

Compulsory Education



Building a solid foundation for students

For many years, education in Taiwan focused mostly on course content that was designed to enable students to pass exams. The system produced students with some of the highest test scores in the world, especially in mathematics and science. However, its strong focus on test results has been criticised for placing excessive pressure on students and eschewing creativity in favour of rote memorisation.

As Taiwanese society became more open and liberal, more parents began to accept the idea that what education should do is enable students to demonstrate their talents instead of just scoring highly in exams. The MOE has, therefore, 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 the reform is to mould young Taiwanese people into becoming more competitive, adaptable in a changing world, creative in their thinking and humanistic in their outlook.

Compulsory education is an important phase in building a solid foundation for young students in preparation for the 21st Century.



Preschool and Compulsory Education

Preschool Education

Education is not compulsory for children aged between two and six years old. Parents of children in this age-group usually send them to study in kindergartens. In SY 2008-2009, 185,668 children were enrolled in 3,195 kindergartens. This relatively high number is due to the rising number of families with both parents working.

To ensure that children from low-income families (including those from indigenous areas) have an opportunity to receive the same basic education, the MOE launched a financial support programme across Taiwan in 2004. The project was initially only for five-year-old children on Taiwan's offshore islands, but later was expanded to cover all underprivileged children and those from families with an annual income of below NT\$ 600,000. Subsidies were also granted based on income level.

Moreover, the MOE plans to offer free tuition for five-year-olds as early as next year. A child education and care law for preschool integration of nursery schools and day care centres is currently under Legislative Yuan review, hoping to offer overall care

for young children.

Compulsory Education

In Taiwan, public education has been compulsory from primary school to junior high school since 1968. In 1982, the government further announced the Compulsory Education Regulations, which stipulate that 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. 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.

Currently, there are a total of 2,654 primary schools and 740 junior high schools in Taiwan, offering quality education to 2.6 million students.

In 1998, the MOE launched a project to downsize the average class size in Taiwan. The move was carried out to allow teachers to dedicate more time to their students.

Before the downsize, the average class size in primary schools in 1994 was around 38 students, and in junior high school was around 43 students. Now, the average class size in primary schools and junior high schools is fewer than 34 students. This decrease in class size in primary and junior high schools is an outcome of the drop in Taiwan's birth rate and the implementation of the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum (see below). By the year 2010, the class size in primary schools is expected to decrease further to 29 students, while the class size in junior high schools will be reduced to 33.

Education Reform

In response to criticism that education in Taiwan focuses too much on test results, the Ministry of Education put into practice the Education Reform Action Plan a decade ago that outlined 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 encouraged academic excellence and respected 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 Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum is one of the most important parts of the education reform.

Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum

Traditionally, the central government had the right to decide almost everything for schools of all levels in Taiwan, 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 enter through what are called "multiple entrance schemes."

This Integrated Curriculum also places emphasis upon cultivating creativity by encouraging students to conduct their own research when doing homework, rather than by 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.

After undergoing a trial run from September 2001, the integrated curriculum was put into full practice in September 2004.

Foreign language proficiency is another important aspect in cultivating versatile students. 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.



Compulsory Education Policies

Diversified Education

“One Standard, Multiple Textbooks” Policy

For the past several decades, 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” means 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 of their schools.

“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, in 2001, the MOE started promoting the College Information Volunteers programme, whereby college students formed digital volunteer groups to help children in rural areas to use computers. The programme also sought to improve the availability of digital information in remote schools and communities.

In addition, the MOE established an online tutoring system, with college students answering online questions from children in rural areas about their homework.

Localised Education

Mother Tongue and Homeland Education

As Taiwanese society becomes increasingly liberal and open, other dialects such as Taiwanese, Hakka and indigenous languages are finding their way into the educational system, even though Mandarin Chinese is still the only official language in school education.

In 2001, the MOE asked public primary and junior high schools to design curricula based on the mother tongues of their students.

Aside from encouraging students to learn their native languages, the MOE also encourages students to learn more about the land of Taiwan by taking Homeland Education, a new subject that students in the third grade of elementary school are required to study.

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 allocate 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 unused space on elementary and junior high school campuses, a consequence of Taiwan's low birth rate.

Approximately 1,000 schools could implement the plan and obtain a 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

Friendly Environment for International Students in Taiwan

As Taiwan is a part of the global society, there are increasing numbers of overseas Taiwanese returning, as well as foreign spouses joining the national family. To help children born to foreign spouses and international students to adapt better to the language requirements and regular schoolwork in Taiwan, the Ministry of Education is promoting tutoring

programmes and after-school language programmes for those who are in need.

Taking the schools in Taiwan's largest city, Taipei, an example, some schools such as Shi-Dong Elementary School and Xin Sheng Elementary School offer Mandarin language programmes for children of returning overseas Taiwanese parents and international students who need to elevate their Mandarin skills.

Nangang Elementary School and Xihu Elementary School, located near the Academia Sinica, Neihu Science Park and Nankang Software Park, offer bilingual classes for children of foreigners working in that area.

Also, schools regularly organise a "Country Week", when exhibitions are held focusing 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.



Momodou (8), Gambia

Eight-year-old Momodou comes from Taiwan's African ally, the Republic of Gambia. He first came to Taiwan with his parents when he was five and he now studies in the second grade at Shi-Dong Elementary School. He was also enrolled in the school's Mandarin language programme.

Speaking in fluent Mandarin, Momodou says: "I love studying the language," and he thinks the instructor of the programme has done a great job in helping him learn Mandarin and become closer to his schoolmates. He especially loves playing football with his friends at school, even dreaming about becoming a professional football player in the future.

Cyril (10), Chad

Ten-year-old Cyril is a fifth-grader in Shi-Dong Elementary School. His father was the former Republic of Chad Ambassador to Taiwan and his mother a librarian at the Taipei European School. He moved to Taiwan when he was six and after attending Shi-Dong Elementary School, he promptly enrolled in a special Mandarin language programme offered by the school.

The programme aimed to help international students and the children of returning Taiwanese emigrants with their Mandarin lessons in the hope of catching up with their Taiwanese counterparts.

"I was having difficulty in learning Mandarin at the beginning, especially the writing part," said Cyril. Thanks to the Mandarin language programme, however, the cute child from Chad now can speak fluent Chinese.

Cyril, whose favourite subjects are mathematics and nature, says he loves life in Taiwan - especially the friendly people here.



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