

Quality Control of e-Learning and Competitiveness Enhancement through Establishment of an International Community

Byoung-Jin Kim _ Researcher, Higher Education Information Team, Korea Education & Research Information Service · kbjin@keris.or.kr

❖ Introduction

In order to secure international competitiveness in the 21st century, each country's higher education reformation is accelerating faster than at any time ever before. The basic principles of higher education reformation are that colleges/universities should become a Mecca of knowledge creation to support companies' growth, nurture talented human resources that can successfully meet the demands of companies, and become the backbone of regional innovation to lead the development of the region concerned in order to equip the country and companies with competitiveness in the international competitive market system.

To this end, colleges/universities are embracing globalization and deepening international cooperation in education research. Countries in the European Union, including the UK, have established the European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) based on a series of conventions from the Sorbonne Declaration and the Bologna Declaration to the Prague Communiqué. Under ERASMUS, these universities are focusing on 'Europeanization' and globalization of higher education through mutual recognition of each other's academic course credits and student transfer. Meanwhile, major countries in Asia and Latin America, as well as South Africa, are concentrating their efforts on globalization of higher education from a similar perspective.

During this process, it has been found out that there is a need to review the establishment of a quality assurance system for e-Learning in the higher education field, the enhancement of

higher educational services through e-Learning, and the establishment and operation of an international cooperation system to achieve the first two objectives.

❖ Innovation of higher education through quality assurance of e-Learning

■ Use of e-Learning and quality assurance for higher education

With the development of ICT, higher education through e-Learning and new corporate education programs are expanding through export markets. Under these circumstances, the methods of quality control or quality assurance currently in use in each country will not suffice to guarantee full quality control or quality assurance for the new higher education. Therefore, a student protection system as well as a quality control and quality assurance system for education should be put in place at the international level. When it comes to higher education programs all across the globe based on the e-Learning system, quality control is not just a single country's problem, but is shared by a number of countries.

Each country, as its information and communication prowess and Internet infrastructure develop and expand, strives to expand its influence on higher education into the whole world. e-Learning programs are provided by various countries and various institutions all over the world, and these cannot be recklessly fed to students in order to protect students' right to learn. As e-Learning in higher education is expanding broadly,

assessment and assurance for e-Learning programs are emerging as an important international issue.

■ International cooperation for international quality assurance for e-Learning in higher education

In the field of higher education, most advanced countries already have independent quality assurance bodies. For example, in the UK, a body called the Education Quality Council of the United Kingdom (HEQC) is in charge of quality assurance in higher education, while the U.S. has Commissions on Institution of Higher Education, in charge of about 3,000 universities on a regional basis. In Hong Kong, a system is in place that ensures quality of higher education services provided by foreign institutions and is managed at the national level. Meanwhile, there are also some cases where institutions for quality assurance of higher education are operated as international bodies. The Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) was established in 1995 by an international consortium consisting mainly of companies including multinational corporations, governments and virtual colleges/universities.

However, these institutions for quality assurance in higher education have limitations in that they focus on assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions offering offline services only. They are not quality assurance bodies targeting e-Learning programs utilized by many countries. In order to ensure quality assurance of e-Learning programs through 'blended learning' or online education, a dedicated international institution should be formed to play its role, just as the current ones operating for offline education programs.

For this purpose, each country needs to set up an e-Learning quality assurance institution that is run separately from the higher education institutions. That is, specific roles should be supported in order to evaluate and facilitate improvement in areas including designing, review, approval, operation and management of e-Learning systems and programs, support for students, communications and evaluation. Also, each country's

quality assurance body should be equipped with sufficient capabilities to guarantee international quality assurance. Rules should be devised in order to enable information exchange and assistance between the international quality assurance institution and each country's quality assurance institution. Furthermore, the differences in purpose and scope of each country's quality assurance institution need to be understood and coordinated. For this to happen, mutual recognition procedures for each country's quality assurance institution should be set up. Through the sharing of knowledge based on mutual understanding, the cooperation and authority for e-Learning quality assurance can be achieved.

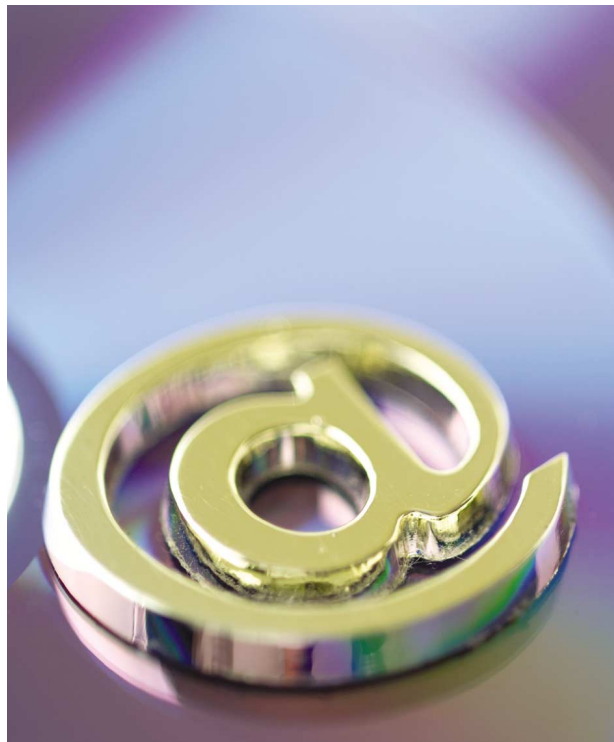
❖ Objectives of the establishment of an international e-Learning community in higher education

In order to form an international e-Learning community in higher education, the following support should first be established. First, an international e-Learning community in higher education should be designed and executed while recognizing other countries' different cultures as a valuable way of life. By ensuring broad participation from both advanced and developing countries, a positive conception about the role of the community can be developed.

Second, the role of the community should be to resolve issues. That is, exchange and cooperation should be conducted for brain gain for developing countries, rather than brain drain. To this end, a joint degree system can be run between higher education institutions under which students can study for a certain period of time at a college/university of any advanced country and finish their academic degree at a local college/university. In addition, institutions from countries advanced in higher education can provide assistance for higher education institutions of developing countries to develop research and education capabilities. In particular, in order for colleges/universities in developing countries to establish an e-Learning system, support can be provided for them to share the systems of advanced countries.

Third, the gap of capability shown in the e-Learning systems should be narrowed. If the higher education institutions of developing countries are lagging behind their counterparts in advanced countries in terms of the capability of the e-Learning system, this deficiency arises from lack of experiences, expertise, infrastructure and funding as well as the government's informatization policy. Just like university e-Learning support center in Korea, it is crucial to set up international college/university e-Learning support centers on a regional basis to assist ICT infrastructure of developing countries and let higher education institutions of developing countries share them.

Fourth, it is also important that colleges/universities in each country enhance their internal capabilities on their own. Without the support of a shared vision for the globalization of e-Learning and strategic plans and core human resources to make it happen, it is very difficult to form an international higher education community. Therefore, not only the mindset for globalization of higher education through e-Learning but



also proactive changes of the organization should form the foundation for colleges/universities' governance system.

Lastly, technological standardization and legal issues should also be taken into consideration. In order to share and mutually operate high-quality e-Learning resources, technological standardization should come first. Moreover, reuse of e-Learning resources themselves should be increased for sustainability of best quality e-Learning resources. In addition, there are many discrepancies between different country's laws and regulations as well as international protocols related to the forming of an international higher education community. Given the circumstances, the issue of copyright is sure to emerge as a bone of contention in the process of operating an e-Learning system. Therefore, each country should focus on resolving legal issues such as copyright, information protection and intellectual property rights by conducting discussions at the national level.

✦ Conclusion

This paper suggests ways to innovate higher education through e-Learning as well as ways to overcome the knowledge information gap between countries. In order to boost the quality of education services through e-Learning quality assurance, a series of activities across the board of e-Learning must be conducted, including the designing, operation and management of e-Learning systems and programs, support for students, and evaluation. Moreover, each country should be armed with sufficient capabilities to ensure that international quality assurance actually works. Another important task is to adjust and overcome the difference of each country's quality assurance institutions. To this end, an international e-Learning community for higher education should be established. KERIS@

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