

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR ACADEMIC COLLABORATION BETWEEN DISCIPLINES IN THE FACULTIES OF COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Communication Faculties of Turkey, there are various departments which focus on different disciplines of communication. Some of these are Public Relations, Radio, TV and Cinema, Journalism, Visual Communication Design and Communication Design. These departments only educate students to be competent in the related discipline. However, through interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration between departments, they may receive more fruitful and effective educational achievements which will enable them to develop their academic, personal and professional competencies. In this study some practical suggestions will be put forward and discussed with special references to educational contexts in different universities in Turkey.

Key words: Communications Sciences, Interdisciplinary Collaboration/Partnerships, Faculty of Communication

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact universally acknowledged that 2000s have been and will be the years of intense technological, economical and political transformation in which people seek new ways and models for the field of education. As it is known, education has the meaning of coaching and shaping the human being, which further means a society's attempt to raise individuals of knowledge and competence as well as critical thinking and ideology for the society itself, because education is always a part of societal and political dynamics. From this point of view, communication education, more precisely, the education undergoing in Faculties of Communication has come out to be the most complex and problematic areas of higher education in Turkey.

One can claim that communication goes back as far as the human cultural history. Communication, both as a concept and a field of science is considered to be the most comprehensive of all social sciences. Communication theorist Wilbur L. Schramm thinks that "any field concerned with humans and their behaviours must be in contact with communication"(Schramm, 1964), since it encompasses everything from visual arts to writing. Therefore, it is an acceptable condition that communication is an interdisciplinary and collaborative field of science compared to other fields.

The aim of this study is to discuss the communication education in Turkey and determine the necessities to revolutionize the conditions present today. In accordance with this purpose, it is going to be questioned why institutions of communication fails to incorporate it's conceptual interdisciplinary and collaborative meaning to communication education. It is also believed that a review of today's models of education would offer an insight for next generations.

Concept of Communication

Communication, as a word or a concept, is used to describe direct or indirect ways of information exchange. Ünsal Oskay (2001:1) considers it as a product of mankind's struggle for existence, continuously changing in response to course of events. A research on printed materials revealed that the word "communication" has 4560 different uses (Zillioğlu, 1993:4). It is one of the most important elements of human life as it is used to satisfy physical and social needs. It can be any of the following: spreading information, expressing opinions, gestures and facial expressions, talking face-to-face, media, culture, sharing ideas, way of dressing, externalizing personal traits and feelings. In a brief sense, it is the life itself. Communication is a form of art, science and a natural process with a purpose.¹

Obviously, communication embraces every aspect of human life. 126 different definitions have been made to describe it. This number can easily be increased, thanks to the interdisciplinary nature of communication. For the purpose of fully understanding and teaching communication, all disciplines should join forces. In this regard, Ertuğrul Özkök (1985: 17-18), signifies the importance of the interdisciplinary nature and states: "If we are sure

that anthropologist Levi Strauus, sociologist H. Marcuase and linguist F. Saussure contributed greatly to the understanding of communication, then we must admit the multi-disciplinary characteristic of it.”

COMMUNICATION SCIENCE

From a scientific point of view, communication science has been formed through the influences of sciences such as sociology, political science, history, philosophy, social psychology, psychology, linguistics, economy, anthropology, ethnology and epistemology. Biology, electronics, engineering and physics have also contributed much to models, theories and approaches on communication (Güngör, 2013: 33). Just like other scientific fields, it grew out of needs to explain certain phenomena, especially the effects of mass communication devices on the society. The first attempts to understand and define the field of communication through theory and methods commenced in 1920, by pioneering American academicians and experts focusing on mass media such as cinema, radio and newspapers.

Whether it be in Turkey or another country, communication education is a form of social sciences education and it is not a rare instance to see the multifaceted content of communication education, rendering academicians confused about the fields they are working on and the boundaries of their interests, since the graduates of communication are employed as journalists, radio-TV hosts, film producers, directors and scenarists, advertisers and PR specialists and at the same time they try to be communication scientists. Given the problematical conditions in institutions of communication, the departments still manage to attract an increasing number of new students and the multifaceted content enriches communication with added popularity and dynamism.

COMMUNICATION EDUCATION IN TURKEY

The first students of communication in Turkey enrolled in classes in 1950, however, it was not until 1980 that reforms were made in the education. These reforms include legislative regulations, technology adoption and work statements.

Istanbul University Institute of Journalism, founded in 1947, was the first establishment to offer an education programme related to communication. Accepting first students in 1950 and later evolving into Faculty of Communication, Institute of Journalism was materialized by members from Istanbul Society of Journalists. In 1964, Academy of Press and Information came out to be the second attempt to offer a similar programme within Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences.(Abadan-Unat 1972: 67) Unfortunately, these establishments suffered heavily from lack of expertise and infrastructure, and even worse, failure to project any employment opportunities resulted in poor career prospects for the graduated students. The only chances were employment in Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT, the only state-owned institution for Radio and TV at that time) and some advertising companies or staying in faculty. Huge numbers of students pursued careers in fields that had no relation to communication.

The reasons for early inconveniences in faculties of communication include failure to underline the importance of communication education, lack of necessary know-how, expertise and information on foreign practices, lack of crucial technical equipment and infrastructure and no long-term planning. Furthermore, the founders didn't manage to recognize the importance of a dedicated syllabus and they let people from various fields like journalism, advertising, public relations, sociology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics, law, management, economics, pedagogics and even statistics make the four year curriculum decisions, resulting in students with little to no mastery and application in communication science. Those students, in Cyrano Bergerac's opinion; “End up being nothing after pursuing everything”(Onaran, 1988: 8).

Today, Turkey has fifty two faculties offering programmes on communication. Forty two of these are based in state-owned universities and ten are in private or foundation universities (İLAD- İletişim Araştırmaları Derneği, 2017). Despite minor differences, all of these faculties have similar structuring. State-owned universities have three departments: 1.Journalism, 2.Public Relations and Advertising, and 3.Radio-Television and Cinema. Some private or foundation universities have an additional department called “Visual Communications Design”.

Contemporary education in faculties of communication doesn't seem to have changed much since the beginning. Students attend courses from different faculties (management, economics, law, public administration, anthropology), but the content of these courses have little, if not anything, to do with communication science. Especially in private and foundation universities, the applied classes are lectured by film makers, journalists, speakers, writers, advertisers and visual designers from industry and nobody questions their scientific capabilities. Unfortunately, students find themselves in an environment with no scientific discipline and they get in an effortless hurry to finish their classes from various faculties just to obtain a university diploma. Another major problem is that the applied classes usually take just a single year to complete, which is obviously not a

sufficient applied course load for students of a four year programme. Consequently, students lose the possibility of a lifelong, satisfactory professional experience.

The structural problems just cover one side of the coin, on the other side, the student selection and placement system poses a major problem. At the early years of communication institutions, students, who had failed to be placed in a department through regular entrance exams, could prefer aptitude tests to enter communication departments. Today, students of TS (Turkish and Social Sciences branch in high school) branch, who score very low in entrance exams consider communication departments as a last chance to get a university diploma.

Even more, there is an odd practice unique to Turkey. Students who are placed in programmes related to cinema enters regular university entrance examinations. The fact that cinema being a form of art is neglected, nobody examines the artistic capabilities of those students. This is not to say that entrance exams are unnecessary, but these departments need a special method to select students. The academic success and future prospects for these students are open to question.

The problems of communication education are not limited to previously mentioned points. Students of Radio-Television and Cinema are subject to conventional evaluation methods and expected to pass exams and courses. Instead, they should undergo an education that would lay a foundation of arts, aesthetics and visual communication. First starting with basic academic courses, students should then move on to applied courses in which they can make use of department archives, film making workshops and equipment while working on their projects. Projects that will bridge the academic and professional life together.

Determining appropriate educational methods, stating purposes for both academic and applied courses and quality course material and staff are just a set of important factors for a healthy education. Educators need to employ several rather than a single way of teaching and evaluation methods. There is supposed to be questions like how the educational practice should be in Radio-TV and Cinema department which embraces both artistic and scientific elements? How the balance between academic and applied courses should be set? Or should it be a blend of those two? What teaching methods to convey the course material? Does a particular subject needs a plain presentation or application? Only after these questions the educators can turn sample cases into audiovisual material to be used in courses and students will find the chance to experience learning in a medium of production.

Unfortunately, there is not a universal standard in universities of Turkey. Each faculty determines it's own content for courses according to it's physical conditions and staff capacity. Even more, doctoral students open courses covering their own thesis subject. It is really hard to talk about a standard curriculum in faculties of communication.

Joint projects, researches, seminars, applied studies, symposiums and festivals among Turkish universities and even foreign institutions are crucial organizations that are effective in motivating students towards their career path, enabling them use both theoretic and applied knowledge in learning. Foreign language is another fundamental requirement for students of communication. Students need to undergo an education for foreign languages.

Along with course-based learning, students should accomplish internships in industry within four years of education. Newspapers and Television establishments, Advertisement and Public Relations Companies and organizations like Society of Journalists, Public Relations Association and Radio and Television Supreme Council are suitable places to have an internship. These companies and establishments should prefer students from faculties of communication at first place when they have open positions available.

Together with educational suggestions, there is a last important point to be mentioned. Faculties of communication are not vocational schools and it is not their obligation to educate students to be employed in communication industry. The primary objective is to ensure that students go through an academic and artistic education prior to any professional training. Last but not least, the industry should learn to be cooperative with universities since they supply a huge number of employees working in communication sector.

Within EU Adjustment Processes, all Turkish universities adopted "Bologna process" into their curriculums. However, a retroactive education programme is not available yet. Short term solutions do not seem to work out for such fundamental problems.

All the suggestions come to the point that the communication education should aim at combining theory, intellectual competency and application, and keeping good relations with the industry. Three concerns of the education should be: first, a multifaceted behavioural science knowledge to build a strong theory basis and an interdisciplinary approach for education. Second, improved workshop opportunities for applied learning in which students can get a glimpse of real world production. Third, the awareness that communication education can not be limited to classrooms and campuses.

CONCLUSION

The drawbacks mentioned so far shows that the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of communication is not applicable when it comes to education of communication. Instead of asking why other disciplines have involved too much in communications education, the question should be whether they managed to bring an awareness for communication science. In order to do that, educators from various disciplines should search out ways to enhance the course content which would appeal to students from faculties of communication. Academic and applied courses should go hand in hand, blending both theory and real world practice together in a disciplined, artistic and professional fashion. Cooperation between different faculties would ensure that the interdisciplinary nature of communication is in use for education. Therefore, students who acquired diplomas from faculties of communication would be professionals and intellectuals who are capable of research, reasoning and critical thinking. An important point to be remembered is that communication education is a part of socialisation.

The fundamental problem of faculties of communication is pointed out by Gökdağ (2009:156): “Do faculties of communications let students notice what is ethical and what is not? Only way to change human attitude and behaviour is through education. It is a moral necessity for faculties of communication to equip students with ethical reasoning. Deans Council for Faculties of Communication shall lead the way to better conditions for education.”

It is the primary purpose of this study to present significant troubles faced in education of communication. It is obvious that evading the real issue would not bring better tomorrows.

The education should embrace communication’s interdisciplinary and collaborative meaning and it should be the mission of faculties of communication to put forth solutions that have scientific reasoning and explanations. One more thing, societies can prosper in arts and sciences only if they live in a economically and socially stable country.

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