Taiwan Aboriginal Achievement Gap Policy

Dr. Tsou, Hui-fen, Associate professor of Dept. of Hospitality Management,
National Taitung Junior College, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

An achievement gap especially for the Taiwan Aboriginal is still not considered by most educators in Taiwan, Republic of China. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the pros and cons of this issue and compare the closing achievement gap in Republic of China with that of the United States. The paper concludes that Taiwan Aboriginal/Hans* achievement gap plan should be abolished because the design does not catch the needs of education. On the other hand, the Taiwan Aboriginal Country Education policy should be continued to be put into effect. Finally, some suggestions are presented to improve the implementation of the closing achievement gap policy in the Republic of China.

Keywords: Achievement gap; aboriginal education; Taiwan education; education policy;

INTRODUCTION

During the past few years, the Republic of China Ministry of Education (MOE) has been making great strides to narrow down the achievement gap between city and country schools. A proposed plan of achievement gap, unifying junior and senior high school curricula nationally since 1969, has been considered one way of carrying out these efforts. However, the proposal has caused a great controversy, because the implementation of the plan did not consider the characteristics of Taiwan Aborigines—about 1.5% of total population in Taiwan.

Three hundred years ago, there was no history of Taiwan Aborigines. In 1626 the Spanish occupied Taiwan and missionaries came to Taiwan. That is why most of the Taiwan Aborigines are Christian. In 1661, the last of the Ming Dynasty Emperor Chien-Chin mandated all 8-year-old children should go to school and learn Han words (Chinese). In 1683 the Chin Dynasty built lots of public and private schools for people to participate in the Capital Examination. Actually, all the education policies did not include the Taiwan Aborigines since most of them have been living in the mountains since Ming Dynasty. Even during the Japanese occupation, the education policy has three levels: Japanese emigration, Han people, and Taiwan Aborigines; and the aim of the education policy were to control Taiwanese people—disregarding Han people and the Taiwanese Aborigines.

In 1949, Kuo Ming Tan (KMT) came to Taiwan and dictated the “People Spirits Education.” It unified the education policies of Taiwan but disregarded the aboriginal distinctive education. In 1996, the published “Present situation and future for the education of Taiwan Aborigines” did not have any statistic information about pre-school children. Since the Spanish occupation the Taiwan Aborigines have been under a situation of cultural hegemony in which all the governments have forgotten the culture sensitivity. The aborigines are the major minority in the Taiwan society for over three hundred years.

As Protheroe noted (2004), the cultural environment influences children to present themselves, understand the world, and interpret experiences. Landson-Billings (as cited in Protheroe, 2004) argued that the child’s ability and intelligence are not determined by the culture but by teaching which can lead to
child awareness, appreciation, and integration in the classroom. Haycock (2001) also stressed that most of minority children get less adequate information before they enter school.

Besides the national education, the Taiwan aboriginal education policy both of coupon and special entrance examination cause a hot debate. Compared with the “People Spirits Education”, the aboriginal education policy catches more essence of cultural sensitivity. The idea of the aboriginal education policy originated from the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force scheme in the United States. The MOE published in 1998 the “Five–year Plan of Development and Improvement for the Taiwan Aboriginal Education.” (Kao, 2002). Based on Kao’s study, satisfaction of aboriginal education policy in Taiwan still lacks professional teaching and curricula because the old regulations have not changed as yet and time and money are limited. By discussing the pros and cons of aboriginal educational policy in Taiwan, some suggestions are presented to improve the implementation of aboriginal education policy.

Abstract of the History of Indian Education in the United States

A descriptive analysis indicated only 12% of American Indian and Alaska Native sample were college graduates by 1986 compared to 30% of the Whites and 22% of the Afro-Americans (Swisher & Hoisch, 1992). The similar report from the American Indian Education Foundation, only 17% of American Indian high school graduates go to college, compared to a national average of 62% (e. g., http://www.aiefprograms.org/history_facts/facts.html). Since 1969 a special Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education issues a final report "Indian Education: A National Tragedy - A National Challenge” centering national concentration on the educational situation of AI/AN students (e.g., http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/oie/history.html?exp=0). Then the landmark of Indian Education Act was legislated in 1972, and the content established only a comprehensive approach to meeting the distinctive needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students (e. g., http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/oie/history.html?exp=0). In 1974, the Indian Education Act was amended to add a teacher training program (e. g., http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/oie/history.html?exp=0). In 2001, Indian Education was reauthorized as Title VII Part A of the “No Child Left behind Act” and designed to assist Indian students in meeting State academic content and academic achievement standards (e. g., http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/oie/history.html?exp=0).

Abstract of Aboriginal Education Policy in Taiwan

Taiwan aborigines have been governed by Spain, Holland, Ming and Chin Dynasty, Japan, and KMT. They have been assimilated and depressed in society, economy, education, and culture. By the Education Report of Aborigines, Republic of China (as cited in Hung, 2001), there are three stages for aboriginal education development: 1. 1945-1962, assimilation. 2. 1963-1987, conglomerate. 3. 1988-1997, open development stage. Even there were many plans for improvement the aboriginal education in 1949, 1950, 1963, and 1970, the effectiveness being limited (as cited in Dai, 2003). In 1988, the Committee of Aborigines, Republic of China was built for research and for the improvement of the education of Taiwan Aborigines. In 1993, the first five-year plan of Development and Improvement for Taiwan Aboriginal Education Policy was published by the Ministry of Education. At the end of the plan in 1998, the second five-year plan of Development and Improvement for Taiwan Aboriginal Education Policy was published after discussion of the deficiencies.

So compared with the Indian education in the United States, there is one kind only of aboriginal education policy in Taiwan during these five years--the five-year plan of Development and Improvement
for Taiwan Aboriginal Education Policy (Kao, 2002; Dai, 2003). There are four goals of the aboriginal education policy: 1. Maintain aboriginal dignity and rights. 2. Increase aboriginal competition in our society. 3. Continue the aboriginal culture, and 4. Advance the life quality of the aboriginal. The content also specifies the pre-school education which is the following: 1. Build the administration and regulations of aboriginal education. 2. Modify the teaching system of aboriginal education. 3. Improve the training and hiring system for the aboriginal teachers. 4. Build the life and education counseling system for aboriginal students. 5. Strengthen the curriculum and teaching methods of physical education for aboriginal students. 6. Support the education equipment for the aboriginal school. 7. Increase the research and conferences for aboriginal education. 8. Increase the benefits for both aboriginal teachers and students. 9. Develop aboriginal parent education. 10. Develop aboriginal social education.

**Evaluation of Development and Improvement for Taiwan Aboriginal Education Policy**

The chairman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, Clarence Wesley, indicated (1961) five reasons why Indian education failed: 1. Culture reasons. 2. Language problem. 3. School curriculum. 4. Poverty. 5. The attitude of teachers. The five criteria seem to match the situation of the Taiwan Aboriginal education. Protheroe (2004) highlights that the culture can produce many different ways of knowing and learning. Either Taiwan Aboriginal students or Indian children are torn between two cultures. They have to struggle with a changing culture. Compiled with the culture, the simple problem is communication—language—of understanding and being understood. Taiwan Aboriginal languages belong to the Malayo-Polynesian or Austronesian. There are around twenty different kinds of languages among the ten major tribes of Taiwan Aborigines (Kao, 2002). Parents still talk with their children in their traditional languages at home. Because the school curricula are designed by the government, the curriculum benefits the non-aboriginal students more than aboriginal students. Not only does the course content lack the culture of aboriginal, but also the teachers lack multi-cultures training (Yo, 2000). According to 1990 Report of Taiwan Aborigines Work Situation (Aborigines Committee of Republic of China, 2001), shows the aborigines average income per month is NT$25,000 compared to the non-aborigines of NT$35,600 (as cited in Lin, 2002). The proportions of Aborigines profession are: lower labors 70.4%, farmers and fishers 19%, military 6.6%, and profession/technology 4% (Lin, 2002). The situation of Taiwan Aboriginal students is the same as Indian children which is poorer than any of non-aboriginal/non-Indian students in their classes.

**The pros of Development and Improvement for Taiwan Aboriginal Education Policy.** I believe that a good parental education will benefit the school education, but a good school education cannot promise to remedy children behavior, thinking, customs, and habits from a bad parental environment. As Karen and Hoisch (1992) stated that the parental support was the major responses from students who had dropped out. Latham’s study (as cited in Reyhney, 1992) also indicates the parental involvement will improve Indian education. Hall (as cited in Hung, 2001) argued that parental occupation and occupational values could be a critical factor in their children’s education accomplishment. Compared to Taiwan aborigines, there are around 40% of parents still not believing in school education (Dai, 2003). Aborigines think that school education is a benefit to these non-aboriginal students; they believe that to go to school is not only a waste of time but costs lots of money. Actually, the Taiwan government supports lots of money to aborigines. They can apply for free tuition no matter whether public or private schools they study through elementary school to graduate school. Unfortunately, it seems till now the Taiwan aborigines have not gotten enough information about the policy. So, both the development of aboriginal education and the building up of the education counseling system are big issues for enhancing the aboriginal student academic performance and educational standard.
The cons of Development and Improvement for Taiwan Aboriginal Education Policy. Since 1993 when the Taiwan government opened foreign laborers from some south-east countries, the labor market has been restructured. According to the report from the Committee of Aboriginal (as cited in Lin, 2002), 3.78% of aborigines own college degrees compared with non-aborigines 35.72%, and there are almost 2/3 of aborigines work on lower labor positions. The basic salary for a person is around NT$18,000 per month, but the foreign laborer’s salary is only around NT$14,000. Many factories, corporations, and business are using foreign labors instead of Taiwan aborigines basically considering the cost. How can we ask Taiwan aborigines to maintain their dignity and rights? If they cannot afford themselves the essential life expenses, how can we talk something like enhancing education level or parental education with them? And how can we increase the aboriginal competition in our society?

Since the beginning, Taiwan government overemphasizes the vocational education and the skill training for Taiwan aborigines. There are 15 reserved senior vocational schools and only two senior high schools—one is public, the other is private. It seems the Taiwan government biases the Taiwan aborigines now and then. A study by Liao (2002) indicates there is no significant difference on the percentage of superior students in elementary, junior and senior high schools between aboriginal students and non-aboriginal students. He stresses that the lower social-economic position is the major cause for reducing the aboriginal students to accept education early; furthermore, the lower position make the aboriginal students confuse themselves and directly shrink their strength of competition in Taiwan society. Again, how can we increase aboriginal competition in our society?

Sometimes the content of policy is good, but the policy should be implemented. According to the Statistics of Ministry of Education (as cited in Kao, 2002), there are two professional counselors for each public high school. In defect of professional counselor, there is almost only one counselor for a whole school with three to four thousand students. Some private schools even have no counselor. The situation is normal for most non-aboriginal schools, the aboriginal school situation is worse. How can the government not are embarrassed to say “build up the counselor system for aboriginal students?” The fact is that there is no counselor system, counselor certification or qualification existing in the country. And usually the tutor has to be responsible for all his/her class students. The origin of school counselor mainly comes from three ways: 1. Certified teacher with 20 credits of psychology and education. 2. Non-certified teacher with a bachelor degree in education or psychology. 3. And some tenure teachers.

SUGGESTIONS

Though aboriginal education policy in Taiwan has been in force for almost ten years, both the quality and quantity still not move up. That is because the scholars are used to admire the government policy and reluctant to reflect the fact. The scholars have the characteristics of traditional scholars which are not involved with the government policy for keeping their own positions. Also, most of the enactors are not aborigines; they lack the passions for the aborigines.

Therefore, the main work to promote the quality of aboriginal education is to push both the government to look at the fact and scholars have the courage to speak out or criticize the defects of the plan and process.

Closing the achievement gap is not a phrase, but putting it in action on it. The Taiwan government should wake up and do not cheat itself anymore. Otherwise, more and more five-year plans of Development and Improvement for Taiwan Aboriginal Education Policy cannot resolve the essential problem.
REFERENCE


