

The Changing Face of Singapore's Education System

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Abstract

Education is Singapore's most important investment. Devoid of any natural resources, Singapore needs to focus on the only resource she has – people. The journey from third world to first was premised on being pragmatic; emphasizing centralized control and close alignment between the education and labor market. As such, education policies that focused on sciences, mathematics and English were developed. Over time as Singapore developed, the economy transformed into a knowledge-intensive and innovation-driven one. This forms the impetus for the education system to move away from a rigid, traditional model based on rote learning and move to one that encourages critical thinking and creativity. Against this backdrop, demands for greater inclusiveness and plural political participation echoed an increasing desire for a new social compact in education. Using a systems approach and a large scale systems engineering framework (Chia, 2007), this paper examines the dynamics of Singapore's education system against the historical impetuses for survival, efficiency and catering to individual's ability. It highlights the need for social systems to be flexible to adapt to changing environments and needs.

Keywords: education system; systems approach; large scale systems engineering framework