

EDUCATION
IN INDONESIA
PERSPECTIVES
POLITICS
AND
PRACTICES

Rommel A. Curaming and Frank Dhont
Editors



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Frank Dhont, Yale University

INTRODUCTION

Thomas J. Connors
University of Maryland

Indonesia's 1945 Constitution mandates both central and regional governments to devote one-fifth of their annual budgets to education.¹ From its earliest inception, the value of knowledge and the importance of the transfer of knowledge to the success of an independent Indonesia was recognized and encapsulated in the founding documents of the nation. To forge a national identity and consolidate a democratic politics, a state level educational system was necessary. It was necessary, but not sufficient. Local identity and local traditions needed to be recognized and harnessed in the creation of a new heterogeneous state. The constitution further acknowledged the variability and varied centers of knowledge, highlighting and valuing equally the distinction between formal and non-formal education, adding that "non-formal education is the path of family and community education."²

What constitutes knowledge? What system of education equally benefits a hunter-gathering Punan of Kalimantan, a sago arboriculturist of Seram, a rice farmer of Java, a Shariah banker of Makassar or a construction worker in Batam? What should the goals

1 In practice, it achieved this goal only in 2010, dedicating 26.01% of total government expenditure to education. This marks significant progress from just ten years prior, when the equivalent figure for 2001 was 11.45%.

2 "Pendidikan informal adalah jalur pendidikan keluarga dan lingkungan." UU 20/2003 Bab I, Pasal 1, no 13; amending UUD 1945.

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CHAPTER 4

EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY IN INDONESIA

Yudi Perbawaningsih
Atma Jaya Yogyakarta University

INTRODUCTION

Communication is among the most popular fields of study in Indonesia. This is clear in the increasing number of programs in communication science or communication studies being offered by various colleges and universities in the country. Because such programs promise to offer enhanced knowledge and skills that are useful in a wide range of fields beyond communication they have become a common platform for training workers or practitioners who are expected to work in various types of businesses. One consequence of this is the development of communication education in accordance with the needs of the industries and it gives rise to a sort of education-industry patron-client relations that may be inimical to the education sector. This article aims to examine the unsymmetrical relation between communication education and industry and its implication on the development of the Indonesian society.

COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY IN INDONESIA

Both as a profession and as an industry, communication has seen rapid development in Indonesia in the past few decades. The

communication industry covers a diverse range of companies including those engaged in mail delivery services (postal), telecommunications devices, mobile phones, and transmitter devices as well as those involved in media, new/social media and journalism. In this article, my focus is limited to the industries engaged in the media sector, advertising and marketing communications, and public relations.

The development of communication industry is manifest in the exponential increase in the number of companies or businesses involved in broadcasting, advertising and public relations. The jump in the number of national television stations to eleven and of regional televisions stations to 183 by 2010 is another indicator.¹⁷ The advances in digital or internet technologies also prove to be a game-changer. Television stations are no longer just competing with each other, but also with newspapers on line, online television, online video, among others.

Radio, on the other hand, has been declining as it cannot seem to compete with the Internet-based media. According to the data gathered by the National Association of Private Radio Broadcasting of Indonesia (PRSSNI), the number of radio stations declined from 845 in 2008 to 756 in 2009 and 2010.¹⁸ All is not lost on radio, however, as at least in theory, if the radio can capitalize on the advantages and uniqueness provided by real-time, live coverage and greater interactive capabilities, it is not impossible for it to be able to compete with other media.

What about the print media? As experience in America shows, the printed newspaper is also in crisis having been overtaken by online or digital newspaper in terms of readership. Based on the data released by Newspaper Association of America, in 2008, the number of visitors to online newspapers increased by 12.1 percent, from 60 million in 2007 to 67.3 million in 2008. Big-name newspaper

¹⁷ <http://www.asiawaves.net>, retrieved on February 2, 2011.

¹⁸ www.radioprnsni.com, retrieved February 2, 2011.

sites most often accessed include *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*. The crisis in printed newspaper was also triggered by the economic crisis that hit the advertising industry, the financial backbone of the newspaper. In 2006, the newspaper industry advertising revenue reached 49.5 billion U.S. dollars; in 2008 it dropped 23 percent to 38 billion U.S. dollars. The value of the newspaper companies' shares on the stock also slipped. From June 2007 to May 2009 the number of employees who were laid off has reached 28,177 people.

The crisis in print newspaper did not happen in Indonesia. However, what is happening with print newspapers in the United States suggests the adverse effects of the fierce competition between media types. Driven to prevail in the competition, companies re-orient the use of material and human resources. Thus it is the "market" that determines the competency model most appropriate for training business communication students and practitioners.

HUMAN RESOURCES FOR COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY

Below is a description of the core competence needed by communication industry. It is a result of the simple research done by myself where I analyzed the job advertisement for public relations, media and advertising positions found in national newspapers and internet in 2011. The following are the human resource competence often required: the ability to write or the ability to convey ideas/thoughts in the form of text or any non-text; and the ability to speak or the skill to convey the contents of the mind into a verbal and verbal symbols orally. Experience in managerial position or working in the business press media is also highly valued. For advertising positions, expected competence includes highly developed skills in graphics and photography and the knowledge of the latest relevant technology and software. In business public relations, the requirements are



generally not very specific, such as the ability to communicate, both in Indonesian and a foreign language (e.g. English). A specialty area that is “trendy” for public relations revolves around the notion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). For this case, requirements are also general: ability to handle programs, sensitivity to public sentiments, organizing ability, and if possible involvement in social organizations.

When compared with the criteria used in the US, among other countries, those in Indonesia are largely similar. This is because in general, the direction of the development of business communication—whether the media, public relations or advertising—is largely American in orientation. With media and communications industry developing much earlier in the US and other developed countries, they naturally set the trends that are emulated by those in the developing countries such as Indonesia.

Based on the analysis of Indonesian members of LinkedIn whose jobs are related to social and professional media, their general profile reveals a young generation with age not more than 40 years. They exhibit passion, energy, enthusiasm, dynamism and creativity. They have a personality that is delightful to everyone. Their educational backgrounds are generally not within the range of explicitly communication-focused courses offered by numerous universities. They tend to come from a wide range of courses with transferable skills valued in communication industry. The ability to communicate—writing, speaking and building relationship—is a generic skill that can be developed by anyone. As noted in the Encyclopedia of Communication¹⁹, communication is a skill that is naturally possessed by all people.

¹⁹ www.communication encyclopedia.com, retrieved on February 13, 2011.



AIMS OF COMMUNICATION EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

Communication Science education in Indonesia is relatively new compared to other social sciences. Such a recent development is in line with the growth of professional communication and communication industry in Indonesia in recent decades. By 2010, there are 114 universities in Indonesia that offer communication science, 105 graduate programs and nine postgraduate programs. In general, courses or majors are labeled Communication Science.²⁰ Almost all colleges proclaim fairly similar educational purposes. That is, to develop human resources to satisfy the criteria noted earlier.

In education discourses in Indonesia, whether communication is a science and/or an art²¹ has been discussed passionately. The attitudes and perceptions held by scholars and practitioners on the nature of communication carry implications on how curriculum in Communication Studies has been designed. As a science, the curriculum aims at developing rational faculties. Students are expected to develop analytical skills and critical attitude towards a vast range of issues relevant to communication. The ability to think tends to be the focus of education from this standpoint and this gets to be reflected on curriculum designs characterized by a load of communication theories and methodologies, and as well as practices that are meant to hone analytical and critical thinking. Many colleges

²⁰ Data from <http://ban-pt.kemdiknas.go.id/direktori.php>, retrieved on May 10, 2011. This is a feature, among others, that distinguishes it from the case in a several overseas countries such as in the US or Europe where the label of Communication Science is rarely used.

²¹ The approaches are divided into two broad categories: (1) the scientific approach and (2) the humanistic approach. The scientific approach looks at a phenomenon as an object, regardless of the researcher and it leans towards quantitative methodology and positivistic paradigm (West and Turner 2008). The humanistic approach, on the other hand, puts the researcher as a subject involved in the observed phenomena. This approach thus accepts differences and diversity of interpretations. In Indonesia, Communications is recognized as a science and it was based on government decisions (Siregar 2011)



of science communication uphold such aims, at least on paper, as shown for example in the following excerpt:²²

“To create graduates who have qualified (sic) for the theoretical and methodological knowledge (sic) of communication science.. [...]; create critical graduates...” (Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya).

“Mastering the principles and theories of various phenomena of human communication .. [...] (Universitas Sam Ratulangi, Manado)

“Winning (sic) as an institution which educates student to be critical human resources for communication [...], professional [...]; Produce communication scholars who master (sic) the professional excellence (sic) and depth of analysis [...]” (Universitas Islam Indonesia)

“Mastering the basics of scientific methodology so as to develop science communication [...] Having the basic skills in understanding, explaining and solving the problems that exist in the skill areas of Communication Science. [...]” (sic) (Universitas Padjadjaran)

“To produce graduates ...(who) master the concept and competence in the field of communication” (Universitas Tarumamagara, Jakarta)

“Providing education and quality teaching Communication Studies by combining applied and theoretical capabilities.” (sic) (Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta)

“Institutions of higher education who studied science of communication for the realization of the pillars of society and scientific-intellectual tradition that

22 Editor's Note: Despite requests to do so, the author did not clarify whether these passages were his own translations or were directly quoted from the websites of the universities. It appears that it his own translation and because he did not provide the original, there is no way to cross-check translation.

gave priority to balance the principles of science (sic) [...]; Facilitate the establishment of scientific activity in synergy intellectual-dialectic (sic) [...]; Realizing wisdom and critical spirit. [...]” (Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta).

Readily apparent in the mission vision statements of various universities is the avowed emphasis on analytical and critical thinking. A closer look at the curriculum, however, reveals that the ratio of subjects that develop critical and analytical skills and those that seek to develop *technical skill* appears out of sync with the avowed goal of developing such a capability. The subjects that teach “how to do” outnumbers those that expressly aim to develop critical thinking and analytical abilities.

The dominance of the ‘how to do’, technical subjects reflect the need to equip students the technical capabilities in communication. This is in response to the demands of the labor market for such kind of human resource. Educational or training institutions are expected to produce human resources who are ready to produce communication products such as newspapers, radio programs, television and cinema, advertising, releases, clippings, events, and campaigns. Pursuit of practical knowledge also forms part of the vision, mission and educational goals of courses in communication science. Here are some excerpts from communication science educational programs offered in a number of universities in Indonesia:²³

“Developing the faculty filled not only by scientific approaches but also professional [...] has the professional skills of communication to meet the challenges the practices world.” (sic) (Universitas Sahid)

23 Editor's Note: Despite requests to do so, the author did not clarify whether these passages were his own translations or were directly quoted from the websites of the universities. It appears that it his own translation and because he did not provide the original, there is no way to cross-check translations.

"[...] Has the technical expertise and practical with the development of communication technology and the latest media [...] master the creative media applications, managerial skills [...] (sic) (Universitas Airlangga)

"[...] Have knowledge of basic skills in the management of journalism, information and Public Relations." (Universitas Sam Ratulangi)

"[...] .. Have a technical mastery of professional excellence [...] (sic) (Universitas Islam Indonesia)

"[...] Understanding the principles of management and capable of assuming positions in accordance with the communication skills in productive activities [...]" (Universitas Islam Bandung)

"[...] To provide education and quality teaching Communication Studies by combining the capabilities of applied [...]" (sic) (Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta)

The focus on generic practical capabilities—variously referred to in the program goal statements as professional ability, technical ability, the ability to apply—indicate the preference of the various communication programs toward graduates who are readily usable in a wide range of positions. Interest in specialization is relatively low. Such a tendency makes difficult to identify the unique features of each communication education institution. This also makes it difficult for prospective student to choose or determine the area they wish to specialize in.

PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONS?

The relationship between industry and communication education institutions may be characterized as unequal, with the former acting as a patron to the clients that are education

institutions. This seems evident in the tendency of education sector to tailor its communication programs to satisfy the interests of the industry. Despite the purported aim of delivering communication program as a science, the orientation of most communication education programs in Indonesia tends to be practical rather than critical-theoretical. This tendency has been criticized by some as a form of capitalist education, a kind of education oriented towards maximizing profits for big businesses at the expense of the interests of the general public.

Critics believe that in the context of the industry, people are not viewed as unique individuals who have diverse interests and backgrounds. They are regarded as objects with uniform and fairly malleable interests. From their standpoint, science precisely aims at building a human society that is prosperous and yet nurtures its humanity. It is not supposed to create machines or robots out of human beings, to be controlled or manipulated through market forces by business and other interest.

Cognizant of such criticism, some communication programs began to introduce, even adopt, a critical paradigm in the study of communication. This paradigm seeks to sensitize the general public about their freedom to design the kind of life they wish to live, and not be reduced to being puppets who act in accordance with the will of others (read: industrial interests). Some examples are as follows:²⁴

"[...] To master basic concepts, theories of communication science and media studies, is able to provide critical analysis [...] so that they can understand and explain the problems in society [...] for the sake of development, policymaking and community empowerment." (sic) (Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya)

24 Editor's Note: Despite requests to do so, the author did not clarify whether these passages were his own translations or were directly quoted from the websites of the universities. It appears that it his own translation and because he did not provide the original, there is no way to cross-check translations.



“Preparing students to be critical communication scholar, has a depth of knowledge [...]” (sic) (Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta)

“Institutions of higher education who studied science of communication for the realization of the pillars of society and scientific-intellectual tradition that gave priority to balance (sic) the principles of science, ethics, and practice and (is) rooted in the nature of human integrity. [...] To realize the critical spirit of wisdom and progressive humanism in communicative interaction global and local scale between the academic community and society.” (sic) (Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta)

Unfortunately, the formulations seem less concerned than they should have been for the spirit of social service. It is true that the notion of *corporate social responsibility* (CSR) is fairly well emphasized in curricular programs, but in practice the true spirit of this idea hardly penetrates into the management of organizations. That is, while companies pile up CSR program funds in line with government regulations, some of their key practices remain exploitative or are patently harmful to the general public.²⁵ Pragmatism remains the main driving philosophy and whatever CSP programs they support appear to be merely public relations strategy or marketing strategy to achieve profit, not really a pure or sincere corporate social philosophy.

What is objectionable is that this line of thinking forms a part of communication science or public relations programs in universities. This strengthens the observation that communication education merely serves the industry and that higher education has

25 Cigarette factories, for example, have a CSR program to support an anti smoking movement or the movement for public health in general. Mining companies provide sponsorship to tree planting project for 100,000 trees. Small food factory that puts ample chemicals (which cumulatively have a negative impact on health) on their products funds a healthy living campaign.

in itself become an industry that merely pay lip service to the notion of social responsibility. Many communication education programs in the country tend to forget that there are other public needs to be promoted or supported. They ignore the need for curriculum to be responsive to the need to empower communities, groups or individuals.

Communication education in the university and graduate levels should be consistent in its aim to develop critical awareness among students with the hope that such awareness would translate into ethical communication practices when they become professionals or practitioners. By ethical communication practice, it refers to the ability and courage to uphold integrity in the practice of the profession by being able to refuse the temptation of being bribed by, or serving as consultant to, unscrupulous political leaders who seek to mislead the public for their own selfish interests.

The communication education sector should also strive hard at declining operational funding from companies that are not “clean” financially and to refuse to cooperate with, or to place graduates into, companies that ignore the welfare of the consumers. This way, the industry will be motivated to become an institution driven not just by pragmatism and capitalism but by genuine concern for the people. If both have a similar spirit, its relations with education industry will no longer be that of a patron and a client but that of equal partnership as it should be.

The following is an example, so it seems to me, of a formulation of educational goal that reflects the pursuit of excellence in communication education but at the same time cognizant of the need of the community.

“[...] Encouraging students to apply civic responsibility in the media. Their work [...], empower audiences through honesty, integrity and a commitment



to social progress. Students learn the significance of their roles as media professionals, gaining an appreciation of the profound interactions between mass communication and society in order to approach their work with respect, openness, and a broader cultural perspective. "(Colorado University)

It is my fervent hope this formulation is being adopted by universities in Indonesia not just as official rhetoric but also as guiding principle in carrying out education process. The ultimate aim is to educate students to create scholars and professionals who not only have the necessary practical and technical competence to satisfy the need of the market, but ones who are also genuinely concerned about the interests of the public in general. This way, both the education sector and the industry can fulfill their mandate to contribute towards creating a sustainable and more humane world for this and future generation. There is no need to depend on the government regulations, which in any way can, rather easily, be skirted around.

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