

Singapore as the Most Attractive Asian Country to Receive Higher-education

Liudmila Ponomarenko

Department of Theory and History of International Relations
 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
 Peoples' Friendship University of Russia
 Moscow, Russia
 E-mail: l.ponomarenko@mail.ru

Anastasia Zabella

Department of Theory and History of International Relations
 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
 Peoples' Friendship University of Russia
 Moscow, Russia
 E-mail: zabella-rudn@yandex.ru

Evgeniya Katkova

Department of Theory and History of International Relations
 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
 Peoples' Friendship University of Russia
 Moscow, Russia
 E-mail: yeniya.dorogova@gmail.com

Abstract—Education is one of the keys for future development. The 21st century is characterized by increasing attention to education as a sphere of broadening influence, developing "soft power" and increasing economic potential. In case of Singapore, education is the most important thing to ensure economic development through improving workforce skills. The article highlights the main directions of Singapore's higher-education development. According to the authors, it includes individual approach, attracting talent, international standards, lifelong learning. Authors focus their attention on Singapore's three initiatives – Smart Nation Singapore, Skills-Future. Authors conclude that Singapore's higher-education development can make useful example of attraction of foreign talent for economic growth of the state. The article introduces the higher-education system in Singapore since its independence. Authors focus their attention on educational development, main features of higher-education system.

Keywords—higher-education; individual approach; attracting talent; international standards; lifelong learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Since 1819 Singapore had been developing under the British colonial rule and was transformed into a major seaport in the Malacca Straits. At that time Singapore was attractive only for immigrants from China, the Malay Archipelago and India. Singapore gained independence from Britain in 1959 and separated from Malaysia in 1965. When the country became independent in 1965, it was a rather poor tropical-island with little natural resources, significant conflicts among ethnic and religious groups and rapidly growing population. At that time there was a small number of educated people and skilled workers. Nowadays Singapore is one of the global-centers of trade, finance, education and transportation. According to the Singapore's

progress booklet of the former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong "total government spending on education trebled from 2 billion dollars to 6 billion from 1991 to 2000 to upgrade schools, level off the student-to-teacher ratio and build more educational institutions. The number of graduates trebled from 4 per cent to 12 per cent in that period". Goh Chok Tong made mention of the Singapore's top 5 achievements that include substantial economic growth, high level of reserves, generous asset enhancement schemes, better education for all and livelier arts scene. The former Prime Minister emphasized "we have achieved and can do so again"[1]. Singapore's transition "from third world to first" in only one generation is certainly a merit of Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew.

Today Singapore is one of the most attractive states in the world for receiving sound academic background. The educational sphere has always been one of the top priorities, as students in many respects will shape the character and type of future agenda including the sphere of international cooperation [2]. Among Asian states' educational systems, Singapore stands out for its academic performance and increasing attraction of talented students. Within the last years Singapore's higher-education system has remained near the top of the major Asian educational and at the top of the most major world educational ranking systems. For instance, according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Singapore was one of the top-performing countries in the 2015 [3]. According to the Times Higher Education Supplement Rankings of World Universities the National University of Singapore is ranked 23rd in the world in 2019 and the first in Asia in 2018 [4]. Nanyang Technological University is ranked 51-st in the world in 2019 and was number 5 in Asia in 2018 [5].

Such results are mainly due to well elaborated domestic policy, which prioritized education in building both the economy and the nation. The objective was to make human capital as the principal driver for economic growth. Successful implementation of educational programs gave Singapore competitive advantage over other Asian economics.

II. BACKGROUND

As the smallest Asian country, Singapore seemed simply to have been created to be dependent on its more powerful neighbors. Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first Prime Minister, believed that the lack of resources and the imperfect external environment had to be compensated by superiority in other areas like intelligence, discipline, ingenuity, and hard work. Lee Kuan Yew set out two overarching goals: to build a modern economy and create national identity. In the 1960's, the government immediately began to search for alternative financing channels, as well as the opportunity to create new jobs, especially in industries where returns could be maximal, for example, education, tourism, construction, ship repair. Lee Kuan Yew attracted foreign educated people to work and teach low-skilled workforce. Perfectly elaborated measures taken by the leadership of the country, led by Lee, as well as favorable economic conditions in the United States, Europe and Japan – Singapore's main business partners, the "cultural revolution" in China which threatened promising investments in Taiwan and Hong Kong, played a positive role in Singapore's development. In the 1970's and 1980's the government started to pay more attention to technical fields. The typical approach of Singaporeans is the application of the most advanced scientific methods, constant monitoring of promising trends, careful planning, adjustment of plans as the situation changes. In 1986 the Information Technologies Development Plan that provided for far-reaching measures in the field of personnel training, extensive use of computer technologies and standardization of the local IT- industry was issued. Since that time Singapore's government has made IT-industry one of the most important spheres for development. In the mid-1990's the Prime Minister Lee focused on global knowledge economy, which led to a growing number of foreign scientists and sound finance of research and development. Lee Kuan Yew repeatedly emphasized that the aim of higher-education in Singapore is "producing good man and a useful citizen" [6]. At that time the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore was established with the purpose of production of high quality materials to teach students. From the 1990's the government has invested in the Institute for Technical Education to enhance the status of blue-collar jobs and make these degrees more attractive. The ultimate goal of that was to produce high-skilled technical workers. The number of polytechnic universities has also increased. At that time fields like information sciences, bioinformatics and medical technologies were determined as the most important to study by the Ministry of Education. In Singapore's case education is a means of social cohesion, a platform for national stability and a tool for economic development. And of course Singapore needed strong economy to survive as an independent country among strong neighbors. The results

were incredible. Rapid economic growth has made Singapore one of the Asian Tigers and a developed country that managed to make a leap from the "third world" to the "first" in one generation.

III. HIGHER-EDUCATION PRIORITIES

Educated people are one of the most important drivers for economic development. There are not so many governments that focus on the future as passionately as Singapore. The interesting thing is that Singapore's education system inculcates the idea of lifelong learning, such as the "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" principle. The "Thinking nation" concept was adopted by the government in 1997 with the aim of developing critical and creative thinking through introduction of thinking skills to the curriculum. In 2004 "Teach Less, Learn More" initiative was announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, making the next step under the idea of "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation". The initiative's aim was to engage students more deeply in learning. Singapore's government is paying a lot of attention to education in 21st century. It is very important for Singapore to attract not only foreign students, but also foreign graduates of Singaporean universities for their settlement in the country. An important role in the development of Singapore is given to non-residents. It is worth mentioning that in Singapore the population is divided into several groups: these are the citizens, residents and non-residents. The non-resident population is employed to support industries where talent is currently in demand, especially in the high-end fields of IT or medicine. Attraction of great number of talented foreign students is a goal of Singapore's foreign agencies that look for talented people abroad to work and reside in Singapore.

Talking about international standards of education in Singapore, it is important to say that more than 10 top universities opened their branches in the country. In addition to local universities, both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees are offered by foreign universities with campuses based in Singapore and international institutions of higher education. These universities are usually private and have a smaller number of students than local public institutions. Some of them include: James Cook University, Singapore; University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Singapore; Curtin Singapore, International Executive Education Center (IEEC); Temple University, Singapore; INSEAD Asia Campus; SP Jain School of Global Management; DigiPen Institute of Technology, Singapore; EASB: East Asia Institute of Management [7]. Graduated students from local and private universities may contribute a lot to intellectual potential of the state. According to Pak Tee Ng from the National Institute of Education, Singapore seeks to win in global talent wars due to cultural and historical base [8]. Moreover, Singapore has sought to be an educated hub as part of the global talent wars, but it is important to mention the effort of Singapore's government to satisfy labor demands in the domestic and global economy [9]. Research is demonstrating that Singapore has been winning the talent war with the incentives it creates for citizens and foreigners [10]. The challenge remains developing citizens with an

entrepreneurial spirit able to reconcile the cultural adherence to reverence toward authority with the need for risk-taking creativity [11].

One of the most important things for state development is the creation of three nets which include: business net, talented net and knowledge and information net. As for the business net, it is no longer a secret that Singapore is one of the most attractive countries for doing business. The country makes part of a business bridge between Asia, Europe and America.

Talking about talented net, it is interesting to say that Singapore paid huge attention to the improvement of human intelligence. It is one of the most important tasks nowadays, especially in new economic environment. There are so many countries interested in attracting great talent people. They are the USA, the UK, Germany, Australia, China, South Korea. And Singapore is not exclusion. Attraction of foreign specialists makes Singapore's government continue to increase living standards. Singapore has established committee of the 21th century which tried to create a new idea for the next century and make Singapore a global city and the best house.

As for knowledge and information net, Singapore is trying to be a center of knowledge and information that would make the state a center between Asia, Europe and America. Singapore is paying more attention to human development, artificial intelligence and high technologies.

The Report of the Committee on the Future Economy came out in February 2017 outlining Singapore's economic strategies for the fourth industrial revolution preparation. The main points are: deepening and diversifying international connections, acquisition and utilization of deep skills, creation of strong digital capabilities [12]. Through these efforts Singapore is internationalizes its education and creates more learning opportunities.

There are a number of educational strategies in Singapore. One of the major of them is "Deepening and Diversifying International Connections" through the Global Innovation Alliance (GIA). The main idea is to create new networks through young people who can facilitate innovation. For realizing the initiative Singapore's institutes of higher education and major innovation hubs around the world started to cooperate.

The program Skills Future Leadership Development Initiative (LDI) was created to identify future corporate leaders and expose them to high-quality opportunities to acquire knowledge of regional markets.

One more initiative is "Acquire and Utilize Deep Skills" which suggests deeper skills and includes analytical and evaluative capacities combined with complex problems solved by a team.

The third strategy is "Build Strong Digital Capabilities". It means creation of strong human capacity in data analyses and cybersecurity. In March 2018 President Tan of the National University of Singapore (NUS) announced: "things are moving very fast in the external environment and we

cannot afford to keep still. The fourth industrial revolution is crucial". Prof Tan said that his first priority is to introduce set skills — statistics and programming — across the entire curriculum, applicable to students from every faculty [13].

Skills Future is a national movement to provide Singaporeans with opportunities to develop their potential to its maximum extent throughout life, regardless of their starting points. Through this movement, the skills, passion and contributions of every individual will drive Singapore's next phase of development towards advanced economy and inclusive society. ... Skills mastery is more than having the right paper qualifications and being good at what you currently do; it is a mindset of continually striving towards greater excellence through knowledge, application and experience [14].

Today, talking about insufficient research problem related to development activities is not necessary. The topic is interesting not only to Western scientists, but also becomes attractive to scientists from developing countries. At the same time, the study of South-South cooperation can hardly be called irrelevant [15]. Singapore also participates in development assistance activities. For instance, in the field of Good Governance Israel, China and Singapore helped Benin in resolving its technical and governance challenges affecting public institutions, management thereof, and providing results-based incentives to specific Ministries to be effective in management [16]. The Singapore government provides grants for receiving education in the country, including through the South-South line. However, it is worth mentioning the fact that students are given grants for specialties important for maintaining Singapore's economic growth.

IV. CONCLUSION

According to Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies in Singapore, "Education is critical because it is education more than anything else that has shaped our social identity in Singapore. We are in a far better place today than we were when we started – in having that sense of being Singaporeans together. And the fact that education unleashed waves of social mobility has led to a different social culture too. It will be education, more than any other strategy or policy that shapes our future identity and this sense of solidarity of Singaporeans, as we face these new challenges. It will require some shifts in education and some trade-offs. We do require new traits, and we should not shrink from developing them, even if we lose something else in the meantime" [17].

Singapore has invested heavily in higher education as a government tool for economic development for its citizens and talented foreigners to employ. It boasts two of the world's best universities and several others with top education. In author's opinion, all countries should examine Singaporean educational system that reached such high results and is attracting talented foreigners from the all world.

REFERENCES

- [1] Prime Minister Goh Chik Tong has released a booklet which charts Singapore's progress between 1990 and 2000. This shows that "we have achieved and can do so again," he said // *The Straits Times* // Saturday, August 18, 2001.
- [2] Anastasia Zaballa. Humanitarian Cooperation between China and Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa // Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities (ICCESSH 2018)-International Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research. URL: <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/iccsh-18/25898223> (Accessed: 11.01.2019).
- [3] PISA 2015 key findings for Singapore. The website of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment. URL: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-singapore.htm> (Accessed: 15.01.2019).
- [4] Universities. The website of the Times Higher Education Supplement Rankings of World Universities. URL: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/search?search=singapore> (Accessed: 18.01.2019).
- [5] Universities. The website of the Times Higher Education Supplement Rankings of World Universities. URL: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/nanyang-technological-university-singapore> (Accessed: 18.01.2019).
- [6] Speech by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Minister mentor, at the 90th anniversary dinner of the Nanyang family of schools, 11 august 2007. The website of the Singapore government media release. URL: <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view.html?filename=20070811995.htm> (Accessed: 08.01.2019).
- [7] Universities in Singapore. The website of the Inter Nations. URL: <https://www.internations.org/singapore-expats/guide/29461-family-children-education/universities-in-singapore-16070> (Accessed: 18.01.2019).
- [8] Ng, "Singapore's response to the global war for talent: Politics and education," *International Journal of Educational Development* 31, no. 3 (2011): 262–268.
- [9] Ka Ho Mok, "Singapore's global education hub ambitions: University governance change and transnational higher education," *International Journal of Educational Management* 22, no. 6 (2008): 527–546.
- [10] Balbir B. Bhasin and Kim Cheng Low, "The Fight for Global Talent: New Directions, New Competitors – a Case Study on Singapore," *Career Development International* 7, no. 2 (2002): 109–114.
- [11] Soren Christensen, "Higher Education and Entrepreneurial Citizenship in Singapore," *Learning and Teaching* 5, no. 3 (2012): 39–55.
- [12] Ministry of Communications and Information Singapore, "Report of the Committee on the Future Economy".
- [13] Future-proofing NUS students. The website of the National University of Singapore. URL: <http://www.science.nus.edu.sg/newshub/2375-future-proofing-nus-students> (Accessed: 17.01.2019).
- [14] "SkillsFuture," Government of Singapore, accessed December 28, 2017. URL: <http://www.skillsfuture.sg/AboutSkillsFuture> (Accessed: 11.12.2018).
- [15] Borzova, A.Yu., Chikrizova, O.S. & Zaballa, A.A. (2018). Review of the Book: Bergamaschi, I, Moore, P. & Tickner, A.B. (Eds.). (2017). *South—South Cooperation Beyond the Myths. Rising Donors, New Aid Practices?* United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 334 p. Vestnik RUDN. *International Relations*, 18 (3), 727—739. DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2018-18-3-727-739.
- [16] Learning South-South Cooperation: Perspectives from Partner Countries. Nov.2016. URL: http://ris.org.in/sites/default/files/FINAL_Learning%20South%20South%20Report_1.pdf
- [17] Transcript of the keynote speech by DPM Tharman Shanmugaratnam at the Hwa Chong Centennial Insights Series and Hwa Chong-Nanyang Education Conference, titled "Educating for the Future: Charting the Next Century", delivered on 15 Feb 2019. The website of the Prime Minister's Office Singapore. URL: <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/dpm-tharman-hwa-chong-centennial-insights-series-education-conference> (Accessed: 16.02.2019).