

Reflections on the education and employment of indigenous Taiwanese

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ABSTRACT: The overall educational and employment conditions of indigenous Taiwanese are discussed in this article, with the aim of helping the Government to determine or revise educational policies for indigenous people. Through various quantitative research methods (i.e. document analysis, interviews with companies, experts and scholars), the researchers found that, in order to offer genuine help to the indigenous people, the Taiwanese Government should develop a preschool education environment that not only embodies indigenous cultures, but also is based on it. As for indigenous employment, the authorities concerned should carry out a *two-in-one* job training and employment policy, because that is the only way to protect indigenous people's rights.

INTRODUCTION

The thriving industries and commercial activities in Taiwan in recent years have led to drastic changes in political, economic and social structures, dealing a huge blow to the self-sufficient lifestyle of indigenous Taiwanese. Large numbers of indigenous youngsters head to the cities, where the huge demand for labour generates many more jobs than in tribal areas. But compared to their non-indigenous counterparts, the indigenous Taiwanese generally receive less vocational education and their lack of professionalism prevents them from seizing job opportunities. Moreover, the Taiwanese Government has in recent years introduced legislation permitting the hiring of foreign labour, which has further deprived indigenous people of employment [1-3].

Not only are the indigenous Taiwanese educationally, economically, socially and culturally underprivileged, but their right to work has been threatened over and over again in recent years by the country's across-the-board introduction of foreign labour. To counter such a perilous situation, according to some scholars interviewed for this study, the first step is to reform Taiwan's primary education. The demand for indigenous-specific education can be addressed in the following three dimensions.

The indigenous people's cultural preservation/development and opportunities for finding jobs/starting businesses: The minorities often have problems keeping their cultures alive after coming into contact with the dominant ethnicities. As their unfavorable political and/or socio-economic conditions frequently put them on the verge of being assimilated, the indigenous Taiwanese have gradually noticed the impending crisis of cultural extinction, and realised it is imperative that their culture be restored and handed down. Therefore, the preservation and nurturing of ethnic heritage will lay a solid foundation for the livelihood of indigenous Taiwanese. As for the country's indigenous-specific education, the most urgent issues that call for reforms or solutions are *mother-tongue teaching* and *vocational education and career counselling*. The indigenous Taiwanese people have said the matter of the greatest urgency is to address their weaknesses in terms of employment, education and the economy, underscoring their long-unmet need for career counselling [4][5].

Guidance and counselling for everyday life: An indigenous-specific legal assistance programme should be implemented to not only ensure that the indigenous people engage in lawful occupations, but also to prevent them from being tempted into either disreputable trades or unfair agreements that might infringe upon their rights. Considering the frequent interaction between an indigenous community and the greater society, it is also advisable that one or two attorneys specialising in indigenous affairs be assigned to each administrative region with a comparatively large indigenous population, so as to promptly solve their problems and meet their needs [1].

Family/parenting education: The rapid change in social structure over recent years has seriously affected the indigenous Taiwanese, giving them problems adapting to social life [6]. The Government, therefore, should step up efforts to enhance family/parenting education, while instilling knowledge and a sense of responsibility in indigenous parents to help indigenous school children feel domestic bliss and care as a family member, and subsequently improve the quality of family life.

Given the ongoing trend toward a diversified culture in Taiwan's society, an ever-increasing significance is attached to indigenous affairs, making it urgent to not only re-examine issues such as indigenous students' academic achievements, advanced studies/employment, talent cultivation and cultural preservation, but also to present a package of comprehensive, visionary policies to facilitate the reform and restoration of indigenous-specific education. These urgent matters have sparked discussions regarding which method should be used to offer the indigenous people a comprehensive educational programme that hopefully will prevent them from going jobless (with a newly acquired capacity to put to use what they have learned) while widening job options. As a result, in this article, the authors address the major objectives of future indigenous-education policies from such perspectives as the motives/results of indigenous-specific education and employment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Analysis of problems concerning Taiwan's indigenous-specific education: The problems concerning indigenous-specific education in Taiwan are caused by two factors, namely the adult education and family education of indigenous Taiwanese [7][8].

Adult Education

Learning difficulties resulting from a cultural gap: Because of differences in language, cultural values, family conditions and social learning environment, indigenous school children and teenagers have more learning difficulties than non-indigenous ones. However, the teaching methods/environment of a typical Taiwanese school, dominated by the Han Population, have left indigenous students unable to fully adjust to the cultural gap and consequently become susceptible to frustration during the learning process.

Poor learning results due to curriculum/teaching methods favouring non-indigenous students: Indigenous and non-indigenous school children differ in such qualities as intelligence, self-concept, self-acceptance and achievement motivation, but the curriculum and teaching offered by Taiwanese schools fail to provide sufficient counselling and assistance to indigenous students, leading to unsatisfactory learning results, low academic achievement, and consequently for many Taiwanese aboriginals, an inferiority complex and social withdrawal that further hinders learning.

Low academic achievement and low educational attainment: Children of indigenous Taiwanese are less interested in advanced studies, because of their generally unsatisfactory academic performance, which could be attributed to the cultural gap, poverty or the fact that many are reared by grandparents.

Family Education

Indigenous households almost always are suffering financially, with parents who undertake physically demanding tasks for long hours and, therefore, become too overwhelmed by work or too busy making money to rear their children, let alone giving them guidance or counselling. Also, lower expectations set for indigenous children leave the youngsters with a careless attitude toward both life and learning, lacking career plans, and inclination to develop deviant behavior and learning disabilities.

Indigenous people's lack of sexual knowledge, as well as a comparatively larger number of children per family, hamper the effectiveness of parenting education and deprive their children of normal growth. A few indigenous people even sell their female offspring into child prostitution, resulting in the social problems of single mothers and abortions. Most of the indigenous people settling in urban areas are manual labourers moving to and from among different work locations, forcing their children to continuously change school districts, and suffer from maladjustment and interrupted learning.

Analysis of Indigenous-Specific Education Policies:

Although indigenous-specific education plays an important part in a country's educational system, the indigenous communities, schools and students in Taiwan are placed at a disadvantaged position that calls for a special, compensatory education model. As a measure of passive coping, the Government should state clearly that no reason, not even ethnicity, justifies a limited access to education. It must take an aggressive step to offer compensatory education to indigenous children in culturally under-privileged areas. As part of a national growth plan designed to meet indigenous Taiwanese' earnest expectations amid the trend toward education on the basis of diversified culture, it is imperative that Taiwan's national educational/cultural development focuses on an all-out effort to provide indigenous citizens with better education, so as to achieve the vision of *equal access to education*.

Patterned after the blueprint of an *Adult Education Implementation Plan*, Taiwan's education policies/regulations for indigenous adults take into consideration the indigenous people's current conditions (i.e. their cultural identity crisis, social adaptation issues, family problems, difficulties in finding jobs and the preservation of ethnic heritage), as well as the results of indigenous-demand surveys before determining the underlying concepts and policy, which serve as the foundation for indigenous-specific education policies/regulations and adult education initiatives [9][10].

Impact on Indigenous Employment of Introducing Foreign Labour to Taiwan:

When it comes to job hunting, indigenous Taiwanese indeed are facing a dilemma, which can be addressed in the two dimensions of labour supply and demand. From the viewpoint of labour supply, indigenous workers generally are placed at a direly disadvantaged position in a labour market dominated by modern industry and commerce, because they lack professional knowledge/skills and the ability to adapt to social change. From the viewpoint of labour demand, on the other hand, the negative attitude of corporate employers toward indigenous workers (i.e. discriminative treatments, dismal working conditions and the crowding-out effect triggered by the hiring of foreign labour) has constituted many obstacles to indigenous employment that need to be tackled promptly.

Amid the ongoing changes in industrial structure, indigenous unemployment in Taiwan generally is attributed to the following causes, when scrutinised in terms of labour supply and demand [11][12]:

1. Indigenous workers' biased occupational attitude results in a gap between their expected wage and that actually offered in the job market: Since indigenous Taiwanese are mostly stonemasons or other manual labourers at construction sites, their jobs provide higher wages in a short period of time as compared to typical ones. The lower-than-expected price of service offered in the job market, therefore, discourages them from job hunting.
2. Relatively low educational attainment has left indigenous workers with fewer job opportunities: Indigenous workers generally are low in educational attainment. According to the *2010 Survey Report of Living Status of Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan*, nearly 60% of indigenous Taiwanese aged 15 and above have an educational status of junior-high school or lower (Note: *elementary school and lower, junior-high school, (vocational) senior-high school* account for 35%, 27% and 32% respectively; while *college or higher* represents a mere 6% of all respondents). Since job openings in Taiwan are mainly high-tech and professional-oriented and consequently require a higher academic degree, non-indigenous workers still have an edge over their indigenous counterparts in the job market (Source: Council for Economic Planning and Development, Executive Yuan).
3. The distinctive collectivity prevents indigenous Taiwanese from adapting themselves to market demand: Among the many distinctive qualities of Taiwanese indigenous culture, stemming from the agricultural and tribal lifestyle, the collective working pattern is the most special, and has a negative influence on an indigenous person, when he/she seeks jobs as an individual in a modern society dominated by industry and commerce.
4. The introduction of foreign labour has dealt a heavy blow to indigenous workers undertaking similar jobs: 41% of indigenous workers in Taiwan do skilled, semi-skilled and/or manual works similar in nature to those undertaken by foreign labour at Taiwanese firms. *The Yearbook of Manpower Survey Statistics*, published by the Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, indicates that Taiwan hired 279,653 foreign workers in 2010, increasing by 7,896 workers from 2009. But the total indigenous workers decreased by 1,000 during the same period of time. *The 1998 Survey Report of Living Status of Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan* also indicates that 10.2% of indigenous primary household earners living in local townships said foreign labour took away their jobs, an apparent sign of the huge impact on indigenous Taiwanese of the hiring of foreign labour.
5. Limited job openings back in their home towns make it difficult for indigenous Taiwanese to explore opportunities: Given the fact that indigenous workers have a hard time earning a living in big cities, offering them jobs in their home towns is supposedly a good idea to improve their grim employment prospects. However, the limited resources of indigenous regions lead to very few job openings. Even if there are openings available (e.g. as mountain patrolmen of the Forestry Bureau or policemen of National Forestry Parks), qualification requirements are almost always attached to the jobs. Moreover, remotely located tribal areas generate little business potential. That is why further efforts are needed to create jobs in those areas.
6. The lack of funding for indigenous people aspiring to start their own businesses: Lack of funding is the greatest hindrance for indigenous people in initiating economic undertakings or industries. Currently, the Taiwanese Government offers loans under *The Fund for Indigenous Economic Development*, but indigenous people are often granted much smaller sums of loans than their applications request, because they tend to provide less valuable collaterals (i.e. land, houses or other properties). That has seriously discouraged them from starting their own businesses, and also denied them such opportunities.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Framework

Introduced in this article is a structure built by four variants, namely *motives for indigenous-specific education, results of indigenous-specific education, indigenous employment and foreign labour*.

The motives for indigenous-specific education are divided into three variants (family, cultural and economic aspects); the results of indigenous-specific education are divided into two variants (predicted and actual results); indigenous employment is divided into three variants (educational, social and professional-skill aspects); the introduction of foreign labour is discussed through replaceable and complementary variants. The overall research structure is shown in Figure 1.

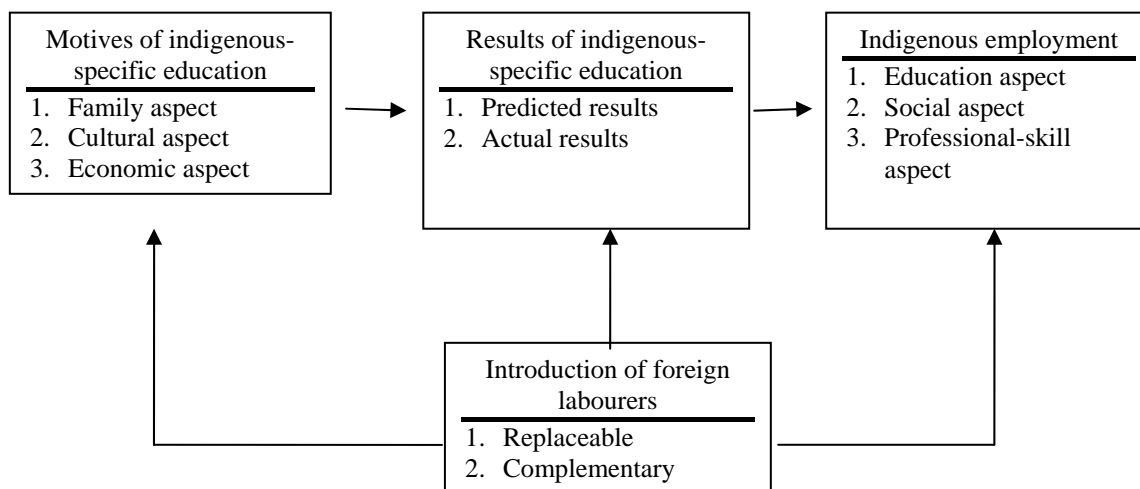


Figure 1: Research framework.

Glossary for the Variants Studied

Based on the studies conducted by Tan [7] and Hsu [8], the variants studied in this article include motives for indigenous-specific education, the results of such education, indigenous employment and the introduction of foreign labourers.

1. Motives for indigenous-specific education:

Family aspect: Examined in this article is whether indigenous parents in Taiwan are showing greater concern about their children's learning from the viewpoint of parenting education;

Cultural aspect: The ever-evolving society and culture in Taiwan caused traditional heritages (such as the mother tongue and handicrafts) to be ignored, which is a predicament that ought to be tackled through an after-school counselling programme;

Economic aspect: Making indigenous people able to meet changes in a modern industry with enhanced educational attainment is a critical problem facing Taiwan's school education.

2. Results of indigenous-specific education:

Predicted results: It is predicted that the educational attainment of indigenous peoples will be improved using the family, cultural and economic approaches;

Actual results: Current conditions of indigenous-specific education are scrutinised by means of a questionnaire-based survey along with case-study interviews.

3. Indigenous employment:

Educational aspect: In this article, viable ways are looked at in helping indigenous Taiwanese to cope with the evolving job market, through improved educational attainment;

Social aspect: Current conditions of indigenous employment are examined in the context of the macro-environment;

Professional-skill aspect: In this article, viable ways are looked at to create jobs for indigenous people by enhancing their professional skills.

4. Introduction of foreign labour:

The extent of any possible harm caused to the employment of indigenous people by Taiwan's introduction of foreign labour, and possible solutions to that unemployment problem are explored, after scrutinising the motives and results of indigenous-specific education, is discussed in this article;

Replaceability: The foreign labour hired in Taiwan not only will replace local workers, but also discourage Taiwanese firms from improving the working environment, and will subsequently slow the industry's technology upgrading progress.

5. Complementary:

Taiwan introduced foreign labour mainly to satisfy the unmet domestic demand in the labour force. Since the labour force nurtured by the country's on-job training programmes is hardly competent for their tasks, there is a supply-demand gap that prompted calls for the hiring of high-tech foreign workers, who would help local companies with technical/technological upgrading, and are unlikely to stay in Taiwan for a long period of time (because most of them come from advanced countries); hence, little or no social cost is generated. That explains why the general public shows approval for the introduction of high-tech workers from other countries.

Research Methodology

- Document analysis: Information concerning the macro-conditions facing indigenous Taiwanese, indigenous-specific education problems/policies, and the employment of indigenous Taiwanese was collected. The pros and cons of indigenous-specific education measures carried out in the country's history were weighed. Addressed in this article is the impact on indigenous employment of Taiwan's years-old introduction of foreign labour;
- Interviews with companies: A questionnaire was compiled in accordance with the literature review and the aforementioned research structure. The questionnaire was used in an interview survey of local companies;
- Interviews with experts/scholars: In an attempt to collect the opinions of Government officials, academia and indigenous people with regard to Taiwan's indigenous-specific education and employment, face-to-face interviews were conducted for this article, of representatives of Government agencies, organisations and individuals, in a bid to enhance both reliability and validity of the study.

ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS

Government agencies interviewed:

- Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) under Executive Yuan: the CIP offers indigenous Taiwanese a *two-in-one* employment and vocational training programme, sponsors community-based skill training programmes, launches indigenous-employment service desks, provides extra information regarding employment and vocational training, instils the correct occupational attitude in indigenous students, offers them counselling and encourages them to take certifying exams and/or enter competitions for professional skills;
- Committee on the Indigenous Affairs at City Government: This Committee carries out tribal developmental plans, offers interest-free student loans to indigenous college students along with various scholarships for incumbent students at all levels, promotes indigenous cultures and ethnic arts, creates social/cultural archives for indigenous people and builds indigenous culture memorial parks/museums. These efforts are meant to uphold the indigenous workers' rights.

Companies interviewed:

- Kaohsiung Hitachi Electronics Co.: A manufacturer of E-guns, silicon transistors, LCD monitors and components;
- Chun Yu Group: A manufacturer of screws, nuts, hexagon screws, polished steel bars, thread screws, stainless steel screws, flange nuts, torque-controlled high-strength screws, drill-head screws and particle-board screws;
- Formosa Heavy Industries Co.: A manufacturer of petrochemical processing equipment and industrial machinery. It also provides transportation and lifting for heavy equipment, automatic storage/logistics systems, metal roll hot grinding and electrolysis polishing;
- Shang-lin Precision Industry Co.: A manufacturer of sheet metal shells and accessories of electronic devices.

Academics interviewed:

- Bih-hsiao Chao, PhD, Professor at the Institute of Human Resource Management and the Graduate Institute of Business Management, National Sun Yat-sen University;
- Chiung-jen Chien, Professor at Kao Yuan University; Former Cultural and Arts Consultant at Pingtung County Government.

A questionnaire-based survey on indigenous workers:

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted on the indigenous employees at companies studied; they were selected using convenience sampling. Valid copies of questionnaires numbered 140; or 70% of the 200 copies given out were returned.

Analysis of Case Study Interviews

Motives for indigenous-specific education:

- Family aspect: It was learned from the interviews that indigenous families are economically weak and mostly supported by a single parent. Indigenous Taiwanese are used to binge drinking, they are prone to traffic accidents

and are under-privileged as a result. The question is: how are they expected to improve educational status and preserve cultural heritage, while living with so many troubles? Those financially sound indigenous families, nevertheless, would still encourage their children to aim higher academically. Currently, the Government policy is intended to *give the jobless fish without teaching them how to catch fish*. In an all-out effort, nevertheless, the CIP is making improvements in this regard because it expects the indigenous people to change for the better, one step at a time;

- Cultural aspect: The authorities are highly protective of indigenous Taiwanese when it comes to cultural preservation, although to little avail. Such inefficiency is because few indigenous people care about cultural preservation, while struggling to make a living, therefore, the authorities may use the *5-day work week* scheme as a tool to help indigenous people market unique cultural traditions to their non-indigenous counterparts or unite the cultural businesses into an industry. In this way, the local economy can create more jobs and retain younger workers. To make the 5-day work week scheme operate as expected, it is imperative that foreign investors be required to hire local employees for all positions below a specific level, with an emphasis on the promotion of cultural industry, because that is the only way to faithfully preserve the culture.

Thanks to the renewed emphasis the CIP puts on mother-tongue teaching, the indigenous children in Taiwan now start mother-tongue lessons from elementary school. According to the questionnaire-based survey used in this study, a majority of indigenous children still speak the mother tongue, a sign that their parents are handing down cultural heritage to the next generation. The survey also showed that indigenous Taiwanese consider it imperative that traditional heritage be preserved, despite today's threatening social culture. During the interviews, however, many scholars argue that what they wish to pass down to indigenous youth is the bilingual skill that involves Mandarin and the mother tongue. They said it takes more than the mother tongue for indigenous Taiwanese to survive, and speaking nothing but the mother tongue will lead to a dead end in the greater society. As a result, the cultural heritage of their home towns actually constitutes a barrier to indigenous Taiwanese living healthily. Unless the Government gives them unshakable assurance (of their culture), indigenous people will not be able to pass down their heritage in a carefree way.

- Economic aspect: During the interviews with companies, it was found that a typical Taiwanese employee is required to have a degree from junior-high school or higher and be able to read the English alphabet. The questionnaire-based survey for this study also indicates that a majority of indigenous respondents are thinking about improving their educational status, for work and livelihood reasons.

Results of Indigenous-Specific Education

- Predicted results: According to scholars interviewed, education authorities should make sure the indigenous-specific curriculum reflects cultural distinctiveness. Since Taiwan's capitalist education is dominated by the Han Population and culture rather than indigenous culture, it is impossible to make indigenous students interested in the curriculum, hence the gigantic obstacle to learning. In other words, a curriculum that truly respects ethnic cultures is supposed to look at indigenous Taiwanese from a cross-cultural viewpoint, and is tailor-made for each specific culture.
- Actual results: Although the Government attaches great importance to the education of indigenous people and is eager to improve their learning, the data that was collected indicate that neither the scholars nor the indigenous people are fully satisfied with existing Government policies. While many indigenous people said the CIP was most helpful during their school days, they did not really like the CIP-proposed education policies. Likewise, the scholars said all the Government subsidies were meant to justify the bloated budgets, but never as an earnest endeavour to understand indigenous cultures, lifestyle and needs. As a matter of fact, the policy implementation almost always proves detrimental to the ecological environment and heritages of indigenous areas.

Indigenous Employment

- Educational aspect: The ill-educated indigenous Taiwanese will remain bottom-level employees. According to the questionnaire-based survey used in this research, a typical Taiwanese company requires that an indigenous employee obtain a (vocational) senior-high school or higher degree, and whether or not an employee qualifies for promotion basically depends on his/her eagerness to learn, as well as work performance. But an employee's educational attainment is undeniably linked to his/her chance of being promoted.
- Social aspect: Indigenous Taiwanese are engaged in mostly strenuous, physically taxing jobs, and only a few of them do administrative work, which explains why Taiwan's introduction of foreign labour influences their job prospects so much. According to the data collected in this research, the country's introduction of foreign labour does not affect the local companies' willingness to hire indigenous workers. Almost all the companies interviewed said they treat all employees equally, indigenous or not, and hiring a foreign worker costs no less than hiring a Taiwanese one. Meanwhile, both Government officials and scholars who were interviewed believe foreign labour poses a huge threat to indigenous employment, because many are college-educated and come all the way to work in Taiwan, hence the better work attitude and attendance rate compared to indigenous Taiwanese.
- Professional-skill aspect: The companies interviewed in this research are industrial manufacturers, which basically require that an indigenous worker have common sense as a machinery operator. Consequently, it is the

Government's responsibility to provide indigenous workers with sufficient counselling regarding occupational skills. The ongoing economic downturn that makes layoffs more probable also calls for a Government-initiated second-career training programme for indigenous people.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

A minority and underprivileged group, the indigenous people in Taiwan received hardly any attention for their education problems and difficulties. The assimilative education policy held by the authorities over the past years also has left the special needs for indigenous-specific education ignored. It was found that ineffective family education is the major reason behind the indigenous Taiwanese's social disadvantage.

Most indigenous people in Taiwan are engaged in tiring, dangerous, low-paying and uninsured jobs, forcing their children to move along with them from one work location to another. Often, these children drop out from school because of household relocation procedures or because schools are unavailable in proximity to their parents' work locations.

Indeed, the Government has granted many subsidies for indigenous-specific education that immensely helped poverty-stricken families, but it fails to create tangible benefits in terms of the nurturing of indigenous talent, cultural preservation and personal career planning. In order to provide a complete solution to all problems stemming from the family factor, it is suggested in this article that pre-school education be available to all indigenous children (so as to build a solid foundation of early-childhood learning), colleges be incentivised to offer curricula focused on a diversified culture and cultural anthropology, further studies be conducted with regard to indigenous Taiwanese, awareness of indigenous-specific education/culture be enhanced and, most importantly, the government keep promoting family education for indigenous people.

The Constitution of the Republic of China, Taiwan, emphasises equal access to education, and providing education based on a diversified culture is currently a dominant educational philosophy. Considering the country's ongoing national development and increasingly better-educated citizens, how to take aggressive steps to ensure the disadvantaged indigenous people obtain equitable access to all levels of education, and how to establish an education model that meets their needs, would top Taiwan's education agenda. For all the subsidies and preferential treatments currently available, the indigenous people remain dissatisfied with Government-proposed education and employment policies because they are impractical and fail to address the root causes of problems.

The authorities should offer genuine help to indigenous people by putting themselves in the latter's shoes. Therefore, the researchers suggest in this article that indigenous Taiwanese be given autonomy and allowance to create their own education system, because applying the Han culture-based curriculum to indigenous people would only train them to work at the lowest level in a capitalist society.

Based on the conclusions in this article, several suggestions are presented to the Government and education authorities. Taiwan's existing preschool education programme, carried out by the Ministry of Education and the CIP, is based on the concept of *positive discrimination*, which indeed has brought positive benefits to the indigenous people that remain underprivileged, or disadvantaged, in the contemporary society. But when that pre-school education programme becomes the sole option, it may weaken the distinctiveness of indigenous culture.

As the pre-school education currently received by indigenous children is dominated by Han Civilisation, without any tangible assistance in the preservation or development of indigenous heritage, the Government should develop another pre-school education programme with indigenous culture as its undertone and foundation, because that would truly benefit the indigenous people. Once the indigenous workers are better-educated, they will surely enjoy more job opportunities. To ensure the social adjustment and full employment of indigenous Taiwanese, the Government has already initiated indigenous-specific vocational training courses. But it is advisable that the *two-in-one* job training and employment policy be implemented at the same time to effectively protect the rights of indigenous people.

To improve indigenous Taiwanese' livelihood and socioeconomic status, the Government must devise an intricate educational plan to offer guidance and help them blend into urban society. At the same time, vocational training courses should be available to equip them with adequate, professional knowledge and skills to earn a living, because that is the only way to noticeably lower the jobless rate of indigenous Taiwanese.

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