

Chinese Taipei

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Introduction

Overview of Education System

The government of Taiwan has adopted a centralized education administration system, which is currently moving toward decentralization and delegation. The Ministry of Education (MOE) determines the Grade 1–9 Curriculum Guidelines, controls most of the education budget, and manages teacher quotas. The role of local government primarily is to execute decisions made by the MOE. Most schools in Taiwan follow the national curriculum guidelines and use approved textbooks. However, schools may select or edit their learning materials to accommodate local characteristics and needs.¹ In 2014, Taiwan enacted three laws governing experimental education, allowing certain schools to develop programs that are not constrained by the curriculum guidelines. Taiwan currently has 109 experimental education schools (2.6 percent of the total number of schools) with 10,913 students.

Taiwan’s education system is typically divided into four levels or schools: elementary (Grades 1 to 6), junior high (Grades 7 to 9), senior high (Grades 9 to 12), and higher education of various types. In addition to regular education, returning education programs, which include supplementary and continuing education, have been established to improve the nation’s education level and cultivate its citizens. Furthermore, schools at all levels provide special education for gifted students or those with other special needs.²

Children begin formalized schooling at the age of 6. However, early childhood education and care from ages 2 to 6 is provided by preschools, and tuition is free for 5-year-olds. Since 1968, Taiwan has required nine years of compulsory education—six years of elementary education and three of junior high. In 2014, the nine years of compulsory education and senior high school were combined to create a 12-year basic education framework. Consequently, the MOE developed the *Curriculum Guidelines of 12-Year Basic Education*. The new curriculum was implemented year by year at the different education levels starting in the fall of 2019.

Taiwan has four types of senior high schools: general, skills-based, comprehensive, and specialty-based. Higher education institutions include junior colleges (two to five years), universities of science and technology, independent colleges, and general universities (usually four years). A master’s degree takes between one and four years to complete, and a doctorate degree requires two to seven years.³

Use and Impact of PIRLS

Taiwan first participated in PIRLS in 2006. However, the test results have not been as strong as expected; Taiwan has been promoting reading in Kindergartens and elementary schools for several years. Recognizing that most teachers do not often teach reading comprehension, the MOE implemented the Reading 101 program (2008–2017) to promote basic reading research and improve reading instruction. As a result, four national reading centers have been established to develop reading instruction models and instructional materials. In addition, reading instruction workshops for teachers are held regularly.⁴ Language teaching has also changed from focusing on vocabulary development to focusing on both vocabulary and comprehension development.

In PIRLS 2016, teachers' daily adoption of reading strategies was identified as having increased as a result of the program. Currently, the MOE is planning a 2021–2026 reading education program based on the following premise: "Everyone who makes good use of paper and digital tools learns to be an intelligent reader."⁵

The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades

The Grade 1–9 Curriculum was the national curriculum for the fourth grade students assessed in PIRLS 2021. The curriculum, which has seven learning areas, was implemented in 2004, revised in 2011, and is classified into two types: the MOE-mandated curriculum and a school-offered alternative curriculum.⁶

The Language learning area includes guidelines for Mandarin Chinese, other Chinese dialects, and English. Mandarin is the language of testing for PIRLS in Taiwan.⁷ The national curriculum for Mandarin aims to ensure that all students are the following:

- Competent in listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- Equipped to use language to think, reason, discuss, and apply to different contexts
- Appreciative of their literary heritage and able to enjoy texts in all their forms
- Capable of using the internet and other tools for independent learning

In addition, the curriculum contains competence indicators for the four learning stages: Stage I is for Grades 1 and 2, Stage II is for Grades 3 and 4, Stage III is for Grades 5 and 6, and Stage IV is for Grades 7 to 9. The Mandarin competence indicators address six areas: listening, speaking, reading, writing, character study and writing, and Chinese phonetic symbols (Zhuyin; Mandarin: 注音). The reading competence indicators provide guidelines for reading materials and instruction and focus on the knowledge and skills students need to process, understand, and think critically about different types of texts. Exhibit 1 presents the Mandarin competence indicators for Stage II reading.

Exhibit 1: Mandarin Competence Indicators for Stage II Reading

Area	Competence Indicators
Chinese Phonetic Symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use phonetic symbols to understand the meaning of words and improve reading performance ▪ Apply phonetic symbols when reading aloud and note changes in intonation
Character Study/Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize 1,500–1,800 commonly used Chinese characters ▪ Use radicals or word formation principles to assist in word recognition ▪ Use new words learned in a sentence ▪ Use dictionaries to determine the meanings of words ▪ Understand the strokes, variations of radicals, and structural principles of characters
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grasp the main ideas and structure of a text ▪ Apply reading strategies to improve reading speed and efficiency ▪ Develop knowledge of stylistic features of texts and use this to make sense of texts ▪ Use reference books skillfully and develop the ability to solve problems on their own ▪ Make sense of sentences in different contexts and use words and structures that are contextually appropriate ▪ Discuss the content of texts and share ideas with others ▪ Learn to value and respect others through reading ▪ Cultivate the spirit of group participation by engaging in reading activities that enhance interactions ▪ Use computers and other technology to improve language capabilities ▪ Engage in higher-order thinking as they read and discuss literature ▪ Read for pleasure outside class and read an increasing range of texts ▪ Develop good reading interests, attitudes, and habits ▪ Recognize the purpose and features of different text types ▪ Recognize the beauty of the Chinese language through reading ▪ Recognize the characteristics of different cultures through reading ▪ Develop a repertoire of reading strategies ▪ Identify emotions in texts and read aloud with appropriate prosody or expression ▪ Develop the ability to analyze and summarize text information ▪ Engage in self-questioning to increase comprehension ▪ Scrutinize the style of the writing, the language used, and the content of texts

The national curriculum also describes how to select reading materials by using the following principles:

- Materials should be aligned with the competence indicators at each stage to develop students’ basic skills in relation to oral and written expression.
- Materials should be designed with reading materials at the core to develop students’ knowledge, understanding, and skills in listening, reading, speaking, writing, composing, and using Chinese phonetic symbols.
- Reading materials should always be connected to real-life and contemporary issues (e.g., the ocean, ecology, gender, and ethnicity).
- Different genres and text types (e.g., narrative, descriptive, lyric, expository, and persuasive) should be included.

Publishers develop Chinese textbooks based on the Language learning area (Mandarin) of the Grade 1–9 Curriculum Guidelines. The books are reviewed in terms of their compliance with the regulations introduced by the National Primary and Secondary School Textbook Review

Committee, formed by the MOE. The school textbook selection committees then choose appropriate ones from the approved textbooks.

In general, Chinese teachers adhere to the textbooks and teaching manuals provided by textbook publishers to plan their lessons. The teaching manual provides a set of teaching activities. For example, the proposed teaching activities for fourth grade Chinese lessons are based on raising students' interest and include modules on previewing and finding the main idea, teaching new characters and vocabulary, developing students' understanding of text structure and rhetoric, and writing instruction.

The following are the guiding principles for reading instruction specified in the Grade 1–9 Curriculum Guidelines:

- Reading is the core of language instruction and is integrated into listening, speaking, composing, and character writing instruction.
- Student-centeredness is key to the learning and teaching of Mandarin.
- Language learning and teaching should always be connected to real life.
- Students should be taught to select and use appropriate strategies according to the text genres and features.
- Textbooks should be used to teach and model grammar rules and engage students in grammar exercises.
- Vocabulary should be taught in context.
- Students should be encouraged to read diverse literature reflecting different backgrounds and ethnic cultures.
- Students should be guided to use the library and technology for independent learning.

Professional Development Requirements and Programs

Teachers must attend in-service training for a certain number of hours each year, which varies across counties and cities. The mandatory training includes four hours of environmental education and three hours for guidance and counseling. In addition, teachers receive ongoing professional development in content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and ethical attitudes through professional learning communities and in-service workshops, seminars, and lesson studies to improve their curriculum design, teaching strategies, and learning assessment. Furthermore, to continuously improve the quality of teaching and student learning and create a teaching culture of peer learning, school principals and teachers should give at least one public lecture per year. Moreover, in response to changes in Taiwanese society, teachers are encouraged to enhance their multicultural and special education competence to teach and care for students from different cultural backgrounds and with special needs.

Since 2001, the MOE has developed several reading programs to improve the reading literacy of elementary and junior high students. Enhancing teachers' reading instruction competence is the

focus of these programs. Approximately 2,000 reading instruction-related seminars and workshops are held for primary teachers in Taiwan each year.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Teachers monitor student learning through unit homework that may be teacher-made or drawn from workbooks. Each semester, most schools have two to three schoolwide examinations in Chinese, mathematics, social science, and natural science. A report card is sent to parents at the end of the semester.

Almost every county and city education bureau implements annual testing for elementary students in Mandarin, English, and mathematics to monitor students' academic proficiency. The test is usually for fourth grade or fifth grade students, but this varies by county and city.

In 2004, the MOE launched the Taiwan Assessment of Student Achievement (TASA) program to measure what students know and are able to do in different subjects. The TASA measures nationwide student achievement in Chinese, mathematics, science, social studies, and English. The main targets are students in the fourth, sixth, eighth, and eleventh grades. TASA results are used to monitor education progress and inform curriculum and instruction improvements. In 2019, the MOE introduced the new *Curriculum Guidelines of 12-Year Basic Education*. To evaluate the effectiveness of the new curriculum, the National Academy for Educational Research initiated a TASA longitudinal study (TASAL). The TASAL will compare and contrast the academic development trajectory of students taught under the old and new curriculum for six years.⁸

For students who are lagging behind, the MOE has established primary and secondary student learning support guidelines to provide early assistance. The guidelines require each primary and secondary school to refer students who are suspected of having learning needs in Mandarin, mathematics, or English to take screening tests. Schools must then design curriculum and teaching strategies to support learning for those who fail the screening tests. Progress tests are used to track students' learning progression. The screening and monitoring tests are to be conducted using the Remedial Instruction Technology-Based Testing System.⁹

Special Reading Initiatives

Taiwan currently has two reading initiatives for preschoolers: Bookstart and Reach Out and Read Taiwan. Bookstart was introduced in 2006 by the Hsin-Yi Foundation, working with public libraries. The program gives a Bookstart pack to children under 18 months old and provides tips and guidance to parents on reading and a list of recommended books.¹⁰ Bookstart aims to encourage parents to read with their children at an early age to inspire children to develop a love of books and reading. Reach Out and Read Taiwan was established in 2017. Inspired by the US Reach Out and Read program, Taiwan's version of the program works directly with pediatric-care providers to share the benefits of parents reading with their children every day. In addition, the

program provides a free book that is developmentally appropriate for children. Program volunteers demonstrate parent-child reading skills.¹¹

Libraries play a key role in promoting reading. For example, the National Central Library started the Taiwan Reading Festival in 2013. Roughly 50 libraries and more than 100 organizations participate each year, holding reading-related activities across the country. This project earned the 2020 American Library Association Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects.¹²

Between 2008 and 2017, the MOE implemented a Reading 101 program, as previously mentioned, and has introduced the Implementation Plan for Improving Reading Literacy of Primary and Secondary School Students to succeed the Reading 101 program. The objectives are to develop digital reading courses and instruction models that guide students to learn through independent reading, increase digital reading resources, and honor schools and individuals who have made significant contributions to the promotion of reading.

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Between January 2020 and May 14, 2021 (the last school test date for data collection in Taiwan), only one primary school was closed. Nevertheless, between May 19 and July 26, 2021, the whole country was at pandemic Alert Level 3. Consequently, all schools at all levels (including childcare centers and tutorial classes) were closed and adopted online teaching. Because schools delayed opening in response to outbreaks, the second semester was rescheduled to end on July 14. Hence, all students experienced two months of online learning. The MOE established the following provisions for continuing instruction remotely during the school closure:¹³

- County and city governments were responsible for preparing the equipment (such as tablets, laptops, and mobile network cards) required for online learning and assisting students in borrowing the learning resources from districts and schools.
- Schools provided students and teachers with equipment, prioritizing students from disadvantaged families.
- In principle, teachers were required to teach online at school. Therefore, if the parents of students below high school level (including Kindergarten) were unable to take care of their children at home or if the students were unable to study at home, the school could arrange for a teacher or another member of staff to provide the students with study support, supervision, and meals at school.
- The MOE organized and built online learning resources and arranged course modules so that students and parents could obtain the necessary resources for online learning at home.

Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning

Because of the rapid changes during the pandemic, Taiwan went directly from Alert Level 1 to Alert Level 3 within a few days. Although teachers had participated in online teaching practice the previous year, their online teaching abilities varied considerably. However, teachers started online teaching within one or two weeks of the school closure. Organizations concerned with education, such as the King Car Cultural and Educational Foundation, have begun to evaluate the impact of online instruction on students. Seventy-one percent of primary students reported that they would like to return to their original school life, and 33 percent believed that they were learning less during lockdown. They also acknowledged that compared with traditional classroom learning, they made less effort when learning online.¹⁴

Policy and Practice Changes

In response to the pandemic, online teaching and learning have become the new norms in education. To enhance the professional ability of teachers to teach online and ensure the effectiveness of student learning, local education bureaus are actively supervising schools to develop online teaching practice, expecting to create a new learning environment that cultivates future digital talent. As a result, multiple hybrid teaching models are being developed.

Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021

The pandemic had a limited impact on Taiwan. By the time the pandemic alert was raised to level 3 (in a four-tier system) for the first time, on May 19, 2021, all the schools sampled for PIRLS 2021 had completed their testing. Therefore, the pandemic did not affect data collection procedures for PIRLS 2021 in Taiwan.

Suggested Readings

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