

Limitations and Possibilities of Evaluation-based Higher Education Reform in South Korea

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Abstract—Evaluation-based higher education reform policies in South Korea have been hot issues among stakeholders including policy makers, professors, and university leaderships since the 1990s. This paper analyzes the aims and contents of the different types of evaluation that have been systematically and practically enforced in Korean higher education as part of its reform initiatives and discusses its' limitations and possibilities for improving higher education quality. By employing content analysis including government documents and related articles this paper first reviews the developmental phases, focusing on the types and contents, of evaluation policies initiated at the government level. Then, the paper explores some characteristics of the evaluation policies since the mid-1990s. Lastly, this study discusses its' limitations and possibilities of the evaluation based higher education reform by considering major issues which appeared in the process of implementing the evaluation policies.

Keywords—higher education reform; evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1990s, the government (or Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MEST]) has been the key player in leading higher education reforms in South Korea. Prior to this, the role of the government in higher education has not been apparent in drafting proposals or public budgets related to higher education reforms. The reason for the direct government intervention has to do with the rapid quantitative growth of Korean higher education institutions.¹ After the mid-1990s, the government has been involved in drafting the main proposals and agendas of higher education reform, as well as funding public/national and private higher education institutions in various ways. As an example, government funding of private institutions was at a minimal 0.1%-0.6% of their operating income in the 1980s ; this figure, however, rose to 1.13% in 1992 and to 5.8% in 1996 [1]. In addition, the government proposed several policy endeavors based on the “pursuit of diversity and excellence”, the core

¹ In view of the world history of the development of higher education, Korean higher education has achieved considerable quantitative growth in a short span of time. For example, the number of higher education institutions (including four-year universities and two-year colleges) more than doubled from 168 in 1970 to 348 in 2008, and the percentage of high school graduates enrolling in universities have exceeded 50% ten years ago, reaching 83.8% in 2008. The number of incoming freshmen stand at an average of 600,000 each year, with 347,750 students in four-year universities, 238,804 students in two-year colleges, and 39,391 students in other universities (colleges of education, universities of broadcasting and communications) (KEDI, 2009).

objective of Korean higher education reform announced in May 31, 1995. Such policy tasks include “Simplified University Establishment Policy”, “Deregulation of University Student Quota Policy”, “Faculty System” and “Evaluation of Government Funding” [2]. The scale and content of higher education reforms led by the government continue to expand according to the times and changes in the Korean administration. Higher education evaluation, in particular, has become more influential across universities and university population over time as the aim, format and contents of the evaluation have become more specified.

Evaluation has become the keyword to characterize Korean higher education. In comparison to higher education institutions in the US and UK that have developed various evaluation mechanisms based on the country's particular needs and features, Korea's evaluation of higher education may have been introduced relatively late but its effect has been powerful. Prior to the 1990s, both the government and higher education institutions have not given much consideration to the purpose of evaluation and its outcome. This changed in the mid-1990s when evaluation became the main agenda and tool to advance reform in higher education. The government associates evaluation with administration and funding, and attempts to enforce the competitiveness of individual institutions through program/department and faculty evaluations. Evaluation is currently used as a means to define the relationship between the government and university, between university leadership and academic departments, and among faculty members. Moreover, evaluation has also become a practical management mechanism to facilitate the qualitative development of university teaching and research.

The purpose of this paper is to understand the aim and contents of the different types of evaluation that have been systematically and practically enforced in Korean higher education as part of its reform initiatives after the mid-1990s, in addition to exploring the impact of evaluation-based higher education reform on university leadership and faculty. Three questions are raised: First, what is the development of Korea's university evaluation system? Second, what are the characteristics of the university evaluation implemented after the mid-1990s? Third, what are the effects of university evaluation on individual higher education institutions and their faculty? Documentary analysis will be used, and documents selected for this study are comprised of articles related to university evaluation, reform agendas published by the government and by individual universities (i.e. public C university, private J university, D university, etc). The results of this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of evaluation-based higher education reform on Korean universities and their responses to the reform.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY EVALUATION IN KOREA

The development of university evaluation in Korean universities has occurred in tandem with the development of Korean universities. In the initial stages, the evaluation of universities was implemented in a temporary and bureaucratic manner that was also a response to particular social issues. After the mid-1990s, university evaluation has been conducted both independently by the individual institutions, and externally by organizations set up by the government, university population, and others. The latter group includes collaborating institutes (Korean Council for University Education), media agencies (JoongAng Daily, Chosun Daily), and institutes affiliated to specific academic fields. Both groups have established multiple objectives (evaluation based on ranking, certification, administration and management) and various time frames (short-, mid-, long-term) to implement university evaluation.

The development phase of Korea's university evaluation can be explained by its distinct features based on a decadal assessment cycle [3] [4] [5]. For example, the 1950s was marked by laissez-faire policy; the 1960s by government-led (bureaucratic) administration; the 1970s by the introduction of a modernized university evaluation system (taken after the US model); the 1980s by association of universities-led autonomous peer evaluation; the 1990s onwards by diversification of university evaluation. University evaluation did not exist in Korea in the 1950s as this was the period following the August 15, 1945 liberation from Japanese rule when there were only 70 universities or so established. The Korean war in June 25, 1950 had also created political unrest in the country and the government was unable to oversee universities. In 1955, the government outlined the University Establishment Policy as a means to legislate supervision of universities, but it turned out to be more noninterventionist as the university evaluation of its philosophy, curriculum, and learning facilities were not set in place [5].

The 1960s marked the period when university evaluation became more systematized, and evaluation administered by the ministry of education was implemented on a short-term, supervisory basis. Evaluation during this period was supervisory in nature and conducted without consideration of the university's intentions [5].² The ministry of education was selective in choosing their target universities for evaluation based on their self-determined criteria, with the 1955 University Establishment Policy outlining the evaluation contents and criteria. University evaluation was also administrative and supervisory in order to expose any forms of corruption [3].

In the 1970s, a modernized version of university evaluation, similar to "University Evaluation Accreditation", was first implemented in Korea. On September 10, 1971, the government set up a review committee for education policy and steered its subsidiary working group, the higher education bureau committee, to facilitate higher education reforms. The first higher education reform initiative was to select a pilot institute and to manage progressive reform within the institute [4] [5]. Under the pilot institute evaluation system initiated in 1972, applications were received from universities and

² For example, having come into power after the May 16, 1961 coup d'état, the military government introduced undergraduate examination and university admissions examination targeted at graduating students in order to control the quota for university admissions. As part of higher education reform, the government adopted the role of "administration inspector" and reorganized 71 four-year universities to 44 universities, expanded 12 two-year colleges to 27 colleges, and created 10 two-year normal universities. University evaluation during this period was also supervisory in nature [3].

those that showed the potential for reform were selected as pilot institutes. The ministry of education formed an evaluation committee with faculty of different expertise to assess the accreditation of pilot institutes [3].

University evaluation in the 1980s shifted to an autonomous peer-evaluation system administered by the Korean Council for University Education (KCUE) to its member universities. KCUE is an independent council of universities that was founded in 1982 with the participation of 97 four-year universities and it has increased to 198 four-year universities in 2008 (KCUE, 2010). In 1984, the Korean Council for University Education legislation was passed and the legal foundation of university evaluation was established. KCUE conducts university evaluation in two ways [3] [4]. The first is the institutional evaluation that provides a comprehensive assessment of the overall university management system. The second is the evaluation by academic field whereby a specific field is selected and its curriculum and management are assessed by academic disciplines (e.g. engineering, humanities, education, etc) and by department (e.g. law, general Korean, general English, special departments, etc).

From the 1990s onwards, university evaluation can be defined as 'the diversification of agencies and contents of evaluation. Evaluation agencies include the government, KCUE, the media, academic organizations by specialization, and universities. First, KCUE revised its method of university evaluation to accreditation of university evaluation. In 1992, KCUE introduced the department evaluation system to provide evaluation to its member university departments. Between 1994 and 2006, the comprehensive university evaluation system was introduced over two seven-year phases (Phase 1: 1994-2000; Phase 2: 2001-2006) to assess member universities (KCUE, 2008). Since 1994, the government (MEST) has carried out general projects and specialized funding projects to distribute administrative and financial support based on direct institutional evaluation.³ In addition, MEST and Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) have jointly been conducting evaluation of teacher training institutes since 1998. An evaluation accreditation system has been introduced in 2010 that conducts the third evaluation of teacher training institutes, upon which sub-standard universities will be guided to reorganize independently, and

³ With the exception of the operating costs of public/national university management, government funding of higher education projects is largely provided in two ways: general funding projects and specialized funding projects. In general funding, the university submits an application for funding and the ministry of education disburses funding in a relatively proportionate manner based on its assessment of institutional factors such as the number of students, scale of institutional self-effort/enterprise, and project goals. The aim of general funding is to assist universities to improve its teaching and research conditions, and university development, extension of pilot national universities, and expansion of public and private university facilities are all examples of projects that fall into this category. Specialized funding projects evaluate project proposals in specific areas that have been submitted by universities, as they relate to government's policy for development in targeted areas, and provide funding to selected outstanding universities. Examples of projects in this category are targeted funding of graduate schools, training of international experts, development of university-affiliated science and engineering laboratories, support of outstanding universities conducting education reforms, regional universities specialization scheme, industrial universities specialization scheme, development of graduate school research-focused universities, and reorganization of local universities [9].

Administrative and financial support will be provided with outstanding universities to enhance their quality as teacher training institutes. [7].

The government has also revised the 2007 higher education law (October 2007) and legislated university self-evaluation [8]. According to the revised regulation on the self-evaluation of higher education institution, each university is responsible for announcing 13 items and 55 contents of its constitution. Items such as teaching, research, organization, management, and facilities are included in the contents of the evaluation. Based on this regulation, it is mandatory for each university to conduct self-evaluation on more than one occasion every two years, and to make public the results.

In addition, field/discipline evaluation system has been established to conduct assessment by each field itself. Specific examples are Accreditation Board for Engineering Education of Korea (ABEEK, 1999), Korean Institute of Medical Education and Evaluation (KIMEE, 2003), Korean Accreditation Board of Nursing (KABN, 2004), and Korean Association of Business Education Accreditation (KABEA, 2005). These evaluation organizations provide standards and guidelines for programs of study in the specialized fields, based on which consultation and accreditation are carried out. Prominent media organizations in Korea also take part in the university evaluation process. JoongAng Daily has alternated evaluation by department and by university every year since 1994, while Chosun Daily has started an evaluation of Korean and Asian universities in collaboration with the UK's Quacquarelli Symonds since 2009.

Evaluation (or accreditation) of learning units (or departments) is also implemented at the institutional level through diverse methods. As an example, D University, a private comprehensive university, has pioneered the 'accreditation system of major subjects' among Korean universities since 2007. This accreditation system certifies major areas of study affiliated to the subject department, upon which incentives are sufficiently provided with the department to enhance the quality of its departmental teaching [10].⁴ In contrast to D University which conducts department evaluation based on procedures and circumstances, the local national C University has implemented outcome-based department evaluation since 2009 with two main objectives. The first aim is to raise graduates' employment rates by promoting the competitiveness of education provided by individual departments. The second aim is to provide feedback of evaluation to relevant departments in order to enhance faculty obligation [11] [12].

C University's department evaluation covers six domains (student characteristics, employment rate, participation of faculty in professional development, internationalization, achievements of programs that foster learning competitiveness, self-improvement efforts etc) and is comprised of 18 specific indicators. In the case of C national University, the university leadership divides up its 90 or so departments into three categories [A(30%), B(50%), C(20%)]. One thing specializing C university is that the evaluation results are connected to faculty's incentives provided by the university leadership. For instance, if a faculty in charge of a certain course does not fulfill his/her teaching duties accordingly, this will be

⁴ The essence of the 'accreditation system of major subjects' lies in the following: the alignment of educational aims and learning outcomes as related to the major subject area, curriculum development, types of instructional activities that would foster students' learning, faculty efforts to enhance expertise in subject field, and educational facilities to support all of the above endeavors. In addition, the highlight of D University's accreditation system of major subjects is its focus not on outcomes but on procedures and circumstances [10].

reflected in department evaluation, the department faculty will be penalized as a whole. Incentives are divided into three categories from Incentive A (approximately 3,000 US\$) to Incentive C (approximately 1,000 US\$), with around 1,000 US\$ difference between each category. This type of group motivation can be an incentive to strengthen the department responsibility, but it also results in shaming the individual faculty if the duties are inadequately performed. However, the annual evaluation of individual faculty achievements is assessed under separate evaluation criteria (teaching, research, service).

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF UNIVERSITY EVALUATION POST-1990s

What are the characteristics of university evaluation in Korea after the 1990s? The main features can be classified as 'diversification of evaluation agencies', 'specialization of evaluation aims and contents', and 'increased pressure related to evaluation outcomes'. These characteristics confirm the fact that university evaluation is increasingly being supported by the government, individual institutions and recipients of university education (students, parents, companies, regional societies) over time.

The first characteristic is the diversification of evaluation agencies. When evaluation agencies are examined across time, the government (ministry of education) only has administered evaluation from the 1950s to 1970s. KCUE, an association of four-year universities, has conducted university evaluation based on the selection of member universities from the 1980s to mid-1990s. University evaluation systems have become diversified since the mid-1990s. For instance, organizations that participate in university evaluation supported by government funding include KCUE, MEST and KEDI. In addition, different accreditation agencies are involved in evaluating the different academic fields, such as Accreditation Board for Engineering Education of Korea, Korean Institute of Medical Education and Evaluation, Korean Accreditation Board of Nursing, and Korean Association of Business Education Accreditation. Mass media agencies, with JoongAng Daily and Chosun Daily as the two key examples, also take part in university evaluation. In addition, program/department evaluations are conducted by individual universities, with 'self-evaluation' at institutional level becoming increasingly common and mandatory.

The second characteristic is the specialization of the aims and contents of evaluation. From the 1950s to 1970s, the aims of university evaluation have been to assess university administration and the state of university facilities, as well as to monitor academic management. In the 1980s, as the aims and contents of university evaluation were largely separated into institutional evaluation and academic field evaluation, diversification of the evaluation contents started [13]. Institutional evaluation is an evaluation of the overall university system, with university goal, curriculum, student, faculty, facilities, administration and finance. Evaluation of academic field is targeted at qualitative reform of university education, and methodically assesses the special institutes, departments, learning programs, and departments within the university. With the shift to the accreditation system, the contents of university evaluation became more detailed in the 1990s. For example, KCUE implemented evaluation systems of undergraduate programs on targeted departments from 1992.⁵ The accreditation system of

⁵ Korea's current accreditation of university evaluation has been implemented with quality assurance as its aim. The government or external agency states the conditions for educational services and management to be provided by the university or department

university evaluation was implemented on member universities over two seven-year phases between 1994 and 2006 (KCUE, 2008). The ministry of education has also provided university funding through an evaluation system called 'specialized funding project' after the mid-1990s [14]. The aims of the project include improvement in university education and research conditions, specialization and diversification of universities, and university reform stimulus, and the common characteristic among all projects [e.g. Brain Korea21 (BK21), supporting graduate school research-led universities), New Universities Regional Innovation(NURI, restructuring of local universities, etc] is that they need to undergo evaluation. The purpose of media evaluation of universities began in 1994 is based on the concept of relative assessment that focuses on comparative rankings of universities. As an example, JoongAng Daily's university evaluation of 2008 is comprised of learning conditions and funding, internationalization, faculty research, and graduate employment in reputable fields. Chosun Daily's evaluation does not vary greatly in content from JoongAng Daily, but the main difference lies in Chosun Daily's target of evaluation being universities in Korea and Asia.

Thirdly, the increasing pressure of evaluation outcomes can be determined by the evaluation administered by the government and media agencies. The results of government-administered evaluation affect the particular university's administration and funding so universities have to prepare thoroughly and respond with sensitivity to the results. For instance, the funding structure of four-year private universities was ineffective to the extent that 77.4% of their income from tuition fees and course fees were allocated towards operating expenses in 2006. In addition, in order to obtain government funding, universities had no alternative but to restructure and reorganize according to the evaluation indicators defined by the government. It may appear that the government's graded funding formula with regard to evaluation is conducted indirectly, but the government in effect has direct regulation over universities and the funding method is also suggestive of the university's dependent relationship with the government [15]. Media-based university evaluation provides information about universities to students, parents and citizens, and therefore, has a big impact on the university's reputation. In order to secure positive evaluation, universities focus on the collection of data that display external and superficial outputs [16]. Universities have responded to evaluation by establishing departments that solely handle university evaluation and by expanding human resources to that effect. As a result, the administrative duties of the university and faculty are intensifying [17].

IV. THE EFFECTS OF UNIVERSITY EVALUATION ON UNIVERSITIES

The effects of evaluation-based higher education reform can largely be discussed in two ways. One is the effect on university leadership (president) in charge of the university management. The other is the effect on university faculty in charge of university teaching and research.

A. The effect on university leadership

The first point of discussion involves the university leadership's perception and management of evaluation. University evaluation is of vital importance to its leadership as the evaluation results are associated with the size of government funding, and the

(program), and quality assurance is guaranteed when the conditions are met.

results prone to affect external appraisal of the university. University leaderships are in competition with one another to secure government funding for various projects. They also believe that such competition is beneficial to improving the quality of university education and is the stated norm, and acknowledge the effects of such competition. This is reflected in university management that allocates funds based on the university's competitiveness in the following areas: educational goals, organization of evaluation department, and faculty hiring based on research productivity. For instance, the word 'competitiveness' is never omitted in universities' mission statements. Research competitiveness, teaching competitiveness, and student competitiveness are representative examples. In addition, university leadership has hired personnel and set up departments (private J University) that attend only to university evaluation in order to secure good outcomes in all aspects of evaluation. This department manages and compares the various evaluation indicators, and finds ways to apply the results. Such measures have been proven to be counter-productive [18]. For example, with the focus of universities being on external evaluation, the leadership does not pay much attention to setting university goals based on the particular characteristics of their institution, and the importance and value of such a task is overlooked. This has resulted in the contradicting effects of standardizing all universities. The influence of evaluation outcomes on private universities with weak funding structures, in particular, is far greater, and in direct contrast to the expansion of university autonomy [19].⁶

Moreover, university leadership is aware that university evaluation prioritizes quantitative measures such as the size and structure of university personnel and the number of research publications, and therefore is in competition to produce more research outputs and to secure reputable scholars. These scholars also expect to assume such roles as they are a means to secure more research funding from the government and enterprises. The selection criteria for the initial funding projects administered by MEST reveal that the selected candidates and funding amounts are related to faculty research outputs, and this relational ratio is on the rise [20]. According to the study by Ryu et al. (2001), universities with a greater number of SCI papers per faculty were also granted more government funding. Rahn's (2002) study, which examined the relationship between the university's average research output and funding size, indicated that the number of papers, including SCI papers, per faculty continues to increase [21]. In addition, university leadership has strengthened its renewal and promotion standards by increasing pressure for research productivity on its faculty.

B. The effect on university faculty

Faculty members are neither exempt from evaluation-based higher education reform nor competition. They have to compete against colleagues within the same department, and departments have to compete with similar departments within the same university as well as in other universities. Faculty evaluation in most four-year Korean universities is conducted by the three areas of research, teaching and service, and several assessment grades are formulated for college faculty. Evaluation of faculty achievement from a local national university is based on seven grades, with the rankings (faculty ratio) provided as follows: S(5%), A+(10%), A°(15%), A-(40%), B+(15%), B°(10%), B-(5%). Among the three areas of evaluation of faculty achievement, the research output of individual

⁶ In the case of Korea, about 80% of higher education is provided by private universities that rely on approximately 80% of its operating expenses from tuition fees. Public universities, on the other hand, rely on 45% from tuition fees [19].

faculty carries the most weight. Research is based on the individual faculty's ability, and since it is better to have as many research outputs as possible, the majority of faculty invests time and energy into research publications. There is also no limit to the number of publications in faculty evaluation, so faculty members with more publications derive greater incentive from faculty evaluation, aside from salary, than those with fewer publications. For example, special incentives are reserved for publications in domestic top Korean academic journals as well as top international journals, although papers have to be published in academic journals within a limited period of time for promotion and renewal. A large part of performance-based evaluation also presents an opportunity to prompt faculty of the importance of teaching. It is not an overstatement to say that most of the faculty's time and energy that ought to be invested in undergraduate and graduate teaching is being expended on research. In areas of teaching, most faculty in public and local universities have a standardized nine-hour course teaching load, and basic points are provided to faculty who fulfill this duty so this factor does not provide much variance to faculty performance evaluation.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After the mid-1990s, both the concept of university evaluation and evaluation-based higher education reform policy, which contributed to higher education reforms, have been meaningful for several reasons [22]. First, higher education reform has surfaced as an important political issue. As a result, the government's intervention in higher education has expanded and its influence more tangible. For instance, with longstanding issues in higher education presented as part of the presidential campaign commitment, the elected president has resorted to diverse higher education reform agendas to fulfill his pledge to higher education reforms. Evaluation has become the only means to determine the effectiveness of such reforms.

Second, 'excellence' and 'competition' have become the keywords to higher education reform. National competitiveness and pursuit of excellence are not omitted in government's aims for higher education reforms. Education reform proposals at the institutional levels are filled with words such as teaching competitiveness, research competitiveness, and university competitiveness. The concept of new liberal market economy that emphasizes competition and consumers is directly reflected in higher education reforms. This is also due to the fact that government provision of graded funding based on evaluation has become more specified. However, this type of reforms have also been criticized as the government having manipulated the higher education market in an aggressive and artificial way, instead of respecting the higher education market principle of supply and demand [23].

Third, government intervention of universities has intensified. For example, the funding structure of private universities is less than adequate in that it relies on more than two-thirds of tuition fees and course fees to cover its operating expenses. Universities have to restructure based on the evaluation indicators outlined by the government in order to secure government funding. This confirms government's control of universities in direct and practical ways [24].

Fourth, the role of KCUE evaluation has been made ineffective as a result of the government's evaluation-based funding. As mentioned earlier, KCUE has conducted university accreditation through a comprehensive evaluation system of universities. The government, at the same time, has linked evaluation and funding with a different agenda for higher education reform. Not only has the duplicate university evaluation assessments increased pressure on both the government and KCUE, the evaluating organizations, but has made ineffective KCUE's accreditation system that is not associated with funding [25].

Fifth, graded funding based on evaluation does not sufficiently reflect the size or uniqueness of the university, but instead is implemented in a leveled and standardized way that impedes university autonomy, and enhanced the pressure on university constituents with regards to reform [26].

In conclusion, Korea's evaluation-based higher education reform efforts in the past 15 years have also been presented with many problems. As discussed previously, evaluation-based university reform has given new meaning to the concept of traditional Korean institutions that has been characterized by a sense of relaxedness, compartmentalization, and autonomy. Competition among universities to secure government funding, and among university leadership and faculty to attain excellent results in different evaluation domains have created an atmosphere of tension. In addition, achievement evaluation based on quantitative criteria has been an impetus to promote university's research competitiveness at the international level. However, a criticism against the evaluation-based university reform, which has continued to be implemented in various mechanisms across time, is that it has strayed far from its original objective and have made universities uniform across the board. It has also neglected teaching, one of the essential components of university establishment. Moreover, it has intensified competition among faculty that has hindered personal communication. The time has now come for reflection. It is apparent that current university faculty members are clearly aware of the limitations and possibilities of university evaluation. It is also necessary now to pay more attention and efforts to teaching, one of the core functions of the university. The author sees that the urgent need for the negative effects of evaluation to be minimized and the courage and wisdom of university faculty are required to bring about quality changes that the university is pursuing.

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