

A Comparative Study of the Links between the Secondary and Post-Secondary Education Systems in Six Nations: Hong Kong, Japan, Switzerland, South Korea, Thailand, and the United States

Christoph Metzgea, Rebecca Maynard, Sumonta Promboon, Tsukasa Daizen, Kin Yuen Ip, So-Young Park, and Julie Vultaggio, University of Pennsylvania, United States

ABSTRACT

There was a time when a secondary education could provide a ticket to economic success almost anywhere in the world. Yet today, the economic health of developed and developing nations increasingly depends on higher levels of education and more specialized vocational training. Across the globe, countries are reforming their educational systems to better capitalize on their natural, social, and economic resources. Many developing nations are striving to create universal primary education and high quality secondary education, along with major improvements to their postsecondary education systems. While developed countries have offered universal access to primary and secondary schooling along with reasonably accessible postsecondary education for many years, there is much diversity with regard to the level of vocational training embedded in their education systems. In addition, access to some nations' most prestigious institutions, which often boast high success rates in terms of economic and occupational attainment, can be severely limited for underrepresented and underprivileged populations.

Considering the rapidly changing faces of primary, secondary, and postsecondary education throughout the world, this report critically examines the education systems of six nations: Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland, Thailand, and the United States. The purpose of this study is to enhance awareness of international approaches to general and vocational education, with a particular focus on secondary to postsecondary transitions. Notably, this type of research is crucial to understanding how different systems operate, but more importantly, how faculty and administrators can ease students' transitions to postsecondary schooling in order to promote more educated citizens who contribute to the nations' economic and social development. Thus, another aim of this research is to provide a cross-national comparison of the distinct education systems, highlighting features that may be applicable to other nations in need of educational reform. Results from our preliminary analysis indicate that there are significant similarities and differences among the six countries, which we categorize into five themes: Structure of the Systems, Curriculum, Commonly Held Educational Values and Beliefs, Main Educational Reforms, and Postsecondary Application/Transition Processes. Based on our findings, the final section of this report offers recommendations for educational policy and practice that can benefit these six nations as well as other countries worldwide.