



## **Quality and Education in Taiwan**

*by JrJung Lyu*

Taiwan has witnessed a proliferation of new universities and colleges in recent years. At the last count, Taiwan had more than 150 colleges and universities—at least one institution of higher learning for every county on the island. The rise in the number of universities and enrollment is cause for both celebration and concern among those interested in the development of higher education in Taiwan. Now, more students have access to higher education than ever before, but as the opportunities increase, some fear the quality of education is declining.

As the supply of universities and colleges exceeds the demand, there has been fierce competition among these educational institutions. Instead of offering students quality education, institutions battle with one another to grab a slice of the shrinking pie. The uneven distribution of resources among universities also contributes to this fierce competition. Public schools obtain more government funding than private ones and urban districts more than rural areas.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) plays a role on improving Taiwan's current education system:

1. The MOE is responsible for raising the educational quality of various domestic institutions, encourages institutions to establish self-evaluation systems, as it hopes institutions would devote more energy to improving their own educational quality.
2. The MOE is responsible for restructuring the distribution of resources among institutions. This is carried out by allocating additional educational resources to institutions that show better performance.

The MOE has an institution to professionally evaluate schools on their administrative and management systems, academic performance, and hardware and software resources. The colleges are evaluated every four years, and the results of the official evaluation are important inputs to decide the amount of government funding each college gets. The aim is to have schools embrace competition and strengthen their performance to get more funding instead of waiting passively for government support. Furthermore, the MOE continuously encourages higher education institutions to achieve ISO 9000 certification to enhance their education quality.



## **ISO 9000 for higher education**

The ISO 9000 series standards provide clear guidelines for the top management of institutions or universities to improve the effectiveness of their education systems. Just like the thousands of organizations that have realized the benefits of international quality standards and have embraced them in the drive for competitiveness, there are more colleges and universities seeking ISO 9000 registration in an effort to improve via a better quality management system (QMS).

In Taiwan, the first institute of technology, National Kao-Hsiung University of Technology, earned its ISO 9000 certification in April 1998. Yuan Ze University, Southern Taiwan University of Technology, Kun-Sen University of Technology and National Cheng Kung University have followed, each having registered with the ISO 9000 series. Meanwhile, almost all the colleges have or are seeking ISO 9000 certification. It's rapidly becoming a common certificate for institutions or universities in Taiwan. This phenomenon seems to be unique in the world. The implementation of ISO 9000 quality systems has a positive impact on quality of education.

To achieve ISO 9000 certification, an organization has to be assessed by qualified auditors who use the standard to evaluate the system. The ISO 9001:2000 standard is a tool to specify the QMS requirements. An organization can become registered if the auditors have not found any major nonconformances. Yet, ISO registration is only the beginning of implementing an effective QMS to achieve education excellence. Other quality management standards are also required to achieve education excellence.

For instance, ISO 9001 and ISO 9004 are two quality standards desirable for the continual improvement of institutions' overall performance, and therefore serve as stepping stones toward education excellence. ISO 9001 provides an interesting learning environment for many higher education institutions in Taiwan to transform themselves into customer-focused organizations. On the other hand, ISO 9004 provides guidelines for performance improvements instead of only compliance and education excellence. With the assistance of the quality management standards, a QMS with delighted customers can then bring the organization one step closer to education excellence.



### **Awarding good behavior**

Apart from ISO certification, the National Quality Award (NQA) is another important element associated with educational quality of Taiwan. To succeed in the highly competitive environment, pursuing outstanding educational quality becomes an important lesson for higher education institutions. Therefore, quality practitioners need to devote themselves to the process to achieve education excellence.

NQA is the highest national honor granted to quality professionals and organizations in Taiwan. The award's mission is "to establish a highest quality control paragon for corporations and organizations to study and learn from, also through the review process, the quality control standard will be referential to corporations and organizations on strengthening the organizations and enhancing competitiveness."

Many higher education institutions are attempting to enhance their educational quality based on the NQA's framework and striving to pursue the honor. Some universities have already performed well, including Yuan Ze University and Tamkang University. Meanwhile, more universities are on their way to achieve their goals, and it's certain more institutions will be honored with the award in the future.

Apart from the MOE's effort and the quality management controls, there are other measures to boost the Taiwanese educational system's overall performance. This includes improving Taiwan-China education relations by allowing educational resources to be exchanged. It also will encourage the development of more innovative ideas to improve education quality.

Achieving Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation is another effective way to improve the quality of higher education in Taiwan. AACSB accreditation is the hallmark of excellence in management education, and it represents the highest standard of achievement for business schools worldwide. To achieve AACSB international business accreditation, business programs must satisfy expectations of a wide range of quality standards relating to:

- Curriculum.
- Faculty resources.
- Admissions.
- Degree requirements.
- Library and computer facilities.



- Financial resources.
- Intellectual climates that are all mission-linked.

Furthermore, the participant-centered teaching method has been introduced into Taiwan, which contributes significantly and positively to students' learning motives as well as the effectiveness of teaching.

All in all, Taiwan's education system is equipped to face these challenges. The country's higher education institutions, however, should continue to steer toward a higher level. In their continued pursuit of excellence, these institutions should be capable of producing high-quality individuals to support the intellectual development of Taiwan citizens and to stay competitive at an international level.

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