

Topic 1: Should we remove the Direct School Admission from the education system

Introduction

In 2024, the Direct School Admission (DSA) was implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Singapore, to allow students to secure early placements in a school of their choice by broadening the scope of admission to recognise both academic and non-academic talents (NLB, 2018). This was part of Singapore's effort to assess students on a holistic basis. Since its introduction, the number of DSA applicants has risen steadily over the years, indicating a rise in demand to secure spots in schools via DSA (The Straits Times, 2022) before students have even completed their national exams, such as the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) and Ordinary Level Examinations (O-Level). The DSA scheme, that does not exclusively focus on academic results, serves as an avenue to nurture students' talent and potential. However, the scheme has also resulted in many doubts and concerns about its effectiveness. One such concern is how due to socio-economic inequality, students with a poorer financial background will have limited access to resources such as the preparatory schools and enrichment classes that their wealthier peers have access to, putting them at a disadvantage in the application process (TODAY, 2018). As such, this scheme was perceived to disproportionately benefit those of higher socio-economic status. Representatives should consider the role DSA plays in our education system today, and whether the complete removal of this scheme is the best remedy to resolve the above charges of the scheme perpetuating socio-economic inequality.

Historical overview

The implementation of the DSA scheme was neither sudden nor new to Singapore's education system. Prior to the introduction of DSA, there was a pre-existing active admission policy in independent and autonomous schools in Singapore (NLB, 2018). Schools were allowed to admit a certain number of students based on other criterias subjected to MOE's conditions. This system's success led MOE to shift its focus towards recognising other areas of talent that students have, beyond academics. In view of this, DSA was implemented in the early 2000s with the intention of developing students in a holistic manner.

The timeline below shows the changes in the DSA scheme over the years.

2004	DSA was introduced as an initiative in seven schools with the Integrated Programme by then Acting Minister for Education Tharman Shanmugaratnam to help recognise diverse talents.
2005	Niche Programme Schools were created for students to grow in other areas. Subsequently, DSA was implemented in these schools.
2006	Schools were allowed to increase their discretionary places, and DSA was extended to Junior Colleges as well.
2014	DSA started to place more importance on the student's character and values during the admission process.
2017	Enrollment capacity via DSA was increased.

2018	Removed academic ability tests during the admission process via DSA. All secondary schools will also be able to increase the intake of students via DSA.
------	--

Current Situation

Overview of how DSA works

The DSA scheme encompasses both DSA-Secondary (DSA-Sec), where candidates sitting for the PSLE apply for secondary schools of their choice and DSA-Junior Colleges (DSA- JC), where candidates sitting for the O-Level Examinations apply for JCs of their choice (MOE, 2023). The extensive and vigorous process of a DSA application aims to fulfil the objective of recognising talent and harnessing potential.

There are 5 key stages to a DSA Application.

- a. Selecting a School
- b. Submission of Application
- c. Interviews/Auditions/Trials
- d. Application Outcomes
- e. School Outcomes

A . Selecting a School

To sieve out the best option when selecting a school, there are a few considerations applicants and parents/guardians of applicants should take note of. Since students can apply via DSA based on areas that they are talented in, the first consideration is the resources available in the school to develop the students' areas of talent. This could be in the form of the school's previous track records or achievements in the specific talent area. The second consideration would be the

suitability of an academic stream to meet the student's learning needs. This is because different academic streams demand different degrees of academic rigour. The various academic streams vary from the GCE O-Level Programme to Integrated Programmes (IP) at the Secondary level and Advanced-Level (A-Level) or International Baccalaureate (IB) at the Junior College level. The third and last consideration is transportation and travelling time, so as to ensure that the school is conveniently located and students are not overly exhausted travelling to the school (MOE, 2023).

B. Submission of Application

For DSA-Sec, the submission of applications is done via the DSA-Sec Portal (MOE, 2023), followed by indicating the choices of talent and DSA school. Following that, there is an optional step of filling up to 10 non-school based awards/activities and achievements related to the selected talent area(s). School-based activities and achievements are automatically shared with the relevant DSA-Sec Schools during the application process. This information includes the applicant's Primary 5 and Primary 6 academic results, with other information from Primary 4 to Primary 6, such as records of Co-curricular Activities (CCA), Values in Action (VIA) involvements, School-based achievements and awards such as Edusave awards, National School Games (NSG) achievements, Junior Sports Academy (JSA) participation and NAPFA results (only for sports talent). The application window period is determined by the respective secondary schools.

For DSA-JC, the application is done via the individual schools' website. These websites also provide information on application periods as the procedures and selection criteria can differ from school to school. There are 2 phases that applicants undergo for DSA-JC, comprising Phase 1 and Phase 2, where students can apply for a school participating in Phase 2 if they missed the Phase 1 application or did not receive or accept an offer after their Phase 1 Application. The selection process may often involve the submission of documents in the relevant DSA Talent area,

such as a portfolio showcasing the students' talents and achievements, secondary school results, CCA records, and personal statements.

C. Interview/Audition/Trials

Following the application period, shortlisted applicants in both DSA-Sec and DSA-JC may be required to attend interviews, auditions or trials in their specified DSA talent area. The duration of the process varies from school to school. These interviews and trials allow students to showcase their passion, commitment and talent in the respective areas.

D. Application Outcomes

For DSA-Sec, there are 3 possible outcomes: Confirmed offer, Unsuccessful and Waitlisted (MOE, 2023). However, even after securing a spot in the school, applicants must meet the eligibility criteria to gain admission into the school. This eligibility criteria comes in the form of attaining a PSLE score that qualifies them for a Posting Group offered by the school for DSA-Sec.

For DSA-JC, there are 2 possible outcomes: Offer and Unsuccessful (MOE, 2023). Similar to DSA-Sec, students too have to meet the eligibility criteria to gain admission into their DSA School, such as having a gross L1R5 score of 20 and below and meeting the relevant subject requirements for DSA-JC.

E. School Outcomes

If one is admitted to the school of their choice through DSA-Sec or DSA-JC, they are not allowed to transfer to another school after getting their PSLE or O-Level results and should follow through with the commitment they have undertaken by gaining admission via DSA.

If one does not gain admission to the school of their choice, they can qualify for the school of their choice either through the S1 Posting exercise or Joint Admissions Exercise (JAE) with their PSLE or O-Level Results.

Benefits

Broadens the scope of admission, reducing emphasis on academics

Singapore's education system is known for its demanding academic environment, which can be attributed to a strong emphasis on good grades. This is supported by reports from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) comparative study in 2017 that showed that 86% of Singapore's students were worried about poor grades at school, compared to the OECD average of 66% (Ng, 2020). To avoid this fixation with grades, MOE has implemented initiatives that focus on moving away from academic performance to a more holistic outlook on education (MOE, 2019). This is where the DSA scheme comes into play.

As such, the DSA plays an instrumental role in broadening the scope of admission. As the DSA application process consists of evaluating students based on the following criteria: Academics, VIA Hours, CCA Achievements, Leadership Positions etc (MOE, 2023), it ensures that even those who are not as academically inclined but exhibit great talent or potential in other aspects are granted the same opportunity to gain admission into schools of their choice.

DSA allows for the recognition of a diverse range of skills and talents (MOE, 2007). It values students who are able to contribute to a vibrant and rich school atmosphere, with their proficiency in the chosen DSA talent area. This recognition is an important step forward for Singapore's education system, sending a clear message that academic performance is not the only area of

focus. Furthermore, with the intentional removal of academic ability tests (MOE, 2018), DSA creates a community which celebrates the students' non-academic achievements, departing from traditional ideals that base a student's worth solely on their academic performance. With its holistic approach to evaluate students, DSA enables schools to develop students' potential and capabilities in their talent area, promoting a more balanced and comprehensive educational journey.

Develops students' co-curricular abilities (even the niche ones)

The DSA scheme serves as a catalyst towards a more comprehensive evaluation of students. However, the journey does not end there. After students gain admission into the school, the scheme provides opportunities for students to develop their co-curricular talents and abilities by providing them with the relevant opportunities to consistently upskill in their DSA talent area (TODAY, 2017).

DSA allows schools to cultivate a diverse range of talents, and nurture potential, ensuring that students with aptitudes beyond academics are given due recognition and opportunities for further growth.

The scheme not only identifies, but also promotes a passion-driven approach to learning. While students still have to sit for their academic tests and examinations, they are also encouraged to explore pathways and areas which align with their strengths and interests. These opportunities include competitions like the National School Games (NSG) or Student Youth Festival (SYF), where students are able to exhibit their skill and proficiency in their DSA talent area, at a national level, and gain recognition for their contributions towards creating a rich educational landscape.

DSA does not restrict students to a singular road to success and encourages a balanced learning style.

When the students gain admission to a school via their co-curricular talents, their time at the school will often involve the building of many interdisciplinary skills, and learning values and lessons that will be valuable to them as they grow into adulthood. These interdisciplinary skills include but are not limited to communication, interpersonal skills, leadership, teamwork and flexibility. As students juggle both their co-curricular talents and academics, they also learn valuable skills, such as responsibility, discipline, and diligence. Being a DSA student allows one to grow to become a well-rounded individual as their DSA journey requires them to strive to find a healthy balance between their passion, and their studies. This scheme has made its mark as a multifaceted and comprehensive program that fosters the development of Singapore's students.

Concerns

Lack of an equal playing field

While the DSA programme was originally implemented to allow for the holistic evaluation of students, over time, many concerns have been raised regarding the fairness of the scheme as a whole and how the entire programme creates an unequal playing field for some. These concerns have been primarily raised due to the disparity in socio-economic backgrounds of students and the ability of parents with a higher socio-economic background to equip their children with portfolios manufactured to ace the DSA application (CNA, 2022). This phenomenon, 'Parentocracy', popularised in recent years, is one where a student's education is increasingly dependent upon the wealth and wishes of his/her parents, rather than the ability and effort of the student (The Straits Times, 2014).

With DSA's holistic evaluation of students, parents are now looking to build their children's portfolios from childhood, to have it ready for the application process. A common perception regarding DSA is that it is seen to be a popular backdoor to get into the most coveted spots at top schools (Straits Times, 2017). Hence, parents with the financial ability often prepare their children extensively, so as to secure a spot at prestigious schools.

The primary issue is that there is a vast difference in the access to resources for children from varying financial backgrounds. Parents who are more affluent or financially well-off are better able to afford the resources that provide their children with an additional advantage to shine (CNA, 2023). These resources include enrichment classes, DSA preparatory lessons, and specialised training in non-academic pursuits, such as sports or the arts. This allows their children to present a polished, well-developed and strong portfolio during the DSA application process, thereby providing them with a significant advantage as compared to their peers from less well-off backgrounds.

In addition, beyond the application stage, many affluent parents also ensure that their children are sufficiently prepared for the DSA interview or audition process by sending them for private tutoring or DSA workshops. For example, tuition centres such as Speech Academy Asia offer specialised DSA coaching classes to equip students with the necessary communication skills to ace their DSA interviews. These tutoring sessions can enhance a student's performance at the interview stage as compared to their less affluent counterparts. This raises the question: Is the talent reflected in the students' portfolios and interviews genuine potential that can be further developed? Or is it a readily manufactured sheet of paper that fails to consider the difference in access to resources that different groups of students have?

All of the above then contribute to a lack of an equal playing field, and may even discourage students who are less affluent from participating in the DSA exercise, as the existing process means that more affluent students have a significant advantage. Furthermore, it could also potentially exacerbate existing educational inequalities and challenge the notion of Meritocracy in Singapore. The very idea of Meritocracy is that students are given equal opportunities and judged based on their worth and ability, allowing them to have equal access to such resources. However, it is evident that solely relying on talent will put less affluent students at a disadvantage compared to those who are more affluent and can afford additional enrichment classes. Thus, the DSA system could potentially exacerbate existing educational inequalities and challenge the notion of Meritocracy in Singapore.

Limiting students opportunities to explore other fields

While the DSA scheme serves as an innovative avenue for recognizing and nurturing diverse talents, there is a growing concern that, paradoxically, it might limit students' opportunities to explore a broader spectrum of interests. Since DSA students have to commit to the specific area that they applied for for the whole programme, it may result in a pigeonholing effect as students could potentially lose interest in the activity that they applied in and not have the opportunity to explore other interests (Davie,2021). As students are channelled into a particular domain based on their demonstrated expertise during the application process, there is a risk of curbing their ability to discover and develop latent talents or interests that may not have been evident at the time of admission.

Once students gain admission into the school of their choice via DSA, upon gaining admission to their chosen school, they are expected to commit to the duration of the programme and remain in the Co-Curricular Activity or area of talent they used to apply for DSA. This is because they have to honour the commitment they have made in order to gain admission to the school.

However this also means that if students subsequently lose their passion for their DSA talent area, and wish to explore other interests they are denied that choice.

Students in their developmental years are often characterised by insatiable curiosity and a constantly evolving sense of identity (Hutson, 2023). This means that what was once their passion two years ago may not necessarily be their passion now. Hence this underscores the importance of providing these students the opportunity to explore a multitude of interests and not limit and pigeonhole students to specialising in one specific talent area. The expectation to honour a

commitment made at a very early age, could potentially result in missed opportunities for DSA students to discover and build diverse skills that could contribute to a student's holistic growth.

Conclusion

The DSA scheme has long been celebrated for its efforts to recognise a diverse range of talents and skills and reducing Singapore's overt emphasis on academic excellence. Revisions have constantly been made to the scheme to ensure that DSA fulfils its original purpose and objectives. Despite these revisions, there have been many voices of discontentment being raised with the DSA scheme, which brings into question if the DSA scheme improves or worsens the unequal playing field in Singapore.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer

1. How do we continue to protect the original purpose of DSA
2. Are the current measures put in place to ensure that DSA students are able to keep up with their peers effective? If not, how can we improve them?
3. Would the removal of DSA then translate to greater equality in access to educational opportunities? If not, how would we ensure that Meritocracy is preserved in our education system?
4. What alternative criteria or methods can be implemented to ensure a fair and inclusive admission process that is able to nurture raw talent and potential?
5. How can the education system maintain a balance between Meritocracy and inclusive access with/without DSA?

Bibliography

1. Tan Adam Reutens (2019): DSA may not put students in the right environment.
<https://www.straitstimes.com/forum/letters-in-print/dsa-may-not-put-students-in-the-right-environment>
2. Johari Amir Mirza (2017): More can be done to support students' talents, abilities.
<https://www.todayonline.com/voices/more-can-be-done-support-students-talents-abilities>
3. Chia Elisa (2023): Kids got talent? Here are Direct School Admission categories you might not know about. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parenting-education/kids-got-talent-here-are-direct-school-admission-categories-you-might-not-know-about>
4. Chong Yew Meng., Neo Chai Chin., & Nivitra Devi Hari (2023): 'The rich out-train everybody else': How to keep Meritocracy a driver of opportunity in schools
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/cna-insider/education-schools-arms-race-improve-Meritocracy-singapore-rich-inclusive-3302586>
5. Davie Sandra (2017): Will changes to Direct School Admission work? It depends on how schools define 'specific academic talents'. <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/will-changes-to-direct-school-admission-work-it-depends-on-how-schools-define-specific>
6. Davie Sandra (2017): What parents need to know about this scheme.
<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parenting-education/direct-school-admission-what-parents-need-to-know-about-the-scheme>
7. Goh Siok Noi (2017): Scheme should not be an entry ticket into popular schools.
<https://www.straitstimes.com/forum/letters-in-print/scheme-should-not-be-an-entry-ticket-into-popular-schools>

8. Huang Jia Hui (2023): Give all students a chance at DSA by beefing up school resources. <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/forum/forum-give-all-students-a-chance-at-dsa-by-beefing-up-school-resources>
9. Hutson Matt (2023): How to Adult Learning: From Children's Cognitive Development to Curiosity. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-adult-learning-from-childrens-cognitive-curiosity-hutson-m-ed-zjfk>
10. Cheng Seah Kelvin Kah (2017): DSA revisions laudable, but challenge lies in transparency. <https://www.todayonline.com/daily-focus/education/dsa-revisions-laudable-challenge-lies-transparency>
11. Liviniyah P (2018): Direct School Admission (DSA). <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuid=bf01ac01-4d4d-42e6-94d6-b117a4ed5f64>
12. Ministry of Education(2023): Direct School Admission for junior colleges (DSA-JC). <https://www.moe.gov.sg/post-secondary/admissions/dsa>
13. Ministry of Education (2023): Direct School Admission for secondary schools (DSA-Sec). <https://www.moe.gov.sg/secondary/dsa>
14. Mokhtar Faris (2018): Revamped DSA scheme to give students from disadvantaged families a leg up. <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/revamped-dsa-scheme-give-students-disadvantaged-families-leg>
15. Ong Andrea (2014): Beware growing 'parentocracy': NIE don. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/beware-growing-parentocracy-nie-don>
16. Ng Pak Tee (2020): The Paradoxes of Student Well-being in Singapore. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1269600.pdf>

17. Teng Amelia (2014): Direct entry to schools? Prep centres cash in.
<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/direct-entry-to-schools-prep-centres-cash-in>

18. Voltaire (2017): Direct School Admission scheme makes mockery of education system and proves PSLE is useless. <https://theindependent.sg/direct-school-admission-scheme-makes-mockery-of-education-system-and-proves-psle-is-useless/>

19. Yeo Daniel (2018): NMP Ganesh Rajaram calls for review of DSA trials and “DSA coaches” to prevent elitism in school sports. <https://www.redsports.sg/2018/07/14/dsa-trials-dsa-coaches-elitism-school-sports-singapore/>

Topic 2: Should the government regulate the tuition industry in Singapore?

Introduction

In Singapore, the private tuition industry is one that is booming, having raked in around S\$1.4 billion (Ting, 2021) dollars in 2021 alone. Attending tuition classes is also seen as a norm for Singaporean students, given how academic results play a pertinent and important role in securing places in elite universities and in acquiring scholarships. For many, tuition classes are viewed as an avenue to help students achieve academic excellence (Seah, 2021), opening a pathway to greater success in life.

However, the tuition industry today lacks any form of regulation. This may result in the industry having unchecked accelerated growth, overriding the aims of the educational system in Singapore and potentially serving as a source of competition to the Ministry of Education (MOE). Furthermore, an unregulated tuition industry may create an unequal playing field and worsen the divide between groups of different socio-economic statuses (Tan, 2021). Students may also experience more academic stress. Lastly, a culture of overreliance on private tuition may be developed, where students will start to view tuition as a necessity instead of a support system (Palatino, 2013).

Historical overview

In earlier years, tuition was intended to support weaker students and to supplement what was taught in schools. In recent years, to ensure that students keep up with the rigorous academic curriculum, parents have sent their children to tuition classes as competitive parents still cling on to the mindset of focusing solely on academic excellence (Wai, 2018), ensuring that their children do better than other, even if their children are achieving good results in school.

The timeline below shows the growth of the tuition industry in Singapore.

2008	The industry worthed US\$650 million continued to grow over time.
2018	In a speech by then-acting Education Minister Ong Ye Kung, he stated that Singapore was not moving towards banning tuitions.
2019	Mr Ong talked about tuition again, explaining the negative impacts of tuition on students.
2020	Student enrolment in tuitions increased by 50% to support students' learning through home-based learning which was new and unfamiliar.
2021	The PSLE scoring system was changed to place more emphasis on academic grades with the hope of reducing reliance on tuition.
2022	Minister for Education Chan Chun Sing announced the removal of Mid Year Examinations for Primary 3 and 5 and Secondary 1 and 3 students as another measure to rescue reliance on tuition.

Table 1: Timeline of the growth of Singapore's private tuition industry

The private tuition and enrichment industry is diverse and often unregulated, with a wide range of providers and settings. This includes larger tuition and enrichment centres, as well as freelance private tutors, who may enter and exit the industry at any time.

Current Situation

Current policies in the Ministry of Education (MOE)

MOE formulates and implements education policies on education structure, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in Singapore. In recent years, MOE has made key shifts in the education system, in the hopes of keeping up with the changing times and needs of the younger generation.

A. Changes in the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) Scoring System

To better meet the needs of today, MOE finds it necessary to fine-tune the education system, for students to better discover and develop their strengths and interests, while moving away from an over-emphasis on academic performance.

Therefore, in the PSLE, the implementation of ‘Achievement Levels’, a shift from the previous ‘T-score’ system, aims to reduce the fine differentiation of examination results from a young age. Furthermore, this change was implemented to acknowledge the students’ level of academic achievement, regardless of their peers’ performance.

The table below shows the main differences between the two scoring systems.

T-score	Achievement Levels (2021-Present)
---------	-----------------------------------

<p>Reflects how well students have performed relative to their peers.</p> <p>Over 200+ possible scores</p> <p>Scores are more finely differentiated</p> <p>Fewer students with the same score</p> <p>Fewer schools with the same cut-off point</p>	<p>Reflects how well students have performed relative to the learning objectives of the curriculum.</p> <p>29 possible scores</p> <p>Scores are less finely differentiated</p> <p>More students with the same score</p> <p>Students have a wider range of schools to choose from, depending on their strengths and interests, unique school programmes and CCAs.</p>
--	--

B. Removal of Mid-Year Examinations (MYE) in Primary and Secondary Levels

In line with the 'Learn for Life Movement' and the aims of inculcating the joy of learning and nurturing students into confident and resilient learners, MOE has made an attempt to move away from the over-emphasis on academic grades and examinations. However, it must be noted that this is not a direct attempt to reduce stress per se (MOE, 2023).

This shift away from grades provides teachers more time to design and provide a variety of learning experiences for students, which potentially enables students to do the following:

- f. Better develop their strengths and interests.
- g. Act on teachers' feedback with the additional space and time.

- h. Strengthen their intrinsic motivation to learn, while making themselves more self-directed in their learning.

Furthermore, MOE has ensured that there continue to be many possible avenues to assess the learning progress, or check the understanding and mastery of students and teachers. Some of these modes include:

- i. Examinations
- j. Weighted assessments
- k. Quizzes
- l. Classroom interactions

Despite such changes, this fixation and obsession with academic excellence still continues to be part of Singapore's student culture today. Given the crucial role that parents play in developing their child's resilience and passion for learning, MOE aims to partner with parents to help students focus on the value of learning and not just assessment outcomes. MOE aims to partner parents to help students focus on the value of learning, and not just assessment outcomes. This is in line with the overall aim of helping students to build tenacity and learn meaningfully, instead of merely inundating them with tests. Hence, representatives must discuss how the issue of overemphasis on grades in Singapore is linked to the growing presence of the tuition industry today.

Willing buyer, willing seller

The booming success and growth of the tuition industry can be attributed to the mentality that Singaporeans hold with regards to education and tuition today.

Meritocracy, which is the idea where individuals are rewarded based on their efforts and talents, rather than their connections and wealth, pushes Singaporeans to achieve their successes through the potential level-playing field that the education system offers. This sentiment is further reinforced by societal values, where success is commonly associated with academic performance, and parents have extremely high expectations of their children. Thus, when students are unable to live up to these standards on their own, parents often just sent their children for tuition classes (Auto, 2021).

Tuition classes are seen as an essential ingredient for academic success, with 46% of Singaporean parents believing that tuition is necessary for their children to stay competitive. 52% of parents believe that tutors will help to ensure that their children will be able to keep up with their peers in the class (Ho, 2023).

While the tuition industry faces an ever-growing pool of consumers, there are currently no measures or regulations put in place to curb the industry's rapid growth. Under the Education Act, centres offering tuition or enrichment programmes to ten or more students must be registered with MOE. As part of registration requirements, centres are required to comply with the following:

- m. Infrastructural and fire safety requirements.
- n. Having a school management committee.
- o. Display of their registration certificate at their premises.
- p. Tutors must also be registered with MOE.

Apart from the above logistical requirements, there are no other regulations put in place. Furthermore, these regulations do not cover freelance tutors who offer private tuition outside of centres, for example, in homes, or agencies that provide matching services between private tutors and students.

In view of private tuition being a commercial business, MOE encourages parents to exercise discretion and due diligence in engaging the services of tuition and enrichment centres, as well as individual tutors. Representatives are to discuss whether these measures are sufficient, how these measures could be improved, and what could be further implemented to regulate the industry.

Benefits

Supplements in-school learning

A common sentiment today is how the syllabus across various subjects appears to grow more and more challenging over the years. Many students go back home after a long day of school still struggling with the different concepts they were supposed to have learnt during the day. This poses another challenge to parents, who find themselves ill-equipped to help their children to learn better. This then drives parents and children alike to turn to tuition classes to seek that extra help.

As such, tuition is perceived to be supposedly capable of helping struggling students in their homework or in their preparation for the examinations by providing much-needed academic support. Tutors can help clarify confusing concepts and provide tips for tackling difficult questions. This supplements the potential gaps that school teachers fail to identify or address in school, due

to their busy schedule and the need to finish the syllabus by the end of the academic year. With little time left for students to ask questions on difficult concepts in school, tuition then serves as a beneficial mechanism for students to better learn (Thoo, 2023).

Furthermore, studies have shown that the typical classroom setting causes students to be more prone towards shying away from asking questions, due to the fear of being ridiculed by peers (Tan, 2023). With a smaller class size and dedicated class time, tutors have a greater capacity to dedicate their time towards any questions or queries that students may have, as compared to teachers in schools.

Providing more personalised learning for students

The private nature of the tuition industry provides tutors with the flexibility to design and adapt the curriculum and teaching methods based on the individual student's needs. Unlike in-school learning, tuitions can provide different teaching styles, additional workshops, supplementary learning materials, and a more interactive environment (Moorman, 2022) to better cater to the students' learning preferences.

This flexibility allows tutors to assess students' abilities, and knowledge levels to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses. From here, a customised learning plan can be crafted, to target those weak areas and build upon the student's existing knowledge. Tutors can focus on a student's needs and break down challenging concepts into small, understandable chunks of information for the student to better process. This personalisation of a student's learning needs is something that schools are unable to provide.

Concerns

Over-reliance on tuition as a source of support

In Singapore, the tuition industry is rapidly growing. In 2021, it was estimated that the private tuition industry in Singapore was worth around \$1.4 billion USD, with an estimated 50,000 tutors providing services to around 200,000 students, making it a significant and thriving sector to the Singapore economy (Ho, 2023).

This substantial growth in recent years can be attributed to an increased competition for the limited academic places available, and high-stake examinations such as the PSLE, GCE-O Levels and A-Levels. This led many to believe that tuition plays a crucial role in helping students achieve academic success. This can be seen from the increase in the student intake by tuition centres from about 10% to 30% (Hio, 2014).

However, is the rapid growth of the tuition industry truly beneficial for Singapore? Are we over-reliant on tuition? Representatives must discuss the extent as to which tuition should be a part of our society, and what measures should be implemented to manage the negative impacts of the industry and prevent harm to Singapore's young generation.

Unequal playing field

Singapore's education system is built upon the value of Meritocracy, which aims to allow any individual to succeed based on merit and talent, and not based on status or wealth. However, the

tuition industry enables those from advantaged backgrounds to find a leverage to succeed further based on their income levels, leaving those from disadvantaged backgrounds behind. This then calls into question whether the Singapore education system is truly Meritocratic.

Expenditure figures from the Household Expenditure Survey in 2019 indicated that higher-income families spent more on tuition, with the top 20% of households by income spending nearly four times as much on tuition as those in the bottom 20%. This creates a worrying phenomenon, where Meritocracy takes a backseat, and differential access to quality tuition potentially increases educational inequality between students from economically disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds. This may be one reason why students from higher socio-economic backgrounds tend to perform better across education systems globally (OECD, 2023). With such an uneven playing field in education, can we move towards an egalitarian society?

In Singapore, we see the industry having a spectrum of tutors, given that anyone can be a freelance tutor. As such, tutors may differ quite vastly in terms of quality and expertise. While some tutors might be very effective, others may not be. Some could merely be taking on the job as a way to supplement their incomes or as a way to pass the time before entering university or getting a full-time job. These tutors are likely to lack strong incentives to take the time to understand the student's syllabus well and may provide erroneous information as a result.

Therefore, there is a concern regarding the lack of apparent quality control with regards to tuition tutors. Should students from less affluent backgrounds or those who opt for a more "value for money" opportunity choose a tutor who may lack the experience and resources that more expensive tuition services boast, they may be engaging ineffective tutors. This may have implications on their academic progress. In this case, it might be better for these students to simply rely on themselves and their school teachers rather than to receive tuition. Representatives will

need to discuss the appropriate course of action to solve this issue. Is regulation the answer? Or should the process of tutor selection be reviewed?

Exacerbating academic pressure

The education system in Singapore is one that is hyper-competitive, built upon the belief that academic excellence is the answer to success. It is a norm for parents to have high expectations for their children's academic performance, due to the belief that stellar grades are essential for success. This can be seen in our national examinations, where a student's score can determine his/her future school. Therefore, it is not uncommon to hear of parents expecting their children to study all day, for the end goal of getting into a good university and subsequently getting a good job. For the students, this translates into high levels of stress, which can be largely detrimental for their mental health.

Mental health issues are now prevalent among a large population of young students. According to a study by the National University of Singapore (NUS), 1 in 10 students aged from 10 to 18 years old suffer from mental health disorders (Seah and Ng, 2023).

This trend can largely be attributed to the stressful environment that students grow up in. As soon as they enter primary school, students are subjected to pressures to perform well in PSLE at the mere age of 12. Students are conditioned from young to believe that their identity and subsequent successes in life hinge on the scores that they obtain at a young age.

Should they fail to meet such expectations, students often find themselves losing their self-confidence. With the need to excel academically while juggling their Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs) and relationships with family and friends, it is no wonder that Singaporean students experience significantly higher levels of anxiety, as compared to their peers in other countries.

While 66% of students across all OECD countries said that they were worried about poor grades at school, among Singaporeans, it was 86% (Davie, 2017). Such pressures on young minds take a toll on the students' well-being, resulting in mental illnesses being more prevalent among youths today.

The prevalent belief in tuition reflects the academic expectations that students come to internalise. Students believe that tuition is an important avenue to gain a headstart and remain competitive. Despite the government's efforts to promote a more holistic approach to learning, students still feel the pressure to excel. Representatives must discuss the tuition industry's role in perpetuating academic pressures, and what can be done about the matter.

Tuition industry in competition with MOE

When seeking the best tutor, many parents and students sought out MOE trained tutors, who are often teachers still teaching under MOE or have quit to entirely focus on their tuition business. These tutors are highly regarded as an attractive choice, due to their in-depth knowledge of the national curriculum and their professional teaching experience. However, when ex-MOE teachers start their own tuition business, does it undermine our national education system as students can simply attend these tuition classes instead of attending school? Is it just and right for MOE teachers to be a part of the private tuition industry?

According to MOE guidelines, MOE teachers are permitted to provide private tuition, but with certain restrictions in place to ensure they maintain professional standards and prioritise their responsibilities within the public education system. This is to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure that the teachers' primary focus is on their school duties. A key requirement is for MOE teachers to obtain approval from their school principals before engaging in private tuition. This requirement

is to ensure that teachers can manage their workload effectively and that their primary responsibilities within the public education system are not compromised. Additionally, MOE teachers are only allowed to accept students from other schools in their tuition classes.

Are such requirements sufficient? Representatives should discuss the impact of such a fast growing tuition industry on MOE and the national education system.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer

6. Should there be more regulation in place to regulate the tuition industry?
7. Does the rapid growth of the tuition industry suggest something is lacking in today's education system?
8. Today, are schools providing students with adequate support?
9. Has the tuition industry become one that is purely driven by profit motivation?

Bibliography

1. Qing Ang (2021): Singapore students say parental and self expectations, Fomo are sources of stress. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parenting-education/singapore-students-say-parental-and-self-expectations-fear-of-missing>
2. Avvisati Francesco., & Ilizaliturri Rodolfo (2022): PISA 2022 <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/finland-6991e849/>
3. Cheng Kelvin Seah Kah (2019): Tuition has ballooned to a S\$1.4b industry in Singapore. Should we be concerned? <https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/tuition-has-ballooned-s14b-industry-singapore-should-we-be-concerned>
4. Colagrossi Mike (2018): 10 reasons why Finland's education system is the best in the world. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/09/10-reasons-why-finlands-education-system-is-the-best-in-the-world/>
5. Davie Sandra (2018): Schools to cut mid-year exams for several levels; Primary 1 and 2 pupils will not be graded. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/schools-to-cut-mid-year-exams-for-some-levels-primary-1-and-2-pupils-will-not-be-graded-or>
6. Davie Sandra (2017): Singapore students suffer from high levels of anxiety. <https://tnp.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/study-says-singapore-students-suffer-high-levels-anxiety>
7. Firstpost (2023): How China's tuition ban has led to mushrooming of illegal classes. <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/china-tuition-ban-mushrooming-of-illegal-classes-double-reduction-policy-12898932.html>

8. Gabtanc (2019): Benefits of Having Tuition in Singapore.
<https://kungfuphysics.com/benefits-of-having-tuition-in-singapore/>
9. Gov.Sg (2021): 5 things you should know about the new PSLE scoring and Secondary One posting systems. <https://www.gov.sg/article/five-things-you-should-know-about-the-new-psle-scoring-and-secondary-one-posting-systems>
10. Ministry Of Education (2021): Tuition <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/parliamentary-replies/20210706-tuition#:~:text=Under%20the%20Education%20Act%2C%20centres,have%20a%20school%20management%20committee.>
11. Goh Han Yan (2024): New PSLE scoring system
<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parenting-education/moe-releases-cut-off-points-for-secondary-schools-under-new-psle>
12. Hao Liang., & Jialun Wang (2021): Why didn't anyone foresee the regulatory clampdown on the tuition industry? <https://www.thinkchina.sg/investing-china-why-didnt-anyone-foresee-regulatory-clampdown-tutoring-industry>
13. Heng Yew Seng (2021): Education movement underway to reduce overemphasis on academic results and strengthen students' resilience.
<https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/forum-letter-replies/20211223-education-movement-underway-to-reduce-overemphasis-on-academic-results-and-strengthen-students-resilience>
14. Ho Joseph (2023):Singapore Tuition Centres Insights & Trend.
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/singapore-tuition-centres-insights-trend-joseph-ho/>

15. Hip Lester (2014): Tuition seen as a 'necessity' for students to do well
<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/tuition-seen-as-necessity-for-students-to-do-well>
16. Ministry Of Education (2022): Correlation between SES and PSLE performance.
<https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/parliamentary-replies/20220307-correlation-between-ses-and-psle-performance>
17. Ministry Of Education (2023): Why is MOE changing the PSLE scoring system?
<https://www.moe.gov.sg/microsites/psle-fsbb/psle/changing-psle-scoring-system.html>
18. Moorman Fiona (2022) <https://oro.open.ac.uk/93728/>
19. Tan Claudia (2021): Lessons from the business of tuition. Are we paying attention?
<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/opinion-features/features/lessons-business-tuition-are-we-paying-attention>
20. National University of Singapore (2021): China's Crackdown on Private Tuition.
<https://fass.nus.edu.sg/srn/2021/08/05/chinas-crackdown-on-private-tuition-a-lesson-for-singapore/>
21. Ng Darrelle., & Seah Sherlyn (2023): Study finds that 1 in 10 teens suffer from mental health disorder. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/teens-youth-mental-health-disorder-nus-study-support-parents-resilience-3448571>
22. Skoolopedia (2014): Enrichment Classes and Tuition Centres in Singapore.
<https://skoolopedia.com/a-comprehensive-guide-to-enrichment-classes-and-tuition-centres-in-singapore/>

23. Song Giam Yean Gerald (2023): Effect of removing mid-year examinations. <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/parliamentary-replies/20231003-effect-of-removing-mid-year-examinations>

24. Sophia Education (2022): Mental Health Amongst Students in Singapore: Why and How to Solve It. <https://sophiaeducation.sg/mental-health-amongst-students-in-singapore/>

25. Tan Rum (2018): Tuition in Singapore. [https://smiletutor.sg/an-overview-of-tuition-in-singapore/#:~:text=The%20tuition%20industry%20has%20grown,over%20%241.4%20billion%20\(2019\).&text=Again%2C%20another%20easy%20one%2C%20as,send%20their%20child%20for%20tuition.](https://smiletutor.sg/an-overview-of-tuition-in-singapore/#:~:text=The%20tuition%20industry%20has%20grown,over%20%241.4%20billion%20(2019).&text=Again%2C%20another%20easy%20one%2C%20as,send%20their%20child%20for%20tuition.)

26. Tan Rum(2023): The Benefits of Private Tuition in Singapore: Is It Worth It?<https://smiletutor.sg/the-benefits-of-private-tuition-in-singapore-is-it-worth-it/>

27. Tan Rum (2021): What Will Your Child Learn In Kindergarten? <https://smiletutor.sg/what-will-your-child-learn-in-kindergarten/>

28. Ting Wong Pei (2021): The Big Read: Singapore's endless love affair with private tuition just got deeper with COVID-19 <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/singapore-tuition-centre-teachers-parents-students-education-2114136>

29. Wai Desmond (2021): Why parents turn to tuition for their kids <https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/why-parents-turn-tuition-their-kids>

30. Ng Jing Yng (2013): South Koreans fight against tuition tide <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/s-koreans-fight-against-tuition-tide>

The information is accurate as of 16 February 2024.