

Document Analysis of School District Policies on Advanced Programs, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Credit Programs in the United States

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate the similarities and differences among the school district policies on Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Credit programs across the United States and how complicated the policies are for parents and students to read and comprehend. The study was designed as a document analysis in which a total of forty-two school districts were randomly selected across the nation, and their policies on these three advanced programs were used as the data source. Flesch-Kincaid readability test was employed to measure the readability of the each district policy based on the pattern of reading ease score guideline. In addition, implications for practice were given based on the findings of the study.

Keywords: Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Dual Credit, Readability, Document Analysis

Amerika Birleşik Devletlerinde Uygulanan; Lisede Ders Alıp Üniversitede Saydırma, Uluslararası Diploma ve Çift Kredilendirme Programları Belgelerinin İncelenmesi

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri genelinde uygulanan, lisede okurken üniversitede saydırılabilecek dersleri alma (Advance Placement), Uluslararası Diploma (International Baccalaureate) ve alınan dersi hem lise hem de sonrasında üniversite transkriptinde göstererek Çift Kredilendirme (Dual Credit) programları ile ilgili belgeleri incelemektir. Bu sayede farklı uygulamalar arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ilgili belgelerden tespit etmek, öğrenci ve aileler için bu belgelerin ne derece okunabilir ve anlaşılabilir olduklarını belirlemek hedeflenmiştir. Doküman analizi yöntemi kullanılan bu çalışmada, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri genelinden rastgele seçilen 42 okul bölgesinin sözü edilen programlarla ilgili kılavuzluk etme amacıyla hazırlanan başvuru, yerleştirme, bilgilendirme vb. amaçlı belgeleri araştırmanın verilerini oluşturmuştur. Her bir yönetmeliğin okunabilirlik puanı Flesch-Kincaid okunabilirlik testi ile ölçülmüş, ve kolay okunabilirlik puan kılavuzuna göre değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışma elde edilen sonuçlara dayalı olarak uygulamaya yönelik önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Lisede Ders Alıp Üniversitede Saydırma, Uluslararası Diploma, Çift Kredilendirme, Okunabilirlik, Doküman Analizi

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1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a driving force for stronger academic standards in the United States following World War II (College Board, 2003). The push for more rigorous curricula has expanded greatly with the vast array of educational reform movements. This was particularly true with the need to ensure students went to college in order to face the world challenges. Over the years, these reform movements have implemented many changes to the educational system to improve the standards for students in the United States. Today, there are a variety of programs and course offerings that allow students to be challenged at higher levels and standards in order to prepare them for college and career readiness. Some of these include Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Dual Enrollment (DE, or Dual Credit) courses.

Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment enrollment are on the rise. Specifically, since the 1960's there has been much emphasis on AP and IB, and more so on dual credit since the 1970's (Young et al., 2013). Currently in the IB program there are over 147 countries participating with almost 1.3 million students in the program (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013). Moreover, Advanced Placement has taken off within the last several decades with an increased number of students in these classes. "In 1954, only 532 students took AP tests. Fifty years later that number was 1.1 million" (Schneider, 2009, p. 814). Additionally, the number of students taking AP courses and exams has increased significantly from 0.6 million students (in 1997) to 1.7 million students (in 2007) (College Board, 1997, 2009b). Dual enrollment participation has also increased, from 204,790 students in 1996 to 1.2 million students in 2003 (Kim et al., 2004).

Although the standards for International Baccalaureate programs have remained ultimately the same over the years, there has been some controversy over the continual increase in the number of students taking part in Advanced Placement courses. Specifically, due in part to the growing popularity of the AP programs that "has brought about a great demand for it, and, in meeting that demand, educators and reformers have weakened the status of AP in high-status high schools" (Schneider, 2009, p. 822). Furthermore, there has been continual criticism of the strength and the credibility of AP programs (Schneider, 2009). The quality of the dual enrollment programs, on the other hand, is dependent on the quality of the faculty and university for the program or class that is being offered.

The purpose of the study was to explore the similarities and differences among the school district policies on Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Credit programs across the United States and how complicated the policies are for parents and students to read and comprehend.

2. ADVANCED PLACEMENT, INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE, AND DUAL ENROLLMENT

Advanced Placement began in 1955 and the original intent of the AP program was to provide students the opportunity to take college-level coursework and earn college credit while still in high school (Geiser, Santelices, & California University, 2004). Advanced Placement courses have significantly increased in popularity as students have tried to set themselves apart from their peers by taking these classes. Students are challenged at a college level with the opportunity to take assessments for college credit. There have been many studies showing

the progress and academic level of students taking such courses. With the growing popularity and competitive market, schools have expanded the AP programs from the high school level to the middle school level by offering Pre-AP classes to prepare students for these college level courses in high school.

The International Baccalaureate is a non-profit foundation that sets strict focus on four programs for students ranging in age from 3 to 19 to “help develop the intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013, para. 2). Students in IB programs at the high school levels “must devote their full junior and senior years to the program, which requires English and another language, math, science, social science and art, plus a course on the theory of knowledge, a 4000-word essay, oral presentation and community service” [Lewin, 2010, para. 5]. Many view the IB program as a more well-rounded approach to setting exceptionally challenging curricula with developing students’ ability to problem solve and to think more critically. The IB program

“...[A]ims 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 programs of international education and rigorous assessment. These programs encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013, para. 4-6)

Although IB offers four different programs including primary year, middle year, diploma

programs, and IBCC programs, for the purposes of this study, we will focus on the secondary levels (Diploma program [DP]) of the IB course programs as a comparison to advanced placement and dual credit courses. Similarly, IB has continued to grow in popularity as well. The IB program has become an alternative to AP by setting up an extremely dedicated two-year program for high school students to focus on a wide array of subjects.

Dual enrollment enables high school students to be enrolled in classes that count for high school and college credit concurrently (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). Dual enrollment programs have been in existence since the 1970’s but did not experience significant growth until the 1980’s (Kim et al., 2004). These programs can vary from school to school; some DE programs involve students taking college courses at their high schools via distance learning and others have students traveling to the college or university campus for classes.

2.1. Distinctions of AP, IB, and DE Programs

The importance of the AP and IB programs exist primarily to challenge students, prepare them for college and career readiness, and to make them more marketable to college and universities worldwide. Although the IB programs offers an extensive two-year program, more colleges and universities accept or give credit for AP courses than for IB courses. Dual credit courses are very similar to AP classes whereby students are given high school and college credit for one class. These dual credit types of programs are also growing in attractiveness to students as they are offered in every state in the United States, and can be taught by college professors or by high school teachers with specialized training. One primary difference however is that dual credit courses have been expanded to include students who are not only high achieving but also those that are low

or average achievers (Young et al., 2013). Although many educators have been rejuvenated over the years with the ability to teach higher achieving students in these programs, the ultimate benefits are for the students. Students often receive college credits for such courses and can even enter college at a sophomore level or beyond in some cases. Additionally, colleges and universities seek out these students for their strong academic success and willingness to demonstrate their abilities on college level work (College Board, 2003).

Dual enrollment programs “increase the rigor of the high school curriculum, reduce the costs of college, and extend a wider range of academic courses to rural or economically disadvantaged school districts” (Barnett & Stamm, 2010, p. 6). Many schools choose to offer DE rather than AP because the acquisition of college credit does not depend on making a certain score on a high-stakes test as it does in AP. Dual enrollment also creates a needed feedback loop between universities and high schools where each system can communicate its needs and goals for student achievement. The benefits of dual enrollment endure long after the high school career ends; students who participated in dual enrollment “had earned 15.1 more college credits on average than nonparticipants three years after high school” (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009, p. 53).

AP, IB, and DE programs offer students an opportunity to set themselves apart from their peers. Students in these programs clearly demonstrate their level of academic strengths as well as prove their competitiveness for acceptance into colleges and universities. Many students receive scholarships and spend less time and money taking basic college level courses. Other outcomes include exposure to a more stringent curriculum and lower costs for attending college (Young et al., 2013). Dual

enrollment courses can also ease the transition from high school to college (Barnett & Stamm, 2010).

2.2. Reasons Behind School Participation

With the ever changing demands on education and the need for continual reform, there is a vast array of options available for students. With Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), state accountability standards, vouchers, charter schools, private schools, funding, and so on, school districts and individual schools have now become marketers of their programs in order to attract and retain students and increase student achievement. Therefore, there is a growing need for differentiation of programs, which drives school participation in an assortment of programs. Furthermore, with differentiation, schools are able to attract and retain more highly qualified teachers with the options to educate a more diverse student population in terms of higher degrees of motivation, performance, and creativity.

Specifically, the Advanced Placement Incentive Program (APIP) is a novel program that includes cash incentives for both teachers and students for each passing score earned on an advanced placement (AP) exam. The APIP has been expanded to over 40 schools in Texas and is targeted primarily to low-income, minority/majority school districts with a view toward improving college readiness (Jackson, 2010).

More importantly, “anecdotal evidence and surveys of teachers suggests that many schools do have open access policies regarding AP courses, which allow for greater student participation as well” (Iatarola, Conger, & Long, 2011, p. 356). It appears that “Florida’s incentive system for increasing advanced course offerings to relatively underserved populations may be too mild and that stronger mandates or incentives are needed” (Iatarola, Conger, &

Long, 2011, p. 356). However, with greater demands placed on schools, now more than ever, districts and schools are continuing to diversify their programs. For these reasons, among others, school participation and student enrollment in these programs have continued to increase over the years and will most likely serve a more diversified student population.

2.3. What Has Been The Policy of Enrollment In These Programs By Schools?

Advanced Placement program was primarily developed for the highest-achieving students at elite high schools in 1950s. The big idea behind the initiative was to challenge the highest-achieving students, and it provided these students an opportunity to finish their post-secondary education early (Schneider, 2009). The second director of Advanced Placement, Dudley (1958) stated, "the basic philosophy of the Advanced Placement Program is simply that all students are not created equal" (p. 1). In other words, this initiative concerned gifted and talented students. At that time, the program was not open for all students, and students who wanted to take any AP course were evaluated based on their academic performance, teacher recommendations, and GPA in order to take AP courses. Advanced Placement has become more open to all students with the reforms in American education over the years. Students' interest in taking AP courses has increased since the first AP course was offered in 1954. Whereas only 532 students took AP exams in 1954 (Schneider, 2009), over a million students took over two million AP exams in 2005 (Matthews, 2005). The AP program currently offers more than 30 courses in six groups of subjects including, arts, English, history and social science, math and computer science, sciences, and world languages and cultures to all students (College Board, 2003). The College Board that administers AP programs encour-

ages teachers, school administrators, and educators to make AP courses accessible to all students (Moore & Slate, 2008). Recently, most school districts endeavor to provide students opportunities to take AP courses, and they only state parents' permissions as a requirement to take AP courses on their AP policies. However, they sometimes have "hidden prerequisites" that can vary from school to school. For example, taking another course before taking an AP course, having a high GPA, and standardized test results on a comprehension test may be set by an AP counselor in a school campus (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). As a result, low performing students cannot take any AP courses even if they are willing to take them.

Many schools in the world take part in the International Baccalaureate programs. Currently, there are 3500 schools in over 145 countries participating in IB programs. The process for schools to become IB is very rigid and there is a very strict set of criteria that must be met and adhered to (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013). Therefore, these programs are rarer than the otherwise more popular dual enrollment and advanced placement programs. Additionally, the student criteria and standards of performance for these programs are exceptionally time consuming. Many students find themselves hard pressed for time, stressed out, and have less time for extracurricular and social activities. Once students are enrolled in these programs, they must adhere to the specific requirements of the program. Specifically, "at each grade level, and in each content area, IB provides an extremely detailed and carefully sequenced set of standards and objectives, which have been tested and refined over four decades" (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013, p. 12). Additionally, the international standards for these programs are extremely rigid because students are held to very high expectations via multiple assessments.

These assessments are “criterion referenced, so students around the world are measured against pre-specified criteria for each subject group” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013, p. 12). This system maintains a worldwide set of standards.

Policies regarding dual enrollment (dual credit) classes vary widely among the fifty states. State-level enrollment policies and student eligibility for dual credit classes range from having no admission requirements to having restrictive admission requirements (Karp, Bailey, Hughes, Fermin, & Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2004). These policies install gatekeeping measures for entrance into dual enrollment programs; examples of these gatekeeping measures are grade point average (GPA), students’ grade level, written approval or recommendation, students meeting college entrance requirements, parental approval, students having taken certain high school courses, and students passing state assessments (Barnett & Stamm, 2010; Karp et al., 2004). These measures are put into place for a variety of reasons. If there is a concern that the dual credit classes are not rigorous enough, having restrictive gatekeeping measures in place can help address that issue. However, a drawback to having stringent gatekeeping policies in place is that these policies might favor high-achieving students and have a chilling effect on the enrollment of less academically successful students who could potentially benefit more from participation in dual credit classes (Karp et al., 2004).

3. METHOD

In order to examine the characteristics of school districts’ policies on AP, IB, and DE and reveal how they are difficult to read by parents according to the Flesch-Kincaid scale, the study was conducted as a qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009) by collecting and analyzing

policies of forty-two school districts across the United States. The analysis of the documents was found appropriate because it allowed the researchers to examine district policies deeply and get insight of each policy. In addition to the qualitative document analysis, words of each district policy were counted to reveal how they are hard to read by parents, students, and people who are looking for information about advanced programs. The following research questions were addressed in this study;

- 1) What are the characteristics of school district policies on advanced programs across the United States?
- 2) How complicated are policies for parents and students to read and understand?

3.1. Data Sources

The data of this study was originated from records of school district policies of IB, AP, and DE programs (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). As Merriam (1988) stated, “documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem.” (p. 133) A total of forty-two school districts were selected randomly across the country. The reason behind choosing the districts randomly was to accomplish unbiased results. These districts were selected randomly from the website of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2012 in order to give an equal opportunity of being selected to each one of the school districts across the nation. Therefore, a total of forty-two school districts from nineteen states (out of 50 states) were randomly selected for the present study. The policies of each school district for three advanced programs, AP, IB, DE, were used as main data sources of the study.

3.2. Data Collection

The list of forty-two school districts was randomly divided into four groups, and then each group of districts was assigned to a researcher. The researchers were graduate students at a university in Southwest Texas in the United States. Each researcher looked for AP, IB, and DE policies of each school district that was assigned. All of the policies of the school districts were retrieved from each school district website. Whereas most of the policies were placed under the board policies' sections on their websites, some of them were in student handbooks or under the gifted and talented programs. Overall, the policies were accessible for everyone, but searching was time intensive. From the forty-two school districts, 32 (77%), 30 (72%), and 33 (79%) had specific policies of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment, respectively.

The AP, IB, and DE policies of the remaining of the forty-two school districts were not accessible through their websites. Therefore, the researchers tried to contact the school districts via email or phone. No response was received from several of these school districts. Some of them claimed that they do not have specific IB, DE, and, especially AP policies, but they open AP programs to every student and offer IB pro-

grams to students who meet the requirements that are set by IB. The people who the researchers contacted stated that the IB program has its own policy on its website, thus they referred their students to the website of the advanced program instead of having their own policy.

3.3. Readability Score

To measure the readability of district policies, a Flesch-Kincaid readability test was used (Polishchuk, Hashem, & Sabharwal, 2012). The Flesch-Kincaid scale provides an appropriate measure for readability for materials intended for the general public (Polishchuk, Hashem, & Sabharwal, 2012). The Flesch-Kincaid (FK) scale measures readability based on the average number of syllables per word and the average number of words per sentence (Doak, Doak, & Root, 1996). Rudolf (1948) came up with a table that explains how a text is hard to understand based on the Flesch-Kincaid's index. The following table was prepared by Rudolf to classify texts or reading materials based upon their readability scores to reveal the ease or difficulty for understanding. For example, a readability score of a reading passage or text falls in the range of 60-70, standard, that means the passage can be understood by 13- to 15-year-old students (Grade level is about 8th).

Table 1. Pattern of "Reading Ease" Scores

"Reading Ease" Score	Description of Style
0 to 30	Very Difficult
30 to 50	Difficult
50 to 60	Fairly Difficult
60 to 70	Standard
70 to 80	Fairly Easy
80 to 90	Easy
90 to 100	Very Easy

Note. Adapted from "A new readability yardstick", 1948, p. 230.

3.4. Data analysis

To draw the characteristics of each advanced program, AP, DE, IB, separately, document analysis was used (Bowen, 2009). However, an

informal data analysis was done throughout the data collection. The analysis of qualitative data was defined as an ongoing process (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993), so the

researchers started and continued the informal data analysis along with data collection using the constant-comparison method. After policies were collected, all of the policies were grouped under AP, IB, and DE folders that made the researchers analyze the policies of each advanced program together. After the data collection was completed, a formal data analysis was made, as well. In that analysis, the following steps, “skimming (superficial examination), reading (through examination), and interpretation” (Bowen, 2009, p. 32) were followed. In addition to that, the researchers met consistently once a week during for five weeks throughout the formal data analysis procedure in order to discuss the findings of the analysis. That peer debriefing (Creswell, 2007) helped build the trustworthiness of the data analysis.

To answer the second research question of the present study, policies were copied and pasted to the Flesch-Kincaid readability test to count their vocabularies and measure their “reading ease” scores. The scores of each policy were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to compare the “reading ease” scores according to frequency distribution of each advanced program. Figures 2, 3, and 4, which were explained in the result section, were given to show the distribution of AP, IB, DE policies by FK scores

4. RESULTS

4.1. Research question 1: What are the characteristics of school district policies on advanced programs across the nation?

4.1.1 Advanced placement

The characteristics of Advanced Placement (AP) in the forty-two school districts that were randomly selected for this study had both similarities and differences. Most of them briefly gave a description of AP, AP exams, offered AP courses and benefits of taking AP courses. For

example, most of the districts’ AP policies underlined earning college credits while students were in their high school years and the role of taking AP courses that increased the possibility of being accepted to colleges or universities. One of the school districts stated AP courses are counted at most of the colleges or universities across the country. In addition, a few of the school districts’ AP policies gave further information about how to earn an AP diploma and receiving college credits. According to these policies, students needed to earn a minimum of five AP credits, and four of them should be from the main subjects (Mathematics, social studies, natural studies, languages, computer science or fine arts). Students also needed to take five AP exams as a final step.

Not all of the school districts’ AP policies were like the latter school policy; in other words, they just gave general information about their AP programs. Because of that reason, most of the policies suggested parents and students contact their local school counselor or guidance office or district counselor for further information regarding deadlines for an application or which AP courses would be offered at their school. Several of the district policies added the link of the College Board web page to redirect parents and students to get more information about AP. The AP policies of several school districts were very short, so parents and students have to meet with a counselor at their high schools in order to get information about the AP courses that were offered.

Most of the school districts placed their AP policies in different locations. Two school districts placed their AP policies under the instructions session in their policy manual. Most of the other school districts placed them under advanced academic, honor courses, or early earning college credit programs in the student handbook, manual or guide.

Although few school districts gave information about the payment of fees for books, exams, or anything that related to AP courses, variations were detected among these school districts. For instance, whereas several school districts kept their students who took AP courses exempt from all the fees, another one required students to pay the cost of any expenses that are related to their AP courses. However, the school district had information for availability of financial assistance on their policy. Another school district required students to pay their exam fees.

All policies of the school districts have lists of requirements that were varied for enrollment in AP programs. Some school districts claimed in their AP policies that AP programs were open to all students who are willing and motivated to study challenging coursework, and students only needed to get permissions from their parents. Moreover, several of the school districts considered students previous test results, GPA, teacher/local school counselor recommendations, and past grades of students while making a decision whether a student could take an AP course or not. On the other hand, one of the school districts stated that each school needs to make a decision about student eligibility for AP courses by themselves.

4.1.2 International Baccalaureate

For the most part, International Baccalaureate policies viewed in the sample fluctuated in what criteria they decided to present. There was also a distinction between the policies readability and word count. Some policies were located in the student handbook, while others required extensive investigation in various locations.

Some were short and to the point, and others gave more in depth descriptions of everything the IB requires and entails. The most basic policies gave a short description of what is

expected of the students in the IB program. Some of the school policies were simplistic, in that they had a brochure for parents to review. Charlotte-Mecklenburg was an actual legal/policy service that had rules and listed what must be completed in A, B, C, and D format.

Some school districts had GPA/age requirements for students interested in pursuing the IB diploma. Furthermore, one district requires the principal's approval. Many of the policies that gave a brief description lead to a referral to talk with a guidance counselor or specific school contact. A large portion of schools had their policies under innovative programs/magnet schools. Many policies did not spread to the majority of their respective states.

Some districts were very specific with how students would be awarded credit for enduring the IB program. Districts vary when it comes to funding and awarding students with free money (tuition, books). For instance, a district gives free tuition to all students within the county where the district is located.

4.1.3 Dual Enrollment

The characteristics of the policies for dual enrollment vary widely among the school districts in the sample. In addition to the word count and readability, variations among the policies are evident in areas such as location found, format, and the criteria presented.

Many of the policies were actual legal school board policies, this trend was most evident in the Southern school districts in the United States. All of those school districts in the sample had dual enrollment policies located in their school board policies. This feature of the school districts makes the policies easy to locate if one knows to seek out the board policies, but parents and students most likely do not search the school board policies as often as they use the district's campus webpages. Also, legal and

local board policies were not typically written in “parent-friendly” language, thus making them possibly more difficult for parents and students to understand.

Regarding the location of the policies in the sample as a whole, there was great variation in the location of the policies. Some of the policies were located on campus webpages or webpages devoted to the districts’ special programs, and others were found inside student handbooks or graduation manuals. These latter policies were probably the most difficult to find when searching online, but for students and parents who may already be using these handbooks this location may be convenient.

The format of the dual enrollment policies varied as much as the location where they were found. Bulleted lists were common and some policies seemed to be more a promotional or advertising document. Another method of presenting the information was to include a brief summary of information on a webpage and then refer the reader to a particular staff member or department in the district for more information.

Finally, the information in the actual policies regarding dual enrollment was another source of variation among the districts in the sample. For example, policies on tuition and book fees varied widely; some districts charged neither, some charged only for books and other fees but

not tuition. One particularly unfortunate district remarks on its website that the dual enrollment program has been discontinued due to budget cuts.

School districts typically had in their policies a list of requirements that students must meet in order to take dual enrollment classes, and these requirements varied from district to district as well. Many districts had requirements that stated a student must have a certain grade point average (GPA) and other districts required a certain level of performance on a standardized or other high-stakes test. One district mandates that prospective dual enrollment students meet both a GPA and a testing requirement. Still other districts included college entrance requirements as part of the stipulations for enrolling in dual credit classes.

4.2 Research question 2: How complicated were policies for parents and students to understand?

Some similarities and variations were found across school districts in the United States. The average word count was 641.1 for all of the policies. After using the FK score, “Reading ease” scores were obtained (See figure 1 for the frequency distributions of “Reading ease” scores of IB policies, AP policies, DE policies). According to the FK readability scale, the average readability of IB, AP, DE, was 14.22, 12.57, and 12.4, respectively.

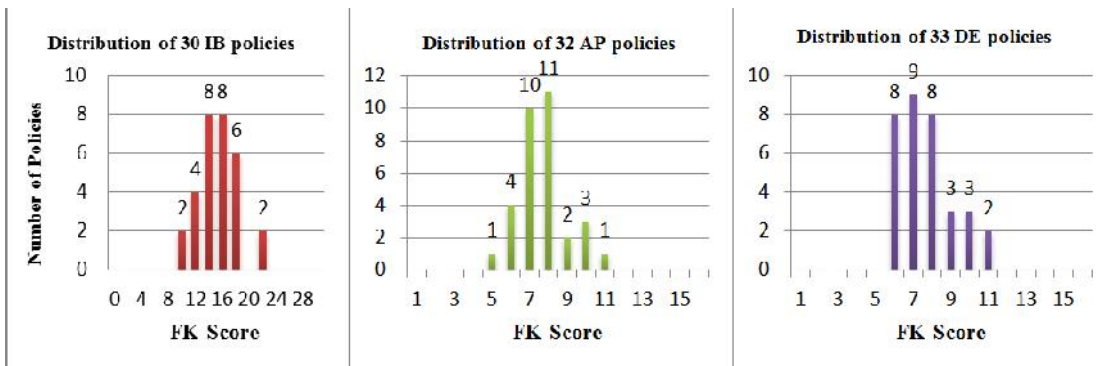


Figure 1. Frequency Distributions of “Reading ease” Scores IB, AP, and DE Policies by FK Scores

All of the averages were in the 12-14 ranges and they were lower than the 30 that is the upper reading ease score of “very difficult” category on the FK table. In other words, the majority of AP, IB, DE policies, was very difficult. These scores correlated with reading level (grade), and could be associated with the number of years of education someone would need when reading the material. To understand the policies, the education level of parents need to be university or higher than that. That being said, it could be expected that most parent would have a hard time comprehending the material of such policies. Some were in the student handbook, and other schools used actual legal documents that were a little harder to understand and navigate through. Parents that might not have had extended education past high school, or might not have English as a primary language, could run into trouble when trying to grasp some of the concepts listed. Furthermore, policies which were found hard to read might be a problem for some parents with low socioeconomic status. Regardless, parents that really want information on AP/IB/DE policies would be able find it on a website or can talk with school counselors/principals if they have further questions.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the present study show that there is variation among the policies for word count and readability. Based on the readability scores of the policies in the sample, comprehending and using the information found in the policies are very difficult. The goal of the policies may vary from school to school, but ideally policies need to provide easy-to-understand information to as many parents as possible. The FK scale provides an appropriate measure for readability for materials intended for the general public (Polishchuk, Hashem, & Sabharwal, 2012).

This study also has several implications for practice. The findings indicate that the readability level of the policies for AP, IB, and DE are of high school level and above. This fact may discourage some families from pursuing these opportunities for their students. Therefore, school districts should ensure that their policies for these programs are of a readability level that is appropriate for 8th or 9th grade students, as these are most likely the students who are looking at high school course offerings and making plans for their futures. For parents whose literacy skills are not at this level, schools need to provide parent-friendly materials that are at an even lower readability level and also offer materials printed in other languages that may be spoken at home in their community. In addition, schools should offer meetings for parents where the course options are presented orally and opportunities are provided to work one-on-one with counselors or other school staff, including bilingual staff, in order for all parents to have access to the information.

Though the study was conducted to analyze the characteristics and readability of school district policies on the advance programs in the U.S., providing parent-friendly materials and policies regarding advanced programs are also beneficial for students and parents who live in other countries where the advanced programs have already been available or recently become available. For example, in Turkey, only thirty-nine high schools had International Baccalaureate program in 2012, but the number has been increasing since that time. Of course, there are different factors that negatively cause decreasing the availability and accessibility of the advanced programs in Turkey, such as: very limited number of universities counts the credits taken in an advanced program as university credits. However, providing parent and student-friendly materials for the present programs are a must

to increase the awareness of students and parents regarding the advanced programs. With enhancing the awareness, the parents and students will become more knowledgeable about the programs, which means providing offer that is beneficial for students will turn out as demand of the students and parents.

Another consideration for the policies is the location. Parents and students should not have to wade through layers of links to locate the policies. Policies need to be labeled clearly and be accessible by navigating just a few “clicks” from the school district homepage. Contact information for appropriate personnel at the district who can answer questions needs to also be clearly provided with the policy information.

The navigation of the websites in order to find the information needed for these programs was difficult. Most school districts did not have individualized section headings for each specified program so there was much digging that was needed to locate the specific requirements for students. Once the infor-

mation was located on a particular program the policies varied by districts. Some of the policies were literal, meaning they were directly tied to the school boards policies and procedures manuals. However, the majority of school districts did not have policies directly tied to their board policies. In these cases, individual school policies had to be located by navigating through a variety of schools within each district.

In reality, many parents would most likely contact the individual schools they are interested in sending their child to in order to get the information on the programs offered. Often the pieces of information needed on the particular programs were buried within student handbooks or graduation manuals. Most of the information found on these programs did not include information on policies but rather included information on background of the programs, history, diploma requirements, course credits, assessment information, and so on. Additionally, some are very general and one would have to contact the schools directly by phone or email in order to find specific requirements.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri genelinde uygulanan, lisede okurken üniversitede saydırılabilecek dersleri alma (Advance Placement), Uluslararası Diploma (International Baccalaureate) ve alınan dersi hem lise hem de sonrasında üniversite transkriptinde göstererek Çift Kredilendirme (Dual Credit) programları ile ilgili belgeleri incelemektir. Bu sayede farklı uygulamalar arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ilgili belgelerden tespit etmek, öğrenci ve aileler için bu belgelerin ne derece okunabilir ve anlaşılabilir olduklarını belirlemek hedeflenmiştir.

1955 yılında başlayan lisede ders alıp üniversitede saydırma programının amacının kökeninde öğrencilerin üniversite seviyesinde dersler almasını sağlamak ve öğrencilere daha lisedeyken üniversite itibarını kazandırmak vardır. Bu gibi kursları alan öğrencilerin akademik seviyelerini, ilerlemelerini gösteren birçok çalışma yapılmıştır. Artan popülerlik ve rekabetçi pazarla birlikte, okullar ders saydırma programlarını lise seviyesindeki okullardan ortaokul seviyesindeki okullara doğru, öğrencileri üniversite düzeyindeki derslere hazırlamak için hazırlık sınıfları da ekleyerek yaymışlardır.

Uluslararası diploma; 3 yaşından 19 yaşına kadar değişen yaş grubundaki öğrenciler için “öğrenmek, yaşamak ve hızla küreselleşen dünyada yaşamalarını, öğrenmelerini ve çalışmalarını sağlayacak, entelektüel, kişisel, duygusal ve sosyal becerilerini geliştirecek bir sistemdir. (Uluslararası Diploma Kuruluşu, 2013, para.2). Uluslararası Diploma programı “...daha iyi ve barış dolu bir dünya için kültürlerarası anlayışı ve saygıyı oluşturmaya yardım eden bilgili ve yardımsever gençleri yetiştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amacı gerçekleştirmek için kurulmuş Uluslararası Diploma Kuruluşu, denetim yapmak ve uluslararası diploma programını geliştirmek için hükümetler, okullar ve uluslararası kuruluşlar ile birlikte çalışmaktadır. Bu programlar, öğrencileri, diğer insanları farklılıklarıyla birlikte kabul edecek, hatta doğru bulacak, dünya çapında aktif, nezaketli ve yaşam boyu öğrenmeye açık olmaları için cesaretlendirmektedir. (Uluslararası Diploma Kuruluşu, 2013, para.4-6).

Çift kredilendirme, lise öğrencilerine lise derslerini aynı zamanda üniversitede saydırabilmek için olanak sağlar. Bu programlar okuldan okula farklılıklar gösterebilmektedir. Bazı çift kredilendirme programları, öğrencilerin kendi liselerinde uzaktan eğitim yoluyla üniversite derslerini almalarını isterken diğer kurslar ise, öğrencilerin üniversite veya yüksekokul sınıflarına giderek ders almalarını gerektirmektedir.

Doküman analizi yöntemi kullanılan bu çalışmada, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri genelinden rastgele seçilen 42 okul bölgesinin sözü edilen programlarla ilgili kılavuzluk etme amacıyla hazırlanan başvuru, yerleştirme, bilgilendirme vb. amaçlı belgeleri araştırmanın verilerini oluşturmuştur. Her bir yönetmeliğin okunabilirlik puanı Flesch-Kincaid okunabilirlik testi ile ölçülmüş ve kolay okunabilirlik puan kılavuzuna göre ölçümler değerlendirilmiştir.

Araştırma sonuçları incelenen belgelerin anlaşılabilirlik konusunda tartışılacak bir çok yönünün olduğunu göstermektedir. Öncelikli olarak bu belgeler olabildiğince ortaklaştırılmalı ve anlaşılabilirlikleri artırılmalıdır. Bunlara ek olarak, okullar ebeveynler için toplantılar planlamalıdır. Tüm ebeveynlerin bilgilere rahatlıkla ulaşabilmeleri için okullar çok dilli personeller barındırmalıdır. Başvuru ve süreçle ilgili şartlar açık ve net bir şekilde belirtilmeli, bu belgelere okul ana sayfasından basit birkaç tıklama ile ulaşılabilir. Velilere ve öğrencilere yardımcı olacak ilgili kişilerin iletişim bilgileri de belgeler ve web siteleri üzerinde açıkça verilmelidir.