Evaluating The Impact of The Learner Profile Attributes On Early Years Learners' Social and Emotional Development.

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Introduction: Identification of the researchable problem

The International Baccalaureate (IB) core mission, enables students to move beyond academic results and equips them with skills to become 21st-century global citizens. These life skills are reflected in the IB program learner profile attributes. The IB program develops individuals who advocate for change and work to build a more harmonious and better world.

Within the IB program is the Primary Years Program (PYP), which is a pedagogical framework for students ages one to twelve. It is one of four programs offered by the international baccalaureate (IB) Organization. The PYP curriculum is divided into six transdisciplinary disciplines, with a learning approach that embodies inquiry-based learning across disciplinary competencies. These 6 themes are driven by the PYP learner profiles. Each profile is a descriptor of the learning attitude required for learners to embody to develop their social-emotional skills and transcend into problem solvers and lifelong learners.

Social Emotional Development is the process by which children gradually develop their ability to assimilate, perceive, articulate, and coordinate their emotions, in readiness to form deep connections with others. Thus, programs like the PYP that strengthen children's aptitude and learning capacities, have been predicted to have a direct and significant impact on further boosting social and behavioral development (Dix and Gregory, 2020).

There have been numerous studies about the influence of learner profile attributes on the development of social emotions (Boomhower, 2020). However, there are limited or no studies on the vital role early years teachers play in the connection between learner attributes and social-emotional development (Bahn, 2022).

The success of a child in their early foundation years of school can be said to predominantly depend on the role of the teacher. The role of teachers in early years cannot be overemphasized as it transcends beyond the teaching of the essentials of numeracy, literacy, identification of colors, and shapes. Early years teachers are tasked with the initiative to be creative and to develop critical thinking learning strategies and approaches that support the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of the student.

As facilitators in schools that implement the primary years' program, we are conscious of the social and emotional development of our learners in the classrooms. It is critical to authentically share and raise awareness about the learner profile attributes with our young learners. When students participate and internalize the learner profile features, they acquire positive personality traits and utilize the skills acquired to define who they are, empowering them to perform as the particular learner profile specifies.

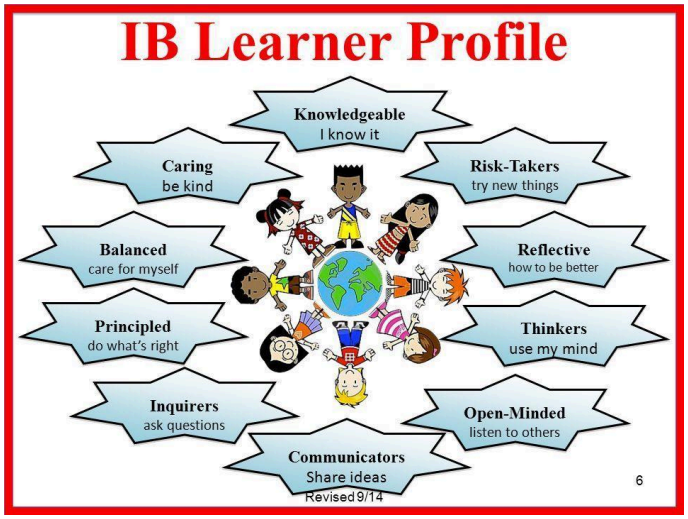
A common example of the Learner Profile in action would be young children exhibiting consideration and learning to share while playing with a friend. Making the learner profile more visible, purposeful, and intentional in the classroom, helps learners to develop socially and emotionally both inside and outside of the classroom.

As teachers in a PYP school system, we understand that the social-emotional development of our young students is critical to their overall development as learners. As a result, it is critical to nurture and drive their development through the use of the LPAs. However, in order to accomplish this, it became necessary to conduct research and investigate how well early-year teachers and parents understand, engage and implement the LPAs with the children. This would help us to assess the impact of the LPAs on social-emotional development in our young learners.

Literature Review

The IB Programme is a student-centered learning approach that drives 21st-century learning skills. The concept is aimed at nurturing the natural curiosity, creativity, and ability of learners to reflect on their learning. At the core of the IB PYP curriculum framework is the PYP Learner Profile. The program offers a transdisciplinary theme learning approach. This means that subjects are most often not taught as stand-alone subjects, but are rather embedded into a unit of inquiry. This allows students to learn by inquiring into concept-based themes across diverse subject topics while making connections to real-life situations. The Learners' Profile Attributes, or LPAs, are inextricably linked to the teaching approach within the PYP framework. They are descriptors of the expected learning attitude students are expected to embrace to help them engage in authentic inquiry-based learning. The LPAs are considered to be the pathway and a guide for which learners acquire foundational social skills and development in their learning**.**

Figure 1: Learner Profile Attributes



Source: "Oak Forest Elementary (2015)- School-wide PYP-PBIS Plan-slide 6". Last Retrieved 3/5/2023 Link

We examined existing research on the effect of the LPAs on the social and emotional development of young learners to find out if the LPAs can impact the social-emotional development of young learners. The IB PYP curriculum is designed with the proposed learner profile attributes to be acquired. As shown in Figure 2 below, these attributes are at the center of the inquiry cycle, and the approaches to teaching and learning take place at the outer cycle of the IB learner profile framework. (P.41Koçer, E. (2019).

Figure 2: The PYP framework

Source: Primary Years Programme. (n.d.). Berlin Cosmopolitan School. Retrieved March 5, 2023 Link

Students in IB schools strive to develop their social skills as they interact and show understanding, and take action using the LPAs. Words like communicator, inquirer, thinker, etc, are the adjectives used in the LPAs framework to describe the attitudes expected of learners in order to successfully engage in learning throughout their learning journey.

Dix, K., & Sniedze-Gregory, S. (2020) in a recent study, found strong conceptual alignment between the learner profile attributes, the IB approaches to learning skill categories, and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

Bullock (2011) states that students can reflect and evaluate themselves as they learn with the support of the LPAs, and transcend into being lifelong learners.

In another study of Social and Emotional Well-Being in IB World Schools (age 3-19) conducted by L Cooker, L Bailey, H Stevenson, and S Joseph 2016, the LPAs were considered a the key tool for providing language to help teachers and students engage with social-emotional well-being concepts**.** Educators embed the learner profile approach into pedagogical practices during unit plans. This action helps to anchor and align the most appropriate LP associated with the ongoing unit of inquiry (UOI). For example, when planning for the theme “Sharing The Planet” with a focus on the concept of “Human choices impact on the planet ”, teachers choose and align the most appropriate learner profile attitude that best supports the inquiry approach and ongoing learning. As students inquire and explore the concept, they are expected to demonstrate the learner profile attributes of Caring, Reflective, and Principled. As such, educators are expected to explicitly teach these concepts as students engage with the unit. The descriptive languages of the LPAs thus become a common feature between teachers and students in the classroom. This not only helps students understand how they learn, but also creates a shared understanding of the learning attributes, and the expected learning attitudes students require to help them achieve in their learning journey.

As teachers continue to model the LPAs and repeatedly use the LP language to give feedback and to describe ongoing learning, students will naturally begin to use the shared

language in their self and peer reflection of learning over time. For example, I am caring towards my friends and my pets, etc. Stillisano, Waxman, Hostrup, and Rollins (2010) reported that students in the PYP and MYP appeared to make relevant connections between what they were learning and real-life contexts.

It is core to note that like any other habit and attitude, it may take a while to get young learners into the rhythm of the flow for any significant evidence. However, since young learners are naturally curious, they are therefore natural inquirers who would likely ask curious questions and show attributes of a communicator. Further, the mission of the IB program is to create global citizens. PYP teachers creatively model real-life situations prompting discussions leading to the promotion of open-minded learners who are responsible and respectful towards the perspectives of others.

With all this in mind and very little research in this area, we found no solid examples or frameworks on how to approach the teaching of the learner profile attributes. Teachers must therefore be creative and sensitive to the ongoing learning and cash in on teaching moments to address students' needs, bearing in mind that a lack of understanding of what is expected of them in terms of implementing, collecting data, recording, and reporting on learner profile attributes can be a challenge for them. Therefore teacher training and development in this area are core to its implementation.

Qatar Academy and Tariq Bin Zaid are part of Qatar Foundation schools situated in Qatar. These schools create a learning environment that fosters inquiry-based learning and follows the IB/PYP curriculum. The LPAs are part of the pedagogical instructions in both

schools. Therefore, there is an expectation that teachers, as well as administrators, will model it to students and their parents thereby representing the mission statement in action.

Though the LPAs have been used immensely in PYP schools over the years, there are limited studies on the topic of their impact on the social and emotional development of young learners in mainstream classrooms. Following up on this, we investigated the implementation of teaching strategies and approaches of the LPAs in ages four to seven PYP learners, and how the LPAs nurture and drive the social-emotional development of young learners while authentically taking their heritage and spiritual growth into consideration.

Description of Variables

Independent variable

Teachers' integration of LPAs in their pedagogical practices.

Dependent Variables:

Early years learners show understanding of the LPAs by taking action and using the language.

Definitions of terms:

CASEL: The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

Learner Profile Attributes (LPAs): are defined as teaching approaches within the PYP framework.

PYP: A short phrase for The Primary Years Programme.

Research Purpose

The objective of the study was to investigate how the PYP learner attributes: communicator, caretaker, and principled impact the social and emotional development of young learners, with emphasis on the role teachers play in promoting the LPAs, to develop the social-emotional aspect in their learners.

Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in students' social-emotional development after exposure to the PYP LPAs?
2. Can teachers leverage the PYP learner profile attributes to support young students' social and emotional growth?

Research Hypothesis

This study aims to test the following hypothesis

1. PYP learner profile significantly influences the social and emotional development of students.
2. Teachers can use the PYP learner profile attributes to support the social and emotional growth of young learners.

Definition of terms:

I. **PYP:** (Primary Years Program). The PYP is an inquiry-based educational framework that seeks to develop the whole child: academic, social, emotional, cultural, and physical.

II. **Learner profile Attributes:** A list of attributes that promote academic rigor and the establishment of a personal value system leading to international-mindedness (IBO, 2013c).

III. **Balanced:** The ability to balance different aspects of our lives to achieve well-being for ourselves and others."

IV. **Caring: " Ability to Show empathy**, compassion, and respect to others and the world around us."

V. **Communicator:** The act of expressing oneself creatively and confidently and being able to listen carefully to the perspectives of other individuals and groups."

VI. **Inquirer:** The ability to nurture our curiosity, developing skills for inquiry and research.

VII. **Knowledgeable:** " Using conceptual understanding to explore knowledge across a range of disciplines with local and global significance."

VIII. **Open-minded:** " Being respectful of our own cultures and personal histories, as well as the values and traditions of others."

IX. **Principled:** "Having a strong sense of fairness with integrity and honesty, and being able to take responsibility for one's actions and the consequences."

X. **Reflective:** "The ability to thoughtfully consider the world and our ideas and experience.

Risk-taker: Approaching tasks and challenges with resilience.

XI. **Thinker:** "Showing critical and creative thinking skills to analyze and take responsible action on complex problems".

XII. **Social-emotional growth:** A child's ability to develop and regulate their attention, emotions, and behavior, and to form positive relationships with adults and peers.

Methodology

We conducted a study in two PYP elementary schools in Doha, Qatar. The study investigated the interdependencies between the dependent variable—student social and emotional performance—and the independent variable—teachers' use of LPAs in their instruction. We selected a population sample consisting of two classroom communities with 22 preschoolers aged four to five and a grade one class with 23 learners aged six to seven. The students have diverse social and emotional needs. Students were exposed to the following learner profile attributes: Communicator, Balanced, Open-minded, Thinker, Reflective, Principled, and Caring. However, for the purpose of this study, we focused on only three learner profile attributes: Communicator, Principled, and Caring.

We surveyed teachers from both schools to assess the specifics of the research. We wanted to know if teachers incorporated LPAs into their pedagogical practices and if their actions had an impact on their students' social-emotional development.

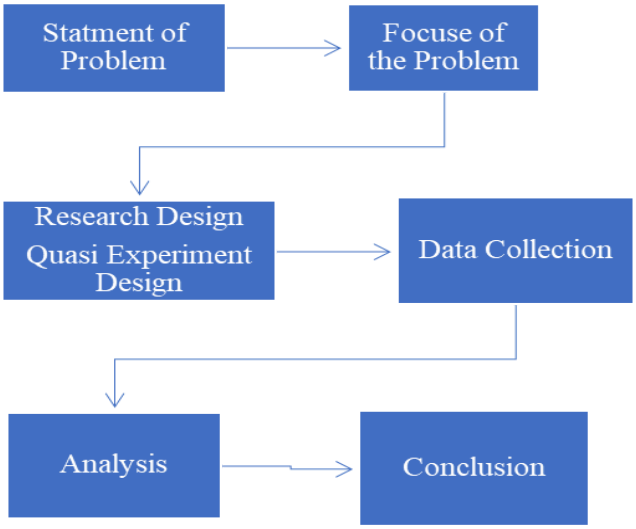
A pre-survey questionnaire for parents was also created on Google Forms to determine whether they believe the school supports LPAs and which LPAs their children have shown the most growth in.

We approached the school principals to obtain the necessary approvals before sending out the pre-surveys. The analysis of the pre-surveys prompted us to look into it further and see if there were any changes after eight weeks. Throughout this time, continual interventions to improve the use of LPAs were implemented, and the progress of students' social actions was observed.

The post-surveys, including collation, were expected to last for a period of two weeks in early February. Finally, a post-survey Google Form was created for parents to assess the progress of their children's social-emotional development. A post-survey was also conducted on the teachers to measure if there were any changes in the social-emotional growth of the learners. The collated answers were used for qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

We reviewed and analyzed the findings. We drew conclusions based on these findings and made recommendations for further research.

Figure 1. Procedure and thought process of the research study.



Source: Author's Estimates

Research Instrument

This study used comprehensive Likert scale questionnaires to collect data. The data acquisition consisted of two parts. Part one was the parents' pre-survey. This questionnaire was

designed to find out what parents thought about if the schools support their children to develop LPAs and where they thought their children showed growth and development.

Teachers were questioned in the second section to determine whether they incorporate LPAs into their lesson plans and pedagogical practices. They were also questioned about the school's assistance in implementing LPAs and the student's growth in this area.

In addition to the above-discussed strategies, we also conducted continuous and ongoing observations in our classrooms to help us evaluate the social-emotional growth of our learners as they interpret and use the LPAs in their actions to make choices and solve problems within their natural surroundings.

Pre-Survey Questions(Parents)

- Is the school meeting your expectations by supporting your child in developing the following IB Learner Profile attribute (communicator)
- Is the school meeting your expectations by supporting your child in developing the following IB Learner Profile attribute (principled)
- Is the school meeting your expectations by supporting your child in developing the following IB Learner Profile attribute (caring)
- In reflection on the above 3 learner profile attributes, what particular attribute do you think your child needs more development in?

Post Survey Questions (Parents)

- Does the school show support and encourage students to take action in the IB Learner Profile attribute: Communicator?
- Does the school show support and encourage students to take action in the IB Learner Profile attribute: Principled?
- Does the school show support and encourage students to take action in the IB Learner Profile attribute: Caring?
- In reflection on the above 3 learner profile attributes, which particular attribute do you believe your child develops most?

Pre-Survey Questions(Teachers)

Teachers from the grade level were questioned in an October pre-survey. The following questions were asked.

- Is the school meeting your expectations by supporting your teaching practices in developing the IB Learner Profiles: Communicator, Caring, and Principled?
- Are the LPAs: Communicator, Caring & Principled often integrated into grade-level unit plans and implemented in your teaching and learning practices?
- Are students able to show their understanding and to take action using the LPAs: Communicator, Caring, and Principled?
- Are your students able to refer to and use the LPAs' language in their communications?
- Is a class culture in place to celebrate students' use and actions in the LP attributes communicator, caring, and principled?

- Has the integration and implementation of the LPAs in your teaching practices, in your opinion, impacted your students emotionally and socially?

Teachers' post-survey questions.

After the pre-survey, teachers from the grade level were again involved in a post-survey conducted in early February.

- The LPAs Communicator, Caring & Principled integrated into grade-level unit plans and implemented in my teaching and learning practices.
- I have a class culture to celebrate students' use and actions of the LPAs Communicator, Caring, and Principled.
- Students can refer to and use the LPAs' language in their Communications.
- Has the integration and implementation of the LPAs in your teaching practices, in your opinion, impacted your students emotionally and socially?

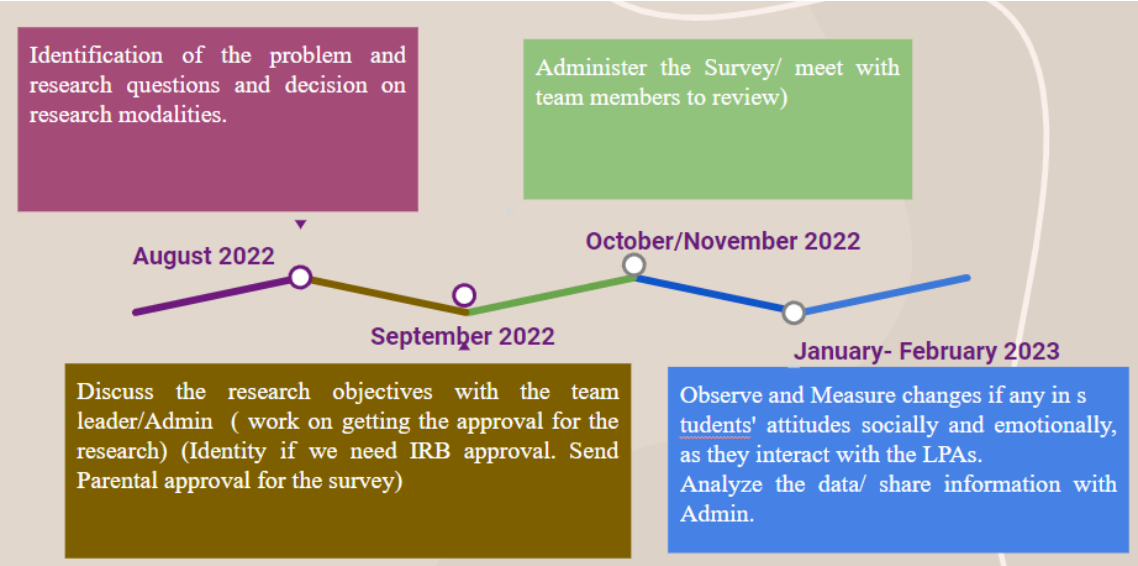
Data Analysis Plan

We collected many forms of data from parents and teachers. Data from surveys administered was specifically analyzed. The research also included close observation of learners' attitudes and behavior in the classrooms. Data collection and data analysis were conducted twice, before and after the implementation of the independent variables and intervention to determine the impact. The data and information were gathered using the aforementioned instruments to represent the characteristics that cannot be quantified; however, a multiple bar chart and frequency comparison by percentage were used to interpret data as obtained by the Likert scale.

Finally, based on the findings, we were able to assess how much the LPAs impacted students' social and emotional development. It also enabled us to determine whether teachers had

been utilizing the PYP LPAs to support young students' social and emotional development. The study further shed light on the necessity for continuing professional development for all stakeholders involved in the implementation and inspection of LPAs.

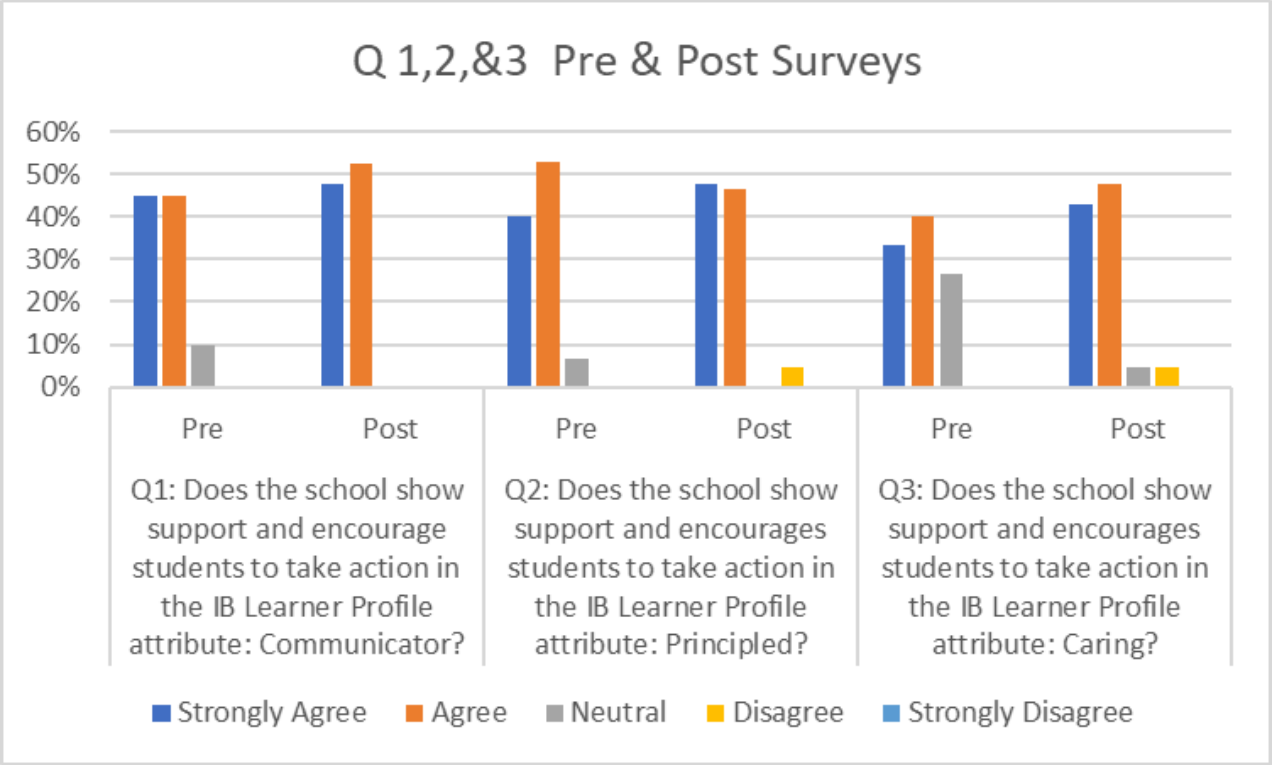
Project Timeline



Findings

The survey data were presented in graphs, allowing for a complete comparison of pre and post-survey results. Also, this study obtained parents' crucial tacit comments, regarding how the school and teachers' methods of instruction impacted their children.

Parents Survey Results



Question 1

Does the school show support and encourages students to take action in the IB Learner Profile attribute: Communicator?

45% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that the school supported and encouraged students to acquire the PYP attributes of communication, while only 10% indicated a neutral position and none of them disagreed or strongly disagreed. The school support was emphasized in the survey results and the post-analysis. The number of respondents that strongly agreed and

agreed increased to 48% and 52% respectively, and none of them remained neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

Question 2

Does the school show support and encourage students to take action in the IB Learner Profile attribute: Principled?

40% of the respondents strongly agreed, compared to 53% and 7% that agreed and were neutral respectively, that the schools promoted the PYP Learner Profile Attribute of principle in the students. Although the number of respondents that strongly agreed increased to 48%, the number of respondents that agreed and were neutrally decreased to 47% and 0% respectively after the intervention. However, 5% of the respondents disagree that the school shows support and encourages students to take action in the IB Learner Profile principled attribute.

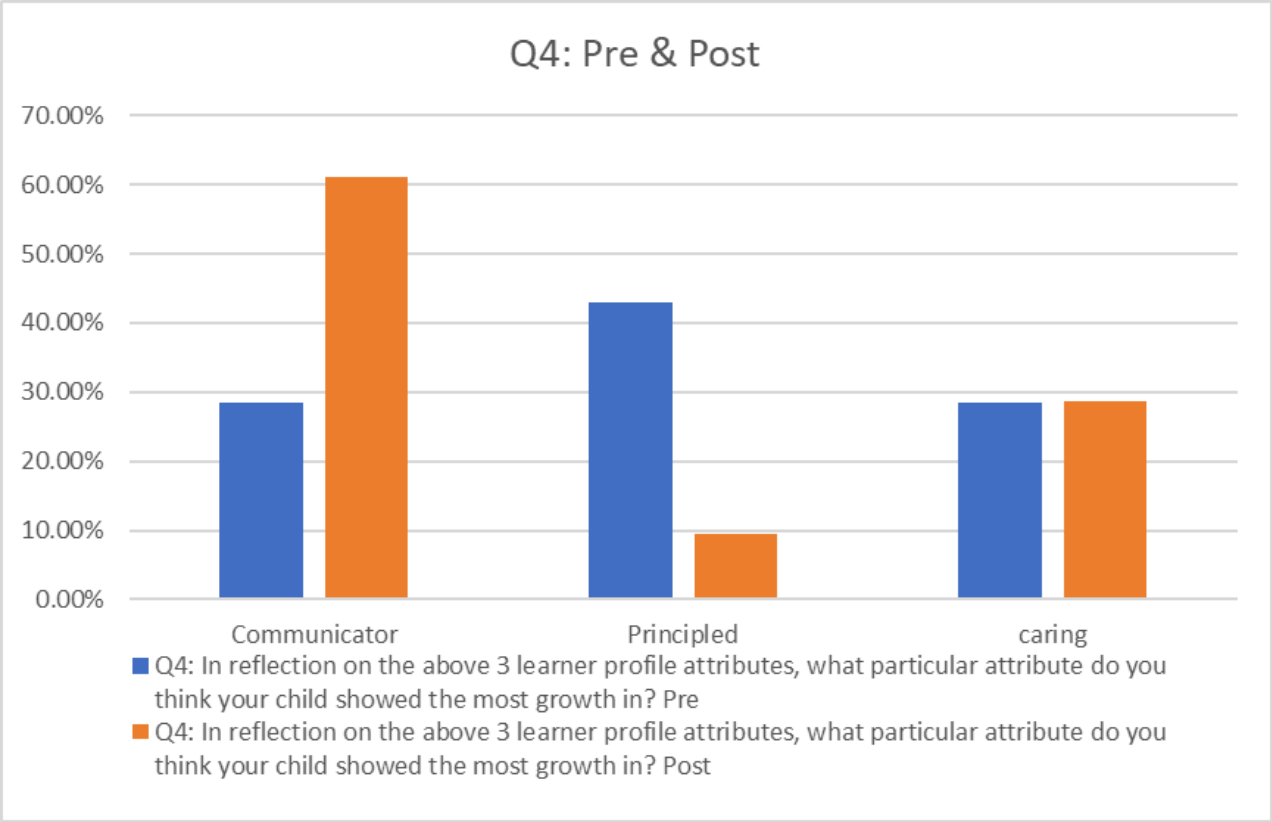
Question 3

Does the school show support and encourage students to take action in the IB Learner Profile attribute: Caring?

33% and 40% strongly agreed and agreed that the school facilitated and encouraged students in projecting kindness and care. 27% indicated neutrality. However, after the intervention, the number of respondents that strongly agreed and agreed increased to 43% and 48% respectively. 5% of the respondents became neutral and 5% disagreed.

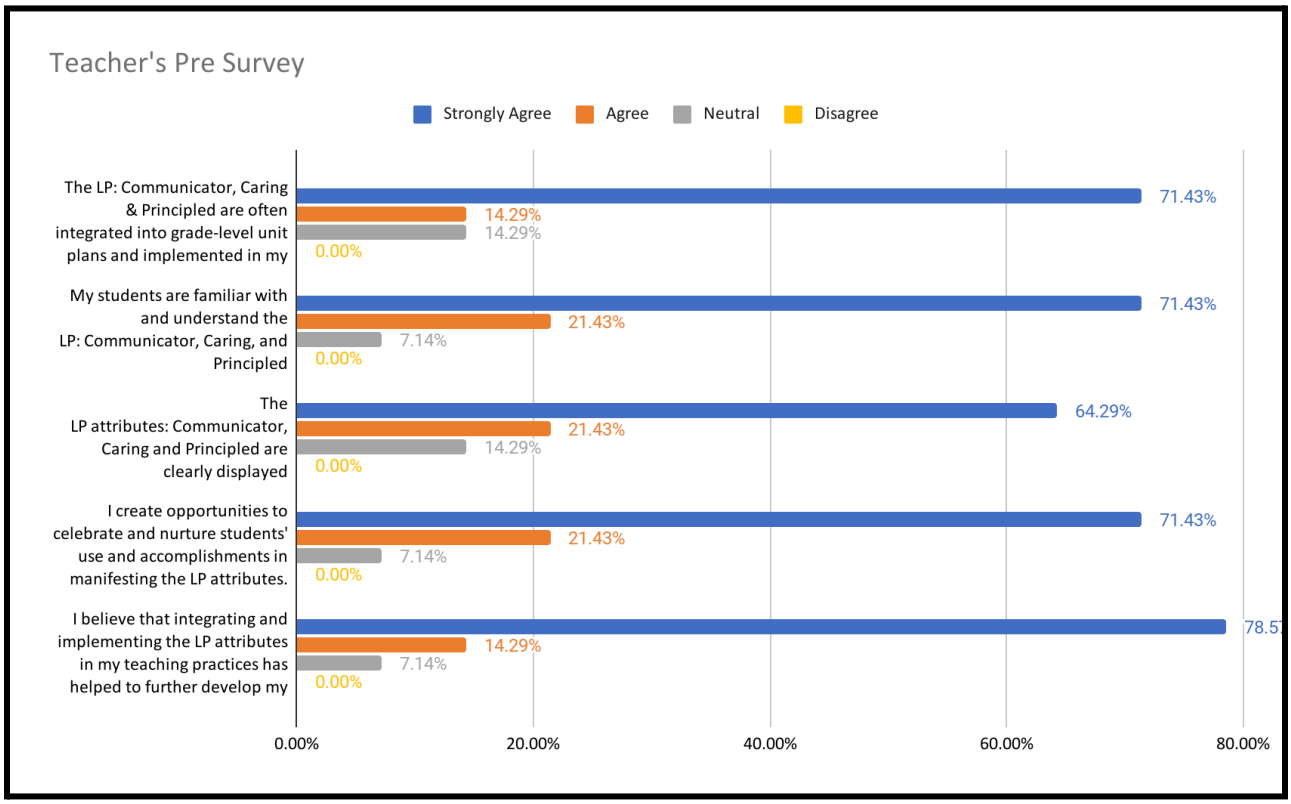
Question 4

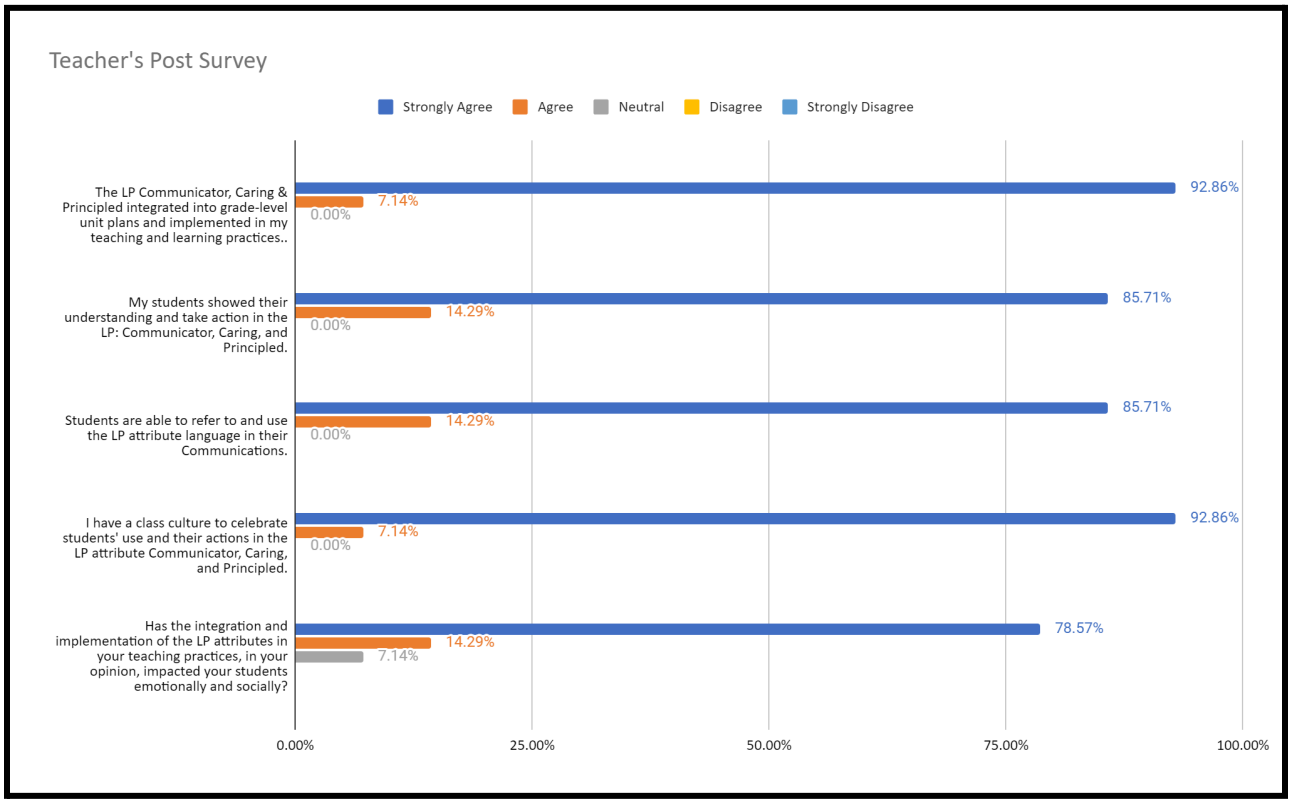
In reflection on the above 3 learner profile attributes, what particular attribute do you think your child showed the most growth in?



As reflected in the results above, 28.55% of the respondents indicated that students showed the most growth with the PYP "communication" and "caring" attributes, and 42.9% agreed that the PYP Learner "principled" attribute was the most popular among the students. However, in the post-survey, the number of popular votes for the PYP LPA communication increased to 61%, but the LPA principled votes decreased to 9.5%, whereas, the caring attributes slightly increased to 28.6%.

Teachers' survey results:





Almost all of the teachers (85.7%) reported previously that they routinely included the LPAs in their lesson plans before the evaluation. Following the assessment, the proportion of teachers who routinely incorporated LPAs into their lessons jumped from 71% to 93%. This resulted in a rise from 93% to 100% of students whom teachers believed to be familiar with the Learner Profile traits, with a corresponding rise from 71% to over 85% of students who strongly agreed with the statement. The chances that teachers gave their students to develop these skills increased at the same rate as well. A significant percentage rise in instructors (from 71 to 93%) said they now strongly agree with this position, from 93% pre to 100% post. It is interesting to note, nevertheless, that while the majority of respondents believed that the inclusion and application of the LP qualities in the teaching methods had an emotional and social influence on the pupils, this percentage remained constant throughout the before and post surveys. This can be

because many teachers fail to recognize a direct link between the application of the qualities and the emotional and social well-being of their students. Although the aforementioned results are impressive, the limited sample size suggests that they may not accurately reflect Qatar's entire teaching population.

Other project considerations

The long closure of schools during the winter break due to Qatar hosting the World Cup in November 2022 had an impact on the timeline for this case study, as well as the planned interventions and strategies for the teachers to implement and integrate.

The 50-day break was unusually much longer than the usual 14-day winter break. This created a huge gap in our ability to meet deadlines as stipulated in the timeline.

Secondly, the number of staff and student absences from classes due to COVID-19 and other flu-related diseases had increased. This again created some significant social and emotional problems that needed urgent and carefully planned interventions to get the young learners back on track.

The next hurdle we faced was the delay in facilitating the necessary administrative approval for the survey to be administered to the selected population. The bureaucracy involved created some loss of time.

In addition to the above, participant bias was one of the limitations as some parents tended to respond in a certain way because they assumed they were being observed or believed they knew what the researcher wanted. This could also be attributed to the culture here, where every child is considered to be perfect, therefore anything contrary to being perfect is frowned upon.

Conclusion

This study's goal aimed to investigate the impact of the LPAs on the social and emotional development of early years learners. The research focused on the role early years teachers play in promoting the LPAs to enhance social-emotional development in young learners.

Based on the study's findings, we were able to conclude that parents in both schools appreciated and valued the teachers' active involvement in promoting the LPAs. They also lauded the whole school approach in promoting the LPAs in supporting their children's social and emotional development.

It is empirical to note that the understanding and usage of the LPAs by young learners takes effort and time. This process involves teaching and guidance from both the teacher and the parents alike. Any noticeable change and effect of the impact of the LPAs on the social-emotional development of young learners must be carefully nurtured and thoroughly taught.

In the conclusion, it can be noted that parents claimed that the LPA “principled” is more difficult to assess, compared to the LPA communication. In addition, it can be said that other players like mosques, churches, family norms, and others also play a vital role in promoting values and social morals which are crucial components of being principled. As a result, it is challenging to measure the growth of students in the PYP LPA principled.

Recommendation

Parents need to get involved in the process of teaching kids about the LPAs. It is also very important to educate the parents about the crucial role that schools play in students’ development of LPAs. Teachers need to develop initiatives that will physically engage young learners with the

LPAs. The teachers should develop practical and feasible Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to measure milestones and achievement in the development, integration, and implementation of the LPAs in the classroom. Teachers are further encouraged to develop positive reinforcement strategies of celebrating and applauding student usage and adoption of the LPAs. A core recommendation is the provision of continuous professional development by the school for the teachers to strengthen the teacher's knowledge and understanding of the LPAs. We also plan to propose the use of our website to help promote a deeper understanding and the sharing of the LPAs as a schoolwide pathway to enhance the LPAs in young learners. The website is user-friendly and updated for dual language use. Overall, we want stakeholders to understand the process of young learners acquiring LPAs to assist them to flourish as lifelong learners in the 21st century.

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