# The Status of Teaching and Learning Centers in Higher Education: An Asian Perspective

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*Abstract* —**This report is an account of a comparative review of teaching and learning centers located in South Korea, Singapore and the Philippines. The areas for comparison include the purpose, organizational structure, major services and programs, and source of funds. It also identified the implications of the study to institutional policies and educational services. Having used a multiple case analysis study design, it was found out that the specific services offered depend on the objectives, organizational structure, and the availability of funds of the academic institution where the center belongs. The most common services and programs provided by the teaching and learning centers are tutoring, and workshops. On the other hand, the services unique to each center include grade warning support, research utilization, and faculty awards. The center can either be a coordinating unit in the university, or one that is integrated in the existing departments. Furthermore, the funds of all subject centers come from a combination of sources ranging from student tuition fees to government subsidies and private sector grants. It is highly suggested that universities consider the importance of having a teaching and learning center to provide more support programs and services to their faculty and students. Not only the members of faculty would be given the opportunity to enhance their expertise, but also the students would have the right venue to address their academic challenges that would otherwise be more difficult without a center.**

*Index Terms* —**teaching and learning center, teaching, learning, academic support services, professional development**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The expansion of higher education institutions coupled with the increasing complexity of student needs necessitate an innovative change from the teaching and learning processes. In this age of digital technology, it is but imperative that a complementary change in terms of curricula, instructional strategies, and assessment methods be made in order to address the evolving nature of the teaching process. On the other hand, the students being the center of this educational transformation, also require a revolutionary approach to the academic experiences that are presented to them. Those who don't take an active part in this change process would be left behind. Passivity only breeds mediocrity. And there is no place for mediocrity in this knowledge economy. Thus, the institutions of higher learning need to support both the students and the teachers in order for them to best fulfil their respective roles. One way to provide this support is through the establishment of teaching and learning centers, herein referred to as centers. These centers go by different names such as Centers for Teaching Excellence; Centers for Development of Teaching and Learning; or Centers for Teaching and Learning Innovation. However, regardless of the numerous nomenclature associated with these centers, there is a common objective. That is, to provide support programs aimed at improving the professional and academic experiences of the teachers and students. Most of the support programs provided by the centers are interdependent with one another since the nature of learning and teaching are likewise intertwined

This study is a comparative analysis of the centers established in three Asian countries, namely, South Korea, Singapore and the Philippines. South Korea's investment in education was one of the most influential factor that led the nation to become the third largest economy in Asia. Among the 51 million population of the country, 93.26% was noted as the enrolment rate in higher education [1]. With more than 370 higher education institutions, both public and private, South Korea is a known study destination for students worldwide [2].

On the other hand, Singapore is one of the fastest growing developed nation in terms of economic growth. One of the key factors to its success is its strong and highly recognized education system. Its educational system is a fusion of Western and Eastern educational philosophies which was made possible through international benchmarking. Singapore views education as the key to deliver the human capital engine for economic growth as well as in creating their national identity. The economic goals of Singaporean education led to the formulation of policies that are practical and relevant. With the advent of globalization and the onset of a global knowledge economy, Singapore's education

system responded with a shift of focus towards modernization, ingenuity and research.

The educational vision of Singapore covers a wide range of action plans over the years that were designed to customize education to the abilities and interests of the students, as well as to provide more options for the students. Recently, its educational model consists of less dependence on rote learning, repetitive tests and instruction, and more towards interactive learning, experiential discovery, differentiated teaching, and character building through innovative and effective teaching strategies [3].

Singapore's success in education can be traced to the close relationship between education and national economic policies. This connection was made possible by the strong support from the central government. The complementing roles of national goals, economic policies and educational structure led to a holistic approach towards building a nation that is driven by highly educated and highly skilled human capital who are ready to accept the challenges of a changing global economy.

In contrast, the Philippines is one of the few countries in Asia where the number of private higher education institutions and enrolment rate are higher than the public sector. Its national government is committed to creating a system that is more aligned to 21$^{st}$ century needs, positioning higher education as a catalyst for innovation and comprehensive development. Furthermore, the national leadership is encouraging cooperation between academia and industry, as well as providing support to the professional development of teaching and research staff, and the promotion and utilization of research among educational institutions [4].

Today, higher education in the Philippines is guided by philosophical orientations that place importance on the formation of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to make the Filipino a productive member of the society. It is geared towards the quest for better quality of life for all Filipinos. Philippine higher education also aims to harness productive capacity of the country's human resources towards international competitiveness [5].

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to compare and contrast the teaching and learning centers in the chosen countries in Asia. Specifically, it seeks to find answer to the following:

1. How do the Teaching and Learning Centers in each country compare in terms of the following:
   1.1 Purposes and Objectives;
   1.2 Programs and services offered;
   1.3 Organizational structure; and
   1.4 Sources of funds?
2. What are the implications of the findings of the study to institutional policies and educational services?

## III. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

The concept of a teaching and learning center has been around the academic community for almost half a century

now [6]. The name teaching and learning center has evolved through times to reflect the evolving needs of the students and teachers. The earlier centers were called Learning Assistance Center [7], and then later on to become Centers of Teaching and Learning or Centers for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. However, even with the change in terminologies, the basic purpose of these centers remain the same, and that is to provide academic support to serve both students and teachers in the most effective and productive manner. Studies suggest that each learning center is unique due to the distinct characteristic of the institution that it serves [8]. However, even with these unique features, there still remain a common bottom line with respect to the functions of the centers. The most common functions and services include tutoring, workshops, programs for at-risk students and faculty professional development programs. Furthermore, it has been argued that Centers for Teaching and Learning Excellence is a must in order to become globally responsive to the needs of both the faculty members and the students [9].

## IV. METHODOLOGY

Using a multiple case study design that probed into the teaching and learning centers in three Asian countries, this study identified the areas of similarity as well as the programs unique to each country.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. *Status of Center for Teaching and Learning*

A.1 Purposes and Objectives. The purposes and objectives identify the rationale for the existence of the centers. The following table shows this aspect of the study.

TABLE I. PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES

| South Korea | Singapore | Philippines |
|---|---|---|
| • Provide support system to students through consultations and tutoring<br>• Enhance faculty teaching strategies through the use of the latest educational technology<br>• Promote greater awareness and utilization of e-learning among the students | • Support faculty needs for research-based teaching methodologies<br>• Utilize faculty research outputs | • Improve faculty instructional strategies and research competencies<br>• Support the learning needs of the students |

Table I showed that the subject center in South Korea was established with the objective of providing support system to student through consultation, tutoring and e-learning, as well as to support the faculty in improving their instructional strategies through the use of the latest educational technology. It is worthy to mention that South Korea has one of the best IT infrastructure in the

world, and so bringing this technology to classroom instruction would definitely help in promoting more meaningful learning experiences. On the other hand, the subject center in Singapore was founded with the aim of supporting the faculty needs by using research-based teaching methodologies. It also aim to make practical use of research outputs in order to enhance the learning outcomes of the students. In one of the interviews, it was mentioned that it was believed that student success is largely dependent upon faculty teaching success. For this reason, they try to provide the necessary tools for the teachers in order for them to deliver their duties more successfully. With respect to the Philippines, the highly limited center was established with the goal of improving instructional strategies and developing faculty research competencies, as well as to support student learning needs.

It can be implied that all the teaching and learning centers across the chosen countries have similar purposes and objectives which are focused on both faculty and student development.

A.2 Programs and Services Offered. The following table presents the various programs and services offered by the centers.

TABLE II.   PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OFFERED

| South Korea | Singapore | Philippines |
|---|---|---|
| • Teaching Development Programs<br>• Learning Development<br>• E-learning Support<br>• Educational Performance Management Programs | • Professional Development Programs<br>• Teaching Assistants' Program<br>• Grant Writing Course<br>• Faculty Workshops and Seminars<br>• Student Consultations<br>• Teaching Enhancement Grants<br>• Publications and Research<br>• Teaching Awards<br>• Teaching Evaluations | • In-service Trainings<br>• Minimal support programs to the students |

Table II revealed that in South Korea, the programs being offered by the center include faculty development programs, learning development, e-learning support, and educational performance management. In Singapore, programs include but are not limited to professional development, teaching assistants program, grant writing course, faculty workshops, student consultations, teaching enhancement grants, publications and research, teaching awards and teaching evaluations. Finally, in the Philippines, the programs are limited to in-service trainings and varied support programs to the students.

It can be implied that among the three countries examined, the subject center in South Korea has a more balanced approach in providing support for the needs of both the teachers and the students. In Singapore, the focus is more on the professional development of the faculty members. This makes sense when such professional development of professors and instructors would trickle down to more relevant learning experiences of the students. On the other hand, because of the

challenges and seemingly lack of value associated to teaching and learning centers by most of the universities in the Philippines, it can be seen that the programs offered by the subject center was highly limited to in-service training and some student support activities.

A.3 Organizational Structure. The organizational structure provides clarity in terms of who does what and identifies the responsibility and accountability for the programs being offered.

TABLE III.   ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

| South Korea | Singapore | Philippines |
|---|---|---|
| • Mostly independent offices having their own organizational structure<br>• Usually include the Director, Asst. Director, Program Chairman, and staff. | • Mostly independent offices with distinct organizational structure<br>• Usually include the Director, Asst. Director, Program Chairman, and staff. | • Mostly informal and usually attached to different offices such as College of Education, Guidance Office, or Research Development<br>• Do not have a separate organizational structure |

Table III presented that most organizations fail not because of its programs but because of the unclear organizational structure. This is highly the case in the Philippines. Since the role of developing the teaching and learning processes are just auxiliary functions of different offices, and rarely there is a separate and unique Center solely devoted for these, most of the results were far from promising. This is the opposite case as compared to South Korea and Singapore, which have more success stories in implementing their programs and services.

A.4 Sources of Funds. In every organization, one of the most needed resource is financial. The effectiveness of its programs and services is largely influenced by how much or how little is the availability of financial support. The following table shows the sources of funding for the chosen countries.

TABLE IV.   SOURCES OF FUNDS

| South Korea | Singapore | Philippines |
|---|---|---|
| • The programs and services are usually funded through the student tuition fees, and from government subsidies | • The programs and services are usually financed through the combination of government support, private sector grants and student tuition fees | • The programs and services are financed mainly through student tuition fees |

Table IV showed that in South Korea and Singapore, the programs of the centers are funded by the combined resources coming from the public and private sectors as well as from student tuition fees. However, in the Philippines, it is mainly funded through student fees. It can be implied that the availability of funds affect the breadth of services and programs that the center can offer

to the students and teachers. The lesser the funds, the more limited are the services provided.

### B. Implications to Institutional Policies and Educational Service

This study implies that supportive services are highly needed for both teachers and students so they can have more productive experiences in the university. The university needs to provide more educational services that would meet the real needs of the students. The hours spent inside the classroom are not enough to fully satisfy the academic needs of the learners. This is likewise true for the professors and instructors. The universities must include in their priority agenda the professional development of their faculty line-up, so that they would be more capable of developing the potential of the students. The value of having a distinct teaching and learning center should not be underestimated. The mission and objectives of the teaching and learning centers should be aligned to the overall mission of the university, and the institutional policies reflect the importance and value of the established centers. Furthermore, in as much as a center can either be a stand-alone unit, or one that is integrated in an existing department, the support of other academic departments is crucial to the success of centers. It is imperative that this supportive structure reflected in the institutional policies.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this paper, it is claimed that the goal of supporting both the faculty and students in order to have more productive academic experiences is universal. However, the specific services offered in order to attain these goals vary depending on the objectives, organizational structure, and the availability of funds. The most common services and programs provided by the centers are tutoring, and workshops. On the other hand, the services unique to each center include grade warning support, research utilization, and faculty awards. The centers can either be a single independent unit composing of a Director and staff, or one that is integrated in an existing department. The funds of all subject centers come from a combination of sources ranging from student tuition fees to government subsidies and private sector grants. It is highly suggested that universities consider the importance of having a teaching and learning center to provide support programs and services to their teachers and students. Not only the professors and instructors would be given the opportunity to enhance their expertise, but also the students would have the right venue to address their academic challenges that would otherwise be more difficult without a center. Finally, it is highly recommended that studies focusing on the outcomes of the programs and services provided by the centers be made in the future.

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