

Education in Singapore: The Legacy of the British Ten Years' Programme

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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce sleduje vývoj vzdělávacího systému v Singapuru po druhé světové válce. Zaměřuje se na jeho nejvýznamnější etapy a výsledky, stejně jako na důvody, které k tomuto vývoji vedly. Společně s tímto se snaží najít spojení mezi hlavními cíly vzdělávacího systému v Singapuru a prvním záměrem o vytvoření národního vzdělávacího systému, se kterým přišla britská koloniální vláda v roce 1949. Práce ukazuje, že i přesto že Britové opustili Singapur v roce 1963 a tato země tak získala nezávislost, vzdělávání se stále vyvíjelo stejným směrem, jako to zamýšleli Britové. Částečně tato práce také sleduje ekonomický vývoj Singapuru, protože ten byl od druhé světové války ohromný a nemohlo by ho být dosaženo bez kvalitně vzdělané pracovní síly.

Klíčová slova: Singapur, vzdělávání, Desetiletý Program, Bílý dokument, Gohův report, Goh Keng Swee, čínské školy, vývoj vzdělávání, národní vzdělávací systém, ministerstvo školství, Velká Británie, koloniální vláda, Všeobecný certifikát o vzdělání.

ABSTRACT

This thesis reviews the development of educational system in Singapore after World War II. It focuses on the major developments and their outcomes as well as the motivations for these developments and tries to establish connections between the main objectives of education in Singapore and the first directive for national educational system proposed by the colonial government in 1949. It explains that although the British colonial government left Singapore in 1963 and the country gained its independence, education kept developing in the same direction as set by the British. The thesis also touches on the topic of economic development as this was massive and it could not have been reached without well educated workforce.

Keywords: Singapore, education, colony, Ten Years' Programme, White Paper, Goh Report, Goh Keng Swee, Chinese schools, development of education, national educational system, Ministry of Education, Great Britain, colonial government, General Certificate of Education.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are a team leader. Your team consists of 4 people. All of them are of different nationalities, different beliefs, each one of them speaks his own language and has his own set of values and culture. But that is not all. One of the 4 people is special, he is stronger than all the others but yet he is not given the rightful space within the team. Your resources are more than limited, you practically have none. Your task is to manage the team, to ensure that they work together as one team. And bear in mind that in no time you will leave this team and it will be up to them how they manage all the future tasks. All you can do is to teach them basics, show them the way and hope that they will understand it and maybe master it in time.¹ This was exactly the position of the United Kingdom after World War II when it was preparing the colony of Singapore for its own independent future. All the tasks described metaphorically above were the same as the colonial government had to ensure. This is a story from 1940's and 50's. This was a journey into the history and looking into the present is logically the next step. Singapore is the most competitive Asian country and the 2nd one worldwide according to *The Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012* by the World Economic Forum. This report measures the productivity of a country shown by various factors such as macroeconomic stability, infrastructure, innovations, the level of corruption but also basic things like health care and education. This paper reviews the development of the education system together with the development of Singapore and tries to find an answer for the "Singaporean miracle" which could be beneficial for other countries too. **One of the reasons why Singapore could reach its enormous economical results in less than 50 years of its independence lays in the continuous working on education coming from the basis and directions set by the British colonial government early after WWII.**

¹Leslie Fong, „We must be flexible in implementing changes“, *The Straits Times*, March 25, 1979, <http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19790325.1.6.aspx> (accessed Jan. 15, 2012). The metaphor was inspired by a similar one used by Lee Kuan Yew in a letter to Dr. Goh Keng Swee.

2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Singapore was established by the British who were in need of ports for their trading with China and India. Therefore they decided to establish ports in the area of Southeast Asia, namely in Penang, Malaca and in Singapore. In 1818, Sir Stamford Raffles was deputed the task to establish Singapore as the British port. He succeeded in doing so in the next year, in 1819. From that time, Singapore was a British colony until the year 1959 when it gained self-governance, respectively 1963 when Singapore became fully independent.

Ever since Singapore was founded as a British port, it started to grow and develop rapidly. Starting from 1818 when the population of Singapore was approximately 1,000 indigenous people, by 1860 it was already more than 80,000 people.² This was mainly caused by a huge increase of immigration of people from other countries. The ethnical structure in 1860 shows a big immigration from China as the Chinese accounted for 61,9 per cent of all population. The rest were Malays (13,5 per cent), Indians (16,05 per cent) and others including Europeans (8,5 per cent).³ Since then, not much has changed with respect to the ethnic composition. Nowadays, Chinese account for 74,1 per cent, Malays 13,4 per cent, Indians for 9,2 per cent and the group of others has decreased to just 3,3 per cent of the population. However, the population itself continues to grow and the census from 2011 shows that there are nearly 4 million Singapore residents plus a million more of non-residents.⁴ This significant growth shows an important need for a massive evolution and development of the state itself.

If Singapore was strongly following the governance of Great Britain before WWII, then the situation changed after the War. In 1942, the British troops in Singapore were forced to surrender to the Japanese which was described by Winston Churchill as “the worst disaster and largest capitulation in Britain history”.⁵ For the period of nearly 3 years Singapore went under the governance of Japan. Soon after the War ended, British forces

² Ministry of Information and the Arts, Publicity Division, *Singapore 1994* (Singapore, 1994); „Pre-Colonial History“, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, <http://app.www.sg/who/31/Pre-Colonial-History.aspx> (accessed December 10, 2011).

³ „Founding of Modern Singapore“, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, <http://app.www.sg/who/32/Founding-of-Modern-Singapore.aspx> (accessed December 10, 2011).

⁴ Ministry of Trade and Industry, Department of Statistics, *Population Trends 2011*, <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/population2011.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2011).

⁵ „1942: Singapore forced to surrender“, British Broadcasting Corporation, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/15/newsid_3529000/3529447.stm (accessed December 10, 2011).

returned to Singapore in September 1945.⁶ However, the defeat of Great Britain made the citizens of Singapore realize that Great Britain was not as strong and undefeatable as they might have thought.

Another important historical event that had a big influence on the development of Singapore and the development of its education in particular is the end of the Civil War in China and establishing the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. It was about that time that the modern development of education in Singapore was starting, however the Chinese schools in Singapore had been operating for a long time already due to Chinese's love for learning.⁷ As a result of the communist revolution in China, the national awareness of Chinese people was strengthening not only in the Mainland but also outside in other parts of Asia. This was also the example of Singapore where various groups were attempting to bring the Chinese part of the population closer to the beliefs of the communist's China.⁸

⁶ Ministry of Information and the Arts, Publicity Division, *Singapore 1994* (Singapore, 1994).

⁷ All-Party Committee, *White Paper on Education Policy*, No. Cmd. 15, Singapore, 1956, 2.

⁸ A visit at the National Museum of Singapore, August 23, 2011.

3 EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE BEFORE 1979

Ever since the colony of Singapore was established by Sir Raffles, the British government in the island was mainly interested in trading and did not pay much attention to education of the people. They left all the activities concerning the education mainly to missionaries and local communities that were setting up local schools. These however were not controlled by the Government which is often referred to as a “laissez-faire” style of governance.⁹ The only aim of the British government was to have clerks, few teachers and doctors and that was enough. This was a logical decision because it would have been more difficult to rule a country of well-educated citizens. Citizens who are poor in knowledge are relatively easy to be manipulated and controlled by the Government. It was not until the end of World War II when the British changed their approach towards the education from the laissez-faire style to the first attempt to control the education centrally from the national level.¹⁰

Since the end of WWII, the Singaporean education system went through a great development which will be evaluated in this and the next chapter. The 3 main documents which set the direction of education in the 20th century were *Ten Years' Programme* by the British, All-Party Committee's *White Paper* and the *Report on the Ministry of Education* made by the research group led by Dr. Goh Keng Swee. This chapter will be focusing on the development brought by the first two documents. The next chapter will review the changes in the education system from 1980 using the Goh Report as a key document. The big importance will be put mainly to the biggest issues and challenges of the education system as observed throughout the century since 1949.

3.1 Ten Years' Programme

In 1949, the Government introduced *Ten Years' Programme* the purpose of which was to establish a centrally controlled system of education in the colony. This programme focused on 3 main areas that the Government considered to be the “basis for future educational development in the Colony of Singapore.”¹¹ The areas or general principles, as described

⁹ Wee Tong Bao, „An Overview of Singapore's Education System from 1819 to the 1970s“, *Biblioasia*, July 2009.

¹⁰ Jason Tan, „Education and Colonial Transition in Singapore and Hong Kong: Comparisons and Contrasts,“ *Comparative Education* 33, no. 2 (June 1997): 304, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3099895> (accessed October 5, 2011).

¹¹ Directory of Education, *Education Policy in the Colony of Singapore: Ten Years' Programme*, Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1948, 5.

in the programme, were “foster[ing] and extend[ing] the capacity for self-government, and the ideal of civic loyalty and responsibility; … [providing] equal educational opportunity to the children — both boys and girls — of all races, … upon a basis of free primary education there should be developed such secondary, vocational and higher education as will best meet the needs of the country.”¹² This action taken by the British government meant a significant change in approach towards the education as was already introduced earlier but also was a wise preparation for providing Singapore with self-governance.¹³

3.1.1 Extending Capacity for Self-governance and Education towards Civic Loyalty

As described earlier, Singapore has always been a very heterogenic society consisting of 3 main races – Chinese, Malays and Tamils, using English as the medium of communication. After WWII, the United Kingdom was increasing the level of self-governance put in the hands of Singaporean officials and this was also the first step on the path to the complete independence of the country. However, at the time discussed, there was no sense of common nationality and people tended to identify themselves as members of their own race and their own nationality (i.e. Chinese, Malay, Tamil, etc.) and tended to be influenced by political movements abroad.¹⁴ This lack of loyalty towards the country was undesirable and therefore several strategies purpose of which was to foster the common loyalty and prevent the political influence from abroad were introduced in *Ten Years' Programme*.

The intention of *Ten Years' Programme* to establish schools that would accept students on the regional basis rather than racial can be seen as an example of such strategy. This meant establishing vernacular schools that would accept all kids with no limits to their race. As described in the Programme “… the basis of all schools should be regional rather than racial, and should ensure the intermingling of pupils of all races in all the activities of

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Vernon Cornelius-Takahama, „Past and present leaders of Singapore,“ National Library Board Singapore, http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_139_2005-01-19.html (accessed March 20, 2012).

¹⁴ Ting-Hong Wong, “Institutionally Incorporated, Symbolically Un-Remade: State Reform of Chinese Schools in Postwar Singapore” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27, no. 5, (Nov. 2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036172> (accessed Nov. 20, 2011); A visit at the National Museum of Singapore, August 23, 2011.

school life.”¹⁵ This can be understood as an attempt to lower the awareness of one’s own race and creating the sense of national loyalty among the citizens of Singapore.

The intermingling of pupils was however not only left to the school life but was also focused on by other extracurricular activities.¹⁶ As was explained in the beginning of this section, the biggest importance in creating a well working successful nation was to ensure that the citizens unite and consider themselves to be people of one nationality. The Government believed that providing pupils of all races with opportunities to be involved in sport and leisure time activities will serve as one of the means of fostering the common nationality and loyalty.

After the War, education in Singapore was in very poor conditions. This could be understood materially as the facilities were damaged and materials for teaching were of low quality, but it can also be understood from the point of view of the system.¹⁷ As it can be seen from the table below, the Chinese schools were far outnumbering the other schools and almost 60 % of all pupils in Singapore were receiving their education from the Chinese stream schools. On the other hand, the Government could only enforce its power effectively at less than 8 % of all the schools at the colony.

Table 1 - Types and numbers of schools in 1949¹⁸

Type of School	No. of schools	No. of children
Malay Schools	24	8,052
Chinese Schools	319	71,251
Tamil Schools	17	1,177
English Schools		
a) Governmental and Aided schools	35	23,333
b) Private schools	53	14,438
Total	448	118,251

¹⁵ Directory of Education, *Education Policy in the Colony of Singapore: Ten Years' Programme*, Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1948, 6.

¹⁶ Ibid., 20.

¹⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁸ Wee Tong Bao, „An Overview of Singapore’s Education System from 1819 to the 1970s“, *Biblioasia*, July 2009, 6.

The problem connected with this is the fact that most of the Chinese schools were financed by other sources than the governmental aids and they were using materials mostly from China for educating pupils.¹⁹ These materials and the education provided were strongly influenced by the revolution happening in the Mainland of China. The Government was aware of the consequences this influence could have on the country as stated in the Programme: “The undesirable features of such schools will increase, the alien influence and political outlook will strengthen and the difficulties in developing civic loyalty and responsibility will be multiplied.”²⁰ Combined with the poor level of facilities used for education, the Government was trying to provide such schools with a support that would both improve the standards at the schools and also give the Government the power to control what is taught and the way it is taught at this kind of schools. Nevertheless, the Programme explains, that “many – indeed the majority – [of such schools] are housed in unsuitable buildings, some are mere profit-making undertakings, and there is reluctance in many quarters to accept any governmental aid (and the control and inspection which it would imply)...”²¹

3.1.2 Equal Educational Opportunity

As introduced in the previous section, most of schools in pre-War and early after-War period were operated either by missionaries or community leaders and this was making education quite expensive and often almost unreachable for the poorest. Therefore the most significant change that *Ten Years’ Programme* brought was “**providing free primary education at schools using the 4 main languages as the medium of education – i.e. Chinese, Malay, Tamil or English.**”²² This change was so significant because never before was there a legal regulation providing Singaporean youth with free primary education. The plan that the Government introduced was creating a 6 years course for both boys and girls of the age from six to twelve years.²³ At that time, they were planning to prolong the course to meet the same standards as were prevailing in the United Kingdom which introduced compulsory education of children from age of six to fifteen by the

¹⁹ Nor-Afidah Abd Rahman, „National Service Riots of 1954,“ National Library Board Singapore, http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_1202_2006-07-28.html (accessed March 20, 2012).

²⁰ Directory of Education, Education Policy in the Colony of Singapore: Ten Years’ Programme, Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1948, 12.

²¹ Ibid., 11.

²² Ibid., 5.

²³ Ibid.

Education Act from 1944. The 6-year duration of the course, however, remained unchanged until today.²⁴

As the schools were allowed to choose which language they would use as the medium of education and were supposed to be set on regional bases and not the racial, there was a need to make sure that the students would understand each other. Therefore a policy that could be considered as a beginning of a bilingual effort was introduced. The paragraph 5 of *Ten Years' Programme* states that “English will be introduced as a subject at the beginning of the third year.”

The Government was aware both of pecuniary costs and political costs which this “free education policy” would bring. While the pecuniary costs seemed to be rather less difficult to deal with, the political costs were of serious importance. Mainly the Chinese schools were rejecting most forms of support and resisting any kind of control by the Government. Therefore putting this policy into practice required a series of sensitive and long term actions such as close cooperation with the schools. It took almost 30 years until the Government could effectively control all the schools as it will be described in the next chapter.

3.2 White Paper on Education Policy

Although *Ten Years' Programme* laid down the general rules and policies for newly established education in post-war Singapore, there were still issues that stayed unsolved. The intention of the British colonial government to make all educational streams equal was slowly coming into practice.²⁵ However there were still many differences between particular streams causing difficulties. The biggest problems were found in the schools using Chinese as the medium of education as there was a history to these problems as described earlier (resistance to the control processes, etc.). The Government was successful in providing Chinese schools with grants and financial aids and using this also straightened its position as the controlling body. Despite this, Chinese schools still could not match the Government or Aided English schools.²⁶

²⁴ „Our Education System,” Ministry of Education, Singapore, <http://moe.gov.sg/education/> (accessed October 22, 2011).

²⁵ Ting-Hong Wong, “Institutionally Incorporated, Symbolically Un-Remade: State Reform of Chinese Schools in Postwar Singapore” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27, no. 5, (Nov. 2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036172> (accessed Nov. 20, 2011)

²⁶ Ibid.; *White Paper on Education Policy*, No. Cmd. 15, Singapore, 1956, 2.

The quality of teachers was low mainly because of the little financial motivation. This low academic and professional standard of teachers and the attitude of pupils were causing undesirable effects on the society. Students lacked in their interest towards the studies and resisted the authorities of teachers and parents. They very often took part in anti-Government activities so typical for the young generation of Chinese population in Singapore in the 50's. For example in the big riot of Chinese middle school students in 1955 students joined with strikers were rioting against the Government and several people were injured and killed.²⁷ The All-Party Committee was established to study the present situation of education in Singapore and the *White Paper on Education Policy* was the result of their study.

The two main problems in education and actions that had to be attended, as seen by the committee, were “reconciliation of the elements of diversity which arise from the multi-racial structure of [Singaporean] population” and “coping with the phenomenal increase in the population of school-going age.”²⁸ We can suppose that the original direction set in 1946 by *Ten Years' Programme* was correct as even the All-Party Committee considered as one of the most important tasks for the Government, and for the education to be precise, to build the sense of the common nationality. Paragraph 9 of the With Paper says that “the future of Singapore depends on the triumph of those forces which are trying to build a Singapore or Malayan nationalism, and it is in our schools that the foundations of that nationalism must be built.”²⁹ The later articles of the White Paper deal with the ways of building up a common Malayan or Singaporean loyalty in the schools.

3.2.1 Fostering Common Loyalty

The All-Party Committee was aware of the difference between most countries in the world and Singapore. Singapore is specific for its vast variety of languages spoken in a very small place without any geographical boundaries between them.³⁰ Therefore 6 proposals which

²⁷ “RIOTERS BATTLE the POLICE,” *The Straits Times*, May 13, 1955, <http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19550513.1.1.aspx> (accessed Feb. 15, 2012).

²⁸ *White Paper on Education Policy*, No. Cmd. 15, Singapore, 1956, 4.

²⁹ Singapore was preparing for joining the Federation of Malaya which finally happened in 1963. However, the merger did not last for long and Singapore left the federation in 1965 and declared the Republic of Singapore.

³⁰ *White Paper on Education Policy*, No. Cmd. 15, Singapore, 1956, 4.

should develop the common loyalty were introduced. These are the 6 ways as proposed by the Committee:

- a) “Education in all primary schools should be bilingual and in secondary schools trilingual;
- b) All schools should use similar Malayan-centered syllabuses, with text-books specially written in the various local languages for this purpose;
- c) Civics should be taught in all schools;
- d) Every attempt should be made to fuse the best elements of the various racial cultures to build up a common Malayan culture;
- e) Every attempt should be made to bring together pupils from the different school systems through various forms of extra-curricular activity;
- f) Steps should be taken to remove the causes of the frustration felt by the Chinese community and by Chinese teachers because of past discrimination against the Chinese schools.”³¹

The importance of bilingualism was stressed throughout the modern history of Singapore as the key factor for creating one nation. The *White Paper* might be the first official document that states this as a rule. The Government valued the principle of the equal respect for the four cultures in Singapore and therefore parents were given the right to choose which school they want to send their children to. However, the policy stated that all 4 streams would be required to teach second language. Also, while parents of pupils in the English stream schools could choose whether to have their children taught Chinese, Malay or Tamil, the students in other 3 streams were required to study English as their second language.³² The proposal to teach the third language was seen with serious concerns by the Government as there was a belief that only pupils with “more than average linguistic ability” would be able to master another language. The overall outcome and desired result of this first draft of the bilingual policy was having pupils “to speak, write and understand the language readily and accurately and teaching must (have been) directed primarily to this end.”³³

As mentioned in the point c, another way how to foster the common nationality was establishing Civics classes. While the *Ten Years’ Programme* was lacking a concrete vision and the way of education towards the common loyalty and focused mainly on intermingling of pupils of all the races, the vision of All-Party Committee was clearer. The introduction of Civics classes was a clear example of this. In these classes, children were to

³¹ Ibid., 4-5.

³² Ibid., 5.

³³ Ibid.

be taught about their duties towards the country and towards the other citizens, they should understand the way Singapore is governed and the way other countries are governed, get the necessary information about the services the country provides, the laws it is regulated by and the way it is administrated.³⁴ Despite the clear vision of what should be taught in Civics, the Committee was also aware of the fact that the proper national loyalty and the sense of what is right and what is wrong cannot be obtained only through studies of texts and materials but is mainly transferred through the role modeling of the teachers and parents. The Committee stated that if the teachers actively practice the civic virtues “then little formal teaching of Civics is necessary.”³⁵ At the same time, the benefits of providing pupils with extra-curricular activities such as sport were kept and the list of the activities was extended.³⁶

Another important factor in making non-Singaporean forces weaker was the revision of materials, books and syllabi used in schools. It was necessary to revise and change these materials as particular schools were under quite a significant influence of forces coming from outside of the country. This simply meant that the books and syllabi used in Chinese school were reflecting the history, traditions and opinions of Chinese people but also the English schools were using materials that were strongly influenced by London. This was mainly due to the fact that most of the materials in particular language came from these countries. The movement introduced was aiming at revision of all the materials and making sure that all of them used for the purposes of education in Singapore should be Malayanned.³⁷ This proves the previous assumption that during late 50's and early 60's, the goal of common nationality was seen as returning back to the traditional sense of Malay nationality rather than creating a new Singaporean one.

3.2.2 Coping with an Increasing Number of Children

The committee believed that the educational system would experience a rapid growth of number of children reaching school age and actions that would cope with this should be taken. It was introduced at the beginning of this section that the Chinese schools were often far behind the qualities of the English schools and the situation would get even worse with an increase of pupils in the schools. If the quality of education should have not lowered but

³⁴ Ibid., 6.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 7.

³⁷ Ibid., 6.

increased instead, two things were necessary: ensuring the good academic and professional quality of loyal teachers and the strict control of the syllabi and things taught at the schools.³⁸

The system of governmental funds and grants-in-aid could ensure both objectives mentioned above. The committee proposed that these financial aids would be received fully or partially based on specific criteria. Although it is clear and obvious that these criteria should match the desires of the Government, the All-Party Committee states it explicitly in the Paper as “the general education policy of the school must not in any way conflict with the education policy laid down by the Government” other criterion says that “the school must have a responsible committee of management under a constitution approved by the Registrar” or that “no principal or teacher shall be appointed or dismissed without the approval of the Registrar.”³⁹ *Ten Years’ Programme* aimed to establish a centralized educational system in Singapore already back in 1950’s, however this plan was not successfully realized due to many obstacles. One of the obstacles causing problems was the inability of the Ministry to provide schools with financial grants and adequate control. Now, since the system of grants-in-aid and financial support was working better, it was the best time to start enforcing the centrally managed system. This was still a pioneering proposal and it needs to be stressed that this vision was not successfully achieved until the 1980’s as will be described in the *Goh Report* section.

While some of the criteria for receiving the governmental funds focused on establishing a centrally managed system, others were purely aimed at improving the educational standards and making all the schools equal. One of the criteria in the section of White Paper which is describing the conditions under which school would be given grant-in-aid says that “the school must reach certain educational standards so that it can make an effective contribution to the country’s education system”. Other regulations that the Ministry of Education could enforce were controlling the age of pupils entering the primary schools, limiting students who would continue at the secondary schools according to the results of qualifying examinations or number of pupils in classes and their age.⁴⁰ These regulations were applied to all schools equally. Using the rule of equal treatment of all schools it was also stated that the universal reward system for teachers would be applied

³⁸ Ibid., 8.

³⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

according to their equivalent qualification and experience. As Chinese teachers were limited in this sense, the Chinese teacher-training classes program was started by the Government.⁴¹

The general policy of the Government in Singapore was to treat all 4 main groups of citizens equally. One of the ways how to ensure that all citizens would really be treated the same was teaching the civics classes which should have fostered one common nationality with no differences. Therefore, the policy of treating the different language stream schools equally that was described here was just a logical follow-up of the main governmental policy.

⁴¹ Ibid.

4 MODERN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Starting with 1970's, Singapore was not a developing country anymore. There were many improvements made in the country and the education system was developing along. After years of intensive work, there were already information and knowledge which could have been analyzed and using these resources led to a great development of education in modern Singapore. This chapter will focus on the changes brought with the *Goh Report* and the main outcomes many of which can still be found in today's system. It will be finished with a section focusing on contemporary education system.

4.1 The Goh Report

As was already outlined in this paper, the ultimate attempt of the Singaporean government was to establish an educational system that would be controlled and operated centrally. This, however, had not been fully achieved for various reasons. The change came in the late 70's when the political and social situation changed and brought up an opportunity for action.⁴² A committee purpose of which was to examine problems of the education system was set up and came up with the *Report on the Ministry of Education*. I consider this report to be crucial in the development of education in Singapore and therefore a significant part of this paper will focus on the main finding and suggestion of the report.

This report is commonly known as the *Goh report* named after the committee's chairman, Dr. Goh Keng Swee. Together with the Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew⁴³, he might be one of the most significant politicians in the history of new Singapore and its development. He was in various ministerial positions since 1959 when Singapore gained self-governance and soon after finishing the report, he was appointed the Minister of Education.⁴⁴

An important achievement, which the centralized system was crucial for, was ensuring that all school streams would be treated equally and its graduates would have the same position on the labor market. To accomplish this, it was necessary **to standardize the length of schooling in primary and secondary schools throughout the different streams**. Standardizing the examinations was the next step after ensuring the same length

⁴² Leslie Fong, „We must be flexible in implementing changes“, *The Straits Times*, March 25, 1979, 6, <http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19790325.1.6.aspx> (accessed Jan. 15, 2012).

⁴³ The Prime Minister in the period 1959 – 1990.

⁴⁴ Minister for Finance (1959-1965; 1967-1970), Minister for Defence (1965-1967; 1970-1979), Minister for Education (1979-1984).

of education in all language streams (examinations will be described later in this section). All these actions were taken in 60's and early 70', here is a list of some of them:

- In 1960, Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) was introduced to all language streams.
- In 1961, the Malay stream primary schools were shortened to 6 years.
- In 1962, Government Secondary Four (Chinese) Examination was introduced in Chinese language schools and this examination was given the equal status as GCE Cambridge examination in English stream schools.
- The pre-university education was set to the length of 2 years in all language streams⁴⁵ finished by GCE "A" level local exam for Chinese schools and GCE "A" level Cambridge exam for English schools.
- In 1971, all Secondary 4 students in Singapore finally sat for common GCE "O" level exam.⁴⁶

It was not easy but the Government succeeded in creating a universal educational system for all language streams schools in Singapore that was setting truly an equal treatment of pupils of all races as well as all schools regardless the language of instruction. Due to the fact that this was a goal set long before actually achieving it, another issue was brought up by the report. Many of the committee's objections were focusing on the structure and mainly on efficiency of the Ministry of Education. Although the position of the Ministry should have been superior to the schools, hardly ever did the officials actively influence the internal issues of the schools such as appointing and dismissing the principals and teachers.⁴⁷ The Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew explains this "unwillingness of officials in the Ministry to take hard decisions, to make difficult choices"⁴⁸ as a result of instability and weak political situation from the past (as described in the beginning of the section 3.2).

4.1.1 Well-educated Nation

In the late 70's, it was the best time to examine the achievements and efficiency of students in Singapore as the independent country. After years of many changes in the system, surveys were conducted and statistics analyzed. Many teachers found the changes occurred

⁴⁵ Pre-universities were only divided into two language streams – English and Chinese

⁴⁶ „A walk along the education road... ,“ *The Straits Times*, March 18, 1979, 8,

<http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19790318.1.8.aspx> (accessed Jan. 20, 2012).

⁴⁷ Leslie Fong, „We must be flexible in implementing changes“, *The Straits Times*, March 25, 1979, 6, <http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19790325.1.6.aspx> (accessed Jan. 15, 2012).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

too often and this might have also been, to some extent, the reason for a problem outlined in the Report – high attrition rate.⁴⁹ There were various things regarded as the reasons for high attrition rate but the ultimate result was not meeting the goal of education set by the PM Lee Kuan Yew as “[educating] a child to bring out his greatest potential, so that he will grow up into a good man a useful citizen”.⁵⁰

The main problem was seen in the combination of the system of promotion to the higher grades and the style of examination. Singapore has been using the terminal examination system which is designed to examine the pupils at the end of primary school, secondary school and pre-university. Based on the results from these exams, the pupils are then accepted to higher levels of the education. As outlined in the list of developments from beginning of section 4.1, this system was successfully applied to all schools in Singapore and was based on the examination system in the United Kingdom. While the Primary School Leaving Examination was created and examined in Singapore, the secondary and pre-university examination known as General Certificate of Education Ordinary (taken at the end of the secondary school) and Advanced level (taken at the end of pre-university) has always been sent to Cambridge to be graded. The requirements for passing the examinations were never lowered, however the pupils were often promoted to the higher grades without obtaining the necessary knowledge. As a result of this, statistics say that about 65% of all pupils enrolled in the Primary 1 cohort in that period either failed or dropped out at primary or secondary level.⁵¹

4.1.1.1 Streaming pupils according the academic abilities

Only very little attention did the education system pay to the specific needs of every child and to his or her academic ability. The committee working on the Report was aware of the fact that different children might have different abilities and therefore suggested to create a customized education system allowing children to study adequately. Three streams of primary and three streams of secondary schools were created and designed for different pupils according to their academic abilities.

⁴⁹ Goh Keng Swee and The Education Study Team, *Report on the Ministry of Education 1978*, (Singapore: 1979), 4 – 4. Attrition rate consists of both fails at exams and dropouts.

⁵⁰ Leslie Fong, „We must be flexible in implementing changes“, *The Straits Times*, March 25, 1979, 6, <http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19790325.1.6.aspx> (accessed Jan. 15, 2012).

⁵¹ Goh Keng Swee and The Education Study Team, *Report on the Ministry of Education 1978*, (Singapore: 1979), 2 – 3.

a) Primary schools

The first one, *normal bilingual stream*, was meant for the top 60% of pupils who were able to finish primary school and pass the PSLE in 6 years without having to repeat any year of the primary school. Another 20% of the pupils were capable of passing PSLE only after repeating one or two years of the primary school. For those, *extended bilingual stream* was created where they could take advantage of a slower pace of education than in the normal 6 years long primary education. The length was expected to be 7 or 8 years. Statistically, the last 20% of pupils were unable to finish the primary education and pass PSLE in the old primary education system and therefore a *monolingual stream* was created for them. In this stream, the children who cannot successfully cope with two languages should get literate at least in one language. This language was English for children from English, Malay or Indian speaking home environment. Those from Chinese homes should have been taught in Chinese with some oral English. It was also not expected that these children would study further and therefore they were expected to take vocational and industrial courses. Children for this stream were identified by examination and intelligence tests and streamed after Primary 3 class. Lateral movements between streams were allowed with some restrictions.⁵² Although the purpose of this decision was to help those pupils who for some reason cannot perform well, at the end it put them under big pressure of being seen by the society as of low intellectual capacity.⁵³

b) Secondary schools

Similarly as in the primary cohort, the pupils were streamed to different streams of secondary schools according to their results achieved in PSLE. The research conducted showed that approximately 39% of the Primary 1 cohort would successfully pass the GCE "O" Level Examination. These students were streamed into *special bilingual stream* and *normal bilingual stream*. Both of these were designed to take 4 years and to be finished by GCE "O" Level Examination. The difference was made in the importance put on the second language. While in the special stream schools it was made equally important to the first language, the

⁵² Goh Keng Swee and The Education Study Team, *Report on the Ministry of Education 1978*, (Singapore: 1979), 6 – 2.

⁵³ Durga Devi, interview by author, Zlin, February 13, 2012.

second language requirements on the students were lowered in the normal stream schools. The rest 41% of the cohort⁵⁴ were sent to *ordinary stream* schools where they were concentrating on English language and studying only lower second language. These students were not expected to continue in studying at pre-universities and obtaining GCE “A” Level Examination. Therefore this stream was introduced as 5 years long with GCE “O” Level Examination at the end of Secondary 5 and allowing students to sit for Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) at the end of Secondary 4. This provided them with previous preparation for GCE “O” Level Examination and also with a lower qualification in case they would not have succeeded in passing GCE “O” level.⁵⁵ **An interesting connection with the United Kingdom that has to be mentioned here is that secondary students in the UK studied for 5 years before they sat for their GCE “O” Level Examination.**⁵⁶

Table 2 - Years of schooling of children with different abilities⁵⁷

Group Level	Brilliant (8%)	Above average and average (72%)	Poor (20%)
Primary	6 years	6 – 8 years	8 – 9 years
Secondary	4 years	4 – 5 years	-
Pre-University	2 years	2 years ⁵⁸	-
Language skills	English, Chinese and foreign language	English and Chinese	Chinese and oral English

4.1.2 Effective Bilingualism

Although it was already understood by the British colonial government after WWII that Singaporean citizens need to be able to communicate with each other regardless of their origin, it was still an unfinished plan in the 1970's. The abilities of the people in other language could have only been assessed through the results from school examinations.

⁵⁴ The sum 80% is formed by Normal Primary schools and Extended Primary schools. The rest 20% of Monolingual Primary school was not expected to continue studying at the Secondary level.

⁵⁵ Goh Keng Swee and The Education Study Team, *Report on the Ministry of Education 1978*, (Singapore: 1979), 6 – 3.

⁵⁶ “Structure of Education System in the United Kingdom,” World Higher Education Database, <http://www.euroeducation.net/prof/ukco.htm> (accessed March 5, 2012).

⁵⁷ Goh Keng Swee and The Education Study Team, *Report on the Ministry of Education 1978*, (Singapore: 1979), 6 – 4.

⁵⁸ Excluding the students from Ordinary Secondary school stream.

From the statistics of the Ministry of Education on PSLE and GCE “O” Level Examination it was obvious that only less than 40% of all pupils successfully passed both first and second language examination. However, these results did not necessarily show the real skills of the citizens. Therefore a different approach towards the assessment of bilingualism was taken in 1977. A survey that focused on newspaper reading was conducted revealing that 8% of all the population of Singapore in the age of fifteen and above read both Chinese and English newspapers. Furthermore, 60% of this group are people in the age of fifteen to twenty five. This forms only 13% of all the citizens in the age of fifteen to twenty five who were at that time in the process of education and as such expected to be practicing their language skills.⁵⁹

Taken the information from Table 2 and the section above, about 39% of all the young people were expected to be either brilliant or above average in their academic skills and yet only 13% of the same cohort were actively practicing their bilingualism. Today, it could be argued that the rest of the examined group (15-25 years) simply did not buy the newspaper because they would obtain the necessary information from other sources. However, back in late 70’s this could have been used as a good way how to research the common practice of the citizens.

The strategies for ensuring the effective bilingualism of pupils were outlined in the previous section already where putting different stress and importance on the languages in different streams is explained. The basic objective of the education system was to “produce school-leavers who are literate in at least one language.”⁶⁰ Important fact is that the term “literacy” was explained as “the ability to read articles on local news in the newspapers and to write at least simple sentences.”⁶¹ This was one of the first times when the goal of bilingualism was specified in detail.

To achieve this goal, students were supposed to study the languages (mainly English and Chinese) on different levels according to their abilities. Therefore, as described in the previous section, the ablest students were meant to study two languages on the level of the first language (for example English and Chinese) and possibly a third language (French, German, etc.) later. The average and the above average students were studying the “first”

⁵⁹ Goh Keng Swee and The Education Study Team, *Report on the Ministry of Education 1978*, (Singapore: 1979), 3 – 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6 – 1.

⁶¹ Ibid.

language and “second” language (mostly English as first and Chinese as second). The final group of the poor students who had often experienced big difficulties with studying two languages was decided to be literate in one language rather than illiterate in two. As shown before, these are the students of monolingual primary school stream who were studying their mother tongue and were slightly exposed to oral English.⁶²

By the words of the Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, those citizens of Singapore who could not have been made bilingual should have been encouraged to be “translingual” which is “to speak ... in different languages and to understand ... without translation.”⁶³ The Prime Minister offered an example of such practice of “translingualism” saying that “[speaker] A speaks to [speaker] B in Hokkien ... B, who understands Hokkien, replies in Mandarin and is understood by A.”⁶⁴ This was the minimal objective of introduced bilingual educational.

Not only was the English language important for the everyday life in Singapore and for its future but it was also becoming a need for the future employees. With the general strategy of the Singaporean government to attract big multinational corporations to invest in Singapore and build its branches there, English was required as the medium of communication in such companies.⁶⁵ This shift was demonstrated in changes in one of the Singaporean Chinese universities – Nanyang University.

Nanyang University announced in 1978 that it would use English as the language of instruction and as the language for the written examination. This was seen as a significant change as Nanyang University was established in 1956 as a demonstration of Chinese culture and language. However, the graduates from Nanyang University could not have competed with the graduates from University of Singapore who were fluent in English. As a result of this lack in competitiveness of the graduates, the number of students from Chinese language stream schools applying for studies at University of Singapore was increasing and therefore the decision of Nanyang University was just recognition of the situation – although it was a bold move given the history of the University.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Leslie Fong, „We must be flexible in implementing changes“, *The Straits Times*, March 25, 1979, 6, <http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19790325.1.6.aspx> (accessed Jan. 15, 2012).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Further information to this can be found in the chapter 5 of this paper.

⁶⁶ Goh Keng Swee and The Education Study Team, *Report on the Ministry of Education 1978*, (Singapore: 1979), 1 – 2.

Even though this was a move towards making English to be the most dominant and spread language in the country, the Government did not want to lose the other language stream schools (mainly Chinese). The Government has always valued bilingualism more than establishing English as an ultimate language of communication and it introduced changes in the education of English at Chinese schools. As the result, the importance put on the English language in the Chinese stream schools was increased. After many years of attempts of the Government to foster the position of English as the medium of communication in Singapore (starting with the policies of the British colonial government), the socio-economic situation and the preferences of the citizens finally did the job.⁶⁷

4.2 Contemporary Education System

It was outlined in the beginning of this chapter that starting with the Goh Report, Singaporean education has entered its modern period. Many new strategies in educating the youth have been started and from 1990 it was time for “fine-tuning” of these strategies as described by Professor Gopinathan from National Institute of Education in Singapore. But even before that, an eye-opening period of economic recession in 1985 came.

4.2.1 1985 and the Recession

This recession was an important moment in the development of education as well as the development of Singapore as a nation. The economic downturn reminded Singapore of its vulnerability and stressed how important it is for the nation that the education of the new generations is in connection with the economic development. Not only with the present development but also with the future one ensuring that the “education system remains relevant to the type of economy in which ... children will have to find employment when they leave school.”⁶⁸ As a result, the basic principles of the education system were focusing on encouraging logical thinking and life-long learning, keeping pace with the economy and society and boosting creativity in schools through bottom-up approach.⁶⁹

Together with this attempt for improving excellence in Singaporean schools, a committee created of 12 senior school principals was sent to study the education system in USA and UK. They prepared a report called *Toward Excellence in Schools* (1987). The

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1 – 3.

⁶⁸ Saravanan Gopinathan and Ho Wah Kam, “Recent Developments in Education in Singapore,” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 10, no. 1, (1999): 111, <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan025147.pdf> (accessed Jan. 15, 2012).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

most important reform resulting from these initiatives was allowing few well-established schools to become independent. **After many years of continuous working on establishing a centrally directed system this was the first time when the Government officially gave some autonomy to the schools.** The schools could have decided on hiring and firing their staff and providing them with improved salary and they could set their own fee for the students. However all this was only allowed given that the national curriculum and the common bilingual policy will be kept. These few schools should have been a pilot projects and based on the results it was decided whether to continue in this or not. In 2000, there were already eight schools that chose and were allowed to be independent.⁷⁰

As it was highly possible that only children from rich families could have reached for these independent schools, initiatives helping children from poorer families were set up. The Government ensured public that “no academically able pupil who wishes to attend an independent school is deprived of the opportunity to do so as a result of financial constraints.”⁷¹ To keep this promise, Edusave Scheme was established in 1993 and has been helping the families in Singapore to provide their children with the best education they can benefit from.⁷²

4.2.2 “Fine-tuning” of the System

When discussing improvements and changes in the education system in 90’s, we need to keep in mind that these changes shall rather be described as “fine-tunning” of the previous reforms, especially those introduced with the Goh Report. This clearly shows that the improvements from late 70’s have been still current in 90’s and even today. Report called *Improving Primary School Education* from 1991 is a perfect example of such “fine-tuning”. This report made improvements in mostly primary education system from 1979. While according to the Goh Report pupils of primary schools were streamed at the end of Primary 3 to *normal bilingual, extended bilingual* and *monolingual* streams, from 1991 on the pupils were streamed at the end of Primary 4 to different streams according to their language abilities. These streams were called *EM1, EM2* and *EM3* which were allowing

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 106.

⁷² Edusave Advisory Council, *Education Endowment Scheme: First Annual Report for the Period 1 January 1993 to 31 March 1994*, Singapore: 1994.

the pupils to learn English and the Mother tongue at different level of difficulty.⁷³ The distinctions of the language difficulty were closely matching those used in the secondary schools after the reforms from the Goh Report.⁷⁴ The PSLE examination was also modified but it was still taken at the national level and the results of PSLE place pupils into appropriate secondary school streams.

These secondary school streams were also changed from the previous ones. An increasing importance was put on technical and vocational education and this was reflected in the newly created secondary school streams. *Normal Academic* and *Normal Technical* streams were set up keeping the length of education of 5 years with a GCE “N” level examination at the end of Secondary 4 and having the opportunity to continue to Secondary 5 finished with GCE “O” level examination. For those pupils who were more academically oriented, an *Express/Special* secondary school stream was created keeping the education system similar to *Special bilingual* stream from Goh Report. More technical education was also provided at the post-secondary level with opening new Polytechnics and Institutes of Technical Education.⁷⁵

“Fine-tuning” is obviously not a single change but a process that takes long time. Therefore there were more changes until current days. The biggest change can be seen in the streaming of primary school pupils. It was mentioned in this paper, that pupils streamed to the *Monolingual* or later the *EM3* streams could have been considered by the society as less smart and this could cause a decrease in their motivation. As the improvement, in 2008 the primary school streaming⁷⁶ has been replaced by *Subject-based Banding* that allows the children to focus more on the subjects that they are strong in. The other subjects are taught only on the foundation level. This combines the strategy of adjusting the education to the real abilities and pace of the pupils together with keeping all the students together.⁷⁷ *Subject-based Banding* continues in the system of streaming as it is using the pupil’s results from school-based examination at the end of Primary 4 after which parents decide

⁷³ Saravanan Gopinathan and Ho Wah Kam, “Recent Developments in Education in Singapore,” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 10, no. 1, (1999): 106,
<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan025147.pdf> (accessed Jan. 15, 2012).

⁷⁴ See appendix I and the previous section for more information.

⁷⁵ Saravanan Gopinathan and Ho Wah Kam, “Recent Developments in Education in Singapore,” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 10, no. 1, (1999): 108,
<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan025147.pdf> (accessed Jan. 15, 2012).

⁷⁶ Planning Division, Ministry of Education Singapore, *Education Statistics Digest 2011*, (Singapore: 2011), 30. EM1 and EM2 streams were merged in 2004 and EM3 stream ceased to exist in 2008.

⁷⁷ “Subject-based Banding: Catering to your child’s abilities,” Ministry of Education,
<http://moe.gov.sg/education/primary/files/subject-based-banding.pdf> (accessed Feb. 20, 2012).

on the level of subjects that their children will learn. While for Primary 5 it is decision of the parents (school only gives advice to the ideal level), the school will decide on possible changes for Primary 6. This objectively adjusts the pace of education to the real abilities of the pupils leaving behind the possible emotional connection of their parents.

4.2.3 Present Days Civics Education

Currently there are many ways how the Ministry of Education tries to teach children the civics and the sense of Singaporean nationhood. One of the ways is setting the desired outcomes of the education system in Singapore. The Ministry wants every person who gains his education in Singapore to be **confident person** who can distinguish what is right and what is wrong and knows himself, **self-directed learner** who is responsible for his own learning now and in the future, **active contributor** who works in teams and brings up new innovations and ideas and **concerned citizen** who is a true Singaporean with overall information from civics and is active in bettering the situation around him. These outcomes are to be created through reaching successfully the goals of each key stage, of each section of the education process. In the primary schools, the pupils are provided with the basics which are straightened at the secondary schools and brought to perfection at the post-secondary level. Examples of these Key Stage Outcomes are also contributory factors for civic and moral education. The later one aims to provide the pupils at the primary level with the “(ability) to distinguish what is right and what is wrong”, the secondary schools teach to “have moral integrity” and post-secondary education shows the students how to “have moral courage to stand up for what is right.” The civic education in the primary schools teaches pupils to “know and love Singapore”, the secondary schools make them to “believe in Singapore and understand what matters to Singapore” and finally in the post-secondary level students learn to “be proud to be Singaporeans and understand Singapore in relation to the world.”⁷⁸ **These examples show the continuous interest in educating children in areas which were already drawn up by the colonial government in the Ten Years’ Programme.**

Another way how the Government ensures creating the common Singaporean nationality among its citizens, regardless of their race is through keeping national military service compulsory. Although the military threat is greatly reduced compared to the

⁷⁸ „Desired Outcomes of Education,“ Ministry of Education, <http://moe.gov.sg/education/desired-outcomes/> (accessed Feb. 20, 2012).

situation when Singapore gained its independence after separation with Malaysia and was left without any military forces. Singapore adopted the national military service from Israel and in 1967, the National Service Bill creating the compulsory military service was passed by the Government.⁷⁹ In the same way as 45 years ago, young males learn to love and protect their country during the national service. As the former Chief of Defence Forces Winston Choo says, “national service is a very equalizing experience, you bring people from all strata of society ... and by force of circumstance they learn to live with each other.”⁸⁰ This experience fosters the common loyalty much more than any formal education.

The national service is not the only way how to mix various citizens of Singapore together. *Ten Years’ Programme* already came up with the idea of extra-curricular activities purpose of which was to ensure intermingling of pupils. The White Paper stressed this idea as an important factor in fostering common loyalty and today, the Ministry of Education provides students with a wide range of co-curricular activities which they join. Every student takes part in at least one co-curricular activity such as sports and games, arts and culture or clubs and society, etc.⁸¹ **This is continuous progress of proposals made when Singapore was becoming an independent country.**

4.2.4 Present Days Bilingual Policy

This paper was extensively discussing the issue of bilingualism as a nation building factor as well as being beneficial to the everyday life in Singapore. All the attempts starting with *Ten Years’ Programme* and continuing with the *White Paper* were more or less unsuccessful but finally the socio-economic situation helped to promote the importance of an effective bilingualism as it shown the Goh Report section and will be shown in the next chapter. Continuous work on bilingualism is, however, still an issue in Singaporean education system and as such it still enjoys great attention from the officials. Currently, the Lee Kuan Yew’s Fund for Bilingualism was set up in November 2011 and its purpose is to

⁷⁹ Lim Gek Hong, “1967 – March 1967 National Service Begins,” Ministry of Defence Singapore, http://www.mindf.gov.sg/imindf/about_us/history/birth_of_saf/v06n03_history.html (accessed Feb. 29, 2012). Dr. Goh Keng Swee was the Minister for Defence during this period.

⁸⁰ Discovery Channel, „The History of Singapore: Lion City, Asian Tiger,“ video file, 5:37, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xph6am_lion-city-asian-tiger-the-history-of-singapore-episode3_shortfilms (accessed Feb. 2, 2012).

⁸¹ “Co-Curricular Activities (CCA),” Ministry of Education Singapore, <http://moe.gov.sg/education/secondary/cca/> (accessed March 2, 2012); “Co-Curricular Activities,” Temasek Polytechnic, http://www.tp.edu.sg/home/life/stu_cca.htm (accessed March 2, 2012).

“support the teaching and learning of English and Mother Tongue Languages, especially at the pre-school level.”⁸² Bilingual education is considered a “cornerstone” of Singaporean education system by the Ministry officials because it helps the citizens of Singapore to be more competitive in the global environment while keeping the connections to their cultural heritage and mainly the growing economic importance of Asia.⁸³ The Lee Kuan Yew’s Fund for Bilingualism is an example of an activity the aim of which is to develop an interest in bilingual education in Singaporean children. While earlier in the history of the country the Ministry of Education was trying to enforce the bilingual education at least in the higher level of education, today the youngest citizens of Singapore are the targets of such activities.

4.2.5 Present Education System in Statistics

This chapter shall finish with a statistic showing the success of the modern education system in Singapore. In the year 2010, there were 356 primary, secondary and post-secondary schools (excluding universities) in Singapore where more than 500 000 students could get educated by almost 30 000 teachers. Back in 1960, there were approximately 330 000 students enrolled in all the schools being educated by 10 000 teachers.⁸⁴ During these 50 years, the ratio of students per a teacher doubled. Another problem and one of the objections towards the old education system identified by the Goh Report was the big attrition rate of students. From the *Education Statistics Digest 2011* published by the Ministry of Education it is clear that approximately 98% of all students from Primary 1 cohort sat for PSLE and passed this exam. This proves the success of the changes in the educational system since 1979 described above.

⁸² „Press Releases: Formation of Board to Manage the Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism,” Ministry of Education Singapore, <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2012/03/formation-of-board-to-manage-lky-bilingualism-fund.php> (accessed March 2, 2012).

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Planning Division, Ministry of Education Singapore, *Education Statistics Digest 2011*, (Singapore: 2011), 27 – 37.

5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AFTER WWII

Throughout the paper it was shown that many changes in the development of Singaporean education were reflecting the situation in the country. A few moments when the situation in the country had a huge effect on education were already introduced in the previous chapters, such as the shift in approach towards English education at Nanyang University. This chapter will summarize the economic development in Singapore after WWII and will draw connections of the economy of the country to its education system.

Singapore, traditionally a staple port, is a little island with no natural resources. Its economy was strongly dependent on the port trading and services provided to the British military bases. After WWII, however, the country entered a period when income only from the port trading could not provide the demanded growth. Also the British announced the withdrawal of its soldiers in 1968 which was to have serious consequences for the country's economy. At the same time the number of citizens in Singapore was rising due to immigration from Asian countries, especially China. Therefore a shift towards an industrial economy was necessary.⁸⁵

The industrial activity was reflected in setting up manufactories. These manufactories were mainly mills for the materials that were traded through Singapore such as rubber and oil. In 1957, manufacturing already accounted for 16% of employment and in 1964 it was generating approximately 13% of Singaporean GDP. As the manufactories and other industrial businesses were starting, there was a need for financing its operations. Therefore many banks were opening in Singapore, both "local" (mainly Chinese) and "overseas" (European) banks and they were together creating what could be considered a modern financial sector. This is partially a root to today's position of Singapore as a financial center.⁸⁶

In the late 1950s, the Government started focusing on even stronger industrial promotion by providing income tax relief and other incentives. This went hand in hand with the establishment of Singapore Polytechnics from 1954 that was providing the work

⁸⁵ W. G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and development in the twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), 274; N. Vijayan, „1968 - British Withdrawal," Ministry of Defence Singapore, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/about_us/history/birth_of_saf/v01n01a_history.html (accessed March 16, 2012).

⁸⁶ W. G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and development in the twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), 286-288.

force with the necessary skills.⁸⁷ At the same time, the Economic Development Board was established by Dr. Goh Keng Swee⁸⁸ to be both a financing institution and industrial corporation setting up new industries and opening industrial estates. Jurong Island could be an example of such estate. A swamp area the size of 15.000 acres which was turned into a modern industrial park with over 150 companies by 1968.⁸⁹ This, together with well-planned infrastructure was a way how Economic Development Board was attracting big multi-national corporations to invest in Singapore. Singapore at that time was also more secure place to invest due to the revolution in China and its effect on other states in Asia such as Hong Kong. But as relying on a Singaporean economy based only on the multi-national corporation would make the economic growth vulnerable, many public enterprises that were owned by the Government were setting up as well.⁹⁰

The development of Singapore as a financial and business center plays a very important part in the economic growth of the country. By 1990, financial and business services accounted for 26% of GDP. The importance of these services plays its role in building Singapore as a country which builds its economy on a professional and well-trained work force. To have such people, so important for a sector generating $\frac{1}{4}$ of GDP, a perfect education system providing formal education is necessary. The services these people are educated for are accounting and auditing, legal services, advertising, market research or management consultancy.⁹¹ Working in these services puts great requirements on the quality of education of the workers as well as on the language skills. It was reviewed in the Goh Report section how even big Chinese education institutions such as Nanyang University started focusing on English education as the business world demanded these skills. This is a clear link of the evolution of education based on the socio-economic development in Singapore.

⁸⁷ Planning Division, Ministry of Education Singapore, *Education Statistics Digest 2011*, (Singapore: 2011), 57.

⁸⁸ Minister for Finance.

⁸⁹ MediaCorp Channel 5, "A Tribute to Dr. Goh Keng Swee," video file, 7:45, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibzH-tZ3llg> (accessed Jan. 20, 2012).

⁹⁰ W. G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and development in the twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), 299-307. Singaporean Airlines can be seen as an example of public enterprise.

⁹¹ Ibid., 336-340.

CONCLUSION

This paper was seeking the connections of the first ever introduced governmental approach towards the education made by the colonial government after WWII and the development of the educational system until nowadays. Before WWII, the colonial government did not put much interest into education but as the independence for Singapore was being prepared, the importance for having the citizens of the country united was rising. It was necessary for the future of the country that its people and mainly the young generations learn to accept the country as their home. The strategies of the colonial Government were simple, to teach pupils the ideal of civic loyalty and responsibility, to equalize all the various races and reduce any kind of discrimination and to build up an education system that would allow the people to obtain the necessary education required for the economic growth of the nation. However, not all of these strategies were successfully achieved by the British colonial government until 1959 when Singapore gained self-governance. Resistance towards the colonial government could be seen as one of the reasons for the failure. It was not a complete failure though, as the new Singaporean government kept on working on achieving the same goals as introduced by the British.

It could be argued that the way how the education has been developing in independent Singapore is not based on the original goals of the British *Ten Year's Programme*. The fact is that the objectives stayed the same throughout the important moments of the second half of the 20th century. The *White Paper* was dealing with the difficult situation of rioting Chinese secondary school students through fostering the common loyalty and introducing bilingual education; all the streams of schools in Singapore were unified and standardized during 1960's providing all the pupils with the same opportunities after finishing the school regardless what stream it was; the *Goh Report* brought the control over all the education finally to the hands of the Ministry of Education to ensure that national curriculum and educational strategies are followed in every school. It also focused on providing the pupils with the best education meeting their abilities and the needs of the national economy. Effective bilingualism was no more just a way how to foster the Singaporean nationality but also an important mean of attracting foreign investments that boosted the Singaporean economy.

All these policies and strategies have been evolving until present days. If we only focus on the main areas from *Ten Years' Programme* we see that teaching civics and fostering the Singaporean nationhood is still an important part of the education. The

Government still ensures that all the pupils have the right for the best education according to their abilities. Racial or gender discrimination is already out of the question but there are governmental funds that limit potential selection of students based on the financial situation of their families. And finally, now more than ever is the education of the future Singaporeans in close connection with the strategic development of the country. This brings the same outcome as it was desired when *Ten Year's Programme* was establishing secondary, vocational and higher education back in 1948.

All the pages above prove two propositions. Both of them are included in the hypothesis of this paper. The first thing is that many of the currently present policies in Singaporean education can be linked to the original proposals made by the British colonial government as introduced in *Ten Years' Programme*. The other thing is that without a continuous hard work of the independent Singaporean government none of the successful policies, as they proved themselves today, would come into effect. The close connection between the country's education system and its economy helps Singapore to reach such economical results as it does today.

I would like to finish this paper with a quote by Dr. Goh Keng Swee which I believe played an important part in the development of the educational system as well as the development of the country: "*The only way to avoid making mistakes is not to do anything. And that, in the final analysis, will be the ultimate mistake.*"⁹²

⁹² Chua Mui Hoong, "Passing of a S'pore Titan," *The Straits Times*, May 15, 2010.

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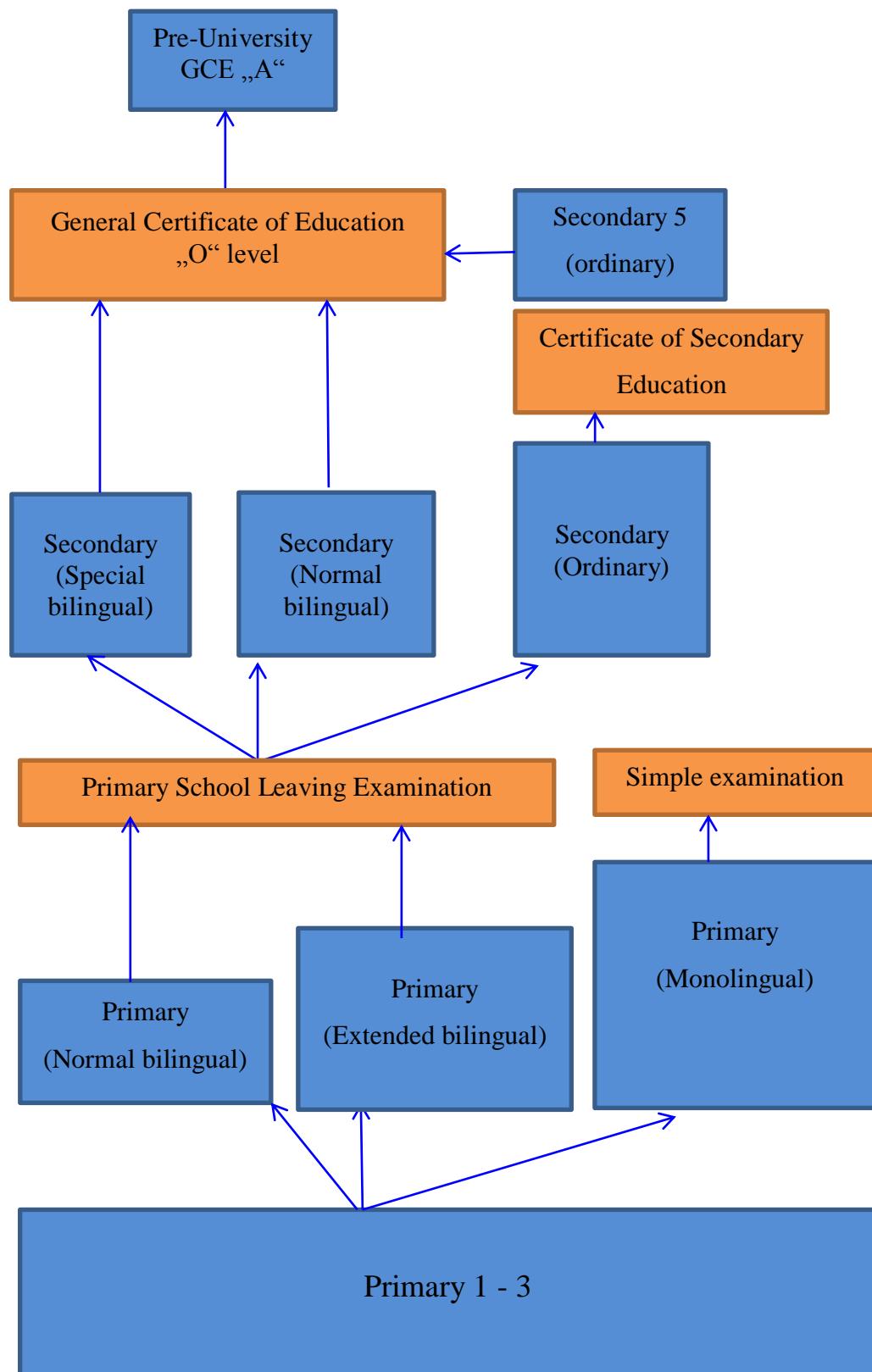
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APPENDICES

P I A simplified chart of the education system after the changes made by the *Goh Report*.



P II A simplified chart of the present education system.

