



Educational Development Issues in Southeast Asia: An Overview


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Goals and Objectives of the Seminar

- **To introduce the field of comparative education in the context of Southeast Asia**
- **To introduce a critical issues approach to studying education and development**



The Critical Need to Make Value Premises and Assumptions Explicit (Gunnar Myrdal)



Our Key Value Premises and Assumptions

- **Black Gold** (social justice, equality, equity, access for all)
- **Yellow Gold** (cultural preservation, cultural democracy; development of cultural intelligence, competency; development of “software of the mind”)
- **Blue Gold** (sustainable development, sufficiency economy, clean air and water)
- **Green Gold** (preservation of forests, social forestry, development of green campuses, Mahidol, e.g.)
- **Quality education and human resource development are central to international competitiveness**



Background: The Importance of Comparative Education and the Development of Comparative Thinking



Evolution of the Field of Comparative Education

- Phase I: Mere description of educational systems
- Phase II: Education for national development, primarily based on human capital theory (Becker, Schultz, Lewis)
- Phase III: Critical theory; dependency theory; education as seen as reinforcing inequalities and injustices



Evolution of the Field of Comparative Education

- **Phase IV (current):** Era of globalization and its complexities and controversies; growing power and influence of neoliberalism and the decline of socialism
- **Basic problem of the field:** few genuinely comparative studies



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Warm Up Exercise: Images of the Region

Testing your ASEAN IQ?













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Overview of the Southeast Asian Region

- Basic statistical indicators on the region
- What makes the region distinctive?
- How can we fruitfully classify the countries of the region?





What Makes the Region Distinctive?

- Diversity and unity
- Selective borrowing of outside influences
- Strong sense of nationalism
- World of islands and rivers (water theme)
- Presence of Chinese diaspora, especially in urban areas
- Tropical monsoon climate
- Regionalism: ASEAN



How Can We Classify the Countries of the Region?

- Island versus mainland
- Types of political system
- Type of colonial influence
- Nature of religion
- Level of development; great economic disparities



Overview of Major Countries in the Region

Brief review of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste, and Vietnam

Sultanate of Brunei



- Dependence: “Shellfare state”; need to import labor
 - Excessively UK/Australian oriented in terms of overseas higher education
 - Chinese 20% of population, allowed to prosper economically, but severely limited in other arenas
 - Overly dependent on oil/gas revenues; critical to invest in human resources to ensure long-term future
 - Need for environmental education
- + 60% of those in higher education are women
+ Strong English language tradition
+ Links with Singapore



Kingdom of Cambodia



- Explosion of private education (often low quality)
- GER secondary education only 29%, lowest in ASEAN
- Pervasive corruption
- Economic dependence similar to Lao


+But advantages, not land-locked; Angkor Wat as a source of much tourist revenue

+nation of special survivors





Republic of Indonesia

- 
- Most important country about which we know the least
 - Special demography, over 17,000 islands
 - High drop-out rates
 - Unqualified teachers (57% lack college degrees and 87% uncertified)
 - Disparities among schools
 - Inadequate decentralization of funds to local areas
 - lack of gender equity

Republic of Indonesia

- + Abundance of natural resources, generating foreign exchange reserves
- + Political stability in recent years
- + Rich cultural/linguistic diversity
- + Unrealized tourist potential; ecotourism and cultural tourism





Lao People's Democratic Republic



- Demographics: remote mountainous areas; low population density
- Colonial legacy of adverse neglect
- Economic constraints; heavy dependence on donors
- Extremely low salaries of teachers 1k per year compared to Thai 8k
- Huge complex ethnic diversity and related language policy issues



Lao People's Democratic Republic

- 37% of high school teachers only 8+3 years of schooling
 - Supanavong University in Luang Prabang, wonderful Korean-financed campus, but lack of trained faculty
 - Bureaucratic rigidities
 - No family planning
 - Weak English
 - No tolerance of dissent
- + good parenting/no serious policy gridlock; political stability
- + goal not to be a least developed country by 2020
- + potential for ecotourism, cultural tourism

Federation of Malaysia



- Affirmative action; Chinese exit
- English STEM policy
- Complex ethnic issues

+ 85% of Malaysian high school teachers have a BA or higher

+ English

+ Genuine decentralization (political, not educational)

+ Visionary Multi-Media

Super Corridor (leapfrogging)

+ Goal to be developed country by 2020



Union of Myanmar



- Because of politics, black sheep; limited donors; boycott of Burma
- No academic freedom, universities frequently closed because of political tensions
- Corruption
- Isolated, not networked

+English language



Republic of the Philippines



- Many diploma mills; quality of higher education issues
- Disconnect labor market/educational system; much export of skilled labor

+ strong in spoken English
+ working democracy
+ strong intellectual traditions
+ transcending “black sheep” of Southeast Asia economic image



Republic of Singapore



- High costs
- No natural resources
- Small higher education system
- Highly competitive stressful educational system
- Still much lecture-centered and role learning
- High stakes testing and streaming; diverse educational paths





Republic of Singapore

- + Huge international exchange reserves for a small economy
- + Positive colonial influences
- + Human resources as the key to development model
- + Commitment to a multicultural Singapore
- + Favorable central location
- + One of the world's leading ports and financial/communications center
- + English language strengths
- + Well funded educational system (all levels); well paid teachers/professors
- + Aspiration to be world class education hub

Kingdom of Thailand



- Inadequate bang for the baht related to educational spending; poor performance of Thai students in international tests; scores dropped in the past ten years across the board
- Teachers' inadequate knowledge of subject matter; problems with English education
- Inadequate investment in R & D
- Massification of higher education with related quality issues
- Disadvantaged Isaan (northeast)
- Major quality issues throughout the system
- Educational corruption
- Progressive educational reform ideals (NEA of 1998) but slow and partial implementation; difficult to decentralize; problem of recentralization at local levels





Kingdom of Thailand

- + Dramatic diversification and internationalization of the economy
 - + Popular monarchy; King Bhumipol as a committed educator
- + Low fertility rate, allowing for investment in a smaller number of children



Timor Leste



- Long colonial legacy (both Portuguese and Indonesian)
- Complex language policy issues; 16 languages
- Small scale; micro-state, population of only 1.15 million
- No English tradition



Socialist Republic of Vietnam



- Poor infrastructure, particularly at the higher education level
- Serious quality and access issues
- Burden of state owned enterprises on the economy
- Inflation
- Educational corruption





Socialist Republic of Vietnam

- + Vietnam as an “educational outlier”
e.g., success in international competitions; positive Confucian traditions and influences
- + Diverse international influences
- + Legacy of Ho Chi Minh
- + High quality labor relative to cost



Closing Quotation

“devotion to the idea that self-cultivation through the disciplined pursuit of knowledge is the path to human perfection”

Thomas Rohlen, Stanford University