

Vision and Strategy for Human Resources Development through e-Learning



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Currently, e-Learning in Korea can be said to have passed the initial bubble stage and has begun to coordinate ideals with reality. At this important juncture, it is imperative to review e-Learning in Korea and establish a new vision and strategy based on the results of the review. In Korea, where striking developments have been made in the area of IT, policies are getting ahead of the research results of the OECD and UNESCO. It seems people are in a hurry to talk about 'Beyond e-Learning', but now is the time to pursue 'Beyond the Hype' instead.

Development and convergence of ICT led a technology-driven policy to exert considerable influence in the education field. Schools provided a great testing ground for ICT, but at the end of the day technology, not schools, underwent changes as a result. Rather than encouraging serious discussion and debate on ways to combine e-Learning and human resources development in order to nurture national human resources, the paradigm of ICT in education has been limited to expanding and reproducing itself as a kind of extension of ICT in elementary, secondary and higher education. In this situation, there is room for misinterpretation of the situation, that is, the focus is only on expanding the size of e-Learning by linking e-Learning and human resources development, which is the mantra of the era and pursuing economic growth.

Under these circumstances, a basic roadmap to develop the e-Learning industry was devised by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MOE&HRD) in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy (MOCIE). The government suggested the concept of the 'Worldwide e-Learning Market Partner' as the vision for Korea's e-Learning industry, and drew up two strategies to supplement it : 1) Enhance Korea's e-Learning competitiveness, and 2) Expand e-Learning and create demand. Specifically, there were six policy directions : 1) Establish a standardization and authentication system for e-Learning, 2) Enhance advanced technology in e-Learning, 3) Nurture experts in e-Learning, 4) Assist start-up e-Learning companies and their management and reorganize the distribution structure, 5) Support revitalization of e-Learning, and 6) Facilitate knowledge-based industrialization through e-Learning. The government aims to pursue these goals on a step-by-step basis.

For the development of e-Learning, we should overcome the temporary lull and strive to find the 'blue ocean' to create new areas for business. For e-Learning to be able to ride the third wave, the following tasks should receive serious discussion and debate.

First, a conversion from rosy rhetoric (Hype) to reality is needed. e-Learning is not a magic wand that can resolve all problems and it is time to stop such unrealistic rhetoric (Beyond the Hype) to return to a sense of reality. e-Learning should be simply recognized for what it is, a type of learning in the era of the information society where ICT is utilized. An important pending task in terms of policy is to narrow the gap between the past

excessive expectations for e-Learning and the stark reality. We have to forgo the old way of education and forgo the 'e-Everything' concept that e-Learning will resolve every problem. Rather, we have to revisit the idea of learning in order to resolve the discrepancy between reality and expectations for the introduction of e-Learning. In terms of pursuing policy, it is of utmost importance to have a sense of balance, being mindful of both excessive optimism and pessimism shown in the existing ICT in education plan.

Second, a practical deployment of e-Learning focusing on learning solutions is required. Rather than the technology-driven policy where technology is utilized just because of the influence from new technology, technology should be used as a tool with education potential for the purpose of resolving pending educational issues. Efforts should be focused on an integrated resolution of pending education issues for each area. Educational issues do not come from a single factor, such as lacking or insufficient technology. Rather, they are complex problems existing across society, culture and the economy. Therefore, an integrated approach among departments of government and businesses is desperately needed, instead of a separate project for e-Learning. e-Learning should not end up being a nominal education, but should be utilized as a support tool that can be utilized in numerous ways. While the 1990's can be said to have been a content-focused era, the 2000's is an e-Learning supporter's era, a testament to the fact that e-Learning can be successful only when there is a support system.

Third, a foundation for spontaneous e-Learning should be provided by separating the roles of the government and the project for sustainable development of the e-Learning industry. As Korean e-Learning is in the initial stages, the government should focus on pursuing projects to provide a solid foundation. Put another way, the government should direct its effort to establishing a policy direction and guiding it while offering support to the private sector to pursue projects simultaneously. When it comes to e-Learning, the state should not row but steer.

Fourth, to efficiently utilize limited resources and to avoid double investment, a strategy of selection and concentration, focusing on major targets should be adopted. To this end, the government should strategically link ICT in education project in MOE&HRD with relevant ministries, including MOCIE, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Information and Communication, the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs. Through these efforts of coordination and integration, joint e-Learning projects as national policy projects can be identified and pursued, while avoiding overlapping investment. By consolidating and eliminating existing plans or previously pursued projects and making them bigger consolidated projects, the success rate of major projects can be maximized. Technology is just a tool for use, so rather than putting trust only in technology and content, what is important is who will actually use it. So far, the weaknesses of the

e-Learning field have been the lack of experts and not enough job creation. Therefore, e-Learning resources should be developed and facilitated through innovative methods.

Fifth, e-Learning should be changed from an extension of school education to an extension of corporate education. Learners are not limited to just students. Managers and heads of departments are also patrons of e-Learning. Most learners are already accustomed to 'self-service'. They know how to choose on their own and give up if they are unsatisfied, they reconnect on their own if they need to, and they know how to satisfy their own needs. Students already have the educational initiative. It is time for schools, teachers and companies to recognize this undeniable fact and to establish new roles accordingly.

Sixth, we should abandon traditional stereotypes. There are discussions that as the burden on teachers might increase due to e-Learning and u-Learning, some counter measures may be required. It is because the fields of offline schools and classrooms are copied directly in cyberspace. We should take caution that the learning system of the current e-Learning and the Cyber Home Learning System don't end up being an extension program of the school system. In addition, transition costs incurred due to administrative operations should be reduced through e-Learning. Instead of putting effort into controlling management costs, what is important is to motivate students and develop communities. Administrative operation in cyberspace in fact hinders the forming of communities.

Seventh, Korea's national human resources development (NHRD) should be modified in a way that enhances e-Learning further and allows e-Learning and NHRD to complement each other. In today's wired economy, knowledge workers are wired workers. The best system for human resources development for these people is the e-Learning system. As Korea has the foundation for maximizing national human resources development by taking advantage of its status of the world's advanced IT powerhouse, we should share our vision and join the ranks of advanced countries in human resources development.

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) states that e-Learning is drawing huge interest as a new knowledge industry and that e-Learning is expected to produce practical results in human resources development, not just elaborate ideals. Nurturing of workers, including scientists, engineers, architects, designers, educators, artists and musicians, so called, 'creative class' according to Richard Florida, depends on new ideas, technology and content to make it possible to go 'Beyond e-Learning'. 