THE CHANGING ROLE OF EDUCATION IN A DYNAMIC ASIA

MOSAIC Towards Globally Competitive Yet Locally Rooted Asians

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ABSTRACT

Asia faces a new wave of globalization that brings a lot of changes, including the needed skills to survive in this highly competitive and fluid age. Furthermore, individuals should be given adequate freedom to be exposed to, decide on and pursue disciplines that are in sync to how they wish to contribute to their society because there are so many choices. Education must be able to forge this new kind of "competency" in students. But the set-up of current educational systems in most Asian nations does not address the needs posed by the changing world. The current systems leave students ill-prepared for making career choices in the global markets because it does not provide them with relevant skills and information for making such a choice. We are calling, thus, for the adoption of the Model for Social Empathy and Asian Identity through Competency Enhancement (MOSAIC). MOSAIC restructures school level education into two phases. Phase 1 (Foundation Phase) involves the teaching of standardized Mathematics and Science across Asia, including the learning of one additional Asian language and requiring community work. Phase 2 (Immersion Phase) involves the systematic integration of exposure programmes, by networking with the various career sectors, as a means of broadening the background of students on possible careers before they decide what university course to pursue. Phase 1 ensures that Asian students possess the same set of fundamental education, facilitating inter-regional mobility. At the same time, standardizing skills will equalize the competition among graduates. Phase 2 aims to nurture social empathy. This cultivates the students' awareness, ownership and responsiveness to the current issues of both their local and regional societies. This assumes a clear idea of the possible options one can seize in order to contribute to one's society, which this model intends to achieve. MOSAIC intends to unleash globally competitive yet locally rooted Asian youth: Asians who are successful in the global arena but remain committed to improving socio-economic conditions from where they come from. But ultimately, MOSAIC will benefit the countries as a whole by producing more competent workers and responsible members of society.

1.0 BACKGROUND

Asia faces a new wave of globalization - one that is characterized by a more integrated world, enhanced mobility of factors of production, and innovation-driven growth. Given these widespread changes, the competency needed to survive in this fluid and highly competitive age also changes. Education is about equipping youth for engaging society after they graduate. Its approach must be critically reviewed to ensure its relevance.

Being competent in this world further means that individuals should be given adequate freedom to be exposed to, decide on and pursue disciplines that are in sync to how they wish to contribute to their society. Given the choices that globalization has made possible, it becomes important not just to have skilled graduates but also those who are committed to and who find meaning in the choices that they make.

2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Current educational systems adopted by Asian nations today do not effectively address the needs posed by the changing world. Never before has the need to produce students who value Asian identities and possess strong social empathy been placed at the forefront. The current system leaves students ill prepared for making career choices because it does not provide them with relevant skills and information for making such a choice.

3.0 OBJECTIVE

In this White Paper, we shall first elaborate on the new kind of competency that educational systems must be able to forge in students, given a dynamic and globalizing Asia. We shall then outline our proposal for a revolutionary model for augmenting primary and secondary education in order to fulfill education's new role.

We believe that the most effective intervention is the one addressed to formal school-level education, because by doing so we are addressing the system that affects the majority of the population.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Model for Social Empathy and Asian Identity through Competency Enhancement (MOSAIC) is a proposed reorganization of the current curriculum of formal school level-education.

MOSAIC restructures school-level education into two phases. Phase 1 (Foundation Phase) involves the teaching of certain standardized subjects across Asia, including the learning of one additional Asian language and requiring community work. Phase 2 (Immersion Phase) involves the systematic integration of exposure programs as a means of broadening the background of students on possible careers before they decide what university course to pursue.

Phase 1 ensures that Asian students possess the same set of fundamental education, facilitating inter-regional mobility. At the same time, standardizing skills will equalize the competition among graduates.

Phase 2 aims to nurture social empathy. This cultivates the students' awareness, ownership and responsiveness to the current issues of both their local and regional societies. This assumes a clear idea of the possible options one can seize in order to contribute to one's society, which this model intends to achieve.

MOSAIC intends to unleash globally competitive yet locally rooted Asian youth: Asians who are successful in the global arena but remain committed to improving socio-economic conditions from where they come.

But ultimately, MOSAIC will benefit the countries as a whole by producing more competent workers and responsible members of society.

4.1 PHASE 1: FOUNDATION

Phase 1 recommends three complementary programmes to existing formal education:

4.1.1 Standardized Mathematics and Science curriculum across Asia

To formulate the standardized curriculum, we propose a collective effort involving curriculum experts of each country to construct a curriculum that best befits Asian needs as well as standardize means of assessment to ensure quality control. This will increase social mobility of Asian students among nations without interfering with local government's control over subjects that may be politically and culturally sensitive. Moreover, standardization will also lift the standards of science and maths throughout Asia. Increased mobility and common standards will help to realize the sense of a common Asian identity.

4.1.2 Additional third Asian language in schools

Intra-regional cooperation can be shaped through language - due to the fact that the study of language will encourage its learner to also understand and appreciate the culture of the other - increasing the chance for Asian integration and competition as a united bloc against other existing blocs around the world. Furthermore, a third language can also boost the competitiveness of a nation at a time when most people can already speak two languages. Consequently, under the proposed model, schools across Asia will be compelled to offer additional Asian languages but it is made optional to students.

To realize this initiative, a wide method of teaching, including E-learning, will be implemented. The E-learning approach must include the establishment of online libraries and language resources that will reach not only the students but also members of public. Developing other approaches that encourage learning not to be confined in the classroom is crucial.

4.1.3 Community work

Community work takes the form of a maximum of two activities per year. For example, primary school students may join initiatives like community rubbish collection as secondary school students perform activities like teaching underprivileged children. Making community work a compulsory subject and a requirement for entering the next grade will develop social empathy in students - being socially responsible citizens will become a habit over time.

4.1.4 Preparatory sessions for the Immersion Phase

To prepare 10th grade students for the next phase, career counselors in each school will provide a general introduction of the existing industries through a session that will be held one hour per week.

4.2 PHASE 2: IMMERSION

Phase 2 leads individuals to be deeply aware and prepared for a career path that accommodates both their interests as well as abilities. This phase will be facilitated through two years of intensive and compulsory career and skill modules. Two days per week shall be devoted to these modules. Each module involves a ten-week immersion process and will run for six times throughout the two years. Each module will proceed as follows:

4.2.1 Agents

Phase 2 necessitates the formation of a participative national committee (government, private sector and civil society) that will be in charge of pooling resources and coordinating individual programs. Each province and district, however, will organize their own committees to be in charge of logistical processes and arrangements in their areas.

4.2.2 Mechanism

4.2.2.1 Step 1: Sector Familiarization for One Week

Teachers and career counsellors in each school will introduce the students to the following about the various possible sectors: (a) job descriptions, (b) technical skills necessary, and (c) career opportunities.

Students will be asked to pick six out of the following sectors:

Public Service	Pure Science	Construction
Commerce	Applied Science	Environmental
Engineering/ Technology	Social Science	Fashion & Textiles
Military	Health Sciences	Food & Beverage
Liberal Arts	Sports	Manufacturing
Education	Religious Studies	Petroleum
Entertainment/Leisure	Information Technology	Retail
Languages	Transportation	Social Care
Law	Advertising and Public Relations	

4.2.2.2 Step 2: Interaction with Professionals for Two Weeks

The organizing committees in each district will arrange sessions for professionals to talk with students and share their experiences as well as trends in the industry.

4.2.2.3 Step 3: Workshops/case studies for Two Weeks

Students will be given activities to provide them basic skills needed for a particular industry. This will consist of case studies and workshops.

4.2.2.4 Step 4: Excursions to relevant sectors for Two Weeks

Students will be introduced to the actual workplaces of each sector.

4.2.2.5 Step 5: Group Projects for Three Weeks

Students will pursue projects that synthesize the things they have learned during the entire exposure process.

4.2.3 Final Project

As a culmination of the Immersion Phase, the students will have an opportunity to explore deeper one of the six sectors they have been acquainted with. This will be a three-month period where students are free to pursue projects of their choice, individually or collectively depending on the nature of their project. To promote inter-regional experience on the different sectors, the national government and the private sector will be encouraged to pool resources for merit-based grants for students who wish to gain experience abroad.

Evaluation and feedback after the completion of the project are necessary to further motivate the students, process what they learn and lead them to the next stage of their education. In addition, the evaluation will give ideas on areas of improvements. These evaluations and their analysis would be taken into account during application for university/vocational education.

The evaluation method will have two components:

4.2.3.1 Evaluation done by teacher and relevant sectors

The evaluation of students will be accomplished by both the teacher and a representative of the relevant sector and these two evaluations will have equal weight. In terms of the criteria for rating, 50% will be about theory, the depth of the knowledge and content of the project, while the remaining 50% will concern the application, the ability to apply knowledge in a creative manner. The output of the evaluation will be an academic grade and a document containing the qualitative comments of the evaluators.

4.2.3.2 Self-evaluation

The students will themselves evaluate the project and their performance. Self-evaluation will set goals for future improvement, identify weakness and strengths, and assist in the clarification of industry preferences.

4.2.4 Send-off Counseling

This will synthesize the whole immersion process undertaken by the students. The end goal is to have the students decide with conviction what specialized learning they will pursue.

The benefits for the economy as a direct result of MOSIAC are three-fold:

Firstly, due to the exposure to a multitude of industries and skills, students will become more well rounded than they would if they had not been exposed; citizens will have more depth, more flexibility and increased knowledge and integration abilities, and consequently be able to better contribute to the national and regional economies.

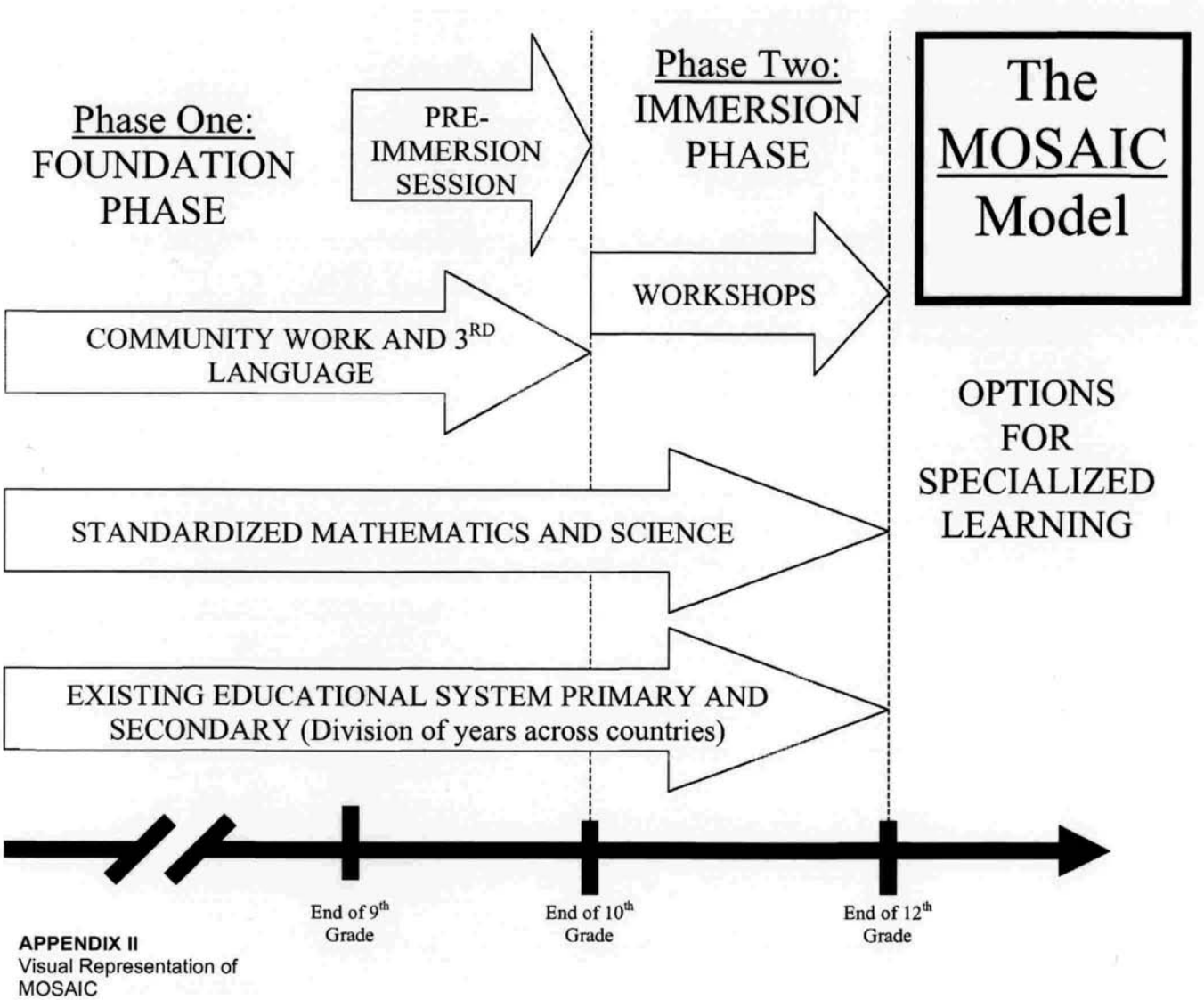
Secondly, when students know what they want to do, resources will not be wasted on occasions when students just choose to continue their studies for the sake of choosing and not being idle.

Thirdly, when students know how they want to contribute to society, they will be passionate about what they do. This is extremely beneficial especially if the country is seeking to foster a knowledge-based economy since the country will have many passionate people working towards excellence in a great variety of industries.

Additionally, economies of countries that are not concerned with a knowledge-based economy will still not be affected because governments still retain the rights on the number of admissions that each faculty can take each year - governments can still engage in the formulation of national development in plans. Figure 1 below summarizes Phase II.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Education in our model is characterized by the fusion of academic excellence and fulfilling societal needs. This necessitates curriculum reformatting and the inclusion of social empathy in the formal school -level education system. Figure 2 below summarizes MOSAIC.



APPENDIX II
Visual Representation of MOSAIC