

Education alone cannot counter globalisation: Heng Swee Keat

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Education Minister Heng Swee Keat said education can help to address some of the emerging divisions in Singapore society, but added that there were also larger forces at work which have to be taken care of.

Citing the effects of globalisation and technological advancements, Mr Heng said a good education on its own cannot counter these forces.

Education would equip people with the right skills, but the economy must also be restructured to make sure people have opportunities to thrive, he said at the Institute of Policy Studies' (IPS) Singapore Perspective 2014 conference.

"I will be very humble about the role education can play," he added at the conference on the differences defining Singapore society.

He has already started to act, by looking "quite seriously" at introducing computer programming in schools to prepare people for the new technological age.

The Education Ministry has started some "experiments" in schools through working with their computer clubs, he added. It is also studying school systems that have embarked on the path.

The aim is to help people understand the "basic logic" behind these advances shaping the world.

Mr Heng was replying to a question on whether the Education Ministry would consider introducing more "unconventional" subjects in school to help people harness advances in technology.

Earlier, in reply to another participant's question, he spoke about how technological advances have transformed jobs, with some skills losing their premium status.

The effect of these widening divisions in society will only accelerate, he said.

Adding that it was inevitable that differences exist, Mr Heng said the challenge is in harnessing the diversity while maintaining unity.

He proposed three ways: Understand the nature of the difference; harness them as a source of creative and productive strength; and accept that not all differences can be settled "once and for all".

For lingering differences, he felt it was more constructive to set them aside temporarily and find common causes to work towards. Doing so will enlarge the common space shared by all and build trust in the process, he said.