The Development of Education in Singapore since Independence
- A 40-year perspective

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Education is at the core of a nation’s development.

Since 1965, Singapore has consistently transformed its education system to meet changing landscapes.

The overall objective is to develop a cohesive society and prepare successive generations of young people to compete and thrive in a globalised future.
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- 1945 – 1960s:
  - Ethnic divisions
  - High Unemployment
  - Political Instability
  - Poor infrastructure (e.g.) Health, Housing, Education.

- The political challenge was to build a viable state that had legitimacy. A merger with Malaya which would create a bigger market was to be the solution. But it was not the case.
In education, the colonial heritage was one of:

- Four medium of instruction school system.
- Low investment in school infrastructure.
- Inappropriate “British-based” curriculum.
- Education was poorly linked to emerging economic needs.
- Poor teacher training infrastructure and low status of teachers.
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Building the Nation: 1965-1978


- Political – to build a Singapore nation in which citizens unite, contribute and have opportunities regardless of race, language or religion.
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- Economic - to transit from an entrepot economy to an open, export-based economy.

- Social – to strengthen unity between the ethnic groups

- Educational – to build an education system appropriate to emerging socio-political needs
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- Singapore needed:
  - A labor force with relevant industrial skills.
  - A language with which to communicate with investors & to seek export markets.
  - Political will & skill to deal with national issues.
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- **Survival-driven Education (1965-1978)**

  - Merged the ethnically diverse educational streams into a single national system.

  - Adoption of bilingual education policy (English and the Mother Tongues).

  - Access to education for all – rapid building of schools and large scale recruitment of teachers.
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- Emphasis on languages, science, maths and moral education in the curriculum.
- Investment in Vocational & Technical Education.
- Upgrading of teacher education via the establishment of the Institute of Education in 1973
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Efficiency-driven Education (1978-1997)

- By the early 1980s, Singapore had grown to become a Newly-Industrialising Economy and the education system was unable to supply the skills needed in the economy.

- Need for education reform - from a “one-size-fits-all” education to a differentiated approach which enabled pupils of different abilities and aptitudes to develop at their own pace. “Streaming” was introduced.
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- Efficiency-driven education resulted in lower attrition, more students having vocational technical opportunities and closer education-economy fit.

- By the late 1990s, however, Singapore’s education system had to respond to growing impact of a knowledge-based, new economy.
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- Ability-driven Education, 1997 - present
  
  ➢ New initiatives:
    
    - Thinking Schools Learning Nation
    - IT Master Plan
    - National Education
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- Launched of "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" (TSLN) in June 1997.

- Objective – to gear the education system towards nurturing an innovative society in the new millennium.

- Providing opportunities for teachers and pupils to engage in creative approaches in teaching and learning and to develop the habit of thinking for themselves.

- Providing more diverse paths for students with different talents to develop their knowledge, skills and character.
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- IT Master Plan: to exploit the potential of information and communication technology to give students access to new information sources and make anytime, anywhere learning possible.

- National Education: designed to better acquaint students with their own history, to strengthen civic commitments, and protect and defend Singapore’s core values.
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Besides the changes in the school system, three other major components of Singapore’s education system also undergone transformational change:

(a) teacher-education
(b) technical & vocational education
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Teacher-Education:

- Quality teachers, quality education. Status of teaching as a profession increased dramatically since the 1960s. Educational excellence is sustained through the recruitment and training of quality teachers and outstanding school leaders.

- Concept of “life-long” training and re-training for all teachers and principals.
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- Technical & Vocational Education

- Image/status of vocational and tech training improved tremendously in the 1990s with the Institute of Technical Education and the polytechnics playing vital roles in creating a robust and broad-based technical and vocational education segment.

- These institutions equip young Singaporeans with the skills for employment or entrepreneurship in a high-value economy.
What Singapore’s education system has achieved?

- Sound and robust schools
- Reduced dropout rate
- Improved academic achievements for all ability groups
- Better trained teachers and principals
- Better facilities
Planning Ahead

The Singapore Government will be constantly planning and reviewing educational policies and changes that are aimed to:

- Prepare young Singaporeans for the knowledge-based economy and, in the process, sustain Singapore’s world competitiveness standing.

- Strengthen national identity, values and social cohesion and, in the process, sustain Singapore’s multi-racial, multi-cultural society.
Conclusion

The Singapore’s case study has shown that:

- Education and the provision for lifelong learning is a national priority.

- Strong political leadership and will has guided the overall education development and produced a structure and system that is relevant and responsive to the ever-changing economic and social landscape.
Thank you