

Educational Systems Comparison in Six Nations

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## **Introduction**

A global domino effect for twenty-first century learning began in 1945 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, igniting strategic planning around the world. The educational infrastructure of six countries will be the focal point of comparison through the lens of Reimers and Chung (2016). A comparative study in educational goals, policies and practices from Singapore, China, Chile, Mexico, India and United States will be examined. Teaching and learning for the twenty-first century will be closely looked at, focusing in on salient features, commonalities and distinctions among these six nations.

## **Singapore**

On August 9, 1965, Singapore became an independent nation. Fifty years after conception, Singapore outranked every country in the world on PISA 2015 in Math, Science and Reading. It became obvious that Singapore's educational frameworks, methodologies and strategies are effective. Tan and Low (2016) credit Singapore's global distinction in education to its size, shared vision, and policy reform. Singapore is a small island that can disseminate information quickly, within its educational support structure. Guidelines, systems and ongoing feedback establishes, maintains and fortifies its relationships between stakeholders – governmental entities, educators and families alike.

In 1997, the Asian financial crisis forced Singapore to focus on the “importance of innovation, creativity, and lifelong learning” (Tan and Low, 2016). Singapore's educational reform became instrumental to their countries' progressive trajectory as a nation. As a result, a universal platform was established for teaching and learning. Teachers are of high-quality standards and are consistently trained accordingly. Initiatives such as the Core Values in the

21CC: Respect, Responsibility, Integrity, Care, Resilience and Harmony are rooted in children and their families and are reciprocated throughout Singapore's education system. Tan and Low (2016), highlight "Singapore's key strength in educational reform lies not just in its ability to communicate its policy goals and intent but also in its adherence to a serious implementation plan that ensures that the initiatives are carried out with fidelity". Order and discipline among all stakeholders involved in educational innovations hallmark Singapore as an exemplar nation in the world with respect to their high educational standards, development and methods of implementation.

### **China**

China has the largest education system in the world and outperformed all nations on PISA 2018 in all tested areas. According to Wang (2016), China's determined drive is reflected in their reform, as the government views education as a top priority. Wang (2016) notes how Chinese researchers conducted surveys and cross checks on curriculum, content, pedagogy, homework, examinations and assessments. From this feedback, a Curriculum Reform Outline was established, piloted and implemented nationwide. The Ministry of Education developed the National Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) as a strategic plan to close the gaps in education. Standards in education were raised and resources were put in place for attainment in educational gains.

China's ancient history is rooted back to Confucius's time; education is seen as a means to obtain "officialdom". Culturally, it is honorable to do well in school. In order to meet the demands of the world, emphasis is placed on initiatives in education reform for access and equity. Funding sources may shift in China, but financial aid is never cut altogether because

education subsidies are always prioritized. China believes preparedness and readiness for the demands of the twenty-first century are attained through education. Wang (2016) emphasizes how morals and ethics are reinforced in schools, as a way for society to gain traction in being productive members of society.

### **Chile**

Chile's educational system is attempting to gain momentum after falling victim to an inadequate dictatorship which left "huge gaps in civil education" (Bellei and Morawietz, 2016). For decades, Chile's government did not prioritize education, resulting in tension in leadership and created division among the nation. Bellei and Morawietz (2016) highlight, "In an education system that is already unequal and unfair; great care must be taken when including new competencies not to increase the gaps among different population groups." It is also noted that "only a small proportion of Chilean students achieve high performance in reading, mathematics and science." As a result, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and UNESCO served as liaisons, in an attempt to heal Chile's plagued educational framework. Revamping interventions provided initiatives conducive to meeting the needs of twenty-first century development. These innovations in education are aimed to aid student capacity and are providing Chileans with hope to improve the trajectory of their disadvantaged nation.

Chilean students deserve and demand more from their leadership. Even though the Ministry of Education made attempts to establish education reform, those in leadership lacked the skills to address and enforce an improved pedagogical framework. As a result, students rallied and protested in front of the public eye, which drew attention to both the need and desire

of desperate Chileans. Bellei and Morawietz (2016) highlight, “Others perceive the accountability logic as acquiring a disproportionate relevance in educational policies, which might impose drag on the educational process...” The longer it takes government officials and stakeholders to establish a strategic agenda to establish goals, policies, and an improved curriculum; the longer Chileans will be prey to poor leadership.

### **Mexico**

Cardenas (2016) labels Mexico’s distorted curriculum and disproportion in education as being “mismatch”. This imbalance in educational leadership will continue to have direct and long-lasting rippling effects on Mexico’s workforce. Cardenas (2016) warns, “if the lack of alignment is ignored in the ongoing curriculum revision, it is likely that most of the learning goals related to 21CC will remain just as an ‘intended curriculum’, but not ‘enacted’ or ‘learned’ like on other educational reforms.” Designing innovative educational interventions is the beginning of reform; however, without making strides to bring these modernizations into fruition, the trajectory of change will never be seen.

Many Mexicans are in need of acquiring the necessary skills to be productive in the twenty-first century workforce. Unfortunately, many students are not trained for the demands of the world they live in. Though Expected Learning Outcomes (ELOs) were established to address interpersonal, cognitive and intrapersonal skills, the lack of follow through from educational leaders causes inconsistencies and gaps in Mexico’s education organization. Cardenas (2016) also adds that the lack of relative uniformity causes a discrepancy in how skills across grade levels are achieved. As a result, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Union de Empresarios para la Tecnologia en la Educacion (UNETE), have argued about Mexico’s

curriculum, demanding the programs offered to students be adjusted. (Cardenas, 2016). Modifications in Mexico's education system are in need of including acquired skills and competencies for students to be able to be competitive and knowledgeable in the global world they live in. Students cannot be productive in a world they are not groomed for.

Due to habitual poor test scores on PISA, Mexico's education system has become a priority that is in need of discussion and repair (Cardenas, 2016). However, when stakeholders met to discuss a plan of action to conceptualize 21CC in classrooms, "...parents, teachers, and school principals lack familiarity with the concept of 21CC," Cardenas (2016) emphasizes "94% of parents reported they have never heard about this concept, nearly 46% of teachers and approximately 40% of school principals reported the same" when a survey was administered across the state of Guanajuato. An underlying key factor is that the trailblazers expected to spearhead and pilot 21CC initiatives have openly shared they do not have the knowledge of 21CC's expectations. In order to develop Mexico's framework, buy-in from all stakeholders is needed; this includes policy makers, parents, and educational leaders.

### **India**

India's National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF2005) is a well mapped out reform that will forever change the landscape of its education system. Natraj (2016) notes how thoroughly articulated NCF2005's goals are "from a 'holistic' perspective and how they balance the twin aims of social transformation with economic growth for the country". However, to effectively shift educational policies in India, generational cultural beliefs also have to change. Natraj (2016) remarks, "leadership at various implementation levels struggle with skills and attitudes necessary to recognize the regressive impact of hierarchal thinking and the related

consequences in making the shift toward an inclusive education system.” An inclusive education system does not exclude anyone, regardless of gender; however, what is scripted in NCF2005 is not applicable to every child, creating gaps in India’s educational framework.

Natraj (2016) affirms, “Though untouchability and gender discrimination were declared illegal, effects of historic stratifications continued to cause unequal access to education.” In addition, India has the highest youth population in the world, however, it also has a “skewed sex ratio” (Natraj, 2016). Though the expectations of NCF2005 are clearly outlined, Natraj (2016) proclaims, the reform’s “flexibility of interpretation and comprehensive curricular expectations place rigorous demands on...the entire education bureaucracy.” Fostering a framework that is only applicable to a select few will continue to strain the divide in the system. Natraj notes that the leadership that is needed, is one “equipped to facilitate changes would ensure that India is able to move beyond the various sociocultural and economic inequities...” (2016). The bridge towards inclusive education will be birthed when leaders break the gender barriers that exist in education.

### **United States**

What many attribute to be the strength of the United States, has become the root to the controversies in its education system - Democracy. Reimers and Chung (2016) focus in on how “the very instruments that were successful in focusing attention on a narrow set of outcomes to ensure academic excellence have contributed to crowding out from the curriculum...”

Traditionally, the United States allows each individual state to oversee the educational policies that assess academic achievement. When The Department of Education was created in 1979, “Public schools in the United States are, by design and by tradition, institutions where the

practice of democracy is exercised by members of the community...” (Reimers and Chung, 2016). When decisions that impact smaller communities are made, it can cause inconsistencies across the nation. Historically, the liberty to establish regulations, curricula, and policies caused gaps in the education system that are visible to this day. The US does not face the same concern in every state. On the contrary, every state has their particular concerns, as well as their methodologies for making amendments to reform; leaving the dilemma of our beloved “United” States to be “Divided” States.

Reimers and Chung (2016) warn that the quality or lack-there-of in education has undulating effects in the economy, which impacts productivity, employment and the global market as a whole. In fact, Reimers and Chung (2016) note that when the government invests in education systems, the nation’s security and level of prosperity follow suite. Leading to the conclusion, when government officials deny or lower funding in our education system, the gaps in education become greater, and the steps towards progress come to a halt.

Some states have adopted Common Core, and some have adopted PARCC. The mere fact that not all fifty states are not on the same page is an indicator of a divided agenda on education reform. Gradually, the United States continues to decline in global standardized tests. Reimers and Chung (2016) suggests, “without an explicit articulation in the curriculum frameworks, there is no guarantee that teachers and students would be engaged in these higher order thinking activities.” The Department of Education notes that 50% of teachers across the United States leave the profession within the first five years. This high turnover rate has a direct impact on the US’s educational system as a whole. Reimers and Chung (2016) add, “efforts to align those programs with the goals of the education reform initiatives have been lacking.” While efficacy is placed on scores, the mere fact that there is such a high turnover rate in teachers is the

barometer in which the United States should measure its success for twenty-first century preparedness.

### **Commonalities and Distinctions**

There are commonalities and distinctions in the education systems in Singapore, China, Chile, Mexico, India and United States. All six nations have made education reform a priority in an attempt to prepare future generations for the twenty-first century. Methodologies and practices within each nation are being revamped to meet the needs of its nations' needs. This includes student preparedness, policy restructuring, and reorganization in curriculum. Each country shares the same goal: To improve student performance in order to meet the demands of the twenty-first century.

Instructional policies and procedures vary in each nation. To produce instructional improvement all stakeholders need to share a common vision. When there is a cohesive goal, everyone involved does their individual part, and contributes to the prosperity of the nation. Not all nations share the same cultural values and belief systems; therefore, this is where the underlying distinction is between Singapore, China, Chile, Mexico, India and United States. In Singapore and China, parents are involved and aware of the academic expectations for their child; in Chile, students themselves rallied for change; in Mexico, many parents shared they did not know what 21CC was; in the United States, each state has their individual viewpoint and strategy. Reimers and Connie (2016) noted, "Americans are the most likely to say parents do not put enough pressure on their children (64%); whereas Chinese are the most likely to say that parents put too much pressure on their children (68%); in Mexico, 42% of those surveyed think that parents don't put enough pressure on students".

As we continue to compare nations with one another to find the commonalities and differences in our education system, it is important to remember that academic success is not a secluded goal, but rather it is a never-ending expedition that countries undergo for the greater good of the global economy. The global economy is the world we ALL share.

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