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The Marketisation of Education in Singapore: Policies and Implications

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Abstract

This article focuses on the marketisation of education in Singapore since the mid-1980s. It describes and analyses several policies and trends. These include the encouragement of greater school autonomy, the fostering of competition among schools, an increased private involvement in educational provision, the growth in entrepreneurial activities among schools and a greater involvement of schools in marketing activities. In addition, the article argues that the Singapore case does not actually involve a free market, but rather a controlled, or quasi-market. The promotion of such a quasi-market threatens to exacerbate not only the disparities between schools in terms of educational outcomes but also social inequalities. At the same time, it is not entirely clear whether the desired policy goals will be successfully attained. The discussion adds to the existing literature on the marketisation of education and its accompanying policy implications.

The Marketisation of Education in Singapore:
Policies and Implications

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- Greater school autonomy
- Increased competition among schools
- Greater private involvement in educational provision
- Schools as entrepreneurs
- Marketing activities by schools

Greater school autonomy

- Independent schools
- Autonomous schools
- 149 secondary schools:
 - 8 independent schools
 - 18 autonomous schools
 - 123 non-independent, non-autonomous schools
- Greater choice and diversity and flexibility?

Increased competition among schools

- Annual school league tables
- Mean subject grade
- Value-addedness
- Physical fitness test results and the percentage of overweight students
- Greater choice and diversity?
- Improved standards for all?
- Stratification of schools

- Social stratification

Greater private involvement in educational provision

- Edusave scheme
- Corporate sponsorship of sports programmes
- Opening of Singapore international schools in neighbouring countries

Schools as entrepreneurs

- Provision of educational consultancy services
- Setting up of branch schools in other countries?
- Can all schools be entrepreneurial?

Marketing activities by schools

- Efforts to attract parents and potential students
- brochures
- recruitment talks
- videos
- media publicity
- What kinds of students are targeted?
- Overseas marketing activities
- Children of Singaporean expatriates
- Academic high achievers in neighbouring countries

Summary

- a regulated market
- tensions between centralisation and autonomy

- disparities between schools
- social inequalities
- marketisation amid heavy government investment in education