

Rethinking pathways: Comparing the career capital of knowledge workers in Australia and Singapore

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Introduction

- Policy significance of learners pathways in Singapore and Australia
 - Bradley Review (2008) in Australia
 - Singapore CET Masterplan
- This study rethinks pathways and contributes to conference theme (and knowledge) in three ways:
 - understanding movements of two samples in Australia and Singapore (*in context*)
 - investigating movement between educational sectors through life rather than transition from school (*in focus*)
 - interpreting the above through the lens of accumulating career capital (*in conceptual framework*)
- Research issue: how individuals in two different national contexts manage and leverage their career capital

Research significance

- Need for research on types of pathways other than transition from school to work
- Access to different forms of post-school education is critical especially in a society committed to lifelong learning and an economy requiring a knowledgeable, skilled and adaptable workforce
- Careers – increasingly the responsibility of individuals:
 - ‘career investment behavior’ (Greller 2006)
 - ‘career self-management’ (King 2004)
- ‘This paper focuses on *learners* in contrast to *structural* matters (such as articulation, sectoral blurring, accreditation)

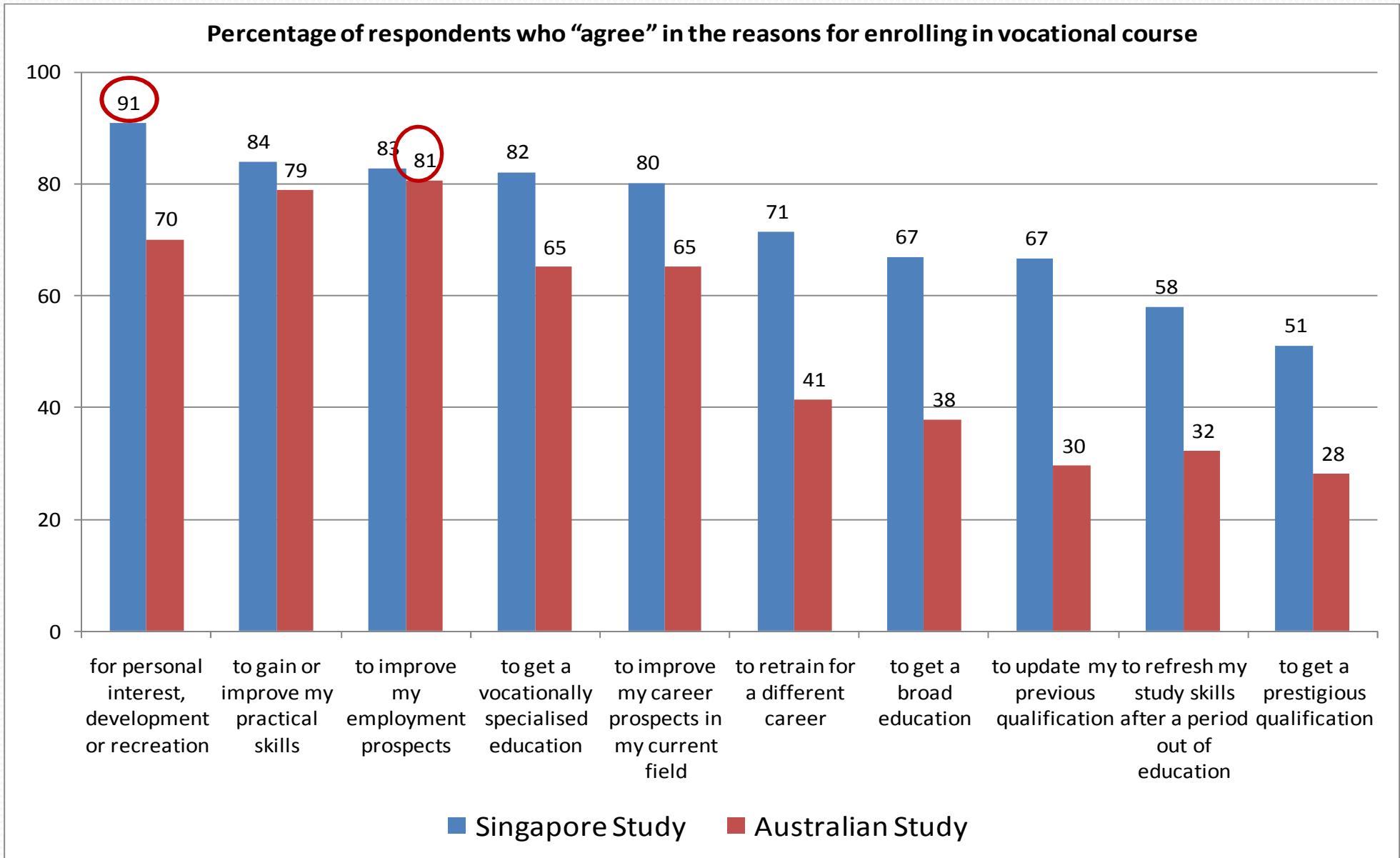
Background information

- Singapore Workforce Skills Classification (WSQ)
 - national credentialling system that trains, develops, assesses and recognises adult workers for competencies to enhance their employability
 - covers six levels from certificates to graduate diploma over 26 industry frameworks
- Career capital
 - identify own career motivations, personal meaning and self-awareness (**knowing-why** capital),
 - develop occupational skills, knowledge and understanding needed for good performance (**knowing-how** capital)
 - acquire career-relevant networks and contacts (**knowing-whom** capital).

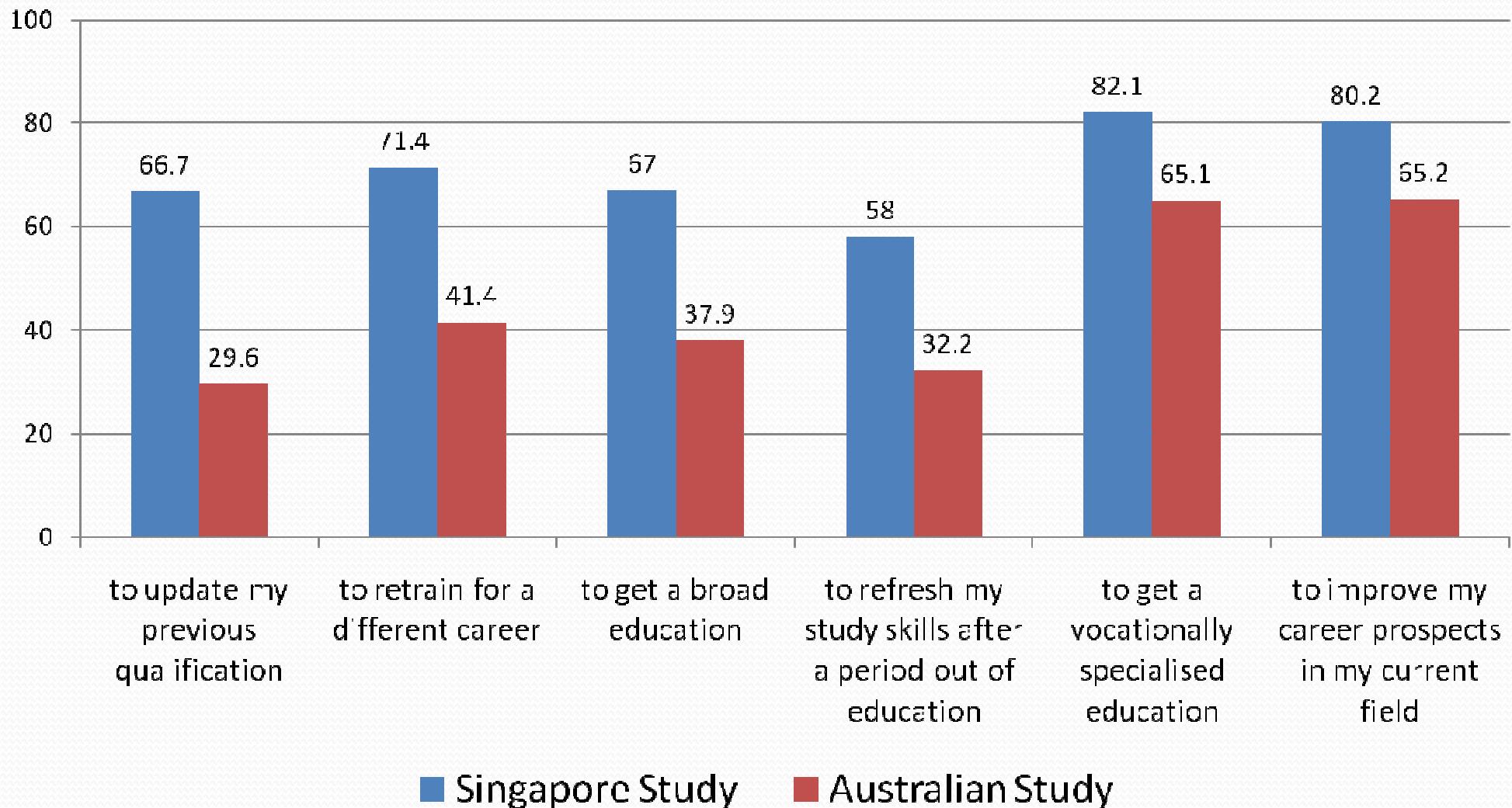
Research process

	Singapore	Australia
Survey samples	N=101, from 6 (of 26) WSQ frameworks	N=190, from TAFE institutes in SA
Interviews	N=30	N=22
Brief description of samples	79% male 61% over 40 years of age 59% employed fulltime	44% male 23% less than 25 yrs old, 36% 35-54 years old 55% employed fulltime

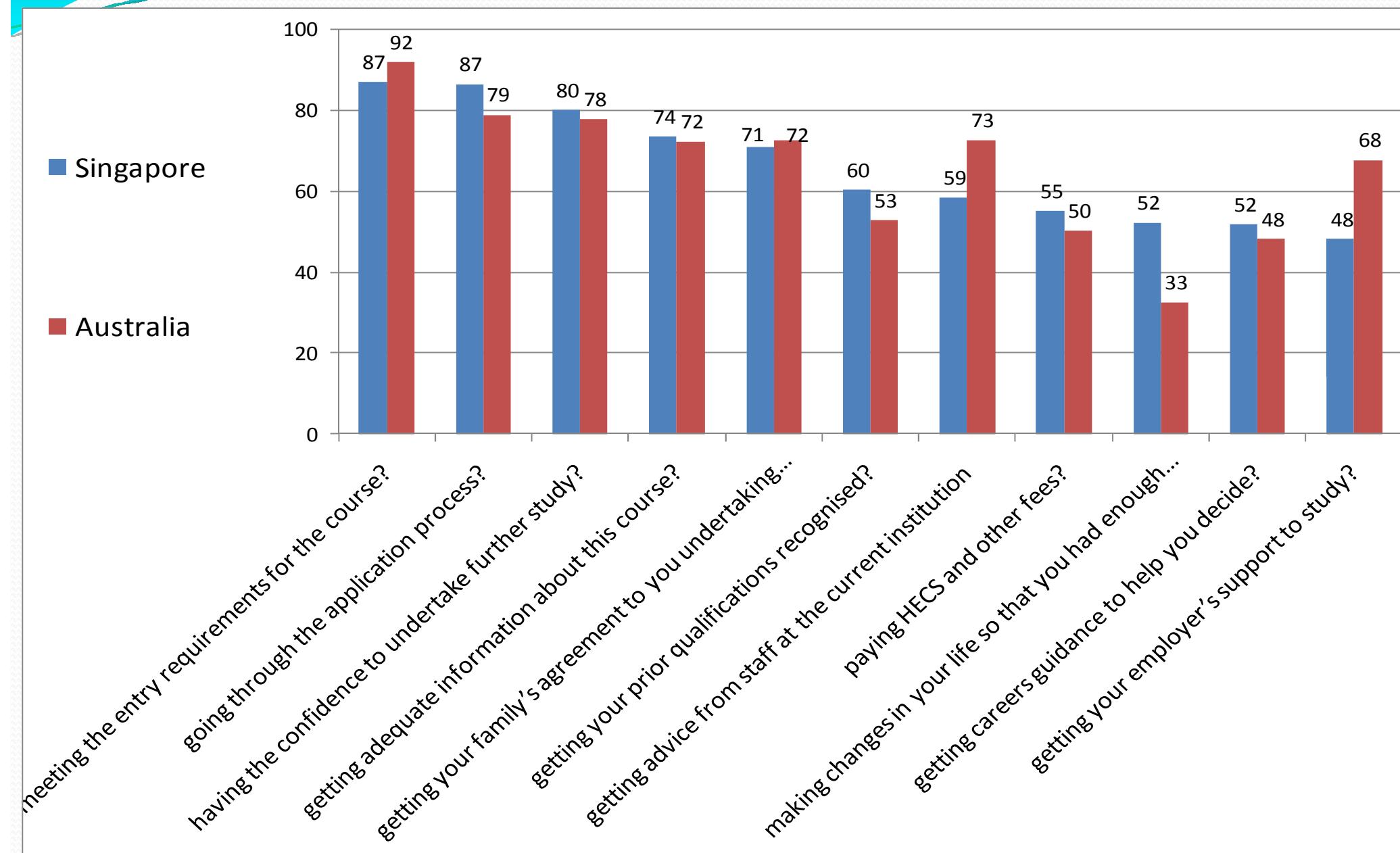
1. Motivation for enrolling in vocational education



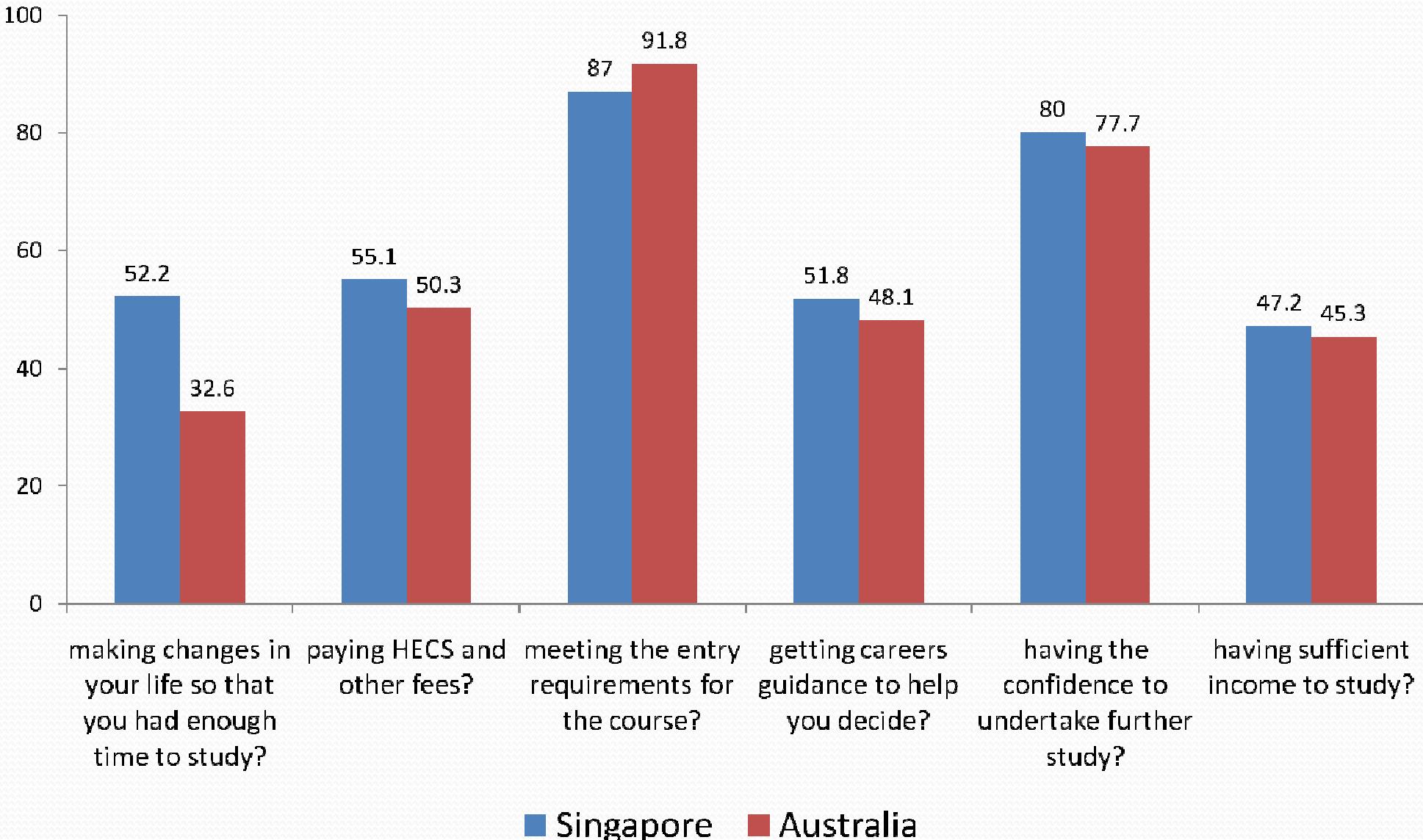
Motivations that showed major differences in level of agreement between the two groups



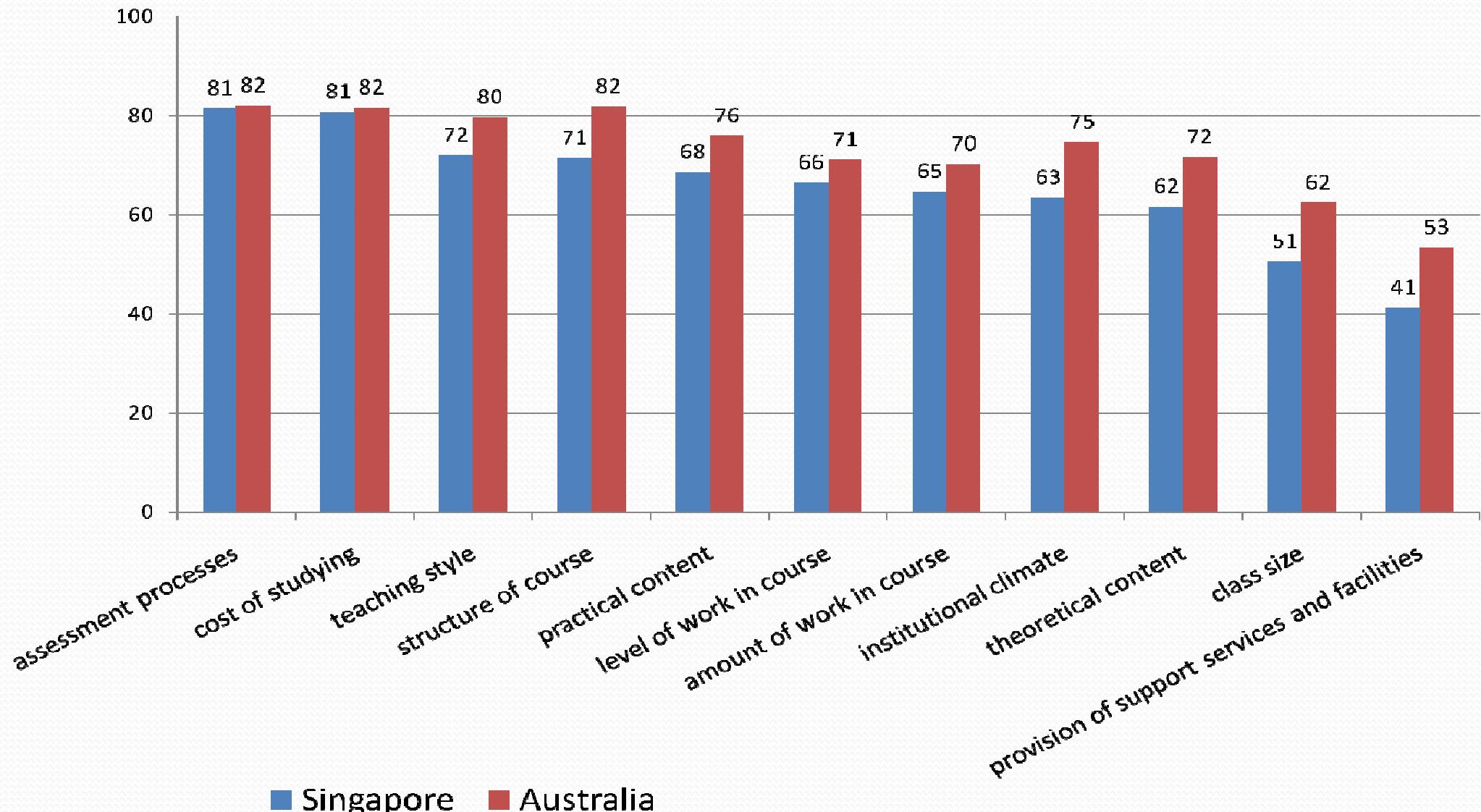
2. Ease in moving from academic to vocational sector (%)



Major differences of the two groups in ease of moving from academic to vocation sector



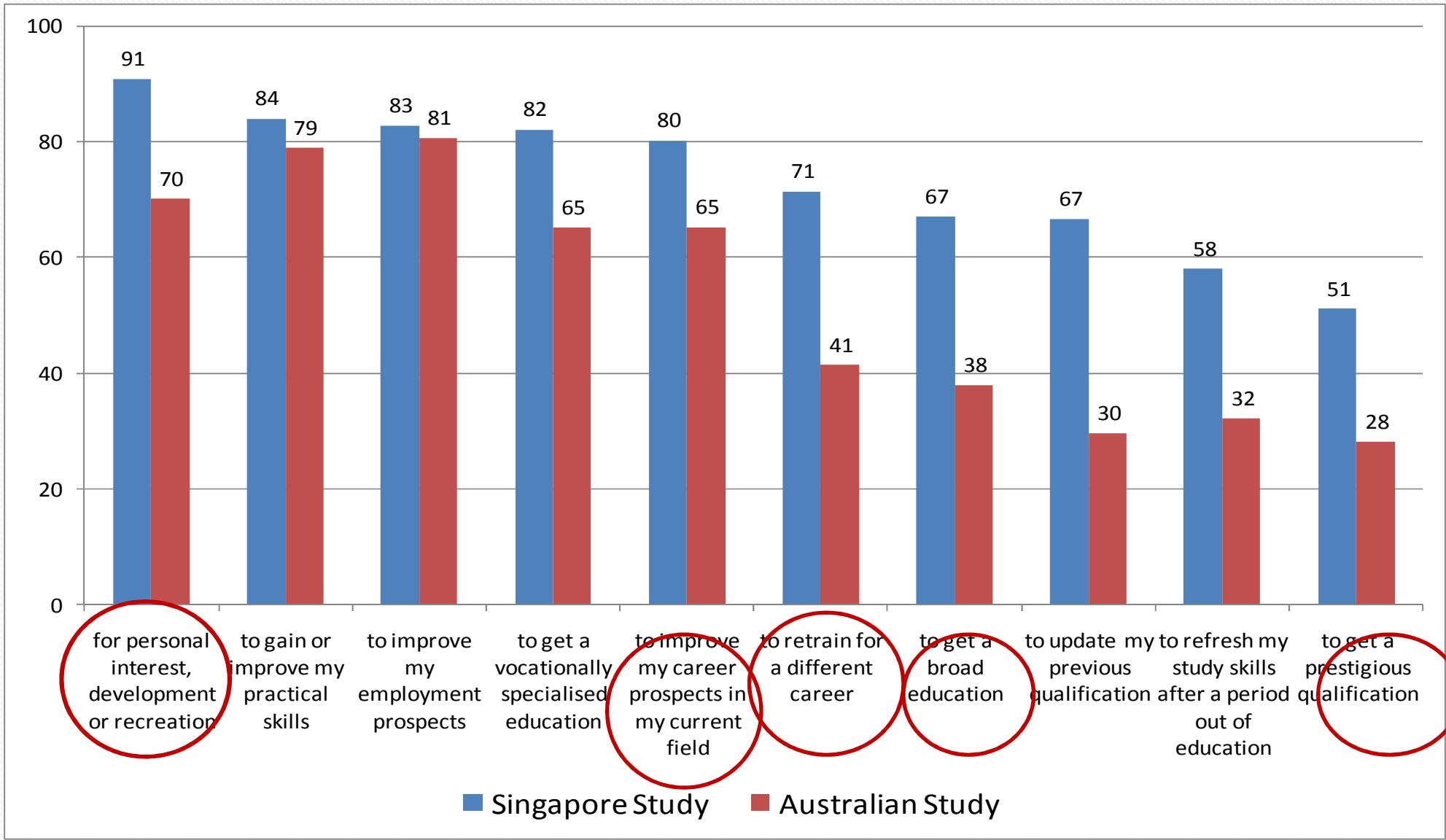
3. Perceived differences of vocational education from academic education



Knowing-why capital

- Refers to career motivations, personal meaning and self-awareness
- All of the reasons for enrolling in vocational programs are relevant to this type of career capital
- But 5 are particularly pertinent:
 - for personal interest, development or recreation
 - to improve my career prospects in my current field
 - to retrain for a different career
 - to get a broad education
 - to get a prestigious qualification

Knowing-why capital



Knowing-why - from interviews

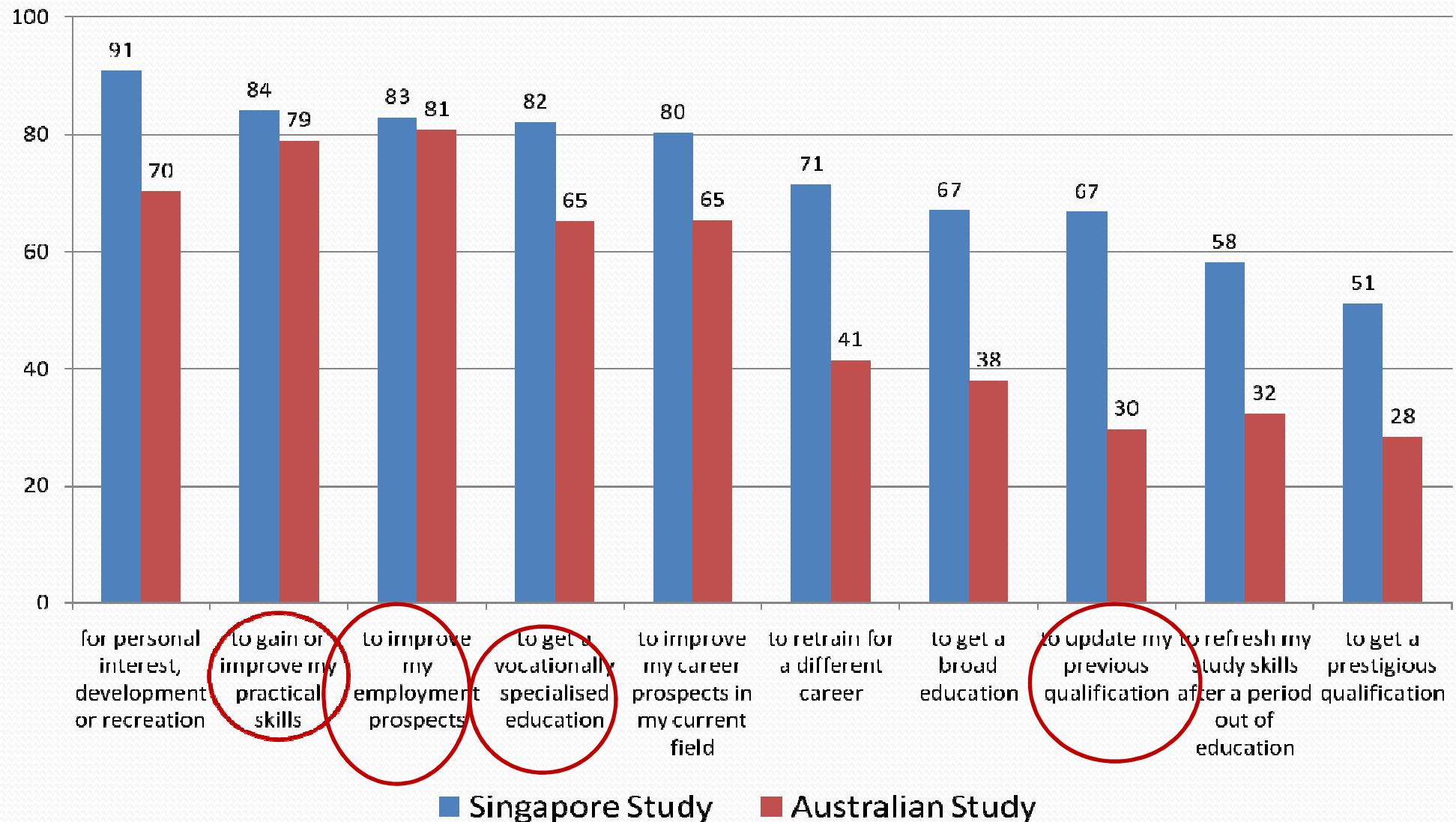
Singapore Study	Australian Study
to be in a 'niche industry' (#111, Aerospace, male)	'I have gained something from everything – everything is always an advantage'
because of the demand from the industry (#87, Security, male)	'... strings to your bow – [you] encounter different situations and you are able to deal with them a little better than had you not had those previous experiences' (#3151, Training & Assessment, female)
the need to start up a training academy in our company, so they needed someone to be familiar with the WSQ' (#77, Training, male)	'better interpersonal skills'
to pursue personal interest while not in unemployment	'understanding myself – I have gained more with each move' 'growth in self-belief'
WSQ course was such a good experience because it helped him to be a better person	'Biggest gain ... confidence – to keep going... I have found it to be an enlightening experience in many ways' (#72, Resource Management, male)



Knowing-how capital

- Refers to developing occupational skills, knowledge and understanding
- The learners clearly highlighted that they were enrolling in the vocational sector to build their knowledge and skills in order to improve their position in current employment or search for further career opportunities

Knowing-how (% agreement)



Knowing-how – from interviews

Singapore study	Australian study
Practical knowledge as the main gain in completing a WSQ course (N=12)	Completion of qualification ‘enabled me to gain employment’ or ‘got me a trade’
Believed that the practical knowledge and skills that they gained would boost their confidence at work and result in better performance (N=9)	Refreshing of skills
Hoped that the WSQ and the practical knowledge gained from it would open up opportunities for them (N=9)	‘More knowledge in the areas I was interested in’ ‘information that helped at the time’ ‘a lot of knowledge’
To upgrade their qualification (N=9)	Experience in the industry
To have more options or other career opportunities (N=7)	



Knowing-whom capital

- Relates to acquisition of career-relevant networks and contacts
- 35% of Singaporeans agreed they enrolled in a WSQ program to meet people and be with friends (cf. Australians 7%)
- Singaporeans: networking opportunities a key gain
- Australians highlighted also the relationships with staff

Knowing-whom – from interviews

Singapore study	Australian study
'I find the networking very enriching' (#60, Training, male)	'the closeness and connectedness with our lecturers and our classmates because there were only ten of us... so we did have that connectedness [and] we have been able to use that in the future'
'... where we can get to know more of our friends now' (#85, Security, male)	'... on a personal level, I have got friends that I made through that course'
'Part of my goal was really to get to know more people in the training field, and I think I got that' (#76, Training, male)	

Conclusions

- Intimate connections between the three types of capital - but accumulation tends to be more on knowing-how
- Knowing-why and knowing-how are mostly shaped by current economic needs (e.g. getting employment, having a contingency plan in case of retrenchment, demand from industry, upgrading qualification to obtain employment or promotion)
- Moving from the academic to the vocational sector is not difficult, but it is different
- There may be important differences between Singapore and Australia in terms of the tightness of the relationship between education and the labour market - but movement is vital, and both countries are exhibiting considerable policy interest in pathways and the degree of seamlessness between their academic and vocational sectors
- Opportunities for continuing education, moving between sectors (however different) and accumulating career capital act as essential escalators in the pathways of adult learners