

Education was a
foundation of civilised
society education
essay



Education was the foundation of the civilised society. Man evolved from uncivilised barbarians living in the wild, to civilised people living in structured societies. It was through education that social elements such as language, culture, rules and morals were spread. In our cities, we have systems of law to fight for justice and settle disputes. When we require acts of services or products from one another, there are occupations, currency and trade. In most nations, Man already lives in civilised societies. Thus, education today is less about civilising Man but more about paving the road towards progress, and the continuous improvement of our lives.

So, when we think of education, what comes to mind? Getting our ' O ' Levels certificates? How about ' A ' Levels certificates, or diplomas and degrees and other higher qualifications? Why do we go through all these years of schooling to attain these? Education opens up doorways to occupational opportunity [5]. Flip through the job advertisements in the newspapers, or those from online job portals: be it an accountant, a chef, a teacher, a doctor, a technician, or even a driver - they all need relevant qualifications as proof of education. Through education, we learn skills that qualify us for an occupation. Thus, the purpose of education is to allow us to earn a living, by taking on occupational roles in the society.

As such, education is also linked to a society's economy [5]. If a country's education system is not up to par, its economy will suffer because of it. It was recently reported in the news that " Poor Science Education Impairs US Economy" [10]. Statistics showed that the US trails behind many other industrialized countries, standing at the 48th position in the K-12 category worldwide ranking for mathematics and science. The stagnating science

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education resulted in a shortage of qualified workers, thus employers had to look elsewhere for employees - thus contributing to other countries' economies instead [10]. Further statistics show that the rate of high school dropouts in the US is 1.2 million a year, and 44% of these dropouts up to the age of 24 remain unemployed [16]. If these numbers were halved, the US economy would have gained back US\$150 billion a year in lost wages and taxes [16]. Thus, the purpose of education is to achieve economic prosperity for the society.

Another purpose of education is to instil the society's values into the individual's character. In the case of Japan, their Fundamental Law of Education states a purpose of education:

“ Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice ... have a deep sense of responsibility ... builders of peaceful state and society.” [15]

The Japanese school system achieves this through moral education not only as an independent subject, but emphasized throughout all other subjects and activities in the school [12]. For example, Japanese language classes are not designed only to allow the pupil to develop an understanding of the language, but also to cultivate a respect for it [12]. Japanese students also learn to appreciate responsibility and the value of hard work through their daily rotational duties of cleaning the various facilities in the school [12]. Through education, Japan aims to instil in every pupil strong codes of social

etiquette. Without social etiquette, Man would return to its original days of barbaric lifestyles.

“ Real education has to draw out the best from the boys and girls to be educated.” [11]

Education should also seek to maximise an individual's potential. In South Carolina, Forest Lake Elementary customizes lessons to suit the diverse students through the use of differentiated instruction [17]. Surveys are conducted to find out the students' interests. Assignments are not fixed – for example, instead of essay questions, students can choose to submit poems, plays, comic strips, or even record a video [17]. Differentiated instruction gives each student a way to show off their own diverse talents.

The above stated purposes of education are generally universal to most societies, though each may have different perspectives of it. What is Singapore's take on the purposes of education? For a nation without any natural resources, our main resource is our people. Hence, much has been invested into our education system in order to improve this resource [8]. Education equipped the workforce with the skills and qualifications they needed to earn a living. Education also solved the racial disharmony issues in Singapore, which were caused by miscommunications and a lack of mutual understanding between the different races.

The government began by implementing integrated schools where students of different language streams would be able to study together in the same school [8]. Schools promoted values of racial harmony while establishing a national identity through flag-raising and pledge-taking ceremonies [8].
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Bilingualism was also introduced in 1966 [8]. This gave students of different races a common English language to communicate with, while they continued to learn their Mother Tongue to maintain their cultural roots. Teachers also had a common language to teach their multiracial students with. Today, Singapore is world-renowned for her multicultural society. Thus, education met the purpose of building a cohesive society in Singapore.

However, policies such as Bilingualism have their implications, which are becoming more and more visible today. Students are speaking a lot more English because of the emphasis of English on a national level. The standard of Mother Tongue overall was declining. For example, the ' O' level results of numerous students were greatly affected because of poor Chinese grades. Eventually, CL ' B' was introduced, where students could take this simpler version of Chinese that would not count to their overall results. Students are slowly losing touch of their cultural roots. For Mother Tongue teachers, they can hardly keep their Mother Tongue lessons a one-language classroom, having to use English to explain words. This has further implications on the more senior teachers who graduated from one-language schools, as their proficiencies in English may not be good enough to explain the words to the students.

Singapore's education system also had to fulfil the purpose of instilling society's values into the students, building their character. Similar to Japan, Civics and Moral Education was part of the curriculum [13]. Students also go through a compulsory Community Involvement Program (CIP) where they are required to clock a minimum number of hours of community work per year.

CIP gives the students the opportunity to participate in volunteer work that <https://assignbuster.com/educations-was-a-foundation-of-civilised-society-education-essay/>

exemplify the values taught in CME, and allow them to play active roles in bettering the lives of others in the society [13].

However, because CIP was made compulsory, there are several implications to its effectiveness on students. Majority of the students only go through the motions of doing CIP just to clock the minimum number of hours. This reduces its effectiveness because the pushing factor to do CIP should come from the heart. Furthermore, CIP activities are usually things like beach cleaning and collecting donations. These mundane and repetitive activities cause the students to find even less meaning in CIP.

Like South Carolina, education in Singapore also meets the purpose of developing every student to the maximum of his potential [7].

“... to educate a child to bring out his greatest potential ...” [3]

Hence, the ability-based streaming system was introduced. Students were banded into different classes based on their diverse abilities, where brighter students formed a class to learn at a faster pace and less capable students formed another class to learn at a slower pace. The rationale of this was to “allow a child every opportunity to go as far as he can” [2]. Statistics showed that after streaming was implemented, there was an increase from 71% to 98.4% of primary school students who progressed onto secondary education [13].

However, there are implications to this system. While the brighter students receive recognition for their excellent performance, some of them also suffer from a high level of stress. This stress is caused by the pressure from

parents and schools who expect them to keep up their excellent performance. For the less capable students, they may lose self-esteem due to the stereotypical labels placed on them because they are in the “weaker” or “slower” group. For the teachers, there is also additional stress at the two extremes. In the higher band classes, teachers would have to meet the higher expectations of the brighter students, as these are children whose capabilities usually go beyond the textbook syllabuses. In the lower band classes, teachers would need to motivate and work harder to help the students achieve their target grades.

As an expansion of this streaming system, the Ability-Driven Education (ADE) was implemented in 1999, as one of the key aspects of the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (TSLN) framework that was introduced in 1997 [4]. The aim of TSLN was to inculcate in our students a lifelong learning passion, at the same time encouraging innovation and creativity [4]. Under the ADE, students can now choose to develop their talents, be it in arts or other areas [4]. New educational facilities such as the Singapore Sports School were built to provide an alternative secondary education to students with talents in sports. Another key aspect of TSLN is the Integrated Programme (IP) that allows top percentile students to skip the ‘O’ Levels examinations and go straight to Junior College or other specialized institutes, giving students more choices to customize their education and develop their talents [4].

MOE also launched the ICT Masterplans to support the TSLN framework [14].

IT was integrated into schools and teachers were encouraged to use IT in their classrooms. There was a need for this because the switch from the

Industrial Age to the Knowledge Age made the use of IT in society prominent.
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The Knowledge Age also brings with it globalisation and fierce economic competition. Keeping up with changes is no longer sufficient; Singapore needs people who are innovative and creative to be at the frontline introducing new changes to the world. However, Singapore is lacking in such individuals as compared to countries like Japan, where technological innovations are a regular affair as a result of their strong focus on technology in their education. As such, TSLN was implemented to educate Singapore's students to be continuously adaptable to changes, and produce talents to lead our frontline against the global economy. Here, the purpose of education is aimed at achieving economic prosperity for the country.

TSLN is currently at its third phase: Teach Less, Learn More (TLLM) [4]. Classrooms are becoming more student-centred, with teachers acting as facilitators to the students' independent learning, as opposed to the traditional "spoon-feeding" of textbook knowledge. Additionally, the use of IT is emphasized more heavily in TLLM [4]. For example, e-learning assignments encourage students to conduct research independently and present their findings to one another in class.

However, there are some implications to the implementation of the TSLN framework.

Firstly, the ADE and IP require the students to make a lifelong decision at a young age [4]. For example, by opting to join the IP, the student will go straight to JC without taking the 'O' Levels examinations. If the student performs poorly in his 'A' Levels exam, he would be left in a spot without having an 'O' level certificate to fall back on.

Secondly, the ICT Masterplans promote the increased usage of IT which can become a hassle for teachers who are less IT-inclined as they would have to attend additional trainings on top of their heavy workload [14]. Furthermore, lessons can be hindered when problems crop up with the IT systems.

Thirdly, when MOE introduced TLLM, only the concept was explained, with little instructions and examples to follow [6]. The implementation and accountability of the policy is left to the school, meaning that if the school is unable to perform up to standard, the responsibility remains with the school [6]. For teachers, being at the frontline of the classroom, they experience the most pressure from this responsibility. When one hears the term “ Teach Less”, one would assume that the teacher’s workload is lessened. However, this is not true. Even as a facilitator, the teacher has even more to plan for the lesson. How will she complete the syllabus on time, what with having to spend extra time planning for TLLM and implementing it in her already-tight lessons? How would the students react, and if their solutions are insufficient, how would she hint them towards the right direction, while maintaining their independent learning? Furthermore, the current textbooks are designed more for the traditional methods of teaching and assessing. How would she apply TLLM to it? Additionally, if a student is not motivated to learn independently, or if he is not pro-active enough in the classroom, he would receive little benefit from the TLLM approach. It is again on the teacher’s onus to find more ways to engage the student and encourage them to participate actively.

In conclusion, Singapore shares the same purposes of education that most other countries do, although our methods of implementation may bring

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about different results and implications. Ultimately, our goal for education is for our people to become passionate lifelong learners, while being innovative and creative enough to introduce new changes in the world; at the same time instilling in them good social values. As our education system progresses, so will the lives of Singaporeans.