Conference on Integration

Monday, 21 May 2012
Ballroom 1 & 2, Orchard Hotel

iPS Institute of
Policy Studies

LKY Lee Kuan Yew
School of Public Policy

National University of Singapore

Dr Joy Chew Oon Ai

International Students in Singapore Schools: How are they integrating?

Policy Context of IS in Singapore schools and tertiary institutions

- Singapore government's policy to attract, train and retain foreign talent to enlarge nation's talent and skills pyramid

- Low birth rate: **"If our total fertility rate remains the same, and we do not allow immigrants to settle down here, our resident population will start to shrink as early as 2015 because deaths will outstrip births." Wong K.S.**

- Policy to develop Singapore as a hub for world-class education by recruiting high calibre overseas students & subsidised fee-paying students

Concerted effort by Ministry of Education to promote integration of IS

- National Integration Council(Apr 2009) functions to encourage collaborative social integration efforts among the people, public and private sectors and drives integration initiatives in schools, workplaces, community and through the media.

- National Integration Working Group for Schools gives ideas, resources, social networks for sharing good practices on 'functional integration; monitoring how schools implement IS integration activities

Research Questions

- How are IS adjusting and integrating with Singapore students in the context of their schools?

- What is the impact of their presence on host school communities?

- What mutual influence do IS and local students have on each other?

Sample of 7 schools for interview and survey data & percentage of IS students

- Broadrick Secondary School (Pilot study) - 24%
- Anglican High School   - 13%
- Manjusri Secondary School   - 9.8%
- Shuqun Secondary School   - 15%
- Fengshan Primary School   - 12.6%
- Macpherson Primary   - 27%
- North View Primary School   - 7.5%

Fieldwork in March, July and August 2010

- Sample of schools with low, moderate and high IS enrolment

- Interviews with 35 school personnel: Principal, Vice Principals and Teachers

- Questionnaire with 9 open-ended questions administered on 163 Singaporean pupils from Primary 5 and 6, Secondary 3 and 4 classes

- 71 male (43.55%) and 92 female (56.44%) students

Interview data with school leaders and key teachers

- Routes for admission of IS to national schools

- How schools organise formal curricular activities for student integration

- Leaders and teachers' views on how IS are adapting to schooling in Singapore schools.

Student Survey Data

Singapore students' perspectives & perceptions of IS

❑ How many IS friends do you have at your class level, CCA groups and other activities?

❑ How long did it take for you to know them as 'friends' when they first joined your class?

❑ In your view, do IS have difficulty adjusting to their schooling because of different language and cultural backgrounds?

Student Survey Data

❑ Some teachers and parents have observed that IS are more hardworking, talented and better in sporting skills than the average Singapore student.

Do you agree with this observation? If 'Yes' how has this encouraged or discouraged you from mixing with them in study activities, CCA, sports or out of school activities?

Student Survey Data

❏ Do you think that your school is doing enough to help make IS feel welcome and valued as members of the school community by encouraging Singaporeans to bond with them?

❏ Why is it beneficial for schools to have more IS than only a small number of them?

❏ How can their presence add to the quality of school learning and enrich you personally?

Tabulation of survey data: group and individual

Q1 Your school has a sizeable percentage of IS. How do you feel about studying and mixing with IS students from China, India, Taiwan, Indonesia or other countries?			
School and Sample	**Generally positive & happy to have IS in school**	**Indifferent about having IS in school**	**A little unhappy or very unhappy about having IS in school**
Anglican HS (25)	12	12	1
Broadrick SS (18)	16	2	0
Manjusri SS (25)	23	1	1
Shuqun SS (25)	19	5	1
Fengshan PS (20)	20	0	0
Macpherson PS (25)	24	1	0
North View PS (25)	25	0	0
Total: 163	139 (86.27%)	21 (12.88%)	3 (1.22%)

Q3: How long did it take you for you to get to know them as 'friends' when they first joined your class?

Time taken to become friends	Anglican HS	Broadrick SS	Munjusri SS	Shuqun SS	Fengshan PS	Macpherson PS	North View PS
< a day	5	2	8	5	1	1	11
2-3 days	4	3	6	5	9	7	8
1 week	2	8	3	8	3	3	3
2-3 weeks	2	3	3	6	4	8	0
1 month	4	1	4	0	0	4	2
>2 months	1	1	1	1	1	2	1

Q6: In your view, do IS have difficulty adjusting to schooling in S'pore because of their different language and cultural backgrounds? If Yes, can you say more?

Anglican HS 9/25	Yes but it only applies to some. From my experience, some China scholars tend to think that they should always be first in the school. Thus they are giving themselves a lot of stress. Moreover they cannot cope with the hectic schedule in Singapore schools (CCA) as they have no such programme back in China. AHS#14
Broadrick SS 17/18	Yes. Not all of them are well versed in English and their cultures are so different from Singapore. Sometimes students regard them as outsider and treat them badly. Many of them are not used to Singapore's education system. Their accent could be hard to comprehend at first. BSS#14
Manjusri SS 18/25	No. I found that the IS can manage their English and many are mixing around with Singaporean friends instead of forming their own groups. MJR#4

Q6: In your view, do IS have difficulty adjusting to schooling in Singapore because of their different language and cultural backgrounds? If 'Yes' can you say more?

Shuqun SS 20/25	No and Yes. As for some people they are naturally loud like my friend and don't have any difficulty fitting in. However, sometimes when they first enter it may be a bit intimidating for them and it would be hard but soon they will adjust. SQSS#21
Fengshan PS 7/20	Yes because they may need to buy things but they don't know how to say it in English and they may have some difficulty understanding the subject. FSPS#8
Macpherson PS 15/25	Yes. They would probably have a hard time adjusting to their schooling for a month as they do not know how other students will react to them. MPS#7
North View PS 14/25	When the IS just come to our school they are not used to our surroundings and the language that we use to communicate. An example is one of my friends. She does not use English to communicate and went to the teacher. But after sometime, they are used to it. NVPS#1

- **Yes. Similarly if we go overseas, we have the same inclination to succeed in our studies and return home with glamour instead of returning home empty handed. They would definitely work hard to excel and accomplish it with flying colours. This encourages me to mingle with them as I would be influenced by their industrious attitude and maybe change my attitude toward studies. AHS#4**

- **Yes, they are more hardworking than Singapore students. They tend to achieve better results than us. This makes me unhappy and discourages me from mixing with them during lessons as this makes us left out and they snatch away our position in our country. MJR#5**

- Yes. In my class the few top positions will always be filled by them. Even in sports, they have good skills. In fact I would like to mix with them more because I want to learn from them. I get motivated a lot by their attitude towards studies and sports. BSS#14

- Yes. It encourages me to take the challenge with them. They calculate very fast, speak well in English. When they first came they didn't know how to speak English but in two years time they can get an A* for English. FSPS#19

- Yes, I think so. This is a sign for Singaporeans to wake up as they must be aware that someone is better than them. Also they must be even more hardworking and maintain their good results. MPS#4

Q9: Why is it beneficial for schools to have more IS than only a small number of such students? How can their presence add to the quality of school learning and enrich you personally?

Shuqun Sec School	With the IS in class, teachers will try to find new ways to teach so that they (IS) will be able to understand. Sometimes, the new teaching method will be better for me too and helps my studies. SQSS#8
Fengshan Pr School	It is good to have more IS so that we can learn different things from them like their culture and other stuff to gain more knowledge and they can also learn from us. FSPS#3
Macpherson Pr School	Yes, it is beneficial. Some of the IS are good in singing thus they can help our school's choir group to excel and we can learn from them to excel and improve. MPS#7
North View Pr School	We can learn the way of speaking Chinese (I mean, like they pronounce more clearly); they are smart, which makes me learn a lot from them, learn more about their cultural heritage. NVPS#16

Discussion & Policy Implications

- Strong evidence of functional and social integration

- Conditioning factors: selectivity of IS; MOE policies supportive of integration: available funds, teachers, curriculum time for integrated learning; high motivation of IS to succeed; IS enjoy equal access to full range of school facilities

- Strong peer cultures that feed on students' desire for friendship, academic cooperation and competition

Recommendations for MOE

- Is there an optimal number of IS for each school?

- Distributing IS evenly across several classes

- Listening more to students and involving them in policy making at the school level

- Better communication with students about MOE policies on IS

Recommendations for MOE

- Potential for enriching each school's learning curriculum by tapping on the rich diversity of students' cultural heritage, international and social identities

- A whole-school approach to the integration of IS

- Strong pastoral support for IS in and out of school

- Avoiding late admission of IS to schools

Thank You