educators have studied the growth of the IB and the challenges associated; however, few have attempted to provide feasible solutions. As an outsider who believes in the value of the IB as an excellent curriculum for international education, the author sincerely hopes the IB can continue to grow in a planned manner to benefit more people in the world. This literature review aims to examine the growing pain of the IB, so as to lay a foundation for further research into coping with the pain for sound development in the future.

The IB’s History, Mission and Growth

History

In the early 1950’s, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) founded the International Schools’ Association (ISA), and contracted ISA to find practical ways to harmonize curricula and methods for advancing international understanding. In 1963, ISA obtained a grant from the Twentieth Century Fund to design a universal curriculum and examination program. In 1965, the International Schools' Examination Syndicate was created, which became the International Baccalaureate Office with headquarters in Geneva in 1968. Education inspectors, university professors, and secondary school teachers collaborated to design the IB Diploma Program (IBDP) and established an international board of examiners. From 1964 to 1969, this program was in the initial trial phase; the examinations were not officially recognized during this period. It wasn’t until 1970 the first official IBDP
examinations offered complete diplomas or certificates, albeit the trial examinations continued until 1974 (Poelzer & Feldhusen, 1997).

**Mission Statement**

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) articulates the Mission Statement of the IB on its website as follows:

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right (IBO, 2012a).

As Bunnell (2011a) has observed, this mission statement is radical partially because the IB was conceived during the Cold War in 1962, at a time when the Cuban missile crisis reached its climax (p. 167). It indicates the IB aimed to develop a challenging curriculum, in order to promote intercultural understanding and global-mindedness. It is essential to keep this mission statement in mind when examining the IB’s growth and challenges throughout this paper.

**The Growth of the IB in the World**

From its birth in 1968 to 1976, the IB was in the experimental stage. With only 500 annual IBDP (IB Diploma Program) entrants for sampling and observation purposes, the IB was not sure if it would be accepted and survive. The number of IB schools grew slowly in its first two decades. However, since the mid-1980s, the IB World began to expand prodigiously. There were only 47 IB schools in 1978; the number rose to 164 in 1985, 540 in 1995, and 1,052 in
2000; it further skyrocketed to 3,035 in 2010 (Resnik, 2012, p. 253). According to the IB Annual Review 2011, in June 2011, the IB marked a historic milestone by reaching 4,000 IB programs worldwide. To put this growth in perspective, there were only 569 IB programs in 1995; this number jumped to 1,159 and 2,055 in 2000 and 2005 respectively (IBO, 2012b, p. 1). Today, there are 3,473 schools in 144 countries offering the IB programs for over 1,055,000 students aged 3 to 19 years (IBO, 2012c). From five hundred to one million participants, the IB has come a long way, and the impact it had four decades ago pales in comparison with today.

The Growth of the IB in the US

As Bunnell (2011b) has noted, since 1971, the IB has been growing at a double-digit rate and its explosion is especially demonstrated in public schools in the US. While it was initially established in Northern Europe, the IB now has found its home in the States. The May 2008 IBDP examination shows that the number of IB schools in the state of Virginia was higher than the combined total of Africa and the Gulf Region; Florida alone had the world’s ninth largest bloc of IB schools. In the same year, more than half of the IBDP entrants in the world were US citizens. In July 2009, nearly 40 percent of all IB schools were located in the US; and together with Canada, England, and Australia, these four countries represent 61 percent of the IB World. On the other hand, the two biggest countries in Africa – Nigeria and South Africa – each had only two IB schools (pp. 66-67). The uneven global presence of the IB is strikingly obvious as shown in Table 1 in Appendix I (source: IBO, 2012d).

From this table, one can see that the IB’s presence is dominant in the US with 1,382 IB schools, four times more than that of Canada (319), the second biggest country in terms of IB schools; whereas Africa is almost untouched by the IB World. This huge geographic discrepancy suggests that to some extent, the IB has failed its mission to become global.
Challenges Facing the IB World

As illustrated above, the IB has established itself as a major player in the field of international education; however, its unbalanced growth has resulted in some unintended consequences. After a thorough study of the existing literature concerning the IB World, several challenges emerge: undermined quality, unbalanced global growth, lack of unity within the IB community, and concerns over education denationalization.

Undermined Quality

For the IB, quality assurance involves quality control in the areas of curriculum development, assessment, and teacher training, particularly the reliability and consistency of its Diploma Program assessment. The vast expansion of the IB World has made it very difficult for the IBO to provide qualified examiners and sufficient administrators in a timely manner, which has affected the reliability of assessment. As Toze (Superintendent of the International School of Manila) puts it, “This increase in numbers has been achieved at the expense of the integrity of the quality and consistency of the grading process” (as cited in Bunnell 2011c, p. 182).

According to the IBO, the April 2006 School Satisfaction Survey undertaken by the IB indicated that while 96 percent of schools were happy with the curriculum, only 85 percent were very content with the assessment (as cited in Bunnell 2011c, p. 180). Bunnell (2011c) has further revealed that in May 2007, the 2005 history paper was sent to the students in northern Europe (p. 180). This mistake was unbelievable, sending a clear signal that the administration of the IBO was chaotic, with no quality control system in place. All of these facts suggest that, to some extent, the IBO has failed to cope with its fast pace of growth and the reputation of the IB as a standardized high-quality product has been undermined. This will pose a serious threat for the IB, whose success has been based solely on the reliability and consistency of its assessment and
word-of-mouth marketing. The compromised quality is diluting the power of the IB brand, and the situation will only deteriorate if the IBO does not take immediate actions to control its quality.

**Unbalanced Worldwide Growth**

While the IB strives to have its impact on students across the world so as to make them active, compassionate and lifelong learners with intercultural awareness, the presence of the IB is far from global. Bunnell (2011a) has collected the following statistics exhibiting the uneven distribution of IB schools. In early 2010, eleven countries led by the US, Canada, UK and Australia had ¾ of the total IB schools; on the other hand, eighty-five nations accounting for 62 percent of all countries with IB schools, had less than five apiece. In the May 2008 IBDP examination, 54 percent of the entrants were from the US; whereas there were less than ten participants each in the other fifty-eight nations. In many parts of the world, the IB’s presence is limited: countries such as Italy, Japan, France and Nigeria each have less than 20 IB schools. Meanwhile, Africa had only two percent of the total IB schools in 2008, and this figure has remained unchanged since the 1980s. Currently, the whole of China has a number of IB schools equal to Buenos Aires, and the same holds true between Africa and South Australia, and between Japan and Toronto (Bunnell, 2011a, pp. 171-172). With its prevailing presence in the US, the IB World has consequentially put on an American persona; as such, the enormous geographical disparity of IB involvement has gone out of line with its mission to go global.

**Lack of Unity within the IB Community**

As the IB World grows, so does the diversity of the IB schools. As Bunnell (2011a) has commented, the original role of the IB was to cater to a “niche group of mobile students,” and provide appropriate programs for international schools (p. 170). However, since 1999, the IB
has started to convince other non-international schools of its value, and has shifted its focus away from the initial “international school movement” towards more engagement with “national schooling” and “elite private schooling” (Bunnell, 2011a, p. 170). As such, a diverse group of schools, both public and private, has been added to the originally international-schools-only IB World. Among the IB schools in the US, 92 percent are state-funded, whereas half the primary ones are in the Title 1 Category with 40 percent of its students from low-income families. At the other extreme, all IB schools in the Middle East are private, catering to an elite group of students (Bunnell, 2011a, p. 171). The wide range of IB schools each have its own characteristics, agenda, and concerns, making upholding unity of the IB community a daunting task.

**Concerns over Education Denationalization**

As previously discussed, the IB started with international schools catering to a minority of children from mobile families, but it has involved an increasing number of private and public schools over the years. In 2010, among the 3,035 IB schools in 139 countries, half of them were state schools (Resnik, 2012, p. 248). In the US, to respond to the call of globalization, policymakers welcomed the IB, and federal funding has been provided for public schools to incorporate IB programs since 2003 (Bunnell, 2011b, p. 75). As the IB grows, its influence in policy and curriculum reform and the media has been rising accordingly. An extreme example of this tendency is that the IB diploma might take the place of the Australian Certificate of Education (as cited in Resnik, 2012, p. 249). Not surprisingly, many people, including politicians and parents, are concerned that the IB will take over national curriculum and diminish national identity. The IB thus has met with resistance in countries like France and New Zealand, where a national curriculum has remained strong and centralized; in England, its success is limited at the advanced level (A-Level) due to the 1998-introduced national Curriculum of
England (Bunnell, 2011b, p. 70). This concern over national interests will continue to prevent the IB from penetrating into national education systems in the world.

**Conclusion**

In response to the demand for a globally accepted curriculum for mobile families after World War II, some pioneers of international education created the IBDP (IB Diploma Program). As the concept of the IB was conceived during the Cold War, the IB has a radical mission to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural awareness and respect. Over the past decades, the number of IB schools has been multiplying, especially in the United States.

With this development, increasing challenges have emerged in the future landscape of the IB. The first concern is that the IB’s growth has come at the cost of compromised quality; this will be detrimental to the IB, which relies mainly on its reputation as a standardized, quality-assured product. Another challenge is to become a global player with IB schools evenly distributed all over the world to make global impact. This growth will make the third challenge even greater – to foster a strong IB community among a myriad of different schools. As the IB tries to penetrate the global market, emphasis on national identity is hampering, and will continue to hamper, its future development. In the face of all these difficulties, the IB World has to pause and reflect: what direction it should take? How can the IBO address these challenges? Further research has to be conducted in order to identify effective solutions to maintain the sustainable growth of the IB.
Introduction

On June 7th 2012, the IBO issued the results from the 2012 IBDP examination session with 119,000 entrants, an increase of over 8,000 from 2011. The report shows the average score of DP students is 29.83, while 109 students obtained the full score of 45 points. Carolyn Adams, the IB Chief Assessment Officer, claims that they are very pleased with the exam results achieved across the world; they believe “it is essential that students, teachers and universities have confidence in a robust qualification, which offers an internationally benchmarked standard against which to judge success” (IBO, 2012e).

While the IB is justified in celebrating its great success achieved over the past decades, there are hidden rocks under the powerful torrent that carries the ship of the IB World, as elucidated in the previous literature review. Inadequate attention, or worse, completely ignoring these rocks will run the ship aground or capsize it. As an adamant believer in the IB, the author of this paper aims to bring the hidden dangers to light and offer suggestions to avoid them, so the IB can navigate safely. To this end, the author first looks into the IB’s growth as a product and its strategic planning, then conducts a SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats) analysis to discern the opportunities and challenges facing the IB World. The research concludes with recommendations for the IB to overcome these challenges for sustainable growth.

The Growth of the IB as a Product

Propagation of Programs

As described in the literature review, the IB has not only grown statistically over the years, it has also developed into a complicated product. At the very beginning, to enable privileged children of diplomats or higher-class parents to access a college or university in their home country, the 2-year IBDP program was designed. Then, the IBO introduced the less-
known Middle Years Program (MYP) in 1994, and the Primary Years Program (PYP) in 1997. These programs can be combined to offer a continuum of international education; however, in reality, many schools only offer one or two of these programs. For example, in July 2010, as many as 3,000 IB schools were scattered in 139 countries offering 3,700 programs to 840,000 young people, among which, only 150 schools were offering the continuum (Bunnell, 2011c, p. 175). This suggests that each IB program can stand alone in practice, and schools have to decide whether to offer one or more of the IB programs based on their own conditions. So far, the IB World has not made any attempts to push schools to offer the whole continuum. Apart from the aforementioned three programs, the IBCC (International Baccalaureate Career-related Certificate) program was officially launched in September 2012, which offers vocational qualification to students who want to focus on career-related education. The four programs are introduced in more details below.

**IBDP (the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program).**

IBDP is a two-year pre-university course for students aged 16 to 19, and students take examinations upon completion of the course. It consists of six subjects, a 4,000-word extended essay, a course in theory of knowledge, and several creativity, action and service (CAS) projects. The six subject groups include language, individuals and societies, mathematics and computer science, the arts, experimental science, and second language; students are free to choose one course from each subject group. These six subject groups and related projects of the IBDP are illustrated in the diagram in Appendix II. The IBDP examinations (which take place annually in May and November) are available in English, French, and Spanish, and are marked by external examiners. This challenging academic program aims to address students’ intellectual, social, emotional, and physical well-being, while preparing them for university and life beyond.
MYP (the Middle Years Program).

The IBO brought this program to the IB World in 1994, which caters to 11 to 16 year olds. Unlike the IBDP, MYP students do not take external exams. Instead, based on their interests, they carry out a personal project, which can be an original work of art, a piece of fiction writing, an experiment, or an invention. In this program, the fundamental concepts of holistic education, communication and intercultural awareness are embedded in the five areas of interaction – human ingenuity, community and service, health and social education, environments, and approaches to learning – as shown in the diagram in Appendix III. These five areas of interaction empower students to connect different subjects, apply their classroom knowledge to the real world and global issues, and reflect and act on their learning.

PYP (the Primary Years Program).

The PYP program is designed to demonstrate and enhance the learning of students aged 3 to 12. This course involves six transdisciplinary themes of global significance, engaging children with their surroundings and the real world as shown in the diagram in Appendix IV. The six themes are sharing the planet; who we are; where we are in place and time; how we express ourselves; how the world works; and how we organize ourselves. Through a unit of inquiry, students explore each theme with in-depth study, which helps them construct meaning, make connections between subjects, develop conceptual understanding, work collaboratively, consider multiple perspectives, think critically, and reflect on their learning.

IBCC (the International Baccalaureate Career-related Certificate).

In 2006, the IBO initiated a trial program of the IBCC in 12 schools around the world. The positive feedback from participants led to the program being fully operational in September 2012 (IBO, 2012b, p. 5). This program integrates the IB’s educational principles, vision and
learner profile into a unique course that combines academic vigor with the practical application of vocational or technical studies. Students can take two or more IBDP courses combined with four core IBCC courses: approaches of learning, a reflective project, language development, and community and service. The IBCC adds value to schools that already offer the IBDP specifically designed for them to provide a flexible learning framework that meets the needs of students, the local community, and the world.

**Expanded Online Presence**

Apart from creating more programs, the IB also has expanded its presence in the virtual world since 2007 when the Digital Space Initiative was designed to provide an online, web-based virtual community. In the same year, the IB introduced a learner profile, which advocates that IB students are “inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced and reflective” (IBO, 2012f). In March 2008, as part of the IBDP online project, the Virtual High School initiated its first online courses.

One year later, the IB partnered with RM Education plc, a leading provider of educational services based in Oxfordshire, England to launch an electronic marking system called Scoris (Bunnell, 2011c, pp.177-178). The IB 2011 Annual Review ascertains that this E-marking system has worked effectively, and the IB is aimed to e-mark all scripts in 2013. Furthermore, the review reports that in November 2011, IBO invited all IB World Schools to abandon their postal system and upload coursework to audio files online for oral tasks. This initiative encouraged the IBO to conduct a pilot exercise in May 2012 to accept electronic uploads of visual artwork. Further trial and evaluation of the system will be conducted before the IBO invites all schools to participate (IBO, 2012b, p. 2). These initiatives designate that the IB has
not neglected the digital space; rather, it has stayed abreast with technology and enhanced its impact through the virtual world.

**The IB’s Strategic Planning**

Bunnell (2011c) has illustrated that the IBO has been adjusting its strategic planning based on the different stages of its growth. In 2004, the IB World hit the mark of 2,000 schools; since then, this number has been doubling every five years. In April of the same year, the IBO stipulated a ten-year strategic plan in which planned growth was the key word and enrolment of one million students by the year 2014 was projected (As a matter of fact, as shown in the previous statistics, this goal has already been reached this year with 1,055,000 students). In 2006, the IBO updated this plan to stress “wider access” and “greater impact” in future growth. Currently, the IB’s goal is to serve 2.5 million children in 10,000 schools by 2020 (p. 176). The speedy development of the IB means the planning process is not a static one; as such, the IBO has to be proactive with a clear vision in order to achieve planned growth. With this goal in mind, the author conducts a S.W.O.T analysis on the IB as a product, to gather a clear picture of its position on the market of the international education.

**S.W.O.T Analysis**

**The IB’s Strengths**

As shown in the literature review, the last three decades have witnessed the skyrocketing rise of the IB. This rise has not occurred by accident; rather, it is because the IB has established its reputation as a high quality, standardized product. There are four major strengths integrated in its challenging curriculum and rigorous assessment: reliability and consistency of assessment, quality education leads to excellent academic performance, intercultural awareness that fosters students’ intercultural competence, and critical thinking and social skills.
Reliability and consistency.

For the IB, quality should be judged in terms of consistency and reliability, stated Walker (2005), the Director General of the IBO (as cited in Bunnell, 2011c, p. 178). The IB has established itself as a quality product over the years with consistent and reliable assessment of its Diploma Program (DP). Walker (2007) boasted that the DP pass rate remained at an average of 82.2 percent between 1998 and 2007, with a maximum spread of only 3.4 percent (Bunnell, 2011c, p. 178). Numerous studies also have proven that in spite of the propagation of IB schools and candidates, the IB has not suffered any form of grade inflation. Bunnell (2011c) has compared the IB with the almost never failing English General Certificate of Education Advanced Level system (A-Level). In 2009, the A-Level pass rate of the 310,000 students in the UK excluding Scotland climbed to 97.5%, the 27th consecutive year of rise in the pass rate. On the other hand, the IB’s failure rate (scoring less than 24 points) was 21.29% in the same year. Among all students who passed the A-Level, above 26.7% of them were at grade A, up 0.8 percent than 2008, marking the 12th year-on-year increase; whereas only 1.8 percent of students achieved the full score of 45 points on the DP (Bunnell, 2011c, p. 180). The well-testified record of the IB’s reliability and assessment reflects the high standard of its programs, which is the key to the IB’s worldwide recognition.

Academic excellence.

The IB’s challenging programs and rigorous assessment have led to IB students’ better academic performance than their non-participating peers, a result proven by a number of studies. In 2004, among the 31,413 students taking 81,182 IB exams in the US, 7,790 of them obtained their IB diploma. Almost 81 percent of IB exams taken in US schools achieved grades of 4 or above. Many educators were impressed with these figures, but what was even more impressive
was the fact that IB schools added greater chance for students to succeed in college and in life. William Kolb, Director of Admissions for the University of Florida, conducted an analysis on his freshmen’s SAT scores in 1996. He found that IB students’ average SAT score was 1,213, higher than that of AP program and the standard college prep programs, which were 1,177 and 1,158 respectively. Moreover, he discovered that IB students were better prepared to cope with the demanding academic life in college, and their grade point average as freshmen dropped only slightly from that in high school. On average, the IB students’ GPA went down 0.5, from 3.8 to 3.3, while their AP counterparts dropped 0.8, from 3.9 to 3.1, and regular college prep students lost a whole grade point, from 3.6 to 2.6 (Matthews & Hill, 2006, p. 215). All these numbers demonstrate the IB programs enable students to outperform their peers in school, which has gained the IB wide recognition from universities all over the world. According to the IBO, by the year 2009, the IB diploma was accepted for admission to 2,765 universities throughout the world (as cited in Resnik, 2012, p. 258). This recognition manifests the quality and high standards of the IBDP program; in turn, it has made the IB programs even more appealing.

**Intercultural awareness.**

At the outset, the IB was created as a curriculum to cater to different cultures; hence intercultural awareness is embedded in its mission statement, which calls for students across the world to understand that “other people, with their differences, can also be right” (IBO, 2012a). As such, the IB programs place an emphasis on developing students’ attitudes, knowledge and skills as they learn their own and other’s social, national and ethnic cultures. Meanwhile, these programs encourage students to consider a broad range of perspectives when dealing with global issues. For example, IB students have to learn to speak another language, empowering them to access another culture. Additionally, the course of community and service enables students to
interact with others; while providing service for the community, they gain a deeper understanding about themselves as well. Throughout the program, students learn about their own culture and how it fits into the world around them, and understand that their choices will affect others. Intercultural awareness leads to the development of intercultural competence and global-mindedness, which is the key for students to stay competitive in the 21st Century.

**Critical thinking and social skills.**

The IB programs aim to develop students’ critical thinking and social skills to prepare them for university and life in general. While this concept is interwoven in the teaching of six basic subject areas, these skills are especially nurtured through the three core DP programs: Theory of Knowledge (TOK), Extended Essay and Creativity, Action and Service (CAS). These courses are designed to encourage students think out of the box, reflect on their learning, conduct research into subjects of their interests, solve problems independently, and develop a sense of social responsibility. With these skills, students are well-prepared to continue to learn and cope with challenges both in their academic and personal life. Furthermore, IB students are exposed to cultural diversity, which prepares them to acquire a broad worldview and cross-cultural communication skills.

**The IB’s Weaknesses**

Despite its many strengths, like any product, the IB also has its weaknesses: the curriculum possesses a great challenge for many students, it is very expensive, and it is offered in just a few languages. Ironically, being a challenging curriculum is both a strength and a weakness for the IB: it is limited to those gifted or academically advanced students. Poelzer and Feldhusen (1997) have argued that the IB is “an alternative secondary program for gifted youth” (p. 168). Interestingly, Doherty (2009) has also noted, “The students don’t just choose the
curriculum – the curriculum chooses the students” (p. 13). As such, it is not an easy task for the IB to fulfill its goal of wider access since only higher academic achievers are able to cope with this challenging program.

Another weakness of the IB is its high costs. For example, if a school wants to offer the IBDP, the affiliation fee alone is above US$10,000. Besides, every student has to pay US$717 in total, which includes a DP candidate registration fee of US$141, and an examination fee of US$96 for each subject (96 X6=US$576). Meanwhile, to secure the IB World School license, schools must have high standard hardware such as comfortable facilities, small class size, modern laboratory equipment, sufficient books in the library, advanced computer services, pre-service and in-service teacher training, and expensive IB programs and texts (Resnik, 2012, p. 261). Admittedly, these state-of-the-art facilities and equipment ensure a quality education; however, it can be a huge burden for low-income families, even in developed countries. Resnik (2012) has affirmed that in under-developed countries, such as Argentina and Chile, it is difficult even for rich families to afford having their children attend a private IB school where parents bear the full cost of their children’s education (p. 261). The expensive and highly demanding academic programs of the IB have led many to believe that the IB is an elitist educational system.

The third weakness of the IB is its linguistic limitation. As IBO clearly states on its website, the IB publishes both PYP and MYP curriculum documents in English, French and Spanish, although schools can teach these curricula in any language they choose. This means, even though the PYP and MYP programs can be taught in any language, in general, students can only take the IB exams in three languages: English, French and Spanish (IBO, 2012g). Although there is some new development in this regard as Chinese has been included as a grading
language for the MYP curriculum recently. Not surprisingly, the language barrier has precluded more schools from entering the IB World; the IB has to be made available in many more languages in order to further expand its presence.

**Opportunities**

In the 21st century, globalization is not an empty word; rather, it is an everyday reality. As a result, the competition for talented people with intercultural competence has become increasingly tense. At the same time, to build knowledge economy in the new era, businesses and organizations set their eyes on people who have critical thinking and problem solving skills. Both trends are conducive to the development of the IB as its programs are specifically designed to equip students with such skills. The IB definitely has a strong appeal in Australia, which invited Doherty (2009) to look into the debate over the Australian government’s intention to take the IB as a centralized national curriculum. This consideration is a double-edged sword for the IB: on one hand, this might alarm some people that the IB will take over their national education; yet on the other, it suggests the IB has established itself as a well recognized quality curriculum.

Apart from the above trends for talent with intercultural competence, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, another trend also works in the favor of the IB: the number of people speaking English will grow by leaps and bounds. As Bunnell (2011a) has noted, a 2006 British Council report predicts that half of the people on the earth will be using or learning English by 2015. Meanwhile, the IB has great potential to expand in the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) where only five percent of the IB schools were located in early 2010. This potential expansion might occur in the Middle East as well, a place where people have been attaching increasing importance to international education, whereas it remained home to only
two percent of the IB schools in the same year (p. 172). These figures augur great potential for the IB to boom across the world.

**Threats**

As a major leader in international education, up to the first decade of the 21st century, the IB enjoyed a monopoly in this field. However, it cannot rest on its laurels as new threats are looming on the horizon. As exemplified in the literature review, the IB World has been facing several challenges: undermined quality, unbalanced growth, lack of the IB community, and concerns over education denationalization. All these problems are diluting and will continue to dilute its hard-earned brand power.

In addition, the landscape of international education has been changing rapidly in recent years with more international curricula emerging. For example, in April 2003, the Cambridge International Primary Programme was initiated. In 2008, in order to compete with the exported and expensive IBDP program, the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), UK’s number one examination body, introduced its “AQA Baccalaureate” (Bunnell, 2011a, p. 175). Another example is Avenues World Schools that opened its first campus in New York this fall. According to its website, over the next decade or so, there will be 20 or more Avenues world schools built in leading cities (Avenues: The World School Website, 2012). These developments indicate the era of the IB World monopoly has been replaced by one of competition, making its goal of wider access and greater impact even more difficult to achieve.

**Recommendations**

The above S.W.O.T analysis outlines the status quo of the IB World. On the macro level, education internationalization will continue to push its growth; on the micro level, its unique strengths and proven quality might lead to a rosy future. However, with all its growing pain as
depicted above, the path to this future is by no means smooth. Bearing in mind all the challenges and threats the IB faces, the author has come up with the following recommendations.

**Quality Control Through Planned Growth**

The key to the success of the IB is mainly attributed to its high quality. Without assured quality, the IB World will collapse in today’s cutthroat marketplace. Therefore, the IB must set quality control as its top priority. This task is not only the responsibility of the Office of Quality Control; rather, it is the responsibility of every IB member, be it an examiner, a teacher, or an administrator. To realize this goal, first and foremost, the IB should raise the awareness of quality assurance throughout the organization. Second, the IBO should be more proactive and ensure that the IB grows in a planned manner. When there is conflict between quality and quantity (e.g. increase of IB schools), concern over quality should prevail. In doing so, the IB might lose some profit in the short run; but keeping its good reputation as a quality curriculum will lead to long-term success.

**Market Penetration**

As Bunnell (2011a) has suggested, the easiest way for the IB to achieve wider access is to grow internally (p. 175). At present, among the total 3,483 IB schools, only 204 offer all three programs – the continuum (IBO, 2012h). The number of schools by program combination and region is shown below in Table 2. If the IB can convince all IB schools to implement the continuum, the number of IB students will multiply substantially.

In marketing, this strategy is called “market penetration”. For the IB to penetrate its existing market, the IBO should use research results to convince schools that if a student pursues all three programs, the chances of him or her passing the IB Diploma Program are much higher. Since the IBDP is such a challenging program, it is critical for students to lay a solid foundation
from the beginning of their schooling. If a student starts the IB curriculum from the elementary level, by the time he or she enters high school, the IB Diploma Program won’t pose as much a challenge to him or her as to those who take it without any preparation. As such, this strategy can also help the IB to gradually cast out of its image as an “elitist product”. Thus, the IBO should make efforts to educate schools about the great benefits of offering the continuum to students.

Table 2: Number of Schools by Program Combination and Region

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Combination</th>
<th>Africa/ Europe/Middle East</th>
<th>Asia-Pacific</th>
<th>Latin America</th>
<th>North America &amp; the Caribbean</th>
<th>Total schools</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PYP only</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYP only</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP only</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>1,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All three</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PYP+MYP</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PYP+DP</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYP+DP</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total schools</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>1726</td>
<td>3,483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Listen to the Market (Focus on Universities)

As a product, the IB’s customer base is a very interesting mix, which includes students, parents, and schools, with students at the core. Students take the IB curriculum believing the IB diploma can give them higher chance of getting into a good university. It is from this perspective, the author contends the IB should consider universities as one group of its customers as well. No matter how fantastic the IB claims its curriculum to be, without acceptance from good universities, no students will participate in its programs. This is why when designing curriculum, the IB should listen to universities, and find out what qualifications they look for from a potential candidate.

As a matter of fact, the IB has made remarkable progress in this regard; as previously stated, 2,765 universities across the world recognized the IB diploma by the year 2009 (as cited
in Resnik, 2012, p. 258). However, the IB should not stay content with the current achievement; it should strive for even wider recognition. Furthermore, as the world constantly changes, the IB should keep up with the times, and should not take for granted that its curriculum can remain successful forever. To this end, the IB should keep a close eye on new development in education, and adjust its programs to align with the need of universities and the society.

**Seeking Philanthropic Funds to Expand in the Developing World**

Regarding the unbalanced growth in the world, one way for the IB to spread its mark is to seek financial support from charity. The major problem that has kept the IB from thriving in the developing world such as Africa, is the high costs involved in establishing IB schools including providing well-trained teachers and state-of-the-art facilities and equipment. However, the IB needs to maintain its quality, so compromising on the aforementioned hardware is not an option. To deal with this financial strain, the IB should actively seek to provide more financial aid to students from poor families. A good example is, in fall 2009, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided funds for the IB on a three-year project “IB Access Project” to help minority or poor students to join the MYP or DP program. This project has been ongoing in eight schools in Maryland, Tennessee, and Florida in the US (Corcoran & Gerry, 2010, p. 1). If the IBO can reach out for more funds to implement similar projects in the developing world, the striking discrepancy in terms of the IB’s geographic presence will be diminished.

**Strengthen the IB Community**

The speedy growth of the IB has made it difficult to keep a sense of unity among various IB schools; yet such unity is crucial for the future development of the IB as a whole organization. If the IB World is not united, with different schools sending different messages, the image of the IB will be damaged sooner or later. Therefore, every IB school should share the mission and
vision of the IB, and all schools should observe a set of core values and requirements stipulated by the IBO. Establishing a sense of community does not mean all IB schools should be exactly the same: they can each keep their own culture or features, but they must share the core values and comply with the fundamental rules of the IB World.

Actually, the IBO has realized that the IB community is not yet strong, and has taken actions to address this problem. In 2007, the IB launched the IB community theme “Sharing our humanity”, which requires all IB World schools to focus on the following five issues:

- Education for all
- Peace and conflict
- Global infectious diseases
- Digital divide (access to technology)
- Disasters and emergencies

To support this initiative, the IBO has also dedicated a “Global engage” website (http://globalengage.ibo.org) for member schools to engage with global issues and connect with each other. This project provides a platform for communication among all IB schools; the IBO should make good use of it to foster a stronger sense of the IB community.

**Conclusion**

In the 21st Century, globalization has further pushed forward education internationalization. In this context, it is opportune to examine an international curriculum that has the potential to provide worldwide students with quality education. This is why the author has conducted this study on the history and present of the IB (International Baccalaureate), in order to draw lessons from its past and build on its success in the future.

With that in mind, this paper starts with a literature review, canvassing the IB’s history, growth, and mission. From an experimental program catering to only an elite group of diplomats and mobile families after the World War II, the IB today has more than one million participants
all over the world. It has not only multiplied in terms of numbers, but has grown into a sophisticated product with its four programs (PYP, MYP, IBDP and IBCC) and amplified online presence. However, the prodigious growth has brought considerable stress and strain to the IB World: it has been a challenge for the IB to maintain its quality; its unbalanced growth bespeaks a deviation from its mission to go global; there is a lack of unity within the IB World; and concern over education denationalization halts its future development.

Though fraught with challenges, the IBO has been very ambitious in its strategic planning, striving to achieve wider access and greater impact. With this objective in mind, the author performs a S.W.O.T analysis probing the IB as a product to understand both challenges and opportunities facing the IB World. For the IB to remain a winner on the market of international education, the IBO has to plan its growth with quality being top priority. Given that many IB schools only offer one or two of its programs, the IB can enjoy a much greater market share if it can convince its member schools to offer more of its programs. Moreover, the IB has to understand the market – the needs of universities – to prepare students in the right direction. Last but not least, the diverse group of IB schools must share the core values, vision and mission of the IB, and abide by a set of basic rules to keep the same IB identity and build a stronger IB community. If the IB can preserve its unique strengths and take up its challenges in an appropriate and timely manner, achieving global access and impact will become reality despite the fierce competition in the 21st Century.
Reference


http://www.avenues.org/world-school


http://www.ibo.org/facts/schoolstats/progsbycountry.cfm

http://www.ibo.org/announcements/2012/ib-diploma-programme-2012-results-released.cfm


IBO, (2012g). Four programmes at a glance. Retrieved from:
http://www.ibo.org/programmes/index.cfm

http://www.ibo.org/facts/schoolstats/progcombinationsbyregion.cfm

http://globalengage.ibo.org/about-ib-community-theme


Appendix I

Table 1: Number of IB Schools in Some Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total IB Schools</th>
<th>Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1,382</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>3,473</td>
<td>970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US/World Ratio</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note that one school may offer one or more programs.
Appendix II

IBDP (IB Diploma Program)
Appendix III

MYP (Middle Years Program)
Appendix IV

PYP (Primary Years Program)