

For three straight weeks, a poll of some sort about the social and global awareness of teenagers has appeared in the news. Conducted by different organizations, the latest one published last week showed that 50 percent of teenagers are not interested in or familiar with global issues that are closely tied to Taiwan, such as the South China Sea territorial disputes. When asked to rate themselves and the general public in terms of global perspective, respondents gave both groups a score of less than 60 out of 100.

While it might seem normal for teenagers to be disinterested in news and politics, that the students also rated the general public at less than 60 in global perspective indicates that the problem is prevalent even in older generations.

It is also not just about global issues — Taiwanese respondents were ranked third-least knowledgeable in the world about their own nation in last year's Index of Ignorance. In May, a survey showed that 90 percent of teenagers did not know that more than 98 percent of the nation's energy is imported.

In a nation that often looks inward and is prone to internal squabbles, both local and global knowledge are crucial to steer Taiwan toward a competitive and stable future. Especially when so much of the nation's fortunes depend on its international standing, Taiwanese cannot afford to be ignorant.

One problem is that teens really do not have many sources of relevant national and international news and analysis in Chinese. With the local media fixated on sensationalism, empty political statements and dashcam footage, it might be easier to simply start incorporating more global and practical current events topics and discussion into the classroom.

As society starts to value practical, creative and vocational education over the traditional "force-feed" model, awareness of current events should be a point of emphasis as well.

The same goes for social issues. Another recent survey showed that 42 percent of teenagers are passive toward social issues. The average score of their self-evaluation regarding how much they understand nine listed issues was 2.8 out of five, meaning that they are not "capable

More relevant topics needed in class

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of expressing detailed points of view.”

A third survey indicated that Taiwanese teenagers tend to engage in political and social issues through social media, while few of them join organizations.

The second survey might have a key clue to the students’ passiveness: 40.9 percent of parents were unsupportive of their children’s interest in such matters, with more than half of them saying that their children should focus on schoolwork, while 43 percent said teens should care when they are older.

Again, it is the same mentality that leads to students attending college just for the sake of attending college. Good grades matter over career choice, practical skills and relevant knowledge. There is really no waiting until they get older for civic participation — good habits are best developed young, since ever more of the realities of life will get in the way as they get older.

The oversaturation of college students and lack of opportunities for them are causing society to realize that the system is no longer working, but it will likely take a while for parents to realize that what their children learn while working for social causes is just as valuable as information in textbooks. These social issues could be incorporated in classrooms so that they become legitimate pursuits for students in the eyes of the parents.

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