

1. Introduction

Education is a huge undertaking and one that is focused on the nurturing of skills and talent. In order to create a strong basis for the sustainable development of their countries, well-developed nations have all spent much effort formulating education policies. These education policies have been implemented to develop the full potential of individual citizens and to increase the overall qualities of their citizens.

Taiwanese society and families place an extreme amount of importance on education and this concern towards education has become a graceful tradition in Taiwan. The impacts of this tradition have been far-reaching and all people of Taiwan have become concerned with the question of how to establish the best education system for developing capable, well-rounded citizens. However, before the 1980s and the emergence of democracy in Taiwan, the avenues for political participation for the common members of society were limited. Education policy was thus mainly planned by the Ministry of Education, that went along according to the policies of the central government. Thus, common members of society had very little to do in the process of planning the education system.

During the 80s, Taiwan started the move towards a plural, democratic and open model of society. There was wide-spread debate over the way in which Taiwan's education system should develop. In 1994, 'the Alliance for the Education Reform Movement' was established by the common people. They proposed that a basic education law be set up, and carried out the establishment of smaller schools with smaller classes, as well as a much greater number of senior high schools and universities. They pushed for the fore concepts of education modernization and helped forge a consensus for education reform amongst the general public. The government reacted immediately with concrete measures to meet the demands of society. This began with the Ministry of Education holding the Sixth National Conference on Education. Following this, the Executive Yuan established the 'Committee for Deliberation on Education Reform'. This was then followed by the proposal of the 'Advisory Report on Education Reform'. This emphasized greater access to education, personal attention for all students, increases in the number of ways for students to continue more advanced studies, increasing the quality of education as well as the creation of a society that values lifelong learning.

In order to carry out the above-mentioned education reforms, the Executive Yuan in 1998 specially allocated a total of NT\$ 150 billion. This money was to be spread out over five years. During these five years, twelve education reform projects would be launched. These reform projects included: (1) Building a complete education system for everyone (2) The popularization of kindergarten education (3) Building complete systems for teacher training



and their further on-job training (4) The promotion of a more diverse and improved technical education system (5) The promotion of the development of excellent higher learning institutes (6) The promotion of lifelong learning and online teaching (7) The furthering of home education (8) The improvement of the education for the mentally and physically disabled (9) The improvement of education for Aborigines (10) Easier access to higher education (11) The creation of new student counseling systems and (12) Increases in the amount of education funds and expansion of research into education.

Education reform must combine a nation's resources and the wisdom and will of its people. It is only by self reflection of the current problems faced by education in Taiwan, as well as by having the foresight to consider future trends in education that we can set up a modernized education system. In view of this, the Ministry of Education in September 2003, once again held 'the National Conference on the Development of Education' to explore the main challenges education in Taiwan will face in the future. Main issues explored at this conference included: (1) Increasing the education opportunities of the underprivileged and ensuring fairness across society (2) Furthering the quality and effects of higher education to increase international competitiveness (3) Returning to the basic idea of education for the people and the



implementation of the twelve year long education for the people program. This conference came to conclusions on 115 separate cases and has become an important reference for future education policy and planning in Taiwan.

After many years of continued education reform, there have been visible results in areas such as the more pluralized and more flexible school entrance system, the humanization of the study environment, greater technological improvements in teaching materials, increased relevance of course contents, greater professionalism of teachers and the establishment of a society that values lifelong learning. Over the next four years, the idea of 'A creative Taiwan as a global strategy' will be used as the main concept behind education. Special attention will be given to the four main ideas of 'Modern Citizens', 'Taiwan as the Main Concept', 'Global Viewpoints' and 'Care for Society'. The foreign language ability of Taiwan's people will continue to be improved, digital learning environments will be established, teachers will become more professional and education in areas such as the environment, art, citizen duty and science will also be strengthened. Greater assistance will be given to disadvantaged groups, efforts will be made to make senior high schools for local students and the curriculums of primary and middle schools will also be unified.

Education for new immigrants will be strengthened, outstanding students in various academic fields will be encouraged to go abroad and study, the intake of foreign students will be increased. Assistance will be given to universities for them to reach even higher levels of excellence. By the establishment of a high quality education system that is complete, the overall skill level of Taiwan's citizens can be improved and this improved skill level in the people will then lead an increase in Taiwan's competitiveness.