

The Educational Enterprise of Singapore

A Closer Look at Singapore's Relationship to PISA

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The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, also known as OECD, utilizes the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), to produce analytical data to evaluate the effectiveness of worldwide educational policies. Countries use PISA as a global barometer to gauge 15-year-old students' educational performance over time and compare standings to other participating countries around the world. This intensive assessment provides a comprehensive overview to improve global competence and to promote productive collaboration between countries (2018). Singapore is on the top of the global leaderboard in all three areas, outperforming the US.

Table 1
2015 PISA Scores for Singapore and United States

2015 PISA Results			
	Science	Reading	Math
OECD Average	493	493	490
Singapore	556	535	564
United States	496	497	470

Note: Data scores retrieved from: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf>

2015 PISA scores reveal Singapore as having the top-ranking scores in the world in science, reading and math. Andreas Scheicher, education director for OECD points out that Singapore is “not only doing well, but getting further ahead...taking over the wealthiest nations” and is doing so “without a big gap between rich and poor” (Coughlan, 2016). Coughlan highlights that Singapore became an independent country in 1965; “...this new nation had a poor, unskilled, mostly illiterate workforce” and is now ahead of every country tested (2016). As

a result, foreign political leaders and policy makers react; their eyes are fixated on “The Asian Heavyweight,” to know the infrastructure behind Singapore’s educational enterprise (Panda, 2018).

Question: What are Singapore’s methodologies that attribute to successful academic achievement? Answer: Education and Government. Professor Lee, vice president of Nanyang Technological University, points out that Singapore increased its standard of teaching by consistently focusing on teachers, as they are the core of the educational “eco-system” (Coughlan, 2016). Relentlessly, teachers are strategically recruited, trained and supported. Ankit Panda (2018) from the Council on Foreign Relations notes how Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s founder and first prime minister, has shaped Singapore’s foundation of “tiger economics”. Yew views, “individual liberties as secondary to communal prosperity and social discipline as a necessary condition for that prosperity” (Panda, 2018). Singapore prioritizes the ethical forces that achieve economic global gains; respect for authority is valued and seen as culturally relevant. Both teachers and the government impact the educational system which has a direct reciprocity on the country’s global fingerprint. Hogan adds, “Singapore’s unique configuration of historical experience, instruction, institutional arrangements and cultural beliefs has produced an exceptionally effective and successful system” (Hogan, 2014).

To truly understand Singapore’s consistent academic success on PISA, and its global economic influence, one cannot solely take into account what goes on within the four walls of the classroom, but keen in on the political and cultural vessels that fuel its foundation.

References

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