
Title	Education reforms in the Singapore education system: Implications for school leadership
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Digital Presentation

Education Reforms in the Singapore Education System: Implications for School Leadership

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An Institute of



OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

I) Education Reforms in the Singapore Education System

- Introduction & Rationale
- Reforms & shifts over the years

II) Implications for School Leadership

Leaders of future-ready learners in the 21st C

- Evolving roles of School Leaders
- New Competencies -- Knowledge, skills, aptitudes
- What research says
- Further thoughts

Conclusion

References

Discussions

**Education Reforms
in the
Singapore Education System**

Singapore Education System: Outstanding performance in International benchmarking studies

- Top in the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2016 and 2019 (MOE, 2020; Ng, 2020)
- Top in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015, 2nd in 2018
- 4th in the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)
- International Baccalaureate (IB) wins 35 out of 69 perfect scorers in 2020

Amongst the best in its ability to meet the needs of a competitive economy in the WEF Global Competitiveness Report (MOE, 2020).

Yet, why education reforms in Singapore education system?

- To be future-ready in VUCA environment – 4 desired outcomes: Confident Person, Self-directed Learner, Active Contributor, Concerned Citizen -- “Learn for Life”
- Bring out the best in every child at every stage – student-centricity
- Proactive and continual reviews to improve
- Education remains an effective social-leveller

Evolution of Singapore education system

- 1) Survival-driven paradigm (1959 to 1978)
- 2) Efficiency-driven paradigm (1979 to 1966)
- 3) Ability-driven paradigm (1997 to 2011)
- 4) Student-centric, values-driven paradigm (2012 to present)
- 5) Lifelong learning (2015 to present)

Shifts over the years (I)

Move away from over-emphasis on academic grades

- Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessment
- Structures & Processes
- Harnessing Technology
- School Leadership

Curriculum -- Streaming (1980s) – Subject-based Banding – Full Subject-based Banding (2021 onwards in phases)

Pedagogy – Frontal (before 1980) – Varied approaches – Differentiated Instruction

Assessment – PSLE results by T-scores – New PSLE Score system by AL (2021); Reduce, weighted, school-based holistic assessments, remove exams at selected levels

Shifts over the years (II)

Harnessing Technology – Traditional approaches – MP1 to MP4 – Student Learning Space -- Home-based Learning – Blended Learning

Structures & Processes – Standardized one size fits all – Flexibility, adaptive to individual school needs

School Leadership – Top-down – Autonomy – Collaboration & Partnerships

Impact:

- ❖ Significantly reduce attrition rate
- ❖ Improved quality of passes at critical exams
- ❖ Holistic development of students – engaged learners
- ❖ Enhanced competencies of teachers and leaders
- ❖ More future-ready

Findings: Role of School leader

School leaders are technical, human, educational, symbolic cultural leaders as they undertake their roles (Sergiovanni, 2019) and are disciplined, synthesizing, creating, respectful and ethical in their mindsets as they prepare students to be future-ready learners (Gardner, 2005).

As educational and curriculum leaders, they are responsible for “setting the direction, advocate, close monitoring on progress and implementation”. They engage stakeholders, encourage, and provide resources for teachers to achieve school goals.

**Education Reforms in the Singapore
Education System:
Implications for School Leadership**

Implications for School Leadership

Leaders of future-ready learners in the 21st C

- Evolving roles of School Leaders
 - New Competencies -- Knowledge, skills, aptitudes
-
- What research says
 - Further thoughts

What Research Says

Aim of research

To better understand:

- How the recent education reforms in the Singapore education system impact on the role of school leaders as “leader of future-ready learners in the 21st C”
- The knowledge, competencies, skills that will be helpful as a leader of future-ready learners in the 21st C

Methodology

A qualitative methodology is deployed to elicit responses from 26 aspiring school leaders (vice-principals). Data is collected through structured questionnaire at the beginning of the Leaders in Education Programme, a seven-month milestone training programme for aspiring school leaders.

Two key questions:

- I) Looking ahead, how will your role change compared to what you have been doing as a “leader of future-ready learners in the 21st C”?
- II) What are the knowledge, competencies, skills that will be helpful to you as a leader of future-ready learners in the 21st C?

Findings:

I) Looking ahead, how will your role change compared to what you have been doing as a “leader of future-ready learners in the 21st C”?

a) Learner-focused:

Primary schools – basic skills, values, identity -- “...right foundation of skills and the right values.... will help them to navigate the future no matter what the future will be”.

“ground them more on values & citizenry especially in the rapid world of technological advancements”.

“develop their identity and teaching them how to make right choices is critical.”

“Being able to better facilitate and support the way learners learn.”

“Stretching the learning platforms beyond the current "low" risk platforms to the academic areas. Determining new areas of focus for the students.”

“Understanding what learners need and building capacity for beyond school”

“Giving students a voice” – previously top-down

“... our focus in ensuring their mental wellbeing”.

b) Teacher preparation

“Looking ahead, I will need to empower my teachers with curriculum design principles and knowledge of the key global trends which impact teaching and learning processes ...”

“In light of COVID-19, education and learning has taken on a new meaning. I see my role as riding on the wave of changes and adaptations that teachers have to go through to create and sustain new culture of learning (e.g. blended learning). I also see my role as having to recast what professional development for teachers will be like.”

“...to better support my staff in understanding and embracing change.”

“...empower our teachers and students to respond quickly to the VUCA world & the unexpected complexities that lie ahead. ...”

II) What are the knowledge, competencies, skills that will be helpful to you as a leader of future-ready learners in the 21st C?

“Be an early adopter (not of fads). That state of being an early adopter suggests agility and nimbleness.”

“Our leadership needs to more deliberate and intentional in creating more opportunities for students to be equipped and developed in the relevant skills needed in the future.”

“Nurture, incubate and catalyse strong relationships and social skills in the school.”

Findings: Knowledge, Competencies and skills of School Leaders

9 of the 26 participants (34.6%) -- External scan:

“Understanding the national and international development”

“Being aware and connected to perking issues and trends”

“Knowledge of global trends that impact teaching and learning”

“Futuring and Foresight”

Findings: Knowledge, Competencies and skills of School Leaders

5 out of 26 (19.2%) – Understand the Learners:

“Know the learner profile/ skills, values, learning dispositions needed for learners to be future ready.”

“Knowledge on how to develop student's values”

“Understanding what the learners need to be future ready learners in the 21st C.”

“Understanding how the new generation think and learn; and their sources of motivation and priorities”

“Deep knowledge of the learners as individuals”

“How to concretize the learning of soft skills in the students”

Findings: Knowledge, Competencies and skills of School Leaders

4 out of 26 (15.4%) -- Field of educational leadership - theories (latest)/understanding of complexities/ Knowledge of competencies needed for a leader in the 21st century.

“Knowledge of the competencies of a leader in the 21st C”

“Core skills and dispositions required that of 21st C”

“Being values and mission driven”

“One can never own all the knowledge in the world. To be able to network, valuing co-creation”

Further thoughts: Implications for School Leaders

1) Change /Transformational Leader

- Sense-making of policies in school context
- Influence, inspire others to act
- Timely Communication – clarity, articulation to stakeholders
- Integration – intentional interweaving for holistic education, eg. As curriculum / instructional Leader and character and citizenship education, critical thinking
- Distributed Leadership – Empowerment & Autonomy-- ‘strategic alignment, tactical empowerment’ (Ng, 2017)

Implications for School Leaders

2) **Mobilise resources** -- eg. partnership in times of crisis, needs-based resourcing

- Partnership with stakeholders, as collaborator with community, industries, institutes of higher education, etc
- Parental Engagement -- Parents Gateway/school website/official social media accounts/google classroom announcements, etc.

Implications for School Leaders

3) **People developer** -- Importance of continual professional learning – upskill, lifelong learning, SkillsFuture for Educators

4) **Culture builder**

- School tone
- Quality teaching and learning
- Monitor commitment and measure impact

Implications for School Leaders

5) **Lead & manage the pace of digital transformation** -- Use of Artificial Intelligence for: decision-making, management and administration, assessments, etc.

6) **Social & Global Leader** -- Covid19 pandemic has accentuated the social divide. School leaders now need to pay greater attention to develop:

- Greater citizen-centricity (CCE 2021)
- Inclusive society
- Sustainability awareness eg. Green movement, 3Rs in support of a sustainable planet

Implications for School Leaders: Global Competencies

- Deep learning focuses on the development of the 6 global competencies(6Cs): Character, Citizenship, Collaboration, Communication, Creativity, and Critical thinking. (**Michael Fullan Sept 2020**)
- School leaders have to be visionary, decisive, with a strong sense of conviction, commitment, wisdom & empathy to manage stakeholders and their expectations.
- As curriculum leaders, they lead in the knowledge, content, curriculum , pedagogy and assessments of school curriculum. They need to be skillful and competent as leaders of teachers, learners, and ensure that teachers are not merely teachers of content, but also teachers of values, and be catalyst to drive change.

Implications for School Leaders: Global Competencies

In the process, they are gate-keepers of the aptitude and attitudes of learners for the future, embracing the joy of learning, spirit of inquiry, ruggedness of character, confidence, and lifelong learning.

In addition, they have to lead nationally (Heng, 2014) ensuring that MOE-initiated policies are implemented according to the needs and readiness of the school. This is carried out through the “strategic alignment, tactical empowerment’ approach (Ng, 2017). Inevitably the process of implementation and school leadership is underpinned by strong pragmatism and efficiency for maximum outcomes is the norm (Hairon, 2019).

Implications for School Leaders: Personal Competencies

- guided by a purpose-driven, values-driven philosophy
- open, flexible, adaptable and agile
- decisive, visionary, strong sense of conviction, commitment, wisdom
- empathy to manage stakeholders and their expectations
- growth mindset and social adeptness (EQ, relationship) will also be critical

Challenges of School Leaders in midst of education reforms

VUCA environment, Covid19 pandemic

- Diverse society – Greater needs across more areas are increased significantly
- Social divide
- Rapid change in technology
- Covid 19

Possible derailers:

- Work-life harmony – well-being of self, staff and students

Support for School Leaders

- Top support for MOE
- Newly-posted principals – peer-mentoring programme, coaching
- Cluster system
- Peer support
- Networks, eg. Academy of Principals (Singapore)

Conclusion

Education Minister Lawrence Wong (LEP 2020 Graduation speech):

“Leadership is not just about knowing what to do; it’s also about getting people to want to do the right thing”

School Leaders need to lead with courage and conviction

Some references

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END OF PRESENTATION

DISCUSSION