

Evaluation in Taiwan: An Overview

Shu-Tung Huang

Tung Nan Institute of Technology

Evaluation in Chinese Society

There are two tremendous influences on evaluation-related topics in Chinese society: external examination and Confucianism. Using oral and written tests to select individuals for positions in the civil service and the military generally used competitive group examinations and could be tracked back to the Western Zhou Dynasty (1027-711 BC) (Kellaghan & Madaus, 2003). Such public examination systems have deeply affected what standards to use in assessing the individual's performance, and how to do it, in Chinese society.

Also, Confucianism (circa 551-479 BC), the most important ancient religious underpinning for the social values, institutions, and transcendent ideals of traditional Chinese society, has influenced the educated Chinese approach to self-reference and correction of the flaws of his/her conduct. In one of Confucius' famous analects; Zeng Zi, one of Confucius' students, said: "I examine myself three times a day about whether I help my peers with all my efforts, whether I am

honest and faithful to my friends, and whether I practice what is imparted.” The way of self-reflection has been rooted in how to improve one’s morality, behavior, and problem-solving skills.

Although such early developments of evaluation philosophies have blossomed in Taiwan society, there was no indication of sprouting the theories and methodologies of modern evaluation until a manufacturing boom of semi-industrial exported goods in the late of 1960s. The inspiration of product evaluation was brought out the force of foreign manufactures’ competitions.

Historical Outlook of Taiwan Evaluation

Besides product evaluation, beginning in the mid 1970s, Taiwan’s higher education quality management systems was also directly shaped by American evaluation theories and practices. Increasingly, the Government looked to evaluation as the critical reference as to whether to approve the applicants for procuring governmental subsidies, or in offering a new program. For convenience, we shall describe five periods in Taiwan’s evaluation development.

The period of the MOE implementing programmatic evaluation 1975-1989

In 1975, the first formal evaluation occurred when the Ministry of Education (MOE) drew up an experimental system of quality assurance for specialized

bachelor and master programs; then, the MOE found programmatic evaluation could be a powerful tool to enhance university departments' academic and administrative operations. Consequently, over the next 15 years, the MOE increasingly expanded the evaluation objects to specialized colleges, teachers colleges, and training centers.

The period of professional bodies initiating programmatic evaluation 1990-1994

In the late 1980s, there were several debates concerning how education evaluation should be conducted more professionally; what the evaluation purpose(s) should be; what the evaluation managing body should be; and who should be involved in constructing and clarifying the evaluation standards or criteria. Also, several graduate schools began to offer one or two course(s) in evaluation theory and methodology. A number of educational journals had begun to disseminate information about the various facets of educational evaluation practices nationally and internationally. Numerous monographs dealing exclusively with educational evaluation were also published.

In 1989, the MOE contracted with three independent professional associations to individually design and execute the departmental evaluations. During this period, the MOE also assigned National Hsinchu Teachers College not only the task of providing consultative services about related evaluation theories and practices, but also of conducting an external metaevaluation study of these three professional

societies' implementations. The results of this metaevaluation study found that the effectiveness of these societies' assignments was significant. Such assignments could have created further mechanisms for assuring higher educational academic and administrative quality (Su, 1997).

The trial institutional evaluation period 1995-2000

In 1994, the MOE amended the University Law to offer higher education institutes more autonomy and academic independence. Also, the quantity of universities was dramatically increased from 50 universities and colleges in 1991 to 127 accredited institutes in 2000. In 1991, the number of college students totaled 280,000; however, there were over 465,000 students in 2000. Such a notable educational expansion had also raised doubts about the quality of higher education. Again, in 1997-1998, the MOE, legislators, and educationalists, looked to institutional evaluation as a way of managing the quality of higher education.

This first institutional evaluation embraced 62 comprehensive universities, specialized universities and colleges. The purposes of evaluation had been formulated as: ensuring accountability; contributing towards institutional quality improvement; and providing essential information to the MOE. The main evaluation methods were institutional self-evaluation, one-day on-site external assessment, public reporting, and follow-up reviews.

According to Dr. Jin-li Su's metaevaluation study, the effects of the universities' evaluation were quite satisfactory. However, Dr. Su recommended that

governmental actions should deeply influence the evaluation of professional development in every possible way, such as: supporting the organization of an independent higher educational evaluation body, and upholding evaluation capacities like evaluator training, development of Taiwan's specific evaluation standards, and a progressive professional infrastructure. Moreover, she suggested that the evaluation process, from beginning to end, should be more open and democratic for all main stakeholders; meaning the evaluation study should include the interests and value of major participants involved in this program, and the evaluation process should also facilitate and foster dialogues amongst evaluators, governmental agencies, evaluation managers, and higher education institutes' representatives (Su, 2001).

During this stage, Taiwan's vocational and comprehensive high schools were all required to be evaluated based on the local education regulations, and a few Master and Ph. D. dissertations on the subject of educational evaluations were presented. A number of important metaevaluation reports were also disseminated. In addition, Taiwan's first Master degree program for evaluation was set up in 1997.

The period of universities installing internal evaluation mechanisms 2001-2004

By 2000, evaluators and evaluation advocates faced a foundational crisis: whether the external evaluation was a more effective and efficient technique than other methods; whether the external institutional evaluation could help the institutions to

achieve their own educational mission, goals, and objectives; and whether internal evaluation mechanisms for Taiwan's higher education institutions should be launched. For these reasons, the MOE decided to subsidize universities to help construct their own internal quality assurance systems. In 2001 and 2002, there were 34 and 26 universities that gained US\$ 600,000 and 200,000 of the MOE subsidy separately.

The metaevaluation study of the 34 internal evaluations in 2001 found that the effects of the internal evaluations were satisfactory; and several follow-up actions resulted, which included: one university's Board of Trustees allotting more than US\$ 30 million dollars to reconstruct several buildings; another school authority discharged an inefficient dean; two institutes redefined the assessed objects' personnel tasks, developed their personnel performance standards in several departments, and re-scheduled several training workshops for their team members.

However, most of them felt that conducting an internal evaluation themselves was full of difficulties, which included: the lack of competent evaluation designers and managers, inadequacy of monetary supply to design and execute an evaluation, malfunction in communication between evaluation managers and the assessed objects' participants, and the needs of outside evaluation societies' consultants etc. (Huang & Su, 2005).

In 2003, the Central Government's Research, Development, and Evaluation Commission (RDEC), based on American Government Performances and Results

Acts, finally set up the Regulation of National Enterprises Performance Evaluation (RNEPE). The RDEC therefore has the obligation to evaluate the performance of national public services annually through regular or random inspections. Moreover, at the end of year, the Commission will establish a task force to assess enterprises' performances based on their written internal evaluation reports as well as the on-site audits. Although such regulations have been put in action, there have been no related reports published from either corporations or RDEC itself.

The period of allocation of universities' resources through evaluation 2005-

In 2004-2005, Taiwan's second universities' institutional evaluation was held by the Taiwan Association of Evaluation and Assessment, a nongovernmental evaluation body. This institutional evaluation consisted of 76 universities and colleges, which was divided into 9 groups based on the institutions' distinguishing characteristics. The standards which were designed and revised through three hearings of professional conferences comprised 7 standards of categories: specialized programs professionalization, teaching resources, internationalization, extension education, student affairs, general education, and government/resources. The evaluators utilized the standards to judge each category of institution performances and ranked it separately within 9 groups, meaning the institutes within a group would compare their ranking within each other, but not with those outside the group.

In 2005, Taiwan MOE used part of the evaluation ranking outcomes to approve 12 universities to join the Plan for Upholding Universities' Capacities (PUUC), in which plan MOE would subsidize totally NT\$ 50 billions (US\$1.6 billions) for two universities and 10 research centers in the next five years. The PUUC intension is to promote one or more universities to rank in the top 100 of world universities and/or top 3 in Asian countries, as well as help 5 or more research centers to be in the top 50 of world research centers.

Though no systematic metaevaluation reports have been provided, according to several main newspapers and journals there are several flaws in this institutional evaluation design, execution, and outcomes utilization:

- the unclear relationships between the evaluation ranking outcomes and future universities funding from the MOE, in terms of whether the intended purpose(s) of the external evaluation should be accountability or improvement-oriented
- the standards of evaluation had been focusing heavily on resources and processes, but with little emphasis on teaching, student achievement, or student learning outcomes
- this evaluation had already created a very tense issue of what values the university's faculty should possess: teaching obligations or research obligations

Observably, the standards in this evaluation basically asked the faculty for more research commitment than teaching commitment.

- the extremely rigid visiting procedures, such as: 2-day visiting time, only 15-day interval after the internal evaluation reports were done prior to the visit, made the evaluation process somewhat unsatisfactory—perhaps just a passing glance at the evaluated objects
- some main stakeholders questioned the entire evaluators' performances, such as: their professional qualification, reasonable competencies, selecting, training, and ethical considerations, etc.
- the fairness of the process, specifically, how to assure that various review teams were consistent in this expectations of university performance
- some of the evaluated institutes criticized the credibility and viability of the ranking outcomes

Challenges

- in Taiwan, 95% of evaluation implementation has been in the educational setting. Program evaluations of health, justice, and public services have seldom been designed, and executed
- the evaluation practitioners (evaluation designers, evaluators, and

evaluation managers) are almost all from the educational areas; therefore, the lack of strategies to encourage experts with a different background to get into the evaluations fields probably have limited the development of evaluation capacities

- most of the evaluations are sponsored by the MOE and/or city/county education departments; the evaluations have been done almost always externally; and the objectives of external evaluation are inclined to favor accountability requirements
- there are no commonly agreed standards and/or codes of evaluation performances right now; moreover, 90% of the evaluators indicated that their learning to be evaluators came just through direct practice, not by formal training or education
- although the Government has established the RNEPE as an integral part of its enforcement strategy to pass the accountability requirements, the public confidence in government holding the evaluation is still obviously unclear and deficient

Evaluation Activities in Progress

Taiwan as a highly economically developed country has confronted more economics liberalization issues than the impacts of its public services. In 2002, 18

Taiwanese products were ranked first in the world; moreover, Taiwan published 10,381 scientific dissertations, the 18th highest in the world, and in 2003 held 6,676 patents in the United States, the fourth largest capacity in the world (MOEA, 2005). Such achievements have always benefited from the continuous improvement of product evaluation in business sectors themselves; apparently, the governmental actions to improve public services through evaluation have not met the public needs. In other words, the quality of services provided is not proportional to the level of Taiwanese success in its economic and democracy development.

However, in Taiwan, such critiques and suspicions lie ahead; probably the implementation of the higher educational institutional evaluations in 2004-2005 is the most noteworthy turning point to establish the evaluation profession during this decade. Since then, evaluation theories and practices have continually attracted main stakeholders, legislators, and public to discuss what can be utilized to integrate and foster continuous improvements and accountability of the evaluation programs. Again, the MOE has been forced to act in the following way, such as:

- conducting a metaevaluation study to clarify the objectives of educational evaluation, the utilization of evaluation outcomes, and periodic updates of the evaluation standards, etc.
- spending at least US\$ 1 million to establish a higher educational evaluation center before the end of year 2005

- encouraging Taiwan's universities to seek international specialized program accreditations
- during the following five years, the MOE will conduct program evaluations, which will be focusing on teaching and student learning in higher educations

References

- Huang, S. T. & Su, J. L. (2005). A Metaevaluation study: Evaluating the self-evaluation reports for the colleges/universities implementing the 2001 year self-evaluation project in Taiwan (in Chinese). *Bulletin of Educational Research* 51(2), 31-65.
- Kellaghan, T. & Madaus, G.F. (2003). External (public) examinations. In T. Kellaghan, D. L. Stufflebeam & L. A. Wingate. *International handbook of educational evaluation*, 577-600. The Netherlands: Kluwer.
- Ministry of Economics Affairs (2005). *Invest in Taiwan* (in Chinese). Retrieved Oct., 11, 2005, from <http://investintaiwan.nat.gov.tw/en/env/taiwan.html>.
- Su, J. L. (1997). *Higher education evaluation: Theories and practices* (in Chinese). Taipei: Wunan.
- Su, J. L. (2001). A metaevaluation research in higher education (in Chinese). Taipei: Yuzing.