

Changing from a Two-Model System back to a One-Model System: A Qualitative Study on an International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Program English Department from the Perceptions of the Teachers as the School Responds to Educational Reforms and IB Requirements

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Abstract

International Baccalaureate (IB) Chinese Internationalised Schools who teach compulsory education are tasked with meeting the demands of both the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the IB. This follow-up study documents the transition of a Middle Years Program English department from a Two-Model System back to a One-Model System to meet requirements of both respective authorities. Advantages of the One-Model System are presented including communication, but continued disadvantages highlighted in the Two-Model system are also present, specifically the appropriateness of the MYP for students of low level English ability. Assessment tensions are underscored with school leadership forcing MYP teachers to inflate MYP summative assessment scores while also requiring teachers to implement unstandardized in-house Chinese National Curriculum ‘based’ examinations. Scores from both forms of assessment were used interchangeably as a measurement to determine student phasing. Reasons for these assessment policy changes were related to parents, marketing, and preparation for Chinese national examinations. The use of inflated MYP assessment scores and non-standardized in-house examinations raises questions about the legitimacy of this CIS’s MYP English teaching and learning practices and perhaps the greater Chinese context as CIS who to teach the MYP implement policies to meet MOE CNC examination requirements.

Keywords: International Baccalaureate, Chinese Internationalised Schools, Two-Model System, One-Model System, Assessment

DOI: 10.29329/ijpe.2025.1163.3

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INTRODUCTION

This follow-up study, along with the initial study (Clark & Terrett, 2024), is in response to Bunnell's (2020) invitation to scholars to investigate "significant transformations... in the characteristics, purpose, and identity of certain institutions... particularly from those with firsthand experience of these changes within...mainland China" (p. 3), as international schools undergo a transitional period. This article also looks to provide findings for scholars such as Wright et al. (2022a) who have called on researchers to provide authentic accounts for how Chinese IB schools are adapting to education reforms. Two types of international schools are found in the Chinese education system. This first is the traditional understanding of an international school, termed Type-A in the literature (Hayden & Thompson, 2013), designated as 'Schools for Children of Foreign Workers' in the Chinese context.

The second type of international school is non-traditional, termed Chinese Internationalized Schools (CISs) in the literature, which have seen rapid growth in China (Keeling, 2019; Poole, 2020). These schools cater to affluent Chinese stakeholders and teach some form of British, American, or Canadian curriculum (Wu & Koh, 2022a). A hallmark of these schools is their bilingual curriculum and employment of both expatriate teachers and local Chinese mainland teachers. Poole (2020) states "CISs are characterised by the coexistence of national and international orientations which are often in tension, leading to dissonance" (p. 6).

This dissonance is further exacerbated by Ministry of Education (MOE) policies which limit, restrict, or completely censor foreign curricula (Deng et al., 2023). Wright et al. (2022a) report the MOE tightened regulations for CISs beginning in 2021 with the introduction of policies such as the banning of foreign textbooks, but mention some schools work around these restrictions by offering international curriculum as extension or integrated courses. The ability for schools to integrate the CNC and a foreign curriculum have been called into question by some researchers (Poole, 2016).

The context of the present study, a CIS middle school English department, is the same as a previous study conducted by the same researchers (Clark & Terrett, 2024) who documented the dissonance this department experienced as the school tried to find a means to satisfy both the International Baccalaureate (IB) and the new reform policies enacted by the MOE. The CIS's leadership decided to create what they branded an AB model, which for clarity Authors (2024) later termed a "Two-Model" system, in the middle school English department to meet the demands of both organisations. Model-A would be tasked with teaching the CNC and Model-B would teach the MYP. School leadership marketed the Two-Model system to parents as a blended approach combining the best aspects of both curricula. Results indicated the 'integration' between the CNC and the MYP for the department between the two Models was to the degree that both could be conceptually understood as constituting the English department, but teachers' perceptions defined the two Models as being completely separate in practice (Clark & Terrett, 2024). This was the first documented case, to our knowledge, of a CIS implementing a framework in which both curricula were taught independently by a single department under the guise of integration. This follow-up study explores and reassesses teachers' perceptions in the same English department as these teachers transitioned from the Two-Model system back to a One-Model system.

Theoretical Framework

This study continued to use Albert and Whetten's (1985) organisational identity as the lens to view participant responses. Researchers believe the collective understandings of the participants regarding the English department's identity to be central and reasonably permanent, created from the interactions between members of the department which was established in the seminal study (Clark & Terrett, 2024). In alignment with organisational identity, multiple identities were identified which were influenced by internal and external factors (Authors, 2024; Pratt and Foreman, 2000) leading to synergy and dissonance. The continued use of organisational identity is appropriate for this study and is justified by an organisation's identity forever being fluid and dependent upon the members of the

organisation as well as changing external factors. In this case, some members left the department while the department dropped the Two-Model system and transitioned back to a One-Model system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chinese Internationalized Schools (CISs)

CISs are schools which cater to an affluent Chinese middle-class and offer a foreign bilingual curriculum to Chinese students delivered by Chinese and expatriate teachers (Poole, 2020). The Chinese faculty normally outnumber the expatriate faculty (Gaskell, 2019; Poole, 2020). These schools provide an alternative route for stakeholders who lack the means to access the local public schools or for students who have failed out of the public school system (Young, 2018).

This is particularly salient for students entering their high school years due to the structure of the Chinese education system; specifically, the Zhongkao, the high school entrance exam, and the Gaokao, the university entrance exam. Students who fail the Zhongkao do not get placed in a high school and instead move to vocational or technical schools. Students who perform poorly may be placed in a low-ranked high school meaning their chances of accessing a top Chinese university are negligible due to the difficulty of the Gaokao. Students who enrol in a CIS high school program are not required to take the Zhongkao to gain entrance and in entering a CIS high school program are exempt from taking the Gaokao. In doing so, students forfeit their right to a Chinese university education to access a potentially higher quality of education compared to the trajectory of attending a vocational school or a low-ranked high school. We note this can be assumed for the majority of students attending CISs, there still remains a minority of high academic achieving students who choose CISs as a pathway to elite universities.

Most research on CISs regarding the IB in China is focused on the IB Diploma Program (DP). However, the IB consists of four programs including the Primary Years Program (PYP), Middle Years Program (MYP), Diploma Program (DP), and the Career-related Program (CP). The research presented in this study is unique due to the context being an IBCIS MYP. This context is significantly different compared to the IBDP context due to the curriculum restrictions placed on PYP and MYP CISs which are not apparent in IBDP CISs.

The PYP and MYP run from grades 1 to 9 which is designated as compulsory education in China. Schools who serve these student populations are prohibited from using foreign curricula and textbooks (CPC Central Committee and State Council, 2019; MOE, 2020). Wu and Koh (2022b) found some schools renamed their programs, realigned content with the CNC, and increased students' exposure to Chinese history, culture, and technological advancements in order to promote patriotism. Mandatory flag raising ceremonies for these schools can also be viewed as supporting this increase in patriotism (Wright et al., 2022b). Deng et al., (2023) have referred to this as the fourth phase of IB development in China which they termed "localization". Previously there was a focus on integration between the IB and CNC, now however the emphasis is on placing the CNC and Chinese identity at the core of education (Deng et al., 2023). This increase in patriotism across the curriculum creates dissonance, requiring schools to reevaluate their position in the Chinese education system and adapt to policy changes.

Authors (2024) documented how one MYP CIS implemented what was later termed a Two-Model system to meet the demands of both the IB and the MOE. School leadership reorganised an MYP English department creating what leadership designated a Model-A group and a Model-B group. Model-A was tasked with teaching the CNC and Model-B the IB. Although this new Two-Model system was marketed to parents as an integrated model with their respective subject matter experts which would benefit students more compared to the previous One-Model system, the Two-Model system was abandoned the following year in favour of returning to a One-Model system. There were several challenges when implementing the Two-Model system.

Structural Challenges (Department Organization, Time, Classes)

The first challenge was the structural organisation between the Model-A and Model-B. Model-A and Model-B, even though under the umbrella term of the English department, had two separate line-managers who met infrequently. Model-A and Model-B even met separately in what were colloquially termed “department” meetings even though the entire department, both Model-A and Model-B, members were not present. Both Models shared the same open-plan office space, but most members were separated by an invisible line which divided the office. Only one member of Model-A located their desk in an area which was otherwise Model-B terrain. The first time both Models met was when the original study was first presented. Teachers' time schedules also made regular full department meetings impossible.

Another structural challenge was student placement in classes. Before implementing the Two-Model system, leadership was informed collaboration between Models would only be possible if both Models' students were phased into the same classes so these same classes could be taught by teachers from both Models. Model-B phased students, a requirement of the MYP, based on Aptis data as a means of measuring student language ability, with the Aptis test sat once each year. Leadership decided not to phase students for Model-A and did not provide reasoning to support this decision. One possible reason may have been staffing, with Model-A not having enough teachers to cover the number of Model-B phased classes. At the beginning of the second semester, leadership decided to phase Model-A classes. This may be seen as an attempt to appease parents instead of authentic phasing because these classes again were not phased according to Model-B, but independently based on Model-A test results. Parents were seen as being a powerful force of change in the school by both Models and is similar to reports by Wu and Koh (2022b, p.14) who found “pressure from parents, making it nearly a ‘must’ for international schools to follow their demands.”

Conceptual Challenges

Both Models presented different collective understandings of their and the other Model's identities. Model-A viewed themselves as Chinese teachers with a focus on teaching grammar, reading, vocabulary, and writing. Model-A teachers described these aspects of language as the basic precepts or core for language acquisition. Model-A saw Model-B teachers as Western and teaching listening and speaking with a focus on project-based learning. While Model-A was composed of only teachers of Chinese nationality, Model-B was composed of both expatriates and teachers of Chinese nationality. Model-B had more Chinese nationals than expatriate teachers. Model-B saw themselves as IB, but like Model-A reports, this was also reported by some Model-B teachers as being Western. Model-B also saw their instruction as appropriate for students with higher levels of English ability. Model-B viewed Model-A as Chinese teachers teaching the CNC with a focus on examination.

Dissonance was evident in the perceptions of both Models. Model-A was found to not be implementing the government mandated CNC, but instead a government-approved textbook due to most students having surpassed the CNC provided English textbooks. Similar to Wu and Koh's (2022b) findings, Authors (2024) documented a shift to adopt government approved textbooks. Wu and Koh (2022b) documented school leaders stating these textbooks as being government-mandated. This is in contrast to Authors (2024) who recorded teachers selecting government “approved” textbooks to use. This could be an area of the law for which CIS schools who serve compulsory years may be still trying to navigate.

Model-A also believed MYP English Language Acquisition (ELA) was mostly a communicative curriculum and did not stress what they called “core” skills necessary for language learning. The MYP requires assessments to be authentic and this could have been the reason for why Model-A believed the MYP ELA was project-based and communicative in nature. This could have also influenced Model-B teachers' reports where teachers saw communicative skills as the basis for language acquisition while Model-A stressed grammar and vocabulary.

Student challenges were also present. Teachers reported the difficulties students had adapting to both curricula. Students essentially had double the workload. Students went to two different classes, did two different sets of homework, and sat two different assessments. Students were also confused when courses or teachers seemed to contradict each other. Students with higher levels of English were reported by some Mode-A teachers as seeing Model-A being below them, causing classroom behaviour issues.

Response to Challenges

All teachers believed the Two-Model system could be improved. Most suggestions centred around better ways to integrate the Models including shared meeting times, shared classes, shared teaching, and a shared curriculum. After a meeting to present results, many teachers voiced the idea of developing a structural alignment of a shared system with students taking Model classes based on English ability. Specifically, Model-A could focus on the “core” skills for lower level English ability students by teaching more periods each week for lower-phased students. The example given was if students had 6 periods of English a week, 4-5 periods could be Model-A and 1-2 Model-B. This scale was not succinctly defined and was only discussed with the opposite being true for students with high English ability. The question arose from teacher-researchers what would distinguish this new form of integrated Two-Model system from a One-Model system.

Integrated or One-Model Systems

The MYP may be able to adapt to the MOE requirements while also providing an ‘international’ education. Without prescribed textbooks, the MYP is not in violation of the MOE’s strict textbook policies. The MYP uses conceptual understandings to organise the curriculum which allow for teachers to populate and align content, including government-mandated content, while still maintaining MYP practices. This is not to say there are no difficulties in aligning compulsory education with the MYP.

Perry et al. (2018) noted MYP teacher perceptions of obeying “two masters” when adhering to MYP and Australian national curriculum standards. This tension caused teachers an increase in “workload and stress” (p. 4). However, teachers did report integration was “not impossible. It just makes life a bit tougher” (p. 4). Timetables, professional support, planning, and resource allocation were all challenges reported by teachers (Perry et al., 2018). Sizmur and Cunningham (2013) recorded 61% of their sample of UK MYP teachers reporting encountering problems when teaching the MYP. One teacher reported schools should choose either the UK national curriculum or the MYP curriculum, but not both. This statement was linked to the tension teachers felt in meeting assessment demands of both with most teachers reporting to focus on the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs) over the MYP.

Final responses from teachers went as far as recommending “Don’t try to do it (MYP) in parallel with another qualification if you want it (MYP) to be meaningful. Don’t do it (MYP) alongside anything else. All or nothing!” (p. 42). Other public schools which teach a national curriculum and the MYP have given up the MYP due to the difficulty in meeting the demands of both curricula standards (Dickson et al., 2020). Within the Chinese context, Deng et al. (2023) cite two Chinese CNC subject-matter experts promoting the IB philosophy over the exam-oriented textbook-based Chinese education system. Some of the problems mentioned in the integrated One-Model system: timetabling, planning, lack of teacher support, assessment confusion (Perry et al., 2018; Sizmur & Cunningham, 2013); are similar to issues found in the Two-Model (Clark & Terrett, 2024).

The purpose of this study was to continue to explore teachers’ perceptions within a MYP CIS English department as the department continued to meet the demands of both the IB and MOE standards. This follow-up study provides micro-level insights to the macro-level changes observed by researchers (Bunnell, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The previous study employed qualitative methodology in the form of a case study through individual interviews. This study looked to again explore teacher perceptions using qualitative case study design which was deemed most appropriate to provide insights to the given research questions:

RQ1: How do you feel about the One-Model system compared to your previous experience of the Two-Model system from last year?

RQ2: What are the advantages or disadvantages of the One-Model system compared to a Two-Model system?

RQ3: How do you feel about the IB and its appropriateness as a curriculum to teach Chinese students?

The focus of the previous study was on individual perceptions outside the influence of the group to explore how the department's identity was formed by the teachers who made up the Models. In this way we created a bottom-up analysis allowing us to collate themes which were shared or not shared across the group. These themes also provided insights on the difficulties in implementing a Two-Model curriculum as a means to satisfy both curriculum standards. The identity of the organisation is somewhat set from the last study, and with the return to a One-Model system, as mandated by school leadership, we decided to implement a focus group in lieu of traditional case study interviews. We chose to use a focus group to allow for teachers to build off each other's perceptions. Focus groups are suitable when researching understandings which emerge through group interaction (Cohen et al., 2018). We believed these "group" understandings were most appropriate in answering the research questions and the design was more aligned with the purpose of the study. The department was no longer two separate Models, instead having been placed into One-Model, with the aim of the school leadership to create an integrated department teaching an integrated curriculum. We had also already discussed the previous study's findings which helped to foster feelings of teachers belonging to a single department further strengthening the "group" mentality. One researcher served as a moderator facilitating the discussion (Cohen et al., 2018).

Participants

Clark who served as moderator did not participate in the discussion. The researcher no longer worked at the study site, but participated in the research as the focus group discussion facilitator (Cohen et al., 2018). Terrett took on the role of researcher-participant and participated in the focus group discussion as they were still an active member of the department. The English department is composed of 10 teachers. Two of these teachers are expatriates and the other 8 are Chinese Nationals. Three of the teachers are male while 7 teachers are female. All 10 teachers participated in the study and no new hires were made so from the original study 4 teachers were Model-A and the other 6 were Model-B (Author, 2024). Of the 10 teachers, 6 teachers are new to the One-Model system whereas 4 teachers have experience with both the One-Model and Two-Model system. All teachers of Chinese nationality teach the MYP ELA. The expatriate teachers support MYP ELA instruction by providing once a week listening and speaking to different ELA classes. The expatriate teachers are the only teachers who instruct the MYP English Language and Literature (ELL) students.

Data Collection and Analysis

Terrett presented a request in a department meeting for volunteers to participate in the follow-up study. Teachers discussed time schedules and decided the end of the semester would be most convenient. This also gave teachers the opportunity to experience final assessment under the new One-Model system potentially providing more important insights. Teachers suggested the focus group occur over Wechat, a Chinese messaging application. This was agreed upon by everyone with participants stating convenience and the preference to not conduct the study at school. This is of note,

teachers implied this may provide more ‘valid’ data. Also, researchers noted this format would leave a clear record of discussion and could help to address a limitation of focus groups where participants sometimes dominate discussion leaving others without the opportunity to voice their opinions (Cohen et al., 2018). All participants were given informed consent and understood their participation was voluntary. They were made aware their responses would be kept anonymous and they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Clark facilitated group discussion by posing research questions and prompts into the chat group. Teachers responded to both the facilitator’s prompts and each other. Clark judged when an appropriate amount of time had passed, and qualified this by asking “Would anyone else like to respond to the discussion or the prompt before moving on?”. When no responses were given to the affirmative, Clark submitted the next research question or prompt. This was done in succession until all research questions and prompts had been asked. The discussion lasted several days and, after the data had been moved to secure files for analysis, the chat group was deleted.

Thematic analysis was conducted individually by manually reviewing and revisiting the participant responses obtained from the focus group, with a focus on identifying thematic content (Cohen et al., 2018). After establishing themes and categories, we convened to examine the emerging patterns, areas of agreement, and points of divergence in our analyses (Cohen et al., 2018). Consensus was reached on the identified themes and supporting evidence, which are presented below.

FINDINGS

One Department Fostering Collaboration and Communication

There were apparent advantages of the One-Model system over the Two-Model system regarding communication and group dynamics. One teacher remarked on how they felt more like they were part of a team:

I feel like we are on the same boat.

Another teacher discussed how the One-Model system allowed for better communication.

All English teachers are together in the same department, so no separation based on Model. That was really weird last year, when we didn't know what each other were doing.

The use of past tense and referring to last year “we didn't know what each other were doing” implies under the One-Model system teachers are aware of the teaching and learning occurring in each other’s classrooms. The above statement was met with affirmations from other group members lending emphasis to this “same department so no separation”.

This communication and sharing were mentioned by one teacher as they were transitioning to become a first year MYP teacher.

The good thing is our department is one, no separation anymore, and much thanks to [other Teachers] for their help.

The single department appears to better facilitate teachers in lending support, particularly veteran teachers helping novice teachers who are unfamiliar with MYP practices and standards. One teacher reported the One-Model system was better than the Two-Model, and that the One-Model was an “*IB system*”. Another teacher focused on the student experience:

Returning to the One-Model IB system was the right choice for the students.

No teacher disagreed with this statement nor did any teacher state the One-Model system was inappropriate or worse than the Two-Model system. As the teachers responded to each other in the focus group, new understandings and new definitions for terms emerged to describe this evolving One-Model system differentiating it from the Two-Model system.

Evolving Understanding of the One-model System

There was no distinction made between the One-Model system and the MYP indicating teachers had conceptually equated the One-Model system as being IB MYP.

The One-Model system is like the IB teaching model.

One teacher discussed the relationship between the IB and the CNC in the One-Model system, which had previously been the criterion for separating the Model-A (CNC) and Model-B (MYP) in the Two-Model system.

The original unit plans are based on the provided CNC textbooks. We merely adapted the content to work within an IB (MYP) curriculum.

Teachers regarded the MYP as positioned above the CNC from which it draws its foundation. While no teacher indicated the MYP was inappropriate for students, there was discussion on the appropriateness of curriculum focus and teaching methods depending on students' MYP phase. The MYP phases students for ELA with phase 1 being the lowest and phase 6 being the highest. In the study context, these phases represented almost the full range of CEFR framework levels from A1 through to C1. Students C1 and C2 had the choice to join the English language and Literature class. While discussing phasing, teachers began to change the use of the term *Model-A* from previous understandings.

For lower phased students, they should actually study Model-A first till they get enough input and learned basic vocabulary, grammar, accumulated basic reading and listening comprehension skills, and then move to IB model.

Model-A is no longer associated with CNC, but is now beginning to evolve into a term meaning “*basic*” language skills. The lower phase focus on these basic language skills was echoed by another teacher:

Specifically focusing on remedial language acquisition ... for phase 1 and 2

This statement was agreed upon by many of the teachers with everyone relating Model-A to remedial English and later with traditional pedagogy. One teacher explained the differences between the Model-A (language) and Model-B (inquiry) in terms of teaching practices.

Teachers need to balance the language part and inquiry part. Especially for lower phase kids, the inquiry part has to be reduced greatly, which would also lead to a teacher-centred class. Coz I don't think we have the luxury to do inquiry about grammar rules.

Along with “*basic*” language skills, “*remedial language*” and “*language input*” are both associated with the Model-A. One teacher described the Model-B or the MYP as being “*communicative*” in approach while the Model-A was more about content “*accuracy*”. However, these were not necessarily seen at odds and in fact were seen as beneficial.

Communicative approach prepares students for real-life situations...language accuracy... is beneficial for students' (academic) writing in the future.

Both practices (the former Model-A and Model-B) are seen as beneficial for students depending on their phase, communicative ability and accuracy of target language use. However, Model-A assessments were a source of tension for teachers. The discourse around assessment became a major theme for teachers.

Assessment Issues

Despite the absence of a formal distinction between Model-A and Model-B within the classroom, assessment practices stemming from the Two-Model system still endured. The MYP ELA only requires summative assessments based on four criteria with corresponding strands (IB, 2020). However, school leadership at this study site decided to keep the tests associated with Model-A in the Two-Model system which were drawn from the Cambridge English Qualifications.

Every half semester, we mark two [MYP] summative assessments and one KET/PET test.

In-house language proficiency examinations were developed taking questions from the Cambridge English Qualifications Key English Test (KET), Preliminary English Test (PET), and CNC. These in-house examinations were later used as an alternative measurement to determine student phasing, meaning students had the potential to move either up or down. These language assessments were given as in-house midterm and end of semester exams.

Midterm and end of semester [in-house] exam data , now seems to carry as much weight as Aptis or MYP summative assessment data, and is now a consideration in English phasing.

One teacher conveyed the belief these exams are intended to motivate students based on fear of demotion.

The role that assessment are playing is really to push...students. Coz they don't wanna be kicked down.

One teacher expressed how this format does not seem to motivate lower phase students.

You know what 1-2 students always say to me after the [MYP] summative assessment? "We are stuck with you. You can't really drop us to even a lower phase class, right?"

Of note, where one teacher states the in-house examination scores are taken into "consideration in English phasing" alluding they are used in tandem with IB summative assessment scores, this is later clarified by the same teacher who expresses how MYP assessment scores are being manipulated by school leadership.

[School leadership] *After evaluating the term grades [MYP summative assessments], Heads of departments and teachers were called in to discuss why students had not achieved the "agreed upon" grades.*

This issue with summative assessments not achieving "agreed upon" grades is not limited to the English department as this teacher references "Heads of departments" attending the meeting. This same teacher saw this change in practice as the school leadership moving away from the IB (MYP).

School leadership itself does not have faith in IB... It seems like the IB is becoming more of a marketing tool than a legitimate education system in this school.

Another teacher believed the exams were a means to align with educational reforms.

The whole point of midterm of end of semester exams [in-house examination] is to make sure the integration hasn't got CNC totally outta the picture, plus to cope with the inspection from education bureau.

A large amount of time seemed to be spent by teachers “*training [students] for standardised exam*”. Time was a pressing issue for teachers with one teacher stating “*the problem is, time will not wait*” referencing the tension between MYP practices such as inquiry-based learning and the pressure to complete content in preparation for in-house examinations. Underlying these assessment issues was the perceived influence of parents who seemed to be the motivating force for the assessment policies and phasing.

I mean, we can't really say “your kids are not meant for IB (MYP)” to their parents, right?

Other teachers discussed potential issues in presenting actual MYP standard assessment scores and depicted a three-way relationship between school leadership, parents, and the marketing department.

We would expect results [MYP summative assessment scores] to drop significantly and therefore, again, it is unlikely to be welcomed by school leaders or parents, and certainly won't be appreciated by marketing dept.

Teachers appear to believe leadership is inflating grades to appeal to parents who have purchased or who may be considering purchasing a product, the IB. This is concurrent with the previous teacher's earlier mention of marketing trumping educational value. One teacher summed up these assessment policies and changes.

Assessment is no longer meaningful, cuz they [leadership] can always change the result into whatever they [leadership] want after [assessment] has been taken.

This apparently is now the case at the study site as during discussion, teachers received a new assessment phasing policy which presented new criteria for English class placement that had been changed by leadership. These new criteria were not discussed with the department, nor did any teacher agree with the changes or voice they were beneficial for student learning.

DISCUSSION

The focus group served as a platform for the department to openly address and comprehend the challenges it encountered moving from the Two-Model to One-Model system. Teachers individually raised these issues, which were subsequently acknowledged, validated, and expanded upon by their colleagues, as indicated by the findings. A collective synergy emerged around teachers' perspectives, contributing to the solidification of the department's identity through active participation in this collaborative endeavour.

The advantage of the One-Model system over the Two-Model system appears to be an increase in teacher communication, an increase in peer support, and an increase in feelings of team camaraderie. In the original study (Clark & Terrett, 2024), there was the repeated use of the word “separate”. Teachers in this study reported the One-Model system as being in the “same boat”, “same department”, with “no separation”. The use of the phrase “same boat” implies a sense of team unity for which members are working together towards a goal. This feeling helped to foster an environment where teachers supported each other, particularly teachers new to the MYP.

Whereas in the previous study many teachers did not appear to interact across models, the discussion in this focus group saw teachers, who previously would not speak to each other, affirm and build off each other's statements facilitating discussion and collaboration. This led to synergy around

group understandings, one such understanding being the terms “Model-A” and “Model-B”, which were still used by teachers to describe teaching practices. Models were equated with teaching practices as well as pedagogy, such as Model-B being student-centred and Model-A being teacher-centred, and not content like in the previous study where Model-B teachers reported the Model-A as being CNC.

Ostensibly this is because teachers used the CNC textbooks as the base to build the MYP framework therefore integrating the content into One-Model. In the previous study (Clark & Terrett, 2024), Model-A teachers labelled their teaching as “basic language input” and “teacher-centric” which now seems to be synonymous with the term “Model-A”. “Model-B” and the “One-Model” system were used interchangeably by teachers who describe both as focusing on “inquiry-based” learning. Previously Model-A teachers had described the MYP as “spoken” and about “output”, this no longer seems to be the case. This demonstrates the fluid nature of the department’s identity as the individual teachers negotiate group and individual understandings. It also reinforces the teachers’ own perceptions regarding the improvements in departmental communication.

All teachers hold the belief the MYP ELA is appropriate for students with higher levels of academic and English ability which is similar to the first study (Clark & Terrett, 2024). All teachers voiced the concern of the appropriateness of MYP inquiry-based learning for students with limited language ability and study skills. All teachers were of the opinion lower phased classes would benefit most from more direct instruction on basic language skills such as vocabulary and grammar. These are the same opinions made in the first study (Clark & Terrett, 2024) and are consistent with recommended practices for second language learning (Goo et al., 2015).

The integration of the MYP and CNC by CISs is not new to the Chinese education system. Deng et al. (2023) delineate the integration of the IB and the CNC during a two-year period spanning 2016 to 2018 but assert this integration phase concluded with the onset of 2019, a phase they term as '*strict restriction*' (Deng et al., 2023, p. 8). Deng et al. (2023) have even quoted policymakers stating that MYP, under the new educational reforms, to be illegal for all compulsory education, yet the CIS in our study still implements the MYP as a framework. However, similar to Deng et al.’s (2023) findings, national examination pressure seems to be influencing this study site’s assessment policies and additionally may be impacting phasing policy for English language. In addition, during the writing of this article, teachers were informed government exams would begin to be implemented to monitor student learning at the CIS. Phasing and assessment led to the largest dissonance under the One-Model system as described by teachers.

Phases were connected to assessment as phase placement was determined using assessment scores. Phasing is required by the MYP for ELA but not required by the MOE. MYP assessments, in which teachers reported scores being inflated at the direction of the study site’s leadership, were given the same weight as in-house examinations. These in-house examinations were not standardised, not aligned to the MYP, nor were the original examinations for which the in-house examination was populated from created with the intention to be implemented as a means of phasing students, and did not measure the top three CEFR bands (Cambridge Assessment English, 2019, p.2). However, these in-house examinations appear to be loosely aligned to the CNC.

One teacher postulated the emphasis on in-house examinations as being a requirement of the local education bureau. The connection between the use of an unstandardized exam with content questions populated from multiple English language curricula and the Chinese local education bureau test was unclear to teachers. Potentially these in-house exams, which are not used by Chinese education bureaus for examination purposes, were seen by MYP leadership as better preparation for local education bureau tests compared to MYP summative assessments.

A result of inflating MYP assessment scores by school leadership as well as the use of unstandardized in-house examinations is inaccurate student data. Questions then arise about the ethicality of the decision making processes by the study site’s leadership, and the apparent misuse of data to make data-driven learning decisions. The focus by school leadership on artificially increasing

MYP summative assessment scores had some teachers questioning the legitimacy of the MYP practised within the study site's context, perhaps lending credence to Chinese State media scrutiny which has depicted IB CISs as corrupt for-profit institutions who have questionable "school-management" (Wright et al., 2022a, p. 8). However, it is promising that all teachers involved in the study did not agree with leaderships' actions to change student scores which challenges that same State media which has described teachers at IB CISs as "low quality" (Wright et al., 2022a, p. 8).

Parents were one reason alluded to by teachers for why school leadership was concerned with student scores. Parents seem to be a major stakeholder with teachers reporting not being able to communicate with parents about actual student performance "*I mean, we can't really say "your kids are not meant for IB (MYP)".*" Wu and Koh (2022b) discuss how parents are a powerful force at international schools for which these schools 'must' follow their demands (p. 14). The parent demand for inflated MYP scores and the use of unstandardized in-house examinations at the study site was not corroborated. However the new assessment policies were tied to parents with one teacher remarking how parents may not welcome actual student MYP performance scores and therefore the school's image would suffer, leading to challenges for marketing and finance.

One teacher believed the IB had become little more than a marketing tool for the school, and another stated they believed leadership had lost confidence in the MYP even though the MYP is what parents were paying for. School leadership appears to have manipulated grades and phasing criteria based on marketing which is related to parents as they are the purchasers of the product (the school). The implementation of in-house examinations to prepare students for national examination has been confirmed as MYP teachers were informed near the end of study that students would be sitting standardised local education bureau tests. However, how the in-house unstandardized examination, which is only partially and loosely based on the CNC, is supposed to support student preparation for Chinese local education bureau tests was not determined by teachers.

LIMITATIONS

We acknowledge the inherent limitations associated with qualitative methodology used in this study. Foremost among these limitations is the challenge of generalizability, as findings derived from our focus group may not be applicable to broader CIS populations or contexts. Furthermore, the subjectivity inherent in our study such as one researcher also having the role of participant can introduce biases in data collection, analysis, and interpretation, potentially compromising the validity of the findings. We justify the need for one of the researchers to participate based on the context of the study and the researcher being a member of the population of interest. We kept bias to a minimum by analysing findings separately before coming together to discuss results. Despite these challenges, acknowledging and addressing the limitations, we believe the study presented maintains a high level of integrity and rigour with results which are beneficial for similar contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the transition from a Two-Model to a One-Model system in CISs integrating the IB and the CNC. It underscored the advantages of the One-Model approach, emphasising enhanced teacher communication, peer support, and team camaraderie. However, despite the shift towards integration, terminology reflecting teaching practices persisted, albeit with an evolving understanding of pedagogical approaches. The study highlighted a broader tension between MYP integration and compliance with national examination standards, with CISs facing pressure to define their assessment practices and their use. School leadership's decision to manipulate MYP assessment scores related to marketing, ostensibly to assuage parental concerns about shifts in teaching, learning and assessment practice, raised questions about the fidelity of MYP implementation and underscored the influence of parental expectations on educational practices within CISs. Future research should explore the nuanced dynamics between school leadership decisions, parental demands, and student learning outcomes, particularly in navigating the complexities of international education environments and ensuring the integrity of educational frameworks amidst evolving policy landscapes.

The IB should reflect on the results presented paying particular attention to assessment and its relationship to school authorization. The IB, while not directly enabling CISs, play a major role in their legitimacy as institutions in the eyes of stakeholders.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Funding Details: The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

CRedit Author Statement: Both authors contributed equally to this article

Ethical Statement: This research was conducted in accordance with all relevant ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent from participants, maintaining confidentiality of data, and minimizing potential harm.

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