

ABSTRACT

A Study on National University's Incorporation Policy in Korea

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More than 20 years have passed since national university's incorporation appeared in higher education reform agenda in Korea with only a few policy outcomes. A draft act on national university corporation's establishment and operation that the Korean government handed in to national assembly in 2007 was discarded due to the expiration of national assembly's term. Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology, the only national university corporation in the country, was opened in March 2009 and a draft act on Seoul National University corporation's establishment and operation was submitted to national assembly in December 2009.⁴¹⁾

This study aims to provide policy recommendations by confirming the necessity of national university's incorporation, comparing the past incorporation policies, drawing out positive and negative effects of incorporation based on survey results and policy experiences in Japan and

41) The draft act was passed in the national assembly in December 2010 and Seoul National University will be incorporated in 2012.

Singapore. The results of this study consist of first, status quo and problems of national university's operation, second, policy experiences in Japan and Singapore, third, survey results of national university faculty and staff followed by policy recommendations.

The status quo and problems of national university's operation are as follows. First, the institutional governance of national university features a system of agreement among faculty members, which makes hard to deal with external changes and needs with relevance and speed. Also, the president of national university is elected almost all by faculty, which makes it difficult for the president to have a strong leadership. Second, the financial system of national university is divided into several different accounts, which results in low efficiency and transparency. The current financial system lacks of accountability and comparability of management among universities. Third, national universities have no autonomy in organization and personnel matters as they are run as government bodies. Fourth, there is no accountability mechanism designed for national universities, and thus government funding is distributed without consideration of performance outcomes of universities. Interviews with faculty and staff in UNIST, the only national university corporation let us know that the above-mentioned problems were solved more or less. When comparing the past incorporation policies, the draft act on Seoul National University's incorporation included phrases that government funding will be consistently continue even after incorporation at an increase rate of higher education budget.

Comparison between policy experiences in Japan and Singapore let us know that Korean national university's incorporation policy resembles more Singaporean than Japanese case. Unlike Japan that incorporated all national universities at one time, Korean government allow universities to choose

incorporation with their own will and the objectives of incorporation focus on increase of autonomy and global competitiveness of national universities. In case of Japan, the size of government funding itself did not decrease but the way of distribution was changed to competitive acquisition of government funding for universities' perspective. The tuition rate was not raised as much as expected and employment of non-regular workers increased. By contrast, the Singaporean government continued and increased funding for national universities and the national university corporations increased teaching and research staff after incorporation.

The survey that asked 3,650 faculty and staff in national universities as well as 71 experts what they thought of incorporation policy resulted as follows. First, faculty and staff in national universities agreed on the problems of national university's operation, but disagreed with incorporation of national universities. By contrast, experts agreed with the incorporation policy. However, both groups agreed that there were few extensive consultation and hearings on the policy and that the government did not properly deal with conflicts over the policy. Second, 64.3% of faculty and staff in national universities were against the policy implementation and 31.9% of them were for the policy. In terms of the size of the universities, middle-sized universities were the most against the policy while large-sized universities were the most for the policy. Seventy five percent of faculty was against the policy whereas 45.8% of administrative staff was for the policy. Third, the first and foremost prerequisite of incorporation was secure and consistent funding for the incorporated universities followed by faculty and staff job security and balanced support for the basic research areas such as arts and sciences. Those who are against the incorporation policy thought it necessary to give more autonomy to national universities in finance, organization and personnel matters . Fourth, respondents did

not expect that incorporation of national universities will increase autonomy, quality of teaching and research, and global competitiveness. Rather, they thought that incorporation will result in a decrease in government funding, weakening democratic decision-making, and strengthening control and interventions of the government. As a result of correlation analysis between understandings of incorporation policy and the expected effects of incorporation, those who have more understandings are more likely to agree on positive effects. Experts did not expect that government funding will decrease, but faculty and staff in national universities tended to agree on positive effects and negative effects simultaneously, which seems irrational. Fifth, respondents did not expect that incorporation will exert positive effects on governance of the university and thought that harmonization of several decision-making committees is important. They thought that job security will decrease and employment of non-regular workers will increase.

On the basis of the above research findings, the study has drawn the following policy recommendations. First, the government should clearly formulate that the policy purposes are to enhance university's autonomy and global competitiveness. Therefore, even after incorporated, the university should maintain public responsibility. Second, the government should facilitate social and political discussions about the incorporation policy and make policy support groups by informing the above-mentioned purposes and positive effects of incorporation. Third, the government should intensify public relations with faculty and staff in national universities to persuade them to have a positive understanding of incorporation. As a result of correlation analysis between understanding of incorporation policy and expected effects, those who are more knowledgeable were more likely to agree on the positive effects. Thus, the government should explain what the

incorporation policy contains, especially in terms of concerns about finances and personnel matters. Fourth, it should have a good example of open governance system, which faculty and staff in national universities are most concerned about. The board of trustees of Seoul National University should be a good case example showing that the open governance system will contribute to university development. Fifth, the government needs to provide financial incentives to expedite incorporation of national universities. For example, a separate funding program for incorporation or a way of including indicators on incorporation in the existent funding programs can be devised. Sixth, it should provide detailed information about changes of labor conditions to faculty and staff in national universities. Finally, the government should help national universities to set their vision and missions clearly and prepare strategy, objectives, and outcome indicators systematically. It could organize expert groups that can consult performance planning. Also, the government should make a guideline to inform how to evaluate performances of incorporated national universities and how to relate it to government funding for them.