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Communication curricula at universities in the Republic of Korea: Evolution and challenges in the digital age



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This paper examines the current status, strengths and weaknesses of media communication curricula at 95 South Korean universities. It aims to find out whether the communication departments at South Korean universities reflect the global trend towards an integrated curriculum in the communication discipline as the literature suggests. This means a curriculum that integrates the theory, practice, and inter-disciplinary philosophies of Communication Studies, Journalism, Mass Communication, Advertising, Public Relations and Digital Media. The analysis shows that overall the current curricula in South Korean universities, which lean towards liberal-professional education, are relatively lacking in inter-disciplinarity. Most lacking is in the theory and practice of Communication Studies, particularly in Speech Communication and Public/Business Speaking. This study concludes with a proposed model for an integrated liberal, practical, and inter-disciplinary communication curriculum.

Innovations in digital technologies and global communication have compelled higher education institutions to be more responsive in their curriculum planning to meet the professional demands of the workplace, academia, and changing needs of students. Research on communication curricula in the global context have emphasised the need for expansion of subject offerings in the communication curricula and integration of courses (Bertelsen & Goodboy, 2009; Kang & Kang, 2010) to graduate students with skill competencies and functional knowledge. The digital age has also influenced the map of integrated communication curricula in all areas encompassing Communication Studies (e.g., Speech, Interpersonal, and Group Communication), Journalism, Mass Communication, Advertising (AD), Public Relations (PR), and Digital Media.

For instance, communication departments in US universities have combined practical communication technology courses with Public Speaking, Rhetorical Theory, Interpersonal Communication, and Small Group Communication (Morreale & Pearson, 2008). European universities' traditional theoretical focus on media and cultural studies have also integrated multimedia and marketing studies (Orton, 2001) in their respective communication curriculum. Asian higher education institutions from China (Wu, 2000) to Japan (Kang & Kang, 2010) to Singapore (Haas, 2001) show similar trends in integrating multimedia communication in their traditional communication discipline (journalism, cultural studies, and history). An inter-disciplinary approach to the communication discipline is critical to graduate well-rounded communication professionals for the multimedia workplace (Brumberger, 2005; Morreale & Pearson, 2008) and future scholars.

Using the theory, practice, liberal-professional (Niven, 1961) and inter-disciplinary typologies (Fleury, 2005), this study examines how the communication curricula at universities in the Republic of Korea are structured, and diagnoses its strengths and weaknesses. Based on the analysis, this study suggests a core course model that a communication department can consider in designing or revamping its programs, if needed.

Communication curriculum typology

Changes in the communication curricula are evident from theory development and skill performances (Redmond & Waggoner, 1992) to the 'lead-out' principle, in which educators train communication students in an inter-disciplinary context by leading-out to other areas (Kantner, 1951). The theory-skill philosophy embraces Speech Communication, Mass Communication, AD, PR, and Digital Media. The inter-disciplinary principle originates from Speech Communication, which emphasises student experiences in different disciplines to develop diversity, multiplicity, and participation as a citizen. The inter-disciplinary principle applies to Mass Communication, AD, PR, and Digital Media Studies for an extensive learning experience as well. In this view, the integrated communication curricula are structured under the philosophy of theory, practice, and inter-disciplinary education.

Niven (1961) specifically classifies the 'liberal,' 'practical,' and 'liberal-professional' as three curricular philosophies in the communication discipline. Liberal or Liberal Arts curricula emphasise on the theoretical, historical, philosophical, and ethical aspects of communication studies. Practical curricula focus on skill-learning programs involving writing, speaking and media production. Liberal-professional curricula

offer a combination of subjects in the liberal and practical components. Fleury (2005) argues that a comprehensive exposure to varying areas of study would enhance the adaptability of graduates to the global communication era.

Applying the integrated communication curricula in the global context, liberal, practical, and liberal-professional education represents the American, European, and Asian communication disciplines. Recent argument of inter-disciplinary communication curriculum could be added to the liberal-professional typology in view of expanded communication education.

Liberal arts education

McCall (1987) espoused the liberal arts education in communication by noting that liberal arts curricula offered students critical thinking skills with insights providing “why” solutions rather than “how to.” Stuhlfaut and Farrell (2009) noted the importance of ‘liberal’ education in communication, such as legal, societal, and ethical issues for advertising majors. They mentioned that technical skills in advertising production should be supported by students’ knowledge gained from a ‘liberal’ communication education. In addition, it was viewed that ethical and philosophical aspects of communication would develop students’ view of the world as communication specialists such as in rhetoric (Smither & Buzza, 1987) and public relations practitioners (Kent & Taylor, 2005). For a comprehensive understanding of communication, studying the history of communication was also emphasised (Rogers & Chaffee, 1983).

Practical education

Kolb and Kolb’s (2001) theory of experiential learning draws on the premise that learning effectiveness can be maximized when the learner interacts with the real world. In turn, students are encouraged to experience, observe, connect concepts to the case and re-evaluate their learning. Brandon (2002) contended that the practical education emphasis would help communication major students acquire competency. Scholars have advocated practical and specialised education, such as speaking, public relations planning, writing, and reporting as an integral part of the arts and industry (Dannels, 2001; Renz, 1991). Phang and Schaefer (2009) found that practical education was more effective than theory-oriented education to increase awareness in media literacy. The Web 3.0 era has also oriented communication education towards practice to prepare students for using Web’s production tools (Berkeley, 2009).

Educators suggest that a client project be taken on as a model to facilitate communication between academia and business. The client project offers a service-learning experience because students work as non-paying employees at a business company (Cooke, & Williams, 2004).

Liberal-professional curricula

Blanchard and Chris (1988) called for the hiring of faculty who could teach in both liberal and professional education sectors. Regardless of school size, scholars have

noted that the combination of liberal and professional curricula can mediate the relationship between courses offered to facilitate the success of the communication department (Latterell, 2003).

The combination of liberal arts and professional education is detailed in the theory of expertise (Carpenter, 2009; Hatano, 1982), which explicates that adaptability and skills without the conceptual knowledge is an incomplete acquisition in the field of study. This concept of adaptive expertise suggests that the learner's clear conceptual understanding of the target domain will complete the professional's practical achievements derived from balancing both theoretical and practical education.

Inter-disciplinary communication

Recently, Fleury (2005) noted that speech communication curricula should reformulate its programs as Communication Across Curriculum (CXC) because they need to expand and become inter-disciplinary to accommodate knowledge and experience from outside the communication discipline. Likewise, Neiman (1997) asserted that the Communication In Discipline (CID) approach designed to produce skill-based communication specialists would give a narrow definition of communication study, thereby minimising the integrative nature of communication. The CXC approach, as an expansion of CID, would stress participatory communication through an understanding of liberal education, communication theories and practices that stimulate active citizenship. This "inter-disciplinary communication" philosophy could be an addition to the liberal, practical and liberal-professional typology. CXC emphasises students' learning of core education courses such as world history, social systems, politics, geography, and foreign languages. All communication curricula from Communication Studies to Digital Media are applicable to the inter-disciplinary philosophy in the view that students apply extensive knowledge from other fields to their own needs (e.g., World History for game development).

The liberal, practical, liberal-professional, and inter-disciplinary communication could be integrated. The courses representing each philosophy are often simultaneously offered in a communication department at today's universities. The question is whether the communication curricula are integrated or skewed in one or the other direction. Today's communication industry demands communication majors to be multi-skilled (Carpenter, 2009; Rhoades, & Roessner, 2009). A more employable communication specialist from a PR practitioner to a college instructor today is one who possesses critical thinking skills, knowledge, writing, eloquence, presentation, analytical capability, and adept in multimedia productions.

History of communication discipline at South Korean universities

The Republic of Korea has more than six decades of history in teaching communication at universities. Although several newspaper journalism courses were offered at Seoul National University in 1949, and at Yonhee University in 1953, the first official communication department began at Hongik University in 1954, one year after the truce in the Korean War. As South Korean society realised the

importance of journalism education, journalism departments were established in Ewha Women's University in 1960, Hanyang University in 1963, Korea University in 1965, Sungkyunkwan University in 1967 and Sogang University in 1968. Yonsei University established the country's first department of journalism and mass communication in 1973 in an expanded module including print and radio/TV broadcasting. The first doctoral program in communication was offered at Seoul National University in 1975.

Most of the universities used "the department of journalism" as the official title of the unit in the 1960s. They were renamed "department of journalism and broadcasting or mass communication" in the 1970s and 1980s when television became the dominant medium (Cha, 1987) in the country.

A communication curricula study reported that there were 55 communication departments in 1999 (Kang, Wolf, & Kang, 2002). Preliminary research shows that 95 South Korean universities currently offer communication studies under various titles, a 72% increase (Korean Council for University Education, 2010). The curricula at Seoul National University are liberal education oriented (Niven, 1961). In Sogang University and Kyunghee University, the curricula are a hybrid of 'liberal-professional' (Fleury, 2005; Heuvel & Dennis, 1993).

As the multimedia environment in the Republic of Korea today seeks communication majors with knowledge, specialties, and skills in the digital era, South Korean universities are likely to respond by offering liberal-professional type of communication curricula. To ascertain the extent to which South Korean universities have moved toward meeting the needs of the changing communication environment the current study focused the following research questions:

RQ1: What communication curricula do the 'communication departments' of South Korean universities currently offer?

RQ2: How do the communication curricula in South Korean universities fit into the 'liberal,' 'practical,' 'liberal-professional,' or 'inter-disciplinary' typology?

Method: Sample and data collection

Data were obtained from the *Korean Council for University Education* list of 201 universities downloaded from the council website on February 10, 2010. There were 158 private and 43 public universities at the time of analysis. Information about the communication departments and curricula were then viewed and analysed from the respective university web sites.

First, we examined whether the universities had a communication department, defined as an academic department that covers communication studies in Public Speaking, Interpersonal, Group, Organizational, Cultural, Intercultural, International Communication, Journalism, AD, PR, Print Media, Electronic Media, and Digital Media in theory and practice.

A total of 95 universities had departments in Communication, Journalism, Media, AD, PR, and Digital Media. The universities were sorted in different regions. The capital, Seoul, has the largest number of universities with a communication department (n = 27), followed by Kyungsang-Do (n = 14), Chungcheong-Do (n = 11), Busan City (n

= 10), Kyunggi-Do (n = 9), Jeolla-Do (n = 7), Daejeon city (n = 5), Kangwon-Do (n = 4), Kwangju City (n = 4), Incheon City (n = 2), Daegu City (n = 1), and Jeju-Do (n = 1).

Unit of analysis

Following the classifications of communication curricula - liberal, practical, liberal-professional, and inter-disciplinary - this study collected and analysed the online course catalogues of universities with a communication department. Liberal studies indicate the communication programs emphasise on theory, history, law, principles, and ethics. Practical orientation encompasses programs that focus on production, writing, reporting, design, and speaking compared to liberal arts subjects. A department with liberal-professional emphasis indicates a combination of both offered within the program. Inter-disciplinary communication curricula are those offering non-communication studies such as World History, Music, Algebra, Geometry, or Astronomy as well as Communication Studies.

This study judged the orientation of liberal, practical, liberal-professional, and inter-disciplinary on its respective emphasis in the departments. For example, if the coders judged a department to have offered more hands-on production and internship courses than theories, the department was categorised as “practical.”

The analysis classifies ‘core’ as ‘required’ courses in both general education (GenEd) and communication majors. Students must complete the ‘required courses’ to graduate. Hence, the unit of analysis is the course title as noted in the online course catalogue. There were two coders – a trained South Korean graduate student and me. We computed the percentage of agreement in sorting out the courses offered in each department and curricular orientation (e.g., liberal, practical, inter-disciplinary). The average coefficient of reliability was 94.1%.ⁱ

Findings

The number of credit hours for a communication major to complete for graduation at South Korean universities ranges from 120 to 136 for four years with eight regular semesters. In their communication major studies, students should complete 15 hours of GenEd core courses, 20 hours of GenEd electives, 6 hours of core in the major, 54 hours of electives in communication major (95 hours). The student can choose over 30 hours of other electives besides 95 hours to complete graduation requirement.

The universities analysed used different departmental names based on its emphasis, for instance, “the department or division of journalism and broadcasting”, “journalism and mass communication,” “journalism and public relations,” “public relations,” “advertising and public relations,” “AD/PR and journalism,” “information and media,” “media and creativity,” “visual and mass communication,” and “information and digital media.”

Since similar courses were titled differently across departments, this study provided a list of core courses and classifications of courses depending on concentrations. Reporting the data in this format rather than the frequency of all the courses better represented the courses taught in the curricula at South Korean universities since the courses in frequency might induce overlaps.

The analysis of curricular orientation found that there were 17 (17.8%) liberal education-oriented communication departments; 24 (25.2%) practical departments, and 36 (37.8%) liberal-professional departments. There were no inter-disciplinary departments out of the 95 universities examined. As the range of department names and segmentations reflect, South Korean universities in 2010 offered both liberal and practical courses in their programs.

From the data collected, this study classified three departmental programs: “journalism and mass communication,” “advertising and public relations” and “digital media.” All three programs were run as separate departments or divisions. These departments, however, concomitantly offered core courses (see Table 1). Language Reading (Korean and English), Mass Communication Principles, and Communication Law were typical required courses. The core courses were limited to Communication Studies and Language. They did not include fundamental Communication Studies courses, such as Public and Professional Speaking. All of those were ‘liberal’ courses with a practical component: Writing.

Table 1. Typical core courses offered in all communication departments

Course	Hours
Korean Reading and Writing	3
English Reading and Writing	3
Understanding of Modern Society	3
Principles of Mass Communication	3
Communication Law	3
Media Writing	3
Introduction to Media Studies	3

Table 2 shows the courses offered in the journalism and mass communication department. The media programs at South Korean universities are likely to offer a set of curricula to liberal-professional courses. Other courses not included in the list but offered in the departments were Media Literacy, Media Industry and Policies, Speech Communication (anchoring or announcing), Media Philosophy, Media Culture, Media Ethics, Media Aesthetics, Public Opinion & Politics, Online Journalism, Computer-Mediated Communication, Marketing Communication, Organizational Communication, Persuasion, Job Interview, and Internship.

Table 2. Typical courses offered in journalism and mass communication department

Course	Hours
Fundamentals of News Journalism	3
Fundamentals of Broadcasting	3
Human Communication Theory	3
News Writing	3
Media and Culture	3
International Communication	3
Digital Media Production	3
Video Production	3
News Production	3
Advertising and Public Relations	3
Media History	3
Mass Communication Research Method	3
Media Effects	3
Film Studies	3
Photo Journalism	3
Media Law	3
Principles of New Media	3

The advertising and public relations (see Table 3) department offered specialised curricula in AD and PR in conjunction with marketing communication. Students in the programs learn both liberal (e.g., Persuasive Communication, International Advertising and Public Relations) and professional (e.g., Advertising Planning and Production, Television Commercial Production) courses. The departments attempt to link students' learning experience from theory to practical applications focusing on strategic advertising and public relations.

Table 3. Typical courses offered in advertising and public relations department

Course	Hours
Marketing Communication	3
Advertising English	3
Public Relations English	3
History of Advertising	3
Advertising Planning and Production	3
Persuasive Communication	3
Advertising Case Study	3
Public Relations Case Study	3
Television Commercial Production	3
Print Advertising Production	3
Advertising Marketing	3
Advertising Psychology	3
Portfolio Production	3
International Advertising and Public Relations	3
English for Advertising and Public Relations Career	3
Communication Design	3
Presentation Skills	3
Flash Animation	3

The department of digital media (see Table 4) module concentrates on a student's exposure to digital media learning from theory to practice. The courses cover Graphic Design, 3D Animation, Principles of Digital Storytelling, and Web Development. Other digital media courses encompass multimedia culture and management courses, such as Culture Management, Understanding of the US Cultural Industry, Interaction Design, Cultural Content Marketing, and Understanding of Cultural Industry Policy.

Table 4. Typical courses offered in digital media department

Course	Hours
Media and the Internet	3
Digital Culture	3
Digital Storytelling	3
3D Animation	3
Digital Media Content Planning	3
Entertainment Business English	3
Graphic Design	3
Directing and Acting	3
Digital Video Production	3
Video Editing and Effects	3
Creative Production	3
Audio Design and Editing	3

Discussion

The results show that the universities do offer liberal-professional education, but which lacks inter-disciplinary curricula (Fleury, 2005; Niven, 1961). The departments of journalism and mass communication, and AD and PR contain both liberal arts and practical courses with a stronger emphasis on the liberal arts typology. The department of digital media places a heavier emphasis on practical components than liberal arts courses.

The departments analysed integrated theory courses with different emphases including cultural studies, communication philosophy, democracy communication, and empirical communication theories. These courses reflect that communication curricula at South Korean universities embrace European communication study tradition, Asian communication studies' integration, and the empirical aspect of US communication curricula. Further, practical courses from AD Project to Digital Media Production in conjunction with marketing and business communication are found as faculty with their terminal degrees vary from European and South Korean to American universities. Through this education, critical thinking skills can be developed, which provide students with opportunities for a higher academic degree pursuit or professional positions in the industry.

In this sense, the communication curricula at South Korean universities are appropriately responding to changes in the communication discipline environments and demands of the job market for liberal and skills-based education. However, with respect to the integrated communication curricula in a global context, communication departments in South Korean universities are less focused on foundational Communication Studies, such as Public Speaking, Rhetoric and Interpersonal Communication. Even though South Korean universities offered theory and practice in the courses, they were skewed toward mass communication, AD/PR,

and multimedia as the three departmental classifications from the data demonstrate: journalism and mass communication, AD/PR, and digital media.

Although the universities provided a fair number of courses in liberal-professional studies, the results show that they are still at the developing stage in internship opportunities. In addition to internship courses, student-managed public relations agencies at universities would be an alternative (Bush, 2009). By doing this, students can experience real-world public relations with less burden of working with real professionals through internship. Students in the student-run agencies would learn both critical thinking and practical components. As such, South Korean universities may use students majoring in multimedia to develop websites for school offices and other sectors. If students could be employed part-time by the university, then their adjustment to the professional world would be easier. Besides, these practical experiences can also be an asset for those who plan to pursue a higher academic degree for a job in higher institutions. They can be educators who can teach both theory and practice in the communication discipline.

What the South Korean universities most lack is a focus on theory, practice, and interdisciplinary education in Communication Studies, Speech Communication and Public and Business Speaking. Only 10% of the universities in this study offered Speech Communication courses, but even then, they were a single course in either sophomore or junior years with its focus limited to news anchoring or announcing.

One notable finding from the study is that Kyunghee University in Seoul offers a fully developed Speech Communication concentration. Students learn Rhetoric, Interpersonal Communication, Voice and Diction, Nonverbal Communication, Business Presentation, Public Speaking, Persuasion, and Job Interview.

This limited interest and few curricula in Communication Studies at South Korean universities offer some implications. As a probable result of this, South Korean students studying at universities or working for companies around the world may show a deficiency of confidence in presenting in public for an audience or clients. For example, a recent survey in June 2009 of South Korean students studying at universities in the US, including the Ivy League and other prestigious schools, revealed that a majority contended the necessity for South Korean students to improve in their discussion and public speaking skills (Park, 2009). They experienced their limited capability of expressing their views competently and confidently during discussions or in public presentations particularly in English.

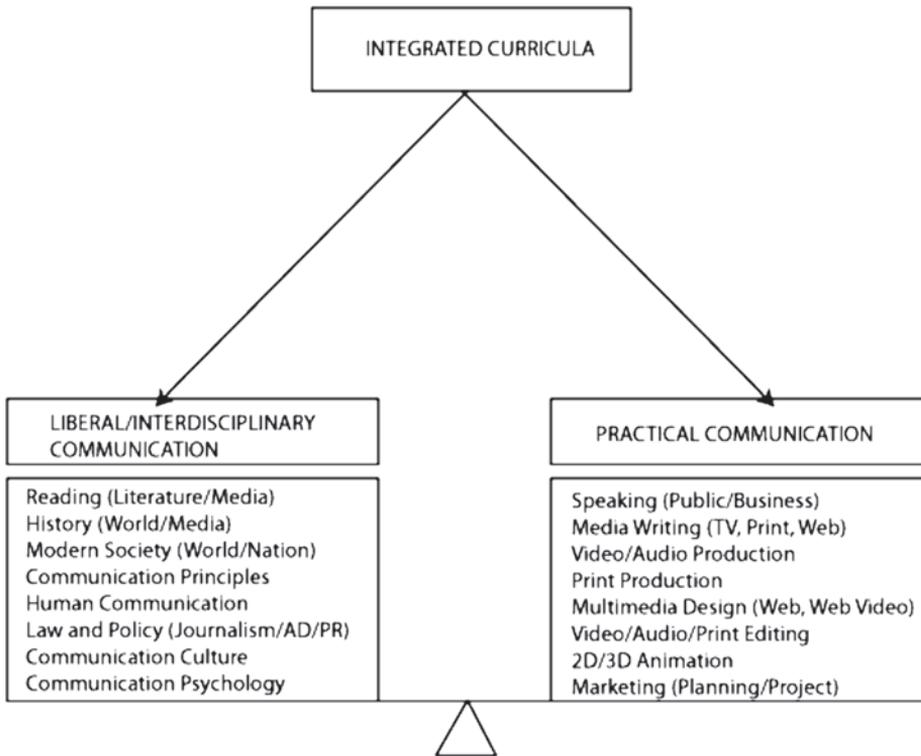
In this context, Kyunghee University's Speech Communication major offered to South Korean students is inspiring. The Republic of Korea needs more universities that teach Speech Communication. The speech communication department can educate students in fundamental communication skills at different levels (e.g., Interpersonal and Group Communication) and practical speech in both Korean and English (e.g. Public Speaking, Voice and Diction, Debate). These concentrations may facilitate the development of other communication discipline, such as Journalism (e.g. news writing, reporting, anchoring, and announcing), AD and PR (e.g. academic presentation, presentation to the client, persuasion, negotiation, debates, conference meetings), Marketing Communication (e.g. teaching, promotion, strategic communication), Political Communication (e.g. election campaign, public address, speech, TV debates), and Digital Media (e.g. video presentation as user generated content).

The Speech Communication major may need to cover “listening skills” as well as “speech.” Listening means learning how to listen as a critical and courteous audience. A proficient listener could pinpoint the gist of the speech as a productive part of the discussion. Learning to be a courteous audience member and showing a desirable listening attitude towards the speaker is also a necessary skill to acquire. Eventually, the Speech Communication major would develop into MA and Ph.D. programs for future professors.

The findings show that the universities are not ready for the inter-disciplinary curricula in the communication department. Even though students would choose their inter-disciplinary courses using 30-hour electives, it would be ideal if the communication department provided students with such courses to ultimately benefit the communication majors. As an alternative, a few GenEd required courses could be offered to communication students. For example, a US National Public Radio (NPR) foreign war correspondent, Anne Garrels (2010), in her response to a question about what courses could help journalism students prepare for a foreign affairs or international correspondent position, emphasised that student journalists needed to have a sense of history of the nation and the world. It is not just only media history, but also knowledge about world history that can provide correspondents with competency in international journalistic work. This could be a reason for CXC, which focuses on an inter-disciplinary approach to communication studies. World History, Political System, Arts, Geography, or Government System would be possible courses communication students can take to learn about the world in this global era.

Taken together, four words summarize the current study’s results: *segmentation*, *expansion*, *specification*, and *need for communication studies*. The communication departments at South Korean universities are currently segmented in the theoretical and practical elements. South Korean universities are expanding to larger departments to cover the increased number of segmented communication study areas from Journalism to Digital Media. Courses are specified covering theory, hands-on productions, and real-world experiences. However, the universities seem to need additions of the most fundamental communication discipline, Communication Studies, to their current curricular structure.

Figure 1. The integrated curricula model in the communication department



Hence, this study proposes an integrated communication curricula model (see Figure 1). The model consists of two groups of curricular modules that provide relevant courses for the purpose of integration. In the liberal/inter-disciplinary communication module, liberal arts courses from World History to Communication Theory to Speech Communication to Understanding of Modern Societies are suggested. Communication Principles could include Speech Communication and Interpersonal Communication. Students may need to develop a broader knowledge base and experience with legal cases in Journalism, AD, and PR. As the world is increasingly relying on multimedia, the culture derived from the use would be an important subject for communication students. Varying psychological or psycho-physiological responses in face-to-face communication and media such as the Internet and 3D television could be covered in Communication Psychology.

Pertaining to the practical communication module, the department can offer Public Speaking, Video Production (e.g., Video Compression, Non-Linear Editing), Marketing Communication (e.g., Client-based projects), Graphics (e.g., Photoshop), Animation (e.g., Flash), and Web Development (e.g., HTML, CSS, PHP, Java Scripts). Practice in Speaking and Writing would provide communication students with credibility in all professional settings (e.g., presentation, reporting, speech). Further, Public Speaking should cover not only speaking but also listening.

When these two modules are integrated, the department curricula may sit in equilibrium. Communication departments at South Korean universities may balance

their course curricula considering the courses proposed in the present study with their own emphasis on the particular sector. The addition of inter-disciplinary aspects and emphasis of Communication Studies may lead South Korean universities' communication education to a higher level, producing competent communication professionals and academic scholars for both the domestic and global job market. As the results show, the South Korean universities will need to embrace the fundamentals of communication (e.g., Speech) for a successful result of theory-practice based education for communication students.

Overall, South Korean universities integrate European, Asian, and US communication disciplines with a bit skewed emphasis on the US curricula (e.g., empirical studies, US media industry). This curricula structure would be anticipated as over 60 percent of faculty in the communication discipline earned their terminal degrees from the US (Korea Research Foundation, 2010). It is notable to find that the South Korean universities are limited in Communication Studies, which are offered in communication departments at European and US universities. South Korean universities balanced critical and empirical theories and application of technological development to practical components reflecting the global trend but still underdeveloped in Speech Communication and the inter-disciplinarity.

Limitations and suggestions

This study limits its analysis to the curricular content of communication departments. Future research should find the link between communication department enrolment and employment rate. A comprehensive analysis of communication departments' students and their job status after graduation would paint a clearer picture of the effectiveness of the curricula in the real job market (Becker, Vlad, & Olin, 2009).

An analysis of the curricula of two-year colleges would help provide helpful suggestions for comparison and development of curricula of communication departments at South Korean universities. Two-year college graduates could be important pipelines for skill-based media experts.

In conclusion, this study shows that communication departments at South Korean universities are properly responding to the changing communication environments in terms of combining liberal and professional curricula. However, the departments showed deficiency in providing an integrative learning environment in Communication Studies. To enhance the quality of curricula offered, it is suggested that communication students be increasingly exposed to speech communication under the theory, practice, and inter-disciplinary context to be trained as a globally well-rounded personnel.

Notes

i The formula used to determine intercoder reliability is:

$$\text{Coefficient of Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$$

Where M = average number of coding decisions on which all coders agreed.

N1 + N2 = number of coding decisions made by the two judges (Holsti, 1969).

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