



Cabinet A - Education

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[18 - 20 March 2026]



Introduction To Council

Dear representative,

Welcome to Cabinet A: Education. The presidents warmly welcome you as we engage in three days of rigorous study and discussion. We would like to stipulate the purpose of the council, our mandate, our principles, and our goals.

The various ministries and statutory boards of the cabinet assemble to discuss pertinent issues that substantially affect Singaporeans. Members play a vital role in enacting inclusive and targeted policies. Furthermore, the cabinet aims to introduce representatives to the reality of policy making by reflecting real-world governance where trade-offs are inevitable.

An effective government must first understand its role and, by extension, its mandates. The cabinet of education aims to oversee management and development of the nation's education system, from primary schools to tertiary educational institutions. Besides sometimes competing interests, ministries and statutory boards have respective powers which cannot be overruled. While legislative power lies with the cabinet, its members control aspects of our society.



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The mandate of this cabinet is rooted in the constitution, guaranteeing the right to education and forbidding discrimination. While the cabinet aims to ensure compulsory education, tackle inequality, and nurture academic excellence and good character development in its students, it faces challenges due to the constraint of manpower and resources, global uncertainties and rising expectations, as well as ensuring quality and accessibility of education in Singapore.

The objective of the Cabinet remains addressing pressing concerns while managing trade-offs. As representatives, the onus of representing competing priorities and engaging in diplomacy falls upon you. Alas, the president is excited to see substantive debate during the conference, but also wishes to see you grow as representatives and as people. So speak, write, and argue to garner as much as knowledge as possible from Singapore Model Cabinet 2026.



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Topic 1: Should Singapore impose stricter regulations on the tuition industry?

Introduction

The tuition industry in Singapore is a large and growing market, valued at over SGD1.4 billion in 2023, driven by high academic competition, national exams, and high per capita income (NIE, 2025).

The high demand of this sector leads to a variety of different tuition being made available, where some provide “lifeline help” and others are merely interested in the profit accumulated. A significant portion of students, estimated at over 70 percent, receive certain lessons that pertain to private tutoring, and as a result, spending on tuition has risen considerably (Lee, 2024).

Factors contributing to the growth of the tuition industry are likely attributed to a desire for academic excellence and more recently, the emergence of specialised and non-academic tuition services, such as those for the Direct School Admission (DSA) scheme. The DSA scheme allows Secondary Four or Year Ten students to secure placements in Junior Colleges or IB Schools through non-academic talents, such as strength in leadership and sports.



As the tuition market grows and more in-depth services are made available, though at differing extents of affordability, attending tuition is no longer viewed as a resource for struggling students but rather a stepping stone that is advantageous for students. Tuition becomes more normalised and Singaporean children are limited by a phenomenon where they believe that survival in our education system is only possible if one undergoes excessive amounts of tuition or alternatively, that one will definitely struggle without it (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Background

Historical Overview with Timeline of Key/Relevant Events

The rise of the tuition industry in Singapore can be attributed to what is known colloquially as the Singaporean “rat race”. Students experience high pressure in a rigorous educational system from a young age to succeed academically. Despite changes in the national exams tailored specifically to be “non-competitive”, the very presence of schools being viewed with different levels of prestige due to streaming in secondary schools which places a lot of pressure on parents and children to race to the top. Hence, tuition is viewed as not just an accelerant, but a necessity for success. According to CPD Singapore, “The tuition industry in Singapore is primarily driven by a highly competitive education



system, academic pressure, and cultural influence.” (CPD, 2025) Cultural influence can be seen from how this issue is highly specific to APEC countries.

Key Statistics and Data Points

Official figures show that Singapore’s overall spending on private tuition has increased over the past decade at a rate that surpasses household income growth. This is particularly striking, considering that successive student cohorts have continued to shrink due to Singapore’s declining birth rate. (Zalizan, 2025) The number of students enrolled in local schools from primary to pre-university levels dipped by about 10.8 percent from 473,375 in 2013 to 422,342 in 2023. Yet, the amount spent on tuition jumped by 63.3 per cent, from \$1.1 billion to \$1.8 billion during the same period. This not only represents the greater competitiveness, but also, the greater dependence on tuition. A report from the Straits Times shows that certain individuals opt for tuition simply to catch up to the current curricular standards.

Singapore aims for the pursuit of neutrality in terms of educational opportunities and tuition. As the former Minister of Education Mr Ong Ye Kung once said, ‘Singapore’s circumstances are different and unique, and we cannot assume that we will have to eventually do what other countries like the [United States of America] have done.’ At the same time, Singapore will not follow in China’s footsteps (Tseng, 2021) but also will not be too lax about the regulations that are allowing tutoring to run underground which is unethically against standards to regulate the sector through tutor registration, safety checks, and ethical advertising to ensure quality and equity.



Urgency of Issue

The question of government restriction in Singapore's tuition industry has become increasingly asked frequently as the problems it brings become more relevant today, which can partly be associated with issues such as rising income disparity, kiasu culture in Singapore and how it affects industry growth, and greater research data on how our academic system has caused considerable stress in students of all academic levels. As Singapore continues to make changes to perfect its extremely competitive education system (Manager, 2025), critics continue to highlight how the tuition industry threatens the very meritocratic basis that make up the foundation of the system. (See, 2023) Privilege threatens the equality that Singaporean education promises and the issue of the tuition industry must be discussed now more than ever.



Key Issues

The Current Situation

Currently, an amalgamation of critical issues has raised an alarming need to answer this topic's question. Issues such as income divides, a decline in meritocracy, overreliance on tuition and loss of ability to study independently, and the surfacing of unethical promotional tactics that stresses parents and students, which is deemed equivalent to corruption by the Minister of Education, and hence gives rise to corruption offences.

Past Policy Initiatives or Key Legislation

Tutors must register with MOE if they teach more than ten students (Education Act Chapter 87 Section 20), tutors must declare their history of offences, should they have any, license must be renewed every two years, Fee Protection Scheme (under private Education Scheme) safeguards student fees against school insolvency, closure, or failure to refund due to court orders, ensuring fees. MOE tutors must seek approval first but can still teach under the condition that it does not interfere with their MOE-based duty. This is beneficial for the tutors who are able to earn additional income from tutoring as well as for the students who learn from qualified tutors with real experience in the education industry. However, it also poses challenges as teachers may choose to teach privately instead



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as they are relieved from various non-teaching responsibilities they are assigned in schools, lowering the staff workforce in schools and raising school fees. (Jinghui, 2021)



Scope of Debate:

Case for stricter regulations

Protection of mental health of students

In Singapore, a commonly highlighted issue is the mental health of students. Students spend, on average, 50 hours a week on studies, and often an additional 4 hours on extracurricular activities. (Seah, 2022) This may place a large burden on students and leave them with little time for themselves. Within that limited time, they also have to maintain a social life, nurture hobbies, and take care of daily needs and chores. Tuition may exacerbate this issue, as on top of the hours they spend in tuition, averaging two or three, there's also often transportation time or time spent on homework given by the tutors. (Davie, 2016) Furthermore, links have been found between after school tutoring and depression, and students who attend tuition frequently often report chronic stress. (Fan et al., 2025) (Wan, 2025) Stricter regulations such as banning tuition or limiting hours of tuition can reduce the stress students face and likely shift importance away from academic excellence, which potentially reduces expectations that could be burdensome on students.

Reduce exploitation, particularly of vulnerable children

Another problem often brought up is the manipulative tactics some tuition centres resort to. They may guilt trip parents, give out flyers outside primary schools and prey on young children who are



vulnerable to manipulation, potentially with the motive of purposefully increasing their stress and exploiting them. For example, reports from Malaysia indicate tuition providers would often exacerbate and magnify the stress of students to make them sign onto their service. (Loi et al., 2025) In Singapore, it is common to have tuition workers linger around schools to coax students into going to their center, targeting even primary school children. (Chan, 2025) Some independent tuition teachers may not even have the necessary qualifications to help students, hence draining money from unaware parents without truly teaching their students, as only tutors at centres with 10 or more students need to undergo registration, creating a loophole for freelance tutors to exploit. (Zhang & Mokhtar, 2024) By tightening regulations such as requiring all tutors to be registered and certified or banning such manipulative advertisement techniques, the likelihood of people getting tricked or deceived decreases.

Promotion of meritocracy

Meritocracy is a social system, society, or organization in which people get success or power because of their abilities, not because of their money or social position. Some families cannot afford tuition, as prices can range from \$20 to \$120 per hour, which may allow families who can to get ahead, widening the inequality between households of different socioeconomic status. The advantage granted to those with greater financial power and thus access to tuition can be seen from a study by the Singapore Department of Statistics which reveals that students who engage in private tuition generally outperform their peers without in national examinations, suggesting that such students may be given an advantage



or greater chances of academic success because of their wealth. (Scott, 2024) Stricter regulations such as banning tuition or placing price caps, could reduce this unfair advantage that may lead to income immobility. Furthermore, there is currently a psychological barrier where children of lower SES believe they cannot succeed without tuition and children of higher SES believe that they can only succeed with tuition, thereby causing children of lower SES to likely give up on trying, creating a utopia-dystopia perception of society. (Loi et al., 2025)

However the public will likely be unreceptive to such policies, as there may be pushback from parents who may be scared of their children not getting the help they believe is needed, due to their conservative mindset and the culture that exists in Singapore of pushing children to excel in studies, often by loading them with tuition. This can be seen from 52% of parents who send their children to tuition citing helping their children keep up as the reason. (Davie, 2016) There will also likely be pushback by stakeholders and businesses as tuition is a large and profitable industry, valued at approximately SGD 1.4 billion. (CPD Singapore, 2025) Lastly, there will also be fiscal constraints in the form of the money required to ease the transition and implicit costs.

Case against stricter regulations

Prevention of personalized help



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In Singapore class sizes often range from 20 to 40, and generally, in secondary schools, there are ~30 students per class. This makes it difficult for students to receive one-on-one attention from teachers who are already preoccupied with covering a heavy syllabus and teaching, and may lack the time to help students personally with their questions. Furthermore, teachers have multiple classes and limited time, so it may be troublesome for them to hold consults with every student. This means teachers may not be able to clarify every students' questions or sit with them and explain it patiently until they understand. Hence students likely require additional tutoring to help clear any misconceptions or confusions, which may be unique to each student and hence impossible to resolve in a generalised manner. Tuition helps students to achieve academic success which may lead to better job prospects, as there is a direct link between higher education and greater job benefits or opportunities, such as better pay and autonomy (Tushara, 2025). Stricter restrictions like bans or price caps reduce the amount of help students receive, negatively impacting their grades and their future prospects.

Possible creation of black markets

- A tuition ban will likely result in the emergence of black markets, as evidenced by this very occurrence in China. The demand of tuition is likely to remain high after the ban, as tuition is now seen as a requirement by Singapore's society, and this high demand makes it probable that a similar situation to that in China would happen in Singapore should Singapore follow in China's footsteps and ban tuition. As tuition is now being conducted illegally, the industry becomes entirely unregulated, and



such black market providers will likely set higher prices, due to lesser supply and the risk associated with breaking the law, and are no longer beholden to registrations and standards. (The Straits Times, 2024)

This may not only exacerbate the social economic divide mentioned earlier and worsen the financial burden on parents, but may also result in greater risk to the safety of children, as such black market tutors will likely be going house to house or conducting tuition in the tutors residence to avoid detection, away from the public eye, which may place children in vulnerable or dangerous situations. Furthermore, there is no longer any quality control, and the quality of tuition will likely decrease, reducing consumer satisfaction as the public are now paying more for less. Lastly, black markets involve tax fraud, depriving the government of tax revenue from this industry.

Job loss and increase of unemployment

- The tuition industry in Singapore is valued at approximately SGD 1.4 billion and continues to grow annually. The banning or crackdown of tuition may have a significant economic impact. Mass layoffs may occur, as companies now make less profits and can no longer sustain so many workers. For example, when China outright banned tuition, 3+ million job openings were lost in four months and there was at least 11 billion RMB in VAT losses over 18 months. (Huang et al., 2025)



Past Solutions

Tuition ban

Tuition bans can be observed in countries such as China, which banned for-profit private tutoring for core subjects, forcing companies to become non-profit and prohibiting lessons during weekends and holidays. (向亚男, 2021) As a result, official statistics showed a dramatic drop in the number of tuition centers immediately after the ban. Furthermore, as perspectives of tuition shift to be seen as illegal and even taboo, such a ban may have led to a lowered demand for tuition. However, it is also widely known that such a ban has resulted in Chinese parents finding loopholes within the policy or simply seeking illegal methods to counter the ban, resulting in the creation of a thriving underground tuition industry. In the context of Singapore, the outcome of a tuition ban may similarly be ineffective. This is considering the 'kiasu' nature of Singaporeans, including parents, who hope to 'gain an 'edge' despite a ban and turn to black markets. This may lead to issues such as unregulated market price, no quality control, victims not having legal mechanisms as a safeguard to these issues. Lower income families may also be further priced out of the tuition market, further perpetuating social stagnation and poor upward mobility. Hence, such a policy reaps short-term benefits, but has long-term consequences.

Restricting MOE teachers from teaching

Currently, Singapore still allows MOE teachers in primary, secondary, IB and JC to tutor outside. However, there are stringent measures in place such as that these tutors are not allowed to tutor students from their own



school, must adhere to a 6-hour-per-week limit, and need prior approval etc. These measures apply to MOE teachers regardless of whether it interferes with their official duties, hence discouraging tutors from teaching outside of school. As a result, this removes conflict of interests such as material sharing and recommendations for teachers serving as both private tutors and MOE teachers, and improves quality of teaching in school since teachers focus on only their given tasks. However, there is no guarantee that this will be the case since teachers may use the extra time to serve their private needs instead. Furthermore, this solution also reduces the number of tutors available in the tuition market, driving up demand and hence price, making tuition overall less affordable, potentially pricing out lower income families and perpetuating inequity in Singapore. Such restrictions also removes certified teacher professionals (receiving accreditation from NIE) from tutoring, reducing the overall quality of tutors in the tuition industry.

Imposing stricter regulation on marketing for tuition industries

Currently, the Singapore government has criticised tuition centers for utilising manipulative marketing techniques such as guilt-tripping, deception and pre-selection (only accepting already academically strong students), which play on customer's fear of missing out. However, no formal action has been taken in Singapore, despite the spade of benefits further restrictions can bring, such as reducing pressure on both parents and students within the academic system such that tuition becomes a choice rather than a social norm. In South Korea, regulations have been imposed on digital marketing tactics for 'educational institutions', as well as regulations for physical adverts put in mail (Lovells, 2022). This solution also has a lower fiscal burden compared



to other methods of intervention, making it an easier temporary solution for the government to implement. However, this solution has failed to reduce demand for tuition in South Korea (Hoon Choi, 2016), and does not address the root cause of the deeply ingrained ‘kiasu’ and ‘tiger parenting’ mindset Asian parents possess, which is difficult to change, making it only a temporary solution.

Tuition price cap/ cost regulation

Following the 2021 "Double Reduction" policy, China imposed drastic tuition price regulation measures, requiring academic tutoring institutions to register as non-profit organizations, and introduced strict price guidelines for off-campus tutoring and, in some regions, set maximum fees per 30-minute block (e.g., 20 RMB) to limit excessive costs. (The Business Times, 2021) Capping tuition at a regulated price level can make tuition more affordable for lower income families, and is also cheap and easy to implement by the government since the solution is, in essence, just legislation. However, what may be considered ‘affordable’ is disputable, and enforcing a too low price level may affect the livelihoods of full-time tutors, affecting quality of teaching. Furthermore, the solution is also difficult to enforce especially due to prevalence of freelance tuition, which may under report earnings.



Questions a Resolution Must Answer

1. In the present circumstances, what offences by tuition teacher(s), agencies and/or networks would be considered corrupt? At the same time, should stricter regulations be implemented, what offences by tuition teacher(s), agencies and/or networks may arise? To which, how can they be mitigated?
2. Should Singapore also increase the independent learning of students, by implementing preventive measures alongside corrective measures? When such learning becomes more independent, should sectors in the Singapore government enact more preventive measures, and how?
3. How can Singapore balance between families that are unable or have limited access to tuition, and the families that excessively use, or are extremely dependent on tuition?



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Topic 2: Should preschool education be made compulsory in Singapore?

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[18 - 20 March 2026]



Introduction

The preschool sector in Singapore is constantly evolving, with continuously changing demands due to shifts in population size, demographics, as well as a need for strong support systems to support a new generation of young parents. Over the past decade, the preschool sector has continued its growth, expanding from about 100,000 full-day spots in 2013 to over 200,000 in 2023, while enrolment rates for children aged three to four have increased to roughly 90%. More than half of all centres Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK) certified and the early childhood workforce exceed 23,000 educators, signifying improving efforts by the government in maintaining the quality of education for preschoolers (MSF, 2023). The SPARK certification is also an award for educators dedicated to their work, serving as a motivator for educators to continue pursuing such a career. Despite this, issues persist in terms of accessibility and availability of manpower. Preschools are essential in focusing on pedagogy and curriculum, yet in Singapore, children are not required to attend Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). With the expansion and increased focus on the ECCE sector came a shortage of qualified and experienced teachers and staff to facilitate the new childcare centres. (Lian et al., 2012)



Background

From 2013, regulation of creches in Singapore were set up under the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), serving a custodial function (MSF, 2023). Feeding Centres set up by the British for children suffering from malnutrition eventually evolved into multi-functional Children's Social Centres that provided informal schooling, and also functioned as after-school care centres for children from low-income families. (Lim, 2006) By 1971, eleven creches had been set up in Singapore. To increase accessibility, political parties, church groups, private schools, and the Ministry of Education offered kindergartens as an aspect of community service, as government focus was mainly on primary education for boys at the time. By 1993, over 60,000 children were enrolled in kindergartens. (MSF, 2023)

In the 1970s, as more women joined the workforce, the Ministry of Social Affairs added the National Trade Union Congress (hereinafter referred to as NTUC) and industrial establishments to help run crèches. By 1979, ten crèches were handed over to NTUC. In Singapore today, NTUC runs more than 120 childcare centres (MSF, 2023).

Globally, only around four in 10 children aged three and four attend early childhood education (ECE) as of 2025 (Tseng, 2021). As of 2024, about 90% of children are enrolled in ECE nationally within Singapore (MSF, 2025). In Singapore, despite the presence of a relatively large variety of preschools dispersed in different areas, most preschools are sequestered in private homes, or built on separate estates in landed areas that are usually not easily accessible by public transport, such as Siglap and Bukit Timah. Singapore's landscape is 90 per cent more privatised than that found in other economically advanced nations such as the United Kingdom, Australia,



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Japan and the Netherlands (CNA, 2022). Some preschools are also affiliated with non-academic institutions. For example, Little Seeds Preschool has its campus within Saint Paul's Church in Kovan, which reflects the issue of accessibility for families in the area. Parents may be less willing to enroll their children, especially with the underestimation of early education, and thus choosing to opt out due to inconveniences such as distance (Manager, 2025).

A notable effort by the government is their aim for 80% of preschool places to be government-supported by around 2025, up from over 60% in 2024 (Tseng, 2021).



Key Issues

Currently, the Singapore government is working closely with the community to aid lower-income families in enrolling their children by the age of three, through programmes such as KidStart and the Pre-school Outreach Programme (Manager, 2025).

There is an estimate of another 1,500 more educators that are needed to continue to support the sector's expansion in the coming years. In order to attract and retain quality early childhood educators, ECDA has reviewed salaries to ensure they correspond with educators' contributions and professional skills. (Zalizan, 2025)

The government has also more than doubled the number of full-day preschool places in the last decade and there are now over 200,000 spots for potential students, aiming to cater to most resident children aged three and above. This is despite a fall in the number of babies born over the period. (Zalizan, 2025)

In addition, ECDA plans to work with the five Anchor Operators to develop close to 40,000 new infant and childcare places from 2025 to 2029. This will include approximately 6,000 new infant care places to cater to increased demand for such services. (CPD, 2025) There are also further plans of expanding KidSTART to more regions in Singapore to tackle the issue of accessibility and availability, as well as expanding KidSTART partnerships for a greater outreach. (CPD, 2025)



Scope of Debate:

Case for compulsory preschool education

Stronger Future National Workforce From Cognitive and Socio-Emotional Foundations

As a continued trend, children from lower-income households commence school in Primary One while having weaker vocabulary, literacy, and numeracy (Wong, 2020; UNESCO, 2025). Preschool attendance from age three, given the proper childcare, which is targeted at developing the Wernicke's area of the brain's temporal lobe, has been proved to build up literary readiness and classroom behaviour. Yet, this is not the main aspect of thought stimulation in preschool.

In this decade of the 2020s, the Ministry of Education's requirement for kindergarten teachers is for them to pass the MOE Kindergarten Teacher Training Programme, which advises these prospective teachers to consider pedagogies, for example, the Waldorf Approach, that is, a path of holistic consideration, namely, thinking (head), feeling (heart), and being willing (hands).

Therefore, making preschool education compulsory increases the likelihood of ensuring that all children, including those with rather lackadaisical caregiving, regardless of whether it is intentional, such as those under the care of parents with flexible shifts, or those living with grandparents, actually receive consistent stimulation in a set atmosphere.

Ages three to six, is a period of high neuro-development where children acquire basic vocabulary at the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages A1-B1 levels. They also start to personally internalise the concept of control, as well as have greater working memory (UNESCO, 2021). The pupils need a basis to propel them to that level, as well as monitoring.



Simultaneously, children's attention spans require time to be developed, that working parents may not have the capacity to provide. Preschool educators with the Early Education Qualifications are trained under the National Institute of Education and this equips with the necessary skill sets to cultivate these core developmental skills in preschool children through a structured learning environment. Ensuring preschool children have access to structured stimulation would also ensure that they are able to easily transition to Primary One and keep up with the academic progression.

Thus, children who attend preschool for a minimum of two years tend to have smoother transitions into primary school. They may also cope well with the reduction of anxiety, which is an emotion which is mainly felt passively rather than actively, around the ages of five to six, and therefore there would be an overall lower likelihood of them being flagged by adults for early literacy or numeracy support (Settlement Services International, 2021).

Upon full attendance at a national level, Primary One classes may then be conducted with a more standardised baseline, so that teachers are more likely able to advance curriculum depth, such as S-T-E-A-M subjects, instead of correcting their fundamentals.

Furthermore, long-term economic analyses show that early-years interventions are more beneficial than remediation (UNESCO, 2017).

Should foundation gaps arise in the first half of three years of primary school, intervention is more expensive—be it through excessive tuition, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programmes that are outsourced from third parties, or even neuro-stimulation such as through using a Vagus Nerve Stimulation Device, and could be potentially disruptive to children's self-esteem. Compulsory preschool thus allows Singapore's education scheme to be preventive, instead of corrective. This targets the root cause more.



Early Detection of Child Neglect Through Interactions

Preschool educators, who interact with children daily, are often the first adults outside the pupils' homes with the likelihood of noticing concrete indicators of distress or neglect, such as (but not limited to) persistent fatigue, constant yet fluctuating levels of hunger upon arrival, unwashed uniforms, bruising that may recur in the same areas, withdrawal during group activity, sudden fearfulness around adults, delayed speech or expression, or repetitively unpunctual pickups that may show the extent of, or lack of, caregiving (Yang, 2023). As a result of this, children who are mostly, or fully absent from preschool will remain invisible to adults trained to recognise these patterns, delaying detection by up to two or three years until Primary One. Compulsory attendance ensures that children in unstable or stressful domestic conditions are observed by professionals, which have undergone pedagogical training at an earlier stage.

Select families may experience housing overcrowding, such as the one-room Housing and Development Board blocks in Jalan Kukoh or Outram, along with financial insecurity, parental mental-health challenges, or inconsistent caregiving, which may be a byproduct of the lack of dedicated time in childcare. Nationally, it has been proven that these groups of children have greater extents of palpable behavioural indicators at age four (Singapore Medical Journal, 2012) and generally all ages below five, such as outbursts that range from a spectrum of mild yet offensive remarks to aggressive tantrum-based agitations, while some may experience excessive clinginess. On the contrary, marginalised groups of students who are mostly from widowed households or intermediate-income families with overseas working parents that only see their children around one or two weeks per month, experience difficulty separating from caregivers (Arasu, n.d.), frequent tummy-aches or headaches, vacillation in terms of standard social interaction, or regression in toileting or their use of language (Lee, 2019). When preschool attendance is optional, these behaviours may go unnoticed. Thus, compulsory attendance has a higher prospect of guaranteed supervision and can escalate concerns to the Ministry of Social and Family Development or the Early Childhood Development Agency should there be a cause for concern.



Henceforth, even though the explicit cost of making attendance compulsory is that there will be a greater extent of capacity-building required for the base of MOE and private preschool teacher in the short-term, (The Straits Times, 2023) an implicit cost that may also result from this is that there will be a more stable population profile in the long-term, which reduces pressure on public systems that would have been corrective-led (than it is preventive-led), as a result of the poorly supported childhood developmental issues that may arise in the short-term.

A society, consisting of the basic units of families, will likely be more socially stable when the vulnerable groups are not missed out until primary school. This lies in the pillar of social sustainability for Singapore to achieve, and that especially weighs on the children as well, who shall not only be an aspect of social sustainability, but also, they shall develop well enough to carry social sustainability out in the future as well, and thus embody it.

Case against compulsory preschool education

Preschool is Not the Most Optimal Environment for those Requiring Constant Healthcare

Accounting for children who are registered officially, in Singapore, approximately twenty percent (20%) of children aged six years are affected by asthma, twelve percent (12%) experience chronic eczema symptoms (National University of Singapore Department of Paediatrics, 1996), and up to five percent (5%) of children under the age of twelve have dietary allergies. This necessitates close supervision and for households to have emergency preparedness (Lee, 2014). Upon the basis of compulsory attendance, there is a higher likelihood of pressure to be present even on days when the pupils' symptoms may relapse. This may compromise their comfort and well-being, rather than benefit them.



Those undergoing speech therapy, occupational therapy, or physiotherapy often have morning appointments once or twice (1-2 times) weekly. Long-term developmental progress would unlikely be achieved without these sessions. Because such concerns often surface between ages three and six (Bi, 2024), therapeutic intervention is the most intensive and effective at this period. A compulsory preschool schedule may result in absences due to therapy, that is of medical necessity. Attendance issues, which creates unnecessary stress for families involved, would arise. Consequently, families may need to update schools about such absences, provide documentation, and moreover, arrange transport for such appointments to school and from school to home, which potentially may be burdensome. These students will also have to navigate their developmental issues while receiving the exact same set amount of school work. The extent of whether these pupils are able to handle this is thus, relatively uncertain, considering that they would have their time for committing to preschool lowered by almost one-thirds, or a quarter.

Beyond that, certain groups of children may require isolated or controlled environments for recovery from medical procedures. Those with sensitive immune systems or Early Delayed Sleep-Wake Phase Disorder (DS-WPD) may require additional monitoring that is beyond the Ministry of Education's standards of having at least 1 teacher for every 20 children in Kindergarten 1 (ages five to six) and 1 teacher for every 25 children in Kindergarten 2 (ages six to seven).

Hence, compulsory attendance reduces the flexibility needed to prioritise health without administrative consequences. This may cause families to face the dilemma of having to choose between compliance requirements and the actual non-negotiable extent of the child's clinical needs.



Key Stakeholders Involved

Private preschool:

Private preschools such as Eton House and Tanglin Trust School, while they have a certain degree of autonomy, must still comply with regulations set by the ECDA. Parents who send their children to private preschools are typically of higher income. The services provided by such preschools are arguably better quality and more varied, and children that attend are known to have a headstart in their learning, and even networking, in primary school. By making preschool education compulsory, low/ middle-income parents of children living in the neighbourhood of private preschools may struggle to pay its exorbitant fees, or will be forced to travel further to send their children to government supported/ aided preschools, ultimately creating an even greater burden on parents (ECDA, n.d.).

Government-supported preschool:

AOPs (Anchor Operators) and POPs (Partner Operators) such as My First Skool and PCF Sparkletots are government-supported to provide quality education at a more affordable price. They operate under government guidelines and receive government support. Usually operating in max capacity, it may struggle to manage the influx of preschoolers from compulsory preschooling policies, resulting in falling quality and suboptimal education.

Government-run preschool:

MOE kindergartens operated directly by the Ministry of Education are government-run and focus on affordability. Education in these preschools are also supplemented by other government programmes focusing



on early childhood education, such as NLB kidsREAD which offers home-based reading sessions (kidsREAD@Home) and in-person sessions, relying on volunteers for storytelling and activities. Like government-supported preschools, they usually operate at max capacity, and may struggle to maintain quality education should compulsory preschool be imposed.

Preschools run by religious organisations:

Preschools run by religious organisations, such as Little Seeds and Iyad Perdaus, focus on a faith-based early childhood education, integrating religion with ECDA's education regulations. However, these preschools are mainly private, and, as a result, charge school fees at a price consistent with private preschools. Hence, such preschools may be out of reach to low-income parents. Furthermore, the niche filled by such religious preschools as a result of its price range and its faith based approach suggests that policies targeting this group address a small but important minority.

Parents:

Parents are one of the key stakeholders in early childhood education, as they are the ones making decisions in relation to their children's education. When selecting preschools, parents have the responsibility to consider multiple factors such as accessibility, affordability, safety, quality of learning programme and suitability of the preschools' learning environment to support their child's development. (Begum, 2023) Many parents in their quest to find suitable preschools for their children may seek more perspectives via online blogs and forums such as Sassy Mama Singapore and KiasuParents which provide valuable peer support and guidance especially for newer parents, but could potentially skew parents' perception of what constitutes a "good" preschool.



Past Solutions

Greater access in preschool market

To further encourage active participation in preschool education, Nordic countries within the EU have adopted the “Universal Access” Model. (Eurydice, 2025) This Model includes measures such as highly-subsidized quality preschools guaranteed for children from ages three or a little earlier in countries such as France, Belgium and Spain. Legal entitlement is another approach within this Model, whereby the government guarantees a spot in preschools for children aged 6-18 months in countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Germany. These measures in place ensure active and high willingness in participation. In Iceland, participation rates since the age of two remain at a constant high due to laws and regulations ensuring the right to ECEC without referring to a specific age or number of hours. (EU, 2023)

Emphasis on health and social life in preschools

In France, the responsibilities for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) are split between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of National Education based on age range, with the splitting up of management by the two ministries based on children aged until three years old, and children aged three to six years old. (Eurydice, 2024) The two ministries work together with local authorities under the guidelines of public health and facilities, where health and sanitation is prioritised in preschools. A primary focus in preschools is placed on the well-being of children in terms of health and social life, thus fostering a smooth transition to primary level education, where social interactions are crucial in children’s development. It is



notable that further focus can be placed on integrating further health regimes within preschools to further success in participation rates. (OECD, 2016)

Integration of learning spaces in office areas

Incorporating preschools in social hubs such as neighborhoods and office areas can offer greater accessibility, increasing ability to consume preschooling, and hence increase demand for preschools. (GHD, 2025) One notable effort made in this direction is the co-working space for working parents and their children organized by Trehaus Preschool in Singapore in 2017. The workspace includes private office spaces, semi-private dedicated desks with co-work space. There are zones dedicated to parents, as well as shared zones where children and their parents can interact. In the children's area, The Kids Atelier is designed to offer Trehaus programmes aimed to encourage children to explore, discover and imagine with the resources provided (Singapore Business Review, 2017).



Questions A Resolution Must Answer

1. How can Singapore balance the improvement of the sustainability of preschool education while managing potential fiscal burden on the government? How may such sustainability of preschool education be measured, and in the intermediate-term for Singapore's planning, around 2030, what would be certain goals that should be achieved?
2. How could this Cabinet's solution(s) potentially benefit preschool-aged children in terms of planning forward for the future Singaporean workforce?



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