

## 10. Study on Roles and Functions of Center Organizations for Improving Education in Universities

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### (1) Purpose and Aim of Study

“Center” organizations for planning and advancement of educational improvement and other initiatives in universities, with names such as “Center for Higher Education Research and Development” and “University Education Development Center,” have emerged in rapid succession since the first half of the 2000s, mainly at national universities. Many of these Centers perform a wide range of roles and functions beyond faculty development. While they are expected to become specialized bodies for the improvement of university education, the breadth and diversity of their activities—together with the peculiar condition that the vast majority of them are institutional in nature—results in a conflict between Centers’ institutional missions and the effects of their diverse activities. This in one sense hampers their strategic functionality as organizations for the advancement of educational reform in universities. The consequence is that the range of activities expected of Centers expands while their specific nature and roles remain unsettled: they risk becoming characterized as mere organs for the processing of various problems within the university, unable to function effectively as “strategic organizations” that can contribute to educational reform.

This study uses methods such as questionnaire surveys to investigate Center-style organizations through factors such as organizational goals, structure, staffing, spheres of activity, effectiveness (evaluation), and perceptions of associated parties. The roles and functions of such Centers are explored and discussed using cases studies and integrated analysis. Building on this discussion, the study also aims to consider the outlook for Center-style organizations into the future, applying examination and analysis of higher education policy and the current state of university reforms. It is anticipated that the insights gained from the study will be of use in developing Centers’ functions.

## (2) Outline of Research Results

- Used questionnaire surveys to gain a holistic overview of conditions, revealing the highly diverse nature of university education centers and similar bodies, and identifying the contexts and conditions informing their operation.
- Used case studies to collect and analyze information on awareness of problems and responses thereto in individual universities, thereby developing insights to inform frameworks for arranging knowledge on Center-style organizations and the identification of practical issues in the reform of educational organizations.

Used theoretical analysis grounded in policy contexts to develop approaches to the categorization of university education centers and other educational organizations and basic conceptions concerning future profiles and prospects for such organizations.