

Full Length Research Paper

The recruitment of private technical colleges in Taiwan

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Due to the innovation of Taiwan's education strategy, options for the channel of advancing to higher education for students are unobstructed. The number of universities and colleges in Taiwan has grown from 137 to 162, as of today. The rapid development of higher education has raised many issues, such as the over supply of higher education market. Because decline in birth-rate, number of upcoming students has declined sharply, thereby impacting school enrollment. The purpose of this study aims to discuss the situation of recruitment of private technical colleges in Taiwan, and find out the schools that have the higher recruitment competency by examining and analyzing the secondary data. Main data source is based on the number of students in each private technical colleges from 2002 to 2008. Results of this study show: (1) Number of students in private technical colleges are most in 5,001 to 10,000 students. The scale of schools is very different. (2) Compare the number of students in 2002 and 2007 about 65% of schools downsize. (3) There are four schools whose student numbers are increasing in the past seven years and fourteen schools which are decreasing in student numbers.

Key words: Private technical colleges, number of students, situation of recruitment.

INTRODUCTION

In this knowledge-based economy, economic development is closely related to the popularization and universalization of education. Knowledge facilitates economic development, industrial upgrading, and fortune creation. Most people believe the rapid development of Taiwan in the past should attribute to the proper technical human resources cultivated by Taiwan's technical-vocational education to meet the requirements of various industries. Between 1978 and 2008, the number of students in Taiwan's higher education has increased by 4.2 times, from 317,188 to 1,337,455 (Department of Statistic in Ministry of Education, 2009). The number of institutions of higher education has grown from 141 of the year 1999 to 162 as of today. The expanding number of students receiving higher education, in turn, leads to the view of our society (Weng, 2002; Dai, 2000).

Nonetheless, the population of Taiwan has reduced to less than two hundred thousand in 2008, and the declining birthrate is obviously impacting the education changes in the characteristics of higher education and

sector in Taiwan. According to the "Report on Population Projection from 2008 to 2056 of ROC Taiwan" by Council for Economic Planning and Development of Executive Yuan (2008), the population aged 6, 12 and 18 that attend elementary school, middle school and tertiary school will decrease by 16.5, 36.1 and 8.5%, respectively, in the next 10 years; and will decrease by 21.5, 37.2 and 38.3%, respectively, in the next 20 years. The year-after-year decline in enrollments will cause serious problems to the balance between supply and demand for educational institutions on all levels. According to the research by Jhan and Guo (2006), if Taiwan leaves its higher education sector entirely to the invisible hand of free market, approximately 40 private schools will cease to exist in the next 20 years. With the declining birthrate in Taiwan, the supply of higher education will exceed the demand sooner or later. When it happens, there certainly will be schools, particularly private schools, having big problems in recruiting students. Therefore, the following two questions are really worth our attention and study: one, what kind of schools will have more competitiveness in student recruitment in a ferociously competitive market of higher education, and two, what kind of schools will have difficulties in recruiting enough students in this ferociously competitive market of higher education are

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really worth our attention and study.

Research purpose

This study mainly intends to identify schools in Taiwan with strong competitiveness in student recruitment. Due to the fact that public schools and private schools base themselves upon different resources and conditions for student recruitment, public schools are usually at an advantageous position, and hence this study will focus on exploring the status of student recruitment by private technical-vocational schools.

The three specific purposes of this study are as follows: (1) To analyze the current number of students in various private technical-vocational schools in Taiwan. (2) To analyze the variation in the total number of students in each school during seven years between 2002 and 2008, with the student numbers in the year 2002 as the base period, to identify the increase or decrease in student numbers in private technical-vocational schools in Taiwan. (3) To identify the private technical-vocational schools in Taiwan with high or low competitiveness in student recruitment.

Definition

Competitiveness in student recruitment

“Competition” means a rival behavior striving for the same and limited purpose. Market share is one of the indicators for the competitiveness of a business organization. The continuous running of a school is based on an abundant source of students. Faced with a declining student numbers year after year, this study defines those with continuously increasing number of students between 2002 and 2008 as school with “high competitiveness in student recruitment”, and those with continuously decreasing number of students during the same seven year period as schools with “low competitiveness in student recruitment”.

School size

To maintain normal school operation or to even expand its operation, a school needs sufficient fund, which is mainly from two sources: student tuition and government subsidy. The size of enrollment has a direct impact on the income of tuition, and even the survival of a school. This study takes the number of students as an index to school size, and thereby defines those with 5,000 students or less as small-sized school; those with 5,001 - 10,000 students as middle-sized school; those with 10,001 - 15,000 students as mid-large-sized school; and those with 15,001 students or more as large-sized school, then

further defines that school of larger size has stronger competitiveness in student recruitment.

School code

The school codes used in this study accords with the four-digit coding system set by the Ministry of Education. The first digit “0” represents state-run school and “1” represents private school; the second digit “0” represents university, “1” represents technical college, and “2” represents postsecondary vocational school; the last two digits indicate the school’s code in the system.

Literature review

Status quo of tertiary technical-vocational education in Taiwan

Since the first technical college was founded in 1974, tertiary technical-vocational education has been coexisting with general higher education on a parallel track in Taiwan. In the early days, to meet the needs of national economic development, technical-vocational education in Taiwan focused on cultivating technical human resource. Therefore, technical-vocational schools on all levels all played the role as terminal education provider, teaching or training students for vocational purposes; however, as there recently have been more chances and channels for technical-vocational school students to further their study, the role of technical-vocational school is changing from the terminal education provider to an institution that helps students prepare for their future studies or careers (Technical-Vocational Education Department, Ministry of Education, 2003). Taiwan’s tertiary technical-vocational education system consists of technological universities, technical colleges, and postsecondary vocational schools. In 1996, Ministry of Education promulgated the policy of “the Second National Highway for Secondary Technical-vocational Schools”; to provide more opportunities for students in secondary technical-vocational schools to receive higher education. Furthermore, under this policy, a well-performed postsecondary vocational school is encouraged to change its system into a technical college, while a technical college with a good track record can upgrade its status to a technological university. As a result, the quantity of postsecondary technical-vocational schools, along with their student numbers, has greatly increased (Technical-vocational Education Department, Ministry of Education, 2003).

As for the number of tertiary technical-vocational schools, from 1995 to 2008, the number of technological universities grew from 0 to 38, while the number of technical colleges grew from 7 to 40. With the growing number of tertiary technical-vocational schools, it is not

hard to expect the hot competition in this market. The students receiving tertiary technical-vocational education are mainly those graduates from secondary technical-vocational schools. However, under the influence of the Ministry of Education, a considerable number of secondary vocational schools and technical schools have either turned into general high schools or simply ceased to exist, leading to a decline year by year in the number of graduates from such schools. As the Ministry of Education is currently establishing a "general high school" system to adjust the proportion of secondary vocational school, student numbers in secondary vocational school will decrease year by year, which will bring more pressure and even crisis to the student recruitment by tertiary technical-vocational schools.

On the other hand, the number of people taking the national entrance exam for tertiary technical and vocational education is lessening every year. With the declining birthrate, the situation is getting worse. In 2002, for the first time, the authorized size of enrollment to tertiary technical and vocational education surpassed the total number of graduates from secondary vocational school (Technical-vocational Education Department, Ministry of Education, 2003). As the level of oversupply by tertiary technical-vocational education is getting higher, there will certainly be a considerable amount of schools that fail to run properly and therefore lose their businesses due to insufficient enrollment.

Non-profit organization management

Non-profit organization plays an important role in an economy, mostly regarded as "the third sector" between the public sector and private sector. The biggest difference between non-profit and for-profit organizations lies in their purpose of existence. The purpose of a for-profit organization is to keep its business everlasting and pursue more profits; the purpose of a non-profit organization is to fulfill a specific mission without taking profit pursuing as the priority. Since a non-profit organization lacks the "profit-pursuing" motivation, the assessment of its performance is different from that of general business organizations. The most significant difference rests with the fact that the profit gained by a non-profit organization will be used to further fulfill the organization's cause, rather than distributed among the owner and staff of the organization (Lu, 1999; Situ, 1999).

Although, public and private universities are supposed to be non-profit organizations, faced with a limited national education budget and a rapidly growing number of institutions of higher education, such schools cannot help but try to improve their market visibility, in order to meet the needs of the market, to enhance their competitiveness, to gain a higher market share and enrollment rate, in every way they can (Juang and Lin, 2003; Ball, 1994; Chan and Mok, 2001).

Commercialization of higher education

Since Martin Trow put forward the idea of popularization of higher education in the 1970s, the role of higher education has turned from the ivory tower that fosters elites into the general educational institution that opens to the whole society. The access to higher education is viewed as one of civil rights, also one of the mechanisms to facilitate the flow between different social classes. The enrollment rate of higher education in many countries has grown from 15% (elite higher education) to 15 - 50% (popular higher education), even to over 50% (universal higher education) (Dai, 2000). Due to the emergence of "The New Right" in the 1980s, along with the rise of the slogan "Small State yet Big Citizens", the trend of privatization and commercialization of social benefits and public services spread across the world, and the role of government in terms of social benefits and services turned from the provider to the supervisor (Dai, 2000; Gai, 2004; Chen, 2006; Chan and Mok, 2001). In order to lighten the burden on government, various countries started to apply a loose policy on higher education, gradually lifting the controls on private universities and colleges, while introducing the market mechanism to the higher education sector, which became a major force behind the development of higher education (Dai, 2000; Tang, 2005; Simon, 2004; Mok, 2009).

A private school's funds mostly rely on its income of tuition and fees. Further, private schools, like organizations in other sectors, concern deeply about competition and performance, and most of them have to take sole responsibility for their own profits and losses. Due to the cut in government funding, various schools have to depend on (the market and) customers to obtain adequate resources, which impels school owners and managers to adopt a commercialized way of thinking and business model when running their schools.

To sum up, under the impact of the increasing number of schools and the declining birthrate, many technical colleges and vocational schools in Taiwan are facing the problem of inadequate enrollment. Based on the current status of Taiwan, the situation of inadequate enrollment will get worse in the future. Many schools, therefore, are forced to think and act like companies, in order to enhance their competitiveness and to keep businesses everlasting. Learning the model of competition between companies may help technical-vocational schools find the right way to survive and win in this ferociously competitive environment.

This study makes an argument that the number of students has a substantial effect on a school's income of tuition and fees. Particularly, for a private school, the tuition and fees paid by students accounts for a majority part of its total income, and hence the number of students is closely related to the survival and well-being of the school. The number of students is susceptible to many factors, such as increasing number of classes, increasing

Table 1. Distribution of total student numbers in private technical schools.

Student numbers Years	Under 5,000	5,001 - 10,000	10,001 - 15,000	Over 15,000
2002	10	37	15	4
2003	11	36	16	3
2004	12	36	15	3
2005	13	37	13	3
2006	13	36	15	2
2007	14	35	14	3
2008	16	33	13	4

length of schooling/systems of schooling, and increasing number of departments and faculties, etc. However, regardless of what causes the change in student numbers, more students mean more income of tuition and fees. This is especially true to a highly competitive education market. With the overall declining student numbers in the macro-environment, the fact that a school is able to enlarge the size of its enrollment will undoubtedly indicate the school's higher competitiveness in student recruitment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects

In 2002, for the first time, the authorized number of students taking the national entrance exam for tertiary technical and vocational education surpassed the total number of graduates from secondary vocational school. Therefore, the subjects of this study were 66 private technical schools that had already been founded and started to recruit students by 2002, including 28 technological universities, 32 technical colleges, and 6 postsecondary vocational schools.

Tools

This study took the "Basic Database of Schools" and "Student Numbers of Universities and Colleges" from the Ministry of Education as its data source. It collected the data by making a census of the total number of students in subject schools from 2002 to 2008, and processed the data using Secondary Data Analysis. Due to different systems and scales of the subject schools, simply comparing by the total student numbers or certain school system is not fair. In this study, therefore, the researchers summed up the total student numbers of each school by taking a census of students subject to different school systems, and then calculated the decline in student numbers of each school during 7 years, with the total number of students in 2002 as the base period. In this study, descriptive statistics is used to conduct comparative analysis, such as secondary data analysis and percentage analysis.

RESULTS

Analysis on the quantity of private technical schools and public schools as well as student numbers in Taiwan

In 2002, the number of tertiary technical schools totaled 86, including 19 public schools (22.09%) and 67 private ones (77.91%); in 2008, the number totaled 93, including 20 public schools (21.50%) and 73 private ones (78.50%)(Table 1). As for the distribution of school sizes, there were 15 technological universities (17.44%), 56 technical colleges (65.12%), and 15 postsecondary vocational schools (17.44%) in 2002; 38 technological universities (40.86%), 40 technical colleges (43.01%), and 15 postsecondary vocational schools (16.13%) in 2008. In regard to school systems, technical colleges account for a bigger proportion. However, it is noteworthy that the proportion of technological universities and that of technical colleges were quite close in 2008.

Analysis on the variation in student numbers of private technical schools in Taiwan during the seven years

Most private technical schools in Taiwan have a size of 5,001 - 10,000 students. In 2002, there were four large-sized schools with over 15,000 students, which are numbered here, respectively, as 1023 (16,980 students), 1024 (15,509 students), 1025 (16,814 students), and 1032 (15,138 students); in 2008, there were four large-sized schools containing over 15,000 students, which are numbered here as 1023 (19,414 students), 1025 (17,341 students), 1032 (15,299 students), and 1018 (15,108 students), respectively. By comparing between the student numbers in 2002 and 2008, the findings show that a decline in student numbers is evident in most schools (43 schools in total, 65%); while there are 23 schools (35%) whose student numbers in 2008 were bigger than that of 2002.

As Table 2 shows, there are a total of 5 schools with an over 30% increase in student numbers; a total of

Table 2. Percentages of increase and decrease in student numbers of 2002 and 2008.

+ or – Years	Over-30%	-21%~-30%	-11%~-20%	-1%~-10%	+0%~+10%	+11%~+20%	+21%~+30%	Over +30%
2008	12	9	11	11	11	5	2	5

12 schools with an over 30% decrease in student numbers. Of them, the 3 schools with the biggest decrease (over 50%) in student numbers are numbered here, respectively, as 1281 (59% decrease), 1148 (52% decrease), and 1154 (50% decrease); there are a total of 4 schools with an over 50% increase in student numbers, which are numbered here, respectively, as 1286 (153% increase), 1282 (65% increase), 1147 (63% increase), and 1285 (50% increase). The schools with an over 50% decrease in student numbers include 2 technical colleges and 1 postsecondary vocational school; the schools with an over 50% increase in student numbers include 1 technical college and 3 postsecondary vocational schools.

Differentiating schools with high and low competitiveness in student recruitment

As previously noted, with the declining birthrate and school attendance rate, the fact that a school is able to keep a continuous increase in its student numbers indicates the school's strong competitiveness in student recruitment. In this study, a school that has gained increases in student numbers for seven consecutive years is defined as a school with "higher competitiveness in student recruitment". According to the results of this study, there are 4 schools with higher competitiveness in student recruitment, which are numbered here respectively as 1018, 1036, 1147 and 1282, including 2 technological universities, 1 technical college, and 1 postsecondary vocational school. The student numbers of each school are presented in (Appendix 1). There are 14 schools (Appendix 2) that have suffered decreases in student numbers for seven consecutive years and thus had lower competitiveness in student recruitment, which are numbered here, respectively, as 1043, 1045, 1047, 1052, 1054, 1134, 1148, 1154, 1159, 1163, 1170, 1172, 1174, and 1181, including 5 technological universities and 9 technical colleges. Of the schools that have suffered decreases in student numbers for seven consecutive years, there are 2 technological universities with a 10 - 20% decrease; 4 schools with a 20 - 30% decrease, including 1 technological university and 3 technical colleges; 6 schools with a 30 - 50% decrease, including 2 technological universities and 4 technical colleges; there are 2 technical colleges with an over 50% decrease (down 52% at the maximum), which means the number of students has declined to only half as much as seven years before.

Conclusion

The number of students in essence represents the market share of a school. However, the subjects in this study are different in their sizes, from a little over 1,000 students at the minimum to nearly 20,000 students at the maximum. Appraising different schools' competitiveness in student recruitment simply by student numbers is susceptible to factors such as form and size of the school. This study, therefore, assess a school's competitiveness in student recruitment not only by its student numbers but also by the variation in its student numbers. Based on the above-mentioned purposes and results, this study has come to three conclusions as follows.

Analysis on the number of private technical schools and public schools as well as student numbers in Taiwan

Considering the proportion of private and public technical schools in 2002 and 2008, private schools are in the majority, accounting for nearly 80% of the total; with regard to school systems, technical colleges make up a bigger proportion. It is noteworthy, however, that the proportion of technological universities and technical colleges became quite close in 2008. This is related to the fact that many technical colleges have changed their names to "university" in recent years. As the statistics of this study shows, 22 schools have changed their names during the 7 years, which is a main reason why the proportion of technological universities has increased rapidly. As for the number of students, most private technical schools in Taiwan have 5,001-10,000 students. In 2002, the biggest number of students was 16,980; the smallest number of students was 1,168. In 2008, the biggest number of students was 19,414; the smallest number of students was 2,398. It is obviously that private technical schools in Taiwan are very different in their sizes.

Analysis on the variation in student numbers of private technical schools in Taiwan

By comparing between the student numbers in 2002 and 2008, a decline in the number of students during the 7 years is shown in most (65%) schools. Nevertheless, with this decline in student numbers year by year, lack of

students will have a serious impact on the operation of many schools. There are 3 schools, including 2 technical colleges and 1 postsecondary vocational school, that have suffered the biggest (50% or more) decrease in student numbers, which means the student number in 2008 is only half as much as that in 2002; there are a total of 4 schools that have gained an over 50% increase in student numbers, including 1 technical college and 3 postsecondary vocational schools.

Differentiating schools with high and low competitiveness in student recruitment

In this study, a schools that have gained increases in student numbers for seven consecutive years are defined as schools with "high competitiveness in student recruitment"; schools with a larger number of students are also considered to have stronger competitiveness in student recruitment. The results of the study show there are a total of 4 schools with higher competitiveness in student recruitment, including 2 technological universities, 1 technical college, and 1 postsecondary vocational school. The 4 schools with the biggest number of students (over 15,000) in 2008 are also technological universities.

There are a total of 14 schools that have suffered decreases in student numbers for seven consecutive years and thus had a lower competitiveness in student recruitment, including 5 technological universities and 9 technical colleges. The biggest decrease in student numbers over seven years is 52%, which means the number of students has declined to only half as much as seven years before. As the results of this study show, changing the name of a school into something containing the word "university" will not necessarily help to bring in more students. For example, there are 5 schools that still suffered decreases in their student numbers even after changing their names into "university".

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions above, this study made three recommendations as follows for school managers and administrators and other researchers who will conduct follow-up studies in the future.

Designing strategies for student recruitment in the future

It can be seen that under the future market-oriented system of higher education, many schools with low competitiveness in student recruitment will be kicked out of the game. This study has shown four schools that were able to increase their student numbers against the general declining trend in enrollment size year by year and thus considered to have high competitiveness in

student recruitment. Thus, other schools under huge pressure to recruit more students should learn from these four schools their special way of operation and key factors to success, when trying to improve their own operation in the future.

Establishing features and differentiation

Of the four schools with high competitiveness in student recruitment identified in this study, one is a middle-sized school that had an average annual number of students of a little over 7,000 but had gained a 63% increase in student numbers during the seven years, and another one is a small-sized school that had an average annual number of students of a little over 2,000 but had achieved a 65% increase in student numbers. The cause for their substantial increases should have a lot to do with their unique way of teaching and schooling for all these years. With today's declining birthrate, perhaps school managers should consider adopting a niche-marketing or differentiated-marketing strategy to solve their problems related to student recruitment, by establishing their own features and differing themselves from others.

Recommendation on follow-up studies

Technological and vocational education has always played a very important role in the economic development of Taiwan. By analyzing the number of people attending schools in the past seven years, it is found that there still some schools whose student numbers have increased rather than decreased despite a current declining trend in school-attending population, which clearly proves the strong competitiveness of such schools in the fierce education market. Therefore, follow-up studies are needed to explore and examine the features of such schools in terms of operation and management, and the results can help other schools come up with better solutions. Maybe the reason of how to maintain the higher competitiveness in student recruitment will have same contribution to colleges in the world.

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Appendix 1. Schools of higher competitiveness in student recruitment.

School code/ School type	Years	Number of students	Percentage increases	School code/ School type	Years	Number of students	Percentage increases
1147 Technical College	2002	5,587	100	1036	2002	9,927	100
	2003	5,868	105	2003, changed name	2003	10,266	103
	2004	6,793	122		2004	11,322	114
	2005	7,485	134		2005	11,550	116
	2006	8,298	149	Technological University	2006	11,775	119
	2007	8,891	159		2007	12,207	123
	2008	9,122	163		2008	12,316	124
1282 Postsecondary Vocational School	2002	1,702	100	1018	2002	13,269	100
	2003	1,947	114		2003	13,580	102
	2004	2,110	124		2004	13,728	103
	2005	2,420	142		2005	13,892	105
	2006	2,615	154	Technological University	2006	14,154	107
	2007	2,706	159		2007	14,623	110
	2008	2,811	165		2008	15,108	114

Appendix 2. Schools of lower competitiveness in student recruitment.

School code/ School type	Years	Number of students	Percentage decreases	School Code/ School type	Years	Number of Students	Percentage decreases
1148 Technical College	2002	7,488	100	1174	2002	8,735	100
	2003	6,443	86		2003	8,412	96
	2004	5,379	72		2004	7,707	88
	2005	4,629	62	Technical	2005	7,212	83
	2006	4,410	59	College	2006	6,908	79
	2007	3,901	52		2007	6,574	75
	2008	3,616	48		2008	5,971	68
1154 Technical College	2002	8,668	100	1170	2002	6,960	100
	2003	7,997	92		2003	6,371	92
	2004	7,625	88		2004	5,749	83
	2005	6,765	78	Technical	2005	5,577	80
	2006	6,128	71	College	2006	5,443	78
	2007	5,324	61		2007	5,320	76
	2008	4,359	50		2008	5,153	74
1159 Technical College	2002	9,366	100	1172	2002	8,108	100
	2003	8,374	89		2003	7,628	94
	2004	7,611	81		2004	7,280	90
	2005	6,651	71	Technical	2005	7,046	87
	2006	6,177	66	College	2006	6,490	80
	2007	5,562	59		2007	6,220	77
	2008	5,012	54		2008	6,021	74
1163 Technical College	2002	14,068	100	1181	2002	6,756	100
	2003	13,109	93	Technical	2003	6,457	96
	2004	11,641	83	College	2004	6,216	92

Appendix 2. Cont'd.

	2005	9,595	68		2005	6,044	89
	2006	8,856	63		2006	5,819	86
	2007	8,375	60		2007	5,567	82
	2008	8,094	58		2008	5,108	76
1134	2002	10,003	100	1043	2002	12,857	100
	2003	9,382	94	2005, changed name	2003	12,257	95
	2004	8,829	88		2004	11,606	90
Technical College	2005	8,067	81		2005	11,463	89
	2006	7,439	74	Technological University	2006	11,319	88
	2007	6,796	68		2007	10,880	85
	2008	6,170	62		2008	10,138	79
1045	2002	14,267	100	1052	2002	7,931	100
2006, changed name	2003	14,006	98	2006 Changed Name	2003	7,618	96
	2004	12,946	91		2004	7,334	92
	2005	11,246	79		2005	7,323	92
Technological University	2006	10,242	72	Technological University	2006	7,139	90
	2007	9,504	67		2007	6,854	86
	2008	9,302	65		2008	6,787	86
1142	2002	12,479	100	1047	2002	11,327	100
2007, changed name	2003	10,849	87	2006, changed name	2003	11,132	98
	2004	9,862	79		2004	10,976	97
	2005	9,662	77		2005	10,914	96
Technological University	2006	8,707	70	Technological University	2006	10,708	95
	2007	8,507	68		2007	10,504	93
	2008	8,352	67		2008	10,199	90