

Research on the Changes of the Social Curriculum of Basic Education in Taiwan and Its Enlightenment

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Abstract

The *Twelve-Year National Basic Education Curriculum* in Taiwan is compiled and revised on the basis of the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum* and is currently the main curriculum in Taiwan. The *Twelve-Year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* is one of eight learning focuses. Its value and function are to promote culture and institutions, develop attitudes and competencies for inquiry, engagement, practice, reflection and innovation. This paper takes the social curriculum in the *Twelve-Year National Basic Education Curriculum* and the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum* as the research object, illustrates the reasons for the revision of the social curriculum, including contradictions brought by economic development, social burdens brought by population problems, teenagers under huge pressure due to “involution”, the political game between the Democratic Progressive Party and the Kuomintang and continuous updating of the curriculum. The main changes in the social curriculum are as follows: continuation of the basic idea, the shift from ability-oriented to literacy-oriented, adjustment of the content in history, geography, civic and social curriculum. These changes have brought following consequences. First, the integrated curriculum is conducive to cultivating students’ comprehensive quality, but also hinders the friendly development of cross-strait relations to a certain extent. Second, through the analysis of Taiwan’s *Twelve-Year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum*, the reform of China’s basic education curriculum should promote the development of twelve-year consistent education, develop students’ problem awareness, cultivate interdisciplinary thinking, and form an evaluation approach suitable for local education.

Keywords

Taiwan, Social Curriculum, Twelve-Year National Basic Education Curriculum, Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum

1. Introduction

Education reform is not only a response and change to the existing problems in education, but also an important means to improve the overall quality of citizens and promote social progress. As an important carrier of Taiwan's education reform, the curriculum of Taiwan's basic education has continuously attracted the attention of the academic circle. In 2003, the Taiwan authorities promulgated the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum*, in 2014, the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* and in 2019, the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum*. The social curriculum includes three subjects: history, geography, civics and society. The revision of some content in the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* has caused widespread controversy, but some of the content conforms to the process of social development. Therefore, we should view this curriculum dialectically.

2. Analysis of the Reasons for the Revision of the Twelve-Year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum

With the development of Taiwan's social economy, various problems are constantly emerging, and education in Taiwan, especially in the social field, is facing huge challenges. In the revision of the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum*, the Taiwan Ministry of Education explained the reasons for the revision of the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum*: since the implementation of the nine-year national education in 1968, it aims to cultivate sound citizens and lays a good foundation for talent cultivation. However, how to relieve excessive enrollment pressure and implement holistic education is still a topic of concern to all walks of life. In recent years, families have raised less children, the population has become increasingly aging, the interaction of ethnic groups has become more and more diverse, the internet and information have developed rapidly, new jobs have continued to pop up, democratic participation has become more vigorous, the awareness of social justice has been awakened, ecologically sustainable development has drawn more attention and globalization and internationalization have brought many changes. These all greatly challenge school education and require schools to keep pace with the times in response to social needs and the trend of the times. After investigation and analysis, the reasons why Taiwan revised its social program can be attributed as follows.

2.1. Contradictions Brought by Economic Development

Taiwan's economy has developed rapidly in the past few decades, but the economic growth rate has gradually slowed down in recent years. At the same time, it has brought about problems such as the wealth gap and the solidification of classes. Most of the social wealth is concentrated in the hands of the older generation. Once young people graduate, they will face high housing prices and

middle class anxiety in the future. In order to keep promoting economic development and at the same time solve the contradictions brought about by economic development, Taiwan is trying to pass the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* so that young people can receive better education, thereby improving the quality of citizens, and alleviating the problems brought about by unbalanced economic development and promoting economic growth.

2.2. Social Burdens Brought by Population Problems

Taiwan is currently facing increasingly serious social problems such as aging population, low birthrate, population outflow and unbalanced urban-rural development. In the aging society, fewer and fewer people pay taxes, but more and more people receive pensions, forming an inverted pyramid pension dilemma. Such a situation will accelerate bankruptcy of Taiwan's various insurance systems, thus further increasing the social burden on Taiwan. Taiwan is trying to promote equal educational opportunities through education reform to achieve social fairness and justice, narrow the educational gap, balance urban and rural development, encourage more young people to stay in Taiwan, increase the fertility rate, and at the same time attract new immigrants to alleviate the social problems caused by the population.

2.3. Teenagers under Huge Pressure Due to “Involution”

“Involution” means competition becomes fiercer when population outgrows resources. Although the Taiwan curriculum used to advocate reducing the burden of students, students face huge academic pressure due to the fierce social competition and focus on examinations in order to get into a good university (Zheng & Liu, 2014). The reform of Taiwan's *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* aims to ease enrollment pressure, guide students' adaptive development, improve the core literacy of young people, and promote holistic development. In the training concept of the social curriculum, it is proposed that study is to implement the general curriculum and actively deal with challenges, so that students like to learn and make use of what they have learned, so as to raise the literacy of civics in the new era.

3. Analysis of Factors Influencing the Revision of the Twelve-Year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum

The *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* (Draft) was promulgated in 2014, and the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* was introduced in 2018, which was officially implemented in 2019. In the process of revision in the past years, the revision subject changed from the Kuomintang to the Democratic Progressive Party. At the same time, the revision was influenced by various other factors, and finally this controversial curriculum was produced.

3.1. The Political Game between the Democratic Progressive Party and the Kuomintang Dominated the Revision of the Curriculum

Education and politics are closely related, and the two are interdependent and interact with each other. On the one hand, education is constrained by the nature of the regime, political system and political program; on the other hand, it serves politics by exerting the political function of education, so as to achieve the political goals of society. The content taught in the school is usually regarded as objective knowledge, which can be recognized and generally accepted by the whole society, especially the young people who are in the learning stage. Therefore, the ideological content that is partly entrapped in textbooks can be easily rationalized and justified.

Since the establishment of the Taiwan Democratic Progressive Party in 1986, Taiwan's decades-long "ban on political parties" has been declared bankrupt, and Taiwan's one-party dominant system has gradually been abandoned. Since the DPP first came to power in 2000, Taiwan's politics have gradually formed a situation in which the Kuomintang and the DPP take turns to govern and compete against each other, and the fierce struggle between the two parties has caused political division in society (Xu, 2018). In order to win or consolidate their own ruling positions, the two parties have widely propagandized and instilled ideologies and ruling concepts that are beneficial to them. One of the more prominent phenomena is to revise the content of the curriculum to achieve its own political goals (Lin & Wu, 2019).

3.2. Continuous Updating of the Curriculum

In the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum*, the Taiwan Ministry of Education believes that the traditional curriculum in the social field places too much emphasis on delivering knowledge while ignoring the cultivation of students' high-level thinking, inquiry and practical ability, which is also considered to be an area for improvement. It is also an unavoidable challenge for the social field to gradually shift from the transmission of civic knowledge to a model of civic literacy in speculative practice.

With the dissemination of foreign advanced educational concepts, Taiwan is also constantly innovating its own curriculum concepts. The targeted requirements for students have changed from "ability-oriented" to "literacy-oriented", which reflects the continuous updating of the teaching objectives and curriculum concepts in the social field in Taiwan (Feng, 2020). At the same time, advanced teaching concepts such as lifelong education, whole-person education, inquiry-based learning, and the combination of summative evaluation and formative evaluation are also reflected in the social curriculum, thus constantly cultivating young Taiwanese to adapt to the development of the new era.

4. Analysis of the Changes in the New and Old Social Curriculum

In the change of the social curriculum, compared with the *Grade 1 - 9 Curricu-*

lum, the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* has kept some content in the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum*, but some of its content has also been updated.

4.1. Continuation of the Basic Idea

The *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* is divided into eight fields, and the social field is one of them. The division of fields mainly follows the principle of the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum*. The basic concept of the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum* points out that individuals cannot live in isolation, and education is a process of socialization that helps individuals develop their potential, achieve self-fulfillment, adapt to the environment, and then improve the environment. The social learning domain is the domain of knowledge generated by integrating the interaction between self, people, and people and the environment. The *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* not only keeps the method of integrating geography, history, civics and society into the social curriculum, which was adopted in the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum*, but also strengthens the vertical coherence and horizontal integration in the field through multiple strategies. The curriculum is structured in accordance with the spirit of learning subjectivity, multi-adaptiveness, autonomous learning, lifelong learning and literacy orientation, which were emphasized in the general curriculum, so as to cultivate the civic literacy of the new generation in Taiwan.

4.2. The Shift from Ability-Oriented to Literacy-Oriented

In this round of curriculum reform, the proposal of “core literacy” is also one of major changes, which means Taiwan’s *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* has shifted its focus from “key competency” to “core literacy”. In terms of the overarching training goal of the curriculum, the implementation of “core literacy” is undoubtedly more progressive and forward-looking. From the perspective of key learning points and general curriculum, the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum* is based on “Ten Basic Competencies”, from which the expectations for students’ learning effectiveness are formed while the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* is based on the “three aspects and nine sides key competencies”, emphasizing the cultivation of “people-oriented lifelong learners” to make requirements for students’ learning outcomes.

Regarding core literacy, the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* defines it as follows: Core literacy refers to the knowledge, ability and attitude that a person should possess in order to adapt to current life and face future challenges. Core literacy emphasizes that learning should not be limited by subject knowledge and skills, but should focus on the combination of learning and life, and demonstrate the learner’s whole-person development through practice.

4.3. Adjustment of the Content of the History Curriculum

In the revision of the social curriculum, the content of the history curriculum

has been greatly adjusted and revised.

First, unreasonable additions and deletions are made to some historical data. The Education Bureau of Taiwan, taking the training concept of reducing factual memory and instead cultivating students' understanding, thinking, caring, empathy, inquiry and practice ability as the reason, have deleted some historical data.

Second, local concepts are constantly strengthened. The curriculum believes that in the learning and education of the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum*, it has neglected to discuss how to respond to relevant policies from the perspective of indigenous peoples and the impact of these policies on indigenous peoples. Furthermore, a historical perspective has been added to the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* to explore history from the perspective of aboriginal people and further strengthen the concept of localization.

Third, content in some units is modified and renamed. On the grounds of developing students' global vision and with the help of the perspective of the concentric circles, the learning of Chinese history is examined in the history of Southeast Asia, further strengthening the connection between Taiwan and East Asia, and diluting the relationship between Taiwan and the China's mainland.

4.4. Adjustment of Geography Curriculum

In the training of thinking, the geography course in middle school education has three themes: Basic Concepts and Taiwan, Regional Characteristics and Geographic Issues. The course is based on Taiwan to care for the world, and explores regional characteristics through the interaction between human activities and the natural environment. Through the problem inquiry revealed by the entry, the characteristics of geography as a knowledge field are displayed, and the geographical knowledge or skills to be learned are structured on the problems to build a platform for interdisciplinary thinking.

In terms of the revision of the curriculum, the basic content of the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum* is based on the framework of environmental system, regional characteristics and global connection. The global connection takes economic and environmental issues as learning materials. The *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* uses environmental system, regional characteristics and global connection as the foundation of learning, and organizes the subject of geography with three themes: basic concepts and Taiwan, regional characteristics and geographical issues. Each topic also focuses on basic concepts such as different spatial scales, spatial distribution and their interactions, and human-land relationships.

In terms of concept learning, the *Grade 1 - 9 Curriculum* did not put the concept of environmental ethics in the social curriculum, but this concept was an important concept in environmental education. The concept was introduced in appropriate units in each learning area. The *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* directly puts the concept of environmental

ethics into the learning content, so as to improve students' emotional goals for environmental ethics.

In terms of learning methods, Geography course in middle and high schools in the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* provides at least one field observation and one field investigation every semester, so as to provide a platform for the integration of geography, history and civic and social teaching and promotes Taiwanese teenagers to form interdisciplinary thinking. At the same time, through field investigation, they point out different naming traditions and characteristics of Taiwan's Han, aboriginal, and new aboriginal groups, so as to cultivate students' understanding, respect and appreciation attitude towards culture, further emphasizing Taiwan's subjectivity.

4.5. Adjustment of the Content in the Civic and Social Curriculum

The civic and social curriculum emphasized that students are the main body, life experience is the focus, and the cultivation of civic literacy is the key, aiming to change the teaching method that emphasizes factual memory.

In terms of theme setting, it no longer adopts the social science division method to arrange social, political, legal and economic themes, but starts from citizen identity and community, organization and system of social life, social operation, governance, participation and practice and the ideal and reality of a democratic society, integrate relevant social science knowledge, organize learning content, and establish a curriculum structure that is separate but coherent between middle and high schools.

In terms of curriculum characteristics, it constantly emphasizes that students are the main body of learning, and multiple strategies are adopted for integration. Considering the diverse life experiences of students from different backgrounds (including culture, ethnicity, urban and rural areas, gender and physical and mental characteristics, etc.), and taking into account career exploration and development, it provides independent learning space; at the same time, it takes into account the characteristics of different regions, ethnic groups and school types and provides flexibility in curriculum development.

5. The Impacts Brought by the Revision of the Social Curriculum

The revision of Taiwan's social curriculum helps to cultivate the comprehensive quality of Taiwanese youth to a certain extent, but its obvious localization trend has become an important factor affecting cross-strait relations.

5.1. The Integrated Curriculum Is Conducive to Cultivating Students' Comprehensive Quality

In the course of basic education curriculum reform in Taiwan, the integrated curriculum has been continuously emphasized and developed. Curriculum integration is not only the content integration between related disciplines, but also

focuses on the teaching of curriculum integration to improve students' learning efficiency, strengthen the practicality and comprehensiveness of learning content and inspection activities, and provide students with tangible learning experiences through academic activities. The integration of the curriculum is not only conducive to solving problems in their subjects, but also strengthens the comprehensiveness of the curriculum structure and content, enhances students' social participation, and helps to improve students' understanding of subjects and daily life.

5.2. To a Certain Extent, the Revision Hinders the Friendly Development of Cross-Strait Relations

The Taiwan Ministry of Education emphasized in the social curriculum that students are required to learn to distinguish historical facts, historical evidence and historical interpretations, explain the reasons for different historical interpretations, and examine the appropriateness of evidence; they are supposed to use historical data to conduct causal analysis and interpret historical events. In fact, the curriculum cuts out historical facts related to Chinese culture, and at the same time abandons the past "Han people as the main axis" thinking to cut off the historical origin and real relationship of cross-strait relations, tries to alienate the relationship with China's mainland, which is not conducive to the friendly development of cross-strait relations.

6. Enlightenment for the Curriculum Reform of Basic Education in China's Mainland

Although the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* continues to deepen the awareness of localization, some of its content is still worthy of learning for the China's mainland.

6.1. Promoting the Development of the Twelve-Year Consistent Education and the Comprehensive Education for Students

The reform of the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* in Taiwan emphasizes the integrity and connection between the compulsory education curriculum and the senior secondary education curriculum. It not only pays attention to the horizontal integration between subjects, but also focuses on the vertical progression of courses in each field, thus avoiding unnecessary repetition and intersection of course content between successive stages and reducing students' learning pressure, and enabling each student to accept basic and complete courses. At present, in order to implement the concept of taking students as the main body, all countries in the world are constantly strengthening the coherence and integration of primary and secondary school curriculum (Xu, 2014). The design of the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* has become an international trend. The basic education curriculum reform in the China's mainland can also gradually develop towards the establishment of the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum*, actively promote basic research on primary

and secondary education curriculum and further improve and perfect the curriculum for each stage and each subject, improve teaching efficiency and implement curriculum coherence and integration, thereby promoting the all-round development of students at all stages of education (Gong & Liu, 2014).

6.2. Taking Students as the Main Body, Cultivating Students' Problem Awareness

In the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum*, classroom content is combined with advanced educational curriculum concepts such as flipped classroom and future education, reflecting the diversification of teaching methods. Many titles in the course are set in the form of questions, which guide the thinking of teaching and learning with questions, stimulate students to think continuously in the course, and then enhance their awareness of problems and innovation, and truly realize student-oriented idea. Due to the one-sided pursuit of test scores, indoctrination-oriented teaching method still dominates China's mainland. As a result, students entering higher education still focus on books and lack interest in learning, which is not conducive to improving inquiry ability.

6.3. Cultivating Interdisciplinary Thinking Ability and Closely Linking the Knowledge Learned in High School and University

The *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum—Social Curriculum* integrates history, geography and humanities and society. For example, every semester, students are required to conduct field investigations, organically integrate the history, geography and human environment, cultivate students' interdisciplinary thinking through integrated courses, and further cultivate young people's scientific research methods in advance, so as to connect with the requirements of college preparatory education. Due to the particularity of the college entrance examination in China's mainland, the knowledge learned in high school and university are loosely coupled, and the two are relatively independent. In the follow-up curriculum reform in China's mainland, the content of high school education and university education should be linked to form a tight relationship (Zhou, 2018).

6.4. Learning from Their Educational Evaluation Methods to Form an Evaluation Method Suitable for Localization

Instead of quantifying a child simply through summative evaluation, that is, test scores, the *Twelve-year National Basic Education Curriculum* organically combines summative evaluation with formative evaluation and multi-subject evaluation, so as to continuously improve the ability to shape students. Although China's mainland passed the *Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Educational Evaluation in the New Era* in 2020, it proposed to improve result evaluation scientifically and effectively, strengthen formative evaluation, explore value-added evaluation, and improve comprehensive evaluation to ensure the scientific and effec-

tive education evaluation. However, in the specific implementation process of each school, it still focuses on the evaluation of results, and the evaluation method is too simple. In the follow-up curriculum reform process, education evaluation reform and curriculum reform should be continuously combined, and Taiwan's evaluation methods should be used for reference, and localized evaluation methods should be continuously explored and formed.

7. Conclusion

The changes of the social curriculum in Taiwan are the result of a combination of factors, and the revision process has also been affected by various factors. The revision content tends to be localized and overemphasizes Taiwan's subjective view. But through research, we can also take its essence and learn its advanced curriculum concepts, so as to promote the continuous improvement of the basic education curriculum in China's mainland.

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Conflicts of Interest

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