

Price and Convenience Remain Key Sustainability Challenges for Human Quest for Values E-book

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Newly Launched Human Quest for Values E-book Still Sees Low Demand

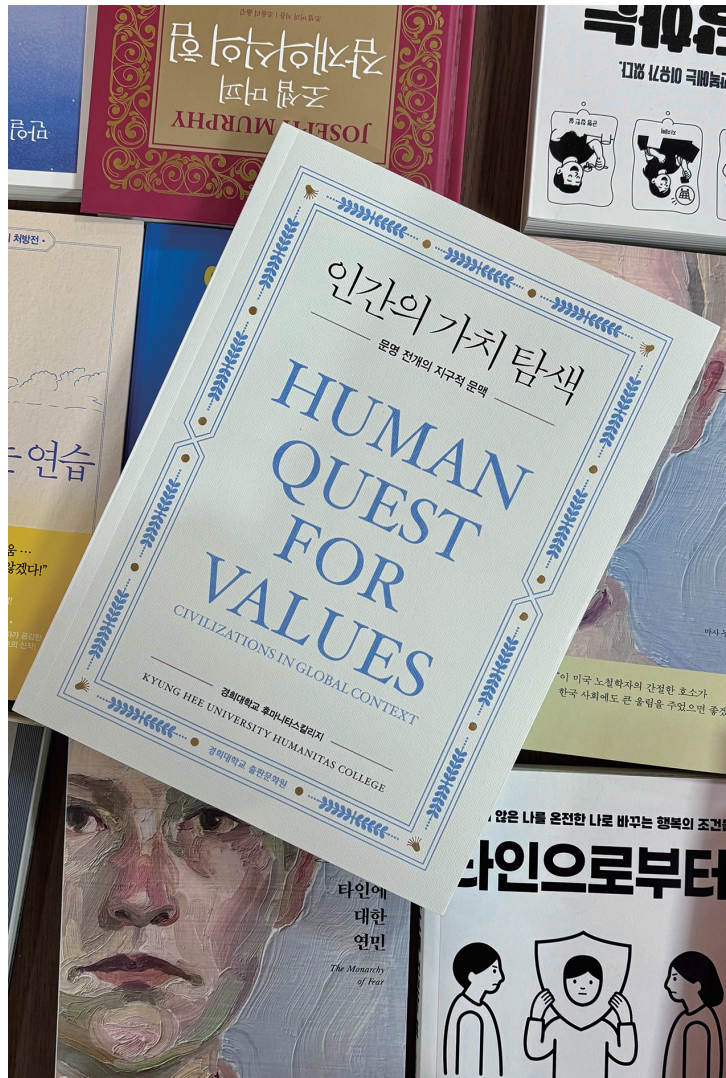
This fall semester, the textbook for Human Quest for Values was released in an e-book format. Human Quest for Values is a required liberal arts course for all Kyung Hee University (KHU) students.

The Human Quest for Values course is now using an official e-book for the first time. But despite a lower price and new digital features, many students are still choosing print copies or unofficial PDFs.

The textbook, written by Humanitas College and the Civilizations in Global Context Editorial Committee, has traditionally been sold only in print, but this semester, an e-book version was officially published by KHU Communication & Press in August along with the release of the sixth edition.

The e-book is more affordable at 24,000 won, compared with 30,000 won for a new print copy. Students can also rent the e-book for six months for 13,000 won. It's available through Meebook, an online learning platform operated by Megastudy that offers various study tools, such as note-taking.

KHU Communication & Press said the main goal of the e-book is to curb illegal copying. "The launch of the Human Quest for Values e-book is aimed to bring users



The Human Quest for Values textbook

of illegally copied textbooks into the mainstream." In other words, by lowering the price and making the book easier to access digitally, the University hoped to reduce the demand for scanned PDFs and uncensored copies.

However, the results have been lukewarm. KHU Communication & Press explained that "Generally, more than 90 percent of course takers purchased the textbook if we launched a revised edition." They added, "For the sixth edition, however, the student purchase rate remained at around 65 percent, and nearly two-thirds of those students chose the paper version."

They further stated, "Although we published the e-book and paper version simultaneously and completed copyright negotiations to allow purchases at off-campus bookstores, the e-book purchase rate is significantly low."

Cheaper Than New But Not Cheaper Than Used

One reason is price competitiveness. On Everytime, a popular campus community platform, it is easy to find posts selling used copies of Human Quest for Values. Many are priced under 20,000 won, and PDF files are even cheaper, sometimes for under 10,000 won—less than half the cost of a six-month e-book rental.

For some students, that difference makes the e-book a hard sell. Kim Jung-woo, a student in the Dept. of Chemical Engineering, said, "I often review major textbooks later, but not usually elective course books. I usually sell them after finishing the class."

He added, "If I want to keep a book, I usually buy a used copy, so I probably would not buy a new book at full price. Since e-books cannot be resold, they feel less valuable than owning a PDF or a paper book."

One Course, One Platform—Too Many Apps

Convenience is another sticking point. The e-book is only available through Meebook, and Human Quest for Values is currently the only KHU textbook on that platform. This means students end up using Meebook for one class and other apps for their remaining coursebooks.

Bang Ju-yeon, a student in the Dept. of Tourism Sciences, said, "If the professor asked us to use the e-book, I would follow it. However, since I already use apps like GoodNotes, I would stick to my existing method if given a choice."

She added, "I organize my class materials and personal notes on one platform, so having to read and take notes for just one subject on a different platform would disrupt my workflow. Adapting to a new platform also feels burdensome, so using it separately for only one course would be inconvenient."

Park Se-eun, a student in the Dept. of English Language and Literature, also said, "The low price is certainly an advantage, but the e-book does not allow text capture or copy-and-paste, compared to other online textbooks."

She added, "When I need to search the book's content or use AI tools, I cannot copy the text directly and have to type everything manually. Also, some paragraphs included in the print version were missing from the online textbook, which caused problems during group discussions."

Why KHU Cannot Copy Foreign E-book Models, Yet

Abroad, some universities have lowered textbook costs by building large shared platforms. For example, OpenStax, an open-access platform in the U.S. and the subscription-based platforms Perlego and Kortext, operating mainly in the UK and Europe, allow students to access textbooks for free or

through a low monthly subscription fee. This approach significantly lowered textbook prices by building large-scale educational content databases with cooperation between universities and government agencies.

KHU Communication & Press said those examples are encouraging, but difficult to apply in this case. "The Human Quest for Values textbook is a composite of diverse literary works, produced based on individual contracts with each author and rights holder. Due to this, there are practical limits on providing open access materials through a third-party platform or a subscription service," they explained.

Cost and diverse requirements are also the factors that hinder quick improvements. KHU Communication & Press explained that "separate copyright agreements are required for the printed book and the e-book, which ultimately double production costs."

They added that some works included conditions such as 'sales permitted only within the university' or 'exclusion from e-book publication,' making the e-book production process more complex. Combined with low sales figures, this production complexity suggests that expanding the e-book option may be difficult in the near future.

Regarding future plans, KHU Communication & Press stated, "Considering the low sales of the Human Quest for Values e-book and the persistent risk of illegal copying, we will carefully review the future production of e-books."

The Human Quest for Values e-book was launched with good intentions, but student uptake remains low. Concerns about price and convenience have not been fully addressed, and current sales performance suggests that these problems will not be fixed soon. To keep the service alive, KHU will need greater student interest and more sustained efforts.



A student is studying by using the Meebook platform

Photo: JoongAng Ilbo (joongang.co.kr)