



**Biennale on Education in Africa
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**Beyond Primary Education:
Challenges and Approaches to Expanding Learning Opportunities in Africa**

Parallel Session 7C

**Transitions Between Upper
Secondary and Higher
Education:
Similarities, Pathways and
Orientations**

**Pathways for Post-Secondary Education
The Singapore System**

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A Summary

Among the key success factors for Singapore's rapid social and economic development since independence in 1965 is the governmental belief in and continuous heavy investment in education and training. This policy of closely aligning its education system to meet the changing demand for professional, technical and skilled manpower at various phases of economic growth has helped to shape the present national system of education and training.

Highly structured, all pupils receive a strong foundation of at least 10 years of primary (six years) and secondary (four or five years) education. With tracking as a key feature in primary and secondary schools, the efficiency-driven system attempts to maximize the potential of every child. Starting at Primary 4, students are streamed according to their "academic abilities" in English, a Second Language and Mathematics. The objective is to allow for a differentiated curriculum and pace so that students can better cope with their studies. At the secondary level, three main tracks of education are offered, namely, the Express, Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) courses leading to different General Certificate of Education (GCE) qualifications.

Progression at each level is based on performances at key national examinations. So, depending largely on their academic achievements, about 95% of a student cohort would progress to the Junior Colleges, Polytechnics or Colleges of the Institute of Technical Education (ITE). Today, about 30% of each cohort enters the Junior Colleges, which provide an academic high school education in preparation for the university. The next 40% of school leavers would enter a Polytechnic for a wide range of practice-oriented three-year diploma courses in preparation for middle-level professionals and management. A unique feature of the post-secondary education system in Singapore is the role of the ITE, a governmental institution, whose mission is "To create opportunities for school leavers and adult learners to acquire skills, knowledge and values for lifelong learning in a global economy." Its focus is in the training of technicians and skilled manpower. Its mandate is to respond to the needs of and provide an attractive pathway for the lower 25% of a cohort who do not progress to the Junior Colleges or Polytechnics but have the aptitude and interests in a practical curriculum in vocational and technical education.

ITE's courses are mainly full-time, institution-based and conducted under the "One ITE, Three Colleges" system of governance. Covering a wide range of over 50 different courses, ITE offers two basic levels of qualifications under the National ITE Certificate (Nitec) system of certification. Depending on their academic achievements and aptitude, students may enroll at the Nitec or Higher Nitec mainly two-year courses in Engineering, Business & Services, Info-Communications Technology and Applied & Health Sciences.

So, beyond the 10 years of general education, Singapore has successfully developed a robust system of alternative pathways at the post-secondary level to meet the needs of pupils with different academic abilities, aptitude and interests. Also referred to as a system of “bridges and ladders”, there are, however, clear lines of demarcations with respect to the missions of the various institutions of post-secondary education. As a total national educational system, there is formal articulation for progression from ITE to the Polytechnic and Polytechnic to the university based on merit performance. As the aspiration of leavers and their parents is a university degree, the challenge is in managing expectations and maintaining standards at all levels while responding to the diverse interests, aptitude and needs of school leavers.

In this presentation, Dr Law will speak on the alignment of education and training with economic needs, dynamics of vocational technical education systems and the articulation between general education and the system of pathways for post-secondary education in Singapore.