

CHAPTER VII
IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
AT THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

A. Institutional Framework

The function of quality assurance for open and distance learning system (QA-ODL) is proposed to be taken by the SEAMOLEC, which is supervised by the SEAMEO Governing Board, as presented in Figure 1. The main responsibility of SEAMOLEC in QA-ODL should include,

- a) provide assistance to the national quality assurance agency in the member countries in implementing the guidelines to their respective context; and
- b) Coordinate collaborative activities among member countries in developing and implementing quality assurance for cross border ODL.

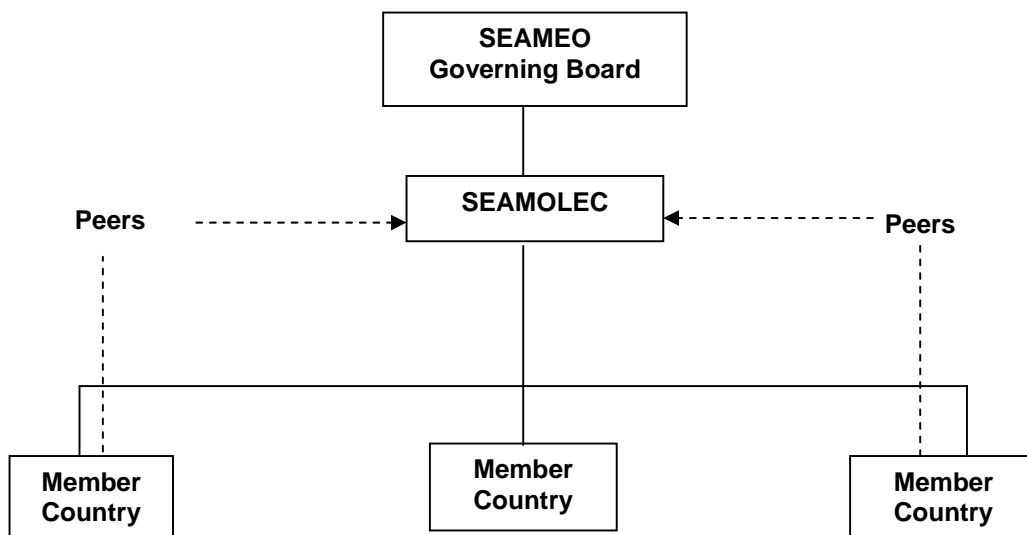


Figure 7.1

1 Policy and regulation

Depending on the respective national regulation, assessment will be conducted either on voluntary or mandatory basis. It is preferable for the SEAMOLEC to provide its assistances and services through the national QA agency instead of directly to the requesting institution. As illustrated in Figure-1, SEAMOLEC could draw the necessary expertise from member countries. In the case of an assessment by SEAMOLEC is requested, SEAMOLEC could recruit peers as assessors from the member countries. The detailed guidelines for assessors should be developed by SEAMOLEC for this purpose.

2 Quality Assurance Organizational Structure

Each member country is recommended to put in place an organization to carry out the quality assurance function for ODL program or institutions. The organization may be part of the existing QA organization already established in the country, but shall coordinate its activity with SEAMOLEC as prescribed in the previous section (Figure 7.1).

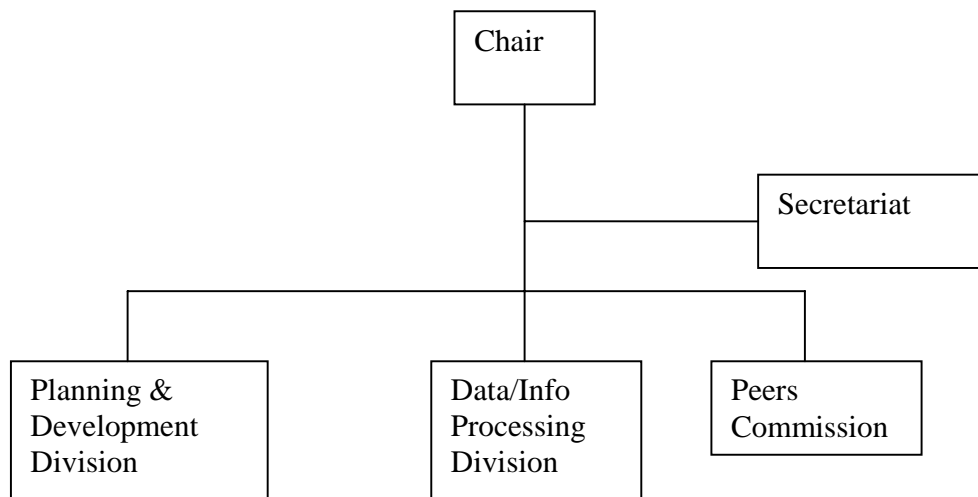


Figure 7.2

Although it is not meant to standardize the organization structure, the structure in Figure 7.2 can be used as guidance for establishing a QA organization. Basically it consists of three main functions namely, planning and development, data processing, and peer evaluation or assessment. Administratively the organization is supported by a secretariat.

B. The practice of Quality Assurance

Survey on the mega universities found QA practices. Those universities are the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU, Pakistan); the Anadolu University (Anadolu, Turkey); the China Central Radio and TV University (CCRTVU, China); the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU, India); the Universitas Terbuka (UT, Indonesia); the Korea National Open University (KNOU, Korea); the Payame Noor University (Iran); the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU, Thailand); the Open University (OU, UK); the University of South Africa (South Africa); and the Shanghi TV University (SHTVU, China).

Key aspects of the survey included QA organization, QA policies, QA methods, objectives of QA activities, QA areas and criteria, QA system for imported/exporting distance education programmes, QA system for e-learning, and link to national QA frameworks for distance education.

1. Quality Assurance Organizational Structures

QA organizational structures in those universities can be categorized into three types, i.e. : a centralized QA structure, a collective QA structure, and a dispersed QA structure.

- *A centralized QA structure.* Several mega universities have set up a centralized total quality management system to co-ordinate and oversee the implementation of QA activities university-wide based on policies and guidelines formulated by QA-related boards or committees. Those centralized units are operated based on university revenue. The names of the QA organization in those universities are UT (Indonesia)'s QA Centre, STOU (Thailand)'s Educational QA Coordinating Centre, AIOU (Pakistan)'s Research and Evaluation Centre, and OU (UK)'s QA team and a Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching.
- *A collective QA structure.* A QA system of some universities has been set and run by the boards, the councils, and/or the committees rather than an independent QA unit in administration. Each body has distinctive roles in different stages of QA processes or in different areas of QA activities. At IGNOU (India), School Boards, Planning Committee, and Academic Council are responsible for

overseeing QA policies and implementations. At Anadolu (Turkey), University Senate, University Executive Board, Academic Advisory Board, Course Accreditation and Review Committee, and Instructional Design Committee play a significant role in QA and accreditation.

- *A dispersed QA structure.* There are mega universities where QA is a part of the responsibilities of one or more related administration offices. At CCRTVU (China), units responsible for assuring quality of distance education include the Educational Administration Division, the Centre of Learning Support Service, the Centre of Examination, and the Academic Assessment Office. KNOU (Korea) has a QA system where quality is not a specified responsibility of any particular post or office, rather it is a responsibility of all related offices and academic divisions. SHTVU (China) assigns QA responsibilities to the Department of Teaching Affairs, but specific QA activities are assigned to all related units of the university.

2. Quality Assurance Policies and Regulations

Developing own QA policies. Whereas, in some cases where the national QA framework for DE provides rather general guidelines or there is no national QA framework specifically for DE institutions, institutions have developed their own QA policies and regulations. Such examples include STOU, UT, AIOU, KNOU, CCRTVU, and SHTVU.

Examples of elaborated QA policies. As for the level of specification in QA policies and regulations, OUUK and UT provide good examples of an elaborated system. OUUK has developed the *Guide to Quality and Standards in the Open University* that provides a guide to the structural and procedural arrangements for internal quality assurance. This document aims to embed QA into OU's organisational structure, staff roles and process design, but yet allow flexible adaptations by each unit.

UT has adopted the AAOU Quality Assurance Framework to develop the "Quality Assurance System for Universitas Terbuka". This new quality assurance system encompasses nine components and 107 quality criteria or statements of best practices.

Each criterion is further delineated into indicators and methods of achievement. In addition, UT has developed 112 work manuals based on its quality system, outlining QA systems, procedures and assessment criteria. The manuals are used consistently by all the members of UT in carrying out their daily responsibilities, assessment forms were developed to monitor and assess tasks performed by individual staff, to support self-assessment of each unit, to record processes and outputs of the tasks, to identify problems, and to offer solutions.

3. Objectives of QA Activities

For most institutions, the predominant objectives of internal QA activities are self-improvement and accountability to the society in general and to the National QA authority in specific. Thus, the internal QA results are used both for self-improvement and/or external evaluation.

Accountability to society and QA authority. Heavy involvement of external experts is often observed in some cases where the primary objective of QA is accountability. IGNOU, being appraised by the Open and Distance Education Assessment. An important driver in all the QA activities is external in nature at OUUK where QA results are used for the basis of public funding decisions. UT's external assessment has involved experts from the Directorate General of Higher Education on a semester basis, as well as from the National Accreditation Board of Higher Education on a three- to four-year basis.

Self-improvement. Feedback from internal and external reviewers and students are used to improve the quality of courses, programmes, materials and services of most of the distance teaching universities surveyed. IGNOU keeps all the records of discussions of various committees and experts to ensure that the recommendations of the committees and experts are incorporated in improving key aspects of its courses, programmes and services. AIOU puts a great emphasis on feedback surveys. The results of the surveys are used to improve quality of distance teaching and learning at AIOU. UT uses feedback and inputs from various sources including the top management for continuous improvement. At Anadolu, formal feedback is collected from teaching evaluation surveys and student questionnaires and the results from the feedback are used to improve its

distance education. KNOU uses the results of student evaluation and expert opinions to improve the quality of its textbooks.

4. Quality Assurance Methods

A variety of QA methods are observed in the mega universities. The popular methods of QA include providing a wide range of opportunities for training workshops, conducting evaluation research, introducing internal review processes, and inviting external audits and assessments. In some cases, detailed guidelines or directions for assessing quality in selected key areas of distance education at the course and programme level are also provided.

Offering internal training and professional development opportunities. The most prevalent method of QA is to provide training and professional development opportunities to faculty and staff, including part-time tutors. The clearest examples are shown in several cases. OUUK specifies initial induction and training, and continuous staff development opportunities for its salaried staff, academic staff and associate lecturers in the “Guide to Quality and Standards”. Formal training sessions, workshops, resources, moderated online courses and seminars are offered. SHTVU has offered a series of training courses to its young instructors, academic staff, and part-time lecturers covering topics in course development and learner support. Each institution at UT sets out personnel development programmes to equip its staff with competencies for effective task performance. IGNOU also provides orientation programmes for course writers, tutors, and counselors. Similarly, KNOU and AIOU organize a series of workshops on course development for teachers.

Involvement in international training workshops and conferences. Some mega universities go beyond internal training activities. For example, UT (Indonesia) has sent a selected number of its staff to a three month training workshop in the Netherlands in co-operation with the Netherlands’ International Development Agency (NUFFIC) and Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and other various international conferences, workshops and training sessions on QA. International organizations such as UNESCO and COL have provided online training manuals and face-to-face training opportunities to distance educators.

Evaluating and monitoring staff performance. Evaluation and monitoring of staff performance is another method to ensure the quality of distance education. AIOU monitors routine duties of its staff and also prepares a formal Annual Confidential Report that includes evaluation of staff performance by each section head in charge. CCRTVU uses feedback from teachers and students to assess the quality of courses and teaching activities. KNOU evaluates tutor performance based on students' evaluation of their services and tutorials. OUUK implements a period of probation to all staff joining the university. During the period, the head of each unit is required to carefully and continually monitor the work of probationers. The "Manual of Personnel Policies and Procedures" specify job evaluation policy and procedure of salaried staff and the "Associate Lecturer Handbook" clarifies appraisal system for associate lecturers. UT's evaluation system is rather extensive. It requests each unit to undertake self-assessment and self-monitoring. A university-wide quality audit team, then, visits all units and regional centers to assess their performance. The top management of the university is also involved in this evaluation process and examines the quality assurance report and provides feedback to all units.

Specifying steps in the course development process. The internal quality assurance system during the development of courses/programmes and materials is well integrated into the whole operations of most distance teaching universities. AIOU adopts a course team approach and a system for QA during the course design and development. CCRTVU plans and produces its conventional DE courses, online courses, and materials following a standardised QA process to ensure the quality. Similarly, IGNOU introduces step-by-step course development processes and engages experts from all over the nation for the design and development of its courses and programmes, ensuring the quality of its teaching and learning materials. OUUK provides the Course Management Guide and adopts the course team approach in approving and developing courses. At UT, the course development process begins from an idea of programme development followed by a market survey or needs analysis. UT has specified a process of development and review of its courses. KNOU develops its textbooks employing a course team approach. Each course team consists of KNOU faculty, external content experts, distance education specialists, and textbook designers. Students' evaluation is sought as well. Anadolu

assures the quality of its courses through the Instructional Design Committee. The Committee decides on a team of experts for the development of each course and facilitates communication among content experts, lecturers and students.

Reviewing learner assessment. The quality assurance procedure during assessment and examinations development is well laid out in a few distance teaching universities. OUUK operates an Examination and Assessment Board for every course. This board is responsible for the production of the examination paper, marking guidelines, the awarding of course results and other related matters. OU's assessment framework complies with the national Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice for Assessment of Students. At IGNOU, a marking scheme is prepared and made available to all examiners to avoid inter-examiner variability. AIOU reviews the process of student evaluation and makes suggestions for improvement. AIOU gathers evidence of course effectiveness from students and has developed a built-in mechanism of continuous course improvement. The Research and Evaluation Centre of AIOU carries out regular course evaluation studies.

Inviting external reviewers and experts: Involvement of external reviewers or/and experts during course development and material production is also a popular method of assuring the quality in most of the mega universities surveyed. KNOU, AIOU, IGNOU, UT, and STOU invite external experts in their QA processes. AIOU invites external experts during its formative or summative studies or feedback surveys. CCRTVU involves external experts, professors from national universities, and persons in charge of e-colleges to review its quality of programmes, courses, tutoring, and other services. OUUK seeks the three main external inputs to QA processes: the External Assessor for course in development, the External Examiner for examination at course level, and the External Advisor appointed at award level.

5 Key Quality Assurance Areas

OUUK and UT provide detailed criteria for each of their QA key areas. Most of the mega universities tend to have more detailed criteria especially for QA areas such as Programme/Course Design and Development, Learner Supports, and Assessment. These areas are more directly related to student learning. AIOU, IGNOU, SHTVU, and KNOU

put a great emphasis on QA in the areas of course/materials production and student support services.

AIOU (Pakistan)

- Courses and their effectiveness
- Tutorial support system
- Assessment system
- Student problems
- Methods of course production
- Cost effectiveness of courses
- Outcome of courses and programmes
- Servicing/Operational departments
- Administration

Anadolu (Turkey)

- Academic and professional enhancements of programmes and courses

IGNOU (India)

- Needs and objectives of the programme
- Content and level of the programme
- Duration of the programme
- Language of the course material
- Presentation of the content
- Transforming the content into distance format
- Delivery of the programme
- Assessment of students

CCRTVU (China)

- Policy and planning
- Course design and development
- Learner support services

- Learner assessment
- Media and technology
- Unified requirements

KNOU (Korea)

- Learner support services
- Tutorials
- e-Learning
- Textbook development
- Broadcasting programme development

OU (UK)

- Institutional management of quality and standards
- Framework for academic quality and standards
- Internal review
- Assessment and awards
- Collaborative awards
- Student support and guidance
- Staff
- Accountability to stakeholders

SHTVU (China)

- Teaching
- Teaching affairs
- Academic staff
- Course design and development (texts and books, online courses)
- Students (learning resources, online courses, digital libraries, telephone, e-mail, BBS, i-class teaching platform)
- Media for learning (Internet, VOD, Video, Audio, Telephone, etc.)
- Study centers

UT (Indonesia)

- Policy and planning
- Human resource provision and development
- Management and administration
- Learners
- Programme design and development
- Course design and development
- Learner support
- Learner assessment
- Media for learning

6 Quality Assurance Criteria

Detailed QA criteria are provided for several universities surveyed. For example, IGNOU lists QA criteria for developing DE materials in self-instruction mode. All materials to be transformed in the self-instructional mode have to meet the criteria of self explanatory, self contained, self directed, self-motivating, self-evaluating, and self learning.

The faculty members are requested to transform the content into distance mode and ensuring that the unit structure is followed: 1) introduction, 2) objectives, 3) content exposition, 4) revision questions, 5) in-text questions, 6) summary, 7) terminal exercises, 8) supplementary material, 9) assignments, 10) suggested readings/reference materials, 11) learning activities and 12) key words.

KNOU puts an emphasis both on content and instructional design of the materials. QA criteria for the content include: appropriateness of objectives, specification of objectives, accuracy and regency of the content and clear organization of the content. QA criteria for instructional design include: appropriateness of teaching-learning strategies, effectiveness of utilizing multimedia, appropriateness of screen interface, and convenience of course management. Other institutions have also devised similar detailed QA criteria for course development.

QA criteria during the delivery of DE programmes have been reported in a few cases including UT, OUUK and IGNOU. One example can be found at IGNOU. IGNOU

has suggested QA criteria such as timely dispatch of course materials, training of tutors and counselors in providing support to students, timely delivery of multimedia packages to study centers, regular tutorials and counseling sessions, timely feedback on assignments, timely response to student queries, feedback to students on their performance and progress and facilitation of peer group interaction.

OOUK provides detailed QA criteria for services to students in regional centers. All the regional centers need to carry out an annual review of key activities: course choice, enrolment and fees, careers guidance, outreach and promotion, preparation, induction and learning skills development, student progress and retention, special needs, examinations and assessment, and exceptions and complaints. The findings of these reviews are shared between regions. Other activities, managed centrally or regionally, are reviewed on an ad hoc basis from time to time. Examples include: support for students with disabilities, the promotion of equal opportunities, marketing and collaborative provision (OOUK, 2004).

7 The Implementation of Quality Assurance in Some Countries

a. Hongkong (China)

In Hongkong, all of universities are established as a self accrediting body. The eight universities funded by the university grant commission (UGC) are evaluated by the external review teams. However, the other universities which are not funded by UGC such as the Open University of Hongkong (OUHK) are evaluated by Hongkong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA).

The UGC adopted the system called the Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews (TLQPR), which have a mission: to focus on teaching and learning, to assist the higher education institution to improve teaching and learning, to enable the UGC and the higher education institutions to discharge their obligations.

The HKCAA as the only independent statutory accreditation authority body oversees the quality of educational programs of distance education and other non – UGC funded higher education institutions. The QA criteria are utilized for all modes of education (traditional mode, conventional distance education mode, and e-learning

mode). However, evaluation criteria for assessing the quality of e-learning program have not been developed. Major criteria for an institutional review included:

- Institutional structure to provide opportunities for staff and students to contribute to the formation of academic community and policy
- Government and management with regard to the committee structure included reference and policies, role of academic board, and accountability of those committees and board, and adequate process for internal review
- Course development and design based on research and consultancy
- Intelligent and integrated approach to academic and resources decisions
- Quality of academic staff and staff development
- Scholarly activity of research and innovation
- Learning environment and teaching methods
- Valid course evaluation and standards
- Resources including fiscal, support staff, accommodation, equipment, furniture, books, software
- New technology
- Collaboration with industry, local and overseas institutions; and
- Self improvement based on past reviews

The accreditation process is done through institutional reviews and program validations. Program validation is to assess a proposed degree program compared with existing degree program in Hongkong and International Standards. Over the years, the HKCAA has conducted institutional reviews and program validation of the Open University of Hongkong (OUHK) along with other distance education program to examine teaching and learning process and the impact on the quality of the program.

b. India

In India, the National Qualification Framework (NQF) was already formulated, and the **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)** is an autonomous sub system of the University Grants Commission (UGC). According to Jung (cited in Stella; 2003) the institutional and departmental accreditations are conducted based on the self-study report and peer team visits.

Institutional accreditation by NAAC is valid for a period up to 5 years. The NAAC adopts a nine points ranking systems, to assess where the accredited institutions are on the nine-point scale. Seven criteria become the basis of NAAC's assessment Focus i.e.: curricula aspects, teaching, learning and evaluation, research and consultancy, infrastructure and learning resources, student support and progression, organization and management, and healthy practices. Once accredited by the NAAC, the institutions are required to submit an annual progress report based on the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) Guidelines.

To assess and accredit for distance education (including e-learning) institution in India, the Distance Education Council (DEC) with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) have mandate to promote open and Distance education network, and to plan and implement schemes for ensured quality in distance education in close collaboration with NAAC. The DEC has the following functions:

- Providing the financial support and academic guidelines to ODL institution
- Developing norms procedure, and guidelines in respect of admission, evaluation and certifications
- Assessing and accrediting ODL institution
- Promoting convergence of conventional and distance learning to facilitate learners through credit transfer

Within the DEC, ODL institutions assessment and accreditation was created to appraise a distance education institution at intervals of 5 years. Major criteria for an institutional review included:

Evaluation should fill out two kinds of forms: one for basic information and another for detailed information. Those forms will be evaluated and an expert team will visit the institution before the final decision is made by the DEC. The current requirements for accreditation include faculty qualifications, staff student rations, and space that are appropriate for virtual institution such as the NetVarsity.

Although the forms specify quality assurance and accreditation criteria for conventional distance education institutions, they are not suitable for the assessment of e-learning program. In fact, quality assurance and accreditation criteria for virtual

university or e-learning program have yet to be developed. Major evaluation criteria include:

- curriculum
- self-instructional materials
- faculty
- evaluation
- delivery methods
- regional and study centers
- infrastructure of study centers
- staff at regional and study centers
- building structure
- land
- administrative staff
- financial resources, and
- vocational/technical/professional program

c. Indonesia

Since 1998, The National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (Badan Akreditasi Nasional Perguruan Tinggi = BAN-PT) has functioned as an independent unit directly under the Ministry of National Education. This unit was established under the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE) in 1994. The BAN-PT accredits distance education programmes using the instrument different from the one used on-campus of higher education. However, no specific quality evaluation instrument for e-learning has been created by BAN-PT yet.

The QA criteria utilized to assess higher education institutions is in the form of instruments which includes assessment questions on the following area:

- Curriculum
- Course content
- Development of course materials
- Facilities and methods to deliver the course

- Staffing
- Student services
- Counseling services
- Students' feedback
- Methods of evaluation of student progress
- Number of students
- Selection and registrations of students

This accreditation is built around the aggregate assessment on the portfolio, the input from an external review team, the input from the site visit and other decisions.

The BAN PT has also evaluated distance education program of the Universitas Terbuka (UT), as state distance education institution. UT has introduced a new internal quality assurance system to improve its services. The new quality assurance system adopted the AAOU Quality Assurance (QA) framework.

d. Japan

In Japan, the establishment of a new university is to be approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Once a university is established under the approval from the MEXT, the university would go through an accreditation/re-accreditation process every seven years.

There are two major quality assurance agencies exist in Japan: the National Institute of Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) and the Japan University Accreditation Association. The quality assurance systems require all universities (including distance education) to be evaluated at the time of its establishment and re-accredited every seven years after establishment.

The quality assurance criteria for establishing a distance education program within a conventional university specify delivery methods, calculation of a unit of credit, requirements for graduation, and inclusion of a variety of interaction mechanism in case of e-learning. Initial accreditation for a new distance education program is to assist whether it meets the standards specified in the government regulations. The decision is to approve or disapprove the establishment of a university on the documents analysis or site visit. Specific criteria for quality assurance and accreditations of e-learning have been

discussed in a related quality assurances committee in the MEXT and the JUAA but have not yet been specified.

e. Korea

In Korea, the conventional university is required by the Higher Education Law to be approved by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MOE). The institution/university then will be accredited by Korean Council for University Education (KCUE), by going through university accreditation and program evaluation using pre-described standards and procedures (Jung, cited in Lee, 2003). The result of the institutional accreditation is utilized by the MOE to determine administrative and financial support to each university while each university uses the results to improve its systems.

The Korean National Open University (KNOU) has been the only distance teaching university established in Korea under higher education law which approved by the MOE. KCUE or any other external evaluation bodies have not evaluated the quality of distance education provided by KNOU since its establishment. Because of this, the Bureau of Lifelong Education of the MOE has supervised KNOU, whereas the Bureau of Higher Education has supervised other four-year conventional universities, which is responsible for the activities of KCUE. Without having external quality assurance evaluation and reviews, KNOU's competitive power in providing high quality education has to depend solely on an internal quality assurance mechanism (Jung, 2004). The major criteria for establishment of a new virtual university cover:

- Hardware and network establishment
- Course development systems
- Quality assurance mechanism
- Student support services
- Vision and missions
- Administration

Under each criterion, detailed evaluation criteria have been developed. The criteria for establishing a e-learning program to be similar in the context for quality assurance and accreditation for e-learning.

References

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