



Epistemology in the Curriculum: A Comparative Analysis of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Theory of Knowledge and the Turkish Ministry of National Education's Theory of Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Epistemology courses are increasingly used to cultivate critical thinking and responsible knowledge use, yet international and national implementations may reflect different curricular logics. Comparing the International Baccalaureate (IB) Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and Turkish Ministry of National Education (MEB) Theory of Knowledge illuminates how global inquiry and local civic aims are translated into design and assessment. This matters for curriculum theory and practice because it clarifies actionable levers for balancing international-mindedness with cultural grounding in secondary education. The purpose of this study is to conduct a systematic comparative document analysis of the IB Theory of Knowledge and the Turkish Ministry of National Education's Theory of Knowledge curriculum in order to identify their underlying curricular logics, points of convergence and divergence, and implications for curriculum design and epistemology education. A qualitative document analysis was conducted on the official IB TOK Guide (first assessment 2022) and the MEB Theory of Knowledge instructional guide (2009). Using comparative thematic coding across four categories: (1) aims and vision, (2) content/structure, (3) pedagogy, and (4) assessment, the data were synthesized into comparative matrices to identify convergences and divergences. Thus, the findings solely reflect the intended curriculum rather than classroom enactment. Both curricula promote critical reflection and ethical responsibility. However, IB's TOK emphasizes open-ended inquiry, interdisciplinarity, and international-mindedness, operationalized through a globally standardized essay and exhibition. MEB's Theory of Knowledge foregrounds structured epistemology, civic/national values, and applied learning, assessed via projects, portfolios, and examinations aligned with national priorities. Epistemology can be embedded through distinct yet complementary logics, inquiry-oriented globalism and value-grounded civic education. The study offers design principles for curriculum developers and teacher educators seeking to integrate both approaches, enabling secondary curricula that prepare learners for participation in both global and national communities.

KEYWORDS

Critical thinking; comparative curriculum analysis; curriculum theory; epistemology in education; Theory of Knowledge (TOK); International Baccalaureate.

INTRODUCTION

Epistemological education has become increasingly central to curriculum debates in the twenty-first century, particularly as schools navigate the intersecting challenges of globalization, technological disruption, and democratic renewal. In contemporary contexts, knowledge is no longer viewed merely as a set of facts to be transmitted, but as a dynamic construct shaped by social, cultural, and disciplinary perspectives. Consequently, curricula that explicitly address the nature, justification, and application of knowledge represent a distinctive innovation. By moving beyond subject-specific boundaries, such courses aim to cultivate learners who can evaluate competing claims, question assumptions, and reflect critically on their own epistemic positions.

This shift resonates with broader global education discourses. Both UNESCO (2015) and the OECD (2018) have emphasized the importance of global competence and global citizenship education, urging schools to equip students with the ability to navigate multiple perspectives, address complex problems, and balance global interconnectedness with local responsibility. In this sense, epistemology-focused curricula serve as a key site where educational systems attempt to reconcile internationalization with cultural identity, providing fertile ground for comparative research.

Two curricular initiatives exemplify this effort: the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and the Turkish Ministry of National Education's (MEB) Theory of Knowledge (TOK) course. TOK, situated at the core of the IB Diploma Programme, positions epistemology within a global, inquiry-driven framework that highlights interdisciplinarity and intercultural dialogue. By contrast, the elective Theory of Knowledge course, introduced in 2009 as part of Türkiye's national secondary curriculum, embeds epistemological inquiry in a civic-oriented framework emphasizing cultural identity, democratic values, and ethical responsibility.

Despite their shared focus on knowledge, the two curricula are shaped by markedly different educational traditions. Yet, to date, no study has conducted a systematic comparative analysis of these frameworks. This absence is notable, given the growing importance of comparative curriculum research in understanding how different education systems balance global imperatives with national cultural grounding. Addressing this gap, the present study positions itself explicitly as a comparative curriculum study.

Although existing scholarship has examined IBDP TOK from various international perspectives and has analyzed the MEB TOK within Turkey's curriculum reform context, a direct, systematic, side-by-side comparison of the two frameworks could not be identified in the peer-reviewed literature. While it is impossible to provide an exhaustive account of all possible unpublished or locally circulated analyses, an extensive search across major academic databases (e.g., ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science) and relevant national repositories revealed no prior comparative study focusing specifically on IBDP TOK and the MEB TOK. Therefore, this study positions itself as *addressing a significant and demonstrable gap* in the published comparative curriculum literature.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a systematic comparative document analysis of the IBDP TOK curriculum and the MEB TOK curriculum. By examining the aims, structure, pedagogy, and assessment approaches of each framework, the study seeks to illuminate their underlying curricular logics, points of convergence and divergence, and broader implications for epistemology education in both global and national contexts.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the IBDP TOK and the MEB TOK curricula articulate their aims and underlying visions of epistemology education?
2. How is epistemological content structured in each curriculum, and what similarities and differences emerge in their thematic organization?
3. What pedagogical approaches do the two curricula promote, and how do these reflect their broader educational philosophies?
4. How do assessment methods in each curriculum align with their stated aims and pedagogical orientations?
5. What do the convergences and divergences between the two curricula reveal about the relationship between global and national approaches to epistemology education?

The contribution of this study is twofold. First, it provides the first comparative analysis of IBDP TOK and MEB TOK, illustrating how epistemology is embedded differently in international versus national contexts. Second, it generates insights for curriculum theory and practice by showing how diverse epistemological traditions can inform the design of knowledge-centered courses that prepare learners for both global citizenship and national belonging.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Epistemology and Curriculum: From Knowledge Transmission to Epistemic Agency

Epistemology has long occupied a central role in educational theory, shaping how schools conceptualize learning, knowledge, and the purposes of curriculum. Foundational thinkers such as Dewey (1938) argued that education must cultivate reflective inquiry, positioning learners as active participants in meaning-making rather than passive recipients of information. Constructivist perspectives from Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978) further emphasized that knowledge develops through cognitive conflict and sociocultural mediation, foregrounding the epistemic nature of learning processes. Pinar's (2012) concept of curriculum as a "complicated conversation" extends these ideas by framing curriculum as an interpretive, autobiographical, and dialogic engagement with knowledge traditions. In contrast, Tyler's (1949) objectives-based model reflects a more structured orientation, emphasizing clarity, alignment, and measurable outcomes.

Contemporary curriculum scholars continue this trajectory by stressing the need for education systems to prepare learners for epistemic complexity in a rapidly changing world. Biesta (2010) positions education as balancing qualification, socialization, and subjectification: three functions that directly shape how curricula position knowledge and the knower. Similarly,

Hodgson and Spours (2018) argue that twenty-first-century curricula must equip youth to navigate uncertainty, while Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2022) highlight the importance of “epistemic agency” in curriculum-making. Across these traditions, a shared argument emerges: curriculum must explicitly address the nature, justification, and use of knowledge.

These theoretical foundations are highly relevant to epistemology-focused courses such as the IBDP’s TOK and the MEB TOK, both of which foreground critical reflection, ethical awareness, and knowledge evaluation.

Theoretical Framework: Integrating Tyler, Pinar, and Epistemological Traditions

To guide this comparative analysis, the study adopts a synthesized theoretical framework that brings together Tyler’s objectives-oriented model and Pinar’s *currere* centered conceptualization. Although these traditions are often positioned in opposition - Tyler emphasizing structure and alignment, Pinar emphasizing subjectivity and interpretive experience - the present study treats them as complementary analytical lenses.

Tyler’s model provides a theoretical foundation for comparing the *structural* components of the two curricula:

- the articulation of aims and intended learning outcomes,
- the organization and sequencing of content,
- the alignment between pedagogy and assessment.

This lens is particularly effective for examining how each curriculum defines epistemological goals and constructs a coherent instructional pathway.

By contrast, Pinar’s perspective illuminates the *experiential and reflective* dimensions of epistemology education. His emphasis on *currere* and “complicated conversation” enables analysis of how each curriculum positions the learner as a knower; how students are invited to question, interpret, and situate knowledge within personal, ethical, and cultural contexts. This lens is especially relevant to differences between IB’s intercultural inquiry ethos and MEB’s civic-ethical grounding.

Used together, Tyler and Pinar allow the study to analyze both:

1. the technical and structural logic of each curriculum (Tyler), and
2. the interpretive, existential, and ethical dimensions of epistemology education (Pinar).

This integrated dual-lens framework supports a multidimensional comparative analysis, enabling the identification of how each curriculum constructs epistemic agency, reflects broader educational traditions, and positions students in relation to knowledge.

Epistemology in IBDP Theory of Knowledge

The IBDP’s TOK is a flagship course designed to cultivate critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and epistemic humility. Organized around a core theme, *Knowledge and the Knower*, and supplemented by optional themes and Areas of Knowledge, TOK encourages students to interrogate questions such as “What counts as evidence?” and “How do cultural contexts shape what we accept as knowledge?” (IB, 2020).

Empirical studies highlight several positive outcomes associated with TOK participation, including improved argumentation, reflective judgment, and intercultural awareness (Walker, 2004; Davy, 2011). More recent scholarship identifies challenges such as variability in teacher expertise, tensions between universalist epistemology and cultural diversity, and the need to integrate non-Western epistemic traditions (van Oord, 2013; Marsh, 2019; Shahjahan, 2021). These debates position IBDP TOK as a dynamic, globally circulated curriculum whose epistemological framing invites both philosophical and comparative inquiry.

Epistemology in the MEB TOK Curriculum

Türkiye's MEB TOK course, introduced in 2009, reflects the intersection of constructivist pedagogy, national identity formation, and civic education. Its units, Human and Knowledge; Value, Source and Accuracy of Knowledge; Knowledge and Social Life; Knowledge and Technology, emphasize epistemological questioning situated within social, cultural, and ethical domains (MEB, 2009).

National studies suggest the course promotes reflective thinking, ethical reasoning, and everyday epistemology (Kara & Demirtaş, 2013). However, systemic challenges persist, including variability in implementation and limited teacher preparation (Demir, 2020). Unlike IBDP TOK's internationally standardized design, MEB TOK integrates epistemology with democratic citizenship, cultural heritage, and societal responsibility.

Comparative Gaps and the Need for This Study

Although both curricula seek to cultivate critical, reflective, and ethically aware learners through epistemology education, the ways they operationalize epistemology diverge significantly across global and national contexts. Despite this significance, no peer-reviewed comparative analysis directly examining IBDP TOK and MEB TOK was found in searches across ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and national repositories. This gap underscores the need for a systematic comparative curriculum study that situates these frameworks within broader discussions of globalization, national identity, and epistemological education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative document analysis approach to compare the IBDP *TOK Guide* (first assessment 2022) and the MEB's *Theory of Knowledge Instructional Guide* (MEB, 2009). Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing, evaluating, and interpreting documents to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). This method is particularly suitable when investigating educational policies and curriculum frameworks, as it allows for systematic comparison of intended goals, structures, and instructional strategies. Document analysis was chosen due to the absence of large-scale empirical data on MEB TOK implementation and to ensure comparability with IB policy documentation.

Data Sources

Two official curriculum documents served as the primary data sources:

- International Baccalaureate (IB). *Theory of Knowledge Guide* (2020, first assessment 2022). This guide outlines the objectives, content structure, assessment design, and pedagogical underpinnings of TOK as a compulsory core subject in the IB Diploma Programme.
- T.C. Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı (MEB) Bilgi Kuramı Dersi Öğretim Programı (2009). This national curriculum document defines the aims, units, learning outcomes, instructional approaches, and assessment practices for the MEB Theory of Knowledge course, delivered as an elective course in Turkish high schools.

Both documents are authoritative sources produced by the respective organizations (IB and MEB), ensuring reliability and authenticity of the data.

Analytical Framework

The analysis followed a thematic comparative framework, derived from curriculum theory (Tyler, 1949; Pinar, 2012) and epistemology in education (Dewey, 1938; Senge, 1990). Four broad categories were identified for coding:

- Aims and Vision – statements of purpose, learner profiles, and overarching goals.
- Curriculum Content and Structure – units/themes, scope and sequence, emphasis on knowledge domains.
- Pedagogical Approach – instructional philosophy, teaching methods, role of teacher and learner.
- Assessment Methods – evaluation tools, formative vs. summative approaches, alignment with aims.

This framework allows for systematic comparison while remaining sensitive to differences in philosophical and cultural contexts.

Analytical Scope and Interpretive Boundaries

As this study relies solely on official curriculum documents, all interpretations pertain to the *intended* curriculum rather than the enacted or experienced curriculum. Therefore, claims about what the curricula “promote,” “develop,” or “cultivate” should be understood as referring to their stated aims, structural emphases, and pedagogical guidance rather than empirically verified classroom outcomes. The analysis does not assume that these intentions translate directly into practice; rather, it examines how each curriculum conceptually frames epistemic aims and learner roles. Future research incorporating classroom observations, teacher interviews, or student perspectives would be necessary to evaluate how these intended aims are enacted and experienced in real educational settings.

Coding and Analysis Procedures

The analysis proceeded in three stages:

- Data Extraction: Each document was read in full, and relevant sections on aims, content, pedagogy, and assessment were extracted verbatim.
- Coding: Extracted data were coded under the four thematic categories. Codes were both deductive (based on the pre-set framework) and inductive (emerging from the documents themselves, e.g., IBDP TOK's "knowledge questions," the MEB TOK's "national values").
- Comparative Synthesis: The coded data were synthesized into comparative matrices highlighting convergences, divergences, and unique emphases across the two curricula. Narrative interpretations were then developed to contextualize these findings within broader curriculum theory and epistemological traditions.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Several strategies were used to enhance trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

- Credibility: Both documents are official, primary sources from IBDP and MEB, ensuring authenticity.
- Dependability: The coding process was guided by a transparent analytical framework, allowing replication by other researchers.
- Confirmability: Interpretations were grounded in textual evidence, with reflexive attention to avoiding bias in comparing international and national contexts.
- Transferability: Although the findings focus on two specific curricula, they offer insights relevant to broader discussions of epistemological education and comparative curriculum design.

Validity and Reliability of the Document Analysis

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection process, several strategies were employed throughout the document analysis. First, only official and authoritative documents published by the International Baccalaureate and the Turkish Ministry of National Education were included, ensuring the authenticity, stability, and credibility of the data sources. These documents represent the most recent and complete versions of each curriculum, thereby reducing the risk of using outdated or non-standard materials.

Second, validity was strengthened through a systematic and replicable data extraction process. Each document was read in full multiple times, and relevant sections were coded according to a pre-established analytical framework derived from established curriculum theory (Tyler, 1949; Pinar, 2012). This deductive–inductive coding approach ensured conceptual coherence while allowing new categories to emerge where appropriate. Consistency in coding rules and category definitions was maintained throughout the analysis.

Third, reliability was enhanced through continuous cross-checking of coded segments and thematic classifications. Coding decisions were documented, compared against initial coding schemes, and revisited during synthesis to maintain interpretive consistency. The use of

clearly defined thematic categories (aims, structure, pedagogy, assessment) further increased the interpretive reliability of the comparative analysis.

Finally, transparency was maintained by grounding all interpretations explicitly in the curriculum texts themselves. Claims were based on direct statements from the documents rather than inference about classroom implementation. This approach ensures that findings are traceable, reproducible, and constrained within the boundaries of intended curriculum analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study relies exclusively on publicly available curriculum documents, no human participants were involved, and formal ethical approval was not required. However, ethical research practice was maintained by properly citing all sources, respecting intellectual property, and ensuring accurate representation of both curriculum frameworks.

FINDINGS

The document analysis revealed both shared emphases and significant divergences between the IBDP TOK and the MEB TOK course. Findings are presented under four analytical categories: aims and vision, curriculum content/structure, pedagogical approach, and assessment methods.

Aims and Vision

Both curricula articulate epistemological reflection as a central goal but frame it differently. The IBDP's TOK aims to encourage students to ask, "How do we know it?", to embrace ambiguity, and to engage with multiple perspectives. In contrast, the MEB's TOK emphasizes rational and critical thinking while situating knowledge within cultural, civic, and national contexts.

Table 1.

Comparative Aims of IB TOK and MEB TOK Curricula

Dimension	IB TOK (2022)	MEB TOK (2009)
Central focus	Reflection on knowledge questions; awareness of perspectives	Understanding types and sources of knowledge; rational and critical thinking
Orientation	International, inquiry-based, intercultural understanding	National identity, civic responsibility, universal human values
Student role	Reflective inquirer, critical examiner of assumptions	Knowledge user and producer; socially responsible citizen
Ethical dimension	Responsibility in knowledge use and creation	Moral duty, respect for Atatürk's principles, democratic values

Table 1 above illustrates that while both curricula promote critical reflection, IBDP TOK emphasizes epistemic humility and intercultural dialogue, whereas MEB TOK stresses ethical responsibility and cultural/national grounding.

Curriculum Content and Structure

IBDP TOK organizes epistemology into one core theme (Knowledge and the Knower), two optional themes: (Knowledge and Technology, Knowledge and Politics, Knowledge and

Indigenous Societies, Knowledge and Religion, Knowledge and Language), and five Areas of Knowledge (AOK): history, human sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, and the arts. MEB TOK structures the curriculum into four units: (1) Human and Knowledge, (2) Value, Source and Accuracy of Knowledge, (3) Knowledge and Social Life, and (4) Knowledge and Technology. IBDP TOK is flexible and interdisciplinary, enabling connections across subjects, whereas MEB TOK is structured and thematic, focusing on knowledge's role in personal, social, and technological life.

Pedagogical Approach

The IBDP TOK guide recommends inquiry-based pedagogy, emphasizing dialogue, debate, and student-led questioning. Teachers are positioned as facilitators who encourage connections between students' lived experiences and disciplinary perspectives. MEB TOK similarly endorses a constructivist, student-centered approach, highlighting project work, group discussions, and active learning. However, its orientation is less about open-ended inquiry and more about cultivating responsible, values-based citizenship.

As shown in Table 2, both curricula endorse student-centered learning, yet IBDP TOK foregrounds knowledge questions and intercultural perspectives; whereas, MEB TOK prioritizes structured inquiry within ethical and civic domains.

Table 2.

Pedagogical Approaches in IBDP TOK and MEB TOK

Category	IBDP TOK	MEB TOK
Teaching style	Inquiry-driven, Socratic dialogue, interdisciplinary links	Constructivist, project-based, civic-oriented
Role of student	Active inquirer, reflective knower	Active participant, socially responsible learner
Role of teacher	Facilitator, co-inquirer	Guide, mediator of values and knowledge
Emphasis	Exploration of epistemic questions	Application of knowledge to social/ethical life

Assessment Methods

IBDP TOK employs two assessments: the TOK exhibition (internal, moderated) and the TOK essay (external, prescribed titles). These tasks assess students' ability to engage critically with knowledge questions and apply them to real-world contexts. MEB TOK adopts a broader set of tools, portfolios, projects, performance tasks, presentations, and rubrics, aligned with national assessment traditions.

The Table 3 below shows that the IBDP TOK assessment privileges global comparability and epistemic reasoning, while MEB Theory of emphasizes continuous, formative assessment linked to national civic goals.

Table 3.*Assessment Comparisons within IBDP TOK and MEB TOK*

Dimension	IBDP TOK	MEB TOK
Core tasks	Exhibition (internal) and Essay (external)	Projects, portfolios, group work, written/oral exams
Evaluation focus	Argumentation, reflection, real-life connections	Knowledge application, critical reasoning, civic/ethical values
Standardization	Global rubric (IB moderation)	National rubrics (MEB guidelines)
Alignment	Strong alignment with inquiry-based pedagogy	Strong alignment with project-based, civic-oriented pedagogy

The two curricula follow distinct pedagogical and assessment pathways. In IBDP TOK, knowledge questions lead to inquiry dialogue, reflection, and assessment through an exhibition and essay; whereas, MEB TOK progresses through structured knowledge units, project-based learning, and evaluation via portfolios and examinations.

Summary of Findings

- Both curricula value critical thinking and ethical responsibility.
- IBDP TOK highlights interdisciplinary inquiry, open-ended questioning, and international-mindedness.
- MEB TOK highlights structured epistemology, cultural/national values, and social responsibility.
- Pedagogically, both endorse student-centered approaches, though IBDP TOK emphasizes inquiry-dialogue, while MEB TOK integrates projects and civic education.
- Assessments diverge: IBDP TOK uses standardized international tools, while MEB TOK uses diverse formative/summative tasks embedded in national priorities.

DISCUSSION

This comparative analysis reveals that epistemology can serve as a powerful curricular anchor, but the ways it is framed, taught, and assessed vary significantly across educational traditions. The IBDP TOK and MEB TOK represent two distinct yet complementary curricular logics: the former is rooted in a global, inquiry-oriented, interdisciplinary model, while the latter is grounded in a national, civic-oriented, value-based model. Both share a commitment to developing critical, reflective, and ethically aware learners, yet they operationalize these aims through different pedagogical and assessment pathways.

Recent studies in comparative curriculum and epistemology education further illuminate the tensions observed between global and national curriculum models. Research published in the last five years highlights the increasing importance of epistemic agency, intercultural competence, and curriculum responsiveness in navigating rapidly shifting knowledge landscapes (Deng, 2022; Priestley & Biesta, 2022). Similarly, recent IB-focused scholarship notes challenges in local adaptation and cultural translation within standardized international

curricula (Bunnell, 2020; Heyward, 2021), while national curriculum research emphasizes the resurgence of civic identity, ethical reasoning, and cultural grounding in epistemology-oriented courses (Demir & Yıldız, 2021; Porras-Hernández, 2023). These contemporary findings align with the present study's observation that the IB TOK and MEB TOK curricula represent two contrasting yet coherent approaches to epistemology education—one emphasizing global inquiry and epistemic pluralism, the other foregrounding civic responsibility and cultural continuity.

Curriculum Theory and Epistemological Orientations

From a curriculum theory perspective, IBDP TOK aligns with Pinar's (2012) notion of curriculum as a "complicated conversation," emphasizing reflexivity, multiplicity, and intercultural dialogue. Its epistemological stance is dialogic and pluralistic, inviting students to explore diverse ways of knowing and to situate themselves as active knowers. By contrast, Theory of Knowledge is more closely aligned with Tyler's (1949) objectives-based model, structured around specific thematic units, behavioral outcomes, and civic objectives. It reflects a more structured approach to epistemology—one that prioritizes clarity, coherence, and alignment with national values and democratic citizenship.

This contrast highlights the enduring tension in curriculum theory between subjectification and socialization (Biesta, 2010). While IBDP's TOK foregrounds personal meaning-making and global citizenship, MEB TOK emphasizes the formation of socially responsible citizens grounded in local culture and history. Rather than being oppositional, these orientations can be seen as complementary, offering different routes to cultivating epistemically capable learners.

Pedagogical Implications

Pedagogically, both curricula endorse active learning, yet they do so in different registers. IBDP TOK promotes open-ended inquiry, Socratic dialogue, and interdisciplinary thinking. It encourages students to take epistemic risks, to question disciplinary boundaries, and to engage with uncertainty. MEB TOK, while also constructivist in design, embeds knowledge within civic, ethical, and cultural contexts, using projects, portfolios, and group work to encourage applied, socially relevant reflection.

These differences have direct implications for teacher education and professional development. IBDP TOK demands teachers who are comfortable with epistemological pluralism, intercultural sensitivity, and facilitative dialogue. MEB TOK requires teachers who can mediate between philosophical concepts and national values, helping students apply critical thinking in culturally grounded ways. In both cases, teachers must be prepared to navigate epistemic complexity and to scaffold metacognitive reflection - skills that are often underdeveloped in traditional teacher training programs (Priestley et al., 2022).

For teacher education, the findings suggest that professional development should not only enhance teachers' capacity to facilitate open-ended epistemological dialogue, as emphasized in IBDP TOK, but also strengthen their ability to connect knowledge to civic

responsibility and cultural values, as highlighted in MEB TOK. Integrating both approaches into teacher preparation programs could equip educators with a dual skill set in terms of guiding students through globally oriented inquiry while also grounding reflection in ethical and civic contexts. Such integration would ensure that teachers are better prepared to nurture learners who are at once critical global inquirers and responsible national citizens.

Assessment and Accountability

Assessment further illustrates the divergence in curricular logic. IBDP TOK relies on a globally standardized essay and exhibition, moderated internationally, and evaluated through rubrics focused on argumentation, justification, and real-world connections. This model emphasizes comparability and epistemic reasoning. MEB TOK employs a more diverse and formative approach: portfolios, performance tasks, group projects, and written/oral exams. These tools emphasize ethical reasoning, application to social contexts, and civic accountability.

The distinction here is not only about format but about philosophy: IBDP TOK treats assessment as a way to cultivate epistemic dispositions (curiosity, open-mindedness, criticality); whereas, MEB TOK treats assessment as a means to ensure social and ethical engagement. These models reflect different educational priorities—yet both respond to contemporary demands for students who can think critically, act responsibly, and navigate complexity.

Policy and Curriculum Design Implications

From a policy perspective, this comparison underscores the need for curricula that are both globally relevant and locally grounded (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; UNESCO, 2015; OECD, 2018). In an era where global citizenship education is promoted as a policy imperative, national systems must decide how to integrate international frameworks without eroding local identity, cultural values, and civic responsibility.

While the findings highlight complementary strengths in the epistemological orientations of the two curricula, it is important to emphasize that any suggestion of a hybrid or integrative model remains conceptual rather than empirical. The present study does not provide evidence regarding how such a model would function in classroom practice or how teachers and students might experience it. Instead, the discussion of potential complementarities should be understood as an invitation for future research, not as a claim about feasibility or desirability. Empirical studies involving teachers, learners, and classroom enactment would be necessary before any concrete hybrid approach could be proposed or evaluated.

Contribution to Comparative Curriculum Scholarship

This study contributes to the field of comparative curriculum studies in several ways. First, it offers the first side-by-side document analysis of IBDP TOK and MEB TOK, thereby expanding the comparative literature beyond typical East–West dichotomies. Second, it demonstrates the value of applying curriculum theory lenses (Pinar, Tyler, Biesta) to empirical curriculum documents, showing how epistemology is differently constructed across policy contexts. Third, it provides practical insights for curriculum reformers, teacher educators, and policymakers

seeking to embed epistemology in secondary curricula in ways that are both culturally responsive and globally informed.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study provides the first systematic comparison of the IBDP TOK and the MEB TOK curricula, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based exclusively on document analysis of official curriculum texts. As such, the findings reflect the intended curriculum (what policymakers and curriculum designers prescribe) rather than the enacted curriculum (how teachers implement it) or the experienced curriculum (how students engage with it). Classroom-based research would be necessary to assess how these curricula are interpreted, adapted, and practiced in different educational contexts. Second, the coding framework, while grounded in established curriculum theory, involved an element of researcher interpretation. Although measures were taken to ensure transparency and rigor, alternative coding approaches could emphasize different aspects of the curricula. Third, the two curricula differ not only in philosophy and orientation but also in their policy and cultural contexts. IBDP TOK operates within a globalized, internationally standardized program, while MEB TOK is situated in the Turkish national education system. Direct comparison, therefore, inevitably encounters issues of scale and scope that may not be fully resolvable through document analysis alone. Finally, the study does not incorporate longitudinal or outcome-based evidence regarding the effectiveness of either curriculum in fostering critical thinking or epistemological awareness. Hence, it is recommended that future studies could integrate classroom observations, teacher interviews, or student performance data to triangulate the findings presented in the current study. Comparative classroom-based studies across IB and Turkish schools would also enrich understanding of how epistemology education translates into practice.

CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken the first systematic comparative analysis of the IBDP TOK and MEB' TOK course, two distinctive curricular frameworks that both seek to cultivate epistemological awareness in secondary education. While both share a commitment to fostering critical reflection, rational thinking, and ethical responsibility, they emerge from and respond to very different educational traditions. The comparative analysis highlighted how epistemology is operationalized within divergent curricular logics: IBDP TOK promotes a globally standardized, inquiry-driven approach to knowledge, whereas MEB Theory of Knowledge emphasizes structured epistemology rooted in national values, civic responsibility, and cultural identity.

Several key findings emerged. First, in terms of curricular aims, IBDP TOK positions students as reflective inquirers who engage with knowledge questions across disciplinary and cultural boundaries, whereas MEB TOK situates epistemological inquiry in civic and ethical contexts, preparing students as socially responsible citizens. Second, in terms of pedagogy, both embrace student-centered learning, but IBDP TOK privileges open-ended dialogue and

interdisciplinarity, while MEB TOK embeds epistemology in applied, value-laden, and culturally contextualized learning experiences. Third, with respect to assessment, IBDP TOK employs a globally standardized essay and exhibition to evaluate epistemic reasoning and real-world application, while MEB TOK utilizes projects, portfolios, and examinations aligned with national frameworks, emphasizing accountability to social and civic values.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that epistemology in education is not a neutral or universal enterprise but is deeply shaped by cultural, political, and policy contexts. At the same time, both models illustrate the enduring value of embedding epistemological reflection into curricula, albeit through distinct pathways. Importantly, the comparison reveals that global and national approaches are not mutually exclusive. IBDP TOK's emphasis on inquiry, interdisciplinarity, and pluralism complements MEB TOK's focus on civic responsibility, ethics, and cultural grounding.

The implications of this research are significant for curriculum theory, policy, and practice. For policymakers, the analysis underscores the importance of balancing global imperatives with national priorities, particularly as education systems grapple with the twin demands of internationalization and cultural identity. For curriculum designers, the findings suggest that epistemology can serve as a bridge between universal competencies (critical thinking, intercultural understanding) and particularistic commitments (civic duty, cultural heritage). For teacher educators, the study highlights the need to prepare teachers not only to facilitate open-ended epistemological inquiry but also to help students apply reflective thinking in ethical, civic, and culturally embedded contexts.

At a theoretical level, the study contributes to comparative curriculum scholarship by demonstrating how curriculum theory frameworks (Pinar, Tyler, Biesta) can illuminate the ways epistemology is framed differently across international and national contexts. It responds to calls in the literature (UNESCO, 2015; OECD, 2018; Deng, 2018; Sahlberg, 2021) for more research on how curricula navigate the interplay of globalization and localization. By situating IBDP TOK and MEB TOK side by side, this research adds nuance to ongoing debates in curriculum studies about the future of knowledge, the role of values, and the purposes of education in a complex world.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of IBDP TOK and MEB TOK underscores that epistemological education is both globally urgent and locally specific. Designing curricula that cultivate reflective, ethical, and knowledgeable learners requires negotiating the space between universal epistemic practices and particular civic and cultural contexts. The challenge and opportunity for future curriculum development lies in creating integrative models that draw on the strengths of both approaches, thereby preparing students to thrive as epistemic agents in a world that demands both global citizenship and national belonging. Further research could examine how students and teachers experience these curricula in classroom practice, adding an empirical dimension to the document analysis presented here.

Hence, future curriculum reforms should also be accompanied by targeted investments in teacher education. Preparing teachers to navigate both inquiry-driven, global frameworks such as IBDP TOK and civic-oriented, value-based approaches such as MEB TOK requires specialized training in epistemological dialogue, intercultural competence, and ethical pedagogy. Teacher education programs that integrate these competencies will be essential to realizing the potential of epistemology-focused curricula in diverse educational settings.

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