

AIX290 Australia Today Research Essay:

Are the East Asian education systems a model for Australia?

Assignment no. 2

Student name

Class

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The question of Asian education system as being an ideal or model for education system in Western countries, inclusive of Australia, has started uproar since a benchmark of high academic performance has been set by education system of East Asia. The following fact has been highlighted through the results of assessment (PISA) programme by OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) conducted in 2012 in which 65 countries participated and several countries from East Asia, especially Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea and Shanghai, have given outstanding performance in science, reading and mathematics (Schleicher, 2014). The results also revealed the fall of education systems of Western countries, including Australia as compared to East Asian systems, regardless of the increase in school funds across OECD (Asian Scientist Newsroom, 2012). PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) are the assessments being held for many years to conduct research on the features and factors responsible for the high performance of education systems, to propose successful models for the learning of states and territories (Cambridge International Examinations, 2015).

While launching the new report for Grattan Institute School Education Program, “Catching up: learning from the best school systems in East Asia”, the director Ben Jensen declared East Asia as the hub of high academic performance in the world and that the educators and academic professionals of Australia should learn from its successful performance (Asian Scientist Newsroom, 2012). Changes in education systems in East Asia were investigated by Yong Zhao, Mitchell Professorial Fellow, in his report and lessons were drawn out which concern Australia. The report attributed the top performance of the school systems in Asia to better training, teaching, remuneration and mentoring (Zhao, 2015). But the perception of Australia regarding the credibility and adaptability of the academic practices of East Asian education system varies.

The education system of Australia provides an international education as well as the opportunity to the acquirers to connect globally. The focus is laid on the practical learning and application to develop better understanding of the various subjects. Educational institutions of Australia have fostered all the needs and requirements of the international students for a long time with the help of competent staff into various disciplines to counsel international and national students in Australia. This transnational education has benefitted 347,560 students studying in higher

education institutions in Australia in 2014. Around quarters of enrollments were made at offshore campuses and 32.1% is the representation of transnational students (Australian Government, 2014). Orientation week is usually arranged in higher education schools of Australia a week before the commencement of semester in order to help the students in knowing the campus and life of a student at the respective campus/country. Various student organizations and societies deliver information about their activities and hire new members. The orientation week also involves social activities to increase interaction among the students and to build the rapport. Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) regulates the qualifications of Australian education which connects schools of Australia into a single national system. The system has three core sectors of higher education: English language institutions, universities and vocational institutions (Education system in Australia, 2016).

Despite of all the strategic policies and structuring, Australian students still lag behind as compared to East Asian students such as those of Shanghai, Korean, Hong Kong and Singapore. The monetary investment is not the only means for competing in an education system. It is undoubtedly the requirement to support any initiative, yet success is not always the product of monetary investment. The difference and positive factor that was found between the two education systems was the training and development of the medium without which the education system cannot function. The pillars of any education system are the teachers working in it and East Asian education system lays special emphasis on giving more time to teacher to work in collaboration and counsel each other while ensuring that the teaching skills and requirements, curriculum and textbooks are equally supportive to enhance the classroom practice. Teachers play an eminent role as partners in reform. In Korea, it is mandatory to pass entrance assessments and classroom demonstrations to become a teacher. In Shanghai, all the beginning teachers have in-school based mentors and district-based mentors for their supervision and counseling. Stigler and Hiebert in their “The teaching gap” as introduced the idea of teaching gap to describe dissimilarities in teaching practices and methods across various culture. Their argument was based on the notion that student achievement cannot be improved by solely finding extraordinary teachers and rather it could be possible by improving and polishing the mean performance of the teachers (Comings, Garner, and Smith, 2017). Instead of searching for perfections it is better to work on the imperfections by providing opportunity to teachers to learn the essence of teaching and develop professional knowledge through an education system like that of East. There is a

probability that teachers will enter schools in Australia which offer mentoring programs. But they do not receive the feedback based on the observation of their teaching performance. So Australia does have mentoring systems but they do not operate effectively, according to the Australian teachers. Western schools need to tie a long term commitment and reflect consistent improvement in teaching methodology (Grattan Institute, 2012).

Besides the teaching skill factor, there are other characteristics as well that distinguish the Western countries like England, USA and Australia from Eastern countries like Hong Kong and Shanghai. The dissimilarities in the number of schools and students, geography, the makeup of the student in terms of culture, language and socioeconomic profile, and the impact of structure, management, assessment and curriculum of the schools on results (Donnelly, 2014). Cultural factors were also observed in the paper “How not to reason with PISA data: an ironic investigation”, explaining difficulty in transferring from one education system to another (Donnelly, 2014). Role of culture can also be found in the impactful examples of incorporated ethics and values of Confucianism which stresses upon compliance and respect towards authority figure, especially teachers, and on the belief that hard work, motivation and concentration are the key ingredients to cook success and attain better life (Donnelly, 2014). A research was carried out by Zhu and Leung (2010) to examine the relationship between intrinsic (pleasure-oriented) motivation and extrinsic (productivity-oriented) motivation and its collective effect on the academic performance of the students in East Asian education systems compared Western education systems (England, USA, Netherlands and Australia). The results of the study found the contribution of both types of motivation to the substantial mathematics achievement in East Asian students, whereas detrimental effect of extrinsic motivation was found on the learning of the Western students. The positive correlation in the variables shows that the appreciation by the students on the usefulness of mathematics as an external motivation could boost the overall motivation level for learning. The data also revealed that East Asian students usually acquired greater benefits from high level of intrinsic/pleasure-oriented motivation than their Western counterparts.

Director Ben Jenson discussed the conclusions and recommendations of the Grattan’s report at the event by Maxine McKew in Melbourne. According to the new report by Grattan Institute, substantial increase has been made in the expenditure of education along frequent unsatisfactory

results by Australia and several OECD countries in the recent years. The report shows the benefit of evaluating the strengths of the education systems in East Asia in improving the lives of the children. The report shows that Australia should not adopt and integrate the systems of policymaking from the East Asian countries as the country has more room for learning and should shift their relentless focus on the teaching, learning and readiness for strong trade-offs for their academic goal achievement. The triumphs of their counterparts in East Asia could not be matched by the Australian education systems and schools. The emphasis by East Asians was laid on the concerns related to the classroom i.e. a persistent and applicable focus on the effective culture and learning of teaching education, mentoring, collaboration, sustained professional development and feedback. Instead of copying pasting the exact East Asian education system, the best strengths of their system should be integrated according to the shortcomings of the Australian education system. A good amount of emphasis was given on rote learning by Singapore which lead them where they are today with the high stakes in baggage. The idea was to move away towards more holistic approach in order to nurture creativity in the system which is something every system in the world is trying to conquer. Their focus is on learning and making positive amendments to education policy for the learning and growth of the students. Mr. Ben found it quite fluffy when he heard it initially but then he saw the similar reflection in most of the systems and found tangible impact. So considering the example of teacher education in Singapore, their priority is learning of the students, principles of school and constant teachers' feedback to evaluate the continuous adaptation of the course towards improvement of student learning. The debatable issue arises in Australia and many other nations while focusing on learning is what to do with the underperforming teachers (Ingvarson et al., 2016). It was discussed that Shanghai has similar education system as the system in UK. They help underperforming schools by sending teachers from the high performing schools by their principals. They integrated the idea of mentoring and collaboration among the teachers. The Education Strategy of Honk Kong is considered as world's best policy document as there are very less documents which are catered at micro level (Grattan Institute, 2012).

Concluding the entire discussion, the education system of East Asia can be used as a model by taking the best of their practices and integrating them accordingly. More focus should be laid on the development of practices and policies, instead of standardized testing, that strive to foster a diverse array of educational outcomes. The outcomes which possess valuable recognition but

rarely endorsed into policy and practice. The terms for such outcomes vary when they are being referenced, the most commonly used are “twenty-first century skills”, non-cognitive skills, creativity and entrepreneurial thinking. Some of these terms are also mentioned in the national curriculum of Australia but lack substantial support in a way which could generate actual practices in classrooms and schools. Moreover, increasing autonomy has been granted to the teachers and schools of East Asia regarding to their curriculum and implementation. If Australia also expects for the same diversity of entrepreneurial and creative talent then it should would on its expansion of curriculum autonomy of teachers and schools instead of reducing it. Furthermore, a good amount of research should be carried out on the behind the curtain of these high performing East systems as there is not much highlights on what actually happens in the process of policymaking and its translation into schools.

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