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Transition to Post-Secondary Vocational Technical Education: What Matters to Singapore Students

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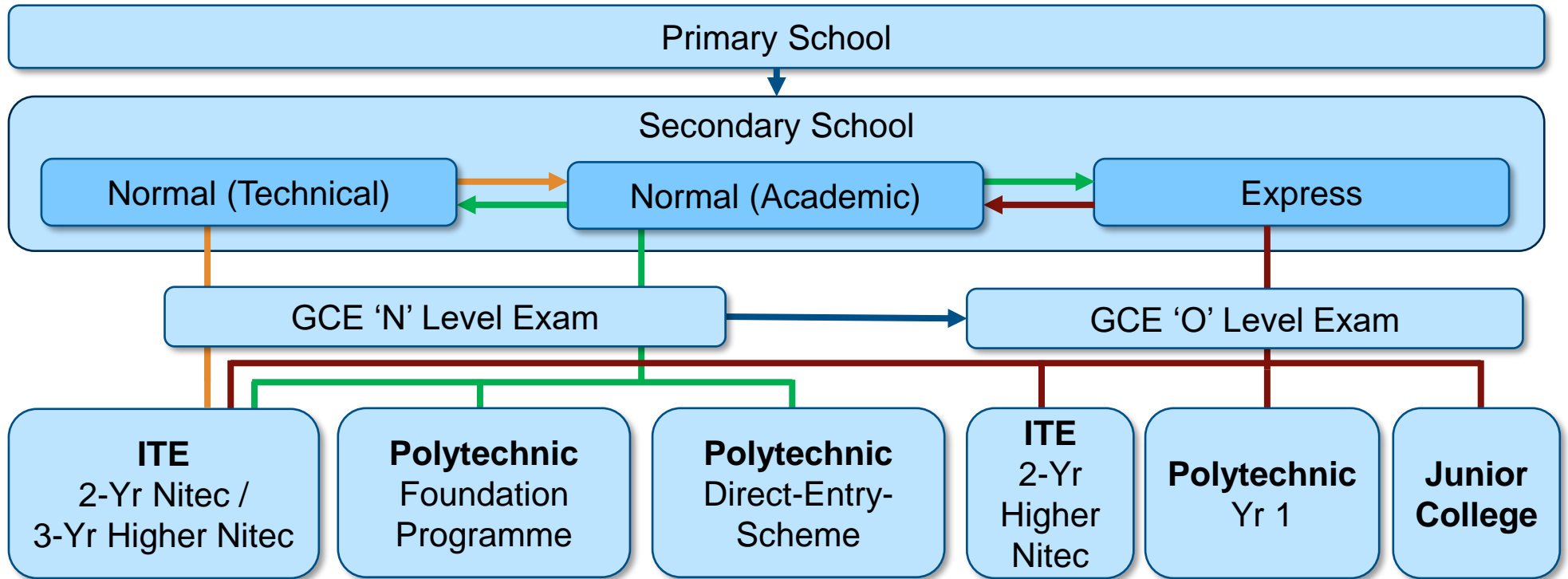
Presentation Outline

- Background of Study
- Focus of Study
- Research Methodology
- Key Findings and Discussion
- Conclusion

Overview of Singapore Education System

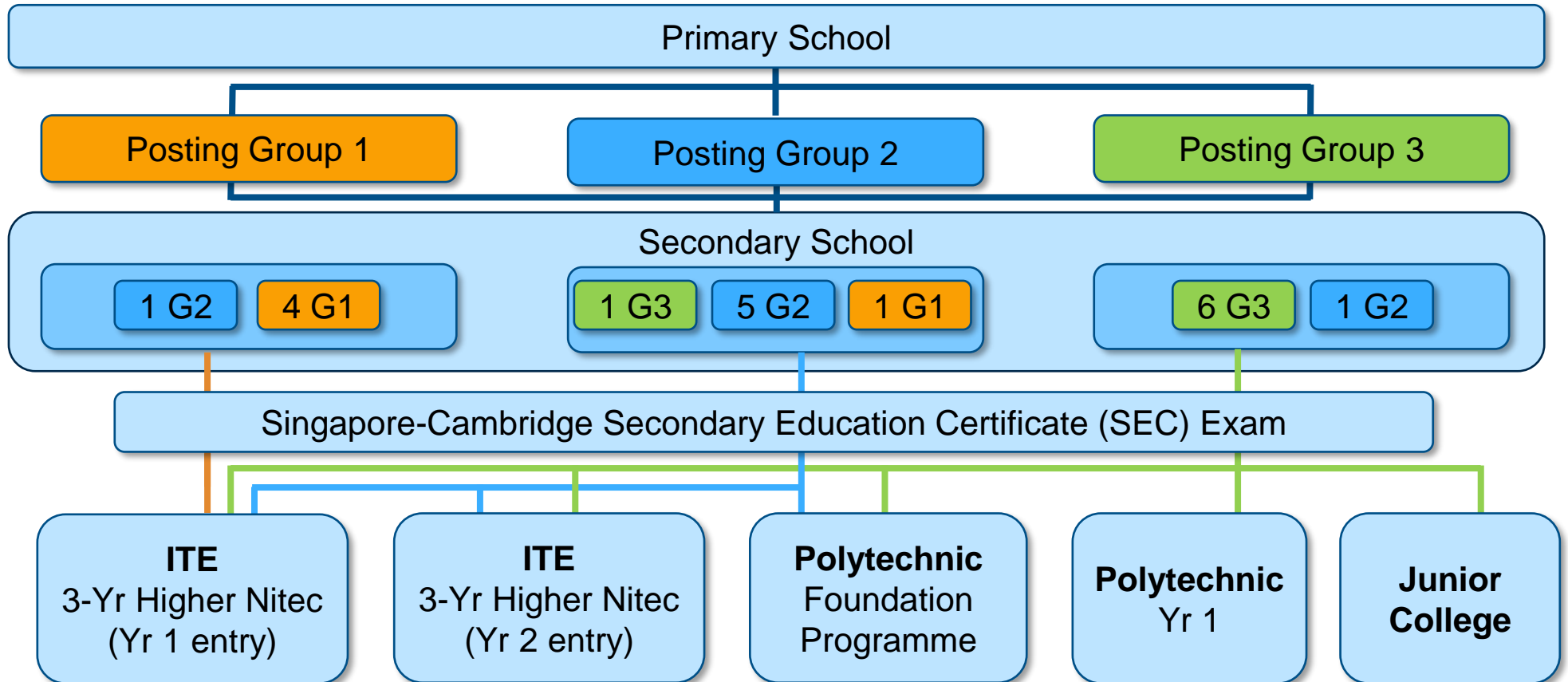
- The aim of Singapore's education system is to bring out the best in every child regardless of their starting point in life.
- We aim for our students to be:
 - Confident persons
 - Self-directed learners
 - Active contributors
 - Concerned citizens
- Multiple educational pathways have been established to cater to students' strengths, interests, and learning needs.

Educational Pathways Today



Source: Ministry of Education, Singapore

Educational Pathways under Full Subject-Based Banding



Source: Ministry of Education, Singapore

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- Yearly intake for ITE is about 14,000 to 15,000 students, which is about 24% of the total number of students graduated from secondary education.

	JC	Poly	ITE	Total
2022	25,231	20,461	14,577	60,269
2021	25,349	20,486	14,738	60,573
2020	26,005	21,014	14,661	61,680
2019	27,532	22,071	15,147	64,750
2018	29,012	23,869	14,819	67,700

Source: Education Statistics Digest 2023 by Ministry of Education, Singapore

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- More than 80% of ITE fresh graduates would gain employment approximately six months after their final examinations, with higher median gross monthly salary.

	No. of Graduates	Proportion of ITE Graduates in the Labour Force	Median Gross Monthly Salary
2022	13,332	81.5%	\$1,920
2021	13,224	80.5%	\$1,800
2020	13,144	73.4%	\$1,720
2019	12,595	85.0%	\$1,700
2018	13,421	75.9%	\$1,700

Source: Graduate Employment Survey conducted by ITE

Focus of Study

- The profile of ITE in Singapore has been refreshed over time and there are better opportunities available for technical education. But how do **students in the ITE feel about this post-secondary option?** What is the **experience of their transition from secondary school to tertiary education** like?

Framing of Study

- Social and psychological resources were used as a frame for the study. Specifically, focus is paid to -
 - i. Social capital such as family, peers, and teachers support,
 - ii. Psychological capital consisting of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, and
 - iii. Psychological processes comprising the need for having autonomy, the need to develop competency, and the need for related with others.
- These resources have been recognized for their influence on decision-making processes (Van Petegem et al., 2012), and for making transitions to a new environment (Helsen et al., 2000; Smetana et al., 2006).

Research Methodology

- 18 students who had attended or were attending a course at ITE had accepted the invitation to participate in the interview.
- A total of 18 sessions of one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted. The duration of each session was about 60 minutes.
- To identify the potential interviewees, cluster analysis was performed using survey data on students' social and psychological capital which was obtained from a larger mixed method longitudinal study of 1271 students. This allowed a spread of participants.

- Some of the broad interview questions that were used to guide the discussion include:

How did you decide on this course? What/who motivated you to decide on this course?

What role did your family play on your education? How did you feel about it?

Did you receive any advice on your next education choice when you were in secondary school? What do you think about it?

Did you receive any support from your peers? How did you feel about it?

Key Findings and Discussion

The Transition to ITE – Psychological Resources

- Based on the insights gathered, students who transited well to post-secondary education tended to have **higher psychological capital**. They would:
 - Consider the **safest pathway to increase the odds** of progressing onto next stage of education.
 - **Make own decisions** based on their long-term goals and have the **will to succeed**.
 - Remain optimistic about the future and would choose courses that lead to **stable and economically viable jobs**.
 - Decide on courses that could **develop their competency**, and taking the **ITE course as a stepping stone** for their future study in polytechnic, **turning disappointments into opportunities**.

The Transition to ITE – Family Support

- Students with **strong family support** could have a smooth transition to post-secondary education. These support can be seen in the following ways:
 - Receiving **words of encouragement** from family during decision-making process.
 - Students with well-educated parents do **receive more concrete support** as compared to those with limited exposure and are unable to keep current of the available educational options.
 - Taking parents or a close relative as the **role model** and consider their pathways.
 - Developing **strong relationship** with parents and would **involve them in the decision-making process**. BUT, student may be overly-dependent on them.

The Transition to ITE – Peers Support

- Thirdly, students were able to make informed decisions with the **strong support from their peers**. These include:
 - Consulting **school seniors or older peers who had similar experiences** before making decisions.
 - Seeking **practical advice from peers in non-technical pathway** who would guide students in realizing their long-term goals.
 - **Receiving continuous support and encouragement from trusted peers** who could provide different perspectives on the decisions to be made.

The Transition to ITE – Teachers Support

- Lastly, **the presence of meaningful support from the teachers** could help with the students' transition from secondary to post-secondary education. These include:
 - **Seeking advice from teachers whom they could trust and are comfortable with** (e.g., class form teachers) during the decision-making process.
 - **Sharing of teachers' personal experience** with students as a form of motivation.

Conclusion

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- The unevenness of post-secondary pathways and transitions is clear. In Singapore, **students tend to be pragmatic** when making their post-secondary choices. They would prefer to take up courses that could lead them to **stable jobs which are economically viable**, and in turn, achieve the lives that they desire.
- To do this, students would **use their social resources to move ahead. Those with higher social capital are likely to take on different trajectories due to the concrete support and practical advice** provided by those within their social circle.
- **For those who have lower social resources, they may not be as well-informed as those with higher social resources. This could possibly result in students making unwise choices**, leading them to drop out from courses or even having regrets about their decisions in the later stage of their academic pursuit.
- Clearly, the extent of social support that the students receive from their family, teachers, and peers, and the students' psychological capital, could possibly shape their educational choices. **If students are not guided well, their educational and career trajectories may be affected.**

Question and Answer

Thank you