

A Comparative Analysis of the Primary Education in Ethiopia and Singapore: Purposes, Governance, and Curricular Practices

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study was to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of primary education systems in Ethiopia and Singapore, two nations with markedly contrasting educational outcomes and socio-cultural contexts, focusing on educational purposes, governance, curricular practices, and to identify potential lessons for educational improvement in Ethiopia. The study employs a qualitative methodological framework based on Bereday's four-step comparative analysis Model. Data was sourced from recent policy documents, academic literature, and international reports, and was analyzed thematically to identify similarities, differences, and contextual influences shaping each system. Findings reveal that Ethiopia's primary education emphasizes foundational literacy, numeracy, moral, and civic education within a decentralized governance framework, facing challenges related to resource constraints, standardization, and quality disparities. Conversely, Singapore's system demonstrates centralized governance, a rigorous, holistic curriculum, ability-based streaming, and innovative pedagogical approaches that underpin its top rankings in global assessments. The study discusses lessons Ethiopia can learn from Singapore's strategic planning, resource optimization, technology integration, and curriculum reform to enhance its educational quality and relevance. Overall, this comparative analysis underscores how socio-economic, cultural, and political factors influence educational purposes and practices, offering insights for policymakers and educators aiming to elevate primary education outcomes in diverse contexts.

Keywords: Primary education, Ethiopia, Singapore, comparative analysis.
Introduction

Background of the Study

Education serves as a vital benchmark for determining the progress and advancement of a nation. Through this process, a society cultivates human resources characterized by spiritual depth, intellectual capacity, and technical proficiency, effectively shaping the path for the next generation (Marsella *et al.*, 2023). The fundamental hope of any country is rooted in the

appropriate education of its children and youth. For a nation to achieve meaningful progress, it must provide quality education that actively influences and sustains national development (Siska *et al.*, 2022).

The education system, through the school system, is an important element for a country in its efforts towards developing society from an economic, political, and social perspective (sources). Primary education is a very important and critical level in a child's educational journey that underlies and lays the foundation for future learning in secondary and higher education and development (Marsella *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, primary education helps students develop intellectual, social, personal, and spiritual aspects according to their developmental characteristics so that they can continue further education. In several countries, primary education is mandatory for all citizens. The same is true of Ethiopia, where the government's policy is for every child aged seven and over to attend primary school, as set out in the Ministry of Education's (MoE) universal and compulsory education provision (MoE, 2023).

From a comparative perspective, analyzing Ethiopia and Singapore is to examine two opposites in the global educational landscape. Singapore consistently ranks at the top of international assessments like the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). In both assessments, it is hailed as a model of efficiency and high achievement (OECD, 2019). In stark contrast, despite showing significant progress in access, Ethiopia grapples with a severe "learning poverty" crisis; a large proportion of its children cannot read or understand a simple text by the end of primary school (World Bank, 2022). This divergence is not accidental but is deeply rooted in each nation's historical trajectory, economic development, and political priorities. Singapore, a small city-state with no natural resources, has treated education as the foundational engine for its economic survival and global competitiveness since its independence. Ethiopia, by contrast, a vast nation with a complex history of conflict, famine, and poverty, has focused on the monumental task of expanding educational access to its massive youth population, often at the expense of quality. This comparison underscores how purpose, governance, and pedagogy coverage produce vastly different outcomes.

The primary education landscapes in Ethiopia and Singapore are deeply influenced by their respective diversities in religion, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic background (Latchanna *et al.*, 2019; Marsella *et al.*, 2023). Recognizing these varied backgrounds, this study compares the primary education frameworks of both nations with a focus on their specific objectives, educational structures, governance, curricula, and pedagogy. By examining these core components, the study seeks to identify significant similarities and differences that define each country. Ultimately, this analysis aims to illustrate how unique contextual factors influence educational practices while exploring how the exchange of successful strategies can enhance primary education outcomes in both nations.

Statement of the Problem

Educational systems are not monolithic entities but are deeply reflective of a nation's historical path, socio-cultural values, economic aspirations, and political ideologies (Wiseman & Baker, 2021). Consequently, the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of curriculum, the very backbone of an education system, vary significantly across global contexts (Bărnăuțiu-Sârca & Ciascai, 2022). These variations manifest in the fundamental purposes of education, the structures that deliver it, the governance structures, and the pedagogical practices that move it within classrooms.

Existing literature provides invaluable information for such a comparative inquiry. For instance, Research conducted by Marsella *et al.* (2023) has produced an overview of comparative character education in the elementary school curriculum in Malaysia, India, and Indonesia. Likewise, Tesfamicael & Lundebj (2019) conducted a comparative study of Norwegian and Ethiopian textbooks and adequately identified and explained the similarities and differences of textbooks, both within homogeneous and heterogeneous cultures, in a way that the results contribute to the improvement of the intended curriculum. Moreover, Latchanna *et al.* (2019) explored the professional development of teachers in the case of Ethiopia, Finland, India, and Singapore, and explained the paramount importance of initial teacher education, induction, and continuing professional development to enhance the content and pedagogy mastery of teachers to develop 21st-century learners' competencies.

However, no prior study has made a comparative study on primary education in Ethiopia and Singapore. This gap is particularly consequential given the two nations' starkly contrasting profiles. Singapore represents a paradigmatic case of a centralized, high-performing system explicitly engineered to fuel a knowledge-based economy and foster social cohesion in a multicultural city-state (OECD, 2023). Its students consistently top international assessments like PISA and TIMSS, making its policies a frequent subject of borrowing by global policy. In contrast, Ethiopia embodies the challenges and aspirations of a rapidly expanding, decentralized system in a low-income, historically agrarian nation. Its primary education system is tasked with monumental goals: achieving universal access, reconciling ethnic and linguistic diversity within a federal structure, and overcoming a legacy of limited resources (MoE, 2021). Therefore, this study seeks to conduct a comparative analysis of primary education in Ethiopia and Singapore. By rigorously analyzing their educational purposes, structures, governance, curriculum, and pedagogical practices, the study is expected to generate nuanced knowledge that can inform systemic improvements, foster cross-contextual learning, and contribute to a more global and contextual understanding of educational effectiveness.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of primary education systems in Ethiopia and Singapore, focusing on purposes, governance, curricular practices, and identifying potential lessons for educational improvement in Ethiopia. Specifically, the Study aims to:

1. compare the primary educational purposes and structure in Ethiopia and Singapore.
2. analyze the similarities and differences in primary educational governance of the nations.
3. examine the curriculum and pedagogical practices employed in primary education in Ethiopia and Singapore.
4. identify lessons Ethiopia can learn from Singapore's primary education model to enhance educational governance, curriculum, and pedagogical practices.

Significance of the Study

In terms of advantages, the study's findings may stimulate other academics, prompting them to dig more into the topic using this study as a springboard. Furthermore, practitioners in educational institutions in both countries will have simple access to an overview of the system's most pressing concerns. It may also assist people who are in touch with policy developments in determining key elements to be addressed in the text.

Scope of the Study

Primary Education systems of two distinct countries from diverse continents i.e., Ethiopia from East Africa, and Singapore from Southeast Asia, are thought to be analyzed. Even if the parameters for comparative analysis are different and diverse, the study is delimited to focus on the major educational issues at primary levels of education linked with educational purpose and structures, governance, curriculum, and pedagogical practices that exist in the primary educational systems.

Definitions of Key Concepts and Phrases

Primary Education: The formal educational stage designed for children typically aged 6-12 years, comprising grades 1 through 6, focusing on foundational literacy, numeracy, moral, and social skills as outlined in each country's curriculum framework (OECD, 2023).

Purpose of Education: intended goals and objectives of primary education articulated in national curricula and policy documents, including fostering moral character, communication skills, civic responsibility, lifelong learning, health awareness, and cultural understanding (OECD, 2023).

Educational Structure: The formal grade levels, duration, and subdivision of primary education, including the curriculum framework (e.g., grades 1-6, 4-4-2 structure), and the inclusion of foundational and orientation stages (MoE, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020).

Governance of Education: The system of authority, decision-making, and management of primary education, characterized by decentralization vs. centralization, stakeholder involvement, and policy formulation mechanisms (Kwek *et al.*, 2023; Latchanna *et al.*, 2019).

Curriculum: The set of subjects, language of instruction, and cultural inclusivity embedded in the curriculum, including the emphasis on multilingualism or bilingualism (Vicente *et al.*, 2024).

Pedagogical Approaches: The instructional strategies employed, ranging from traditional teacher-centered methods to participatory, student-centered, and holistic approaches, including the philosophy underpinning pedagogical practices (Kelly *et al.*, 2020).

Literature Reviews

Global Education Landscape

The global education landscape is characterized by rapid transformation driven by technological advances, globalization, and shifting socio-economic demands. The adoption of innovative pedagogical practices, integration of digital technologies, and emphasis on 21st-century skills are reshaping traditional education systems worldwide (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, 2025). Many countries are striving to achieve equitable access to quality education through reforms aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2022). As nations seek to balance educational excellence with equity, there is a growing emphasis on competency-based education, personalized learning, and student-centered pedagogies (OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2024). These global trends reflect an overarching shift from rote learning to fostering critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability skills deemed essential for success in an increasingly interconnected and dynamic world (World Bank, 2022).

Background of Education in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's primary education system has prioritized expanding access to its vast and diverse population amid resource constraints and infrastructural deficits. Despite progress in enrollment, the Country struggles with issues of quality, resource allocation, and curriculum standardization (MoE, 2021; Fufa & Ensene, 2023). The historical legacy of linguistic diversity, political upheavals, and economic limitations has shaped a largely decentralized education system, with regional adaptation often leading to disparities in quality and resource distribution (Latchanna *et al.*, 2019). As a result, Ethiopia remains below international benchmarks of learning, with many children unable to attain basic literacy skills, which is an issue underscored by the World Bank's 2022 report on learning poverty.

Ethiopia's modern education has an almost one-century-old history, since the opening of the first school at the beginning of the 20th century in 1908 (Wondimu, 2019). Till the Italian occupation (1936), the major purpose of education was limited to mastering foreign language courses such as French, Italian, and Arabic; besides Geez and Amharic. Additionally, some courses in religion, mathematics, law, and calligraphy were offered (Abie *et al.*, 2023). During this time, the Ethiopian education system and its curricular components were principally influenced by the French education system (MoE, 2020).

Italian occupation brought down the creeping education system totally through strategies of persecution of the elites and changing educational institutions into military camps. Moreover, catholic mission schools were mandated to emphasize religion and the Italian language to subordinate people to the Mussolini regime. In general, the major goal of education was to create

citizens who would be loyal to Italy (Tamiru & Lasser, 2019). The content of education focused mainly on basic skills (restricted to grade 4) and semi-vocational skill training, and internalizing fascist values to promote fidelity to the regime. Furthermore, the mother tongue was taken as a medium of instruction for major ethnic groups even if (as many agree) the purpose was not pedagogical (Wondimu, 2019; Tamiru & Lasser, 2019). The curricula and assessments, during this time, were neither uniform nor standardized in the schools.

The planned and coordinated expansion of modern education began after the expulsion of Italians in 1941, when Haile Selassie I was the emperor of the Country (Wondemetegn, 2016; Fufa & Ensene, 2023). Thus, the period from 1942 to 1952 in Ethiopian education history was known as the era of British influence, where the support in liberating Ethiopia from Italian aggression was taken as a pretext to manipulate the education system of the Country. Hence, with the extreme support of British experts, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education and Fine Arts was established for the first time in 1942. The primary school syllabus, textbooks, reference materials, and teachers were imported from Britain. The medium of instruction was primarily English starting from grade three. Amharic was the medium of instruction in grades one and two. The subjects selected to include in the curriculum were such as English, Mathematics, Science, Geography, History, Art, Handicraft, and Physical Education (, *et al.*, 2023).

According to the research results of Tamiru & Lasser (2019) and Fufa & Ensene (2023), the period from 1953-1974 was the time of American influence. As a result, a significant change made during the time of American influence was the promotion of Amharic as the medium of instruction at the primary school level. The English language was used as a medium of instruction from grade seven, and since then, it has remained the dominant language of instruction in the education system of Ethiopia. The major subjects included in the Curriculum were English, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, and Physical Education. These subjects were emphasized to align with Western educational models promoted by the U.S. (Abie *et al.*, 2023).

The Derg, a military Regime, came to power in 1974, chanting socialism as the cardinal political philosophy and slogan of the Government. Marxist-Leninist philosophy overwhelmed and guided the overall aspect of the Country. As a result, Ethiopian education introduced a new grade structure 6+2+4. This meant that primary school students had to go through six years to complete the primary level education, and a national examination was set for evaluating the achievements of primary school students in grade 6. However, the Policy and Curriculum devices were like those of Eastern Europe, particularly the then United Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR), and German-oriented curricula (Wondimu, 2019). In this period, Amharic was determined to be used as a medium of instruction in primary school (grades 1- 6) whereby it had created difficulties for students whose mother tongue was not Amharic (Fufa & Ensene, 2023).

According to the Education and Training Policy documents of Ethiopia, the primary education curriculum and its implementation were guided by written strategies and principles. The Transitional Government of Ethiopia which started to lead the Country in 1991 changed the

education and training policy (ETP) of the country in 1994. The Education Sector Development Program (ESDPI-VI) was designed and implemented to support the Education Training Policy. ESDPI-VI has given more emphasis to educational quality, relevance, equity, and access to schools with special emphasis on rural and marginalized areas, to enrollment of girls at primary and above levels in rural areas, and to achieving Universal Primary Education in 2015 (Wondimu, 2019). According to the Education and Development Roadmap, despite achievements in various areas, many gaps and challenges were observed at the primary school level (MoE, 2018).

Background of Education in Singapore

Singapore's education system is characterized by a centralized governance structure, rigorous curriculum, innovative pedagogical practices, and a strategic focus on holistic development (Kwek *et al.*, 2023). These features have contributed to its sustained top rankings in international assessments, reflecting high levels of student achievement across cognitive and socio-emotional domains (OECD, 2019). The nation's emphasis on ability-based streaming, continuous teacher professional development, and a curriculum that balances academic mastery with socio-emotional skills underpins its success (Tan, 2018). The "Learn for Life" reform (2020 to date) exemplifies Singapore's commitment to preparing students not just for exams but for resilient, adaptable lifelong learning, a paradigm that other countries aspire to emulate.

In Singapore's education history, various phases of reform have been introduced. A Survival-Driven Phase of education reform was introduced in 1965 and stayed until 1978, when there was an urgent need to educate and prepare children for an emerging economy that was transitioning from an entrepot economy to an open, export-based one. A national curriculum was implemented with a focus on languages, science, and mathematics to support the needs of the economy (OECD, 2019).

The second phase of education reform in the country is commonly known as the Efficiency-Driven Phase which was between 1979-1997 (Kwek *et al.*, 2023). During this Phase of reform, Singapore became a newly industrializing economy, and the education system was unable to supply the new skills needed. There was widespread student attrition as the "one-size-fits-all" education system, implemented in the Survival-driven Phase, disengaged students. Low levels of literacy and ineffective bilingualism were evident because a large population of children (85 percent) did not speak English at home. Consequently, major structural reforms were implemented, including "streaming," a form of ability tracking (Marsella *et al.*, 2023), which enabled students with different abilities and aptitudes to learn at their own pace. Streaming was implemented at the primary (grades 1-6) level, and increasing school differentiation formed independent and autonomous schools, designed to cater to high-ability students (Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

The third phase called the Ability-Based, Aspiration-Driven Phase (1997-2011) continued structural reforms through further school deregulation and differentiation, such as the start of North Light School in 2007 to cater to less academically inclined students who failed their

primary school leaving examination (PSLE). The overall structural reform provided multiple pathways to academic success and increased curriculum customization that recognizes students' abilities and strengths (Tan, 2018). Importantly, this phase was signaled by a shift in policy rhetoric from focusing on educational structures to pedagogy and instructional quality.

The next phase of reform was the student-centric, Values-Driven Phase (2011-2019), which further shifted the focus toward the holistic development of the child. The emphasis on holistic education is to expand educational parameters beyond cognitive abilities and academic performance to other growth areas, such as physical, socio-emotional, and artistic achievements. (Kwek *et al.*, 2023; Huang, 2024). In 2021, a new scoring system for PSLE, using broad bands that are criterion-referenced and standards-based, was implemented to reduce the exam-centric and competitive schooling environment. Previously, absolute numeric PSLE scores enabled comparison of scores and drove competition among students (Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

The fifth and last curriculum reform is Learn for Life (2020 to Present), which is coined by the MOE as "Learn for Life" (began in 2020), the shift away from an over-emphasis on academic achievements continues, with a focus on preparing Singapore students to connect, collaborate, create, and be resilient to changing circumstances. The attention on pedagogy and instructional quality continues, with teachers encouraged to deepen their pedagogical skills, with emphasis on the teaching of values and socio-emotional competencies. Schools and teachers are encouraged to be change agents to innovate and prepare students for life, not just the next examination (Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

In summary, this literature attempts to examine the education systems of Ethiopia and Singapore, with markedly different outcomes. Ethiopia's system focuses on expanding access amid resource constraints, with decentralized governance, multilingual policies, and challenges in quality and standardization. Historically influenced by foreign models, Ethiopia faces issues of resource disparity and low learning outcomes. Conversely, Singapore's highly centralized system emphasizes a rigorous, innovative curriculum, ability-based streaming, continuous teacher development, and holistic development, which have contributed to its top international rankings. The reform phases in Singapore reflect a progression from survival to efficiency, then to holistic, learner-centered education. In addition, the review underscores how contextual factors shape each country's educational priorities and practices, offering lessons for improving primary education outcomes globally.

Materials and Methods

This study utilizes Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to systematically evaluate and compare the primary educational systems of Ethiopia and Singapore. The analytical framework of this study is Bereday's Four-Stage Model of Comparative Analysis, which provides a structured trajectory for cross-national inquiry through four distinct phases including, (a) Description: This initial phase involves gathering and documenting extensive data regarding the primary education systems of both nations, focusing on formal policy directives, educational purposes, structures, governance, curriculum, and pedagogical practices. (b) Interpretation: In

this stage, the collected data were analyzed within the context of each country's unique socio-economic, cultural, historical, and political background. (c) Juxtaposition: In this phase, interpreted data from both countries were placed side-by-side to establish preliminary similarity and divergence, identifying "comparable" units of analysis. (d) Comparison: A final integrated, simultaneous analysis was conducted to draw conclusions and identify transferable lessons (Adick, 2018).

The data involved secondary sources, including the recent Education and Training Policy (ETP) documents of both countries, academic journal articles, and reports from reputable international organizations such as UNESCO, PISA, and the World Bank. A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple scholarly databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and Scopus, using targeted keywords such as primary education, education system, education in Ethiopia, and education in Singapore. To ensure the relevance, credibility, and currency of the data, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Literature was included if it was peer-reviewed, published within the last 10 years (from 2016 onward), and directly addressed the primary education systems of Ethiopia and Singapore. Sources were excluded if they were non-peer-reviewed, outdated (published before 2016), lacked empirical evidence, or focused exclusively on secondary or higher education levels.

Following the identification of relevant literature, a thorough reading was conducted to extract pertinent data and key themes. Data extraction was performed using a standardized format, taking the author(s), year of publication, study objectives, findings related to primary education, policy implications, and conclusions. The data extracted were then organized into thematic categories: a) Objectives and structures, b) governance of primary education, and c) Curriculum and pedagogical practices. Recognizing the importance of comparability in cross-national studies, the study first established parameters to ensure the units of analysis were comparable. Then, a thematic analysis was conducted by coding the data according to emerging themes related to the research questions. To enhance the clarity and accessibility of the findings, the study employed data visualization techniques such as tables to present the disparities and similarities between the two countries.

Results and Discussion

Educational Purposes and Structures

This section provides a comparative overview of the primary education systems in Ethiopia and Singapore, highlighting their core objectives and structural features. By examining these aspects, it is possible to better understand how each country's unique socio-cultural, economic, and developmental contexts influence its educational priorities and practices. Table 1 below shows the key similarities and differences in the objectives and structural features of primary education in both nations.

Table 1: *The core objectives and structure features of primary education*

No	Aspect	Ethiopia	Singapore
1	Moral and ethical education	Develop the moral and ethical character of a citizen	Possess a good sense of self-awareness & a sound moral compass
2	Communication Skills	Use oral and literacy skills	Able to communicate effectively
3	Interpersonal Relationships	Develop harmonious interpersonal and social relationships	Be able to cooperate, share, and care for others
4	Civic Responsibility	Appreciate national unity, diversity, and cultural heritages	Be a concerned citizen with a strong civic consciousness
5	Lifelong Learning	Acquire knowledge useful for learning in middle school	Self-directed learners committed to lifelong learning
6	Health and Physical Education	Apply basic rules of hygiene, sanitation, and safety skills for health	Have healthy habits and awareness of the arts
7	Cultural Awareness	Appreciate national unity, diversity	Know and love Singapore
8	Educational Structure	Comprises grades 1-6. Total duration: 6 years	Comprises grades 1-6. Total duration: 6 years

Ethiopia: As shown in Table 1, the primary education system in Ethiopia is fundamentally designed to lay the groundwork for a child's moral, social, and cognitive development. The objectives emphasize cultivating moral and ethical character, fostering communication skills, encouraging interpersonal relationships, instilling civic responsibility, promoting lifelong learning, and ensuring health and cultural awareness (MoE, 2020). The Curriculum aims to produce well-rounded citizens who can contribute positively to society and continue their education in subsequent levels. Structurally, Ethiopia's primary education comprises grades 1 through 6, with a total duration of six years, aligning with the global standard for primary schooling (MoE, 2023). The Curriculum focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy skills, alongside social and moral education, with the medium of instruction predominantly Amharic language, although regional languages are also employed in certain areas (Fufa & Ensene, 2023). The structure is decentralized, with regional governments playing significant roles in Curriculum adaptation and implementation, which reflects Ethiopia's federal and diverse socio-cultural context (MoE, 2021).

Singapore: Singapore's primary education system is characterized by a clear focus on developing effective communicators, responsible citizens, and lifelong learners. Its objectives include fostering self-awareness and sound morals, effective communication skills, social

harmony through cooperation and sharing, civic consciousness, and a commitment to lifelong learning—aligning with the nation’s broader developmental goals (Kwek *et al.*, 2023). The Curriculum emphasizes holistic development, integrating academic proficiency with socio-emotional competencies, and promotes bilingualism, cultural awareness, and moral education (Kelly *et al.*, 2020). Structurally, Singapore’s primary education spans six years (grades 1 to 6), with a highly centralized governance system managed by the Ministry of Education (Marsella *et al.*, 2023). The system incorporates streaming and ability tracking from the early grades to cater to diverse student abilities, and it emphasizes pedagogical innovation to prepare students for a competitive, globalized economy (Kwek *et al.*, 2023). The Curriculum is designed with a focus on inquiry-based learning, digital literacy, and character education, reflecting Singapore’s strategic priorities for sustainable development and social cohesion (OECD, 2023) (see Table 1).

To compare, both Ethiopia and Singapore organize their primary education systems across six years, reflecting a common international standard aimed at providing foundational skills (Table 1). However, their core objectives diverge, shaped by their distinct socio-economic and cultural contexts. Ethiopia’s emphasis on moral, civic, and health education seeks to address its developmental challenges and promote social cohesion within a diverse and often resource-constrained environment (MoE, 2021). Conversely, Singapore’s objectives focus more on holistic development, bilingual competencies, and preparing students for a competitive global economy, consistent with its strategic development plans (Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

Structurally, both countries adopt a grade-based system spanning six years, yet their governance and curriculum implementation differ markedly. Ethiopia’s decentralized approach allows regional adaptation, accommodating linguistic and ethnic diversity, but faces challenges related to resource variability and standardization (Fufa & Ensene, 2023). Singapore’s centralized governance ensures uniformity and high standards across schools, supporting its reputation for exceptional educational performance (OECD, 2023).

In terms of curriculum content, Ethiopia’s focus remains on literacy, numeracy, and socio-moral values, with medium of instruction primarily in Amharic and regional languages, emphasizing national cohesion (MoE, 2020). Singapore’s curriculum integrates academic excellence with socio-emotional skills, bilingualism (English and Mother Tongue), and digital literacy, reflecting its economic and social ambitions Kelly *et al.*, (2020). The pedagogical approaches also differ, with Ethiopia grappling with issues of resource constraints and teacher training, while Singapore emphasizes pedagogical innovation, student-centered learning, and continuous professional development (Latchanna *et al.*, 2019; Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

In conclusion, the primary education systems in Ethiopia and Singapore both share a common structural framework of six years. However, their educational purposes diverge significantly, reflecting their unique socio-cultural and developmental priorities. Ethiopia emphasizes moral, civic, health, trilingual, and cultural education to foster social cohesion within its diverse context, with a decentralized approach to curriculum implementation. In contrast, Singapore

focuses on holistic development, bilingualism, socio-emotional skills, and preparing students for a competitive global economy through a highly centralized and innovative pedagogical system. These differences reflect each country's unique priorities: Ethiopia's focus on social and moral values within a decentralized framework, and Singapore's emphasis on academic excellence and socio-emotional skills within a highly centralized, standardized system.

Governance of Primary Education

This Section provides a comparative analysis of the governance structures, policy frameworks, and management practices that underpin primary education in Ethiopia and Singapore. Despite sharing the common goal of delivering quality education to all children, the two countries adopt markedly different approaches shaped by their unique socio-political contexts and developmental priorities. Table 2 below summarizes the key aspects of primary education governance in Ethiopia and Singapore.

Table 2: *Primary Education Governance of Ethiopia and Singapore*

	Aspects	Ethiopia	Singapore
No	Governing Structure	Decentralized governance through regional and city administrations; each region has its own Bureau of Education	Centralized policy control with decentralized implementation at the school level
1	Policy Setting	The Ministry of Education (MoE) sets the ETP, the curriculum framework, and syllabi	MOE centrally sets policy, the Curriculum, and provides approved curriculum materials
2	Curriculum development	Regions develop curriculum materials based on the directives of the central Ministry, reflecting local culture and needs (MoE, 2020, 2023).	Clusters/schools implement autonomously within the framework (Al-Thani, 2024).
3	Teacher Management	Regions train, employ, manage, and fire teachers, with some delegations for zones and woredas.	The Ministry centrally manages all credentialing; clusters support teacher deployment (Kwek <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
4	Resource Allocation	Resources for building, maintaining, and equipping schools are managed at the regional level with local input.	Funding is centrally allocated by the Ministry to ensure equitable resource distribution; local clusters share resources as needed
5	Community Role	Formal Education and Training Boards facilitate community direction and management at the Woreda level.	Cluster Superintendents provide professional, collaborative support and best practice sharing (Al-Thani, 2024).

Ethiopia adopts a decentralized governance model for primary education, characterized by significant authority being delegated to regional and local levels. Each regional Bureau of Education plays a pivotal role in implementing national policies, developing curriculum materials, managing teachers, and overseeing resource allocation within its jurisdiction. This

approach is rooted in Ethiopia's federal system, which accommodates its ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. The regional education bureaus are empowered to adapt policies and curricula to local contexts, which can enhance relevance and community participation but may lead to variability in quality and resource distribution across regions (Fufa & Ensene, 2023). The policy setting primarily resides with the Ministry of Education (MoE), which issues directives, curriculum frameworks, and syllabi, but the actual development and implementation are regionally driven (MoE, 2020). Teacher management is also regionally administered, with local authorities responsible for recruitment, employment, and firing, often facing challenges related to capacity and resource constraints (Latchanna *et al.*, 2019). Resource allocation is managed at the regional level, with local input, leading to disparities in infrastructure and instructional materials depending on regional wealth and priorities (MoE, 2023). The community's role is facilitated through formal Education and Training Boards at the woreda (district) level, which influences local decision-making and mobilizes community support.

Singapore, conversely, employs a centrally controlled but locally implemented governance system. The Ministry of Education (MOE) centrally formulates policies, sets curriculum standards, and approves curriculum materials to ensure uniformity and high standards across all schools (Kwek *et al.*, 2023). While policy directives are centrally issued, the actual implementation occurs at the cluster or school level, which enjoys a degree of autonomy in pedagogical practices and resource management, within the framework of national policies (Al-Thani, 2024). The MOE manages teacher credentialing and deployment centrally, ensuring consistent quality and standards in teacher recruitment, training, and professional development (Kwek *et al.*, 2023). Resource allocation is managed centrally by the MOE to promote equitable distribution of funding, infrastructure, and instructional materials across schools, regardless of location, thus minimizing disparities (OECD, 2023). Community involvement is facilitated through Cluster Superintendents, who support schools, promote best practices, and ensure alignment with national goals while fostering a collaborative relationship with local communities (Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

Regarding the simultaneous comparison of both nations' primary education systems, both Ethiopia and Singapore recognize the importance of effective governance in primary education but employ markedly different approaches. Ethiopia's decentralized model emphasizes regional autonomy, which allows for local adaptation and cultural relevance but risks variability in quality and resource distribution. This system is designed to reflect Ethiopia's diverse demographic makeup but faces challenges in maintaining consistent standards nationwide (Fufa & Ensene, 2023). Singapore's centralized model ensures uniformity, high standards, and quality control across all schools, which has been instrumental in its consistent top performance in international assessments (Kwek *et al.*, 2023; OECD, 2023). The centralized policy setting allows Singapore to implement reforms swiftly and uniformly, fostering high accountability and standardization (Al-Thani, 2024).

In Ethiopian primary education, teacher management, including recruitment, employment, and firing, is predominantly regional, which can lead to disparities in teacher quality and availability,

especially between urban and rural areas (Latchanna *et al.*, 2019). Resource management is also regional, and disparities are often linked to regional wealth, affecting infrastructure and instructional materials quality (MoE, 2020, 2023). Conversely, Singapore's centralized management of teachers and resources ensures that all schools adhere to uniform standards. The MOE centrally manages teacher credentialing, deployment, and professional development, which contributes to a highly qualified teaching workforce (Kwek *et al.*, 2023). Funding and resource distribution are also centrally managed to promote equity, reducing disparities among schools (OECD, 2023). This centralization underpins Singapore's ability to maintain high standards uniformly across its primary schools.

In summary, the comparative analysis reveals that Ethiopia and Singapore adopt fundamentally different governance models for primary education. Ethiopia's decentralized system empowers regional and local authorities to manage curriculum, teachers, and resources, reflecting its diverse socio-cultural landscape, but leading to variability in quality and resource allocation. In contrast, Singapore's centralized governance ensures uniform policy implementation, standardized teacher management, and equitable resource distribution, contributing to consistently high educational standards. While Ethiopia's approach allows for local relevance and community participation, Singapore's centralized model promotes high accountability, standardization, and excellence across all primary schools.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Practices

This Section provides a comparative analysis of the primary education systems of Ethiopia and Singapore, focusing on their curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies. Table 3 below summarizes the key differences and similarities across these aspects in the two countries, highlighting how their unique socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts shape their educational practices.

As depicted in Table 3, the primary education systems of Ethiopia and Singapore differ markedly in their curricula, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies, each reflecting their unique socio-cultural and developmental contexts.

Ethiopia's primary education curriculum is designed to promote literacy, numeracy, social, and moral development through a comprehensive set of subjects. The curriculum involves eight core subjects, including Mother Tongue, Federal Working Language, English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, Moral Education, Performing and Visual Arts, and Health and Physical Education (MoE, 2020). The medium of instruction is primarily in the regional languages, supporting Ethiopia's multilingual and multiethnic composition, which reflects an emphasis on cultural preservation and national cohesion (Fufa & Ensene, 2023). Pedagogically, Ethiopia faces challenges related to resource constraints, inadequate teacher training, and infrastructural deficits, which influence the implementation of student-centered or inquiry-based learning (Latchanna *et al.*, 2019). Assessments at the regional level involve regional exams, and certification is granted based on performance, with less emphasis on standardized national examinations at the primary level (Wondemetegn, 2016).

Table 3: *A Comparative Analysis of the Primary Education Curriculum Pedagogical Practices*

	Aspects	Ethiopian Primary Education	Singaporean Primary Education
No	Subjects taught	Eight subjects, including Mother Tongue, Federal Language, English, Mathematics, Env. Science, Moral Education, Performing and Visual Arts, HPE	Subjects include Mother Tongue (Chinese, Malay, or Tamil), English, Mathematics, Science (starting from G-3), Arts, Music, Moral Education, and Social Studies.
1	Language and Education	Trilingual focus: Mother Tongue, Federal language, and English. Mother tongue as medium of instruction; English as a subject from grade 1	Bilingual policy: English (medium of instruction) and mother tongue (Malay, Mandarin, or Tamil). Subjects taught in both languages
2	Curricular Emphasis	Focus on core competencies, co-curricular activities, and Extra-curricular activities to enhance learning	Emphasis on holistic development and lifelong learning principles, Character building, and values education
3	Assessment & Certification	Regions administer regional exams, grant certificates, and license private schools	Examinations and Assessment Board oversees national assessments; cluster superintendents facilitate collaboration on assessment implementation

Singapore's curriculum is characterized by its emphasis on holistic development, integrating academic mastery with socio-emotional, moral, and digital competencies. It includes subjects like Mother Tongue (Chinese, Malay, or Tamil), English, Mathematics, Science (from Grade 3 onwards), Arts, Music, Moral Education, and Social Studies (Kelly *et al.*, 2020). The bilingual policy involves instruction in English and the respective mother tongue, fostering bilingualism as a strategic national goal (Kwek *et al.*, 2023). Pedagogically, Singapore employs student-centered, inquiry-based, and differentiated instruction approaches, supported by continuous professional development for teachers to enhance pedagogical quality (Latchanna *et al.*, 2019). The assessment system is nationally standardized, with examinations overseen by the Examinations and Assessment Board, and cluster superintendents facilitate assessment implementation and moderation (Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

Regarding the simultaneous comparison of Ethiopia and Singapore's Curriculum and Pedagogical Practices, both countries incorporate multiple subjects aimed at fostering core competencies; Ethiopia emphasizes foundational literacy, numeracy, and moral education, while

Singapore's Curriculum emphasizes holistic development, including socio-emotional and digital literacy skills (Table 3).

Language instruction reflects their socio-cultural contexts: Ethiopia employs a trilingual approach, using regional languages and English, which aligns with its multilingual diversity and federal structure (Fufa & Ensene, 2023). Singapore follows a bilingual policy with English as the medium of instruction, and mother tongue languages taught as subjects, supporting national identity and bilingual proficiency (Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

Curricular emphasis diverges significantly: Ethiopia's focus is on core competencies, literacy, and moral values within resource-limited settings, often with regional adaptations (Latchanna *et al.*, 2019). Conversely, Singapore's curriculum prioritizes inquiry, creativity, and socio-emotional skills, supported by systemic reforms and teacher professional development (Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

Examinations also differ: Ethiopia relies on regional exams, which may vary in standardization and scope, partly due to resource limitations and decentralization (Fufa & Ensene, 2023). Singapore employs a centralized, standardized assessment system, emphasizing continuous moderation, reliability, and comparability to maintain high standards (Kwek *et al.*, 2023).

In conclusion, the comparative analysis reveals that Ethiopia and Singapore exhibit distinct approaches to primary education curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies, shaped by their socio-cultural and developmental contexts. Ethiopia's primary school curriculum emphasizes foundational literacy, numeracy, and moral education through a trilingual curriculum and resource-limited settings, with regional assessments reflecting decentralization. In contrast, Singapore prioritizes holistic development, inquiry-based learning, and socio-emotional skills within a centralized, standardized assessment framework. These differences illustrate how each Country's unique socio-economic, cultural, and political factors influence their approaches to primary education, with Ethiopia focusing on basic competencies and cultural preservation, while Singapore emphasizes holistic, skills-based learning and systemic quality assurance.

Lessons Ethiopia Can Learn from Singapore's Primary Education Model

The success of Singapore's primary education system offers a compelling framework for Ethiopia to enhance its own educational system. By analyzing Singapore's trajectory, four central lessons appear, including the necessity of long-term strategic planning, the adoption of differentiated instructional models, the optimization of limited resources, and the strategic integration of technology. These pillars provide a roadmap for Ethiopia to move toward a more resilient, high-performing, and equitable primary school system.

Long-term Strategic Planning: Singapore's successive reform phases, from survival-driven to holistic education, exemplify a sustained commitment to strategic, long-term educational development. Ethiopia can enhance its educational system by establishing cohesive and forward-looking policies with clearly defined milestones and implementation timelines. Such

long-term planning should prioritize stability and continuity, minimizing disruptions caused by changes in government or ideological shifts.

Adoption of Differentiated Instruction: Singapore's early implementation of ability tracking (streaming) enables tailored, differentiated instruction that aligns with students' individual abilities, thereby enhancing engagement, academic achievement, and overall learning effectiveness (Marsella *et al.*, 2023). Ethiopia can practically commit to adopting a structured approach to ability grouping and differentiated pedagogical strategies, as outlined in its education policy frameworks. By doing so, the country can better address the diverse learning needs within its student population, providing appropriate academic challenges and targeted support.

Resource Optimization: While resource constraints pose challenges, Ethiopia can learn from Singapore's efficient use of resources through targeted investments in teacher training, curriculum materials, and digital technologies to maximize impact.

Integration of Technology and Innovation: Singapore's integration of digital technologies into teaching and learning enhances engagement and prepares students for a digital economy. Ethiopia can gradually incorporate ICT tools into classrooms in both urban and rural schools, provide digital literacy training for teachers, and develop e-learning platforms to improve access and quality, especially in remote areas.

In summary, Ethiopia can learn from Singapore's primary education model by adopting long-term, strategic planning that ensures policy stability and continuity, free from political interventions. Emphasizing ability-based streaming and differentiated instruction can address diverse learner needs effectively. Additionally, optimizing resources through targeted investments and integrating technology into both urban and rural school classrooms will enhance pedagogical practices and prepare students for a digital future. These lessons highlight sustainable, evidence-based approaches to improve educational governance, curriculum, and pedagogy in Ethiopia's primary education system.

Conclusions

The comparative analysis of primary education systems in Ethiopia and Singapore highlights both shared structural characteristics and profound differences rooted in their socio-cultural and developmental contexts. While both countries employ a six-year primary education framework, their educational purposes diverge significantly, Ethiopia emphasizing moral, civic, health, and cultural education to foster social cohesion amid its diverse society, and Singapore prioritizing holistic development, bilingualism, and skills geared towards global competitiveness through a highly centralized and innovative pedagogical approach. Governance models further distinguish these systems; Ethiopia's decentralized framework promotes local relevance and community participation but can result in variability in quality and resource distribution, whereas Singapore's centralized governance ensures uniform standards, accountability, and high performance across schools. Curriculum content and pedagogical practices reflect these

priorities, with Ethiopia focusing on foundational literacy, numeracy, and moral education within resource-limited settings, and Singapore emphasizing inquiry-based, holistic, and socio-emotional learning within a standardized assessment environment. From this analysis, Ethiopia can learn valuable lessons from Singapore's strategic planning, resource optimization, and integration of technology—elements crucial for enhancing pedagogical practices, ensuring policy stability, and addressing diverse learner needs. Adopting such evidence-based approaches can support Ethiopia's goal of improving educational quality, equity, and relevance in its primary education system.

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