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An Analysis of the Demography of Singapore: A South-East Asian Island over the Years

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Abstract

Singapore, also known as the Garden City or the Lion City, is consisted of a main island of diamond shape along with 62 more islets (Britannica,2020). The country is the global hub for finance, commerce and transport. It is entitled as the "easiest place to do business" by the World Bank. It is the 3rd largest foreign exchange centre, 3rd largest financial centre and 3rd largest oil refining and trading centre and also contains one of the top two busiest ports in the world. The core principles of the nation are meritocracy, secularism and multiculturalism. The massive economic growth of Singapore since 1980, along with a radical change in its demography is due to the incorrupt and pragmatic governance, often cited as the 'Singapore model'. An analysis of some of the characteristics of demography of Singapore will enable us to have an understanding of the gradual evolution and development of demography in Singapore. Since Singapore has a great economic importance to a certain extent among the southeast Asian nations, hence, an analysis of the demography of the country shall be beneficial for determining the various aspects of growth and development of the country. In this research work, based on secondary an analysis of the demography of Singapore has been done. Results reveal that the demographic changes of the country has been beneficial to a certain extent in aiding development of the country.

Keywords: *Demography, Economic growth, Development, Multiculturalism, demographic changes*

1. **Introduction:** Singapore is located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula and lies about 137 kms north of the equator. It comprises of the diamond-shaped Singapore island along with some 60 small islets. The main island of Singapore is separated from the Peninsular Malaysia which lies in the north by the Johor Strait, a narrow channel crossed by a road and rail causeway. It is more than half a mile long. The southern limit run through the Singapore strait where outliers of the Riau-Lingga archipelago, a part of Indonesia extending to within 10 miles of the main island (Britannica,2017). Singapore is the largest port in Southeast Asia on one hand and one of the busiest in the world on the other (Richard, 2016). The focal position of Singapore at the southern extremity of the Malay Peninsula, where it dominates the Strait of Malacca that connects the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea can be attributed to the growth and prosperity of Singapore.

The region saw social unrest which resulted in colonial powers deciding to relinquish some decision making in the 1950s. The colonial powers sought to empower and establish a formidable local government with spurs of race riots (Salazar-Xirinach et al, 2014). The Economic

Development Board was formed as a solution of the unrest resulting from high unemployment (World Bank, 2019). This Board was formed to empower the Singapore government in establishing, developing, and financing industrial undertakings. Singapore faced a small domestic market, and high levels of unemployment and poverty, upon independence from Malaysia in 1965. 70% of Singapore's households lived in badly overcrowded conditions. One third of its people squatted in slums on the city fringes (UN-Habitat, 2003). Unemployment averaged 14 percent, GDP per capita was US\$516, and half of the population was illiterate. However, now, the Singapore economy is one of the most stable in the world, with no foreign debt, high government revenue and a consistently positive surplus.

The country is the global hub for finance, commerce and transport. It is entitled as the “easiest place to do business” by the World Bank. It is the 3rd largest foreign exchange centre, 3rd largest financial centre and 3rd largest oil refining and trading centre and also contains one of the top two busiest ports in the world. The core principles of the nation are meritocracy, secularism and multiculturalism. The massive economic growth of Singapore since 1980, along with a radical change in its demography is due to the incorrupt and pragmatic governance, often cited as the “Singapore model” (CNBC, 2016).

Singapore rapidly developed from a low-income country to a high-income country in the decades after independence (World Bank, 2019). The GDP growth in the country has been amongst the world's highest. The GDP grew at an average of 7.7% since independence and topping 9.2% in the first 25 years. In the 1960s after rapid industrialization catapulted the island nation's development trajectory, manufacturing became the main driver of growth. In the early 1970s, Singapore reached full employment. It joined the ranks of Hong Kong SAR, Republic of Korea, and Taiwan a decade later as Asia's newly industrializing economies. Singapore ranks the best country in the world in human capital development, according to the World Bank Human Capital Index. This implies that a child born today in Singapore will be 88% as productive when she grows up, as if she enjoyed complete education and full health. Along with strong financial support from the government, the country continues to strengthen the nimbleness and flexibility of its workforce by providing continuing education such as the **Skillsfuture** initiative and the Government spending on continuing education will nearly double, to more than S\$1 billion yearly.

Singapore holds the majority population as immigrant Chinese (75.9 % of resident population) followed by 15% Malay, an Indian minority of 7.5% and small number of Eurasians Armenians, Arab, Japanese, Nepalis, Koreans, Pakistani, Sri Lankans and Peranakan making Singapore a multicultural and multiracial country. The recognised indigenous community of Singapore is the Malays, although most of them are descendents of the post-1945 Indonesian and Malaysian immigrants. The country is tolerant to all races since the racial disharmony experienced by Singapore during the racial riots of 1964. In order to commemorate the riot of 1964, Singapore celebrates Racial Harmony Day on 21st July.

Singapore is known internationally for its successful economic development. Over the past 50 years since its independence the key to its economic successes is a variety of policies put into place. Demography is considered an important subject capable of throwing light on the nature of population education. The Oxford Dictionary of Economics defines demography as “**The study of the characteristics of human populations.**” According to the UN Multilingual Demographic Dictionary, “Demography is the scientific study of human populations, primarily with respect to their size, their structure and their development.” According To Barckley, “The numerical portrayal

of human population is known as demography.” While Thomson and Lewis, stated “The population student is interested in population’s size, composition and distribution; and in changes in these aspects through time and causes of these changes.”

The study of demography is of immense importance to an economy as this helps us to know how far the growth rate of the economy is keeping pace with the growth rate of population because if population is increasing at a faster rate, the pace of development of the economy will be slow. Rapid growth of population reduces per capita income, lowers the standard of living, plunges the economy into mass unemployment and under employment and exerts burden on the existing social infrastructure.

Demographic studies highlights these and enables the government to undertake appropriate measures. The government can undertake appropriate measures to control the growth of population and take measures to accelerate the development of the economy.

An analysis of some of the characteristics of demography of Singapore will enable us to have an understanding of the gradual evolution and development of demography in Singapore. Since Singapore has a great economic importance to a certain extent among the southeast Asian nations, hence, an analysis of the demography of the country shall be beneficial for determining the various aspects of growth and development of the country. Demography plays a key role to a considerable extent in the economic, social and cultural development of any country. Demographic change influences the underlying growth rate of the economy, structural productivity growth, living standards, savings rates, consumption, and investment. It can influence the long-run unemployment rate and equilibrium interest rate, housing market trends, and the demand for financial assets. In formulating policies for the economic plan of the country data relating to the present trend in population growth help the planners. These are kept in view while fixing targets of agricultural and industrial products, of social and basic services like schools and other educational institutions, hospitals, houses, electricity, transport, etc and are also used by the planners to project future trends in fertility and to formulate policy measures to control the birth rate. Demographic studies help the administrators who run the government. Almost all social and economic problems are associated with the growth of population and the administrator has to tackle and find solutions to the problems arising from the growth of population.

Singapore has made immense development post-independence, hence an understanding of the demography of the country will help in understanding the some of the factors that led to development of the country and can be beneficial for the other developing countries in their strive for economic and social development.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this research work are the following:

- Analysis of the demographic characteristics of Singapore
- Identifying the proportion of ethnic population in Singapore
- Understanding the proportion of the growth, share of the resident and non-resident population in the total population of Singapore.

3. Methodology:

The following chart explains the methodology followed for this work.



- **Identification of the Study Area:** Singapore has been selected as the study area after in-depth and broad review of various types of literature. This island nation of South East Asia has made immense development over quite a short time span.
- **Review of Literature** has been done from various reports and journals
- **Secondary data** collected from the Census of Population, 2020 published by Department of Statistics, Singapore
- **Analysis of the collected data** has been done using cartograms followed by their interpretations.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

4.1.1 Population Size and Growth

The total population of Singapore grew at the rate 1.1% per year in the decade between 2010 and 2020. The total population of Singapore has increased significantly since 2000 (Fig 1). However, the rate of increase in the decade between 2000 to 2010 has been greater compared to that between 2010 and 2020. The figure 1 shows the rate of growth of total population of Singapore.

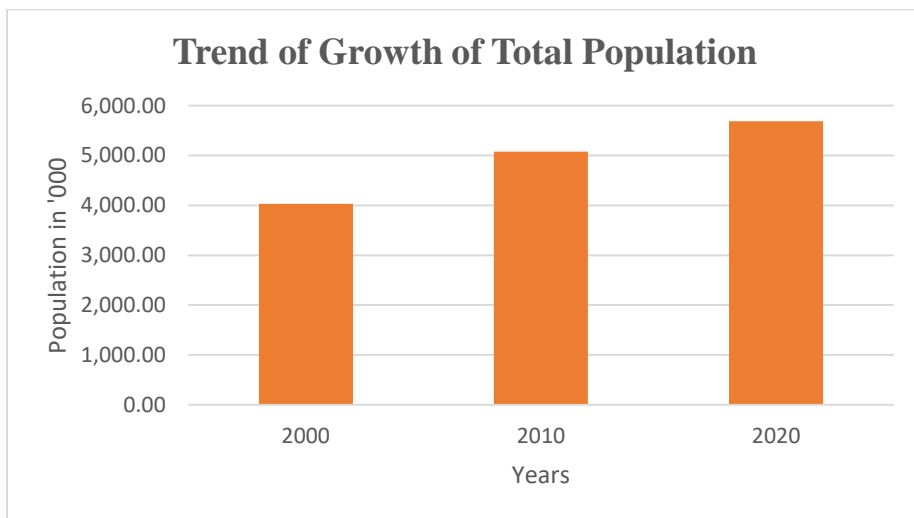


Fig 1: Showing the trend of total population of Singapore
Data Source: Census of Population, 2020, Department of Statistics, Singapore

On the basis of residential status, the size and growth of population of Singapore has been analysed since 2000 to 2020. The proportion of citizens has decreased since 2000 to 2020. The rate of decrease has been more in the decade between 2000 and 2010 compared to that in 2010 to 2020 (Fig 2). There has been a significant increase in the proportion of permanent residents from 2000 to 2010 but this has decreased from 2010 to 2020. The corona virus induced pandemic and associated economic uncertainties may have contributed to this (Fig 2). The proportion of the non-resident population has increased over the years. The proportion of increase has been more in the decade between 2000 to 2010 compared to that to 2010 to 2020.

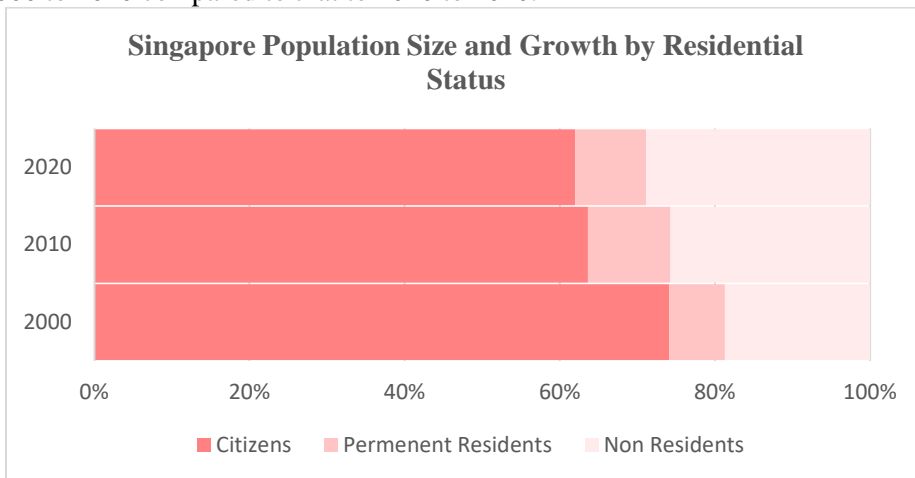


Fig 2: Showing the population size and growth of Singapore by Residential Status

Data Source: Census of Population, 2020, Department of Statistics, Singapore

According to the Census of Population, 2020, published by the Department of Statistics, Singapore, the citizens of Singapore and the permanent residents of Singapore are classified as Singapore residents. Non-citizens who have been granted permanent residence in Singapore are referred to as permanent residents. The non-resident population comprises of foreigners who are working, studying or living in Singapore but have not been granted permanent residence, excluding tourists and short-term visitors.

4.1.2 Age Structure

The median age of resident population of Singapore increased 37.4 years in 2010 to 41.5 years in 2020 which implies population ageing in Singapore (Fig 3).

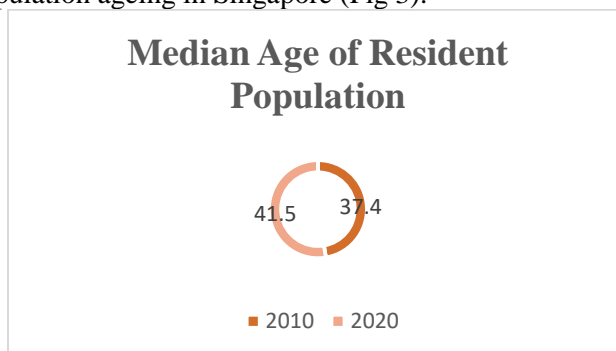


Fig 3: Showing Median Age of Resident Population, Data Source: Census of Population, 2020, Department of Statistics, Singapore

Singapore has witnessed an increase in the resident old age dependency ratio which increased from 13.5 in 2010 to 23.4 in 2020. Dependency ratio implies residents aged 65 years and over per 100 residents aged 20-64 years. The resident population of Singapore continued to age which is reflected in the increase in the proportion of the resident population aged 65 years and above from 9% in 2010 to 15.2% in 2020 while the proportion of residents aged below 15 years fell to 14.5% in 2020 from 17.4% in 2010 (Fig 4).

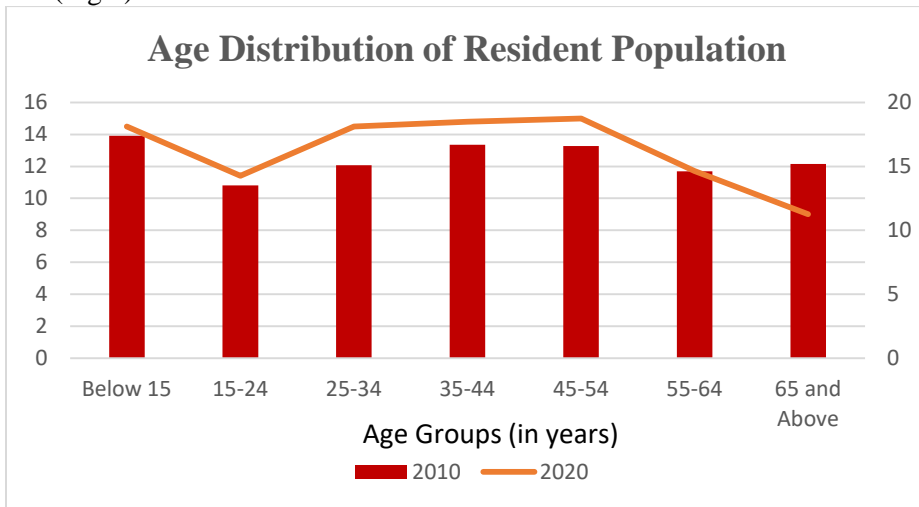


Fig 4: Showing Age distribution of Resident Population, Data Source: Census of Population, 2020, Department of Statistics, Singapore

4.1.3 Age Dependency Ratios

As the increase in old-age dependency ratio (residents aged 65 years and over per 100 residents aged 20-64 years) outpaced the drop in child dependency ratio (residents aged below 20 years per 100 residents aged 20-64 years) hence, the dependency ratio increased to 54.0 in 2020 from 50.0 in 2010. The child dependency ratio decreased from 36.5 in 2010 to 30.6 in 2020, while the old-age dependency ratio increased from 13.5 to 23.4 over the same period.

4.1.4 Ethnic Composition

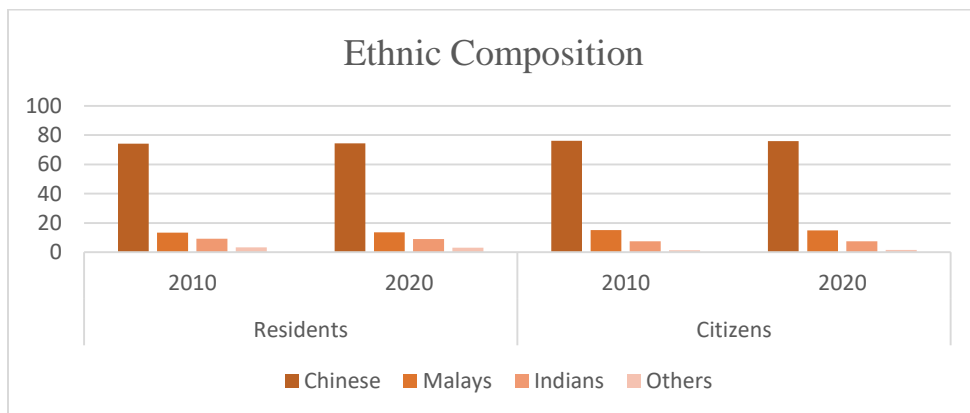


Fig 5: Showing Ethnic Composition of Population, Data Source: Census of Population, 2020, Department of Statistics, Singapore

The ethnic composition of the resident and citizen population of Singapore remained stable. In 2020, Chinese, Malays and Indians constituted 74.3 per cent, 13.5 per cent and 9.0 per cent of the resident population respectively while among the citizen population, the shares of Chinese, Malays and Indians were 75.9 per cent, 15.0 per cent and 7.5 per cent respectively (Fig 5).

4.1.5 Education Profile

Among residents aged 25 years and over in 2020, 58.3% attained post-secondary or higher qualifications, up from 46.5 per cent in 2010 which shows that the education profile of the resident population improved between 2010 and 2020 (Fig 6).

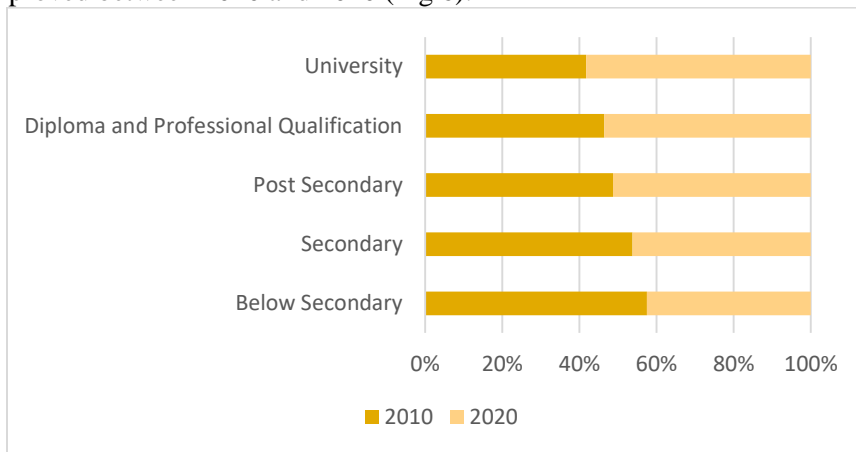


Fig 6: Showing Resident Population Aged 25 Years and Over by Highest Qualification Attained, Data Source: Census of Population, 2020, Department of Statistics, Singapore

The literacy rate among the resident population aged 15 years and above increased to 97.1% in 2020 from 95.9% in 2010. In fact, multilanguage literacy also became more prevalent which means among those who were literate more could read in two or more languages. Multi-language literacy increased from 70.5% in 2010 to 74.3% in 2020. The literacy rate among the ethnic population also remained high.

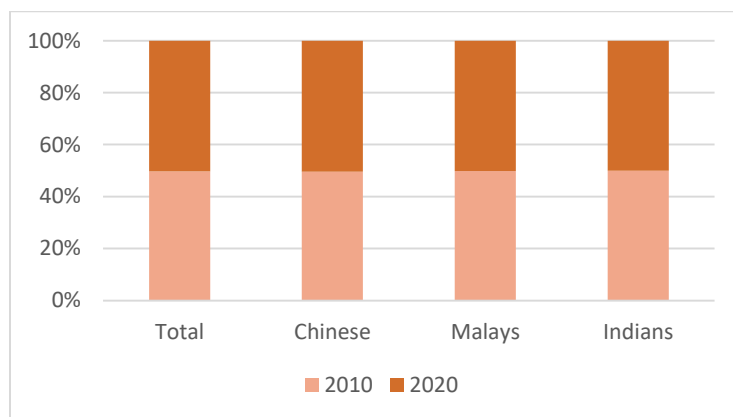


Fig 7: Literacy Rate Among Residents Aged 15 Years and Over by Ethnic Group, Data Source: Census of Population, 2020, Department of Statistics, Singapore

5. Major Findings:

The major findings of this research work can be summarized as follows:

- There has been increase in the total population from 2000 to 2020.
- The rate of growth of total population has been greater in the decade between 2000 to 2010 compared to the decade between 2010 and 2020.
- The proportion of the non-resident population has increased considerably.
- The median age of population of the resident population has increased from 37.4years in 2010 to 41.5years in 2020.
- Resident old age dependency ratio has increased from 13.5 in 2010 to 23.4 in 2020.
- The resident ethnic distribution remained more or less the same.
- Overall, the dependency ratio increased to 54.0 in 2020 from 50.0 in 2010
- The increase in old-age dependency ratio outpaced the drop in child dependency ratio.
- The child dependency ratio decreased from 36.5 in 2010 to 30.6 in 2020, while the old-age dependency ratio increased from 13.5 to 23.4 over the same period.
- The education profile of the resident population improved between 2010 and 2020.
- Up from 46.5 per cent in 2010 among the residents aged 25 years and over in 2020, 58.3 per cent attained post-secondary or higher qualifications.
- The Chinese, Malay and Indian communities living in Singapore all saw improvements in their educational attainment.
- Over the years, female residents have made more significant progress in education.
- Among residents aged 55 years and over in 2020, the proportion with post-secondary or higher qualifications was 34.0 per cent for males and 22.8 per cent for females.
- Among those aged 35-44 years, 84.2 per cent for male and 81.8 per cent for females had post-secondary or higher qualifications.
- Among those aged 25-34 years, the proportion for females (90.2 per cent) marginally exceeded their male counterparts (90.0 per cent).

It can be concluded from the demographic analysis of Singapore, that the demography also plays a crucial in the development of the country. The rapid development of the economy of Singapore can to a certain extent be attributed to the slow pace of growth of population in the country. Moreover, the multi racial people migrated to this country also played their parts either directly or indirectly in the development of the country. The education sector also made remarkable progress over the years. Hence, it can be said that demography has an important role to a certain extent in the development of a region.

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