Exploring the Effects of Living-Learning Centres in the Korean Context: 
A Case Study of a Korean University

Suyoun BYOUN

Education Research Institute of Konkuk University, Seoul, South Korea

Corresponding Author’s E-mail: sybyoun524@gmail.com

Keywords: Living-and-learning Centre; Residence Hall; Student Learning; University; Ecological Perspective

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Living-and-learning centres (LLCs), or residential college programmes, are widely known as one of the ‘high impact practices’ which can facilitate the holistic development of university students (Kuh, 2008). Based on their success in American colleges and universities, LLCs are being transferred to universities in many other countries, including those in Asia. However, scarcely any research has been done on the effectiveness of LLCs implemented outside the US have been scarcely researched. This study investigates what effects LLCs of a Korean university, differentiated from traditional residence halls, have exerted on their students’ learning.

Theoretical Framework

This study views LLCs as one of the most influential learning environments of a campus, as indicated in the majority of the previous literature (Kuh et al., 2005; Inkelas, Garvey, & Robbins, 2012). LLCs were found to be effective even in comparison to traditional forms of campus residences (Pascrella & Terenzini, 1991; Kanoy & Bruhn, 1996).

Strange and Banning’s (2001) ecological perspective provides a useful analytical lens to understand the relationship between LLCs (as a campus environment) and student learning. They assert that educational institutions should intentionally design their physical, human aggregate, organisational, and constructed environments in order to facilitate student learning. Campus environments can support student learning when they achieve the three purposes outlined in Figure 1.
In applying this theory to analyse the effects of LLCs, I advance a proposition that LLCs are effective in achieving these three purposes of learning environments, especially compared to traditional residence halls. It examines whether the proposition is supported by empirical data and investigates what elements of LLCs in particular contribute to this change of perception.

**Methods**

A qualitative case study method was conducted at a single institution chosen for its best practice in terms of the level of student participation and faculty involvement. It had converted its eight residence halls stepwise into LLCs over the last two years. By the end of 2013, four residence halls had completed the conversion. I collected data for this exercise mainly from interviews and observations. Fourteen upper-year students who could compare their living experiences in the traditional residence hall with their experiences in the new LLC were the main informants of this study. In order to obtain contextual information, I conducted two focus group interviews, one with five non-LLC freshmen and the other with four LLC freshmen. In addition, I participated in a two-day faculty workshop organised by one of the LLCs, in which fifteen faculty members and two professional residence assistants participated. All interviews and observation was conducted from October till December in 2013. Data collected from interviews and observations were electronically recorded, transcribed, and classified using the NVivo 10 data research software. An open coding was implemented to identify basic nodes followed by a subsequent axial coding in which the nodes were merged and collapsed in search of their connections or casual relationships. Lastly, the emergent themes were classified according to the theoretical framework proposed for the study.
Findings
While many informants replied that they did not perceive dramatic changes in their learning after the conversion, mainly due to the short period of implementation, most of them provided clear evidence supporting the proposition put forth in the theoretical framework. Findings from the interview and observation data indicated that the positive responses can be attributed to favourable environmental factors, which are explained in detail below.

A Sense of Safety and Inclusion
Most of the informants expressed a heightened sense of belonging and inclusion when they reflected on their living experiences after the halls were converted to LLCs. In the traditional residence halls, they regarded it as a temporary residence, whereas now they feel a stronger sense of belonging to the community residing in the same hall. They felt more ‘at home’ in their LLCs and actually referred to them often as ‘home’. Compared to the former residence allocation system in which students were randomly assigned to different residence halls every semester, the LLC’s relatively more stable allocation system—in which students apply to one of the LLCs that they want to stay until graduation—provided students with the basic foundation to build their in-campus lives, which contributes to a greater sense of security. The simple fact that students will—or have to—live together until they graduate made them more attentive and generous towards each other, cultivating the sense of inclusion. The increased involvement by LLC faculty in hall life was also directly perceived by students since these faculty members now spent longer periods of time in the residence halls. The newly appointed headmaster and a pastoral worker set a weekly office hour to counsel students and LLC faculty members would take part in new events taking place in the residence halls, including regular meetings. The new experience of meeting professors in their residential area created among students a stronger feeling of being supported and nurtured.

Increased Involvement in LLC Activities
The implementation of LLCs and its activities appeared to have led to an increase in the level of student engagement and learning opportunities. This is because LLCs not only initiated new co-curricular programmes and activities, but also gave students the opportunity to develop these programmes or policies themselves. Having an emotional attachment to the LLC community as well as the novelty value of these programmes seemed to initiate student participation at first. As time went on, however, students responded more enthusiastically to the events or activities organised by their peers. Casual and informal gatherings voluntarily arranged by students or faculty increased and became a part of the culture of LLCs. Co-residence of female and male students, provision of cozy lounges and common rooms, and faculty involvement in LLC events as speakers or participants, were noted as major factors which facilitated increased student participation.

Increased Sense of Community
Strange & Banning (2009) assume that a student becomes a full member of a college community by voluntarily contributing to it. However, some of the informants indicated that simply being involved in the college community was akin to enjoying a full membership. The change of attitude was most evident among student leaders of teams, the basic cells which make up each LLC. The team system had already existed in the traditional residence halls. In the LLCs, however, team leaders had more opportunities to meet peer leaders and faculty regularly to discuss various matters pertaining to their LLC. This small community have become a sort of support group for student leaders, providing them with practical information, emotional support and eventually, a spirit of contribution.
**Conclusions**

The analysis of LLC implementation in a Korean university, based on student feedback, showed that LLCs were effective in creating a learning environment which helped educators and students achieve their learning purposes, especially compared to traditional residence halls. It is notable that the three purposes of learning environments were indeed hierarchically structured and the unique elements of LLCs were influential over the whole process. In particular, physical elements encouraging personal contacts and intensified faculty involvement were found to be the most critical elements which contributed to the overall effectiveness of LLCs in creating a conducive learning environment.

**References**


