



Several decades ago, education in Taiwan focused too much on the results of the entrance exam that senior high school students had to take, with most course content designed to enable students to pass this exam. However, as Taiwanese society became increasingly open and liberal, more parents began to accept an educational concept that enabled students to demonstrate their talents instead of just scoring highly 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 education in Taiwan is to mould 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.

A photograph of several young boys playing soccer on a green grassy field. In the foreground, a boy in a white and light blue jersey is running towards the right, with a soccer ball near his feet. Behind him, another boy in an orange jersey is also running. Other children and spectators are visible in the background, some sitting on the grass. The scene is bright and sunny.

Compulsory Education

Helping kids score goals

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 of at least six years of age are required to begin primary schooling without taking entrance tests. After six years, they should graduate with a primary school diploma and need not take a test to enter junior high school, as this also falls under the jurisdiction of county and city government. 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 model, which places 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 of International Olympiads in maths and science. Ten years ago, the Ministry of Education put into practice the Education Reform Action Plan that outlined twelve key policies emphasising 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 and drama, with regular artistic performances also being staged on campus.

The average class size in primary schools is less than 30 students and in junior high schools, 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 SY 2007, the class size in primary schools was cut down to 28.45 students; the class size in junior high schools was reduced to 34.19.

Pre-School Education

Education is not compulsory for children aged between two and seven years old. In SY 2007, 191,773 children were enrolled in 3,283

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 enrol their children early in such schools.

To ensure that children from low-income families (including those from aboriginal areas) have an opportunity to receive the same basic education, the MOE launched a four-year financial support programme across Taiwan in 2004. 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 has 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, which empowers 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 Taiwanese education. For example, instead of completely relying upon a national entrance exam to enter senior high school, junior high school students can now progress through what are called "multiple entrance schemes."

This Integrated Curriculum also puts emphasis upon cultivating creativity by encouraging students to conduct their own research when answering assignments set in class, rather than simply relying on their textbooks. The curriculum seeks to develop versatile citizens capable of responding to the challenges posed by globalisation in the 21st century.

Foreign language proficiency is important in cultivating versatile students. For this reason, the MOE subsidises schools to bring in more qualified foreign teachers to teach English. To minimise the gap between urban and rural areas in terms of educational resources for English teaching, the MOE draws from a budget for subsidising the disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples and lower income families, and trains qualified English teachers for schools in rural areas.



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

Practical Craft Training Project

Junior high school students who are not prepared to pursue advanced schooling would take an occupational aptitude test during the second semester of their second year. They participate in craft and skills training in the third year. After graduating from junior high school, they would be enrolled in a practical craft training project for one more year.

Compulsory Education Policies



Diversified Education

“One Standard, Multiple Textbooks” Policy

In the past, students in primary and secondary education 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 just by memorising the contents of the textbooks. Some students would even refuse material taught by teachers outside the bounds of these textbooks because they would not appear in exams set 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” indicates that the textbook market is no longer monopolised by the NICT or by just one publisher. Schools can organise a committee of teachers to select the textbooks to be used by the students at their school.

“One Standard” means the MOE allows students to take entrance exams that test their real academic level, by compiling comprehensive questions in accordance with the MOE's standards. The policy drew some complaints for increasing students' academic and economic burdens, but it is useful in terms of pushing

Taiwanese education onto the next level – one that is diversified, creative and liberal.

Digitalised 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 children in rural areas to use computers. The MOE has also established an online tutoring system whereby many college students answer online questions from children in rural areas about their homework.

Localised Education

Mother Tongue and Homeland Education

Mandarin Chinese is still the only official language



in school education. However, as Taiwanese society becomes increasingly 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 curricula 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 carry out research to increase their knowledge of Taiwan's history and natural resources.

Spatial Education

Planning and Managing Campus Space

The MOE plans to set aside a budget of NT\$700 million to promote the Planning and Managing Campus Space Plan from SY 2007 to SY 2009. The plan seeks to find ways to utilise the increasing amount of disused space on elementary and junior high school campuses, a consequence of Taiwan's low birth rate.

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



Internationalised Education

A 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 programmes for the children of foreign spouses.

Moreover, some schools regularly organise a "Country Week", when exhibitions are held on the culture, customs and traditions of foreign-bride countries. For example, during "Thailand Week", students are treated to delicious Thai food and 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. Nangang Elementary School and Si Hu (Shihues) Elementary School offer bilingual classes for children of foreigners working in Taipei City.

Asmau (11), Fatima (8), Nigeria

"I love the computer classes here!"

"We don't have winter and earthquakes!"



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

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

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

The two girls enjoy mostly happy days here. Like the other children in the school, they love to watch TV after finishing their homework, with Disney being their favourite 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 programmes help the children born to foreign spouses adapt to Taiwan's educational requirements.