The twenty-first-century learner resides in an advanced global society that is led by the waves of the economy, advances in the technological world, concern around our safety and security, as well as demographical changes (Carver and Markatos-Soriano, 2007). The trends suggest education needs to equip students with the attitudes that promote respect for others, awareness of other cultures and diversity, and communication skills that will assist them in collaborating with those from other countries in which globalization presents. Unfortunately, there has been little research about how school districts navigate the challenges associated with implementing an inquiry-based, internationally-minded program such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) at a level that supports high rates of IB diploma acquisition.

This instrumental case study focused on the IBDP in Michigan IB schools in which 60% or more of their students obtain the IB diploma as noted by the
recent IB standard for IBDP evaluation. The overarching goal was to identify general patterns relating to implementation barriers and challenges which IB coordinators, head of schools, and teachers experienced as they delivered the DP and to describe how these schools overcame these barriers and achieve increased rates of IB diploma acquisition. This study also elicited perspectives regarding the elements that various members in the school implementation process identified as facilitators for implementing the IB Diploma Programme. The study involved the collection of qualitative data from five IB schools in which the IB educators played a main role in the implementation of their IB Diploma Programme. Data was collected through individual interviews, the review of artifacts such as IB site evaluation documents, and a rating exercise.

Content analysis, coding, and categorical analysis guided the research questions to interpret and analyze the data collected. Also, the study followed a form of interpretive analysis introduced by Smith et al. (2009) helping to reduce the data to seventeen key findings or superordinate themes as follows: (a) lack of understanding and program awareness from all stakeholders, (b) lack of initial program preparation, (c) student and staff perception, (d) lack of collaborative time, (e) increased communication to all stakeholders, (f) increased staff and student support, (g) increased awareness of curriculum and assessment, (h) implementing structural changes, (i) continuous communication to all stakeholders, (j) district and community support, (k) establishing an IB school culture, (l) ongoing IB professional development, (m) time focused on IBDP, (n) dedicated staff, (o) change in staff and student perception, (p) understanding of assessment and, (q) structural support. The key findings from the conceptual rating exercise were as follows by highest rated theme and sub-theme when averaging all three participant groups: (1) learning culture (a) shared vision/values, (2) leadership and management (b) adequate resources, (3) practice and performance (c) teacher choice, (4) monitoring and assessment (d) examiner feedback and, (5) MYP-DP transition (e) program design.

This research confirmed much of the research conducted in previous studies, but also added some new findings that could be useful to the IB community. The most significant finding during the initial implementation phase was communication as all cases noted it as being essential to getting their IBDP off the ground. Establishing a solid communication plan to reach all stakeholders helped schools establish awareness, stakeholder buy-in, build positive beliefs around the benefits of the program, and helped to build excitement of younger students at lower grade levels. Program preparation was also a relatively new finding as participants noted having structural supports, ongoing IB training, pre-IB course development, adequate resources, and time to grow as key facilitators in IBDP implementation.