

Recognition and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

The National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE) first began publishing *Lifelong Learning in Korea* in 2013 with the goal of sharing projects and cases of lifelong education in Korea with policy makers, researchers, experts, and practitioners worldwide. NILE wishes to contribute to the development of lifelong learning internationally by sharing their vision and efforts for the promotion of Korean lifelong education. In the second issue for 2014, we introduce project cases centralized on the theme of ‘Recognition and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning.’

Introduction

The word “education”, usually makes most of us think of attending classes with fixed schedules. This form of organized or school education designed with an official curriculum to obtain a diploma or degree is known as “formal education.” However, we also gain knowledge, skills and ideas throughout the course of our everyday lives at home, on the streets, from TV and movies, or during our travels and vacations. In addition, there are a variety of educational activities outside school such as auto repair classes at private mechanic institutions, flower arrangement and culinary classes at community cultural centers and others. These are examples of “non-formal” or “informal education.”

Until recently, people believed that formal education alone was sufficient for living in a society. However, modern society is becoming increasingly dependent upon various forms of non-formal and informal education. The two greatest motivations behind the importance of these forms of education are as follows. First, non-formal and informal education enable people to respond to today’s ever-changing society. Formal education is simply no longer enough to respond to the fresh changes and rapid developments in the knowledge and technology of the 21st century. With this understanding in mind, Korea is poised to build an open education infrastructure embodying the concept of “lifelong education for all,” in order to address these rapid changes proactively. Second, non-formal and informal education provide greater opportunities for self-realization. In any society with an aging population, post-retirement education is an absolute requirement. Non-formal and informal education can offer everyone, including senior citizens, learning opportunities to help them achieve deeper self-realization.

Due to these social changes and growing requirements, non-formal and informal education have been gaining attention within the international community. This has led to an increase in the recognition, verification and accreditation of informal education.

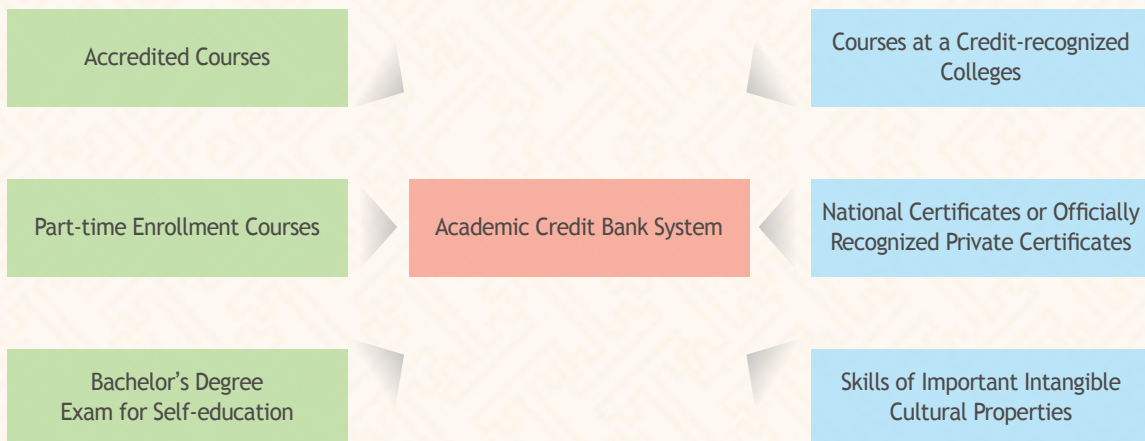
To address this new development, Korea has developed an “Academic Credit Bank, a “Bachelor’s Degree Examination for Self-education”, and a “Lifelong Learning Account System”. The National Institute for Lifelong Education(NILE) under the Korean Ministry of Education is in charge of these three systems, and this issue is designed to introduce their innerworkings.

Academic Credit Bank System

● What is the Academic Credit Bank System?

The Academic Credit Bank System in Korea is a representative open lifelong education system developed in Korea based on the 「Act on Credit Recognition」. It is designed to confer a degree equivalent to a junior college or four-year university by awarding academic credits for both formal and informal learning experiences and certifications. All high school graduates or those with equivalent academic backgrounds are allowed to obtain degrees using the academic credit bank system. According to the 「Higher Education Act」, a bachelor’s degree or diploma received through the system has legal backing equivalent to a degree awarded by a college or university.

The Academic Credit Bank System was introduced in 1997 with the enactment of the 「Act on Credit Recognition」. In 1998, it announced its first standard curriculum. The NILE took over the system in 1999 with the first degree rewarded.



[Figure 1] Credit Acquisition and Accumulation Channels

① Accredited Courses

It means courses accredited* by the Minister of Education provided by lifelong education centers at universities, private institutes, vocational training institutes, and various lifelong education facilities.

*Accreditation refers to official recognition of courses from education and training institutions. These courses are deemed to be on par with those from colleges or universities and are able to confer academic credits.

The target education and training institutions include lifelong education centers of universities or junior colleges, lifelong education facilities, private institutes and vocational training institutes. As of 2014, 572 educational and training institutions are offering accredited courses.

Evaluation is conducted based on operation conditions and a quality of educational content. Financial status, educational equipment, and expertise of instructors are also evaluated to ensure that the courses meet the minimum standards.

Accreditation applications are submitted to the NILE by the education and training institutions. Accreditation certificates are recognized for four years after they are awarded. After four years, the courses are re-evaluated by the NILE. The NILE conducts the follow-up process, which includes monitoring the institutions and the courses.

② Courses at a credit-recognized colleges

It means academic credits completed at the college or university that the learner dropped out of or graduated from.

③ Part-time enrollment courses

It means courses that students attend at universities (including junior colleges and cyber colleges) on a part-time basis.

④ National certificates or officially recognized private certificates

It is the qualifications that the president of the National Institute of Lifelong Education has officially recognized with the approval of the Minister of Education (such as national technique qualifications, national qualifications as per laws, and some private qualifications accredited by the national government).

⑤ Bachelor's degree exam for self-education pass of a bachelor's degree exam for self-education

Academic Credit Bank system standard for the Bachelor's Degree Exam for Self-education

- 1st phase exam pass : 4 credits per subject (5 subjects maximum)

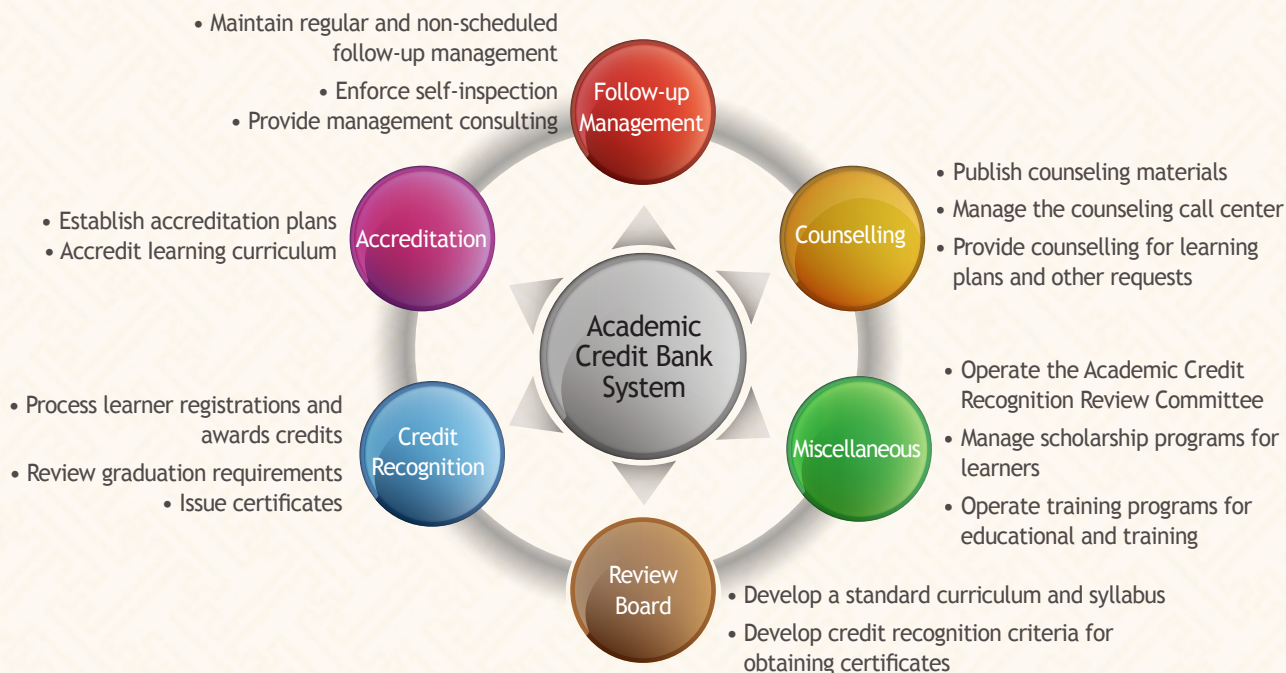
- 2nd- 4th phase exam pass : 5 credits per subject (6 subjects maximum)

⑥ Skills of important intangible cultural properties

Education experiences provided by the national intangible cultural property holder or bearer as per the Cultural Property Protection Law can be accredited.

Of the six possible channels, the largest share of total awarded credits comes from accredited courses which account for 71%. Curriculum at a Credit-recognized colleges and National Certificates or Officially Recognized Private Certificates account for 19.4% and 3.7%, respectively (as of December 2013).

The Academic Credit Bank System's operations are separated into six fields as shown in [Figure 2] below.



[Figure 2] Academic Credit Bank System Operations

● Degree Earning Requirements

The requirements for earning a degree through the Academic Credit System are as follows.

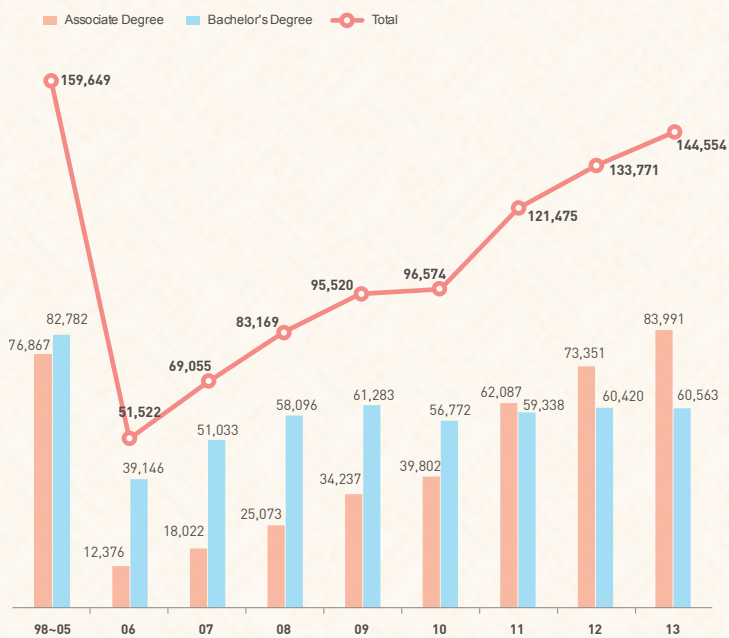
<Table 1> Academic Credit Bank System Degree Requirements

Type	Bachelor's degree	Associate degree		Note
		2 year	3 year	
① Total credits	140 credits	80 credits	120 credits	Common
② Major credits	60 credits	45 credits	54 credits	
③ Liberal arts credits	30 credits	15 credits	21 credits	
④	A minimum of 18 credits must be from accredited or part-time enrollment courses.			
⑤	Credits from compulsory major courses must be completed according to the specific requirements of the major.			Conferred by the Minister of Education
⑥ Credits from colleges	84 credits	48 credits	65 credits	Conferred by the president of university
⑦	Requirements of each university must be satisfied.			

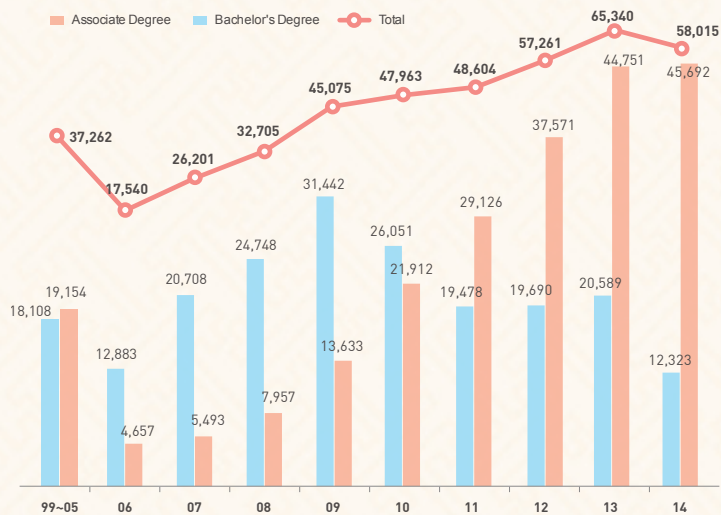
Degrees are awarded according to degree type and major. Depending on the degree and the major, there are different requirements in regards to major and liberal arts courses, credit recognition and academic recognition standards. The Minister of Education sets the degree requirements based on social demands and conditions, academic validity, and suitability of education courses. As of 2014, the standard curriculum covers 113 majors from 24 academic fields for bachelor’s degrees and 110 majors from 13 fields for associate degrees. In regards to Skills of Important Intangible Cultural Properties, 119 majors are included in the standard curriculum for both bachelor’s and associate degree.

● **Current Status**

To date, there have been 430,000 learners who have successfully obtained a degree through the Academic Credit Bank System. As seen in [Figure 3] and [Figure 4], great strides have been made in the promotion of non-formal and informal education, a fact which has garnered great international attention.



[Figure 3] Number of Enrolled Learners



[Figure 4] Number of Degree Awarded Learners by Minister of Education

Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-Education

● What is the Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-Education?

The Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-education was established in 1990 by the Minister of Education based on the 「Act on the Acquisition of Academic Degrees through Self-education」 and is operated by the NILE. The exam, which is conducted in four stages, is designed for high school graduates or those with equivalent academic backgrounds who continue studying through self-education. By successfully passing all four stages of the exam, an applicant may receive a bachelor's degree.

This system provides a low-cost alternative to higher education to those who were unable to attend or complete college or university due to social or economic restraints. It recognizes the results of their self-education efforts to promote the lifelong education of citizens.

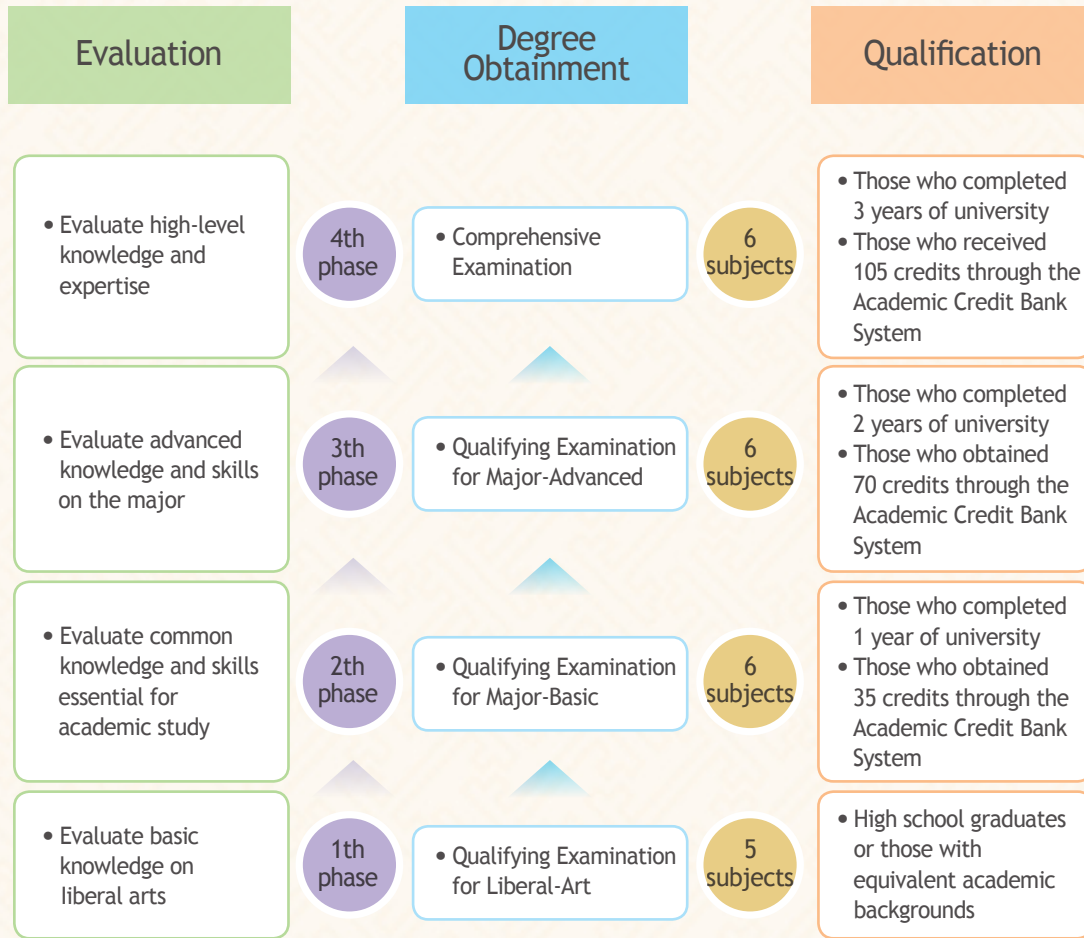
The Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-education covers 11 majors as seen in the table below.

<Table 2> Degree Types and Majors through Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-education

Degree Type	Major
Literature	Korean Language & Literature, English Language & Literature, Psychology
Law	Law
Public Administration	Public Administration
Business	Business Administration
Nature Science	Computer Science (new applications are no longer being accepted)
Engineering	Information & Communication (3rd and 4th stages available only)
Home Economics	Home Economics
Nursing	Nursing (4th stage available only)
Education	Early Childhood Education (3rd and 4th stages available only)

* Chinese Language & Literature, Mathematics, Agriculture (new applications are no longer being accepted)

The Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-Education is composed of 4 stages. The first stage is based on liberal arts and is equivalent to the completion of a university-level liberal arts course when the applicant passes the examination. The 2nd and 3rd stages test the applicant's knowledge of basic major and higher level major courses respectively. The 4th phase is the final examination to evaluate the applicant's knowledge and expertise comprehensively just like graduation examination test at an ordinary university. From this perspective, the 1st stage is equivalent to the first year of university, the 2nd phase to the 2nd year, and the 3rd phase the 3rd year. Accordingly, someone who has previously finished the courses or obtained the equivalent credits from a university is able to move onto the next phase of the system. [Figure 5] details the evaluation categories and qualifications.



[Figure 5] Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-education Process

● Current Status

As of 2013, 15,000 people have been able to obtain a degree through the Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-education. Detailed information for each year and major are as follows(See <Table 3>).

<Table 3> Status of Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-education by Year/Major

unit : person

Major Year	Korean Literature	English Literature	Chinese Literature	Business Administration	Law	Public Administration	Early Childhood Education	Mathematics	Home Economics	Computer Science	Agriculture	Information Communication Study	Nursing	Total
1992-2009	1,658	1,896	22	851	838	640	1,973	24	1,119	2,097	40	0	747	11,905
2010	108	166	1	38	37	11	69	0	56	63	0	0	193	742
2011	94	238	0	45	54	21	54	2	49	51	0	0	179	787
2012	144	222	0	51	41	19	51	0	54	66	0	0	302	950
2013	99	214	0	54	32	22	99	0	59	70	1	2	309	961
Total	2,103	2,736	23	1,039	1,002	713	2,246	26	1,337	2,347	41	2	1,730	15,345

Lifelong Learning Account System

● What is the Lifelong Learning Account System?

The Lifelong Learning Account System allows various educational experiences to be logged and managed through an online education account. These experiences are connected to individual academic records or qualifications and can also be utilized for job hunting as per Article 23 of the Lifelong Learning Act. The account serves as an “e-portfolio” or online “lifelong individual’s lifelong learning activities.”

Thanks to the Lifelong Learning Account System, individual lifelong academic records can be officially recognized and utilized. These various educational experiences can be confirmed as needed to help with systematic education planning and management.

The Lifelong Learning Account System was developed to enable users to log and manage their education record themselves. The system can include school education as well as non-formal and informal education. Confirmation and proof of education can be printed out as certificates.

• Learning Experience Management System (www.all.go.kr)

The Education Record Management System allows to manage of lifelong education records via the internet. An individual can open an education account to record personal information, education background, career history, qualification status, lifelong education processes and other skills. In detail, personal information such as name, address, work details, and contact numbers in addition to academic records at elementary, middle, high school and university (including graduate courses), qualification status and lifelong education program participation can be recorded periodically. Training, adult school participation, volunteer activities, foreign languages, hobby and club activities, award records, reading activities and patent records can be selected for recording as well.

• Recognition of Educational Courses

Before recognizing a course in its listing, the Lifelong Learning Account System first evaluates the course offered by the education organizations based on the course details and operation methods. These qualifications are compared against a pre-defined index which sets a standard for the education facilities, tutoring process, tutors and instructors, and support and management system for learners. Individuals who complete the officially-accepted courses can register the information through their accounts and print out their certificates as needed. Currently, 2,352 courses are recognized by the system (from 2010 to 2013), and exam-exempted courses which can be connected to elementary, middle and high school academic records number at 1,623 (from 2011 to 2013).

● Utilization of Education Results

Information logged and managed through the account can be utilized for job hunting, elementary, middle or high school academic achievement, and education planning. [Figure 6] below shows more detailed information.



*Academic ability recognition for adult learners (Decree 75 of the Lifelong Learning Act) : Academic ability is recognized when the elementary and middle school writing and reading courses are successfully completed

**Qualification exam (Regulations related to middle and high school entrance and graduation) : A national examination to verify knowledge, academic ability and skills required to enter middle and high school and university

***Open Secondary Schools (Decree on standards for establishment of Open Secondary Schools, and Elementary and Secondary Education Act) : Education facility offering secondary education through broadcasting and communication devices (e-learning)

[Figure 6] Utilization of the Lifelong Learning Account System

● Current Status

Since the introduction of the Lifelong Learning Account System in 2010, 26,000 individuals have opened an education account and some 60,000 educational experiences have been registered. Academic background, training and miscellaneous experiences account for the largest share of the total recorded(See <Table 4> and <Table 5>).

<Table 4> Current Status of the Education Record Management System

Year	Web Members	Registered Account	Total
2010	1,482	979	2,461
2011	2,787	1,496	4,283
2012	3,621	2,224	5,845
2013	15,514	15,619	31,133
2014.7	5,203	6,255	11,458
Total	28,607	26,573	-

Total	Academic Ability	Qualification	Career	Training	School Participation	Foreign Language	Publication	Patent	Award	Volunteering	Reading	Other
51,862	15,821	7,508	4,482	19,479	100	545	227	93	1,573	1,350	1,891	657

<Table 5> Current Status of Lifelong Learning Account System

Item	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Lifelong Education Programs	878	433	458	583	2,352
Organizations	286	224	123	160	793

Conclusion

The Academic Credit Bank System, Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-education and Lifelong Learning Account System are the most representative non-formal and informal education systems in Korea. The Korean government is poised to improve education record management and utilization in the job market by connecting the three representative systems. As such, it has been actively working to develop the National Competency Standards and National Qualifications Framework. When they are successfully established like those in the European Qualifications Framework, it will become easier to identify human resources in each area of Korea.

Additional efforts must be made to ensure that the three systems align with the National Competency Standards and National Qualifications Framework. The Academic Credit Bank System and Bachelor's Degree

Examination for Self-education must overhaul their standard curriculum and provide better access to various job training results. As for Lifelong Learning Account System, it is necessary to reassess the educational classifications.

With construction of an open education infrastructure to utilize and verify non-formal and informal education systematically in a reliable way, a society in which all individuals can realize lifelong education will be created.

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