

Improve Access to Global Exposure in Local Education

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Few would disagree with the merits of obtaining a foreign education, that it "opens up young minds to the competing cultures of the world" ("Aim for good rankings and right values"; Sept 23).

In fact, within the local universities, there are already plenty of opportunities for students to head overseas for a sojourn: exchange programmes with partner colleges, internship stints at foreign companies or within bustling start-up ecosystems, as well as courses at summer schools.

Undergraduates have also arranged overseas community projects around the world, immersing themselves in new experiences.

I benefited from the five months I spent in Helsinki, Finland last year.

As an exchange student at Aalto University, I paid a visit to a Finnish couple to explore the contents of their maternity package, observed classroom proceedings in an elementary school, and interviewed representatives to find out more about student unions in the country.

Singapore has had a longstanding fascination with Finland, especially its education system and generous welfare provisions, so spending time in the country was meaningful.

The only issue? The total cost of the experience.

Even without frivolous expenses or trips around the region, I had to save up beforehand after my national service and through part-time jobs.

Some schools in Singapore may be generous with their grants and bursaries for students from low-income households, but many students are still apprehensive about the financial investments needed.

Pragmatically, it would also make more sense to work over mid-year vacations, since one is compensated for the labour, and the work experience could even translate into future careers.

In this vein, it has been argued that "(at) much lower cost, (local education) could bring the world home to Singapore".

I agree. Two things should follow.

First, while communicating the many global programmes and the corresponding financial support made available, universities should be proud of the international representation within their own institutions.

In addition, they should encourage greater interaction between Singaporean and foreign students - beyond superficial get-togethers - in the form of collaborative projects.

Second, universities must resist xenophobic, short-sighted arguments that places must be reserved for Singaporeans, or that foreigners are not welcome.

An inward-looking education system will only erode the country's competitiveness in the future.

Kwan Jin Yao