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## Evaluating Education

The globalisation of trade and opening of markets to foreign goods have resulted not only in increased jockeying for eminence or, to put it another way, pride of place but also to a focus on art, culture and education that was formerly missing. The question is whether a unicultural world or a world with only one standard of education is desirable or wise? This is a question that needs to be given deep thought by policy makers, development, planners economists, and educationists alike. In consequence, education in particular would be in focus as the countries weigh the pros and cons of the related issues.

One of the ways they have found for measuring their position in the education league is through a test, the latest of which appears to be the Third International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) covering half a million students from around the world. In the first phase of the test Singapore tops the list of 41 countries in both the subjects—and by a huge margin—in fact East Asian countries have done remarkably well all round, followed by East European countries all of whom have outshone Britain and the United States and Western European countries, even though they all spend less on education than the west indicating that money has little to do with excellence.

That in itself brings us to a new thought—what are the pre-requisites for academic excellence? If it is not money, that is the amount spent per student, then we must all look deeper at an area that is, to put it mildly, increasingly touch, especially where education is no longer a state provision or essential service but a commodity to be exploited for private gain. But, with many governments showing increasing concern about their education, there is a need to know how their children compare in the global sweepstakes whether or not they translate their findings into practical application. In some countries already the findings have sparked off calls for adopting national standards on a common curriculum as this appears to be the common factor of the countries that have done better.

In Britain the focus shifted from schools to the workplace after the results of a study comparing British workers with those in France, America, Singapore and Germany—all key economic competitors—was published. And international studies on adult literacy show similar disappointing results. In December, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) launched its own series of annual reports on how the governments of the 29 member states spend their combined US\$ 1 trillion annual education budgets and to determine what proportion of each nation's population reaches a given level of education but to taking the studies further by comparing how schools, colleges and universities are run in each country and analysing the implications for policy makers remained at the planning level.

Some countries are already using comparative data as a basis for educational reform in the belief that education is the key to national as well as individual wealth. The belief that countries like Singapore and South Korea owe their economic success to success in raising educational levels gets increasingly vindicated, if individual governments can discover their secret for success or, in other words what it is about education that stimulates growth, other countries may soon be on the way to economic success themselves but, most wish to find this "Magic potent" without having to spend more and, better still, by spending less.

But as myths and theories get exploded and long-held beliefs fail to live up to scrutiny, we must also ask ourselves what the results of these studies mean for us where the learning process has always been a painful affair for causes and reasons fly thick and fast in an attempt to unlock the key. Teaching methods naturally fall under increased scrutiny to discover what works best and, by and large, whole-class inter-active teaching comes out best where a teacher addresses the whole class at once posing questions to students in turn, to ensure they are following the lesson. This was the system in vogue in Britain some fifty to sixty year back before the period of experimentation began and is largely followed in our own 'better' schools which have provided us with our best brains. Despite this, there are no ready made answers or set formulas for success we can follow. In fact, the whole field of education seems to us to be like a well laid out labyrinth—every time we find what we think is the right path we find ourselves at a dead end.

Education in our country as much as elsewhere needs to have productive or employment bias. We have to evolve some method to test how best the system serves the nation's scientific and technological needs. It is not to say that languages and arts need no emphasis. Only that education culture need to be comprehensive.