

EPREUVE ORALE D'ANGLAIS

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8. The Secret Path to Excellence

The rapid economic development of East Asian Tiger economies was heavily predicated on cultural norm-setting. As Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's economic miracle from 1959 to 1990 famously quipped: "culture is destiny". Lee Kuan Yew believed engendering specific cultural values was key to delivering prosperity, worked to promote a "culture of thrift, hard work, filial piety, and respect for elders and for scholarship and for learning".

It made a difference. Singapore has risen to become a First World Country, with a highly educated population, first-rate infrastructure, a population where 90% of people are homeowners, and a national unemployment rate of only 2%.

To achieve similar results in African education, educators, policy-makers, and parents need to adopt a similar mindset in designing the organizational culture of schools. If "culture is destiny" in firms and government, it is crucial that we help inculcate a culture of high performance in our schools.

People often think of "culture" as being abstract and emerging from organic or spontaneous processes. But as in the case of Singapore, it's clear culture can be deliberately engineered for excellence. It involves setting high expectations, norms, and systems that foster and reward excellence. Ultimately, culture is perhaps the simple most cost-effective intervention that can improve outcomes in African education. What is unique about culture is that it is the one variable in the educational equation that we can actually control, considering we have limited control over resources like teachers and textbooks. Inculcating effective high performance culture in schools doesn't require donor funding or government dollars, but the acquiescence and commitment of schools, headmasters, teachers and students to transform mindsets and attitudes.

Adapted from New African, January 2018Vocabulary

To quip: to make jokes

Mindset: mentality

Outcomes: results
