

Session 11

The Tokyo Convention: Creating Bridges to Reinvent Higher Education

Date: August 27th, 2022

Speaker: Wesley Teter (UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education)

Speaker/Chair: Rie Mori (NIAD-QE/NIC-Japan)

In Session 11, participants discussed the practices and issues in recognizing credentials issued in other higher education systems. The session aimed to exchange views on how higher education institutions can protect the rights of students who move internationally and promote their mobility through fair and swift evaluation of prior learning.

Initially, the session was planned as a face-to-face event with three speakers. However, the circumstances forced one of the scheduled speakers, Libing Wang from UNESCO, to cancel his presentation and another speaker, Wesley Teter, also from UNESCO, to present online. On-site at Kansai University, there were 29 participants, including presenter/chair Rie Mori. Teter and a few other participants joined through Zoom.

The session started with a brief remark on the background of the session by Shingo Ashizawa, the Vice President of the Kansai University of International Studies, followed by a presentation by Wesley Teter from UNESCO. Teter explained the significance of internationally agreed-upon conventions to recognize credentials issued in other states and to disseminate information for securing equity of credentials in light of the policies of UNESCO, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Six Guiding Principles. The presentation covered that SDG 4: *Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all* has gaps between expectations and achievements in the Asia-Pacific region. Teter also clarified that UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, also known as the Tokyo Convention, has been deemed to be a part of a potential solution to this situation. Teter showed the general design of the Tokyo Convention, which is one of several regional conventions that promote the international mobility of students and labor forces. This Convention, which legally entered into force in 2018, is an agreement in the Asia-Pacific region that aims to promote sharing of authoritative information on education systems and to facilitate fair and transparent recognition of qualifications. Furthermore, the need to focus more on recognizing non-traditional learning and micro-credentials, which would help achieve the SDGs, was highlighted. Teter's presentation also touched on the potential of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, which might enlarge the border of the current regional conventions globally.

After the first presentation, Rie Mori from NIAD-QE/NIC-Japan introduced the development and the actual practice of the National Information Center Japan, one of the National Information Centres (NICs) created under the Tokyo Convention. She explained the background of the ratification of the Convention by the Japanese government in 2017 and the NIC-Japan activities designed to help local and international Competent Recognition Authorities evaluate academic qualifications. Their activities include information provision inward and outward, such as a list of accredited higher education institutions in Japan, survey and research activities such as international seminars, and global networking through the Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres (APNNIC). During the presentation, pop-up quizzes for fun learning were given. Mori underscored that not the NIC-Japan but individual higher education institutions and the responding governmental bodies were identified as Competent Recognition Authorities in Japan. Additionally, Mori elaborated on the predicaments and future expectations for the practice of the NIC-Japan, especially when the uncertainty is concerning, particularly the impact of the Global Convention that the Japanese government might ratify.¹

Following the presentations, in the discussion among in-person and online participants, a colleague from the Qualifications Recognition Policy Team of the Australian Department of Education elaborated on how the Australian NIC, which has extensive experience with two conventions ratified: the Tokyo Convention and the Lisbon Convention, carries out its practices. It helped the participants gain a more comprehensive view of the reality of regional conventions. Responding to questions from the floor, Teter emphasized the importance of recognition of qualifications and the necessity to have more states join conventions, especially when the world expects to see more refugees. He also clarified that there were several regional conventions covering different geographical areas² around the globe promoting the mobility of students and workforces in a given region. The Global Convention plans to enlarge the size universally, but it has not entered into force yet. Likewise, responding to a question, Mori speculated the reason for the absence of a legitimately approved National Qualification Framework in Japan, which would help the daily work of college administrators responsible for foreign credential evaluation. She speculated that less necessity of such official information derived from less mobility of students and workforces.

¹ As of September 13th, Japan joined the Global Convention as the 17th state in the world. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-convention-moves-closer-entry-force-japan-joins-treaty> (Retrieved September 2022)

² The regions cover following areas: Africa; Arab States; Asia-Pacific; Europe; and Latin America and Caribbean. <https://www.unesco.org/en/education/higher-education/conventions> (Retrieved September 2022)

Further discussions confirmed that NICs and any other official information-disseminating organizations should provide information that is helpful for students/prospective students and higher education institutions. Furthermore, there seemed to be a need for mechanisms to secure and promote the high profile of participating institutions. It was broadly agreed to be the case, especially when there are no tangible incentives or rewards for individual institutions which take the trouble to accumulate and submit an institutional dataset to centers such as a NIC.

Participants networked and exchanged views throughout the session.

§ Rie Mori