



Compulsory Education

Helping kids score goals

Decades ago, Taiwan's education focused too much on the results of the entrance exam that senior high school students had to take and most course content were designed for students to pass it. However, as Taiwan society became more open and liberal, more parents accepted an educational concept that enabled students to demonstrate their talents instead of just scoring high in exams.

The MOE has spent more than ten years carrying out an education reform that seeks to transform a static and tedious learning system into one with a more dynamic and creative style.

The ultimate goal of Taiwan education is to mold citizens for the 21st century, an era that calls for young people who are competitive, adaptable to a changing world, creative in their thinking and humanistic in their outlook.

Primary and Junior High Schools



Taiwan's nine-year compulsory education was first defined by the Compulsory Education Regulations in 1982. Primary schools fall under the jurisdiction of county and city governments. Children at least six years of age are required to begin primary schooling without taking entrance tests. After six years, they are supposed to graduate with a primary school diploma and need not take a test to enter junior high school that also falls under the jurisdiction of county and city governments. After three years, they are supposed to receive a junior high school diploma. This is the basic coverage of the present nine-year compulsory education, that has a strong emphasis on mathematics, physics, chemistry and other sciences.

Taiwan's propensity for science and mathematics has enabled its students to become consistent winners in International Olympiads in math and science. Ten years ago, the Ministry of Education put into practice the Education Reform Action Plan that outlined 12 key policies emphasizing pluralism and general education. The MOE adopted the principles

of diversity and tolerance in re-building a learning environment in primary and junior high schools that encourages academic excellence and respects the students' individual traits and potential. Students receive an education that seeks to develop creativity and versatility by promoting sports, drama, and regular artistic performances on campus.

The average class size in primary school is less than 30 students and in junior high school, less than 35. This allows teachers to dedicate time to each student. This decrease in class size in primary and junior high schools is an outcome of the Nine-year Integrated Curriculum (see below). In the school year of 2006, the class size in primary schools was cut down to twenty-eight students; the class size in junior high school was reduced to 34.9.

Kindergarten Education

Education is not compulsory for children aged between two and seven years old. For the school year 2005, 224,219 children were enrolled in 3,351

kindergartens. This relatively high number is due to the rising number of families with both parents working. Additionally, with more kindergartens hiring native speakers to teach English, parents enroll their children early in such kindergartens.

To ensure that children from low-income families (including those from aboriginal areas) have an opportunity to receive the same basic education, the MOE started a four-year financial support program in 2004 across Taiwan. From 2004 to 2008, a budget of NT\$2.3 billion has been earmarked to offer NT\$6,000 per semester to children from such families.

Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum

Traditionally, the central government decided almost everything for schools from the standard curriculum to students' school uniforms. The Education Reform Action Plan changed all that with the establishment of the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum that empowers the local governments, schools and teachers to design the curriculum and teaching materials.

The Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum is one of the MOE's most important reform policies. Its ultimate objective is to diversify Taiwan education. For example, instead of completely relying on a national entrance exam to enter senior high schools, junior high school students can now go through what are called "multiple entrance schemes."

This Integrated Curriculum also puts emphasis on cultivating creativity by encouraging students to do their own research in answering assignments given in class instead of just relying on their textbooks. The curriculum seeks to develop versatile citizens capable of responding to the challenges posed by globalization in the 21st century.

Foreign language proficiency is important in cultivating versatile students. So the MOE subsidizes schools in bringing more qualified foreign teachers to teach English. To minimize the gap in educational resources for English teaching between urban and rural areas, the MOE draws from a budget for subsidizing the disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples and lower income families, and train qualified English teachers for schools in rural areas.



Junior high school students at the Sacred Heart Girls' Senior High School attend Chemistry class.

Future: Twelve-year National Basic Education

The MOE in 2007 started to promote the Twelve-year National Basic Education and plans to complete its implementation in 2009. The Twelve-year National Basic Education isn't compulsory. It is a means to help junior high school graduates who don't continue on to senior high school nor find employment enter suitable schools and acquire professional skills, ultimately raising the overall quality of Taiwan's labor force.

Compulsory Education Policies



Diversified Education

One Standard, Multiple Textbooks Policy

In the past, primary and secondary education students in Taiwan were required to use only the textbooks published by the National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT). Students could do well in their Joint Senior High School Entrance Exams by just memorizing the contents of the textbooks. Some students would even refuse material taught by teachers outside those textbooks because they won't appear on exams made by an examination committee.

To reach the goal of diversified education, the core of its education reform, the MOE implemented the One Standard, Multiple Textbooks policy in 1999.

Multiple Textbooks means that the textbook market is no longer monopolized by the NICT or just one publisher. Schools can organize a committee of teachers to select the textbooks to be used by the students of their school.

One Standard means the MOE allows students to take entrance exams that can test their real academic level by giving comprehensive questions according to the MOE's standards. The policy drew some complaints for increasing students' academic and economic burdens, but it is useful for pushing

Taiwan education onto the next level—diversified, creative and liberal.

Digitalized Education

Bridging the Digital Gap

To bridge the digital gap between city schools and rural schools, the MOE encourages college students to form digital volunteer groups to help kids in the rural areas use computers. The MOE has also established an on-line tutoring system where many college students answer on-line questions from children in rural areas about their homework.

Localized Education

Mother Tongue and Homeland Education

Mandarin Chinese is still the only official



language in school education. However, as Taiwan society gets more liberal and open, other languages such as Taiwanese, Hakka, and indigenous languages are finding their way into the educational system. In 2001, the MOE asked public primary and junior high schools to design language-based curriculums based on the mother tongues of their students.

"Homeland Education" is another new subject that students in their third grade of elementary school are required to take. In this subject, students are encouraged to foster an interest in the natural and humanistic aspects of their immediate environment and to do some research to increase their knowledge of Taiwan's history and natural resources.

Spatial Education

Planning and managing the campus space

The MOE plans to set aside a budget of NT\$700 million to promote the Planning and Managing Campus Space Plan within three years. The plan seeks to find ways to utilize the increasing unused spaces on elementary and junior high school campuses caused by Taiwan's low birth rate.

About 1,000 schools have begun implementing the plan and will obtain the subsidy. The plan includes "building lifelong learning centers in communities", "designing campuses with special features", "promoting a sustainable learning environment", "transforming unused school space into gyms" and "building digital opportunity centers in rural schools".



Internationalized Education

Friendly Environment for Foreign Children

In Taiwan, the number of foreign spouses mainly from China, Vietnam, and Southeast Asia is increasing. To deal with this, the MOE is promoting after-school language and other tutoring programs for the children of foreign spouses.

Moreover, some schools regularly organize a "Country Week" when exhibitions are held on the culture, customs, and traditions of foreign bride countries. For example, during the "Thailand Week", students are treated to delicious Thai food and they watch performances by fellow students whose mothers come from Thailand.

In Taipei City, some elementary schools such as Si Song (Xi Song) Elementary School and Shih Dong (Shi Dong) Elementary School offer language classes for children of overseas Chinese who have returned to Taiwan. The Nangang Elementary School and Si Hu(Shihues) Elementary School offer bilingual classes for children of foreigners working in Taipei City.

Asmau (10), Fatima (7), Nigeria

"I love the computer classes here!"

"We don't have winter and earthquakes!"



Bilingual Education Programs, Si Hu (Shihues) Elementary School, Taipei

Asmau, 10, and Fatima, 7, are two adorable Nigerian sisters. They moved to Taiwan when their father was appointed director of the Nigeria Trade Office in Taiwan 7 years ago. They are enrolled in the bilingual education program of Si Hu(Shihues) Elementary School. The program seeks to help children of expatriate families catch up with the pace of Taiwanese children in doing regular school work.

"I like attending school, though the homework is kind of heavy," said Asmau, who is in the fourth grade of the Si Hu(Shihues) Elementary School. "The teachers and classmates here are nice."

The two girls enjoyed pretty happy days here. Like the other children in school, they love to watch TV after finishing their homework, and Disney is their favorite channel.

Some schools such as Si Hu (Shihues) Elementary School offer bilingual classes for children of foreigners working in Taipei City. Moreover, after-school language classes and other tutoring programs help the children born to foreign spouses adapt to Taiwan's educational requirements.