

Rating Teachers and Rewarding Teacher Performance: The Context of Singapore

Christine Kim-Eng Lee,¹ Nanyang Technological University
Mei Ying Tan,² Columbia University

February 2010

Introduction

Singapore's education system has received international recognition as one of the top performing systems in the world. The McKinsey study of 10 top performing school systems found three attributing factors that are important: "getting the right people to become teachers; developing them into effective teachers; and ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child". Teacher quality made the largest difference in student achievement and the most effective school systems invested in their teachers ([McKinsey, 2007](#)).

Singapore continues to invest heavily in education and there was an increase of 5.5% in the 2009 budget over 2008 providing a total of S\$8,701 million which is 3.49% of its Gross Domestic Product in spite of the economic downturn ([Ministry of Finance, 2009](#)). Much of the investment goes to the development of teachers who are considered pivotal to the successful implementation of curriculum reforms under the Thinking School, Learning Nation (TSLN) vision of the Ministry of Education (MOE). At the recent annual Workplan Seminar where the MOE provides the direction for strategic planning by every sector in the educational system, there was a focus on teachers as "the heart of quality education" ([Ng, 2009](#)). The Minister of Education, Dr Ng Eng Hen announced at the seminar: the bumper harvest for new teachers, a new career track for Allied Educators hired to support the work of teachers, an increase of funds for schools to hire more adjunct teachers, more pathways for the upgrading of teachers, the development of a Teacher Development Centre (TDC), a new Superscale-grade Principal Master Teacher (PMTT) position as the apex of the Teaching Track and the creation of a new position of a lead teacher in schools. These announcements augur well for the teaching profession as the system works towards a target of some 33,000 teachers by 2015.

Recruiting Teachers

Teaching remains a highly desirable profession in Singapore. According to a public perception survey commissioned by MOE, teaching was viewed by the public as the most respected profession in terms of its contribution to society. Tertiary students

¹ A/P Christine Kim-Eng Lee is currently the Head of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Academic Group (CTL), National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She can be contacted at christine.lee@nie.edu.sg.

² Ms Mei Ying Tan is a research assistant in CTL and is currently pursuing her doctoral studies at Teachers College, Columbia University.

ranked teachers 2nd highest, next to doctors, and above other professions such as law, banking, and nursing ([Shanmugaratnam](#), 2006).

Rating and rewarding teachers begins long before recruits become qualified teachers. To qualify for an interview, applicants need to be within the top 30% of their cohort, should have relevant higher education, pass tests in literacy, and show evidence of interest in educating children. Once they make the paper review cut, applicants would have to undergo an interview process to determine their suitability to be a teacher and a role model for their students. The interview focuses on whether the applicant has strong communication and interpersonal skills, a willingness to learn and a strong motivation to teach ([Sclafani](#), 2008). After a successful interview, they will enter the National Institute of Education and continue to be monitored especially during the practicum and will be asked to leave the profession if their performance is not satisfactory. Only one in five applicants enter the National Institute of Education, and out of these twenty percent, 18 percent eventually graduate to become teachers (McKinsey, 2007). To attract new people into teaching, Singapore provides good pay at the start –“frontloaded compensation” (McKinsey, 2007, p. 22) – paying a salary as well as the tuition fees of student teachers. Trainee teachers with degree qualifications (GEO 1.2 Untrained) are provided with monthly gross salaries ranging from S\$2550 to S\$2990. Meanwhile, trainee teachers without degree qualifications (GEO 2.2 Untrained) are paid gross salaries of S\$1480 to S\$1870 per month ([NIE](#), 2010). Singapore is probably one of the few economies in the world that pays salaries to **all** pre-service teachers undergoing teacher preparation programmes at the National Institute of Education. Starting salaries for teachers upon graduation from NIE are comparable to other professions. The status of teachers is maintained at a high level, thus making teaching a desirable career choice and continues to attract more top students into the profession.

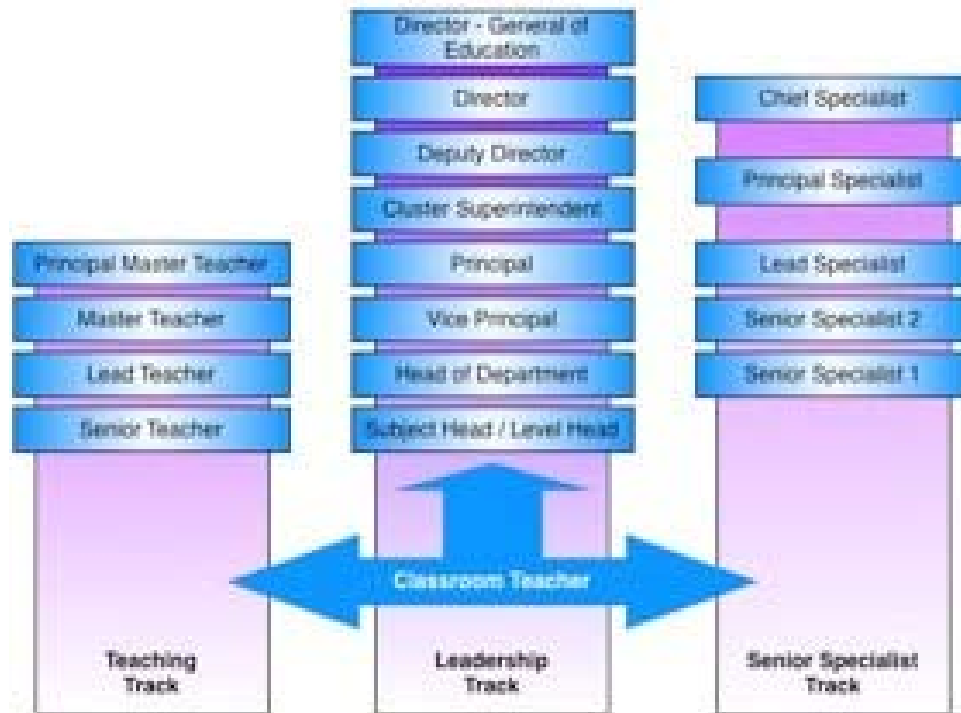
Rating Teachers

Appraisal and feedback have a strong positive influence on teachers and their work. In an OECD study of teaching appraisal and feedback and its impact on schools and teachers, teachers report that “it increases their job satisfaction and to, some degree their job security, and it significantly increases their development as teachers” (OECD, 2009).

Singapore pays a great deal of attention to the development of teachers through the conceptualization and implementation of a performance management system called Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS) which was fully implemented in 2005. EPMS is part of the career and recognition system under the “**E**ducation Service **P**rofessional Development and Career Plan” (Edu-Pac) for teachers to develop their potential to the fullest ([Teo](#), 2001). This structure has three components: a career path, recognition through monetary rewards, and an evaluation system. EduPac takes cognizance that teachers have different aspirations and provides for 3 career tracks for teachers in Singapore: the **Teaching Track** that allows teachers to remain in the classroom and advance to a new pinnacle level of a Master Teacher; the **Leadership Track** that provides opportunity for teachers to take on leadership positions in schools and the Ministry’s headquarters and the **Senior Specialist Track** where teachers join

Ministry's headquarters and become a "strong core of specialists with deep knowledge and skills in specific areas in education that will break new ground and keep Singapore at the leading edge" (Teo, 2001) (see Fig. 1 for the levels within each of the tracks).

Fig. 1: Differentiated Career Tracks under EDU-PAC



Source: [MOE Website on Teaching as a Career](#)

The Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS)

The EPMS (Ministry of Education, 2005) has 2 aspects: (i) it is competency-based and defines the knowledge, skills and professional characteristics appropriate for each track thus providing clarity in terms of the expectations and behaviours needed for success in each of the tracks; and (ii) it is developmental in nature and supports teacher improvement and performance. The process involves performance planning, performance coaching and performance evaluation. In **performance planning**, the teacher starts the year with self-assessment and develops goals for teaching, instructional innovations and improvements at the school, professional development and personal development and meets with his/her reporting officer who is usually the Head of Department for a discussion about target setting and performance benchmarks. **Performance coaching** takes place throughout the year and more so during a formal mid-year review where the reporting officer meets with the teacher to discuss progress and share needs and to coach and provide feedback and support. In **performance evaluation** held at the end of the year, the reporting officer conducts the appraisal interview and review actual performance against planned performance (see Figure 2). A performance grade is given

and this would affect the annual performance bonus received for the year's work. It is also during the performance evaluation phase that decisions regarding promotions to the next level are made based on "current estimated potential (CEP)". The decision on a teacher's current estimated potential (CEP) is made in consultation with senior staff who has worked with the teacher, based on "observations, discussions with the teacher, evidence of portfolio, and knowledge of the teacher's contribution to the school and community" (Sclafani, 2008).

Fig. 2: Performance Management Process



Source: MOE, Enhanced Performance Management System – Teaching Fields of Excellence, p.7

Teachers are evaluated based on the "what" and "how" of performance. The "what" of performance is captured through Key Result Areas (KRA) which describes the broad areas of work expected of a teacher. The KRAs for the Teaching Track are:

- The holistic development of students through:
 - Quality learning of students
 - Pastoral care and well-being of students
 - Co-curricular activities
- Contribution to the school
- Collaboration with parents
- Professional development

The knowledge and skills expected of a teacher complements the KRAs and they are:

- Knowledge:

- Teaching Area – the content and curriculum knowledge that teachers must know to teach in the classroom
- Psychology – the knowledge of child development that teachers must know to maximise pupil potential.
- Developments in the field of education – the knowledge in other areas of education that mould a complete educator
- Education Policies – the rationale and the philosophy that sets the direction and focus for teachers to carry out their tasks.
- Skills:
 - Teaching Pedagogy – the pedagogic techniques and approaches that teachers must practise to teach in the classroom.

Teachers are assessed based on their competencies which capture the “how” of performance. There are 4 points on the rating scale, ranging from ‘Not Observed’, ‘Developing’ to ‘Competent’ and ‘Exceeding’. According to the EPMS Dictionary, competencies are “the underlying characteristics that are proven to drive outstanding performance in a specific job and are the personal attributes and behaviours that lead to longer-term achievement and success”.

There is a set of 13 competencies in the Teaching Competency Model which teachers can use to identify their strengths and weaknesses as areas of continuous learning and professional growth (see Fig 3). Teachers are assessed on 9 of the 13 competencies – Nurturing the Whole Child and the competencies related to Cultivating Knowledge, Winning Hearts and Minds and Working with Others. The remaining 4 competencies related to ‘Knowing Self and Others’ are not used for assessment purposes but are considered as emotional intelligence competencies important for self development.

Fig 3: Teaching Competency Model



Source: MOE. Enhanced Performance Management System – Teaching Fields of Excellence, p.4

An important core competency in the teaching track is the ability of teachers to ‘nurture the whole child’. Teachers are rated on increasing levels of ability to nurture their students holistically as shown below.

<p>Level 1: Shares values Shares values with the child through advice, feedback and discussions, with the intent to nurture the whole child.</p>
<p>Level 2: Takes actions (GEO 1/2/ GEO1A1/GEO2A1/ GEO1A2/GEO2A2/ GEO1A3/GEO2A3) Sees the possibilities in each child and takes appropriate actions to convince him of values, and improve his self-confidence.</p>
<p>Level 3: Strives for the best possible provision (Senior Teacher) Acts consistently in the interest of the child and persists in working for the best possible outcomes.</p>
<p>Level 4: Encourages others to act in the best interest of the child (Master Teacher level 1) Encourages others in the school community to participate in the educational process to realise the child’s full potential.</p>
<p>Level 5: Influence policies, programme and procedures (Master Teacher level 2) Takes an active role in initiatives that influence policies, programme and procedures in line with Nurturing the Whole Child</p>

Teachers at higher stages of their career are expected to perform at higher levels, for example, a Master Teacher is expected to perform at levels 4 or 5 whereas a Senior Teacher is expected to perform at level 3. The table below shows behavioural indicators for a Senior Teacher and a Master Teacher for the core competency of nurturing the whole child.

<p>Level 3: Strives for the best possible provision (Senior Teachers) Acts consistently in the interest of the child and persists in working for the best possible outcomes.</p>	<p>Level 4: Encourages others to act in the best interest of the child (Master Teacher level 1) Encourages others in the school community to participate in the educational process to realise the child's full potential</p>
<p>Behaviour Indicators Seeks out opportunities to stretch the students’ abilities and maximise their potential Willing to do what is necessary to help students overcome challenges. Works in partnership with parents, relevant individual or authorities in the interest of students.</p>	<p>Behaviour Indicators Garners support of colleagues to support student to achieve potential Conducts workshops or sharing sessions with stakeholders to inspire further development of students Conducts studies to determine students' interests and abilities, and seeks to implement practices that benefit students' development. Leads others in the planning and implementation of projects that will benefit the students holistically</p>

Subject Mastery is one competency under ‘Cultivating Knowledge’ and is defined as “the drive to find out more and stay abreast of developments in one's field of excellence”. The levels and behaviour indicators for subject mastery are:

Level 1: Has knowledge in subject area and awareness of educational issues (Classroom Teacher GEO1/2) Shows keen interest in own subject area and related educational issues within subject area.	
Level 2: Keeps abreast with trends and developments in own subject area (Classroom Teacher GEO 1A1/2A1, 1A2/2A2, 1A3/2A3) Takes initiative to stay current and expand content knowledge in own subject area	
Behaviour Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeps updated on subject area through reading beyond curriculum requirements Has broad-based knowledge of subject area Actively seeks new information on subject area through attending courses, training etc Is proactive in offering to share expertise in subject area with colleagues
Level 3: Applies knowledge of trends and developments into lessons (Senior Teacher) Uses knowledge of trends and developments in own subject area in lessons. Makes systematic effort over a period of time to obtain needed feedback or data to ensure effectiveness and relevance.	
Level 4: Develops innovative approaches (Master Teacher level 1) Demonstrates deep understanding of current or new approaches to the future needs of the education system. Develops approaches that could impact the education system.	
Behaviour Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses tested approaches and strategies in subject area and introduces them to other colleagues at school/cluster level Develops new and creative strategies to deliver Lessons Designs an integrated curriculum and/or initiates a pedagogical approach to meet the future needs of education
Level 5: Provides thought leadership (Master Teacher level 2) Explores and pushes the horizon in the one's subject area/teaching field	

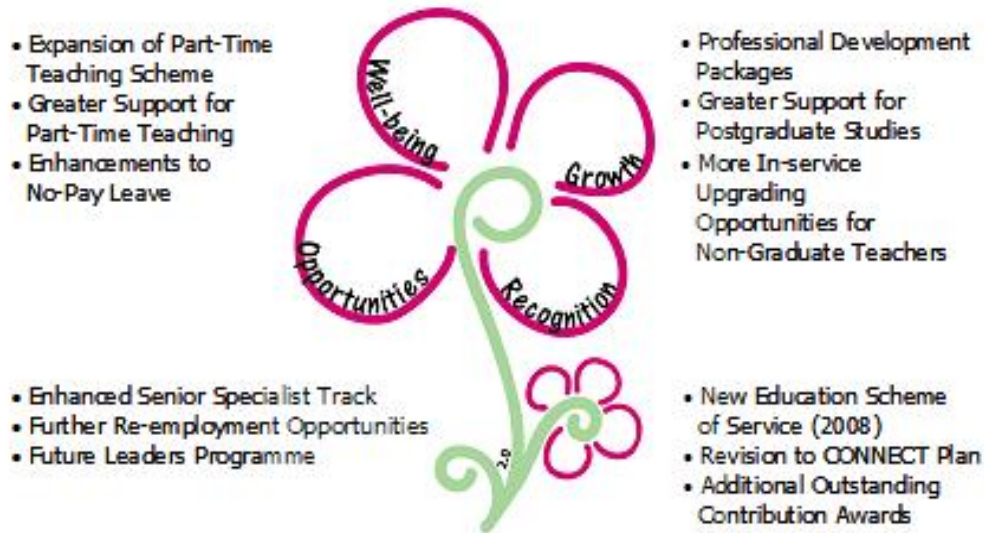
Rewarding Teacher Performance

Teachers are rewarded financially according to how they are evaluated in the Enhanced Performance Management System. In addition to the annual salary increments and based on their performance grades, they would be given a differential performance bonus which would amount to one to three months salary for average to outstanding performers, that is, a 10-30% annual bonus (Sclafani, 2008, p. 7). This performance bonus is awarded in March each year for the work done during January to December of the year before.

Grow 2.0 Package

An enhanced career structure, the GROW 2.0 package (Growth of Education Officers, through better Recognition, Opportunities, and seeing to their Well-being) was introduced by MOE to “give teachers more recognition for excellence and commitment to their calling, more career options and professional development as well as greater flexibility in managing their career and personal lives”. It is aimed at “the professional and personal development of teachers more comprehensively and holistically”. Figure 4 shows the various dimensions of the GROW 2.0 package.

Figure 4: Dimensions of Grow 2.0 Package



Source: [MOE website on Teaching as a Career](#)

CONNECT Plan

An interesting dimension of the GROW package is the CONNECT plan (CONtiNuity, Experience and Commitment in Teaching) which was put in place to increase teacher retention and to reward teachers for staying on in the Education Service. The CONNECT plan encourages teachers to remain in the service until retirement by allocating a sum of \$3,200 to \$8,320 every year for each teacher and giving a monetary payout at defined points every 3 to 5 years ranging from \$15,200 to \$36,100. The payouts are higher in the first 20 years of service as teachers are expected to have higher financial commitments during that period. The total payout (payout quantum plus retention quantum) for each teacher (GEO 1/1A1/1A2/1A3/SEO levels) who stays in service for 30 years amounts to a princely sum of S\$214,120.

Access to professional development (PD) opportunities

All teachers are also entitled to 100 hours of PD annually which can occur during school hours with resources provided for relief teachers. The Ministry also provides funding for scholarships and study leave—both locally and abroad and facilitates “teachers’ movement along selected career ladders and learning along multiple dimensions” (Goodwin, in press). For instance, MOE provides postgraduate scholarship for outstanding teachers tenable at top universities in the US, UK, Canada, Australia and elsewhere.

There is also a provision of enhanced sabbatical scheme for teachers so that they can take a break from teaching and do something else. Teachers with 12 years of service can take 2½ months of full-pay leave. This means they can take a full school term off, at full pay, to be on sabbaticals for a variety of purposes such as teach in a different type of school, pursue a higher degree programme locally or overseas, or go on a structured Teachers' Work Attachment in an organisation quite different from a school. ([Shanmugaratnam, 2006](#)).

Teachers could also claim up to S\$400 or S\$700 per year, depending on their years in service, for learning and development related expenses. This could be spent on the purchase of books, subscription to magazines and journals, purchase of personal productivity devices such as PDAs and webcams as well as payment for courses. Teachers are also rewarded with a sum ranging from \$3,000 to \$10,000, depending on staff strength for outstanding team-based contributions to their school. The individual outstanding contribution award is at S\$1,000.

Given all the support available to new and continuing teachers, it comes as no surprise that the overall attrition rate due to retirement and resignation has remained steady at a low rate of 2.4%, a rate which MOE is committed to reducing (Goodwin, in press).

Conclusion

Salary and career advancement are constantly scrutinized to make rewards attractive to teachers. The reward system is focused on rewarding excellence and reinforces the idea that rewards equals contribution. The evaluation system through the use of EPMS reflects the totality of a teacher's contributions to their students, school and community ([Sclafani, 2008](#)). At the same time, continuous and deep support for teacher professional learning is a priority so that teachers would be able to perform well both in work and in year-end evaluations. The importance of professional development is in turn driven by strategic directions and priorities set by MOE (Wang-Iverson et.al, 2009). While the career and pay structures have been successful in attracting and retaining people, less had been studied about the implementation of EPMS and the extent to which schools are able to release teachers for professional development. It is necessary to conduct an honest evaluation of the effectiveness of EPMS and professional development from the teacher's point of view.

Singapore recognises that its system of evaluating teachers and the implementation of that system need improvement. In particular, the system is not evenly implemented across the school system ([Lui, 2007](#), [Siew, 2007](#)). There is also a need to examine the domain-specificity of the evaluation system, for example, how does it apply to the assessment of math teachers. However, despite its imperfections, the system has helped Singapore attract people into the education service and retain them ([Shanmugaratnum, 2006](#)).

References

- Goodwin, A. L. (in press). Quality teachers, Singapore style.
- Lim, L. H. (2003). Impacting the positioning of teaching as life-long career. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*. 2, pp. 87-92.
- Lui, T. Y. (2007, March). *FY 2007 Committee of supply debate 6th reply by MOS Lui Tuck Yew on teachers workload and assessment of teachers*. Speech presented at Committee of supply debate, Singapore. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2007/sp20070307f.htm>
- McKinsey & Co. (2007, September). *How the world's best-performing school systems come out top*. Retrieved from http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Reports/SSO/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf
- Ministry of Education. (2005). *Enhanced Performance Management System*. Singapore.
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. (2010). *Career information*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/careers/teach/career-info/>
- National Institute of Education (2010). General Information handbook 2009 – 2010. Retrieved from http://www.nie.edu.sg/itt_hb/web/2010/general_handbook_Jan-Dec2010.pdf
- Ng, E. H. (2009). *Speech by Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence, at the MOE Work Plan Seminar 2009, on Thursday, 17 September 2009 at 9.30am at the Ngee Ann Polytechnic Convention Centre*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2009/09/17/work-plan-seminar.php>
- Sclafani, S. (with Lim, E.). (2008). *Rethinking human capital in education: Singapore as a model for teacher development*. A paper prepared for The Aspen Institute Education and Society Program. Retrieved from <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/education%20and%20society%20program/SingaporeEDU.pdf>
- Shanmugaratnam, T. (2006, September). *Keynote address by Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister for Education & Second Minister for Finance, at the teachers' mass lecture, 4 sep 2006*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2006/sp20060904.htm>

Siew, K. H. (2007, March 7). Of soldiers and teachers [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://siewkumhong.blogspot.com/2007/03/of-soldiers-and-teachers.html>

Teo, C. H. (2001, January). *Speech by Radm (NS) Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence at the Ministry of Education investiture of the 2000 national day awards on Saturday, 20 Jan 2001 at 10.00 am at the Singapore International Convention & Exhibition centre*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2001/sp20012001.htm>

Teo, C. H. (2001, July). *Speech by Radm (NS) Teo Chee Hean, minister for education and second minister for defence at the NIE teachers investiture ceremony on Wednesday, 4 July 2001 at 9.30 AM at the Singapore indoor stadium*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2001/sp04072001.htm>

Wang-Iverson, P., Myers, P., & Lim, W. K. (2009). Beyond Singapore's mathematics textbooks: Focused and flexible supports for teaching and learning. *American Educator*, Winter 2009-2010, pp. 28 -38.

Fact Sheet about Teachers in Singapore

Teacher profile by grade level, academic qualification and age

MOE Teachers (all)

Grade level	Number & academic qualification				Number of teachers at the ages of:				
	'O' level	'A' level	Under-grad	Post-grad	<24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55<
Primary Grade 1-6 Total=13,023 (100%)	613 (4.7%)	4,840 (37.2%)	7,187 (55.2%)	383 (2.9%)	461 (3.5)	6223 (47.8)	3,931 (30.2)	1,494 (11.5)	914 (7%)
Secondary Grade 7-10 Total=12,143 (100%)	90 (0.7%)	875 (7.2%)	10,078 (83%)	1,100 (9.1%)	420 (3.5)	5,702 (47%)	3,313 (27.3)	1,858 (15.3)	850 (7%)
Junior College Grade 11-12 Total=2728 (100%)	2 (0.07%)	9 (0.33%)	2,227 (81.6%)	490 (18%)	65 (2%)	1,473 (54%)	596 (22%)	403 (15%)	191 (7%)

Comment: This does not include records for teachers in polytechnic and Institutes of Technical Education. Figures in brackets refer to percentages.

Source: MOE. [2009 Education Statistics Digest](#)