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Feeding NIE : A Funnelling Effect In Recruitment

Leslie Sharpe and S. Gopinathan



Attracting the "right kind of people" into teaching in sufficient numbers is clearly crucial to the issue of teacher quality. This is never easy, however, particularly so when educational systems are being expanded in a tight labour market.

Analysing the question of how to improve teacher quality in the United States, Kennedy (Kennedy, M.M., 1991) argues that solutions must first begin with attempts to improve recruitment. She argues that there are two main problems. First, the need to ensure that recruits are representative of the population of students being taught, and second, to ensure that entrants are of the right intellectual and moral calibre. Finally, having got the "right people through the door", attention can be paid to the problem of improving classroom practice. For Kennedy, representativeness is important because teachers do not only teach content - they "personify" it. Children need to see in their teachers diverse examples of the educated person, such as scientists, writers or mathematicians, "including at least one who looks like they look".

This paper takes up the issue of representativeness and applies it to the Singaporean context by analysing the schooling histories of students admitted to the National Institute of Education for the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (Primary and Secondary) Programme during July 1991. Our concern, however, is not with the issue of the social

origins of student teachers *per se* and its likely impact on the teaching profession. Rather it is with the issue of the representativeness of schools attended by the students. Analysis of data shows that though students originated from a broad spectrum of Singapore primary schools, at secondary level they were concentrated in a relatively few schools, before being further concentrated in selected junior colleges. We term this pattern of recruitment "funnelling" and describe the major feeder schools and JCs as being "teacher friendly".

Feeder Primary Schools

The majority of the NIE students in the sample (90 %) entered their primary schools during the period 1971 - 1976. In 1971 there were a total of 198 government, and 215 government-aided (including full) schools, giving a total of 413 schools taking primary age children. NIE students attended 158 (38%) of these schools. (1)

Students were well spread out amongst the 158 schools, with most schools supplying 1, 2 or 3 students. Only 4 schools supplied 8 or more students, as Table 1 shows.

Table 1: Main Feeder Primary Schools

School	N	%
Tanglin Primary	16	5
Pei Chun Public	11	3
Fairfield Methodist Primary	8	2
Balestier Primary	8	2
Remaining 154 schools	310	88
Total	353	100

Feeder Secondary Schools

Most of the sample entered their secondary schools during the period 1977 - 1982. In 1978 there were a total of 77 government, and 46 government-aided (including full) schools taking secondary age students. NIE drew its current intake of PGDE students from 84 (68%) of these schools.

Though students attended a greater proportion of secondary schools, there is a notable difference in the spread of students amongst them when compared with primary schools. Rather than being spread equally between the schools, as many as 70% of the students attended only 20 of the 84 schools. In other words, 20 out of a total of 123 secondary schools account

for 70 % of the intake. Further analysis shows that 10 of these schools account for 50 %, and that a handful by themselves make up almost a third of the intake (see Table 2).

We have coined the term "teacher friendly" to describe these 10 schools which supplied around half of the 1991 PGDE intake.

Feeder Junior Colleges

Pre-U education began for most of the sample between 1981 - 1986. 88 % attended Junior College and 12% Pre-U Centres. 8 Junior Colleges had already been opened by 1981, and all but Serangoon JC by 1986. Table 3 provides details of Junior Colleges attended.

Table 2: NIE PGDE Intake 1991 - Feeder Secondary Schools

Name of School	No of Students Supplied	Running Total	% Intake to NIE
1 Crescent Girls	26	26	7
2 Raffles' Girls	24	73	14
3 Cedar Girls	23	49	21
4 Tanjong Katong Girls	19	92	26
5 Singapore Chinese Girls	18	110	31
6 Nanyang Girls' High	16	126	36
7 Dunman High	15	141	40
8 St. Nicholas Girls'	12	153	43
9 = St. Joseph's Convent	10	163	46
9 = Chung Cheng High (Main)	10	173	49

Total intake = 353

= equal placing

Table 3: Feeder Junior Colleges

Name of JC	No of Students Supplied	Running Total	% Intake to NIE
1 Temasek	42	42	12
2 = Raffles	38	80	23
2 = National	38	118	34
4 = Hwa Chong	32	150	43
4 = St. Andrew's	32	182	52
6 Nanyang	28	210	60
7 Victoria	22	232	66
8 = Catholic	20	252	72
8 = Anderson	20	272	78
10 ACJC	19	291	84
11 Jurong	14	305	87
12 = Serangoon	2	307	87.5
12 = Yishun	2	309	88
14 Tampines	0	309	0
15 Pre-U Centres	44	353	12
Total	100	353	100

= equal placing

The table shows that 7 JCs produced 66 % of the sample of NIE students. (2) The 12% of students attending Pre-U Centres were, for the most part, evenly distributed amongst secondary schools offering 'A' level courses, though two schools supplied more than the others.

Putting together the schools, junior colleges and Pre-U Centres, it is possible to draw up a pattern of typical routes into NIE. Table 4 shows the JC/Pre-U Destinations of students from the 10 teacher friendly schools.

Of the 173 students originating in the top ten teacher friendly schools, 131 (76%) attended 7 JCs. As might be expected, hidden in these statistics are "typical routes" from secondary school to JCs. Though each secondary school drew its pupils from a wide number of primary schools, output typically moved to a small number of JCs, often with around 50% or more pupils moving on to just one or two JCs.

Table 5 shows the most preferred route to JCs for each of the top ten teacher friendly schools.

Table 4: JC destinations of students from the 10 Teacher-Friendly Schools

Junior College	Number of Students from the 10 Schools
1 Raffles	30
2 National	25
3 Temasek	20
4 Hwa Chong	19
5 = Nanyang	13
5 = St. Andrews	13
7 Victoria	11
8 Anderson	8
9 Jurong	6
10 = Anglo Chinese	5
10 = Catholic	5
12 Serangoon	2
13 Yishun	1
14 Tampines	0
15 Pre-U Centres	15
Total	173

= equal placing

Table 5: Route from School to Junior College

Name of School	Most Common JC Destination	N	% From School
Crescent Girls	St. Andrews	10	
	National	4	54
Raffles Girls	Raffles	17	
	National	3	84
Cedar Girls	Nanyang	5	
	National	4	39
Tanjong Katong Girls	Temasek	6	
	Victoria	5	58
Singapore Chinese Girls	Raffles	5	
	Hwa Chong	3	44
Nanyang Girls	Hwa Chong	7	
	National	4	69
Dunman High	Temasek	7	
	Hwa Chong	3	67
St. Nicholas Girls	National	5	
	Temasek	2	58
St. Joseph's	Anderson	3	
	Hwa Chong	2	50
Chung Cheng (Main)	Temasek	2	
	Hwa Chong	2	40

School Origins of Male Students

Unlike their female counterparts, males (who are outnumbered by over 4 to 1) are less concentrated in particular secondary schools and Junior Colleges. Taking secondary schooling first, they attended a total of 35 schools, and only two schools supplied a disproportionate number. At the JC level, however, there is a greater concentration, with three colleges (Temasek, Hwa Chong and St. Andrew's) supplying almost half of the males in the sample to NIE.

Discussion

The data presented show evidence of a funnelling effect in teacher recruitment, as well as the existence of a small number of teacher friendly schools. Evidence of a funnelling effect is quite clear. Whereas, at the primary level, students in the sample were spread thinly over a large number of schools, at the secondary level they were concentrated into a relatively small proportion of available secondary schools. In fact 20 schools supplied 70%, 10 schools 50%, and just 6 schools 36% of the sample of NIE students being studied. This funneling effect was continued at the JC level where over two thirds of the intake was supplied by half of the JCs. Both at the secondary and junior college level, there appear to be some institutions that are more teacher friendly, in the sense of supplying large numbers of new entrants into the profession. As a corollary, there appear also to be large numbers of institutions that either supplied one or two, or no students at all. Further, clear links appear to exist between teacher friendly schools and junior colleges.

Explanations for these findings are tentative at this stage. It is clear that gender has a role to play, as might geography. Because females outnumber males by such a large margin, it is not surprising that girls' schools supply a large

proportion of the NIE intake. These schools tend to be located in densely populated parts of the island and are more easily accessed than schools, say, in Jurong or Changi. But that can be only part of the explanation. There are many other schools in the same geographical areas that are equally accessible and admit female students but which did not supply anything near the number of students that the ten teacher friendly schools supplied.

Again, though geography appears to have been a factor in choice of junior college, it is clearly not the only factor involved. Many students appear to travel quite long distances to reach the junior college of their choice. Ethnic and religious affiliations seem to play a significant part, as does the pairing that has taken place over the years between some government schools and junior colleges. Parental choice may be an important influence as well in the choice of secondary school, as well as differences in academic attainment at PSLE. Thereafter, it seems likely that school climate, and pupil subcultures are involved too. The possibility that attitudes towards teaching as a profession vary from school to school and are variously supported or discouraged by teachers and pupils is clearly an important one to study.

Apart from the reasons noted above, the obvious question that might be raised at this stage is about the representativeness of the student intake, especially about the desirability of recruitment into teaching from a fairly narrow representation of Singapore schools. (3) Because the concept of the neighbourhood high school is not fully practised, very good PSLE students typically go on to 'good' secondary schools which send large proportions of their intake to University. Being good students they have little knowledge and experience of weaker pupils who make up the majority of students that they will teach on graduation from NIE. The issue is sufficiently important in our view to warrant further research with a more representative NIE population as the findings would have implications for recruitment policy.

NOTES

- 1 Many of these schools were small government-aided schools which have since closed.
- 2 When interpreting these figures, the different points at which the JCs came 'on line' needs to be borne in mind.
- 3 These findings relate to one intake of the PGDE programme. Whether they hold for previous cohorts and other programmes needs to be studied.

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