



Best Practices in ASN Capacity Building in ASEAN: Literature Review and Opportunities for Adaptation in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Capacity building of the State Civil Apparatus is crucial in creating efficient, responsive, and results-focused governance. This paper applies a policy transfer and institutional adaptation perspective to analyze best practices in ASN capacity building in the ASEAN region, particularly in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore, and assesses the possibility of its application in Indonesia. A systematic literature review was conducted, utilizing explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, to obtain data from peer-reviewed academic journals and authoritative policy documents. The research findings show that competency-based training systems, continuous learning approaches, policy integration, and transparent oversight mechanisms support ASN capacity development in these countries. However, the analysis reveals that adaptation of these practices in Indonesia requires careful consideration of local administrative culture, institutional readiness, and political and resource constraints. Indonesia has great potential to adapt strategic elements such as a tiered training system, rotation of positions between institutions, coaching and mentoring, and the use of digital technology in training. However, the process must be guided by evidence-based policy design and robust evaluation mechanisms to ensure effective and sustainable reform, rather than simple replication of external models.

1. Introduction

The effectiveness of government public services is essential to support the community's welfare and fulfill the desired needs (Cuadrado-Ballesteros et al., 2014; Edelenbos et al., 2021). Public service satisfaction is widely recognized as a primary indicator of government organizational performance, as public services are the most direct and visible interface between the state and citizens (Zhang et al., 2022). The reason is that public services are the most visible. The public can determine government performance directly based on what they receive (McGuire et al., 2021).

One of the actors at the forefront of service delivery is the State Civil Apparatus (ASN). In the context of increasingly complex governance environments, the ASN is expected not only to deliver routine administrative tasks, but also to demonstrate adaptability, innovation, and results-oriented public service functions (El Ammar & Profiroiu, 2020). Capacity development, therefore, becomes critical for shaping a professional, dynamic, and citizen-responsive bureaucracy (Liao, 2018). However, various evaluations show that the ASN training and development system in Indonesia still faces challenges such as training that is not needs-

based, lack of impact measurement, and lack of cross-institutional integration.

These persistent challenges are well documented in the literature, revealing a range of structural and implementation barriers. Key obstacles include budget constraints, which drive demand for alternative models such as e-learning and low-cost training (Ivani & Ali, 2024); inequitable distribution of ASN personnel; misalignment between employee placement and core competencies; and limited leadership commitment to human resource development (Dagnev Gebrehiwot & Elantheraiyan, 2023). Furthermore, it is estimated that approximately 35% of ASNs are categorized as “deadwood” due to inadequate competence and performance, compounding the issue.

Other challenges include weak strategic planning for competency development, low work discipline, and digital skills gaps, especially in remote areas, which are particularly problematic amid the ongoing digital transformation and e-Government implementation efforts (Leskaj, 2017; Tian & Ou, 2024). Therefore, innovative approaches such as coaching, mentoring, and integration of training systems across institutions are needed to overcome these obstacles and sustainably strengthen ASN capacity (Golhasany & Harvey, 2025). Comparative experiences from other Asian countries, particularly Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore, provide valuable lessons in this domain. Malaysia’s Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN) has implemented a competency-based training regime integrated with digital technology; the Philippines’ Civil Service Commission (CSC) links training closely to the merit system and emphasizes supervision of training quality; and Singapore’s Civil Service College promotes adaptive and forward-looking learning approaches (Civil Service Commission Philippines, 2025). These cases underscore the importance of institutional commitment, integrated policy frameworks, and adaptation to technological change as key success factors (Civil Service College, 2025).

However, as highlighted by the literature on policy transfer and institutional adaptation, the direct transplantation of “best practices” across

different governance contexts is fraught with risk and complexity. Indonesia’s distinct institutional, administrative, and socio-cultural characteristics necessitate a critical and context-sensitive approach to adopting and adapting external models. By considering the dynamics and challenges of ASN capacity development in Indonesia, this study seeks to critically examine the relevance and transferability of leading ASEAN practices, informed by policy transfer and organizational learning frameworks. The goal is to identify not only strategic opportunities, but also contextual barriers and prerequisites for successful reform.

The exchange of best practices within the ASEAN Public Service Governance framework offers a valuable avenue for peer learning and advancing professionalism among ASNs in the region. Nevertheless, effective capacity building in Indonesia requires not only flexible and adaptive policies aligned with national and regional planning, but also robust monitoring and evaluation systems. This integrated and evidence-based approach is essential to achieve meaningful bureaucratic reform and long-term improvements in public service quality.

2. Literature Review

ASN Capacity Development in the Context of Bureaucracy

Capacity development of the state civil apparatus (ASN) is a crucial part of supporting bureaucratic reform and improving public service performance. According to organizational learning and institutional theory, capacity development encompasses not only technical skills but also managerial competence, integrity, and adaptability to evolving policy dynamics and external pressures. In Indonesia, several studies have shown structural and implementation challenges in capacity development programs. Notably, the literature points to persistent problems of low motivation and participation in training, which are attributed to factors such as weak leadership support, excessive workloads, and the absence of robust incentive structures or reward systems for competency improvement (Hassett, 2022; Kim et al., 2014). These findings highlight the critical role of leadership engagement and institutional

culture in shaping the effectiveness of ASN training initiatives.

Some ASNs resist change, especially when adopting new technology and more modern work methods. A resistant or risk-averse organizational culture, coupled with hierarchical and siloed institutional arrangements, is frequently cited as a barrier to effective ASN capacity development (Malagas et al., 2017; Pallotti et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is often a misalignment between competency development planning and its actual implementation, caused by factors such as weak cross-unit coordination, unclear standard operating procedures, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems (Mors & Waguespack, 2021).

Critically, these challenges reflect broader issues identified in the literature on public sector reform and policy implementation, underscoring that technical fix alone are insufficient without systemic changes in institutional incentives, accountability, and culture.

Regional Best Practices and Opportunities for Adaptation in Indonesia

Several Southeast Asian countries have successfully implemented best practices in bureaucratic capacity development. Malaysia's Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN) exemplifies a structured, competency-based training system that is closely integrated with digital technology and comprehensive performance management. The Philippines, through the Civil Service Commission (CSC), has institutionalized strong linkages between training, the merit system, and periodic, outcome-focused evaluation mechanisms. Meanwhile, Singapore's Civil Service College (CSC) emphasizes continuous professional development and future-oriented leadership training as central pillars for public sector excellence.

However, the literature on policy transfer cautions against the assumption that such models can be uncritically replicated in different contexts. Successful adaptation requires rigorous analysis of the institutional, political, and cultural fit with Indonesia's unique governance landscape. Lessons from these countries show the importance of policy integration,

strengthening training institutions, and monitoring training performance as key pillars in ASN capacity building (Saputra et al., 2024). Yet, challenges such as decentralization, entrenched bureaucratic interests, and uneven regional capacities may significantly affect the feasibility and sustainability of these reforms in Indonesia.

This study examines the possibility of adapting these policies in the Indonesian context, considering the national bureaucracy's complexity and the decentralization challenges. Anchored in frameworks of organizational learning and policy transfer, this research aims to not only catalog best practices but to critically identify both the enabling conditions and the obstacles for effective capacity building adaptation in Indonesia. Considering the above literature study, this research aims to examine best practices in ASN capacity building in South Asia and Southeast Asia, and identify opportunities and challenges in adapting them to the Indonesian context through the ASEAN Governance approach. Ultimately, this analysis is expected to provide both conceptual and practical contributions, moving beyond generic policy recommendations toward sustainable, context-sensitive bureaucratic reform in Indonesia.

3. Methods

This research uses a library research approach to identify and analyze best practices in capacity development of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in the Southeast Asian region and evaluate opportunities for policy adaptation in the Indonesian context. This method systematically searches academic literature, policy reports, and institutional documents relevant to the research topic (Syamsir et al., 2025).

Primary data sources include scholarly journals that discuss bureaucratic capacity building and governance in Southeast Asian countries. Data analysis was conducted through a qualitative approach using content analysis techniques, which enabled researchers to identify key themes, patterns, and relationships between concepts in the literature reviewed. Thematic coding was performed independently by multiple researchers to enhance reliability and minimize subjective bias. This approach is in

accordance with the methodological guidelines proposed by Snyder, which emphasize the importance of literature review in building a conceptual framework and identifying research gaps (Mulia et al., 2022). Additionally, the review process included critical appraisal of the methodological quality and contextual relevance of each source. Using this method, the research aims to formulate policy recommendations based on empirical evidence and best practices to support the development of ASN capacity in Indonesia that is more effective and adaptive to regional dynamics. Limitations regarding language restrictions, potential publication bias, and reliance on secondary data are acknowledged and discussed in the concluding section.

4. Result (11pt, bold)

ASN Capacity Development Practices in Southeast Asia

Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN) Malaysia

Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN) Malaysia is the training arm of the Department of Public Service, Malaysia. The Institute started as a simple training center in Port Dickson in September 1959 and was known as the Staff Training Center. The center trained employees on land administration, financial administration, office management, and local government administration (INTAN, 2024).

INTAN is based in Bukit Kiara, Kuala Lumpur, and has seven regional campuses in Malaysia: Kedah, Terengganu, Johor, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Central Region, and Sabah. As a national training institution, Professionalism in the context of Malaysia's public service, as defined by Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN), refers to the need for each member of an organization to have high knowledge and sufficient skills to carry out their duties and responsibilities effectively (INTAN, 2003). These values are also detailed by Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam Malaysia, emphasizing the importance of commitment, responsibility, efficiency, and integrity in delivering quality public service. Penjawat awam are also expected to have wisdom in action, selflessness, and accountability in carrying out their mandate.

INTAN organizes various programs, including Induction Courses, Leadership Competency Enhancement Programs, and digital-based advanced training. One important initiative is the Center for Coach Development and Advanced Learning (PKPL), which is tasked with improving the quality of trainers and strengthening technology-based learning methods. PKPL is designed to nurture trainers and introduce an andragogy (adult learning) approach to delivering materials to civil servants, which adapts to today's public sector training needs. In addition, INTAN also actively participates in international training diplomacy through the Customized Training for International Government Agencies program. This program reflects INTAN's capacity in various ASN capacity development good practices to other countries, especially in the ASEAN region. This program involves various topics such as policy innovation, public sector digital transformation, and responsive governance.

Malaysia's Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN) has a structured training system to develop civil service competencies. Every new employee assigned to INTAN must join the Training of Trainers (ToT) program, which is a basic training aimed at equipping them with the skills of a professional trainer. The program concludes with individual presentations that are rigorously evaluated before participants are recommended to become official trainers at INTAN. In addition to this initial training, INTAN also applies the principle of continuous learning, where every employee must attend at least 14 training sessions annually, both internally and externally organized. In contrast, support staff must attend training for 7 days a year. INTAN's teaching methods are mostly class-based, with between 20 and 30 participants per class. INTAN also organizes seminars and public lectures with over 300 participants. Classroom learning sessions are generally divided into three two-hour sessions per day with breaks in between. The learning process is facilitated with standard equipment such as whiteboards, computers, projectors, and overhead slides, and adopts adult learning methods (andragogy) involving active group discussions.

The types of training offered by INTAN are divided into two categories: mandatory and optional. Required training is reserved for employees recently promoted to a higher position, and is a prerequisite for confirming that position. Meanwhile, elective training is open to anyone who wishes to apply, taking into account the career development plans of each employee, usually in agreement with their immediate supervisor (Ibrahim, A., 2008). A study by Aziz et al. (2016) developed the Organizational Training Impact Scale (OTIS) instrument to measure the impact of training on organizational effectiveness among Malaysian civil servants. In this study, 211 respondents from various government agencies in Putrajaya were evaluated before and after attending training organized by INTAN. The results showed significant improvements in organizational competencies, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The post-training mean score for organizational knowledge increased to 4.33 compared to 3.41 before the training. Similarly, organizational skills rose from 3.32 to 4.24, and managerial attitudes from 3.23 to 4.10. All these improvements were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the training organized by INTAN effectively improved the competencies of civil servants.

Civil Service Commission (CSC) Philippines

The civil service system in the Philippines was officially established in 1900 through Public Law No. 5 by the Second Philippine Commission, which established a Civil Service Board to administer civil service examinations and set standards for appointments in government service. In 1905, this board was reorganized into the Civil Service Bureau. (Civil Service Commission, Philippines 2025). The 1935 Philippine Constitution then affirmed the merit system principle as the basis for appointing government employees. A landmark reform took place in 1959 with Republic Act No. 2260 (Civil Service Act), which became the first integral legal framework for the Philippine bureaucracy and transformed the bureau into the Civil Service Commission (CSC) with departmental status. Subsequently, Presidential Decree No. 807 in 1975 redefined the role of the CSC as the central civil service agency. In CSC has various program innovations, one of the interesting programs on

its civil service management is the Anti-Red Tape Watch (ART Watch), ART Watch is a direct supervision program to government agencies through the "mystery client" method, where CSC officers pose as citizens to assess the quality of public services in real-time.

The objective of the Anti-Red Tape Watch (ART Watch) is to ensure government agencies' compliance with the provisions of the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act (R.A. No. 11032), particularly in the implementation of public service policies such as the Citizen's Charter, No Noon Break Policy, and anti-calvo campaign. Through a direct observation-based approach using the mystery client method, ART Watch aims to provide a real picture of the quality of public services received by the public. In addition, ART Watch also encourages increased transparency and accountability through the submission of findings and recommendations directly to the leaders of the agencies visited. Thus, ART Watch is a strategic mechanism to encourage continuous service improvement, increase public satisfaction, and strengthen a responsive and efficient public service culture.

Public Sector Leadership Program (PSLP)-Singapore

Public Sector Leadership Program (PSLP)-Singapore is a strategic leadership development program for high-potential civil servants (ASN) to occupy managerial and top positions in the public bureaucracy. The program is under the Public Service Division's (PSD) management as a 2021 Meritorious Service Award winner for promoting officer growth and development in the Public Service. It is supported by the Civil Service College (CSC). PSLP is part of the talent pipeline development strategy in Singapore's strict meritocracy system. The program also aims to capture and prepare future leaders across agencies, with two phases, namely the General Phase for fresh graduates and the Sectoral Phase for professionals with work experience. Firdaus, M. R. (2025).

The structure of Singapore's Public Sector Leadership Programme (PSLP) consists of several key elements that form the leadership pathway for high-potential civil servants. The program begins with Milestone Leadership

Programmes structured in stages, from entry, intermediate, to senior levels, to ensure that each participant receives training appropriate to their career stage (Civil Service College Singapore, 2024). A critical feature of the PSLP is Cross-agency Rotations, a system of rotating positions across ministries or agencies, which aims to broaden horizons and work capabilities across sectors (Public Service Division Singapore, 2024). The program also includes Executive Coaching & Mentorship, which provides personalized guidance from senior officials to accelerate participants' leadership character building and strategic capacity (Civil Service College Singapore, 2024). The overall training focuses on strengthening core competencies such as public service ethics, good governance, innovation in public service, and crisis and change management (Public Service Division Singapore, 2024). With this systematic and meritocracy-based approach, the PSLP has become a key foundation for building Singapore's professional and responsive bureaucracy.

5. Discussion

ASN capacity development in the ASEAN region reflects a systematic and innovative effort to create a professional, responsive, competitive bureaucracy (Schröder, 2019). The three countries that are the focus of the study—Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore present diverse but complementary models in terms of ASN training and development approaches. Malaysia, through the Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN), shows how a structured, needs-based, and competency-oriented training system can significantly improve the effectiveness of ASN performance. With an andragogy approach, the use of digital technology, and mandatory and optional annual training obligations, INTAN emphasizes the importance of professionalism, accountability, and integrity. Findings from an empirical study Aziz et al. (2016) show that INTAN training has significantly improved ASN's knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which is evidence of the effectiveness of its training system.

The Philippines showcases innovative public service quality monitoring practices through the Civil Service Commission's (CSC) Anti-Red Tape Watch (ART Watch) program. The mystery client

method provides an objective, direct monitoring mechanism and promotes real-time accountability of government agencies. ART Watch assesses and provides recommendations for improvement based on field findings, thus supporting the continuous improvement of public services. This approach strengthens the principle of transparency and minimizes space for inefficient bureaucratic practices. Meanwhile, through its Public Sector Leadership Programme (PSLP), Singapore emphasizes the importance of nurturing bureaucratic leaders early on through a rigorous meritocratic approach. This program integrates tiered training, cross-agency rotations, global exposure through world-class institutions, and direct guidance through mentorship and coaching. The focus of PSLP is to form ASNs who have cross-sector strategic insights, adaptive capabilities, and are ready to face the challenges of public governance at the national and global levels.

Adaptation Opportunities for Indonesia

Strengthening the Standardized and Tiered ASN Training Structure

Indonesia can adopt the INTAN approach to mandatory and elective training based on career paths and job needs. Developing a competency-based ASN training curriculum and using andragogy principles are very relevant to increasing training effectiveness, especially for functional and managerial positions.

Establishment of ASN Coach Development Center

Like PKPL in Malaysia, Indonesia needs a special institution for systemic capacity building of ASN trainers so that the quality of training material delivery is more professional and adaptive to the dynamics of the times, including mastery of online learning technology.

Implementation of an Impact-Based Training Evaluation System

Indonesia could develop instruments such as the Organizational Training Impact Scale (OTIS) to measure the impact of training on organizational and individual performance. This is important to ensure that training has a real effect on increasing ASN's work capacity.

Utilization of Mystery Client Method in Bureaucratic Reform

Adapting the ART Watch method from the Philippines can be a model for monitoring and evaluating the quality of public services in Indonesia, especially to encourage the implementation of Maladministration-Free Bureaucracy and Thematic Bureaucratic Reform.

Strengthening the ASN Leadership Path Based on Merit and Potential

Indonesia needs to redesign the ASN leadership career path, such as PSLP in Singapore, which focuses on fostering future leaders through cross-sector leadership training programs, national position rotations, and global debriefing through collaboration with world-class training institutions.

Cross-Agency Rotation for Potential Officials

The position rotation model as in Singapore can be adapted to expand the experience of potential ASNs across government sectors, which is currently still limited due to silos between agencies in Indonesia.

Strengthening the Mentoring and Coaching System in ASN Career Development

The involvement of senior leaders as mentors in ASN coaching can encourage a more structured bureaucratic regeneration and serve as a vehicle for transferring practical experience in facing real bureaucratic challenges.

Digitalization and Technology-Based Learning

INTAN and PSLP demonstrate the importance of digitizing training and distance learning. Indonesia can expand the utilization of the ASN e-learning platform with a national ASN learning performance reporting system and training track record.

Integration of Values and Ethics in ASN Training Modules

Malaysia and Singapore emphasize the importance of values, ethics, and integrity in ASN training. Indonesia needs to develop specific theoretical and applicable training modules on public service ethics.

Collaborative and Regional Approaches

Opportunities for regional training cooperation within the ASEAN framework need

to be expanded through trainer exchange programs, training policy benchmarking, and the establishment of joint training consortia among ASEAN countries to strengthen the learning ecosystem in the region.

6. Conclusion

Capacity building of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) is essential in creating a professional, responsive, and public service-focused bureaucracy. The experience of ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore shows that success in ASN capacity building is highly dependent on integrating competency-based training systems, sustainable leadership, and transparent supervision. Malaysia, through INTAN, excels in the development of a tiered and technology-based training system; the Philippines, through the ART Watch program, demonstrates the effectiveness of public service oversight with a participatory approach; while Singapore through PSLP shows how merit-based leadership career paths and rotation between sectors can build a strong and resilient bureaucracy. Based on the study, Indonesia has an excellent opportunity to adapt these elements, especially in strengthening a more systematic ASN training design, expanding learning technology, establishing an ASN leadership rotation and mentoring system, and strengthening public service supervision based on direct community experience. However, this adaptation process must consider the national social, political, and institutional context to avoid becoming an irrelevant policy transfer. Regional cooperation through the ASEAN Governance framework is also a strategic pathway to expand shared learning and standardization of ASN capacity in the region. Therefore, implementing ASN capacity development policies in Indonesia must be directed at cross-sector integration, a results-based approach, and overall strengthening of training institutions. This step will improve the competence of individual ASNs and strengthen the effectiveness of government institutions in providing quality and sustainable public services.

7. Limitation

Although this study has comprehensively reviewed best practices in ASN capacity

development in the Southeast Asia region, several limitations need to be noted. First, this study mostly relies on secondary data from available literature and official online sources, making it vulnerable to the limitations of the information provided by each country. Second, this study does not include field data or direct interviews with practitioners or policymakers in the countries studied, which could provide a more in-depth and contextually appropriate understanding. Thirdly, as this study's primary focus is on three countries, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore, the findings may not fully represent variations in practice across ASEAN countries, such as Thailand, Vietnam, or Indonesia. Fourth, there is potential bias in policy interpretation due to differences in political systems and organizational cultures in each country that are not discussed in depth. Finally, space and time limitations in this study also mean that not all aspects of the ASN training system can be studied thoroughly, especially regarding the long-term impact of these programs on bureaucratic reform in general.

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