



Curriculum Development in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore

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The role of education in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore has been shaped by the countries' colonial history, geographic size, cultural diversity and other social, political and economic factors. This article briefly surveys the education practices of these three Southeast Asian countries. Specifically, it discusses their educational aims (as defined by and within the context of national goals) and how these are integrated or translated into their education curriculum.

with different curricular orientations were seen as a potentially divisive factor in a multi-ethnic society" (Sharifah, Lewin, 1991: 226). The link between education and national development is reflected in the Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986-1990): "... the role of education and training in Malaysia is to produce knowledgeable, trained, and skilled individuals for the manpower requirements as well as the growing social needs".

Table 1 presents how the educational aims of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have been realized and achieved via curriculum development.



Singapore's education is geared towards economic development and this is being achieved through a curriculum that exploits the full potential of each pupil. An attendant issue is forming "greater social cohesion to build a

EDUCATION and NATIONAL GOALS

Education is seen by the three countries as the means by which to achieve their goals of national (economic) development and unity amidst ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

In Malaysia, the guiding force in nation building and in educational policies have been the principles of the Rukunegara (the national ideology) which was formulated as a result of the 1969 racial conflict (Sharifah, Levin, 1991). The development of a distinctively Malaysian outlook is a preoccupation that continues to dominate educational planning. However, attempts at national unification had been made even before the racial conflict. Before Malaysia's independence in 1956, efforts had been made to develop a national system of education as "the different types of schools existing relatively independently

nation out of various racial groups" (Khoo, 1991:132) and the response has been the use of English as the medium of instruction. The choice of English underscores Singapore's thrust for economic development and national unity: a society whose economy depends on trading with other countries needs citizens competent in English (English being the emerging international language). As to racial harmony, English is not the native language of any ethnic group so that its choice and use as the language of instruction eliminate racial friction arising from "linguistic privileging".

Education in Indonesia faces the dilemma of having to provide for the country's diversity- geographically and culturally. It must also deal with the attendant occupational conditions (Thomas, 1991). Social and political developments in the 60s and 70s such as

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the continued activities of the outlawed Indonesian Communist Party and the growing strength of Islamic political parties led to government efforts to step up Pancasila education - belief in God, nationalism, humanism, social justice and sovereignty of the people (Thomas, 1991).

These aims have defined and given the direction the educational curriculum of each country has taken.

BASIC COMPONENTS OF CURRICULUM

The basic components of each country's

curriculum clearly target national educational goals/aims. Singapore, for instance, uses English as the medium of instruction at all grade levels which is consonant with its economic thrust. But in order to protect Singaporean traditional values from Western influences and incursions, the native language is used to teach cultural and moral education. The extra-curricular activities are so designed to facilitate social cohesion.

In Malaysia, curricular and co-curricular programs are subsumed under the project of national unity and development. This project of nation-building which required

TABLE 1

Country	Aims of Education	Basic Curricular Components	Curricular Features	Method of Curriculum Planning / Preparation
INDONESIA	national development and unity	moral education at all levels emphasis on Indonesia's struggle for independence suitable combination of core and elective subjects	secular and Islamic curricula three tracks (science-mathematics, humanities-languages, social sciences) specialized vocational training	centralized/top-down
MALAYSIA	national unity and development	curricular and co-curricular activities develop discipline, moral values and work ethics focus on necessary skills, values, attitudes	values across the curriculum national language across the curriculum automatic promotion vocational stream in secondary education non-selective general and comprehensive provision for all students in KBSM	centralized/top-down
SINGAPORE	national (economic) development and unity	bilingualism balanced curriculum co-curricular activities cultivate desired social attitudes	streaming of pupils greater emphasis on English	centralized/top-down



CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

the harnessing of human resources so that Malaysia would grow economically, has included provisions to produce citizens competent in the fields of science and technology (Sharifah; Lewin, 1991).

Indonesia's curriculum, like Singapore's and Malaysia's, include moral education (which is derived from the nation's five basic philosophical principles), religious and citizenship studies. In 1984, Indonesia's Research and Development Center came out with an evaluation of the 1975 curriculum and identified it as being 1) irrelevant to the government's socio-economic plan; 2) unsuitable (i.e., the

curriculum contents) to pupils' cognitive development; and 3) overloaded in course materials in certain subject areas (Thomas, 1991:213) The Center recommended as well that the curriculum must 1) emphasize the nation's struggle for independence from the Dutch; 2) come up with a more suitable combination of core and elective subjects; 3) match learning goals and activities more adequately to pupils' cognitive, emotional and psychomotor development; and 4) achieve a better transition from the school to the workplace (Indonesia, 1986: 145-6 in Thomas, 1991: 213). These changes in the 1975 curriculum have since been in place.

CURRICULUM FEATURES

Two separate but parallel systems of education exist in Indonesia: secular schooling which is under the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Islamic schooling under the Ministry of Religion.

The secular school curriculum offers, for instance in the elementary schools, such subjects as moral education, religious studies, citizenship, Indonesian language, mathematics, introduction to science and technology, geography, national and general history, physical education and English language.

The Islamic schools are of two types, the madrasahs and the pesantrens. Pesantrens are Islamic schools whose curriculum is composed entirely of religious topics. Madrasahs, on the other hand, are Islamic schools whose curriculum includes secular subjects. The pesantren and madrasah curricula are designed by a Muslim scholar in charge of the school. Thus, Indonesia's basic education features a secular as well as Islamic curriculum.

Indonesia's secondary education curriculum features various programs for students. A student may choose from three tracks: science-mathematics, humanities-languages,

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Agents of Curriculum Development	Teaching/Learning Strategies
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Directorate of Basic Education/Research and Development (R&D) Center	traditional lectures and question-and-answer methods
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teacher-centered

Curriculum Development Centre, Central Curriculum Committee, Educational Planning Committee	teacher-centered approach
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Curriculum Planning Division, Research and Testing Division	rote-learning/teacher-centered approach
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and social sciences. These have their own objectives and subject matter and are offered in the general or college-preparatory upper secondary school. Another option a student may choose is specialized vocational training offered in separate but parallel senior secondary schools (Thomas, 1991: 204).

Malaysia's New Primary School Curriculum (KBSR) "aims to provide a basic education and promote the total and balanced development of the child at the primary level" (Sharifah; Lewin, 1991: 230-1). The curriculum therefore emphasizes the mastery of reading, writing and arithmetic skills. It is built around the areas of communication, man and the environment and individual development. The development of desirable values among children is emphasized through Islamic religious education for Muslims and moral education for the non-Muslims. An important feature in the curriculum is the introduction of Man and the Environment which integrates the elements of history, geography, science, health education and civics, thereby replacing them in the primary school curriculum. Commercial practices, manipulative skills, and co-curriculum activities are other new elements introduced in the KBSR. Co-curricular activities are given specific time in the formal school timetable and are provided to enrich school experience outside the constraints of the formal academic curriculum. Commercial practices are incorporated into the mathematics curriculum while manipulative skills are taught in a separate subject (Sharifah; Lewin, 1991: 231).

The Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM) is aimed at integrating learning experiences with what is considered as the central goal of Malaysian education, that is producing harmonious and balanced citizens.

KBSM's features include 1) non-selective general comprehensive provision for all students- defined as the core curriculum, together with some guided specialization in the form of electives at the upper secondary level; 2) 'values across the curriculum' which emphasizes the internalization and practice of spiritual, humanistic and citizenship values; 3) 'national language across the curriculum' which attempts to ensure consistency and correct use of the language as well as being consistent with using Bahasa Malaysia as a language of knowledge; 4) a new subject called 'Living skills' which aims to develop interactive skills and basic functional skills for everyday living as well as to provide students with a broad exposure to technology, industry, agriculture and meaningful recreational activities (Sharifah; Lewin, 1991: 232-3).

Both KBSR and KBSM were developed directly out of educational policy decisions and they reflect the national educational philosophy.

In Singapore where education is highly competitive owing largely to its focus on excellence and the maximization of human resources, streaming is practised. The objective of streaming is to maximize the pupils' potential in learning by providing different courses that allow them to learn at their own pace.

Streaming begins at (the end of) primary 3 where pupils are streamed using school-based assessment into three different courses: 1) Normal course (about 90%) of three years of upper primary education; 2) Extended course (6%) of five years of upper primary schooling to complete the same normal course; and 3) Monolingual course (4%) of five years of upper primary in basic literacy and numeracy (Khoon, 1991: 138).

Pupils are streamed again when they enter secondary 1. Based on scores



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obtained in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), pupils are classified into 1) Special (top 5%); 2) Express (next 57%; or 3) Normal (last 38%). At secondary 3, pupils choose one of the following tracks: arts, science, commerce or technical.

The second important feature or aspect of Singapore's school curriculum is the bilingual policy. To make bilingual education more effective, moves have been made to the effect that: 1) the more able pupils will learn English and their mother tongue at the 'first language level' (meaning at a fairly competent level); 2) the average pupils will learn English at the 'first language' level and their mother tongue at the lower 'second language' level; 3) the very weak pupils should become literate in one language only (English) rather than be illiterate in two languages (Khoon, 1991: 140).

Another important feature of the curriculum is moral education which is considered important in helping pupils develop desirable social behaviors and loyalty to the nation.

CURRICULUM PLANNING AND PREPARATION

How have the curricula of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore been developed? In all three countries, curriculum development is centralized. Planning, and conceptualization occur in the country's agency or department tasked with the job of developing the school curriculum. Curriculum development has also been top-down in manner, i.e. the curriculum emanates from the central agency or from the highest authority then it is given to the teachers to whom implementation is left.

AGENTS OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

In Singapore, the main agents engaged

in curriculum decisions are the Curriculum Planning Division and the Research and Testing Division. The Curriculum Planning Division is tasked with the design, review and revision of the syllabuses in all schools. The Research and Testing Division, on the other hand, administers public examinations and undertakes research projects on issues concerning education.

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education is empowered to decide on all policies concerning education. Planning, development, implementation and evaluation of educational programs go through four levels: 1) federal level- the Ministry at the federal level is responsible for translating educational policy into plans, programs, projects and activities as well as coordinating their implementation; 2) state level- the state is responsible for the execution and supervision of educational programs and for the organization



of the coordination of school administration with respect to staff and personnel; 3) district level- it acts as linkage between school and the State Department of Education and assists in the supervision of programs being implemented; and 4) school level (Sharifah; Lewin, 1991: 227-8).

The Curriculum Development Centre, established in 1973, conducts most of the curriculum development projects in the Ministry of Education except for technical, vocational, and religious education as well as special education and music. All decision-making related to curriculum policies and change rests with the Central Curriculum Committee chaired by the Director-General of Education. The Curriculum Development Centre serves as its secretariat. Curricular programs that have financial implications or which may affect the education system are referred to the Educational Planning Committee headed by the Education Minister.

Curriculum development and curricular

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decisions in Indonesia 1) begin with the national parliament; 2) descend through a series of educational organizations such as bureaus and departments of the Ministry of Education or of private school foundations; and 3) finally arrive at the individual school and the classroom teacher (Thomas, 1991: 204).

Two agencies of the Ministry of Education are engaged in curriculum development. They are the Directorate of Basic Education and the Research and Development (R&D) Center.

TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

Curricular innovations in the three countries have called for improvements and even radical departure from the traditional teaching methods used. However, teachers continue using traditional methods of instruction or pedagogy. In Indonesia, traditional lectures and question-and-answer methods are still dominant. Instruction consists of students copying material from the blackboard and of students reciting what they have memorized. Teacher-centered approach to instruction persists in Malaysia. In Singapore, rote-learning remains and instruction is still teacher-centered. Teachers have been encouraged to use inquiry-discovery approaches to learning where pupils have more control or group work that require pupils to be more active in learning.

Existing teaching conditions or educational set-up make such a shift of pedagogy difficult. In Singapore where teachers are expected to play multiple roles and where they have to "prepare their pupils to obtain good grades in public examinations within an overloaded curriculum made even more difficult by double sessions" (Khoon, 1991: 134), such a shift to student-centered learning is constrained and the teachers are often forced to compromise the aims (including pedagogy) of the intended curriculum by this limiting environment/situation.

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CONCLUSION

The need to direct or move the nation towards a common goal has necessitated that the educational systems of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore be centralized. This has also greatly shaped and defined educational policies and programs as well as curriculum development and curricular offerings.

Expenditures for education show how committed these nations are to their education program. Malaysia, over the last few years has always appropriated 15-20% of its national budget for education. Singapore, where schooling is not compulsory, allocated 15.4% of its national budget in 1990 to education.

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