

STRATEGIES for Education

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Preamble

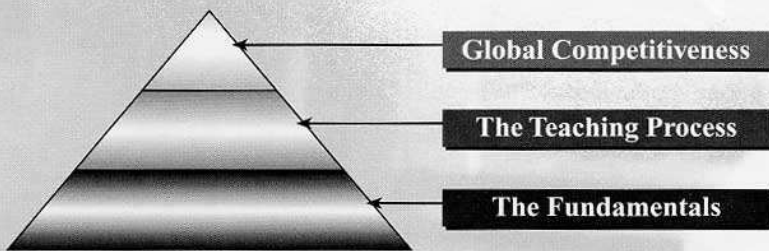
Today, we as Asians reside in the midst of an Asian impulse to recover from the current worldwide financial crisis. This impetus to be once again globally competitive harangues our various domestic and foreign policies with a vast need for reform in a plethora of arenas. One of this definitely is **education**, an indispensable tool for making a country's workforce not only creative and one of distinction, but also competitive and viable for effecting a recovery and prosperity of that country.

The Mission Statement

To this end, this project group has discerned that the purpose of Asian education must be reformed to cope with demanding times of difficulty and hardship. Our vision for Asian education, and its reform for the global age can be encapsulated in the simple mission statement: ***Education as the foundation for global competitiveness.***

Asian Education: Three Levels of Concern

We have identified three-levels of concern which Asian education must address, and these are represented in the following pyramidal structure:



However, we must elucidate precisely what each concern (The Fundamentals, The Teaching Process and Global Competitiveness) means, as well as our rationale for representing them in a pyramidal structure, before embarking on a detailed examination of the concerns themselves, as well as recommendations attempting to resolve them.

Firstly, the **Fundamentals** describe the most basic concerns about the education system of any country. Countries such as Indonesia find this especially pertinent to their situation, as it revolves around the most essential structure of the education system.

That is: What is the role of the government in funding, regulating and supporting the institution of learning? How relevant are the institutions' many courses to the various needs of the country? What is the medium of instruction that is employed and whether this hinders a country's competitiveness? And finally, issues such as standards for evaluation of students at all levels of education.

Secondly, the **Teaching Process** level is concerned with the dynamics of the teaching process itself, the extent to which Information Technology is integrated into the classroom environment, the chief philosophy of the teaching profession (the question of whether we are producing creative and versatile graduates), the whole image of the teaching profession (issue of teachers' wages), how teachers are recruited and evaluated, and finally the expectation that society harbours about the value of education.

Thirdly, **Global Competitiveness** is essentially the endpoint of the hierarchical development that we have presented. After ascertaining both the establishment of the **Fundamentals** and the reform of the Teaching Process, we can attempt to turn our recovering Asian economies into ones that are eminent contenders with other advanced capitalist nations. This means being able to tackle the need for the constant upgrading of the workforce to cope with globalisation and changing the demand on it from the worldwide economy. This also means dealing with problems like the outflow of local talent, fostering the development of leaders and strengthening Asian ties, so that as a region, we can become collectively competitive with other regional blocs like the European Union (EU) and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).



These concerns are represented in pyramidal structure chiefly because we have recognised the varying levels of development that Asian countries are at. Asian countries range from highly developed Japan to fledging economies like Vietnam and Laos, and thus the hierarchical organisation of the concerns for Fundamental upwards to the endpoint of Global Competitiveness is analogous to the differing stages of development which Asian countries occupy.

This is not to say that developing Asian nations reforming their education systems need only be preoccupied with the **Fundamentals**. Rather, this project is advocating that insofar as there are adequate resources, political will and the patience to wait for the fruition of long-term goals like **Global Competitiveness**, every country ought to engage all three outstanding levels of concern wherever relevant.

Naturally, more developed countries like Japan and Singapore would concentrate on intermediate and advanced concerns such as the **Teaching Process** and **Global Competitiveness**, just as countries such as Indonesia would be targeting its fundamentals as its highest priority, but still paying significant attention to the other two concerns.

This White Paper will attempt to engage the task of facilitating Asian recovery and success in the global age through the field of reforming education. We will first elaborate on the concerns of Asian countries, inasmuch as the **Fundamentals**, the **Teaching Process** and **Global Competitiveness** describes these difficulties. The second portion of this paper will deal with our recommendations that may help resolve some of these difficulties. Finally, this paper will conclude with our view on how education plays a role in creating leaders for Asia in the future, a perspective tinged with both hope and optimism for the ushering of a dynamic Asia into the new global age.

COMMON ISSUES

Fundamentals

The group identified 4 major problems common to all countries in the region. These are:

1. *Lack of government support*

The funds from the government have been insufficient in supporting an environment conducive to the development of education. This is clearly seen in countries such as Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia. As education has not become a top priority, this has resulted in a diminutive budget allocation. Hence, this has become an obstacle towards the accessibility of education for many in society.



Some governments do not give enough recognition to the academic freedom and autonomy of tertiary institutions. In the matter of administration, some schools have to turn the wheels of the massive machinery of bureaucracy to ask the government for their needs. This complication in administration causes procedural inefficiency.

Some governments overlook the fact that education is not limited to those in universities. There are not enough safety nets to ensure that all citizens be given the opportunity to receive education that would help develop their fullest potential. Realistically, it is quite impossible for every one to be able to enter the academic institution of their choice. The available alternatives now in most states are to shelf their education and enter the work force. The lack of institutionalised support for students outside of colleges and universities results in greater levels of unemployment and decrease the country's productivity.

2. *Courses are not responsive to industry needs*

In some Asian countries like Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, new graduates make up a large portion of the unemployed. This is because they lack communication skills and their courses have not been responsive to the needs of industries. The dawn of information technology has opened up various fields requiring new skills. The courses offered in universities must reflect this rapid change in society and industrial demands.

3. *Medium of instruction*

In countries like Indonesia, Japan, and Thailand, most courses are taught in the vernacular/national language. This has resulted in graduates losing their proficiency in English. Since English is still the language of trade and communication in the world, the strengthening of the use of English among Asians is necessary if we want Asia to be fully competitive in the global arena.

4. *Lack of standards of evaluation*

Standard systems of evaluation to monitor the quality of the curriculum or the institution itself have yet to be addressed. This has resulted in the lack of feedback mechanisms necessary for upgrading the education system. Most countries do not have a system of ranking their universities on a national scale using acceptable benchmarks. And in some countries which do have the benefits of such systems, the students are not given enough opportunities to participate in drawing up these evaluation systems for their academic institutions.

TEACHING PROCESS

1. *Dynamics of the teaching process*

Teaching philosophy

The present system conditions society to think of education as merely a tool to earn a degree and earn more money. People lose sight of the fact that education is an end in itself. People apparently regard learning as being limited to just earning a degree. Hence most graduates refuse to upgrade their knowledge through further studies. The system does not encourage people to study for the sake of being more educated and for purposes of human advancement, rather than getting a job and earning a living.

Teaching style

The advancement of an individual (in terms of creativity, innovation, and critical thinking) rests primarily on how they are allowed to interact in class. Therefore the teachers play a major role. Teachers in many Asian nations apply rote-learning which forces students to memorise and conform. This results in passive education, which stifles the student's ability to critical thinking and creativity.



GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

1. *Lack of unity*

Asian nations do not have a system of networking that will enable schools to have the transfer of technology and knowledge. There is a lack of co-operation and institutionalised efforts in terms of resources sharing, exchange programmes, and scholarships. Even the present bilateral university programmes such as exchange programmes are insufficient to increase educational standards to globally competitive levels.

2. *Creation of young leaders*

Academic institutions in the Asian region lack the necessary system to instil leadership qualities and similar values to its students. The methods of evaluating students focus only on academic excellence. Extra-curricular activities are not given much weight in the curriculum. These activities play a dominant role in the creation of young leaders and in refining their qualities. There is also a lack of regional effort to foster exchange programmes for potential young leaders to be trained in the different institutions within the region.

3. *Brain drain*

The majority of society in the region feels unsatisfied with the quality of their education. Students with good potential, and have money, usually go abroad to carry on their education. These students, however, more often than not, refuse to return to their home countries and prefer to work abroad. This is caused by a lack of conducive atmosphere that can sustain and develop these young minds. Also, their governments have failed to ensure them with good opportunities by which their services can be properly compensated. This exodus of talented and brilliant Asians serves as a barrier to our being globally competitive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In making our recommendations, it will be most lucient and logical to start from the bottom layer of our pyramid model, the fundamentals of an education system. It is then that we can proceed to show you the continuation of our reform programme in the higher levels, namely the dynamics of the teaching process and its ultimate effects to the overall global competitiveness of Asia.

The Fundamentals

A. *The Government's stance*

We must ensure the total commitment to reform starting at the highest levels of government. Without the political will and strength of leadership to implement reform policies, any change would be miniscule at best. As much as the present constraints of the economic crisis allow, we must increase the funding available to our schools, thereby setting education ahead in the list of national priorities.



B. *The Bureaucracy of education: Cutting the tentacles with decentralisation*

In the increasing complexity of our education system, the core tasks of 'teaching' are fast becoming sidelined for the constant need for administration, with schools tied to the nation-wide clumsy machinery of bureaucracy.

It is our task to counter this with **decentralisation**.

A direct consequence of this strategy is the flexibility schools have in dealing with things like recruitment and procurement of materials. While financial support will be maintained by the state, this decentralisation extends to the greater academic freedom in the teaching process and curriculum.

As a balance to this academic freedom, the state still ought to possess the mandate to anchor educational qualifications (at least at the elementary to high school level) to globally recognise accreditation programmes, not unlike the GCE 'O' Levels taken by secondary school students of various countries like Malaysia and Singapore.

C. *Choice: Multiple pathways to the job market*

We must expand and explore vocational and non-formal alternatives instead of rigidly privileging a singular educational path that concludes with a degree at Universities. Our goal is to meet the needs of the people to pursue careers best suited to their inclinations and abilities. This greatly enhances opportunities for more students all across the spectrum, and go towards our goal of accessibility of education to all.

D. *Responsiveness: Answering the needs of industries*

Education must be there to provide the various sectors of our economy with specialised professionals of high quality. New courses and programmes must be established, in a timely manner to ensure that emerging fields, like Information Technology or IT, do not have a shortage of qualified personnel.

The government's role here is two-fold. On its own, it must provide incentives to the institutions themselves to be responsive. This means trying to subsidise courses and their administration to ease the financial impact on the institutions. Secondly, the government must, with the universities and the industry, encourage the establishment of co-operative programmes with sponsorship for students by industries to study in fields needed by the industry itself.

TEACHING PROCESS

The recommendations that we would like to put forth basically focus on five issues within the teaching process itself, namely:

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| 1) Dynamics of the teaching style and evaluation of students' performance | 3) The teaching profession |
| 2) Integration of IT | 4) Social expectation for education |
| | 5) Human advancement |

1) Dynamics of the Teaching style and Evaluation of students' performance

There is a need for more active and meaningful student-teacher interaction, in short, a democratisation of the classroom. A redefinition of the teachers' role in class might achieve this. Teachers should move away from a 'sage on stage' mentality of spoon-feeding their students with facts to 'guide by side' where concepts and ideas are introduced to be further explored. This would facilitate

learning by encouraging enquiry and participation from the students. To achieve this optimum interaction would also mean changing the mentality of the students from 'passive absorbers' to 'active seekers' of knowledge. This can be done if students are instilled from a young age with the ethos that learning can be an end in itself and a life-long learning process. They should be encouraged to never see themselves as finished products but instead, as constantly upgrading members of a quality workforce.

There is also a need for improvisation of evaluation methods and the school curriculum. Firstly, evaluation methods should take a more holistic approach. Evaluation methods that test students' critical thinking and analytical skills should be more formulated.

As opposed to teaching methods that basically test students' memory and encourage rote learning, the holistic approach encourages students to think, to apply what they have learnt, to use their creativity and ingenuity to solve problems. A lot more focus and weight should also be given to the participation of extra-curricular activities as a means to evaluate the students as a whole.

Secondly, improvisation of the school curriculum calls for it to be more nurturing, flexible and to allow room for the development of creativity. It is pertinent that this development of creativity be given emphasis if we want to achieve and maintain global competitiveness.

Finally, there must always exist a flow of feedback from the people who are affected by the policies implemented in the education system back to the policymakers. This is to ensure the policymakers stay in touch with the needs and realities of the education system.

2) **Integration of Information Technology**

The integration of IT happens on two levels. Firstly, IT as a tool to facilitate learning and secondly as an area of study that should be given emphasis, considering the importance of IT in the future. The recommendations will be stated according to the levels as mentioned above. The first part of integrating IT as a tool must be the allocation of hardware. Accessibility to this hardware should be made as widespread as possible, from primary to tertiary levels of education. In order to make IT integration work, allocation of hardware must be supported by proper software, and the use of both hardware and software to enhance the learning process. Proper usage of software and hardware should be integrated into the respective teacher training curricula to produce the kind of teachers who will know how to utilise the technology to its full potential in order to facilitate in the process of learning.

The second part of integrating IT would be putting more emphasis on to IT-related subjects. Focus should be put on producing a workforce that will not only be users on technology but in fact creators and innovators of new technology themselves. This is where universities should play their part in offering the courses that will produce this workforce

3) **Teaching Profession**

In order for education to play its role as the foundation for global competitiveness, we need to have quality educators. In this respect, we must make the teaching profession a very attractive career option so as to get quality applicants. To do this, we believe that the image of the teaching profession needs to be revamped.





Firstly, priority should be given to re-structuring the salary schemes for teachers more attractively. This is important because we believe that a lot of people who have the potential to become excellent teachers are discouraged by the relatively meagre salary teachers get.

The standards by which we accept applicants into teachers colleges should also be tightened. In the long run, it would be better to sacrifice quantity for quality applicants who hopefully will become quality teachers.

The image of the teaching profession could further be enhanced, by providing standards to appraise the level of teaching quality. Currently, many countries use peer appraisal as a yardstick to a teacher's performance. We believe that students should play a more active role in the evaluation of a teacher's performance. By doing so, it will steer teaching into a service-oriented profession and thus improve the overall quality of education.

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4) Social Expectations of Education

There is a need to redirect society's mindset from a rigid preoccupation with only academic excellence to a more holistic approach. Society should be made aware that education is not only a means to achieve an end but is an end in itself. This awareness, will in turn, inculcate in society and students a culture of lifelong education.

5) Human Advancement

Education is not only about facts and knowledge. It is not only about creating a more knowledgeable human being. It is also about creating a better human being, one who has a sense of responsibility, civic consciousness and will be able to contribute to the strength and advancement of the society as a whole. To this end, we suggest that an emphasis emerge from the respective ministries of education, on instilling in young students a strong realisation of the importance of social responsibility and civic consciousness.

GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

We have recognised from the outset that education plays a major part in aiding a nation's attainment of **Global Competitiveness**. In addition, we believe that these roles are two-fold. Firstly, it is through education that a state may turn its workforce into one that constantly upgrades itself, and thus enhances the nation's competitiveness in comparison with other advanced capitalist nations. Secondly, we have also perceived that education may also be utilised as a tool to strengthen ties with other Asian nations. This, in turn, will lead to a probable increase in global competitiveness for the Asian region as a collective body.

The following are a number of recommendations for attaining the aforementioned goals.

Implementation of English

We perceive that English has been, in references to a majority of Asian nations (such as Thailand and Japan), only a half-heartedly taught language that is introduced far too late in the formal education of Asian education. We suggest that Asian nations should, 'jump on the bandwagon' of this worldwide business/working language. But first, English must be implemented far earlier in the curriculum for all Asian schools

(e.g. at the elementary level), and that it be given greater emphasis and support so that it is taught well. It will facilitate Asian students accessing the global stage far better than picking up English at a late point in their lives. We feel that implementing English as a core subject will enhance its viability as a medium of communication, such that Asia can find its graduates and its next generation more globally competitive. In addition, English can thus become a viable common mode of communication between Asian graduates of the future, better facilitating interactive activities such as trade, diplomacy and definitely the enhancement of ties between countries.



Multilateral institutionalised Asian exchange and scholarship programmes and networking

It is our belief that by instilling intra-Asian exchange and scholarship programmes, (i.e. setting up regularised and collectively supported programmes for Asian students to study in other Asian cities as either scholars or exchange students), we would necessarily improve the interaction of the Asian community and foster stronger links between Asian nations. Education avails itself readily as a means to bring Asia closer together, especially into an age of regulating tendencies worldwide (e.g. EU solidarity and NAFTA).

Ranking of universities and schools

We feel that to enable our Asian universities and schools constantly challenged to excel, and to maintain a continual impetus to upgrade their teaching process, academic standards and contributions to a quality workforce, ranking of universities and schools must be effected. Ranking criteria can be based on broad categories that each Ministry of Education can agree on with its local universities and schools.

Retaining local talent and generating national pride

We suggest a two-pronged approach for dealing with the aforementioned methods. Firstly, efforts should be made to make the local environment appealing and attractive, so that local talents will be retained. Secondly, national pride and identity should be promoted to instil loyalty.

Fostering development of leadership qualities

We feel that it is possible to serve the interest of developing leadership skills, and generating a conducive environment for the manifestation of these leadership qualities, through focusing on promoting student participation in extra-curricular activities (ECAs). One most pertinent means of achieving this is through assigning some reasonable weight to achievement and contributions to ECAs by students, in the evaluation of a student's overall performance. This is a practice adopted predominantly by Singapore and Malaysia, and can be practised in other Asian countries to facilitate the nurturing of young leaders.

Moreover, these methods would work in tandem with the expansions and intensification of networks between Asian schools/universities, where in present day, these are only limited communicative links. Proposals of increased video conferencing between Asian institutes, the adoption of brothers/sisters institutions, affiliation initiatives and linkages between universities in Asia can all facilitate this.

Along with this networking will also come additional benefits, such as sensitising Asian countries as a whole to emerging global trends and changes in industrial paradigm. This can be effected through different Asian countries' exchanging information with each other, and especially students themselves sharing experiences for a collective comprehension of the dynamics of Asia's position in the global age.

Constant upgrading

This could be achieved through constant upgrading of the educational institutions. Japan and her more technologically advanced regional neighbours can offer advice and recommendations for the rest of the Asian countries. Also, the educational models, (their structure and content) of the more technologically advanced countries can serve as a framework and guideline for her neighbours, to be modified and adopted to the unique needs of each country. Multi-national companies and experts should be invited to provide skills training and suggestions for the upgrading of human resources of the Asian states

CONCLUSION

Youthful vigour has always been confused with radicalism. This group submits that it is not enough for young idealists to identify problems. We must offer solutions which are realistic and feasible.

“Our strategies aim to maximise the potential of human resource and cultivate target areas for growth.”

Our strategies for education aim to create an atmosphere conducive for the free exchange of ideas inside and outside campuses. This can be done by mandating that countries in Asia should protect and promote the right of all citizenry to quality education at all levels and should take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all.

The governments should provide for a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society.

Our strategies aim to maximise the potential of human resource and cultivate target areas for growth. This is intended to create an environment conducive for young leaders in Asia to grow and develop. These target areas include the recognition of the two-fold nature of education. Education is not just a tool to gain a degree and earn more money. Education is also an end in itself. There must be a change of philosophy in the way we teach to ensure that civic consciousness and appreciation for the humanities are instilled among our students. The curricula in our schools should emphasise skills critical to the undergraduate's future —critical and higher order thinking, creativity, the ability and desire to learn independently and continuously, effective communication, integration of Information Technology into learning and teaching, interpersonal attributes, perseverance, etc.

It is only by isolating and reforming education, as a key toward crafting a good environment, that Asia can hope to produce young leaders and globally competitive graduates. With such leaders, the Asian Educational Model will make Asia globally competitive.

Leadership is not just an elite concept of having a selected few. It is a personal trait meant to be aspired for by all. Leadership should be instilled in our students through classroom activities and other extra-curricular activities, which are given enough weight in the academic curriculum. The educational system must create an environment that will cultivate young minds and maximise their potential. This will allow our men and women to fulfil the essence of their humanity to excel, achieve and be productive. As such, Asians will not only learn, they will be learned. This is our hope for leading a dynamic Asia into the new global age.

Our respective governments may view these strategies as too unrealistic and naive. We, as future young leaders must ensure that they take them seriously. Evil triumphs when good men do nothing. The cycle of indifference, due to a state of conditioned-helplessness, will continue if the youth will not act now with vigilance. Let us remember: If not now, when will it be? If not us, who will it be?