



INQAAHE
CONFERENCE
2025 TOKYO

The first session

*From Fragmentation to Flexibility:
Rethinking Quality Assurance and
Frameworks for Micro Credentials in
Asian Higher Education*



Presenter: Angela Yung Chi Hou

Professor, National Chengchi University, Taiwan



Outline of Presentation

- Emergence of micro credential
 - flexible learning pathways and employability
- Global discourses and guidelines
- Quality assurance of MCs in Asia Pacific
 - Qualification recognition and quality assurance of micro credentials
 - Four contexts New Zealand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan
- Final remarks

Does quality assurance matter for micro-credentials in higher education? Legitimacy, regulatory framework, and challenges in four Asian contexts

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Why micro-credentials?

- Growth of micro-credentials (MCs)
 - regarded as the significant manifestation of global higher education in the post pandemic era
- Definition
 - a qualification evidencing learning outcomes acquired through a short, transparently assessed course or module within a few weeks
 - ‘an organized learning activity with an associated credential, which recognizes a skill or competency acquired through an organized learning process and validated through assessment ’ (OECD, 2021)
- Value
 - a flexible approach to develop career paths
 - upskilling in the job market
 - enhancing employability
- Several issues no clearly shared definition
 - limited credibility of myriad MCs providers
 - lack of incorporation into national quality assurance systems.
 - complicated to ensure consistent quality due to varying forms

Some questions addressed

- Are there any global guidelines and principles for MCs offering?
- What national policies and quality frameworks are in place for legitimizing MCs?
- What are external quality assurance modes developed to ensure quality of MCs?
- How would universities incorporate MCs into IQA mechanism?
- What challenges do EQAAs and universities encounter in MCs implementation?

Global discourses on MCs

➤ OECD

- Micro credential innovations in higher education: Who, What and Why?
- Quality and Value of Micro Credentials in Higher Education: Preparing for the Future
- Micro credentials for Lifelong Learning and Employability: Uses and Possibilities

➤ UNESCO

- Towards a Common Definition of Micro Credentials

➤ INQAAHE

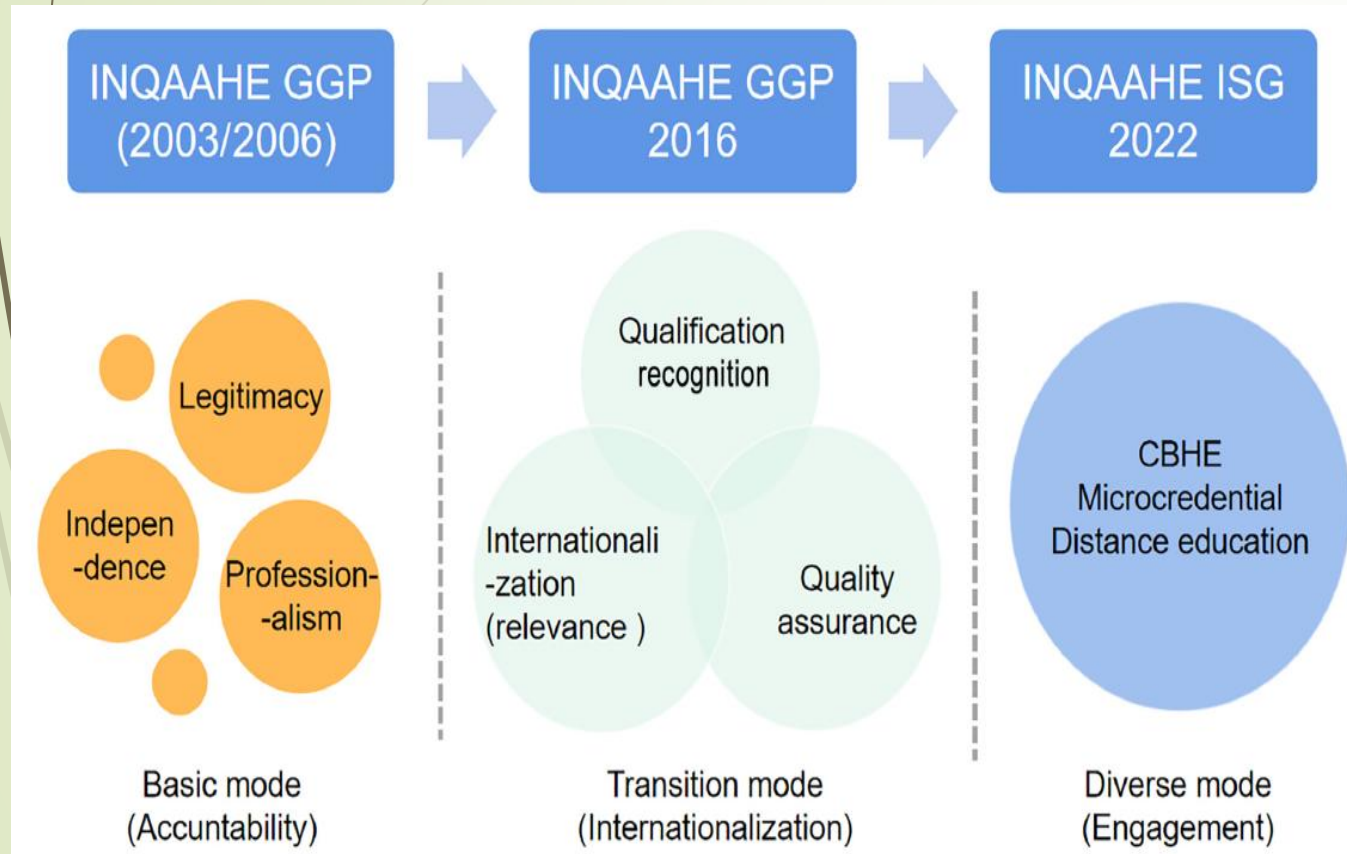
- NESCO INQAAHE Project: Micro Credentials in the Asia Pacific region
- INQAAHE ISGs 2022 : In Module 3: Quality Assurance of Short Learning Programs of the INQAAHE ISGs,

National qualifications framework and quality assurance

- National qualifications framework and quality assurance that facilitate the definition and achievement of learning outcomes of MCs at the systemic, institutional, and faculty levels
 - **NQF** “ makes hierarchical distinctions between qualifications and categorizes them by level,” in which learners **can earn credits and accumulate skills and knowledge in different learning periods and paths** (Hanf and Hippach Schneider, 2005, p. 9).
 - QA to monitor performance and to ensure achievement of quality outputs or improved quality , **including IQA and EQA**
 - **MCs are not incorporated into national QA systems due to misalignment with national qualifications framework** (Ashizawa , Ziguras , and Yonezawa 2024 ; Wang 2023
 - Without recognition and quality, they cannot be integrated into national and international learning ecosystems.

	QA	QF
Nature	Governmental / quasi-governmental	Governmental
Objective	Fitness for purpose / diversification	International standards / global recognition
Function / roles	Policy instrument	
Context	Local	Regional / global
Focus	Learning outcomes based	
Approach	External review / onsite visit	Documentation review
Beneficiary	Universities	Individual
Impact	University governance and management	Talent mobility and lifelong learning

Development of QA in Asian Higher Education



National Qualification Framework (Total 51 countries)

Yes	No	In-process
29 (57%)	18 (35%)	4 (8%)

QA agencies (N=156)

	Public	Private
ASEAN	38 (39%)	27 (47%)
East Asia	32 (32%)	13 (23%)
Central Asia	8 (8%)	10 (18%)
South Asia	10 (10%)	3 (5%)
Pacific	11 (11%)	4 (7%)
Total	99 (100%)	57 (100%)

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide. It features a solid red arrow pointing to the right, positioned horizontally. Behind the arrow and extending downwards and to the right are several thin, dark, curved lines that resemble stylized grass or abstract brushstrokes.

Mapping Micro-Credential Quality in four Asian contexts

Malaysia - a convergence mode

- Building a Lifelong Learning Society, current students and workers
- In 2017, Malaysia Qualifications Framework (MQF) 2nd edition prescribes that the accumulation of credits and learning outcomes is possible through short courses, micro learning and micro credentials.
 - The Guidelines of Good Practices: Micro credentials published in 2020 by MQA
- Universities offer MCs as either a stand alone course or components of accredited programs.

New Zealand - a partial convergence mode

- Enhance learners' competencies and their employability; Working learners are the primary users
- In 2018, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) developed **a Register of NZQA approved MCs**
 - **only non university sectors were incorporated into the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework (NZQCF) and EQA of NZQA**
 - limited value of MCs in academic sectors.

Hong Kong - a divergence mode

- Employability; Working learners
- Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) proposed 8 principles for Credit Accumulation & Transfer (ACT)
- **Self accrediting public universities are required to develop an internal quality assurance for MCs**
- **MCs by self financing institutions are mainly assessed by industries**, vice versa, HKCAAVQ reviews those industries indirectly

Taiwan - a disruptive QA mode

- interdisciplinary studies and self directed learning; **existing students** in Taiwan' universities
- MCs are just considered **as partial graduation credits of a full qualification** awarded under the purview of individual institutions
- The national accreditor , **HEEACT is not commissioned by the MoE to carry out QA over MCs provided by universities**
- Internal QA at individual institutions becomes significant for ensuring quality of MC courses and programs.
- Without national qualifications framework and specific external QA, lead to **limited societal recognition and value of MCs in Taiwan society**

Summary

➤ Objectives

- Responding to job market is common and employability

➤ Legitimacy

- New Zealand and Malaysia have clear policies for MCs incorporation into qualifications frameworks; vocational education as a part of Hong Kong qualification framework; in contrast, Taiwan does not

➤ NQF and QA

- Malaysia has integrated QA into qualifications framework; New Zealand developed QA systems for non university sectors specifically; Hong Kong and Taiwan are still in process
- no common EQA approach due to contextualization

Table 3. Relevance between qualification framework and quality assurance in four contexts.

	Qualification framework	Incorporation into QF	External quality assurance	Internal quality assurance	QF and QA integration	Mode
New Zealand	V (x) (non-university sectors)	v	V (x) (for non-university sectors only)	V	Intermediate	Partial Convergence
Malaysia	v	v	V (all types included)	V	High	Full Convergence
Hong Kong	v	V(x)	V(x) (indirectly by industries)	V	Low	Divergence
Taiwan	x	x	x	V	X	Disruptive

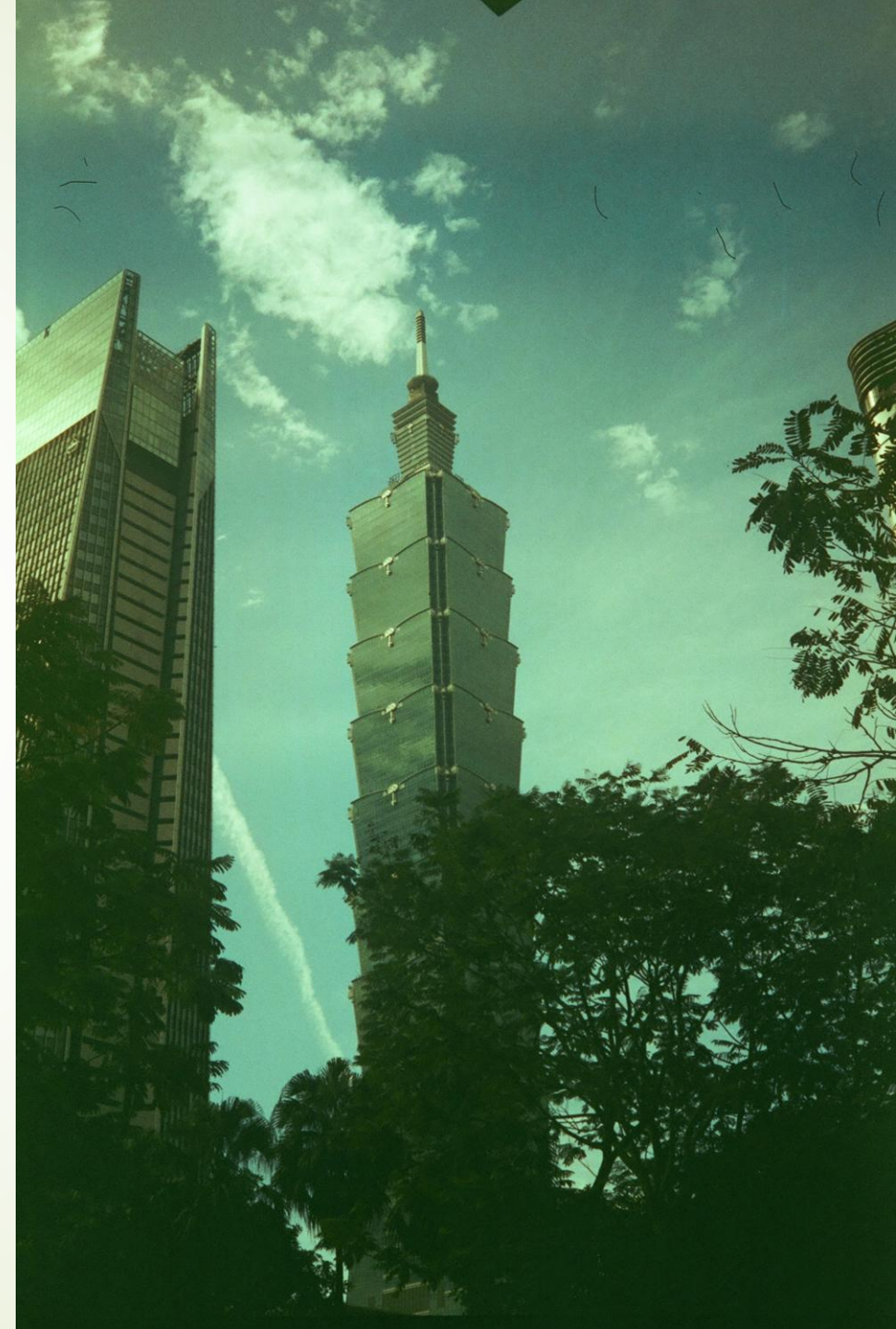
Final remarks

- **Transparency, recognition, stackability , and portability** must be at the forefront of demonstrating the quality of micro credentials.
- **National quality frameworks and quality assurance** should serve as an essential academic infrastructure, safeguarding the quality and relevance of flexible learning pathways while mitigating the risks associated with learning fragmentation.
- A **‘one size fits all’** QA approach shall give way to **‘fit for purpose’** solutions, moving toward **fitness for flexibility** in response to diversification, relevance, and inclusiveness in higher education.
- Given that MCs have been regarded as a gateway to **develop lifelong learning** in Asia, it is imperative to build **a convergence mode of qualifications framework and QA** that can support different types of learner’ professional development, life goal pursuit and qualifications recognition.

Thank you for your
attention.



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The second session

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) of Short Learning Programs from University's Perspective



Presenter: **Kyle Ziwei Zhou & Christopher Hongyi Tao**

PhD Candidate, National Chengchi University, Taiwan &
Lingna University, Hong Kong



Outline of Presentation

- Introduction
 - Research Design
 - Preliminary Findings
 - Discussions
 - Conclusion
- 

Introduction

- Focus of this study
 - **IQA** of MCs in 10 universities across four regions.
- IQA plays a critical role within higher education providers, as they must establish internal procedures for designing, delivering, and approving the MCs they offer, particularly for credit-bearing and stackable courses (European Commission, 2020).
- As Wang (2022) noted, “Without recognition, they cannot be integrated into national and international learning ecosystems” (para. 5).

Methodology

- **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted to capture the perspectives of 10 university representatives responsible for managing MC programs in New Zealand, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.
- All respondents have at least five years of experience in higher education and hold senior administrative positions related to MC development.

Methodology

- Between April and June 2024, the 10 interviewees from 10 higher education institutions (HEIs) participated in the study through a combination of online and offline interviews, as well as email correspondence.

Country/Region	Universities	Position
New Zealand	University A U1	Dean
	University B U2	General Manager
Malaysia	University C U3	Associate professor
	University D U4	Dean
	University E U5	Executive Dean
	University F U6	Senior Lecturer
Hong Kong	University G U7	Senior Lecturer
	University H U8	Dean
Taiwan	University I U9	Dean
	University J U10	Former Dean
Total	10	

Findings

Redefining purpose and content of MCs across universities

Region	Main Purpose	Target Learners	Curriculum Focus
New Zealand	Skill developments	Working Professionals	Short Courses, Modular Programs
Malaysia	Lifelong learning	Working Professionals, Part-Time Students	Professional Skills & Credentials
Hong Kong	Skill developments	Full-Time Students	Skill Recognition & Development
Taiwan	Interdisciplinary	Full-Time Students	Interdisciplinary Curriculum

Findings

Implementation and IQA practices

Region	Delivery Modalities	Assessment	Internal quality assurance
New Zealand	Online	Skills-based	Alignment with NZQA
Malaysia	Online/hybrid	Project-based	Alignment with MQF
Hong Kong	Online/hybrid	Skills-based	QA undertaken by institution
Taiwan	Online	Project-based and others	QA undertaken by institution

Findings

Diversity and sustainability are the key challenges

- ***Faculty engagement***

Many universities struggle to motivate faculty due to unclear policies, increased workloads, and a lack of incentives or formal recognition for participation.

- ***Student motivation and enrollment***

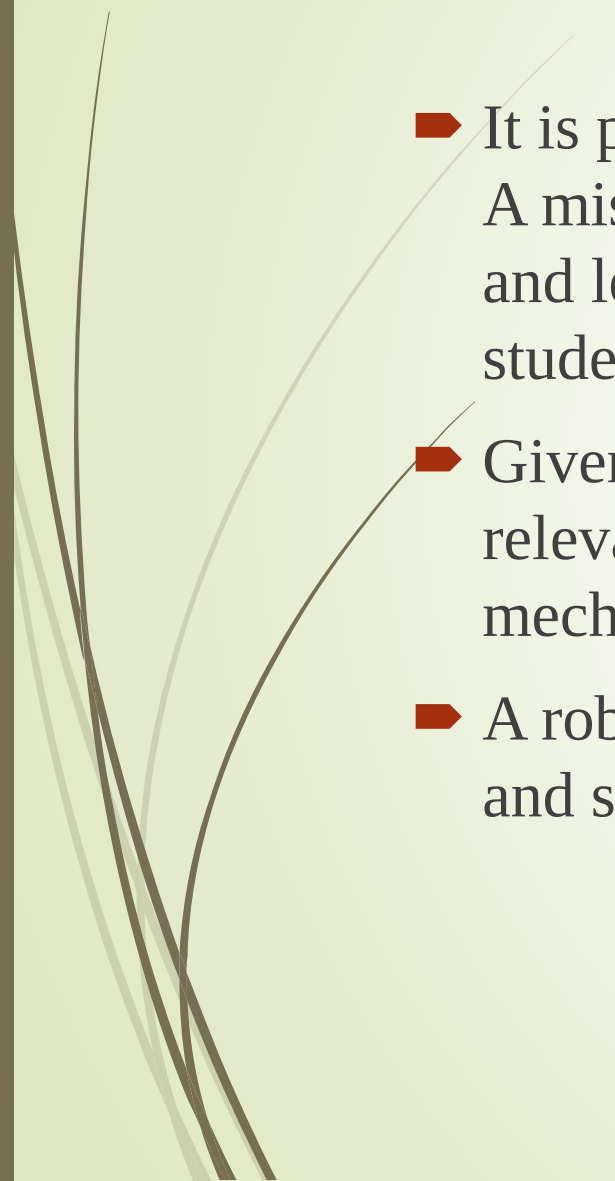
Student motivation and enrollment in MCs vary across regions, largely influenced by low awareness, uncertain recognition, and unclear career benefits.

- ***Resource constraints***

Most institutions rely heavily on external collaboration to ensure the relevance and financial sustainability of their MC programs.



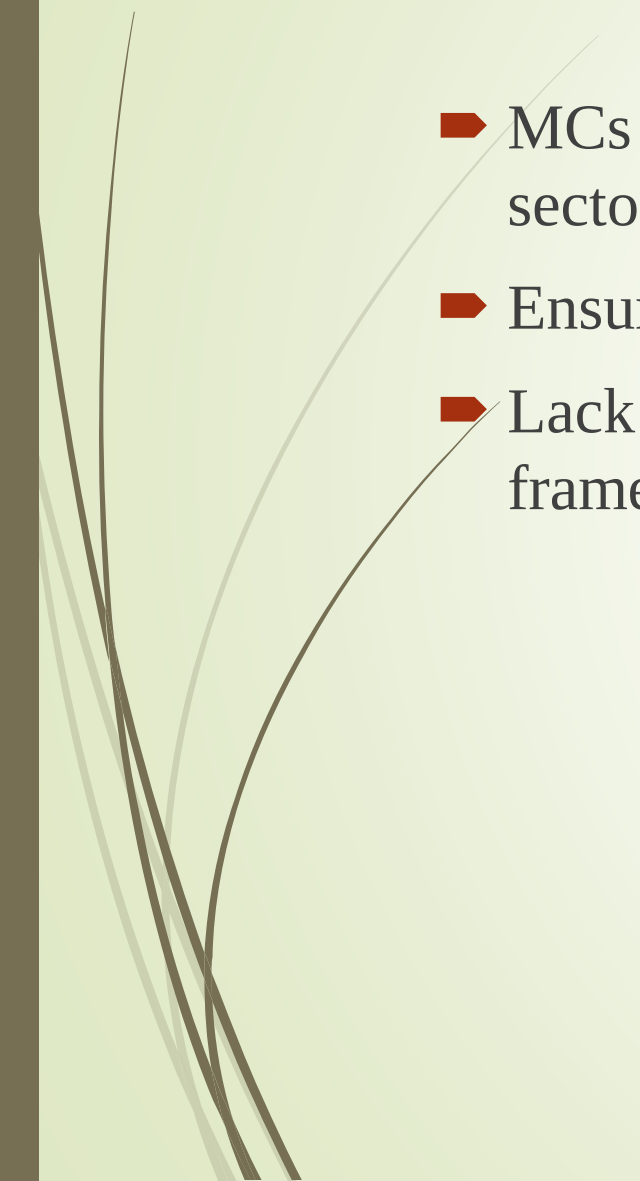
Discussion



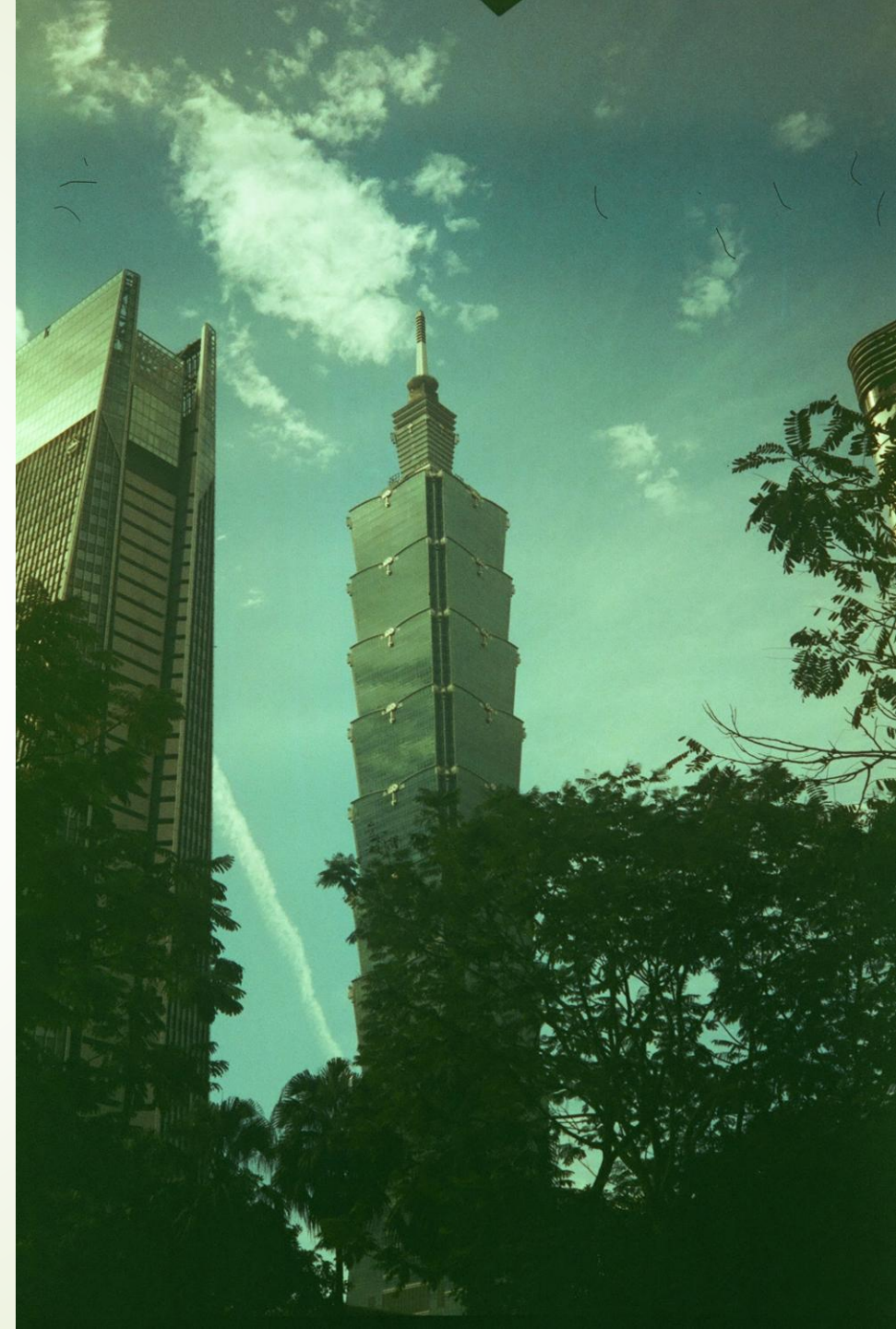
- It is paramount to align institutional objectives with learner expectations. A misalignment between institutional communication of MC objectives and learner expectations may compromise their effectiveness and diminish student engagement.
- Given the emphasis on competency-based learning and labor market relevance, institutions must implement a dynamic and adaptable IQA mechanism to uphold the quality of MCs.
- A robust IQA system will be essential in safeguarding academic standards and student learning outcomes.



Conclusion

- MCs offer HEIs a strategic solution to bridge the skill gap across various sectors.
 - Ensuring the quality of MCs remains challenging.
 - Lack of clear policies, misalignment with qualification recognition frameworks, and the absence of EQA systems in certain Asian contexts.
- 

Thank you for your
attention.





Group discussion

- How can EQAAs respond to the emergence of MCs? Is there any good practice at your context?
- How can EQAAs support universities to promote MCs? Please share some examples



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The last session

*Exploring micro credentials
in Taiwan's higher education institutions:
objectives, regulations, and practices*



Presenter: Edward Hung Cheng Su

PhD Candidate, National Chengchi University, Taiwan



Outline of Presentation

- The current development of Taiwan higher education
- The implementation of MCs in Taiwan
 - Micro credits (微學分) & Micro programs (微學程)
- Discussions
 - How is the term 'micro' defined in comparison to traditional courses or programs?
 - What is the value of MCs for Taiwanese students?
- Conclusion



The current development of Taiwan higher education

Number of HEIs (As of October 15, 2024)

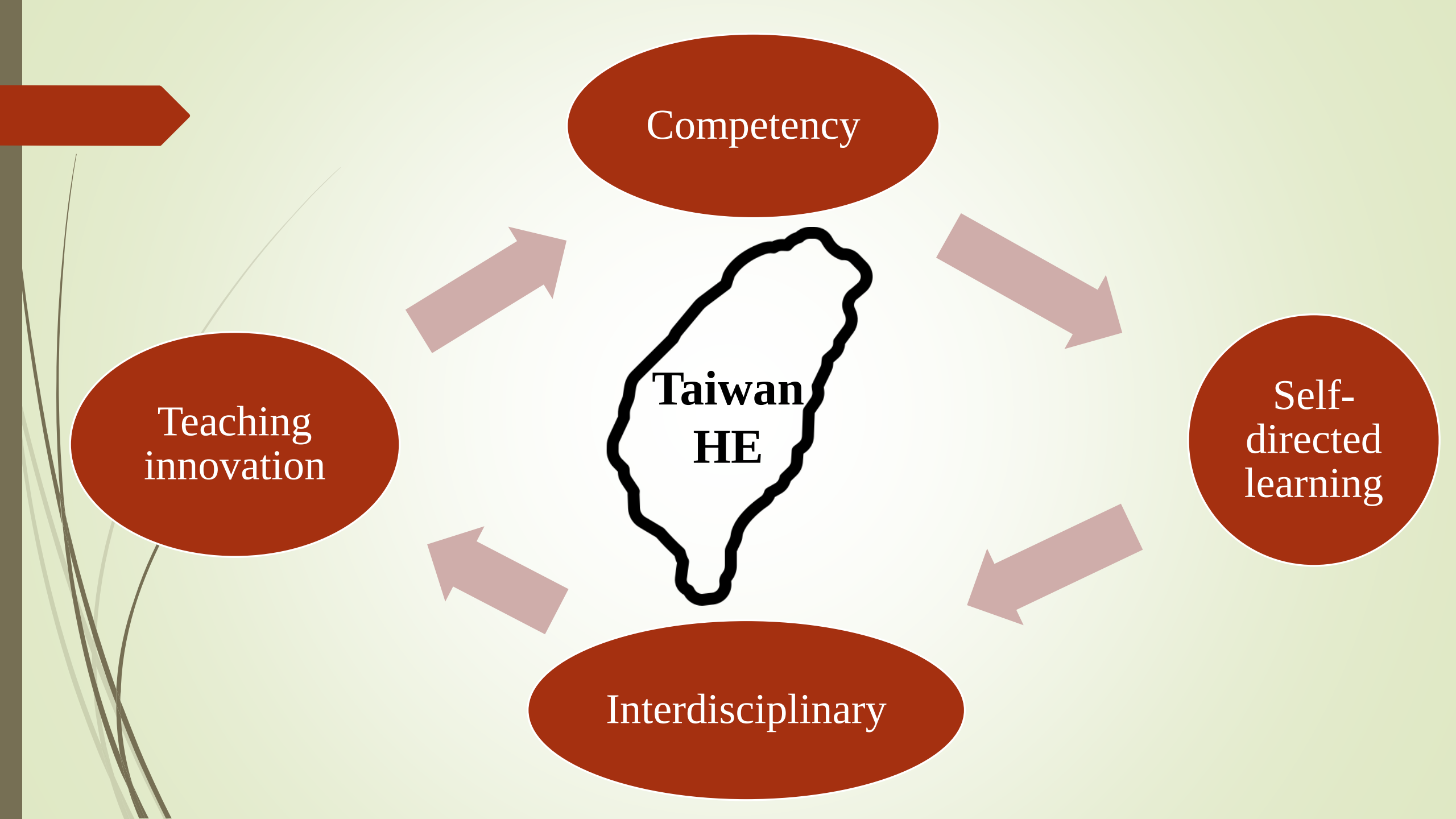
151 HEIs

49 Public HEIs

Universities	32
Technology	13
Junior college	2
Open universities	2
Total	49

102 Private HEIs

Universities	34
Technology	49
Junior college	10
Religious institute	9
Total	102



Competency

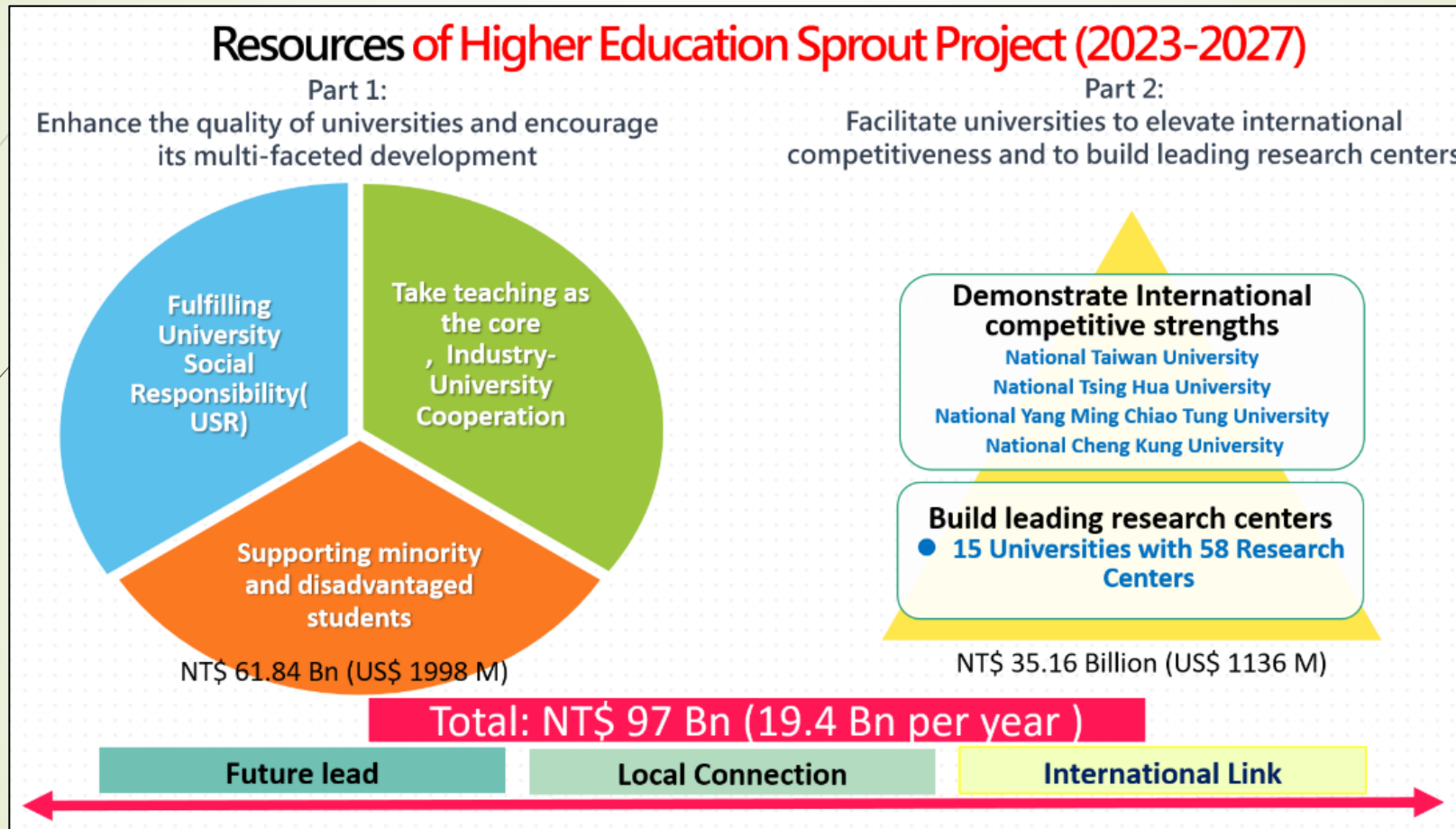
Self-
directed
learning

Interdisciplinary

Teaching
innovation

Taiwan
HE

Higher Education SPROUT Project (Sustained Progress and Rise of Universities in Taiwan)



The first phase (2018-2022)



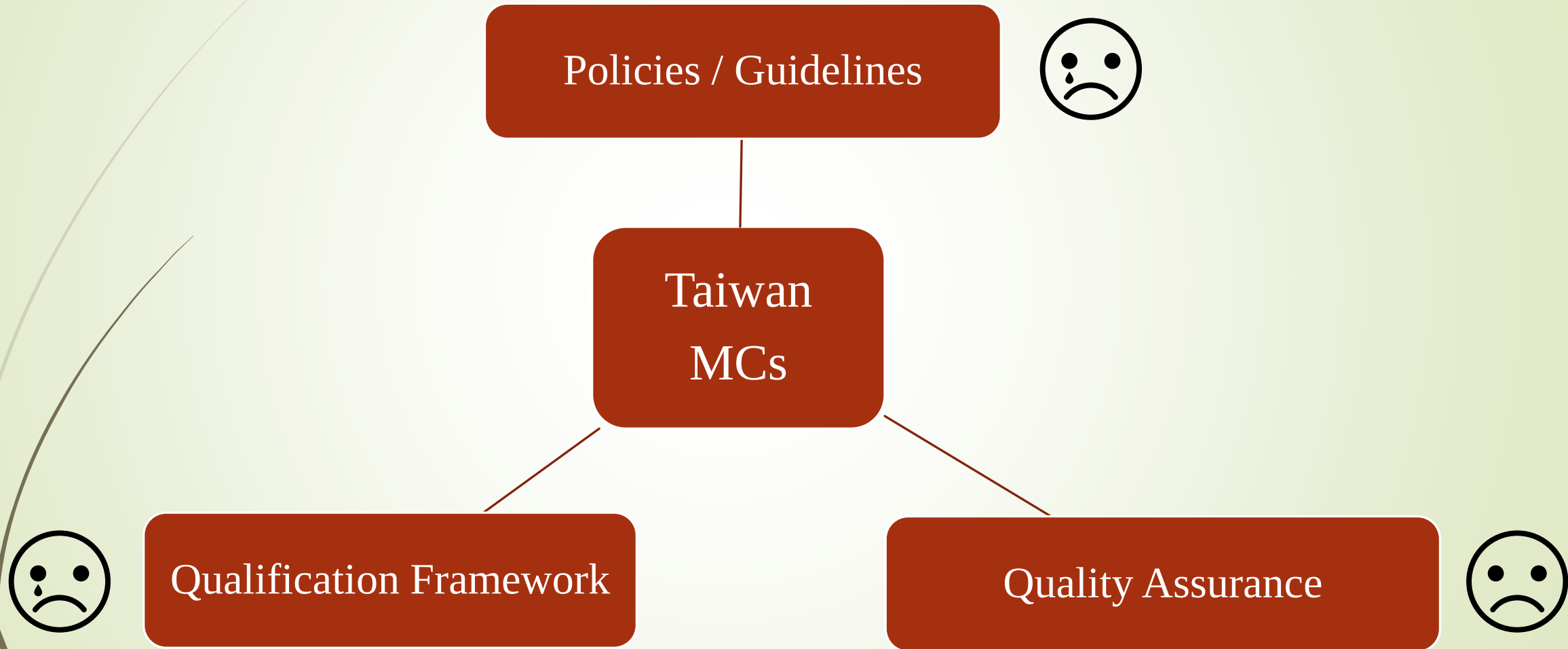
The second phase (2023-2027)

Source: <https://sprout.moe.edu.tw/en-us/main.aspx?rn=3753>

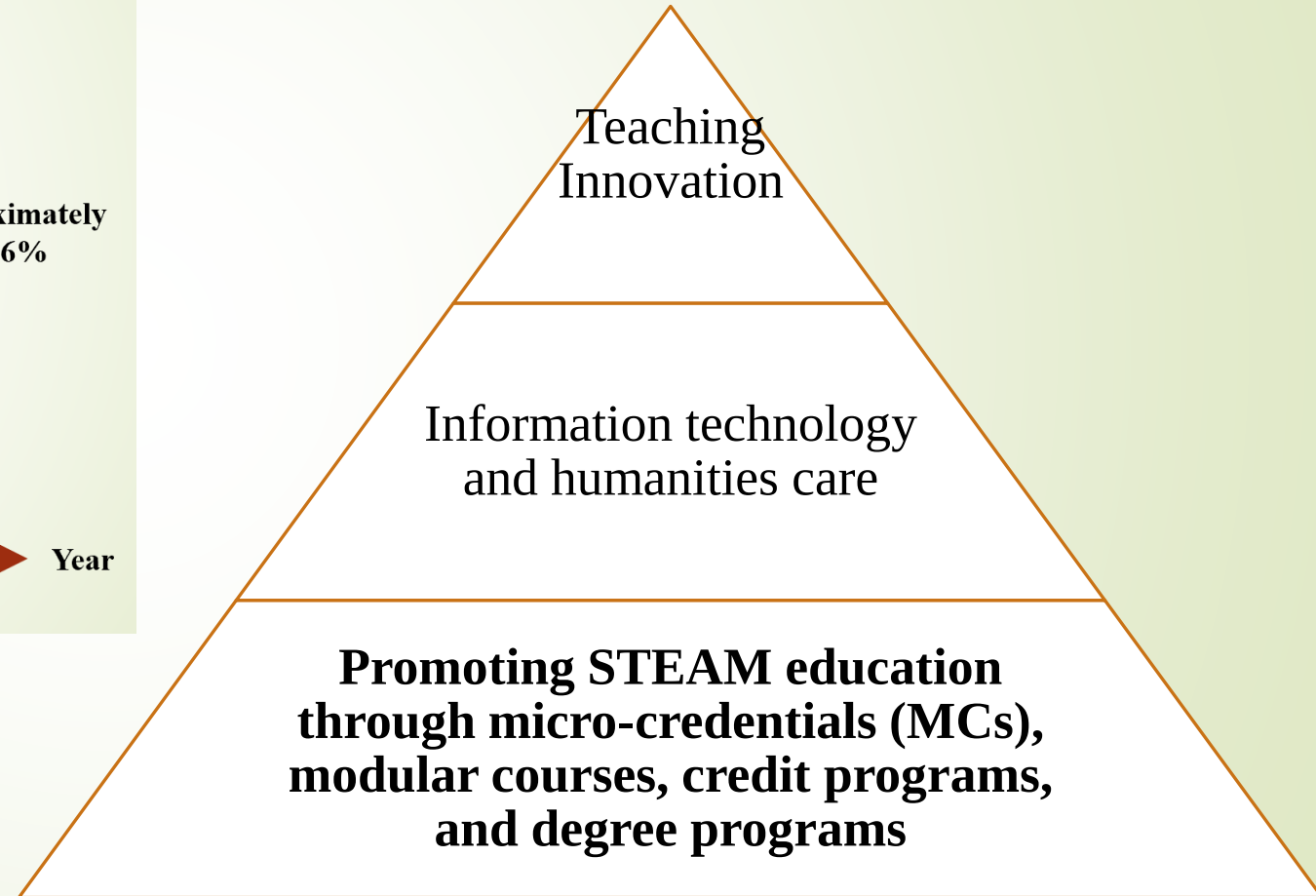
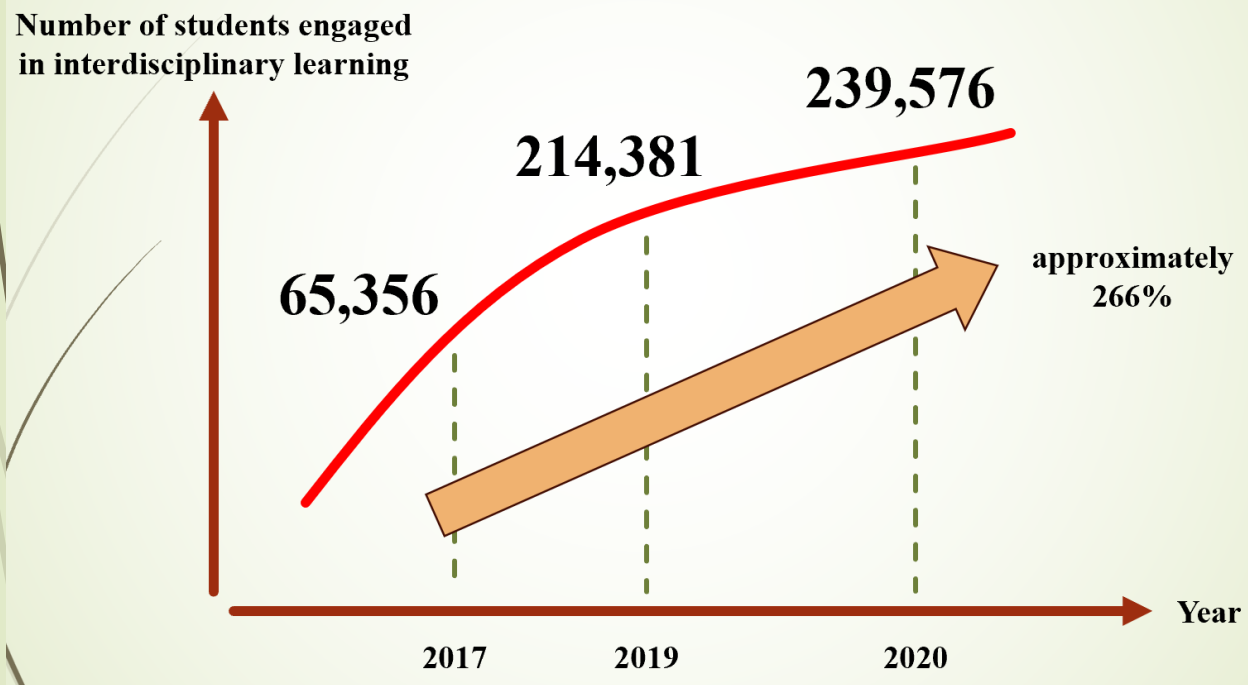


The implementation of MCs in Taiwan

The implementation of MCs in Taiwan



SPROUT projects with MCs



Source: Ministry of Education Taiwan (2024)

Educational Big Data Micro-Credential (EBDMC)

- The Digital Learning Enhancement Plan for Grade 1-12 Students
 - enriching digital learning materials
 - providing mobile devices and wireless internet connections
 - **collecting and analyzing educational big data**

- **Education Big Data Micro-Credential**

“cultivate professionals with expertise in both education and data analysis”

- **A total of 14 HEIs participated in the second cycle of the EBDMC projects**
- **Until August 2024, a total of 3,068 students have enrolled in these courses**

Types of MCs in Taiwan

Micro credits 微學分

- ➡ Micro credits refer to courses developed **within one credit**, which may be expressed in fractional amounts (e.g., 0.1 credit/2 hours)

➡ *Learning accumulation*

Micro program 微學程

- ➡ Micro programs consist of multiple **regular courses** forming a complete program with at least eight credits.

➡ *Certificates*

Micro credits - Providence University case

1 credit

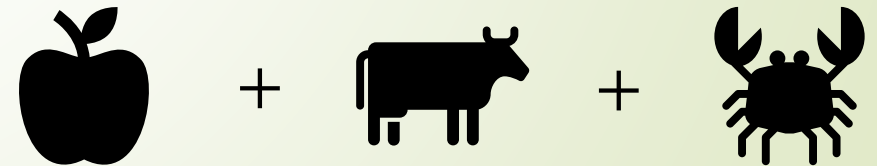
Thematic micro-credits

16 hours series learning
+ performance evaluation
(2-4 hours)



Interdisciplinary micro-credits

Autonomous choice of courses
for 18 hours of learning



Thematic micro-credits

Micro-credits course	Topics	Learning hours (20 hours)
Sugar (1 credit)	Sugar in life	2
	Sugar in human	2
	Hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia	2
	What is blood sugar	1
		
	Group presentation I	1
	Group presentation II	1

Interdisciplinary micro-credits

Topics	Learning hours	Mode
Kimono and Japanese Culture	3	Onsite
Tips for getting on stage	3	
Business Presentation Skills	4	
Taiwan Cuisine in English	3	
Web Game Design	2	Online
English Academic Speaking	1	
Audio Clips	2	



Micro program – National University of Tainan case

Department	Department of Education / Department of Information and Learning Technology
Credits	At least offering 10 credits
Implementation	Basic course (At least 2 courses) Advanced course (At least 1 course) Practical course (At least 1 course)

Basic course (At least 2 courses)	1. Data Science Application in Education (2 credits) 2. Statistical Software for Analysis of Big Data in Education (2 credits) 3. Big Data Programming (3 credits) 4. Data Processing and Analysis (2 credits)
Advanced course (At least 1 course)	1. Artificial Intelligence (3 credits) 2. Education Data Mining (2 credits) 3. Educational Data and Learning Analytics (2 credits)
Practical course (At least 1 course)	1. Educational Project for Data Mining (3 credits) 2. Educational Project for Learning Analytics (3 credits) 3. Educational Project for Artificial Intelligence (3 credits)

Objectives

**Interdisciplinary
Self-directed learning**

Recognition

Approximately **4 to 10 credits** within total degree credits (128 credits)

Primarily designed for **undergraduate students**, with some institutions requiring MCs for graduation

Taiwan MCs

Implementation

**Inconsistent terms used
& credits recognition**

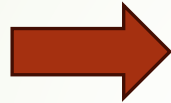
Accreditation

**Fully rely on IQA
Unsystematic IQA**



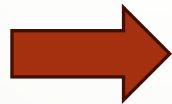
Challenges.....

“We found that many programs were not attractive enough for students to participate.”



Unattractive design

“How to motivate students to take courses and explore, this is something I think is the most difficult in the implementation of micro credentials.”



Lack of motivation

“We mainly use student feedback surveys... guide students to reflect on their learning outcomes and assess whether the course met their original expectations.”



Conducting survey mainly



Discussions



How is the term ‘micro’ defined in comparison to traditional courses or programs?

”Really effectively promote interdisciplinary?”

”Less motivation to have micro credentials”

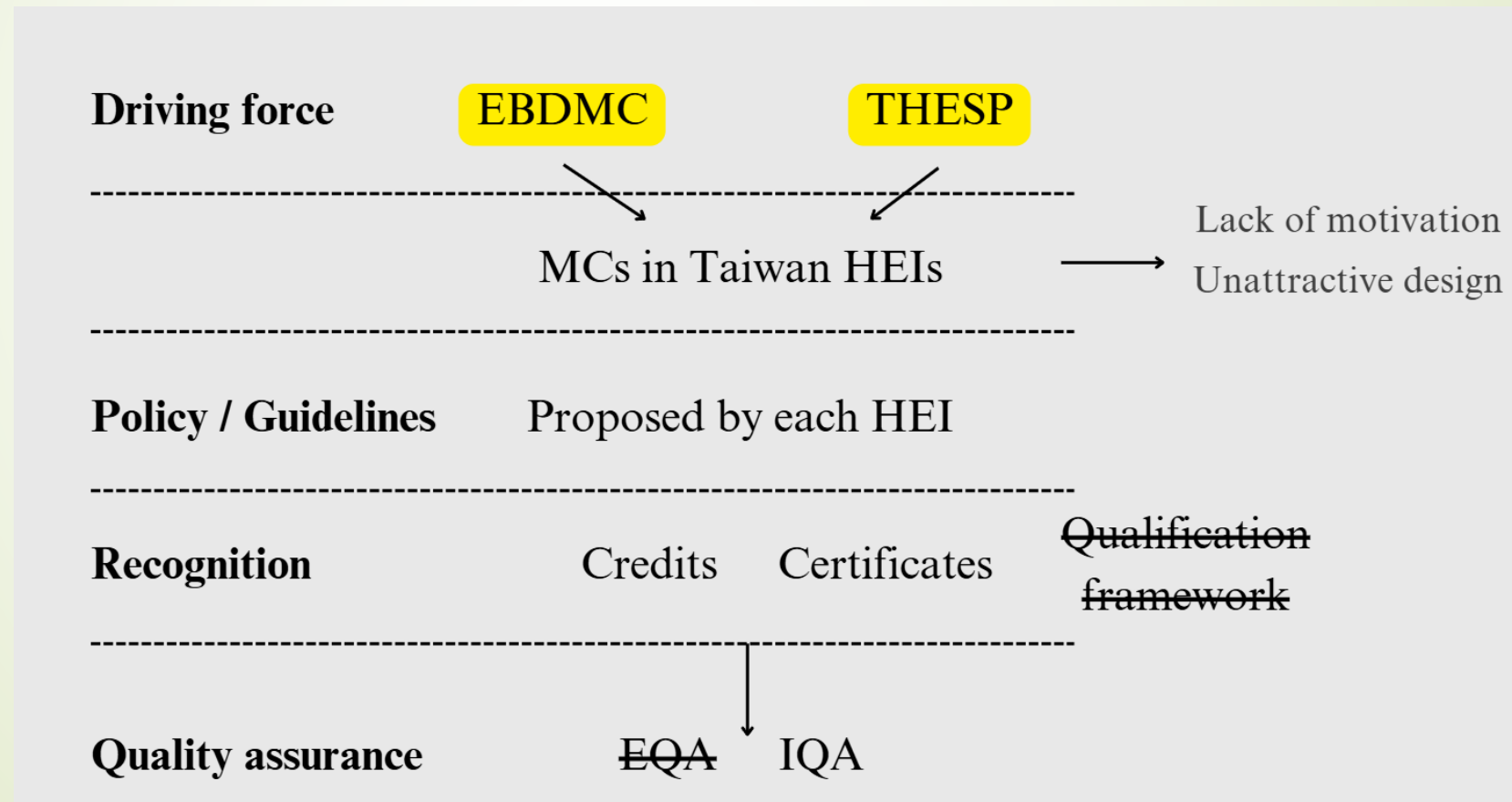
”Seek for credits, certificates, or degrees?”

”Quality assurance”

What is the value of MCs for Taiwanese students?

Conclusions

- The development of MCs in Taiwan remains in its early stages due to the absence of a quality assurance framework specific to MCs.





Group discussion

- Why do universities at your context offer MCs? Who are the key learners?
- Do you think if MCs should be incorporated into NQF and EQA scheme? Why or why not? And what are the challenges?

Thank you for your
time and attention!

