

**The Connections Between a Singapore Education and Experience to Professional
Success: The Stories, Perceptions and Future Possibilities**

by

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Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is my own work, conducted under supervision.

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. It is to the best of my knowledge and belief that this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Date: March 2021

Acknowledgement (i) – Dedicated to Mama and Papa

Papa took care of a primary school. He stayed in the job as he was great with kids. All the children loved him, and their parents appreciated him. Ma is a strong administrator. She worked at Singapore's media corporation for many years until she got retrenched. They both also collectively ran several businesses while I was growing up. I don't always get to spend much time with them. My dad has the best interpersonal skills and is multilingual. Mum is always very prim and proper. She keeps our home clean, neat, and tidy. She is meticulous. They both put me through school in Singapore, supported me to get into a postgraduate degree, where the knowledge and experiences I acquired somewhat urged me to pursue a PhD. They then again allowed me to access a research higher degree in Australia when I was offered the opportunity.

I am nothing without my mum and dad.

They put up with my ambitious attitude.

I am their only child.

This one's for them.

Acknowledgement (ii) – My Story

The experience of undertaking a PhD changed me. My PhD journey isn't just about demonstrating academic rigour. It is about navigating through my life experiences – the strong challenges and great successes over the 5.5 to 6 years of study. I've realised that to successfully complete my higher degree, I had to manage job uncertainty, cultivate positive mental health, feel supported, be encouraged, be understood, breathe resilience, push boundaries, and pace myself through the non-linearity of progress. Through this process, I developed a mental aptitude. I grew fiercely independent. I think in varied perspectives, and I practice a solution-based approach to everything. I am not the same person as I was before I embarked on this journey. But the one thing that has always remained constant is the fact that I simply cannot form any mental visualisations of not completing my doctorate degree. I just don't know how to picture that in my mind.

This one's for me.

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Abstract

Singapore is known for having one of the most successful education systems in the world. Its competitive performance in international standardised testing regimes such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) place it near the top of the world ranking for the past two decades.

In addition, Singapore's is also known for its thriving economy, diverse culture, peaceful society, and political stability, which are attributed to the government's foresightedness. As a country that has almost no natural resources and relies mostly on its human capital, education is perceived to be at the heart of the country's success. In spite of the nation's very public profile, little is known about the perspectives of Singaporeans themselves on success. This study investigates success in Singapore through the perceptions of a sample of its most publicly successful people.

This study used a two-part mixed methods approach including an online survey to 48 selected successful Singaporean professionals, followed by a sample of 12 individual in-depth interviews.

Findings from the study revealed that the participants believe that acquiring non-technical skills through a secondary schooling and then the reinforcement of those skills in professional experience are essential in building a successful career. In their post-secondary lives, participants perceived success inwardly through a self-efficacy lens and, outwardly, through their impact on others. The thesis concludes with recommendations that might influence the future preparation of secondary students. For Singapore to maintain its competitive standing on the global scale, it may need to widen its opportunity landscape for career growth by developing non-technical skills earlier than present, enhancing that part of the current secondary education.

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Table 1: Participants' Age Group

Table 2: Participants' Educational Background

Table 3: Secondary Education Contribution to Current Success

Table 4: Participants' Personal Attributes Enabling Professional Success

Abbreviations

Central Business District (CBD)	CBD
Community Centre (CC)	CC
Creative Director (CD)	CD
Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)	CSI
Criminal Investigation Cases (CID)	CID
DPM (Deputy Prime Minister)	DPM
Emotional Intellect (EQ)	EQ
Extra-Curricular Activities (ECA/CCA)	ECA/CCA
Future Economic Council	FEC
General Paper (GP)	GP
Graduate Certificate Examination ‘O’ Levels (GCE)	GCE
Head of Department (HOD)	HOD
Head Quarters (HQ)	HQ
Human Capital and Education for Asian Development (HEAD) Foundation	HEAD
Institute of Education (IE)	IE
Institute of Technical Education (ITEs)	ITE
Intelligence Quotient (IQ)	IQ
Junior College (JC)	JC
Key Performance Index (KPI)	KPI
Lee Kuan Yew School (LKYS)	LKYS
Ministry of Education (MOE)	MOE
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)	MFA
Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA)	NAFA
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU)	NTU
National Cadet Corps (NCC)	NCC
National Institute of Education (NIE)	NIE
National Police Cadet Corps (NPCC)	NPCC
National Service (NS)	NS
National University of Singapore (NUS)	NUS
Physical Education (PE)	PE
Pre-university (Pre-U)	Pre-U
Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE)	PSLE
Principles of Accounts (POA)	POA
School of The Arts (SOTA)	SOTA
Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)	SARS
Singapore Accounting Commission (SAC)	SAC
Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT)	SIT
Singapore Youth Festival	SYF
Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals	SPCA
Southeast Asia	SEA
Special Assistance Plan School	SAP

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