IB OR SACE?
AN INVESTIGATION INTO
STUDENT COURSE CHOICE AT THE
SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL
IN AN ADELAIDE SCHOOL


A portfolio presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
the degree of Doctor of Education in the School of Education of
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ERRATUM: page 68, line 2; 'cannot' should be 'should not'
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GLOSSARY

The terms below are described in greater detail when introduced in a relevant context.

**CAS**
Creativity, Action and Service. A compulsory requirement of the IBDP. At the time of the research, students had to document that they had spent 50 hours each on a series of activities that involved creativity, for example, the arts; action, for example, sports and service, for example, community volunteer projects.

**EE**
The Extended Essay is a compulsory component of the IBDP, a piece of individual research demonstrating an independent, supervised study to produce a 4,000 word paper on a topic chosen by the student.

**IB**
International Baccalaureate

**IB-DP**
International Baccalaureate-Diploma Programme (ages16-19)

**IB-MYP**
International Baccalaureate-Middle Years Programme (ages11-16)

**IB-PYP**
International Baccalaureate- Primary Years Programme (ages3-12)

**Focus School**
The school at which this study was carried out.

**Head of House**
The staff member in charge of a House, a pastoral care group which incorporates students from all secondary year levels at the Focus School.

**HESS**
A Higher Education Selection Subject is a SACE Stage 2 subject acceptable for university admission. (HESS general subjects were formerly known as PES and PAS, Hess Restricted subjects = SAS).

**PES/PAS/SAS**
Subjects in SACE were given these terms depending on how they were assessed; Publicly Examined Subjects, Publicly Assessed Subjects or School Assessed Subjects.

**Post-compulsory Schooling**
During the time of the research, the compulsory age for attending school was 16 (usually denoting Years 11&12). New legislation passed in 2007, meant that from the beginning of 2009 the compulsory age was increased to 17.

**Reception - Years 11&12**
The entry point for students starting their formal primary education, around five years of age. Successive years are numbered after that; Year 1, Year 2 and so on: the final 2 years are Year 11&12.

**SACE**
The South Australian Certificate of Education.

**SL/HL IB Subjects**
Subjects in the IBDP are designated Standard or Higher level. The latter require more content.

**SSABSA**
The Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia, now the SACE board (as of July 2008).

**TER**
Tertiary Entrance Ranking. In South Australia, tertiary institutions use a tertiary entrance rank score to assist the selection process of students into courses. This score is calculated from the student’s SACE or IB year 12 results.

**TOK**
Theory of Knowledge. This is a compulsory IBDP course that is an interdisciplinary inquiry into the complexity of knowledge. It involves a study of different ways of knowing and the nature of evidence.
ABSTRACT

This portfolio is an investigation of the process of students’ decision-making in choosing between two courses, the South Australian Certificate of Education (a local credential) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, in the final two years of their senior schooling. This investigation was carried out at an independent school for boys in Adelaide between 2001 and 2009.

The aim of the investigation was threefold: to establish what factors were affecting the course choice of the Focus School’s students; to examine how these students as “customers” articulated the risks involved in this decision; and to gain a student-based appraisal of the two course policy.

Three separate projects made up the research portfolio, entitled “Deciding for the Future”, “Coping with the Present Decision” and “Evaluating the Past Decision”. The first was an inquiry by survey of 116 Year 10 students about to embark on their chosen course. The second examined the responses from two surveys administered to a subset (17) of the above students as they studied their chosen course in Year 11 and Year 12. The third was the analysis of survey material from 20 former students about their chosen course and their subsequent directions since leaving school ten years earlier. The data, collected from qualitative research questionnaires that were a combination of closed and open-ended questions, were then analysed thematically.

The findings indicated that their course choice was a complex and highly individual process that could be the result of competing forces such as personal likes and dislikes, short and long term ambitions and pragmatic and aesthetic motivations. Students could be interpreted as customers shopping for a product and weighing up how to manage the risks in an educational marketplace. It was hoped that, from these findings, the school community would have a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes which would lead to better support for students and others who were involved in such a decision.

The data analysis also demonstrated some important differences in long term outcomes for the students doing each course; as well as a degree of customer satisfaction with what the choice of courses offered them.
DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed……………………………………….Date:………………
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\(^1\) The term Headmaster is the official title of the incumbent Principal at the Focus School. It shall be adhered to throughout this research.