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Editor's Note

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the International Journal of Transnational Education and Governance (IJTEG). The expansion of transnational education, international branch campuses, and cross-border academic partnerships has transformed higher education into an increasingly global enterprise.

While these developments have generated new opportunities for collaboration and innovation, they have also raised important questions regarding governance, institutional autonomy, accountability, quality assurance, and policy coordination. IJTEG has been established to provide an international forum for rigorous scholarship addressing these emerging issues. As a peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary, and open-access journal, IJTEG welcomes original research that advances understanding of governance within transnational and international higher education.

We encourage scholars, practitioners, and policy makers from around the world to contribute research articles, review papers, policy analyses, and case studies that examine both the theoretical foundations and practical challenges of educational governance across national boundaries.

The establishment of IJTEG would not have been possible without the dedication of our Editorial Board, Associate Editors, reviewers, and contributing authors. Their commitment to academic excellence has laid the foundation for what we hope will become a respected international venue for scholarly dialogue and collaboration. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the institutions and colleagues who have supported the launch of this journal.

We hope IJTEG will serve as a vibrant platform for exchanging ideas, fostering international collaboration, and contributing to the continued development of higher education worldwide.

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Communicative competence in Public Administration Graduate curricula

Claude Drolet[1]

Abstract:

Communication is recognized as a core competency of professional public service and is explicitly identified within the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) accreditation standards. However, the extent to which communication is visibly represented within graduate public-service curricula remains unclear. This study updates an earlier examination of communication education by analyzing a stratified purposive sample of 64 NASPAA-accredited public-service programs from the United States and abroad. Program websites, curricula, and course descriptions were examined to determine whether communication was promoted in program descriptions, institutionalized through identifiable communication courses, and visibly associated with NASPAA accreditation. The study also compares communication coursework in public-service programs with that offered in MBA programs at the same institutions. The findings reveal a consistent gap between communication as a stated program competency and communication as a formal curricular component. While nearly half of the sampled programs emphasized communication in their public descriptions, fewer than one-third offered an identifiable communication course. Communication courses were substantially more common, and more frequently required, within MBA curricula. The findings suggest that greater alignment between accreditation competencies, program messaging, and curricular design could strengthen professional preparation for contemporary public service.

Key words: public administration; communicative competence; NASPAA; graduate education; curriculum; professional communication

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1. Introduction

Communication to the public is unquestionably one of the most important government functions. The Government should communicate about adoption of laws, public safety issues, issues with international diplomacy and a list of other topics in an honest and timely manner. Unlike commercial communication, government communication often involves life and death subjects, as during a natural disaster, or with issues that directly impact the people, such as taxes, elections, and public policies. Furthermore, given the deteriorating trust in government and growing negative media coverage of government, public administration experts have suggested that regular, improved public communication about government performance could improve interactions with both the citizens they serve and the media they depend on to deliver their information to the public (Fairbanks, Plowman, and Rawlins 2007).

Communication is also embedded in the everyday work of public administrators. Public-service professionals must explain policies, enforce regulations, prepare reports and grants, collaborate with colleagues, manage disagreements, and interact with community members. Krebs and Tikhomirov's (2026) study of recent MPA alumni illustrates the breadth and complexity of these responsibilities. Alumni described communication as involving not only clear speaking and writing but also audience awareness, appropriate channel selection, active participation in meetings, responsiveness to criticism, and the management of emotionally charged workplace situations. Their experiences demonstrate that communicative competence is not a peripheral professional skill but an essential component of effective public administration.

Indeed, in a survey of public relations practitioners Liu, Horsley, and Levenshus (2010) found that 59% of corporate and 66% of government communicators spend most of their time on external communication activities. Given this importance and challenges, it is critical for public administration scholars to more carefully address government communication and its effect on media coverage and, subsequently, citizen trust. Nevertheless, while the role of communication has been stressed in public administration theory (Khan, 2017), communication has been fundamentally neglected in public administration scholarship and teaching with the exception of political communication (Pandey and Garnett 2006).

Recent research suggests that this situation may be changing, although communication remains unevenly represented in public-affairs curricula. Manoharan and Rangarajan (2022) examined the curricula of 356 public-affairs programs and identified 119 communication-related courses across 74 programs. Only 46 of those courses explicitly included “communication” in the course title. Their findings indicate growing recognition of communication pedagogy in MPA and MPP education while also demonstrating that identifiable communication coursework remains concentrated in a minority of programs.

The MPA has become the internationally recognized “professional” degree for individuals pursuing management careers and senior positions in the public service. MPA programs are now growing at a pace equal to MBA program offerings in the 1960s (Jones, Roberts, Martin, Ahumada, King, & Kircher, 2013). Traditionally, as the literature suggests Yeager, Hildreth, Miller, & Rabin, 2007), MPA students seek an MPA degree for its expected career benefit. Pursuant to this, the international accrediting body for public service instruction, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, has recognized and adopted “universal competencies” that Master of

Public Administration degree programs are expected to develop to establish a "global standard in public service education" (http://www.naspaa.org/). However, while other fields, such as the MBA, have made tremendous strides to incorporate communications in their academic programs, public administration programs have been slow to respond.

Although most practitioners recognize the importance of communication in the workplace, most MPA programs have not fully integrated communicative competency into their curricula. This article explores the challenge of communication in MPA degrees and the implications it represents for instructors seeking to prepare students for the profession of public service and foster a competency to articulate the public service perspective to a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

This study updates an earlier examination of communication in accredited graduate public-service education. Using a stratified purposive sample of 64 NASPAA-accredited public-service programs, it examines whether communication appears in program descriptions and curricula, whether identifiable communication courses are required or elective, and whether institutions visibly advertise their relationship with NASPAA. It also compares communication coursework in public-service programs with that offered in MBA programs at the same institutions. In doing so, the study considers the possible gap between communication as an asserted program outcome and communication as a formally institutionalized curricular component.

2. NASPAA Standards

In considering the core content of graduate public-service programs, several questions come to the fore: Does a degree from one institution signify the same preparation as a similarly titled degree from another? Does the same degree designation

imply comparable curricular content? Are graduates assessed according to common professional competencies? Clark et al. (2014) examined these questions in considering the core curricular components of master's-level public-management education. They concluded that the concept of a curricular core should account for the competencies required by practitioners and recognized by accrediting bodies. Identifying such competencies provides a foundation for comparing programs and assessing the professional preparation they provide.

NASPAA has long played an important role in defining professional expectations for graduate public-service education. Hays and Duke (1996) described this role as establishing a common core of professional knowledge that can guide education and assessment. NASPAA accomplishes this purpose by establishing accreditation standards and evaluating programs through self-study and peer review conducted by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation. This process seeks "to ensure excellence in education and training for public service and to promote the ideal of public service" (Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, 2014). The current standards continue this role by connecting accreditation with program mission, public-service values, student learning, and continuous improvement (NASPAA, 2024).

Accreditation does not mean that programs are identical. Denhardt (2001) emphasized the diversity of public-administration education and the difficulty of defining a single model appropriate to every program. Consistent with this diversity, NASPAA employs a mission-based accreditation model. Programs define their particular purposes, the students and professional communities they serve, the public-service values they emphasize, and the outcomes they intend to produce. Accredited programs consequently retain latitude in designing curricula, admission requirements, and instructional methods,

but they must demonstrate that their missions, governance, resources, student learning, and evaluation processes satisfy common professional standards.

Although NASPAA originated in the United States, its accreditation activities now extend internationally and include master's programs in public administration, public policy, public affairs, public management, and related fields. Variations in degree title are permitted when programs share the primary purpose of preparing leaders, managers, and analysts for public and nonprofit service. This broader definition of eligible public-service programs is especially relevant to the international development of accreditation and to comparisons across differently titled professional degrees.

The NASPAA standards also emphasize the values underlying public-service education. Molina and McKeown (2012) identify democratic, professional, ethical, and human values as central to the public-service profession. The current standards similarly identify accountability, transparency, professionalism, competence, objectivity, ethical conduct, public trust, participation, inclusion, equity, and fairness among the values accredited programs should embody (NASPAA, 2024). These values are expected to be reflected not only in formal mission statements but also in governance, curricula, student learning, and program operations.

Under Standard 5, accredited programs must adopt a set of required competencies based on their missions and public-service values. These competencies encompass five domains: leading and managing in the public interest; participating in and contributing to the policy process; analyzing information, thinking critically, solving problems, and making evidence-informed decisions; articulating and advancing a public-service perspective; and communicating productively and in culturally responsive ways with a diverse and changing workforce and society at large (NASPAA, 2024). Programs may

define additional mission-specific competencies and specializations, but all accredited programs must address these five general domains.

Research supports the professional relevance of competency-based MPA education. Yeager et al. (2007) examined the difference an MPA education makes for graduates and emphasized its expected professional and career benefits. Alagna's (2017) evaluation of an MPA employee-education program found that participants and supervisors perceived improvements in employees' ability to work and communicate with coworkers, supervisors, clients, and community members. Similarly, Haupt et al. (2017) found that local-government managers generally recognized the relevance of NASPAA's core competencies to public-service practice. These findings reinforce the need for educators to connect accreditation competencies with the actual knowledge and abilities graduates use professionally.

NASPAA's annual accreditation reporting also provides information about how programs deliver and assess required competencies (Hamilton, 2018). While such reporting documents whether programs formally address accreditation expectations, the existence of a competency standard does not necessarily reveal how visibly that competency is presented or how directly it is institutionalized through identifiable coursework. This distinction is particularly important for communication because programs may address communication across multiple courses without offering a separately titled communication course.

Finally, Standard 7 requires accredited programs to provide stakeholders with current information about their missions, policies, practices, accomplishments, and student learning outcomes (NASPAA, 2024). The standards therefore connect public communication with the public-service values of transparency and accountability. Examining whether programs publicly identify NASPAA accreditation and

communication competencies is consequently relevant not only to curricular content but also to how programs communicate their missions and outcomes to prospective students and other stakeholders.

3. Communicative Competence and NASPAA

NASPAA's communication competency establishes an expected outcome for accredited public-service programs, but it does not prescribe a particular course or method through which that outcome must be achieved. Under the current standards, programs must prepare graduates "to communicate and interact productively and in culturally responsive ways with a diverse and changing workforce and society at large" (NASPAA, 2024). Programs may address this competency through dedicated communication courses, integration across the curriculum, experiential learning, or combinations of these approaches. Consequently, the presence of communication in the accreditation standards does not necessarily indicate how extensively or explicitly it is represented in a program's curriculum.

The evolution of NASPAA's standards reflects both the development of public-service education and changing expectations of the profession. Accreditation establishes common competency domains and baselines for program quality while allowing programs to pursue distinct missions. Through self-study and peer review, accredited programs must demonstrate how their curricula and assessment practices support the competencies expected of graduates (Raffel et al., 2015). This combination of common professional expectations and mission-based flexibility is important because graduate public-service education serves different levels of government, nonprofit organizations, and a wide variety of professional roles. As Riccucci (2007) observed, the

interdisciplinary foundations and organizational diversity of public administration make it difficult to identify a single best approach to public-administration education.

Evidence from practitioners and students nevertheless indicates considerable agreement about the importance of communication. A NASPAA survey of more than 400 city managers identified globalization, cross-sector management, and collaborative management among the important concerns facing the profession (Raffel et al., 2015). These responsibilities necessarily require public administrators to communicate across organizational and sectoral boundaries. Similarly, a survey of MPA students found that written and oral communication were among the skills they believed potential employers considered most important (NASPAA, 2007). Such findings suggest that communication is not merely an accreditation expectation but a practical competency recognized by students and public-service professionals.

Research examining the relationship between public-service education and professional practice has raised concerns about whether programs provide sufficient preparation in these areas. Lazenby (2010) found that MPA programs concentrating on local government did not adequately cover interpersonal communication, human relations, community building, and leadership. Haupt et al. (2017) similarly found that local-government managers viewed communication as important to public-service practice. Their findings suggest that ineffective communication can contribute to community conflict and that public administrators need to communicate effectively with individuals from government, nonprofit and private organizations, and the broader community.

One challenge is determining how a broadly stated competency becomes identifiable curricular content. Clark et al. (2014) proposed comparing public-management curricula through “normed topics” representing recognizable units of content derived from

professional and accreditation expectations. From this perspective, course titles provide one visible indication of whether a competency has been institutionalized within a curriculum, although titles alone cannot capture communication instruction embedded within other courses. More recently, Manoharan and Rangarajan (2022) identified 119 communication-related courses across 74 of the 356 public-affairs programs they examined, but only 46 courses explicitly included communication in their titles. Their results suggest growing attention to communication pedagogy while also showing that dedicated communication coursework remains limited to a minority of programs.

Communicative competence also requires more than technical proficiency in writing or public speaking. Kapucu and Koliba (2017) argue that public-administration education should provide opportunities for students to exchange and debate ideas through discussion and reflection, thereby strengthening their critical, reflective, and collaborative capacities. Public administrators must work with elected officials, citizens, community organizations, businesses, and government employees, often in situations involving conflicting interests or perspectives. Communication education should therefore develop students' abilities to listen, deliberate, adapt messages to different audiences, explain public value, and navigate disagreement.

These abilities also affect the relationship between government and the public. Improved government communication can contribute to transparency and public trust (Fairbanks et al., 2007), while external communication practices can influence media coverage and public perceptions of government (Liu et al., 2012). Public administrators must therefore be able not only to transmit information but also to explain decisions, demonstrate responsiveness, engage different stakeholders, and communicate the public value produced by government activity. The breadth of these responsibilities reinforces

the importance of examining whether communication is merely identified as a desired competency or is visibly institutionalized within public-service curricula.

The increasing internationalization of higher education and the global labor market has transformed communication competence into an essential component of graduate employability. Graduates entering multinational organizations are expected not only to possess disciplinary knowledge but also to communicate effectively with colleagues, clients, and employers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, employment interview preparation should equip learners with the ability to communicate across a range of professional contexts rather than preparing them for a single culturally bounded interview model.

Contemporary research on professional communication emphasis that workplace interaction extends beyond linguistic accuracy. Effective communication requires individuals to explain ideas clearly, justify decisions, respond appropriately to unfamiliar situations, and adapt their communication to different audiences and organisational contexts (Bhatia & Bremner, 2014; Holmes, 2015). Within multilingual workplaces, English frequently functions as a shared means of communication among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. Accordingly, successful communication depends on communicative effectiveness, pragmatic awareness, interactional flexibility, and the ability to negotiate meaning rather than strict adherence to native-speaker norms (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013).

These perspectives have important implications for employment interview preparation. If communication styles and interview expectations differ across professional and cultural contexts, learners should be prepared to recognize diverse questioning styles, interpret communicative intentions, and adapt their responses

appropriately. Interview preparation therefore involves developing flexible communication strategies rather than rehearsing fixed answers or following a single interview convention.

Recent research further argues that successful communication in multilingual workplaces requires linguacultural competence, integrating linguistic proficiency with pragmatic awareness, intercultural understanding, and adaptive communication strategies (Peltonen & Hu, 2025). Such competencies enable professionals to recognise differences in communication styles, adjust their discourse to diverse interactional contexts, and establish effective professional relationships across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Viewed collectively, this literature suggests that effective employment interview preparation should expose learners to a wider range of question forms, communicative functions, and interactional styles than those represented in a single national or cultural context. Preparing learners for multilingual professional communication therefore requires instructional materials that reflect the diversity of contemporary international employment practices rather than a single standardized interview model.

4. Comparing Communication Education in Public-Service and MBA Programs

Graduate public-service programs have frequently been compared with other forms of professional education, particularly MBA programs. Both degrees prepare students for managerial and leadership responsibilities, although they differ in their institutional settings, professional values, and intended sectors of employment. Scholars have consequently questioned the extent to which business-management models should inform professional education in public and nonprofit administration (Hallinger & Lu, 2013).

The comparison nevertheless provides a useful basis for examining how different professional degree programs institutionalize competencies that are important across sectors.

The inclusion of communication in MBA education is not new. As early as the 1980s, business and communication scholars advocated incorporating communication instruction into business curricula to prepare future managers for the changing demands of organizational life (Wright, 1982). Communication ability has subsequently been associated with managerial performance and leadership effectiveness (Penley et al., 1991). Datar et al. (2010) similarly identified clear communication and critical thinking among the capabilities business schools needed to develop more effectively in their graduates. Within MBA education, communication has variously been approached as a technical skill, a managerial competency, and a strategic leadership function (Rath, 2013).

Business schools have adopted several approaches to developing communication competence. Cyphert (2002) found that students considered communication-focused coursework valuable and that integrating communication with business content offered pedagogical advantages. Business programs have also employed experiential and service-learning activities involving nonprofit organizations, social enterprises, and international organizations to prepare students for leadership in complex organizational environments (Metcalf, 2010). These approaches reflect an increasing recognition that effective management requires more than technical business knowledge.

Marcel and Ross Mahon (2019) provide more direct evidence concerning the place of communication in MBA curricula. Using the rankings of the top 100 U.S. MBA programs as a proxy for program quality, they found that a higher ratio of graduate communication courses to internal case competitions was associated with higher program rankings. Required communication coursework was also associated with reputational

advantage. Their findings suggest that prominent business schools treat communication as a formal curricular component rather than relying exclusively on extracurricular competitions or assuming that students will acquire communication skills indirectly. The authors' abstract supports these specific findings.

Comparing public-service and MBA curricula at the same institutions therefore offers a focused way to examine how communication is treated across professional fields. The comparison does not assume that MBA practices should serve as a model for public-service education, nor does it suggest that a separately titled course is the only means of developing communicative competence. It does, however, reveal whether universities that formalize communication instruction in one professional program do the same in another. This distinction is particularly relevant because communication is an explicit universal competency for NASPAA-accredited programs.

5. Research Questions

NASPAA-accredited public-service programs must demonstrate how their students develop the universal competencies required for professional public service. However, the inclusion of communication within NASPAA's standards does not necessarily indicate how visibly programs promote that competency or how explicitly it is represented in their curricula. This study therefore examines communication both as an asserted program outcome and as an identifiable curricular component. It also compares communication coursework in public-service and MBA programs at the same institutions.

The following research questions guide the analysis:

- To what extent do NASPAA-accredited public-service programs identify communication in their program descriptions, learning outcomes, or other promotional materials?
- To what extent do these programs offer identifiable communication courses, and are those courses required or elective?
- To what extent do the institutions in the sample offer MBA programs, and how frequently do those MBA programs include required or elective communication courses?

What relationship exists between promoting communication as a program competency and offering an identifiable communication course?

How does the curricular treatment of communication in NASPAA-accredited public-service programs compare with its treatment in MBA programs at the same institutions?

To what extent do the sampled programs make their NASPAA accreditation visible on their public websites?

6. Method

6.1 The 2019 Baseline Study

The original study used NASPAA's online database to identify accredited MPA programs. Data were collected from publicly available program websites, university catalogs, curricula, and course listings. Program and curriculum pages were searched visually and through browser search functions for evidence of communication coursework. Communication courses were coded according to whether they were included in the curriculum as required courses or electives.

The original analysis identified 239 accredited MPA programs. The institutions were also examined to determine whether they offered MBA programs and whether those MBA programs included communication coursework. Of the 239 institutions, 224 offered an MBA.

Two supplementary analyses were conducted. First, a random subsample of 100 programs without an identifiable MPA communication course was examined for references to NASPAA accreditation and communication as a program outcome or competency. Second, a purposive sample of 10 highly ranked public-affairs programs was examined using the 2019 U.S. News & World Report rankings.

6.2 The 2026 Update

The updated study employed a stratified purposive sample of 64 institutions appearing on the 2025–2026 NASPAA roster. The sample consisted of 48 U.S. and 16 international institutions. It included accredited public-service programs bearing several degree titles, including Master of Public Administration, Master of Public Policy, and closely related public-management and public-affairs degrees.

Institutions were selected to provide geographic and institutional diversity while retaining programs examined in the original study wherever possible. The U.S. sample included institutions from the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West, while the international sample included programs from Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. The resulting sample is intended to support descriptive and comparative analysis; it is not statistically representative of all NASPAA-accredited programs.

Data were collected from publicly accessible program websites, curriculum pages, university catalogs, course descriptions, and, where necessary, archived or

supplementary program documents. Each institution was coded according to six variables:

1) whether NASPAA accreditation was mentioned or visibly identified on the program website;
2) whether communication appeared in the program description, stated competencies, learning outcomes, or promotional language;
3) whether the public-service curriculum contained an identifiable communication course;
4) whether the communication course was required or elective;
5) whether the institution offered an MBA; and
6) whether the MBA curriculum included a required or elective communication course.

For curricular coding, a course was counted when communication was explicitly identifiable in its title, including titles referring to managerial, organizational, strategic, professional, political, or intercultural communication. A course was not coded as a communication course solely because its description mentioned communication or because it contained broadly adjacent content. For example, a course such as “Digital Communities and Public Transformation” was not counted without more explicit evidence in the course title. This stricter criterion provided a consistent and reproducible distinction between communication embedded across the curriculum and communication institutionalized as an identifiable course.

The analysis is subject to several limitations. University websites and catalogs change over time, and publicly available materials may not capture all courses currently offered. Communication may also be taught within courses whose titles do not identify it explicitly. Therefore, a “No” designation means that no qualifying evidence was

identified in publicly available materials; it does not establish that students receive no communication instruction. Finally, differences between the 2019 and 2026 sampling designs prevent the two sets of percentages from being interpreted as direct estimates of change over time.

7. Results: 2019 Baseline and 2026 Update

7.1 The 2019 Baseline

The original analysis identified communication courses in 34 of the 239 accredited MPA programs, or 14.2%. Among the 224 institutions that also offered an MBA, 86 MBA programs, or 38.4%, included communication coursework. Communication courses were therefore more than twice as common in MBA curricula as in the MPA curricula examined.

The supplementary analysis of 100 MPA programs without identifiable communication courses found that 69 mentioned or advertised NASPAA accreditation on their websites. Forty identified communication as a program outcome, competency, or other element of the program description. Thus, communication was promoted more frequently than it was represented through an identifiable course.

A separate examination of 10 highly ranked public-affairs programs produced a similar pattern. Only one offered an identifiable communication course, while six mentioned NASPAA and five referred to communication as an outcome or competency.

7.2 The 2026 Sample

The 2026 analysis found that 57 of the 64 sampled programs, or 89.1%, made their NASPAA accreditation visible on their websites. Communication appeared in the

program description, competencies, learning outcomes, or promotional language of 31 programs, or 48.4%.

Twenty-one programs, or 32.8%, offered an identifiable communication course. Of these 21 courses, 13 were required and eight were elective or optional. Thus, 61.9% of the identified public-service communication courses were required, while 38.1% were elective or optional.

Table 1: Characteristics of the 2026 Sample of NASPAA-Accredited Public-Service Programs

2026 measure	Programs	Percentage
NASPAA identified on website	57/64	89.1%
Communication promoted	31/64	48.4%
Public-service communication course	21/64	32.8%
Required public-service communication course	13/21	61.9%
Elective or optional public-service course	8/21	38.1%
Institution offers an MBA	56/64	87.5%
MBA communication course among MBA institutions	34/56	60.7%

7.3 Communication as promotion and Curriculum

The results reveal a gap between communication as a stated program characteristic and communication as an identifiable curricular component. Of the 31 programs promoting communication, 12 offered a communication course and 19 did not. Therefore, only 38.7% of programs promoting communication supported that emphasis with an identifiable communication-titled course.

Nine additional programs offered a communication course without emphasizing communication in their program descriptions. Among the 33 programs not promoting communication, 27.3% nevertheless offered an identifiable course.

Table 2: Communication as a Promoted Competency and an Identifiable Curricular Component

Communication presentation	Has communication course	No communication course	Total
Communication promoted	12	19	31
Communication not promoted	9	24	33
Total	21	43	64

The largest substantive category was therefore composed of programs that promoted communication but did not offer an identifiable communication course. Nineteen of the 31 programs promoting communication, or 61.3%, fell into this category. Promotional language consequently did not reliably indicate whether communication had been institutionalized as a separate curricular offering.

7.4 Comparison to MBA programs

Fifty-six of the 64 institutions offered an MBA. Among these institutions, 34 MBA programs, or 60.7%, included an identifiable communication course. MBA communication courses were therefore substantially more common than communication courses in the public-service programs, where the corresponding figure was 32.8%.

MBA communication courses were also more likely to be compulsory. Of the 34 identified MBA courses, 28 were required, four were elective or optional, and two did not have a clearly specified status. Required courses therefore represented 82.4% of identifiable MBA communication courses, compared with 61.9% of communication courses in the public-service programs.

Among the 56 institutions offering both types of professional education:

- 13 offered communication courses in both programs;

- 21 offered an MBA communication course but no public-service communication course;
- Six offered a public-service communication course but no MBA communication course; and
- 16 offered no identifiable communication course in either program.

The most notable category consisted of the 21 institutions that formalized communication within their MBA curricula but did not offer an identifiable equivalent in their NASPAA-accredited public-service programs.

7.5 U.S. and International Programs

Communication appeared in the program descriptions or stated outcomes of 10 of the 16 international programs, or 62.5%, compared with 21 of the 48 U.S. programs, or 43.8%. International programs were also somewhat more likely to offer a public-service communication course: seven of 16 international programs, or 43.8%, compared with 14 of 48 U.S. programs, or 29.2%.

MBA availability differed considerably between the two groups. Nine of the 16 international institutions offered an MBA, compared with 47 of the 48 U.S. institutions. Four of the nine MBA-offering international institutions, or 44.4%, included an MBA communication course. Among U.S. institutions, 30 of the 47 MBA programs, or 63.8%, included one.

These regional results should be interpreted descriptively because of the small and purposively selected international sample. Nevertheless, they suggest that international public-service programs were more likely to promote communication and offer identifiable communication coursework, while communication courses were more prevalent in the MBA curricula of the sampled U.S. institutions.

7.6 Interpreting the Historical Comparison

The 2019 census and 2026 purposive sample both show that communication coursework was more prevalent in MBA programs than in public-service programs. However, the increase from 14.2% in the 2019 MPA census to 32.8% in the 2026 sample should not be interpreted as a direct measure of curricular growth. The original study examined a census of accredited MPA programs, whereas the updated study used a purposive sample that included MPA, MPP, public-management, and related public-service degrees. It also deliberately retained several programs previously known to offer communication coursework.

The appropriate longitudinal conclusion is therefore limited: despite differences in sampling and program composition, the updated results reproduce the central pattern identified in 2019. Communication is more frequently formalized in MBA curricula than in NASPAA-accredited public-service curricula, and public-service programs are more likely to promote communication as a desirable competency than to offer an identifiable course devoted to it.

8. Discussion

Graduate public-service education is intended to prepare students for professional roles involving the development, implementation, and evaluation of public policies, programs, and services. Although public administration has intellectual roots in political science and has also been influenced by business and management education, its defining purpose remains preparation for work in the public and nonprofit sectors (Shevchenko, 2016). Communication is central to that purpose because public administrators must

explain policies, collaborate across organizational boundaries, engage citizens and stakeholders, and articulate the public value produced by government activity.

The results nevertheless reveal a distinction between communication as an asserted competency and communication as an identifiable curricular component. Almost half of the sampled programs referred to communication in their descriptions, competencies, learning outcomes, or promotional materials, but fewer than one-third offered a communication-titled course. Most notably, 19 of the 31 programs promoting communication did not offer an identifiable communication course. Communication therefore appears more frequently as an expected attribute of graduates than as a separately visible area of curricular instruction.

This finding does not necessarily mean that those programs fail to teach communication. NASPAA's mission-based standards permit programs to develop the universal competencies through different curricular and pedagogical arrangements. Communication may be embedded in courses involving policy analysis, public management, research methods, capstone projects, internships, or experiential learning. A website and course-title analysis cannot capture all such instruction. Nevertheless, a program that publicly emphasizes communication without identifying where or how the competency is developed leaves prospective students and other stakeholders with limited evidence of its curricular implementation.

The findings are broadly consistent with Manoharan and Rangarajan's (2022) conclusion that attention to communication pedagogy is growing but remains concentrated within a minority of public-affairs programs. Their broader definition identified communication-related courses addressing writing, media, advocacy, storytelling, marketing, and data visualization, whereas the present study applied the narrower requirement that communication be explicitly identifiable in the course title.

The two studies consequently measure somewhat different forms of curricular visibility, but both indicate uneven institutionalization of communication education.

The comparison with MBA programs makes this pattern more pronounced. Among the 56 institutions offering an MBA, 60.7% included an identifiable MBA communication course. At the same institutions, only 32.8% of the sampled public-service programs offered one. Twenty-one institutions offered communication coursework in their MBA programs but not in their public-service programs, while only six displayed the opposite pattern. This comparison does not suggest that public-service curricula should imitate MBA curricula. Public administration involves distinct professional values, audiences, responsibilities, and communication contexts. It does demonstrate, however, that many universities formally recognize communication as a teachable managerial competency in business education without giving it equally visible curricular status in public-service education.

Course status reinforces the contrast. Approximately 82% of the identifiable MBA communication courses were required, compared with approximately 62% of the public-service communication courses. MBA programs were therefore not only more likely to offer communication courses but also more likely to require students to complete them. This finding suggests that communication is more consistently institutionalized as a common component of professional preparation in the sampled MBA programs. In public-service programs, communication instruction was more likely to depend on program choice, student selection of an elective, or integration within other coursework.

The U.S.–international comparison provides an additional, although tentative, perspective. The sampled international public-service programs were more likely than the U.S. programs to promote communication and to offer identifiable communication coursework. However, the small, purposively selected international group does not

support broad generalizations about regional differences. It does suggest that the international expansion of NASPAA accreditation has not produced a single uniform curricular approach. Programs adapt the universal competencies to different institutional, professional, and national environments.

The findings also help clarify what communicative competence entails. Recent MPA alumni have described professional communication as extending beyond clear writing and speaking to include audience analysis, channel selection, meeting participation, responsiveness to criticism, collaborative decision-making, and the management of disagreement and emotionally difficult interactions (Krebs & Tikhomirov, 2026). Programs may therefore need to consider not only whether communication appears somewhere in the curriculum but also whether students receive deliberate instruction, practice, feedback, and assessment across this broader range of professional situations.

The appropriate implication is not that every accredited program must create a standalone communication course. Programs may reasonably integrate communication across the curriculum when that approach is systematic and assessable. The findings instead point to a need for greater alignment among stated competencies, curricular design, and publicly available evidence. If communication is presented as an important program outcome, programs should be able to identify where it is taught, how students practice it, and how achievement of the competency is assessed.

9. Conclusion

Communication is a central component of effective public service and an explicit competency within NASPAA's accreditation standards. Public administrators must communicate across organizational, professional, cultural, and national boundaries while

responding to diverse and changing workplaces and societies. Communicative competence therefore extends beyond the ability to transmit information; it includes the capacity to listen, deliberate, collaborate, explain decisions, navigate disagreement, and engage different stakeholders productively (Appe et al., 2016; Krebs & Tikhomirov, 2026).

The 2026 findings reproduce the central pattern observed in the 2019 study, although the different sampling designs prevent direct estimates of change over time. Communication remains more frequently formalized through identifiable—and especially required—coursework in MBA programs than in NASPAA-accredited public-service programs. The updated analysis also reveals a gap between communication as a promoted competency and communication as a visible curricular component: most programs emphasizing communication in their public descriptions did not offer an identifiable communication-titled course.

These findings should not be interpreted as evidence that communication is absent from programs without a dedicated course. Communication may be embedded effectively throughout the curriculum, and course titles provide only one measure of curricular attention. Nevertheless, accredited programs that identify communication as an important outcome should make its curricular location, pedagogical development, and assessment more visible. Greater alignment between accreditation expectations, program claims, and curricular practice would strengthen professional preparation and provide clearer evidence that graduates are being prepared for the communicative demands of contemporary public service.

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Preparing Students for Professional Communication in Transnational Education: A Contrastive Analysis of Korean and International English Employment Interview Materials

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Abstract:

Employment interviews are an important form of professional communication, yet little research has compared how Korean and internationally developed interview preparation materials represent interview communication. This study employs a qualitative contrastive content analysis of Korean and international employment interview questions. Drawing on Kearsley's (1976) framework of question forms and Candlin's (1976) framework of pragmatic functions, interview questions were analyzed according to their grammatical structure and communicative purpose. The findings indicate that while both corpora rely predominantly on open-ended questions, Korean materials emphasize factual information and qualification confirmation, whereas international materials place greater emphasis on explanation, reflection, and professional self-presentation. These patterns suggest different pedagogical conceptions of employment interview communication. The study argues that effective interview preparation should move beyond teaching question types toward developing learners' awareness of the communicative purposes and professional expectations embedded in interview questions. The findings contribute to employment interview pedagogy and curriculum development for multilingual professional communication within transnational higher education.

Key words: Transnational Education, Employment Interviews, Graduate Employability, Pragmatic Functions

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1. Introduction

Employment interviews are widely recognized as one of the most important forms of professional communication in contemporary recruitment processes. Beyond evaluating applicants' qualifications, interviews require candidates to demonstrate communicative competence, interpersonal skills, and the ability to present themselves effectively within organizational and cultural expectations. As Korean graduates increasingly pursue employment in multinational corporations and internationally oriented organizations, success in employment interviews has become an essential component of career preparation. Although Korea's youth labor market has gradually recovered following the COVID-19 pandemic, competition for high-quality employment remains intense. In March 2025, the youth unemployment rate reached its highest level in four years, highlighting the continuing importance of career preparation and graduate employability among university students (Jung & Kim, 2025).

Career education has therefore become an increasingly important component of higher education in South Korea. Career development scholars have long emphasized employment interview preparation as an essential element of career education (Herr et al., 2004). Likewise, many Korean university students view English interview preparation as a means of improving employment opportunities and frequently seek additional guidance through university English programs (Drolet, 2013). Consequently, employment interview education should prepare students not only to answer questions in English but also to communicate effectively in authentic professional settings.

Although employment interviews are often viewed as language-learning tasks within English education, they are more accurately understood as communicative events in

which applicants and interviewers negotiate meaning through culturally and professionally appropriate communication styles. Interview success depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on pragmatic competence, interactional appropriateness, and the ability to recognize the communicative intent underlying interview questions. These communicative demands become even more significant as graduates seek employment in multilingual and internationally oriented organizations, where successful communication requires adaptation to diverse linguistic, cultural, and organizational expectations.

Recent scholarship on multilingual professional communication similarly emphasizes that effective workplace interaction depends upon speakers' ability to adapt their communication styles across diverse linguistic and cultural environments rather than conforming exclusively to native-speaker norms (Peltonen & Hu, 2025). Studies of international recruitment have likewise questioned assumptions of a single universal interview style, demonstrating that appropriate professional communication is negotiated within specific organizational and intercultural contexts (Bonelli & Zhu, 2025).

Despite extensive research on employment interviews, previous studies have primarily examined interviewer decision-making, applicant evaluation, and interview effectiveness (Posthuma et al., 2002; Macan, 2009). Comparatively little attention has been devoted to the communication styles represented in employment interview preparation materials, particularly within Korean EFL contexts. Moreover, few studies have compared the form and pragmatic function of interview questions found in Korean instructional materials with those presented in internationally developed interview resources. Because employment interview communication is realized primarily through questions, examining both their structural forms and communicative functions provides an appropriate basis for comparing how instructional materials prepare learners for professional interview interaction across educational contexts.

Drawing upon classical theories of question form and communicative function (Candlin, 1976; Kearsley, 1976), together with contemporary perspectives on professional communication and multilingual workplace communication, the study examines the grammatical forms and pragmatic functions represented in interview questions. The resulting patterns are subsequently interpreted to explore the broader communication styles reflected in Korean and international interview preparation materials.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Communication Styles in Cross-cultural Employment Interviews

Communication styles vary across cultures, professional communities, and organizational contexts, influencing how individuals exchange information, establish relationships, and accomplish communicative goals. Research in intercultural communication has consistently demonstrated that differences in directness, politeness, turn-taking, self-presentation, and information organization affect how messages are produced and interpreted during professional interaction (Hall, 1976; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Such differences become particularly significant in employment interviews, where applicants are expected not only to provide accurate information but also to communicate competence, professionalism, and credibility.

Employment interviews are therefore shaped by interactional expectations that extend beyond linguistic accuracy. Applicants must determine how much detail to provide, how directly to answer questions, how to present achievements, and how to balance confidence with humility. These expectations are influenced by cultural conventions, organizational norms, and professional practices, meaning that communication

considered appropriate in one context may not necessarily be interpreted in the same way in another (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999).

Earlier intercultural communication research frequently explained these differences through broad cultural frameworks such as Hall's (1976) distinction between high-context and low-context communication. While such models continue to provide useful conceptual insights, more recent research argues that communication styles should not be viewed as fixed characteristics of national cultures. Rather, communicative practices are dynamic, context-dependent, and negotiated according to the participants, organizational expectations, and interactional purposes involved (Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Holmes, 2015).

These observations have important implications for employment interview preparation. If interview communication varies across cultural and professional contexts, learners should be prepared for a range of communicative expectations rather than a single standardized interview model. Understanding differences in communication styles therefore provides an important foundation for examining how interview preparation materials represent different approaches to employment interview interaction.

2.2 Question Forms and Pragmatic Functions

Employment interviews are conducted primarily through questions. However, interview questions serve purposes that extend beyond simply requesting information. They organize interaction, guide the flow of conversation, establish institutional roles, and provide applicants with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, experience, judgement, and professional competence. Consequently, analyzing interview communication requires attention not only to the grammatical forms of questions but also to the communicative functions they perform.

Early studies of institutional discourse challenged the assumption that questions should be classified solely according to grammatical structure. Candlin (1976) argued that questions fulfil a wide variety of communicative purposes and therefore cannot be adequately understood through structural categories alone. Similarly, Kearsley (1976) proposed that questions perform multiple discourse functions, including requesting factual information, eliciting explanations, encouraging evaluation, prompting reflection, and clarifying understanding. Together, these studies established an important distinction between question form and question function, demonstrating that similar grammatical structures may perform different communicative purposes depending on the interactional context.

This distinction is particularly relevant to employment interviews. A grammatically similar question may invite applicants to describe previous experiences, explain decision-making processes, justify professional choices, or reflect upon workplace situations. Consequently, successful interview performance depends not only on recognizing the grammatical form of a question but also on understanding the communicative purpose that underlies it. Applicants who recognize these pragmatic expectations are better able to organize information strategically and provide responses that address interviewers' intended objectives.

For employment interview preparation, this distinction has important educational implications. Instruction that focuses primarily on memorizing model answers or practicing isolated question types may overlook the communicative purposes embedded within interview interaction. Preparing learners for diverse interview contexts therefore requires attention to both the structural forms of interview questions and the pragmatic functions they perform.

Accordingly, the present study adopts Candlin's (1976) distinction between question form and communicative function as its primary analytical framework. By comparing both the grammatical forms and pragmatic functions represented in Korean and international employment interview materials, the study examines how different instructional resources conceptualistic employment interview communication and prepare learners for a range of professional interview contexts.

2.3 Preparing Learners for Multilingual Professional Communication

The increasing internationalization of higher education and the global labor market has transformed communication competence into an essential component of graduate employability. Graduates entering multinational organizations are expected not only to possess disciplinary knowledge but also to communicate effectively with colleagues, clients, and employers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, employment interview preparation should equip learners with the ability to communicate across a range of professional contexts rather than preparing them for a single culturally bounded interview model.

Contemporary research on professional communication emphasis that workplace interaction extends beyond linguistic accuracy. Effective communication requires individuals to explain ideas clearly, justify decisions, respond appropriately to unfamiliar situations, and adapt their communication to different audiences and organizational contexts (Bhatia & Bremner, 2014; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). Within multilingual workplaces, English frequently functions as a shared means of communication among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. Accordingly, successful communication depends on communicative effectiveness, pragmatic awareness, interactional flexibility, and the ability to negotiate meaning rather than strict adherence to native-speaker norms

(Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013).

These perspectives have important implications for employment interview preparation. If communication styles and interview expectations differ across professional and cultural contexts, learners should be prepared to recognize diverse questioning styles, interpret communicative intentions, and adapt their responses appropriately. Interview preparation therefore involves developing flexible communication strategies rather than rehearsing fixed answers or following a single interview convention.

Recent research further argues that successful communication in multilingual workplaces requires linguacultural competence, integrating linguistic proficiency with pragmatic awareness, intercultural understanding, and adaptive communication strategies (Peltonen & Hu, 2025). Such competencies enable professionals to recognize differences in communication styles, adjust their discourse to diverse interactional contexts, and establish effective professional relationships across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Viewed collectively, this literature suggests that effective employment interview preparation should expose learners to a wider range of question forms, communicative functions, and interactional styles than those represented in a single national or cultural context. Preparing learners for multilingual professional communication therefore requires instructional materials that reflect the diversity of contemporary international employment practices rather than a single standardized interview model.

2.4 Employment Interview Preparation in Transnational Education: Research Gap

The rapid internationalization of higher education has substantially expanded the role of Transnational Education (TNE) in preparing graduates for increasingly global and

multilingual workplaces. International branch campuses, joint-degree programs, and other cross-border educational initiatives aim not only to provide academic knowledge but also to develop graduates' capacity to communicate effectively across linguistic, cultural, and professional boundaries (Knight, 2013; Healey, 2018). Within these educational contexts, graduate employability has become an important measure of institutional effectiveness, with communication competence consistently identified as one of the most highly valued professional skills by employers.

Employment interview preparation therefore represents an important component of employability education. Preparing students for interviews requires more than teaching appropriate vocabulary or rehearsed responses; it also involves developing the ability to recognize diverse communication styles, interpret different types of interview questions, and respond effectively across a range of professional contexts. These competencies are particularly important for graduates seeking employment in multinational organizations and internationally oriented workplaces.

Despite the importance of employment interview preparation, existing research remains fragmented across several disciplines. Human resource management research has primarily examined interviewer decision-making, applicant evaluation, and personnel selection processes (Posthuma et al., 2002; Levashina et al., 2014). Studies within applied linguistics and English language education have focused largely on language proficiency, communicative competence, or classroom instruction, while pragmatics research has investigated how questions function within discourse and institutional interaction (Candlin, 1976; Kearsley, 1976). Although each of these bodies of literature contributes valuable insights, they have generally developed independently and have rarely been integrated into a framework for employment interview preparation within transnational higher education.

Furthermore, relatively little research has systematically compared employment interview preparation materials developed in different educational contexts. In particular, few studies have examined how Korean and internationally published interview materials differ in their use of question forms, pragmatic functions, and communication styles, or considered how these differences may influence learners' preparation for multilingual professional communication.

Addressing these gaps, the present study adopts a contrastive analysis of Korean and international employment interview preparation materials by examining the forms, functions, and communication styles represented in interview questions. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to employment interview pedagogy, curriculum development, and graduate employability within transnational higher education by providing evidence-based guidance for instructional materials that better prepare learners for contemporary international employment contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Two analytical dimensions guided the investigation: question form and pragmatic function. These analytical dimensions provided the empirical basis for interpreting broader communication styles during the discussion of the findings. A contrastive design was selected because it allows systematic comparison of pedagogical materials developed in different educational and cultural contexts. This approach makes it possible to identify differences not only in the grammatical structure of interview questions but also in the communicative assumptions embedded within interview preparation materials.

Although the instructional materials analyzed in this study were published between 2016 and 2018, they remain appropriate because the purpose of this study is not to evaluate current interview textbooks but to compare the communicative models embedded in Korean and internationally developed interview preparation materials during a formative period of English interview education in Korea.

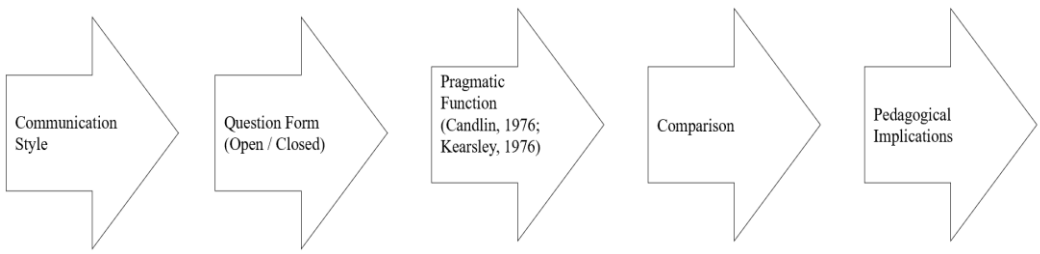


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

3.2 Data Sources

Two sets of employment interview preparation materials were selected for comparison. The Korean corpus consisted of employment interview preparation textbooks commonly used by Korean university students preparing for domestic and international employment. The primary textbook analyzed was designed for students seeking positions with international airlines and multinational employers. The textbook organized interview questions into twelve situational categories, including personal background, teamwork, customer service, overseas experience, and scenario-based interviews.

The international corpus consisted of interview preparation materials produced by a Canadian government-sponsored employment agency and commonly used in North American career preparation programs. These materials emphasized competency-based interviewing, behavioral interviewing, career goals, and problem-solving questions.

Only interview questions intended for applicant preparation were included in the analysis. Explanatory text, vocabulary exercises, and model answers were excluded to ensure comparability between the two corpora.

Table 1. Summary of Data Sources

Corpus	Source	Purpose	Questions
Korean (KE)	Korean employment interview textbook	International employment preparation	163
International (IE)	Canadian employment interview guide	Career preparation	105

3.3 Analytical Framework

Two analytical dimensions guided the analysis of employment interview questions: question form and pragmatic function. Together, these dimensions enabled systematic comparison of the structural and communicative characteristics of interview questions across the Korean and international corpora.

Question Form:

The grammatical form of each interview question was classified according to the taxonomy proposed by Kearsley (1976) and further informed by Mahood (2014). Questions were initially categorized as open or closed, with additional attention given to directive forms (e.g., *Tell me about yourself*), WH-questions, and yes/no questions. This classification enabled comparison of the structural characteristics of interview questions across the two corpora.

Pragmatic Function:

Questions were also classified according to their communicative purpose. Following Candlin (1976), question functions included eliciting new information, clarification, explanation, confirmation, evaluation, and elaboration. This analytical dimension moved

beyond grammatical structure to examine the communicative purposes represented in employment interview discourse.

Rather than serving as an independently coded analytical category, communication style was interpreted from the combined patterns of question forms and pragmatic functions identified across the two corpora. This interpretive perspective informed the discussion of broader communicative orientations reflected in Korean and international interview preparation materials.

Table 2. Analytical Framework

Analytical Dimension	Purpose	Primary References
Question Form	Examine grammatical structure	Kearsley (1976); Mahood (2014)
Pragmatic Function	Identify communicative purpose	Candlin (1976)

Note. It was interpreted from the combined patterns of question forms and pragmatic functions and is discussed as an interpretive finding in Section 4.

3.4 Data Analysis

Interview questions from both corpora were independently coded according to question form and pragmatic function before being compared across the two datasets.

Quantitative comparisons were conducted by calculating the frequency of each question type within the Korean and international materials. These frequencies provided an overview of structural differences between the two corpora.

The quantitative findings were then supplemented with qualitative analysis to interpret broader communication styles represented by the interview questions. Rather than treating question forms as isolated grammatical structures, this stage examined how combinations of question types reflected different assumptions about professional communication and applicant performance.

Finally, representative interview questions from both corpora were compared to illustrate how similar communicative purposes were realized through different linguistic forms and interactional expectations.

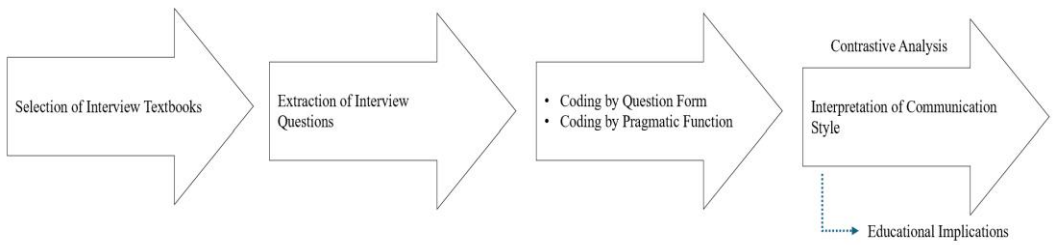


Figure 2. Data Analysis Procedure

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the contrastive analysis of Korean (KE) and internationally developed (IE) employment interview preparation materials. The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the characteristics of the Korean interview corpus were examined and reorganized into analytically comparable categories. Second, the grammatical forms of interview questions were compared. Third, the pragmatic functions represented by the interview questions were analyzed. Finally, learner response data were examined to explore how Korean university students interpreted and responded to different interview question types. These findings provide the empirical basis for the discussion of professional communication, Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), and transnational education presented in Section 5.

4.1 Characteristics of the Korean Interview Corpus

The Korean employment interview textbook contained 163 interview questions organized into twelve situational chapters, including self-introduction, personality,

educational background, overseas experience, teamwork, customer service, motivation, and scenario-based interviews. While these instructional units reflected the pedagogical organization of the textbook, they were not directly comparable with the organization of the international interview materials.

To facilitate systematic comparison, the interview questions were reorganized into five broader communicative categories based on their primary interview purpose. These categories included Personal Background, Experience and Qualifications, Career Motivation, Behavioral and Situational Questions, and Organization-Related Questions. This reclassification reduced overlap among textbook chapters while preserving the communicative intent of individual questions. It also provided a common analytical framework for comparing Korean and international interview materials despite differences in textbook organization.

4.2 Distribution of Question Forms

Following the reclassification process, all interview questions were coded according to grammatical question form using the analytical framework described in Section 3. Questions were first classified as either open or closed before further analysis of their communicative functions.

A total of 163 interview questions were identified in the Korean corpus and 105 interview questions in the international corpus. As shown in Table 4.1, both corpora relied primarily on open questions. However, noticeable differences emerged in their relative proportions.

Table 3. Distribution of Question Forms

Question Form	Korean (KE)	%	International (IE)	%
Open	125	76.7	89	84.8
Closed	38	23.3	16	15.2
Total	163	100	105	100

The Korean materials contained a larger proportion of closed questions than the international materials, whereas the international corpus relied more consistently on open-ended questions. Representative examples illustrate this difference. Korean materials frequently included questions requiring confirmation or short factual responses, whereas international materials more often invited applicants to describe experiences, explain decisions, and construct extended professional narratives.

Although open questions predominated in both corpora, the higher proportion of closed questions in the Korean materials indicates a greater emphasis on confirmation-oriented interaction, while the international materials more consistently encouraged elaboration and extended discourse. These quantitative differences provided the foundation for the subsequent analysis of pragmatic function.

4.3 Pragmatic Functions of Interview Questions

While the comparison of question forms revealed structural differences between the Korean (KE) and international (IE) interview materials, grammatical form alone does not fully explain how interview communication is organized. Following Candlin's (1976) framework, the interview questions were therefore analyzed according to their pragmatic functions, that is, the communicative purposes they were intended to achieve rather than their grammatical structures alone. This analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of how interview questions guide applicants' responses and shape professional interaction.

Across both corpora, the dominant communicative purpose was information elicitation. However, the analysis revealed noticeable differences in the types of information sought and the communicative behaviors expected from applicants.

The Korean interview materials primarily employed questions that requested factual information or confirmation of previous experiences. Many questions focused on educational background, qualifications, language proficiency, previous employment, and personal characteristics. These questions generally encouraged applicants to provide concise and accurate information while demonstrating their suitability for employment.

By contrast, the international interview materials more frequently required applicants to explain previous experiences, reflect upon workplace situations, justify decisions, and construct coherent professional narratives. Rather than requesting isolated facts, these questions encouraged applicants to organize experiences into meaningful accounts that demonstrated problem-solving ability, teamwork, leadership, and professional judgment. Table 4 summarizes the dominant pragmatic functions identified in the two corpora.

Table 4. Dominant Pragmatic Functions in Korean and International Interview Materials

Pragmatic Function	Korean Materials	International Materials
Confirmation	High	Moderate
Information Elicitation	High	High
Explanation	Moderate	High
Reflection	Low	High
Narrative Construction	Low	High
Professional Self-presentation	Moderate	High

As shown in Table 4.2, both corpora relied heavily on questions designed to obtain information from applicants. However, differences became increasingly apparent beyond this shared function. The Korean materials more frequently emphasized confirmation-oriented questions that verified applicants' qualifications or previous experiences. In

contrast, the international materials more consistently encouraged explanation, reflection, and narrative construction.

These differences can be illustrated through representative interview questions. For example, questions such as “Have you ever worked as part of a team?” primarily seek confirmation of experience before additional information is requested. Conversely, questions such as “Tell me about a time when you worked successfully in a team.” require applicants to construct a coherent narrative describing a specific experience, explain their actions, and demonstrate the competencies expected by the interviewer.

Similarly, questions asking applicants to describe difficult situations, explain workplace decisions, or discuss previous accomplishments require considerably greater communicative engagement than questions requesting factual information alone. Such questions invite applicants to interpret experiences, evaluate outcomes, and present themselves as competent professionals capable of reflective thinking.

Overall, the findings indicate that the principal distinction between the two corpora lies not simply in grammatical question form but in the communicative expectations embedded within the interview questions themselves. Whereas the Korean materials more frequently represented employment interviews as exchanges of factual information, the international materials more consistently portrayed interviews as opportunities for applicants to demonstrate professional competence through explanation, reflection, and narrative self-presentation. These findings provide the basis for the subsequent analysis of communication style presented in the following section.

4.4 Interpreting Communication Styles from Interview Question Patterns

The preceding analyses of question forms and pragmatic functions provide a basis for interpreting the broader communication styles represented in the two corpora. Although

communication style was not analyzed as an independent coding category, the combined patterns of interview questions reveal clear differences in how professional communication is conceptualized within the instructional materials.

The Korean interview materials generally represent employment interviews as structured question-and-answer exchanges in which applicants are expected to provide accurate, relevant, and complete information. Many questions focus on confirming qualifications, educational background, work experience, and personal characteristics. This pattern reflects an instructional emphasis on responding appropriately to anticipated interview topics.

By contrast, the international materials present employment interviews as interactive professional conversations in which applicants are expected not only to answer questions but also to explain decisions, describe workplace experiences, justify actions, and construct coherent professional narratives.

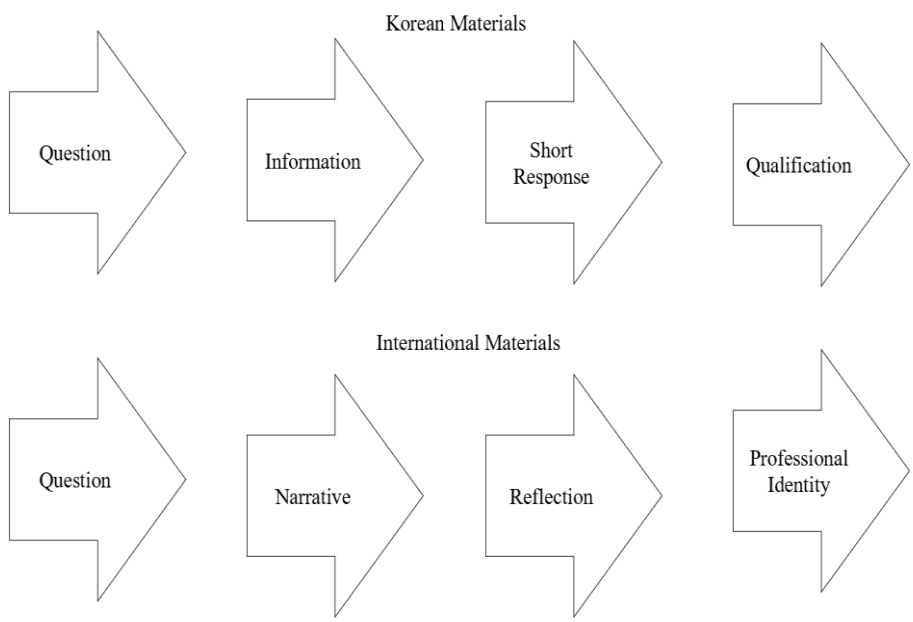


Figure 3. Communication Styles Represented in Interview Questions

4.5 Communicative Orientation of the Two Corpora

Beyond differences in question forms and pragmatic functions, the overall organization of the two interview corpora reveals distinct communicative orientations. These orientations are reflected not only in the types of questions included but also in the ways interview preparation is structured within each instructional resource.

The Korean employment interview textbook contained 163 questions originally organized into twelve instructional situations and subsequently regrouped into five broader analytical categories to facilitate comparison with the international materials. The largest proportion of questions was classified as Job-related Questions (46 questions), followed by Hobbies and Interests/Stress (35 questions), Personal Data/Small Talk/Personality (32 questions), Travel/School Life (32 questions), and Scenario Questions/Self-presentation (18 questions). This distribution suggests that the Korean materials emphasize preparing applicants for a broad range of anticipated interview topics while maintaining a strong focus on employment-related knowledge and personal qualifications.

The preceding analyses demonstrated that both corpora rely primarily on open-ended questions; however, important differences emerge in the communicative expectations embedded within those questions. The Korean materials more frequently emphasize obtaining factual information, confirming qualifications, and eliciting descriptions of applicants' backgrounds and experiences. Although opportunities for explanation and self-presentation are present, these functions generally appear within clearly defined instructional categories.

In contrast, the international interview materials more consistently organize interview questions around workplace situations that require applicants to explain decisions,

describe previous experiences, evaluate outcomes, and demonstrate professional judgement through extended responses. Rather than treating interview topics as isolated categories, the international materials more frequently integrate multiple communicative purposes within individual interview questions.

These differences should not be interpreted as indicating that one approach is inherently superior to the other. Rather, they represent different pedagogical approaches to preparing learners for employment interviews. The Korean materials provide broad coverage of common interview topics and emphasize systematic preparation across multiple interview situations, whereas the international materials place greater emphasis on explanation, reflection, and experience-based responses as evidence of professional competence.

Overall, the findings indicate that differences between the Korean and international interview materials extend beyond grammatical question forms to broader patterns of communicative organization.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Question Forms

The comparison of Korean (KE) and international (IE) employment interview materials revealed that both corpora relied predominantly on open-ended questions. At first glance, this similarity may suggest that the two instructional approaches promote comparable communicative practices. However, a closer examination indicates that grammatical form alone provides only a partial explanation of interview communication. Rather than reflecting identical pedagogical objectives, the shared preference for open-

ended questions masks important differences in the communicative expectations placed upon applicants.

Open-ended questions have long been recognized as a defining characteristic of contemporary employment interviews because they enable interviewers to evaluate applicants' reasoning, communication ability, behavioral competencies, and interpersonal skills more effectively than closed questions (Campion et al., 1997; Levashina et al., 2014). Unlike closed questions, which primarily verify factual information, open-ended questions require applicants to organize information, explain experiences, and demonstrate judgement through extended discourse. Consequently, the predominance of open-ended questions in both corpora reflects the interactive nature of contemporary employment interviews rather than a preference for a particular interview format.

Despite this overall similarity, the Korean materials contained a higher proportion of closed questions than the international corpus. While the numerical difference was not substantial, it nevertheless suggests a relatively stronger emphasis on confirming applicants' qualifications, educational backgrounds, work experiences, and other objective characteristics before inviting more elaborated responses. Such an approach is consistent with structured interview practices in which factual information provides the foundation for subsequent evaluation (Campion et al., 1997).

The international materials, by contrast, demonstrated a more consistent reliance on open-ended questioning throughout the interview process. Rather than serving primarily as prompts for factual description, many questions required applicants to explain previous decisions, describe workplace experiences, and interpret professional situations. These findings are consistent with research showing that competency-based interviews increasingly evaluate applicants through behavioral evidence rather than factual credentials alone (Levashina et al., 2014).

Importantly, the findings of the present study suggest that grammatical form should not be interpreted independently of communicative purpose. As discussed in Section 4, questions sharing the same grammatical structure frequently performed different pragmatic functions depending on the interactional context. This observation supports Candlin's (1976) argument that communicative meaning cannot be explained solely by grammatical form but must also be understood through the function that language performs within interaction.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that grammatical instruction alone is insufficient for preparing learners for English-medium employment interviews. Traditional interview preparation frequently focuses on recognizing question types and memorizing appropriate responses. While such approaches may assist learners in identifying common interview topics, they do not necessarily develop the communicative flexibility required for authentic professional interaction. Applicants must not only recognize whether a question is grammatically open or closed but also understand the communicative purpose underlying each question and adapt their responses accordingly.

This distinction becomes increasingly important within multilingual professional environments, where communication requires individuals to explain, negotiate, justify, and adapt their discourse according to organizational and interactional expectations (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Bhatia & Bremner, 2014).

Accordingly, the differences identified in question forms should be interpreted not merely as variations in textbook design but as indicators of broader pedagogical assumptions regarding interview communication. Whereas the Korean materials continue to provide valuable systematic preparation across a wide range of interview situations, the international materials place relatively greater emphasis on communicative performance within authentic workplace contexts.

5.2 Interpretation of Pragmatic Functions

While the comparison of grammatical question forms provides useful structural information, it does not fully explain how communication is accomplished during employment interviews. As Candlin (1976) argues, the communicative value of a question lies not solely in its grammatical form but also in the function it performs within interaction. Consistent with this perspective, the pragmatic function analysis presented in Section 4 demonstrated that the principal differences between the Korean (KE) and international (IE) interview materials lie not in the grammatical structure of interview questions but in the communicative purposes they are intended to achieve. This distinction has important implications for understanding both interview communication and English-language interview preparation.

Both corpora sought information from applicants; however, the nature of the information requested differed considerably. The Korean materials more frequently emphasized questions designed to verify applicants' educational backgrounds, employment histories, language abilities, and personal qualifications. Such questions primarily required applicants to provide accurate factual information regarding themselves and their experiences. Consequently, the interview was frequently represented as a structured process of confirming qualifications across a broad range of anticipated topics.

The international materials, in contrast, are more consistently employed questions requiring applicants to explain previous experiences, interpret workplace situations, justify decisions, and demonstrate professional judgement. Rather than simply confirming whether an experience had occurred, interviewers sought evidence of how applicants approached problems, interacted with colleagues, resolved conflicts, and

reflected upon outcomes. This finding is consistent with research on behavioral and competency-based interviewing, which suggests that employers increasingly evaluate applicants through demonstrated competencies rather than factual credentials alone (Campion et al., 1997; Levashina et al., 2014). Consequently, the communicative objective extends beyond information gathering toward evaluating professional competence through discourse.

The findings therefore suggest that pragmatic competence plays a central role in successful interview performance. Applicants must recognize not only the literal meaning of an interview question but also the communicative intention underlying it. For example, a question such as *"Tell me about a time when you experienced conflict within a team"* does not simply request a description of a disagreement. Instead, it invites applicants to demonstrate conflict-management skills, collaboration, self-awareness, and reflective judgement. The effectiveness of the response therefore depends upon recognizing the communicative purpose of the question rather than merely responding to its literal wording. This interpretation is consistent with Candlin's (1976) view that successful communication depends upon understanding language as purposeful social action rather than as isolated grammatical structures.

This observation is particularly relevant for English language instruction. Traditional interview preparation frequently emphasizes vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and memorization of model responses. While these instructional practices remain valuable, they may not adequately prepare learners for interview situations in which communicative intent extends beyond literal interpretation. Learners who recognize only the surface meaning of interview questions may produce grammatically accurate responses that nevertheless fail to demonstrate the competencies interviewers seek to evaluate. As Levashina et al. (2014) note, modern employment interviews

increasingly assess behavioral competencies through applicants' explanations and interpretations of previous experiences rather than through factual recall alone.

The findings also suggest that interview preparation should move beyond topic-based instruction toward function-oriented communication. Rather than organizing interview practice exclusively around topics such as personal background, hobbies, or previous employment, instructional materials should explicitly address why interviewers ask particular questions and what forms of professional evidence applicants are expected to provide. Such an approach encourages learners to develop greater pragmatic awareness while promoting more flexible and authentic communication during interviews.

Importantly, these differences should not be interpreted as deficiencies within either instructional approach. The Korean materials provide systematic preparation across a comprehensive range of commonly encountered interview situations and remain valuable for developing foundational interview knowledge. The international materials, however, place relatively greater emphasis on demonstrating professional competence through explanation, reflection, and experience-based communication. Together, these approaches represent complementary pedagogical emphases rather than competing instructional philosophies.

From this perspective, pragmatic function represents an important bridge between grammatical competence and professional communication. Understanding what interview questions are designed to accomplish enables learners to respond more strategically, organize experiences more effectively, and communicate professional competence more convincingly. Such pragmatic awareness is increasingly recognized as an essential component of professional communication in multilingual environments, where communicative success depends upon achieving shared understanding and accomplishing interactional goals rather than simply producing grammatically accurate

language (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). The discussion therefore naturally extends beyond pragmatic analysis toward broader issues of professional communication within international workplaces, which are considered in the following section through the perspective of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF).

5.3 Implications for Transnational Education and Graduate Employability

The findings of this study extend beyond employment interview preparation and contribute to broader discussions concerning communication within transnational education (TNE) and graduate employability. As universities increasingly prepare graduates for participation in international labour markets, employment interviews represent one of the earliest professional contexts in which students must apply English not simply as an academic subject but as a practical medium for professional communication. This reflects the evolving role of higher education in preparing graduates for multilingual, multicultural, and globally connected workplaces (Knight, 2013; Healey, 2018).

Transnational education has expanded considerably over the past two decades, creating learning environments in which students, faculty members, employers, and institutions interact across multiple linguistic, cultural, and organizational contexts (Knight, 2013; Wilkins & Urbanovič, 2014). Within these environments, graduates are increasingly expected to communicate effectively with colleagues, supervisors, and clients whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds differ from their own. Consequently, communicative competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy to encompass pragmatic awareness, interactional flexibility, intercultural understanding, and the ability

to negotiate meaning in diverse professional settings (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013; Jackson & Dean, 2023).

Viewed from this perspective, employment interviews function as more than recruitment procedures. They are authentic communicative events in which applicants demonstrate not only their qualifications but also their ability to participate effectively in professional discourse. Success therefore depends upon recognizing the communicative purpose underlying interview questions, organizing relevant experiences coherently, and responding appropriately to the interactional expectations of interviewers. As demonstrated throughout this study, effective interview performance requires applicants to integrate grammatical knowledge with pragmatic competence and professional communication skills.

The present findings therefore suggest that interview preparation within transnational education should move beyond topic-based instruction towards developing learners' awareness of communicative purpose. While familiarity with commonly occurring interview questions remains valuable, students also require opportunities to analyze why interviewers ask particular questions, what competencies those questions are intended to evaluate, and how professional experience can be communicated persuasively across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Such an approach prepares learners not merely to answer rehearsed questions but to participate confidently in authentic professional interaction.

These findings also have important implications for curriculum design. Interview preparation courses have traditionally emphasized vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, and the memorization of model responses. Although these elements remain essential, they represent only part of the communicative competence required within contemporary international workplaces. Increasingly, higher education institutions are

expected to develop graduates who can communicate strategically, collaborate effectively across cultures, adapt to changing professional contexts, and present themselves confidently within multilingual organizations (Jackson & Dean, 2023). Accordingly, interview preparation should explicitly integrate linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, professional communication, and intercultural communication into a coherent instructional framework.

Importantly, the findings do not suggest replacing one instructional approach with another. Rather, they indicate the value of integrating complementary pedagogical perspectives. The systematic topic coverage evident in the Korean materials provides learners with a strong organizational framework for interview preparation, while the greater emphasis on explanation, reflection, and experience-based communication found in the international materials supports the development of communicative competencies increasingly expected in global professional environments. Together, these complementary strengths suggest a more balanced model for employment interview preparation within transnational education.

More broadly, the study contributes to discussions of graduate employability within international higher education. Contemporary employability encompasses not only disciplinary knowledge but also communication, critical thinking, adaptability, intercultural competence, and the ability to function effectively within multilingual professional environments (Jackson & Dean, 2023). Employment interviews therefore represent an important educational opportunity through which these broader competencies can be developed before students enter the workforce.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that differences between Korean and international employment interview materials extend beyond grammatical question forms to encompass pragmatic functions and broader communicative orientations. By integrating

perspectives from employment interview research (Campion et al., 1997; Levashina et al., 2014), pragmatics (Candlin, 1976), Business English as a Lingua Franca (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013), and transnational education (Knight, 2013; Healey, 2018), this study provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding how interview preparation can support graduate employability in international contexts. Rather than advocating one instructional approach over another, the findings suggest that combining the systematic preparation characteristic of the Korean materials with the communicative emphasis evident in the international materials offers a balanced pedagogical model for preparing learners to communicate effectively in multilingual and multicultural professional environments. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on professional communication within transnational higher education while offering practical implications for curriculum development and English-language interview instruction.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how Korean and international employment interview preparation materials conceptualize interview communication through the question forms and pragmatic functions they present to learners. Although both corpora relied predominantly on open-ended questions, important differences emerged in the communicative purposes those questions were designed to achieve. Korean materials primarily emphasized factual information, qualification verification, and structured responses, whereas international materials more consistently encouraged explanation, reflection, justification, and professional self-presentation. These patterns suggest that

interview preparation involves not only learning what questions may be asked but also understanding the communicative expectations that underlie professional interaction.

By interpreting communication style through the combined analysis of question forms and pragmatic functions, this study demonstrates that employment interview materials represent broader pedagogical conceptions of professional communication. Rather than viewing interviews as isolated question-and-answer exchanges, international materials more frequently frame interviews as opportunities to construct coherent professional narratives and demonstrate workplace competence through discourse.

These findings have important implications for English language instruction and transnational higher education. As graduates increasingly seek employment in multinational organizations and internationally oriented workplaces, interview preparation should extend beyond linguistic accuracy and memorization of model responses to include pragmatic awareness, interactional flexibility, and the ability to communicate professional competence effectively across cultural contexts. Integrating these communicative dimensions into interview preparation may better equip learners for authentic professional communication in multilingual environments.

Future research could extend this analysis by examining additional interview preparation materials from other educational contexts, investigating how learners respond to different pedagogical approaches, and exploring the relationship between instructional materials and actual interview performance.

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"The Exam was about Thinking and Explaining, Not Just Memorizing": A Hybrid Open-Book Take-Home Collaborative Test for an Inclusive Transnational Class

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Abstract

Technology, social change, and the collective nature of major problems facing the world present challenges for contemporary classrooms where ability to cooperatively research and synthesize information is at a premium over individual ability to memorize and recall information during a short period of time, presenting a validity issue for the skills university classes are cultivating. This study presents the student reactions to hybrid open-book take-home collaborative tests in a diverse transnational social science class. Sixteen students wrote their reaction to the question "How was your experience of examinations in this class compared to examinations in other classes?" after completing hybrid open-book take-home collaborative midterm and final exams. The student perceptions offered support for using hybrid open-book take-home collaborative exams to reduce the need for memorization in exams in preference for promoting general learning with limited support for increased retention. In addition, the study supported student appreciation of the hybrid format, more thinking and reflection, reduced stress, reduced time pressure, engaging concepts more deeply, and more opportunity and incentive to practice research skills.

Key words: open-book test, take-home test, collaborative test, classroom ICT

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1. Introduction

Students and educators now face a number of novel challenges in the classroom and in their environment that have disrupted some of the traditional ways of helping young people adapt to society. Previous generations have been able to depend on a relatively limited source of information gathered in predictable and traditional ways where contemporary education must contend with constant information overload. Technology, including "social" technology, has managed to connect students in unprecedented ways, but has also left many simultaneously isolated and with outsized expectations of both the rewards and demands of peer relationships, and opened vulnerabilities online. Young people are particularly at risk for the negative effects in dealing with new information communication technologies (ICT) though everyone has paid the costs. New technologies have also blurred the boundary between the world inside and outside of schools, making media literacy an important skill for addressing student questions when their online sources contradict what is taught in the classroom and students feel they are backed up by legitimate authority.

At the same time, the worldwide social responses to the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the regular school environment for many students who were sent home for prolonged breaks. Students suddenly had to participate online in classes taught by teachers with limited preparation teaching in the format (Ulvi et al., 2022) or had to study in "socially distanced" classrooms that further disrupted their regular school life. Anecdotally, this disruption left individual students frustrated, feeling left behind, unprepared for subsequent stages in their education, and even more focused on online relationships to the detriment of relationships with peers around them in their daily life.

Meanwhile, the nature of the problems students will have to confront in the future is increasingly collective, requiring more collaboration and making the ability to work in groups more important for the future. Social skills and collaboration are needed for working with peers on projects, even when one is only doing their little part in the collective effort. While students often expect to make use of mediating digital technologies. As students have more resources available and expect to use those resources, they have weaker peer relationships to depend on in dealing with ICT as increasing online activity has been shown to relate to decreasing in-person social activity (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021; Braghieri et al., 2022). They may also need more guidance from educators in integrating more resources into their education, including teacher role modelling of healthy and constructive ICT device use (Mathewson, 2020).

These factors lead to a reduced need for memorization when students spend time using electronic resources in the process of doing their actual work. Practical skill application is at a greater premium than memorization, particularly under typical real-world conditions that vary from in-class testing conditions (Kim et al., 2021). Research skills are representative of the type of skills with real-world applicability taught in schools. At the same time, there has been increasing concern over student AI use and even preference (Manning et al., 2026), particularly as academic literature points in the direction of AI failing in writing readability and complexity even when just used to assist student writing (Craven, 2026). This again suggests a need for more instructor guidance regarding AI in the context of classrooms with a writing and research component.

In addition to managing these challenges, there is the added challenge of valid testing of classes focused on cooperative discussion. Memorization is not at a premium in a context where the students discuss and refer to the material with their textbook and digital resources at hand, sharing their opinions and conclusions with the class based on

notes. This is at odds with the typical memorization-heavy in-class written examination where students often stay up late the night before memorizing expected material for the short-term and then quickly forget the information as they move on to their next exam. Furthermore, the students who excel during class are not the same ones who excel on the examination, suggesting that typical written examinations lack validity for such classes.

This research took place in a fourth-year level social science course taught along the lines of a graduate seminar, with extensive discussion and research in class, and presentations. After experimenting with different written examination formats, the instructor has settled on conducting midterm and final examinations as collaborative open-book tests with a take-home element. The basic considerations were that the format would allow for students to practice using ICT with teacher guidance, that the format was compatible with social distancing and online formats, the exams would practice cooperation and address collective concerns while allowing for measuring individual contribution, there was less need for memorization, and the tests would more accurately reflect and measure the work done in class. The instructor has been satisfied with the results on each of these dimensions.

At the same time, there have only been anecdotal suggestions as to how the students have related to the exams. These have varied from enthusiastic embrace in the case of a student shouting out with joy not having to memorize the extensive material in contrast to her secondary education to the dismissive in the case of a student who asks a colleague whether she had “real” tests. Most students, however, have kept their reactions to themselves. This research seeks to discover their reactions. First, the study reviews literature regarding the intersect of findings related to open-book, take-home, and collaborative examinations. Next, students’ reactions to the tests are reviewed. The results are then discussed and conclusions drawn.

2. Literature Review

Students have shown a preference in research for open-book, take-home, and collaborative tests over individual in-class closed-book tests. For example, several studies show that students generally prefer open book tests (Gharib et al., 2012; Johanns et al., 2017; Rummer et al., 2019; Kim & Cho, 2021) though some students perceive the tests to be harder (Krarup et al., 1974). Similarly, some studies show a preference for take-home tests (López et al., 2011; D'Souza & Siegfeldt, 2017; Jamil et al., 2023) though student preference is not universal (Weber et al., 1983). In any case, students in several studies have found take-home tests to be more meaningful (Andrada & Linden, 1993; López et al., 2011; Isbell & Kremmel, 2020; Jamil et al., 2023; Curbo et al., 2025). Likewise, several studies show students preferring collaborative tests (Russo & Warren, 1999; Meseke et al., 2010; Wiggs, 2011; Rivaz et al., 2015; Patiwael et al., 2021).

Reduced need for rote memorization is not mentioned generally in studies of collaborative tests, but it is a feature of both open-book (Theophilides & Koutselini, 2000; Durning et al., 2016; Kim et al. 2021; Kim & Cho, 2021) and take-home tests (Weber et al., 1983; López et al., 2011; D'Souza & Siegfeldt, 2017; Jamil et al., 2023) where students do not engage in as much or as intense memorization.

Thinking and reflection are benefits of all three types of tests. Deeper thinking, higher-order thinking, and critical thinking have been found to be benefits of open-book tests (Theophilides & Koutselini, 2000; Brightwell et al., 2004; Durning et al., 2016; Green et al., 2016; Johanns et al., 2017; Senkova et al., 2018; Rummer et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Zagury-Orly & Durning, 2021), though students may bypass deeper thinking with an information scanning strategy (Kim et al., 2021). The most common theme in

studies of take-home tests was their promotion of deeper and higher-order thinking (Andrada & Linden, 1993; López et al., 2011; Durning et al., 2016; D'Souza & Siegfeldt, 2017; Isbell & Kremmel, 2020; Şenel & Şenel, 2021; Jamil et al., 2023; Curbo et al., 2025; Namatovu & Kyambade, 2025) though some (Weber et al., 1983) found take-home tests mostly assist recall, assist lower-order thinking tasks (Jamil et al., 2023; Bode-Staud et al., 2025) or just promote surface learning (Bode-Staud et al., 2025). Collaborative tests promote critical thinking (Russo & Warren, 1999; Rao et al., 2002; Meseke et al., 2008; Wiggs, 2011; Duane & Satre, 2014; Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019), provide opportunity for reflection (Patiwael et al., 2021), and develop of reasoning skills (Rao et al., 2002; Tung & Tseng, 2013; Duane & Satre, 2014; Johanns et al., 2017; Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019).

Among the most mentioned benefits of all three types of testing has been reduced stress and anxiety. Students taking open-book tests mention reduced stress (Kim et al., 2021; Kim & Cho, 2021) and less test anxiety (Brightwell et al., 2004; Rakes, 2008; Gharib et al., 2012; Durning et al., 2016; Green et al., 2016; Johanns et al., 2017; Senkova et al., 2018; Rummer et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Kim & Cho, 2021). The same has been reported for take-home tests (Weber et al., 1983; Durning et al., 2016; D'Souza & Siegfeldt, 2017; Bengtsson, 2019; Şenel & Şenel, 2021; Jamil et al., 2023; Bode-Staud et al., 2025). Likewise, decreased anxiety is a frequently mentioned benefit of collaborative examinations (Russo & Warren, 1999; Kapitanoff, 2009; Meseke et al., 2010; Wiggs, 2011; Duane & Satre, 2014; Rivaz et al., 2015; Wissman & Rawson, 2016; Johanns et al., 2017; Levine et al., 2018; Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019; Eastridge & Benson, 2020).

Time is a factor that impacts the three types of tests, but it works differently. Open-book and collaborative tests are usually done in class so they work like closed-book tests

in terms of time, though open-book tests do not provide an advantage for spending more time (Brightwell et al., 2004) and collaborative testing includes time-consuming discussions that may generate more time pressure (Wiggs, 2011; Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019). Take-home tests reduce time pressure (López et al., 2011; Bengtsson, 2019) but are more time-consuming (Bengtsson, 2019; Şenel & Şenel, 2021; Jamil et al., 2023), making time management more important (Isbell & Kremmel, 2020).

Deeper engagement with course content is seen as a benefit for open-book tests (Theophilides & Koutselini, 2000; Brightwell et al., 2004; Durning et al., 2016; Green et al., 2016; Johanns et al., 2017; Senkova et al., 2018; Rummer et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Zagury-Orly & Durning, 2021), take-home tests (Andrada & Linden, 1993; López et al., 2011; Durning et al., 2016; D'Souza & Siegfeldt, 2017; Isbell & Kremmel, 2020; Şenel & Şenel, 2021; Jamil et al., 2023; Curbo et al., 2025; Namatovu & Kyambade, 2025), and collaborative tests as well (Meseke et al., 2010; Tung & Tseng, 2013; Wissman & Rawson, 2016; Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019; Patiwael et al., 2021).

There is evidence that some students doing take-home tests take advantage of the greater time to do more research (Namatovu & Kyambade, 2025) and students have found take home tests to be more meaningful than in-class assessments (Andrada & Linden, 1993; López et al., 2011; Isbell & Kremmel, 2020; Jamil et al., 2023; Curbo et al., 2025). Meanwhile, more engaged discussion was sometimes reported on collaborative tests (Rao et al., 2002; Meseke et al., 2008; Tung & Tseng, 2013: Duane & Satre, 2014; Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019; Patiwael et al., 2021). Collaborative testing allows for expressing diverse perspectives (Wiggs, 2011) and developing cooperation and social skills (Rao et al., 2002; Duane & Satre, 2014). Peer feedback and explanation are valued by students as helpful (Russo & Warren, 1999; Rao et al., 2002; Kapitanoff, 2009; Wiggs, 2011; Leight et al., 2012; Wissman & Rawson, 2016; Patiwael

et al., 2021), even specifically increasing understanding (Kapitanoff, 2009). Several studies reported the students benefiting from what they perceived as useful feedback provided immediately by their peers (Rao et al., 2002; Meseke et al., 2008; Duane & Satre, 2014; Rivaz et al., 2015; Patiwael et al., 2021).

Open-book tests better assess understanding over recall (Kim et al., 2021; Kim & Cho, 2021). Collaborative tests have further been found to improve understanding (Rao et al., 2002; Kapitanoff, 2009; Meseke et al., 2010; Wiggs, 2011; Tung & Tseng, 2013; Levine et al., 2018; Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019).

The testing types are divided on the question of retention effects. Open book tests may hurt retention (Agarwal & Roediger, 2011; Rummer et al., 2019), make no difference (Gharib et al., 2012; Heijne-Penninga et al., 2013), or even improve retention (Senkova et al., 2018). Retention does not appear to be affected by take-home tests relative to in-class tests (Bode-Staud et al., 2025). In contrast, increased retention of material is often mentioned as a benefit of collaborative tests (Meseke et al., 2008; Kapitanoff, 2009; Wiggs, 2011; Leight et al., 2012; Duane & Satre, 2014; Hollis-Gilley & Clarkston, 2014; Rivaz et al., 2015; Johanns et al., 2017; Kapitanoff & Pandey, 2018; Levine et al., 2018), though some have found no retention benefits to the format (Wissman & Rawson, 2016).

Open-book testing may increase confidence (Theophilides & Koutselini, 2000; Durning et al., 2016) as does take-home testing (D'Souza & Siegfeldt, 2017; Bode-Staud et al., 2025), and particularly collaborative testing (Rao et al., 2002; Kapitanoff, 2009; Wiggs, 2011; Leight et al., 2012; Eastridge & Benson, 2020). However, open-book tests may lead to overconfidence (Johanns et al., 2017). Students may also be more comfortable with take-home tests (D'Souza & Siegfeldt, 2017; Bode-Staud et al., 2025).

All three formats have been touted for being more realistic tests of actual application of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Open-book tests are better for assessing realistic applications over closed-book tests (Kim et al., 2021; Kim & Cho, 2021) and align more with real-world practice where people usually have ready access to resources performing actual tasks (Krarup et al., 1974; Brightwell et al., 2004; Heijne-Penninga et al., 2008; Anaya et al., 2010; Durning et al., 2016; Johanns et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2021; Kim & Cho, 2021; Zagury-Orly & Durning, 2021). Take-home tests provide opportunity for application of real-world skills (López et al., 2011; Isbell & Kremmel, 2020; Şenel & Şenel, 2021). Likewise, collaborative testing provides the opportunity to transfer skills to realistic settings (Russo & Warren, 1999; Rao et al., 2002; Duane & Satre, 2014).

There is evidence that all three testing formats lead to some enhanced level of learning. Open-book tests may promote active learning strategies (Kim et al., 2021). Take-home tests may have deeper learning taking place over memorization (Weber et al., 1983; López et al., 2011; D'Souza & Siegfeldt, 2017; Jamil et al., 2023). Similarly, collaborative testing may enhance learning (Kapitanoff, 2009; Wiggs, 2011; Leight et al., 2012; Kapitanoff & Pandey, 2018; Levine et al., 2018; Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019; Eastridge & Benson, 2020; Patiwael et al., 2021), even during testing (Hollis-Gilley & Clarkston, 2014; Rivaz et al., 2015). Vygotskyan constructivism based on the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed suggests collaborative testing is appropriate for the learning process (Meseke et al., 2008; Duane & Satre, 2014; Levine et al., 2018; Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019).

3. Methodology

The course that is the subject of the study was an elective fourth-year English-language social science class that took place in the fall of 2025 at a public university in the Republic of Korea. The course had 18 students, 16 of whom elected to participate by submitting a written answer to the question "How was your experience of examinations in this class compared to examinations in other classes?" The two students who declined to participate in the study were outliers who had employment-related issues and had not been able to participate in the class fully and did their final exams independent of the rest of the class as take home. The students who participated were 9 male and 7 female, with a mean age 22.38 years old, ranging from 19 to 30. The group was very international, mostly exchange (7) or international (5) students, with four domestic Koreans. Four were from Uzbekistan, two from Denmark, two from Spain, and one each from Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Venezuela. Eleven of the students were in their junior year, with two seniors, two freshmen, and one sophomore. The instructor was a foreign professor from the United States with more than 25 years of experience teaching in Korea.

The class had a midterm and a final examination. The course met in person Thursday and Friday during the Fall 2025 semester. The typical week would include a question-and-answer session on Thursday to clarify issues from the text, then the students would divide into groups, each choosing a section from the week's lesson to discuss. The groups would choose a spokesperson on Friday to lead the discussion who would present and explain their section, illustrating it with their own examples. For the midterm and the final, a review session was conducted on Thursday. The exams were written to take up two 75-minute class sessions. The objective half of the exam was distributed at the start of class on Friday. The short answer/essay half was given at the end of the Friday class, and both were due at the end of the subsequent week's Thursday class. The students were

encouraged to work together by discussing their objective work and to proofread and review each other's written work.

The sixteen written answers were analyzed and coded into thirty themes. The pieces were read to identify themes matching the literature as well as authentic student reactions. The minimum number of codes was two and the maximum was nine, the mean was 5.06, and the mode was five. The top three codes were cited by eight students. One code was cited by seven students. Two codes were cited by six students each. One code was cited by five. Two codes were cited by three students. Eight codes were cited by two students. There were thirteen unique comments only mentioned by a single student.

4. Analysis

> "I greatly appreciated the examination format of this class. This format provided me with ample time to deeply reflect on the topics and review the course material, rather than making me feel rushed."

The first theme to emerge was that half of the students expressed an appreciation for the exam format, which is different from the general concern about preference, though an additional two preferred the exams, reflecting a more common theme in the literature for all three types of tests (Kim & Cho, 2021; Patiwael et al., 2021; Jamil et al., 2023). Two students called the tests "meaningful," which is a common reaction to take-home tests (Curbo et al., 2025) but not for open-book or collaborative tests. None of the students expressed a negative reaction to the formator as undesirable. One student (a Korean) thought "Compared to other classes, I think the professor's test method is the best" though he considered they were "really questionable for Koreans," reflecting on his experience of classrooms and tests emphasizing control, regimentation, and a narrow

range of specific answers in a competitive context where students are usually given class rankings and assuming other Koreans might not be as prepared as he was for this testing format.

The first reason students expressed for appreciating the exam was that half of them felt it provided broader learning than just the memorization promoted by their usual in-class tests, which is common to open-book (Kim & Cho, 2021) take-home tests (Jamil et al., 2023) but not for collaborative tests. One student remarked, "Both the longer essay question and the shorter questions pushed me to reflect on the material instead of just memorizing it." Likewise, two students indicated that the format led to them having a better understanding of the course material, which is a common reaction to collaborative exams (Kapitanoff, 2009; Mahoney and Harris-Reeves, 2019. Another student felt that the exams had led to deeper learning, which is one of the most common themes for take-home exams (Namatovu & Kyambade, 2025). Another student appreciated the emphasis of the exams on learning over performance leading to a particular grade. This was a unique reaction, though several students have mentioned all three types of testing as promoting more actual learning (Kim et al., 2021; Patiwael et al., 2021; Jamil et al., 2023).

> "I reckon this approach is very effective that allows students to think deeply about each task and gives a chance to research and find data on their own when they lack information."

Further, six of the sixteen students noted that the exams allowed the students to engage and explore deeper concepts, which is consistent with literature regarding all three testing formats (Mahoney and Harris-Reeves, 2019; Zagury-Orly & Durning, 2021; Curbo et al., 2025) with two adding that they practiced and developed more opportunities for critical thinking, which has also been cited as a benefit of all three types of tests (Mahoney and Harris-Reeves, 2019; Rummer et al., 2019; Şenel & Şenel, 2021). Five

students additionally said the tests provided the opportunity and incentive to do more research to supplement what they learned in class, which has been mentioned as a benefit of take-home tests (Namatovu & Kyambade, 2025).

> "Overall, the evaluation methods in this course required deeper thinking and offered a much broader scope of academic inquiry than the memorization-based exams common in many other subjects."

Half of the students mentioned the format offered more chances for thinking and reflection beyond the rote memorization required to pass an in-class test. These are also regularly mentioned as a benefit of all three formats (Johanns et al., 2017; Senkova et al., 2018; Isbell & Kremel, 2020)

Seven of the students liked that the testing format avoided stress and unnecessary pressure, allowing students to "…learn without pressure" and "…removes the stress of having to memorize everything." This is a common feature of all three exam formats (Green et al., 2016; Bengtsson, 2019; Eastridge & Benson, 2019).

Six of the students noted the opportunity to spend more time on the test "…because they gave me the time and space to think critically, review the material in a meaningful way, and organize my ideas into well-structured arguments." This is not usually a feature of open-book or collaborative exams, which are typically timed in class, but reduced time pressure has been mentioned for take-home exams (López et al., 2011; Bengtsson, 2019).

> "In addition, the open-book format and the chance to share ideas and discuss the exam questions with classmates made the assessment feel much more reflective and collaborative than the traditional, individual-focused exams I have taken in other classes."

Three students were impressed by the discussion, noting it was more focused and productive than other in-class examinations, which is a commonly cited benefit of collaborative exams (Tung & Tseng, 2013; Patiwael et al., 2021). Another three felt that

the exam discussions afforded them the chance to express their unfettered true thoughts and to form real opinions in an unrestricted environment (Wiggs, 2011).

Two students emphasized the exchange of ideas as students learned from each other. One student liked that the tests involved explanation in lieu of memorization. Three also noted the collective nature of the answers they submitted. Another two stressed the cooperative nature of the tests. All of these emphasized common elements of collaborative tests (Leight et al., 2012; Duane & Satre, 2014; Wissman & Rawson, 2016).

Two students called the tests meaningful, a common benefit of take-home tests (Curbo et al., 2025), and one other mentioned the exam had led to personal growth. Two students emphasized how different the tests were from what they were used to. One student called the tests “Comfortable.” One student noted better retention of material following the midterm exam compared to her experience of staying up all night to memorize material she would just forget shortly after the test “Because of that, the material has stayed with me much more effectively.” This has sometimes been mentioned as a feature of open-book tests (Senkova et al., 2018) but not for take-home tests, though it is often cited as a benefit of collaborative exams (Kapitanoff & Pandey, 2018; Levine et al., 2018).

One of the younger students felt a confidence boost, not unrelated to being able to express his full ability instead of being limited by the format. This is cited as a potential benefit of open-book (Durning et al., 2016), take-home (Bode-Staud et al., 2025), and especially of collaborative tests (Eastridge & Benson, 2020).

Another student felt that the experience had provided real-world practice, having used skills described by professional guest speakers in a different but related class. The top student in the class found the exams to be challenging in an affirmative, positive sense, which accords with how students sometimes find open-book tests more difficult

(Krarup, et al., 1974). Finally, one student appreciated how the collaborative process (Rao et al., 2002) connected to concepts from the course, which frequently included shared governance as diverse groups work together to solve problems: "…as it felt like collaborative work connected to the very idea of global governance that we studied in the course."

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The top three themes were mentioned by half of the students. Two of these, the tests promoting more learning over memorization (common to open-book, e.g., Kim & Cho, 2021, and take-home tests, e.g., Jamil et al., 2023) and more thinking and reflection on the tests (all three formats: e.g., Johanns et al., 2017; Senkova et al., 2018; Isbell & Kremel, 2020) are also major themes in the testing literature. The third, appreciation, is not a major theme in the literature, which discusses preference extensively (e.g., Kim & Cho, 2021; Patiwael et al., 2021; Jamil et al., 2023). However, if it is assumed as related to preference and the response indicating preference but not appreciation is added in, this becomes the leading theme, the only one expressed by a majority.

The next three themes, each supported by more than a third of the students, (six or seven out of sixteen) all represent major themes in the literature. Two of the themes, reduction of stress and pressure (Green et al., 2016; Bengtsson, 2019; Eastridge & Benson, 2019) and deeper engagement with concepts (Mahoney and Harris-Reeves, 2019; Zagury-Orly & Durning, 2021; Curbo et al., 2025) are common features of all three exam formats, while more time is only a factor for take-home exams (López et al., 2011; Bengtsson, 2019). The seventh theme mentioned by five of the students that the

format allows more opportunity for research is likewise a benefit of take-home tests (Namatovu & Kyambade, 2025).

The rest of the themes mostly represented ideas common in the literature review. However, six of the thirty themes (20%) were idiosyncratic and not supported by the literature review. That the exams were different garnered two mentions, and that the exams were the best ever, were questionable for Koreans, promoted personal growth, were comfortable, and allowed the students to express their full ability to a greater extent than other exams each had a single mention.

The initial concerns for implementing this type of hybrid test included concerns about modeling ICT and AI use, COVID-19, and distance learning, addressing collective problems, inappropriateness of memorization as a major testing skill, and the validity of testing reflecting in-class activities. Though the instructor was satisfied with the results in all regards, the students naturally had nothing to say about COVID-19/distance learning as the class took place in-person after pandemic measures had been dropped. Likewise, the students had nothing to say about validity, which is less of a typical student concern and something teachers worries about more.

On the other hand, one student did make mention of AI, writing, “The open-book format made the exams much less stressful, even though we were not allowed to use AI.” This comment clearly reflects the student preference for AI use (Manning et al., 2026). However, there was no given restriction on AI use on the exam in the verbal or written instructions. It appears that the class culture had enough normative force that the student perceived it as a prohibition. During discussions before the class, some students took notes from their group and referred to group sentiment in their own words while others wrote discussions using AI and read them before their class. The former were better received, had more questions, and more positive comments, while the AI discussions

rarely garnered questions other than from the instructor and did not win praise or encouragement. The positive reinforcement extinguished AI-written discussions well before the midterm in the eighth week and the student apparently took that norm for discussions to have the force of a ban on tests. The instructor took this to represent a success at efforts to model positive ICT, social media, and AI use in class (Mathewson, 2020). He spent the time in class while groups were preparing their materials before class answering questions, helping students write outlines for discussions in front of class, helping search for materials, and modeling searches and social media use on the screen in front of the class.

Across mentions of exchange of ideas, cooperation on the tests, and the collective process in producing answers, five students addressed the motive of developing cooperation to address collective problems in the real world that had motivated the institution of the collaborative tests done with knowledge of this as a potential benefit of collaborative exams in the literature (Leight et al., 2012; Duane & Satre, 2014; Wissman & Rawson, 2016). For example, one student asserted, “The style implemented helped me cooperate with my classmates and exchange ideas, have discussion and find what was the best answer collectively.” Despite the diverse classroom composition, these elements appeared to craft an inclusive atmosphere.

Finally, as mentioned above, half of the students suggested the tests “…gave time to think and reflect instead of just memorizing information for an in-class test.” This is common to open-book and take-home tests (Kim & Cho, 2021; Jamil et al., 2023) but not for collaborative tests. One student remarked, “Both the longer essay question and the shorter questions pushed me to reflect on the material instead of just memorizing it.” The instructor perceived this as taking place in the context of better student retention where students seemed more able to recall concepts from earlier in the class (as well as from

other classes) with less stress on memorization. Even though only a single student mentioned the increased retention, it is cited as a common feature of collaborative exams (e.g., Kapitanoff & Pandey, 2018; Levine et al., 2018).

The student perceptions offered support for using hybrid open-book, take-home, collaborative exams to reduce the need for memorization in exams in preference for promoting general learning with limited support for increased retention. In addition, the study supported student appreciation of the hybrid format, that it promotes more thinking and reflection, reduces stress, reduces time pressure, encourages engaging concepts more deeply, and provides more opportunity and incentive to practice research skills.

It is recommended that anyone interested in emulating this hybrid format begin by familiarizing themselves with all three individual formats individually. Many of their strengths and weaknesses overlap and all three formats require careful construction of tests. Careful and deliberate test design is necessary to make sure that the test is measuring the correct factors valid for the class. It is also important for incentivizing and encouraging the desired skills to be cultivated by the exam. All three individual exam formats may be useful for developing skills and extending more learning through the process of testing itself.

Furthermore, it is important that any testing and student evaluation should be consciously matched to and developed for the nature of what is taught and done in the classroom and should validly reflect the practice. Given that, this hybrid format may also require some retraining of students to meet different class expectations that they may perceive as different from their expectations. In spite of those caveats, the format may be utilized for a positive student experience, promoting more learning, even in a challenging transnational classroom environment.

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Governing Shadow Education: Private Tutoring, Educational Inequality, and Policy Limitations in South Korea

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Abstract:

Private supplementary tutoring, including the widespread use of *hagwons*, has become deeply embedded in South Korea's education system. Over several decades, the government has tried several approaches. These include regulation, publicly supported alternatives, and admissions reform. Yet, private education remains widespread and financially burdensome. Total expenditure reached 29.2 trillion Korean won (KRW) in 2024 before declining to 27.5 trillion KRW in 2025, while participation fell from 80.0 percent to 75.7 percent. This article examines why private supplementary tutoring remains strongly institutionalized despite sustained policy intervention. The article draws on government reports, national statistics, and academic research. It argues that policy has often regulated private education without sufficiently addressing the conditions that sustain household demand. These include competitive admissions, unequal educational opportunities, and families' efforts to protect their children's future prospects. The article concludes that shadow education should be understood as an interdependent institution shaped by competitive pressures and inequalities of formal education. Sustainable reform therefore requires coordination among education policy, family support, and efforts to reduce broader inequality.

Keywords: shadow education, private tutoring, hagwon, educational inequality, education governance, South Korea

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1. Introduction

Private supplementary tutoring has become a persistent policy challenge in South Korean education. In Korea, this form of tutoring is commonly called *sagyo-yuk*, or private education. It includes *hagwons*, individual tutoring, and online programs (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016). Although these services operate outside regular schools, they remain closely connected to formal curricula and selection processes. Bray (1999) describes this relationship through the concept of "shadow education," emphasizing that private tutoring follows and changes in response to the formal system. When formal curricula or admissions policies change, shadow education changes with them (Bray, 1999; Bray & Lykins, 2012).

South Korea provides a significant example of how private tutoring can become institutionalized within a national education system. The country's rapid economic development was closely connected to expanded schooling. Educational credentials also gained importance and became widely viewed as paths to social mobility, secure employment, and improved economic status (Hannum et al., 2019; Kim, 2016). The expansion of higher education did not remove competition; instead, much of it shifted toward admission to a relatively small group of highly regarded universities (Byun & Park, 2017; Kim, 2016). These expectations helped sustain demand for educational opportunities beyond the regular school day.

Recent statistics illustrate both the scale and the changing pattern of private education. Total expenditure among school students reached 29.2 trillion Korean won (KRW) in 2024. The participation rate reached 80.0 percent (Statistics Korea [KOSTAT], 2025). In 2025, total expenditure declined to approximately 27.5 trillion KRW. Participation fell to 75.7 percent, and average weekly participation decreased from

7.6 to 7.1 hours per student (Ministry of Data and Statistics [MODS], 2026). Elementary students continued to record the highest participation rate at 84.4 percent, followed by middle-school students at 73.0 percent and high-school students at 63.0 percent (MODS, 2026).

These results show that private education declined in 2025 but remained widely used across the school system. The reductions in expenditure and participation are notable, particularly after several years of rising costs. However, participation still involved more than three-quarters of all students and more than four-fifths of elementary students. Private education therefore continues to play a routine role in how many Korean families organize their children's learning, even as participation and expenditure fluctuate (MODS, 2026).

Private education in Korea is often explained through strong parental aspirations, the social value placed on education, and competition for university admission (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2010). These explanations identify important features of the Korean context, but an emphasis on parental behavior alone can overlook the institutional environment within which households make decisions. Parents do not make educational choices in isolation; their responses are connected to university stratification, employment outcomes, and uncertainty about what students need to remain competitive (Byun & Park, 2017; OECD, 2024).

Building on these explanations, this article makes a governance-centered argument. Shadow education is better understood as a governance problem arising from the interaction of educational institutions, household decision-making, and policy design. It asks:

Why does private supplementary education remain strongly institutionalized in South Korea despite decades of regulation and efforts to strengthen public education?

The article argues that Korean policy has often focused on controlling the visible operation of private education. These efforts have included restrictions on providers, changes to admissions and examinations, and the expansion of publicly supported alternatives (Choi & Choi, 2016; Kim & Chang, 2010; Ministry of Education [MOE], 2023). Such measures can address excessive costs and unfair practices, but they do not fully change the conditions that sustain household demand. Competitive selection, unequal educational opportunities, and families' concerns about protecting their children's future prospects continue to sustain demand for private education (Bae & Choi, 2024; Byun & Park, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2010).

This argument does not suggest that government policy has been entirely unsuccessful. The decline in expenditure and participation reported for 2025 deserves careful consideration. Expanded public after-school and care programs may have reduced the need for some forms of private education (Bae et al., 2010; MOE, 2024). Nevertheless, the aggregate survey data do not establish how much of the decline resulted from particular interventions (MODS, 2026). Changes in the student population, household economic conditions, and family preferences may also have contributed. The 2025 results should therefore be understood as an important development rather than conclusive evidence that the underlying demand for private education has been resolved.

The article contributes to broader discussions of education governance by showing that shadow education should not be treated simply as an external commercial activity. It has an interdependent relationship with formal education. Private providers respond to changes in curricula and admissions, while policymakers seek to regulate their effects on students and households (Bray, 1999; Bray & Lykins, 2012). Government reforms may therefore change the form of private education without eliminating the competitive pressures that sustain it.

The following sections define shadow education and explain the article's analytical approach before examining the structural conditions sustaining demand, the distributional consequences of private tutoring, and the limitations of major policy responses. The discussion then considers the wider implications for education governance.

2. Shadow Education and Its Institutionalization in Korea

Shadow education generally refers to fee-based instruction in academic subjects that takes place outside regular schooling and supplements the formal education system (Bray, 1999; Bray & Lykins, 2012). It includes private academies and individual tutoring. It may also include online instruction, examination preparation, language education, and specialized admissions services (Bae & Choi, 2024; Bray & Kwo, 2014; Bray & Zhang, 2023). The term "shadow" is useful because the content, scale, and organization of private tutoring depend heavily on developments within formal education. Changes in curricula or grading practices can alter the services offered by private providers. Examination and admissions reforms can have the same effect (Bray, 1999; Bray & Lykins, 2012).

In South Korea, the growth of shadow education is closely connected to postwar educational expansion. Industrialization and rising competition for secondary and higher education also shaped its development. As schooling expanded and educational credentials became more important for employment and social mobility, private tutoring developed as a strategy for improving students' positions within the formal selection system (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016; Park et al., 2016). Private education consequently developed alongside Korean schooling. It responds to the curricula, examinations, and

admissions processes that shape formal education (Bae & Choi, 2024; Bray, 1999; Kim, 2016).

The *hagwon* industry now provides services ranging from basic academic support to highly specialized preparation for selective schools and universities. Students may use private education for remediation or advanced study. Others seek examination preparation or individualized admissions guidance. Its role therefore extends beyond additional instruction to include acceleration, specialization, and information that families believe may improve a student's competitive position (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016).

Three interconnected conditions help explain this institutionalization. Competition over access to highly regarded institutions increases the perceived consequences of academic performance; unequal household resources shape the intensity and type of support families can purchase; and uncertainty encourages parents to use tutoring as a form of educational risk management (Bae & Choi, 2024; Byun & Park, 2017; Kim, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2010). As participation becomes widespread, private education may appear necessary even to families that question its effectiveness or dislike its financial and emotional costs.

Shadow education should therefore be understood as a governance problem rather than only as a market outcome. The state regulates schools, private tutoring, examinations, and universities through different policies and administrative systems (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Choi & Choi, 2016). Families, however, experience these areas as one interconnected educational environment. A policy change in one part of the system may therefore redirect demand elsewhere rather than reduce private education overall.

For example, reducing the importance of one examination may redirect demand toward other admissions requirements, while restrictions on *hagwon* operating hours may

change schedules without removing the incentive to seek tutoring. Publicly funded after-school programs may provide useful academic support and reduce some household expenditure while having less influence on demand for highly specialized examination or admissions preparation (Bae et al., 2010; Choi & Choi, 2016; Kim & Chang, 2010; Lubienski & Lee, 2013).

These patterns help explain why private education has remained resilient despite repeated regulation. Understanding its institutionalization requires attention not only to the tutoring market but also to the competitive and unequal education system to which that market responds.

3. Analytical Approach and Sources

This article uses a qualitative policy-review approach to examine why private supplementary education remains strongly institutionalized in South Korea. The article does not estimate the causal effect of a single intervention. Instead, it brings together academic research and official statistics with government and international reports. These sources are used to identify recurring relationships among policy design, educational competition, household behavior, and inequality.

The academic literature was selected to examine the historical development of shadow education and the conditions shaping family demand. It also addresses links to student achievement and inequality, as well as the effects and limits of government regulation. Particular attention was given to research on South Korea, while comparative and international studies were used to clarify broader concepts and place the Korean experience within a wider policy context. The review therefore functions as an

integrative and policy-oriented analysis rather than a systematic literature review. It does not claim to include every study published on Korean private education.

Official statistical evidence is drawn primarily from the annual Private Education Expenditures Survey of Elementary, Middle and High School Students (KOSTAT, 2025; MODS, 2026). The surveys report total and average expenditure as well as participation rates and weekly hours. They also show differences by school level, household income, and region. The analysis uses the 2024 and 2025 results to examine recent changes in the scale and pattern of private education. The most recent data cover the 2025 calendar year and were released in March 2026.

Government policy documents and related studies were reviewed to identify the principal instruments used to reduce dependence on private education. For analytical purposes, these responses were grouped into four broad areas: direct regulation of tutoring providers; publicly supported alternatives, including after-school and care programs; reforms to assessment and university admissions; and targeted measures intended to reduce regional or socioeconomic disparities. These categories are used to compare the objectives of different policies rather than to suggest that each initiative belongs exclusively to one area.

The sources were reviewed thematically around three questions. First, how has private education been defined and framed as a policy problem? Second, do government responses primarily regulate the supply and operation of private tutoring, or do they address the conditions that sustain household demand? Third, to what extent do the policies reduce educational inequality rather than redirecting private investment toward different services or forms of preparation? Policies were considered in relation to both their stated objectives and the assumptions they make about why families participate in private education.

OECD publications were used selectively to provide context on tertiary attainment and instructional time. They also offer evidence on labor-market outcomes, household pressures, and other conditions connected to educational competition. These sources were not treated as direct measures of private tutoring. Instead, they were used to situate private education within the broader institutional and socioeconomic environment in which Korean households make educational decisions.

This approach has several limitations. First, the analysis relies on published research, policy documents, and aggregate statistics. It does not include interviews with students or parents. It also does not include interviews with teachers, policymakers, or *hagwon* operators. It therefore cannot directly capture how individuals interpret particular policies or make decisions about tutoring. Second, official figures may omit some informal or unregistered instruction (Bray & Kwo, 2014). Third, changes between 2024 and 2025 cannot be attributed to a single policy without further causal analysis. They may reflect demographic change or household economic conditions. Changes in public provision and family behavior may also have contributed.

The article therefore treats recent statistical changes cautiously and does not present them as evidence of the success or failure of any one intervention. Despite these limitations, the combined evidence provides a useful basis for examining why shadow education has remained resilient. It also helps identify how its role within South Korean education may be changing.

4. Structural Conditions Sustaining Demand

4.1 Competitive admissions and institutional hierarchy

Competition for admission to selective universities remains one of the strongest conditions sustaining private education in South Korea. The expansion of higher education transformed university attendance from an opportunity available to a relatively small proportion of the population into a common educational expectation (Hannum et al., 2019; OECD, 2025a). Wider participation, however, did not eliminate institutional hierarchy. Korean universities continue to differ in reputation and selectivity. They also vary in location, resources, and perceived labor-market value (Byun & Park, 2017; OECD, 2026).

Competition therefore concerns not only whether students enter higher education but also which institution they attend. Students and families may view admission to a highly regarded university as an important route toward secure employment and social mobility (Byun & Park, 2017; OECD, 2026). This perception is reinforced by labor-market differences in wages, employment stability, and working conditions between large and small firms and between regular and nonregular employment (OECD, 2024). Educational credentials consequently carry implications that extend beyond academic attainment.

Private education providers respond closely to these incentives. *Hagwons* and other services offer examination preparation and advanced study. They may also provide essay or interview coaching and guidance on admissions requirements. Their programs can also change rapidly when the government or universities revise curricula, examinations, or selection procedures. Private education is therefore able to follow shifts in the criteria through which competitive advantage is pursued (Bae & Choi, 2024; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Kim, 2016).

This adaptability helps explain why admissions reform does not necessarily reduce private education. When the importance of one selection measure declines, families may redirect their attention and resources toward another. A system centered on standardized

examinations may encourage test preparation. Greater emphasis on school records or written applications may instead create demand for individualized guidance and interview coaching. The form of private education may change even when the underlying competition remains largely unchanged (Bae & Choi, 2024; Choi & Choi, 2016).

4.2 Educational aspirations and parental risk management

South Korean families have historically invested heavily in education because of its association with economic advancement and intergenerational mobility (Hannum et al., 2019; Kim, 2016). The country's developmental experience strengthened the belief that educational achievement could improve both individual opportunities and family circumstances. Private educational investment, however, is not driven by aspiration alone; it may also help parents manage uncertainty and reduce the perceived risk that their children will fall behind (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016).

Parents cannot always know whether a particular *hagwon* or tutoring program will produce better examination results. Nevertheless, nonparticipation may appear risky when classmates are receiving additional instruction or studying material before it is introduced at school. Families may therefore invest in private education not because they are certain that it will provide an advantage, but because they are uncertain about the consequences of doing without it (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016).

Private education may also provide information that families find difficult to obtain elsewhere. Admissions processes can involve changing requirements and multiple application pathways. Families may also need to understand school records, examinations, interviews, and institution-specific expectations (Bae & Choi, 2024). Families with access to specialized guidance may feel better prepared to navigate these processes, while those without such access may experience greater uncertainty. The

value of private education can therefore lie partly in interpreting the formal system for families, not only in providing academic instruction.

Hagwons may also provide structured schedules and study routines. Some offer supervision and specialized guidance (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016). These functions help explain why a public alternative offering only general learning content may not fully replace private education. To influence household decisions, public provision may also need to address the organizational and informational support that families seek.

4.3 Formal instructional time and supplementary learning

Korea invests substantially in education, and its students generally demonstrate strong academic performance (OECD, 2025a). At the same time, compulsory classroom hours are lower than OECD averages. Korean primary students receive approximately 655 hours of compulsory instruction per year, compared with an OECD average of 804 hours; lower-secondary students receive approximately 842 hours, compared with 909 hours across the OECD. Korean students also devote considerable time to learning outside regular school hours (OECD, 2025a).

These figures should not be interpreted as evidence that Korean schools are deficient or that fewer compulsory hours directly cause private tutoring. Countries organize school calendars and curricula differently. Classroom hours alone therefore do not indicate educational quality (OECD, 2025a). Nevertheless, lower formal instructional time may interact with demanding curricular and admissions expectations. Some families may perceive a gap between what regular schooling provides and the preparation they believe is necessary for competitive selection (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016).

Supplementary education also serves different purposes. Some students seek remedial support, whereas others seek acceleration by studying future content or

receiving preparation beyond the regular curriculum (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016). This distinction has policy implications. Schools may reduce remedial demand through timely and individualized support, whereas acceleration-oriented demand may be harder to address because it is tied to the pursuit of relative advantage rather than a common educational standard (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016).

Even a strong public school system may therefore coexist with extensive private tutoring. When families compete for limited places at selective institutions, improvements in public education can raise general learning quality without removing incentives to seek an additional advantage (Bae & Choi, 2024; Choi & Choi, 2016).

4.4 Care, supervision, and enrichment

Demand for private education, particularly among younger students, cannot be explained only by university admissions. Families may use private academies for academic instruction or structured activities. These programs can also provide supervision and enrichment after the regular school day (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016). For working parents, the timing and reliability of these services may be as important as their educational content (Bae & Choi, 2024; MOE, 2024).

This broader function may help explain why participation is particularly high among elementary students. In 2025, 84.4 percent of elementary students participated in private education, compared with 73.0 percent of middle-school students and 63.0 percent of high-school students (MODS, 2026). The difference should not be attributed entirely to childcare, because elementary students also receive substantial private instruction in academic subjects (MODS, 2026). Nevertheless, private programs often combine learning with supervision. This structured after-school support may be especially attractive to families with younger children (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016).

Government policy has increasingly recognized the connection between education and care through the expansion of public after-school programs, including Neulbom School (MOE, 2024). These initiatives seek to provide accessible education and care beyond regular school hours and reduce the burden on families (MOE, 2024). When such programs are dependable and widely available, they may reduce families' reliance on private academies for supervision and certain forms of supplementary academic support (Bae et al., 2010; Lubienski & Lee, 2013).

Their influence on other segments of private education may be more limited. Expanded public care may support families with elementary-school children without substantially reducing demand for accelerated instruction, examination preparation, or specialized admissions guidance. On the other hand, admissions reforms may alter the test-preparation services families purchase while doing little to address their continuing need for reliable care after the school day (Bae & Choi, 2024; Choi & Choi, 2016).

The multiple purposes served by private education demonstrate why one policy instrument is unlikely to reduce every form of demand. Examination reform and public academic support address some household needs. After-school care and provider regulation address others. Effective governance therefore requires a differentiated understanding of why families participate and which function each policy is intended to replace or regulate.

5. Educational Inequality and the Distribution of Opportunity

Private supplementary education contributes to inequality through more than participation. Families differ in how much they spend and in the type or intensity of instruction they obtain. Access to information and geographic availability also vary (Bae

& Choi, 2024; Byun & Park, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2010). It is therefore insufficient to ask only whether students participate. The duration and strategic value of the services they receive also matter.

Research has consistently found that family socioeconomic background influences participation in and expenditure on supplementary education in South Korea (Byun & Park, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2010). Higher-income families are generally better positioned to purchase frequent instruction and smaller classes. They can also obtain individualized tutoring or specialized admissions support. Lower-income households may also participate, but financial limitations can restrict the type or duration of services they can purchase (Bae & Choi, 2024; Byun & Park, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2010). Private education can therefore widen differences among students even when participation is common across income groups.

The most recent statistics illustrate the continued financial scale of private education. Average monthly expenditure across all students declined from 474,000 KRW in 2024 to 458,000 KRW in 2025 (KOSTAT, 2025; MODS, 2026). Among participants, average monthly expenditure was 604,000 KRW in 2025. The average was 512,000 KRW for elementary students and 632,000 KRW for middle-school students. It reached 793,000 KRW for high-school students (MODS, 2026).

These figures should be interpreted cautiously. Average expenditure among participating students increased only slightly, from 592,000 KRW in 2024 to 604,000 KRW in 2025 (KOSTAT, 2025; MODS, 2026). This nominal increase does not by itself demonstrate that families purchased more intensive services. The more significant finding is that households continuing to use private education still spent substantial amounts despite declines in overall expenditure and participation. Further analysis by

household income and service type is needed to determine whether the 2025 changes reduced or reinforced inequality.

Educational inequality also operates across generations. In Korea, 85 percent of adults aged 25–34 with at least one tertiary-educated parent had completed tertiary education themselves, compared with 45 percent among those whose parents had not completed upper-secondary education (OECD, 2025a). This 40-percentage-point difference cannot be attributed to private tutoring alone. However, it demonstrates that family educational background remains strongly associated with young adults' educational attainment.

Private education may contribute to this broader process by allowing families to convert financial resources, educational knowledge, and social networks into advantages for their children (Bae & Choi, 2024; Byun & Park, 2017). Parents familiar with educational institutions may be better able to identify useful programs, interpret admissions requirements, and determine when specialized support is likely to be valuable. Inequality therefore involves not only how much families can spend but also how strategically they can use private services.

Geographic differences add another dimension. National survey data show substantial regional variation in participation and expenditure, indicating that access to private education is not distributed evenly across the country (KOSTAT, 2025; MODS, 2026). Online tutoring may reduce some distance-related barriers. Participation still depends on affordability and reliable technology. Families also need information and the ability to assess program quality (Bray & Kwo, 2014; Bray & Zhang, 2023).

Educational opportunity is also connected to residential location. Families with sufficient resources may seek housing in areas associated with desirable schools and extensive private education services. Research in Korea has found that perceived school

quality can affect nearby housing prices, illustrating how educational advantage may become reflected in residential markets (Hahn et al., 2012). Access to educationally desirable areas therefore depends not only on tutoring expenditure but also on families' ability to afford housing in those locations.

The financial implications extend beyond educational achievement. In 2023, nearly 80 percent of Korean school students participated in private tutoring, and families spent approximately 10 percent of their disposable income on average on these services (OECD, 2025b). Comparable expenditures represent a larger share of income for lower-income households, while higher-income families retain greater capacity to purchase additional or more specialized support (Kim & Lee, 2010).

Private education expenses form part of the broader economic pressures influencing decisions about marriage, parenthood, and family size in South Korea. OECD analysis identifies several interconnected pressures on family formation, including housing costs, employment insecurity, work-family tensions, childcare costs, and private tutoring expenses (OECD, 2025b). The OECD also reports that many Korean parents regard tutoring as financially burdensome and that education and care costs influence decisions about family size (OECD, 2025b). These findings do not establish that private tutoring alone causes low fertility, but they show that education costs contribute to the perceived financial burden of raising children.

Shadow education is therefore not only an educational issue. It is connected to household expenditure and residential choices. It also affects family formation and the distribution of opportunity across generations. Its effects also extend beyond whether tutoring improves the performance of an individual student.

Private tutoring may benefit students who need remediation, individualized instruction, or specialized support (Park et al., 2016). The policy concern is not that

every form of tutoring is harmful. Rather, access to perceived educational protection and advantage increasingly depends on families' private resources. When supplementary education is widely viewed as necessary for remaining competitive, differences in household income and educational information can produce unequal capacities to manage educational risk (Bae & Choi, 2024; Byun & Park, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2010).

6. Policy Responses and Their Limitations

6.1 From prohibition to direct regulation

South Korea has attempted to regulate private tutoring for several decades. The most restrictive intervention began in July 1980, when the government introduced a broad prohibition on tutoring outside regular schools to reduce educational competition and household expenditure (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim & Lee, 2010). Private tutoring nevertheless continued through informal arrangements. The restrictions were gradually relaxed, and in April 2000 the Constitutional Court ruled that the comprehensive prohibition violated constitutionally protected parental rights and educational freedom (Bae & Choi, 2024; Lee et al., 2010).

This experience demonstrated both the practical and legal limits of prohibition. Once private tutoring had become closely connected to family strategies for educational advancement, restricting providers did not eliminate the underlying demand; tutoring continued through informal channels as the legal framework was revised (Bae & Choi, 2024; Lee et al., 2010).

Policy subsequently shifted from general prohibition toward regulation of the private education market. Governments and local education authorities introduced provider registration, operating-hour restrictions, fee reporting, monitoring, and consumer-protection measures to govern *hagwons* and other tutoring services (Choi & Choi, 2016;

Kim & Chang, 2010). Restrictions on late-night instruction became among the most visible measures, reflecting concerns about excessive study and pressure on students and families (Choi & Choi, 2016; Kim & Chang, 2010).

Direct regulation can improve transparency and discourage misleading practices. It can also restrict very late instruction and establish minimum standards for providers (Bray & Kwo, 2014; Choi & Choi, 2016). Evidence about its effect on tutoring use is mixed. Kim and Chang (2010) found that operating-hour restrictions contributed to reductions in tutoring time, whereas Choi and Choi (2016) found that a 10 p.m. curfew did not significantly reduce tutoring hours or expenditure. These findings suggest that direct regulation can influence provider and household behavior without necessarily removing the competitive conditions sustaining demand.

Direct regulation therefore remains important, but its objectives should be distinguished clearly. Consumer protection, transparency, and limits on excessive operating practices are valuable even when they do not substantially reduce participation. Policies intended to reduce structural demand must address the competitive conditions that generate it (Choi & Choi, 2016).

6.2 Publicly supported alternatives

A second policy approach has sought to provide publicly supported alternatives to private education. These measures include school-based after-school programs, Educational Broadcasting System resources, online learning materials, academic support, and expanded education and care for younger students (Bae & Choi, 2024; MOE, 2024). Their purpose is to provide accessible or lower-cost services that may reduce dependence on private providers (MOE, 2024).

Research suggests that publicly funded after-school programs can improve access to supplementary learning and may reduce some private expenditure, particularly for families with limited resources (Bae et al., 2010). Korea's school-based programs also illustrate how governments can use public provision as an alternative to conventional tutoring markets (Lubienski & Lee, 2013). More recent initiatives, including the nationwide expansion of Neulbom School, seek to provide integrated education and care beyond regular school hours (MOE, 2024).

Public and private programs, however, are not always direct substitutes. Families may use a public after-school program for care or general academic support while continuing to invest in private instruction for acceleration or examination preparation (Bae et al., 2010; Lubienski & Lee, 2013). Public provision may therefore meet a basic educational or supervisory need without replacing services purchased for competitive advantage.

The ability of public alternatives to reduce private demand depends on how families view them. Their purpose and accessibility matter, as do their reliability and quality. Programs designed to expand equitable access may not provide individualized instruction or accelerated learning. They may also lack the specialized information and admissions guidance that some families seek from private providers (Bae & Choi, 2024; Lubienski & Lee, 2013).

The decline in elementary-school participation from 87.7 percent in 2024 to 84.4 percent in 2025 is notable (KOSTAT, 2025; MODS, 2026). Expanded public education and care may have contributed, but the aggregate surveys do not allow the change to be attributed causally to those initiatives (MODS, 2026). Demographic change, household economic conditions, family preferences, and other policies may also have influenced

participation. Public alternatives should therefore be evaluated through more than annual changes in overall tutoring rates.

6.3 Admissions and assessment reform

Governments have also repeatedly changed examinations and university admissions policies in an effort to reduce excessive competition and dependence on private preparation. These efforts have included high-school equalization and revisions to the College Scholastic Ability Test. They have also changed the role of school records and sought to align examinations more closely with the official curriculum (Bae & Choi, 2024; MOE, 2023).

Such reforms can alter what students study and how families prepare for selection. However, they do not necessarily reduce private education. When the importance of one selection measure declines, families may redirect their attention toward another. Greater reliance on standardized examinations can encourage test preparation. By contrast, greater reliance on school records or complex admissions pathways can expand demand for consulting, essay support, and interview coaching (Bae & Choi, 2024; Choi & Choi, 2016).

Frequent changes can also produce uncertainty. Families may seek private guidance to interpret new rules, while *hagwons* can respond quickly by developing programs around revised selection criteria (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016). Admissions reform may therefore change the content of private education without reducing the competitive incentives that sustain it (Choi & Choi, 2016).

The government's effort to remove unusually difficult, or so-called "killer," questions from national examinations illustrates this tension. The 2023 plan to reduce private education emphasized the need to ensure that examination questions remained within the public-school curriculum and did not encourage dependence on costly outside

preparation (MOE, 2023). This objective is important for fairness because students should not need access to specialized private instruction to encounter material expected on a public examination.

Eliminating unusually difficult questions does not remove relative competition. When many applicants meet a common curricular standard, differentiation may shift to other examination items or admissions components. Families may continue purchasing tutoring because their goal is not simply to master the curriculum but to outperform other applicants for a limited number of desirable places (Bae & Choi, 2024; Choi & Choi, 2016). Assessment reform can therefore improve fairness without necessarily eliminating private demand.

6.4 Interpreting recent change and persistent policy limitations

The 2025 survey represents a notable change from the pattern reported in 2024. Total private education expenditure declined from 29.2 trillion KRW to 27.5 trillion KRW, a reduction of 5.7 percent. Participation fell from 80.0 percent to 75.7 percent, and average weekly participation declined from 7.6 to 7.1 hours per student (KOSTAT, 2025; MODS, 2026). These changes are meaningful and should not be minimized.

Several factors may have contributed to the decline. Possible explanations include expanded public programs, demographic change, household economic conditions, changing family choices, and recent policy interventions. However, the aggregate survey data do not show how much of the decline can be attributed to any single factor (MODS, 2026). One year of change is also insufficient to determine whether Korea is experiencing a lasting reduction in dependence on private education or a temporary fluctuation.

Average monthly expenditure among participating students increased only slightly, from 592,000 KRW to 604,000 KRW (KOSTAT, 2025; MODS, 2026). This nominal increase does not demonstrate that participating families purchased more intensive services. The more important point is that participation remained widespread and expenditure among users remained substantial despite the overall decline.

Taken together, the policy record reveals three recurring limitations. Many interventions act on visible forms of tutoring more directly than on the conditions sustaining demand. Responsibility is also divided across schooling, tutoring regulation, admissions, and care. Regional development and employment policy are handled separately. In addition, reforms can redirect demand toward other services rather than eliminate it (Bae & Choi, 2024; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Choi & Choi, 2016; OECD, 2024). Publicly supported alternatives may also reduce some forms of dependence while leaving demand for acceleration, individualized attention, or specialized information largely unchanged (Bae et al., 2010; Lubienski & Lee, 2013).

Policy evaluation should therefore move beyond total expenditure and participation to examine distribution by household income, region, school level, purpose, and type of instruction (KOSTAT, 2025; MODS, 2026). Korea's difficulty in reducing private education does not reflect an absence of policy effort. The central challenge is that these interventions operate within an education and employment system that continues to reward relative academic advantage; policies that do not alter those incentives are consequently likely to have limited and uneven effects (Bae & Choi, 2024; Byun & Park, 2017; Choi & Choi, 2016; OECD, 2024).

7. Discussion: Governance and Wider Implications

Shadow education is not unique to South Korea. Private supplementary tutoring has expanded across diverse education systems. Its scale and organization vary by national context, as does its social meaning (Bray, 2021; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Park et al., 2016). Several conditions commonly support its growth. These include competitive examinations and selective educational pathways. Unequal access to desirable institutions and parental uncertainty also contribute (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Park et al., 2016). The Korean case therefore offers broader lessons about how governments understand and govern supplementary education.

The Korean case highlights two immediate governance lessons. Regulation of provider conduct remains necessary for transparency and consumer protection, but it cannot by itself remove the competitive pressures sustaining household demand (Bray & Kwo, 2014; Choi & Choi, 2016). Public alternatives can broaden access and meet important academic or care needs, yet they are most likely to affect household decisions when they are reliable and responsive to the specific functions families seek (Bae et al., 2010; Lubienski & Lee, 2013). This does not require public programs to reproduce the private market's pursuit of competitive advantage; it requires policymakers to understand why families use private services.

The Korean experience also demonstrates the importance of monitoring substitution. Regulation may reduce participation in one visible form of tutoring while demand shifts toward another service, instructional format, or selection requirement (Bray & Kwo, 2014; Choi & Choi, 2016). Changes in *hagwon* participation alone may not reveal whether demand has shifted toward individual tutoring, online instruction, admissions consulting, or other forms of supplementary education (Bray & Kwo, 2014; Bray & Zhang, 2023; Choi & Choi, 2016). Policy evaluation should therefore examine the wider supplementary education market rather than a single provider type.

This concern also has an equity dimension. Restrictions affecting relatively affordable group instruction may have less effect on families able to purchase more expensive individual or specialized services. Universal regulation can therefore produce unequal consequences when households differ in their capacity to adapt (Bray & Kwo, 2014; Bray & Lykins, 2012). Policy evaluation must consider whether interventions reduce inequality or redirect advantage toward less visible and more costly forms of provision.

More fundamentally, private tutoring policy must be connected to the distribution of educational and employment opportunities. When a relatively small group of institutions is perceived to provide disproportionate access to secure or desirable careers, families have strong motivations to compete for admission (Byun & Park, 2017; OECD, 2024). Policies focused solely on tutoring providers cannot substantially alter these incentives. A broader governance approach must therefore consider institutional hierarchy and admissions design. It must also address regional inequality and labor-market differences alongside private education regulation.

South Korea further demonstrates that shadow education can become part of the normal operation of an education system. Private providers interpret curricular and admissions changes for families, shape expectations about appropriate preparation, and influence how students allocate study time (Bae & Choi, 2024; Kim, 2016). Public policy, in turn, responds to the financial, educational, and social effects of private tutoring. Shadow education and formal education should therefore be understood as interdependent rather than separate systems (Bray, 1999; Bray & Lykins, 2012).

The growing role of digital provision adds a transnational dimension to shadow education. Online platforms allow tutors, companies, and students to connect across national borders. Families may purchase language instruction, academic tutoring, or

examination preparation from providers in other countries (Bray & Zhang, 2023). International companies may also adapt their services to different education systems. Cross-border provision can expand access and choice. However, it also creates challenges for consumer protection, quality assurance, data protection, and national regulation (Bray & Kwo, 2014; Bray & Zhang, 2023).

Digital access does not necessarily eliminate inequality. Online tutoring may extend services to students outside major urban markets, but participation still depends on reliable technology, financial resources, information, and the ability to assess program quality (Bray & Kwo, 2014; Bray & Zhang, 2023). Governments therefore need to consider both the opportunities and the inequalities created by increasingly international and technology-mediated forms of supplementary education.

The wider implication of the Korean case is that effective governance requires a system-level approach. Governments must ask not only how private tutoring should be regulated but also why families perceive it as necessary. Policies are likely to remain limited when they address individual providers without examining the educational hierarchies, selection processes, and social risks that sustain household demand (Bae & Choi, 2024; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Choi & Choi, 2016). Shadow education reform should therefore form part of a broader effort to make educational and employment opportunities less dependent on families' capacity to purchase private advantage.

8. Conclusion

Private supplementary tutoring remains deeply institutionalized in South Korea. Total expenditure and participation declined in 2025. Even so, private education continued to involve more than three-quarters of school students (MODS, 2026). These changes may

indicate that the market is beginning to shift, but one year of decline does not demonstrate that the broader governance challenge has been resolved.

This article has argued that explanations centered on parental ambition, educational culture, or market behavior are incomplete. Shadow education is better understood as a governance problem arising from the interaction of educational institutions, household decision-making, and policy design. Families make decisions within an environment shaped by competitive university admissions and institutional hierarchy. Unequal opportunity and uncertainty about falling behind also shape their choices. Private education becomes attractive partly because families expect academic benefits. It can also offer preparation and information, as well as supervision and a way to manage educational risk.

South Korean governments have responded through prohibition and market regulation. They have also expanded public alternatives and reformed examinations and admissions. These interventions address genuine concerns, but many act more directly on the provision of tutoring than on the conditions sustaining household demand. Regulation may therefore change the form, timing, or location of private education without removing the incentives that lead families to seek it.

From this perspective, shadow education should be understood as part of the wider education system rather than as a separate market. Private providers respond to curricula and admissions policies. Families, meanwhile, combine public and private education within a single strategy for managing educational risk. Policies directed at either system in isolation are unlikely to produce lasting change.

A more effective approach requires reliable public academic support and education-and-care programs, particularly for students and communities with fewer resources. Evaluation should move beyond aggregate expenditure and participation. It should

examine who uses private education and what services they purchase. It should also consider how opportunities differ by income, region, and school level. Most importantly, long-term reform must address the unequal value attached to educational institutions and employment pathways. As long as admission to a narrow group of universities is widely perceived to shape future security and status, families will continue to seek private advantage.

South Korea's experience offers a broader lesson for other education systems. Regulation can alter the size and shape of shadow education, but lasting reform depends on changing the formal institutions and inequalities that make supplementary education appear necessary.

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Climate Change or Climate Crisis? Multilingual Framing of Environmental Risk and the Governance of Transnational Climate Education

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Abstract:

Transnational higher education programs teach climate and sustainability topics to diverse, multilingual student groups, mainly in English. However, research on how climate terminology affects perceived risks has largely focused on English and monolingual populations, leaving a gap in understanding how language works in transnational classrooms. This paper explores whether the language used to describe climate risk is important for education providers and develops a framework to show how terminology affects understanding of scientific content and risk perception. We combine three areas of research: climate terminology and risk perception, the effects of using a foreign language in decision-making, and English-medium instruction in global education. Our framework compares climate terminology in English, Spanish, and Korean. We propose the Multilingual Risk Transmission Framework, highlighting four areas where languages may differ: the words used, their emotional meanings, knowledge transfer, and how messages are understood. From this, we create seven testable ideas and a research plan that pairs language data with experiments on risk perception. Finally, we stress that language policy in transnational education also involves managing risks. Institutions should focus on standard terms, bilingual explanations, assessment methods, and communication about hazards to address an often-overlooked aspect of education.

Key words: transnational education governance; English-medium instruction; climate change communication; risk perception; cross-linguistic terminology; branch campuses

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1. Introduction

Consider two English words. A tornado, in standard dictionary definition, is a violent whirling wind accompanied by a funnel-shaped cloud that travels over land; a waterspout is a comparable rotating column that descends from cloud to the surface of an ocean or lake (Merriam-Webster, 2021). To a non-specialist, the salient distinction is not meteorological but locational, and location implies exposure: land is where people live. The two words therefore carry different implied consequences even though they describe closely related physical processes.

Korean has two words for similar weather phenomena, but they have different meanings. The word 토네이도 (tonei-do) means "tornado" and comes from English. In everyday Korean, it mainly refers to the dangerous funnel storms found in North America. The other word, 용오름 (yong-oreum), means "waterspout" and is a native term. It literally means "the rising of a dragon," stemming from myths where dragons symbolize good luck rather than danger. This term describes a weather event that happens regularly along the Korean coast and is usually seen as a spectacle rather than a threat. The two words differ in two main ways: one is borrowed from English, and the other is a native word; one represents a dangerous event while the other represents something harmless.

The issue of terminology became a real challenge in June 2014 when a tornado hit Ilsan, which is about 30 kilometers away from any significant body of water. Korean media found themselves in a tough position regarding how to label the event (Online News Department, 2014). They could refer to it as a 토네이도, which accurately described what happened according to standard definitions, but that could create unnecessary panic by suggesting it was as severe as tornadoes in places like Oklahoma.

On the other hand, calling it a 용오름 would signal a less dangerous event and imply a connection to water that didn't apply, potentially misleading people into thinking it was less serious than it actually was. Unfortunately, neither term really captured the true risk involved, highlighting a significant limitation in the available vocabulary.

This situation illustrates that what seems like a simple translation issue is, in reality, part of a broader governance challenge, especially in the context of transnational higher education. With branch campuses, franchised degrees, joint programs, and cross-border online courses, educational frameworks designed in one country are often delivered to students in another— and mainly in English. The rapid rise of English-medium instruction (EMI) in higher education has been largely driven by internationalization efforts and the dominance of English in academic publishing (Macaro et al., 2018). This creates a disconnect when it comes to subjects like climate change or disaster risk, as students are learning to identify and discuss hazards in a language that is not the one they will use in real scenarios.

Three areas of research relate to this situation, but they haven't been connected. The first area studies how words about climate affect public risk perception. It shows that word choice matters, but most research has been done in English with only English-speaking participants. The second area looks at how people make decisions in a second language. This research finds that individuals assess risk differently in a foreign language compared to their first language, but it hasn't been applied to climate issues. The third area focuses on English Medium Instruction (EMI) and how transnational education is governed. While it looks at understanding and fairness, it does not consider how people perceive risk.

This paper makes four key contributions. First, it combines these three areas of research and explains how they connect. Second, it introduces the Multilingual Risk Transmission (MRT) framework, which breaks down the process from scientific

information to perceived risk into four levels where language differences can create misunderstandings. Third, it uses the framework to analyze English, Spanish, and Korean and proposes seven ideas that can be tested. Finally, it outlines a two-part plan for testing these ideas and suggests actions that transnational organizations can take in the meantime.

This is a conceptual paper; therefore, the comparative material in Section 5 is based on existing research, news articles, and word usage; it is not original data and does not present new findings. This material aims to support the framework and show its relevance, not to test it. Section 7 explains how such a test would be carried out.

2. Three Literatures in Search of an Intersection

2.1 Climate terminology and risk perception

That the wording of a problem shapes the judgements people make about it is among the most durable findings in decision science (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Applied to climate change, the question has typically been posed as a choice among competing labels. Early work found that Americans' expressed beliefs varied depending on whether survey questions asked about "global warming" or "climate change" (Schuldt et al., 2011), and that the two terms elicited different levels of familiarity and concern in the United Kingdom (Whitmarsh, 2009). The question acquired practical urgency in 2019, when The Guardian instructed its journalists to prefer "climate crisis" and "climate emergency" over "climate change" in order to convey severity—a shift subsequently traced across global news nomenclature (Schäfer et al., 2023).

The experimental evidence on whether the newer terms achieve their intended effect is, however, largely negative. Feldman and Hart (2021) found that "climate emergency" reduced the perceived credibility and newsworthiness of news stories relative to "climate change," with no compensating gain in engagement. In the largest test to date, Bruine de

Bruin et al. (2024) randomly assigned 5,137 US residents to one of five terms and found that "climate change" and "global warming" were rated most familiar and most concerning, with no evidence that "climate crisis" or "climate emergency" produced greater perceived urgency. Their auxiliary analyses point to a mechanism: unfamiliar terms depressed concern, urgency and stated willingness to act. Familiarity, not intensity, appears to carry the effect.

The critical observation for present purposes is the composition of this evidence base. It is overwhelmingly Anglophone and monolingual. The handful of studies conducted elsewhere either translate English stimuli into a target language or examine a single non-English public in isolation. Hung and Bayrak (2020) found no difference in Taiwanese respondents' concern or willingness to act between "climate crisis" and "climate change" labels; Wege et al. (2024) reported broadly convergent findings on terminology comprehension in Germany. Bruine de Bruin and Dugan (2022), drawing on the World Risk Poll, found that concerns about severe weather and concerns about climate change have different correlates, and that in some regions people report perceiving long-term weather change more readily than they report perceiving climate change. Each of these is valuable, but none asks the comparative question: whether the sets of terms that different languages make available are themselves commensurable.

This matters because the dominant model of climate risk perception treats language as a background condition rather than a variable. Van der Linden's (2015) climate change risk perception model integrates cognitive, experiential, socio-cultural and socio-demographic determinants and accounts for a substantial share of variance in holistic risk perception; affective processes emerge as the single strongest predictor. Notably, van der Linden observes that inconsistent terminology across the studies he synthesises may itself explain some of the variance in the literature. The model is well specified within a language. It is silent on what happens across languages.

2.2 Language, emotional distance, and the foreign-language effect

A largely separate literature has established that bilinguals do not evaluate risk identically in their two languages. Keysar et al. (2012) demonstrated that the classic framing effect on risky choice disappeared when options were presented in participants' foreign language; further experiments showed reduced loss aversion under the same manipulation. Costa et al. (2014) extended the finding to moral judgement. Most directly relevant here, Hadjichristidis et al. (2015) found that foreign-language presentation reduced judged risk and increased judged benefit, and attributed the shift to attenuated affective response.

Two accounts compete. The emotional-distance account holds that a foreign language elicits weaker affective reactions, so that emotion-driven components of judgement are muted. The processing-fluency account holds that a foreign language is processed less automatically, prompting more deliberate and systematic evaluation. The accounts are not mutually exclusive, and the literature has not settled between them; replication has also been uneven across tasks and populations, and the effect should not be treated as a fixed constant.

The analytical move at the centre of this paper follows from placing these two literatures side by side. If affect is the strongest single predictor of climate risk perception (van der Linden, 2015), and if processing in a second language attenuates affective response (Hadjichristidis et al., 2015; Keysar et al., 2012), then delivering climate content in a language that is L2 for the learner should attenuate perceived risk relative to delivering identical content in L1. This is a specific, directional, falsifiable prediction. It has not, to our knowledge, been tested. It also has an immediate institutional referent, because delivering content in learners' L2 is precisely what English-medium transnational education does by design.

2.3 English-medium instruction and transnational provision

EMI in higher education has grown rapidly and unevenly. Macaro et al.'s (2018) systematic review of eighty-three studies documents both the expansion and the thinness of the evidence base regarding its effects on content learning. Reported difficulties cluster around unfamiliar subject-specific vocabulary and reduced comprehension relative to first-language instruction. Their review also records a governance observation of direct relevance: the decision to adopt EMI has rarely involved systematic consultation with the faculty and students who must operate within it. Medium of instruction is typically set as an internationalization or market-positioning decision, not as a pedagogical or communicative one.

Transnational education intensifies this. In a branch campus or franchised program, curriculum design, accreditation standards and often assessment rubrics originate in the awarding institution's national system, while students, hazards and civil-protection infrastructure belong to the host system. The language of delivery bridges the two, and in doing so becomes the channel through which all content—including content about risk—passes. Quality assurance frameworks for transnational provision generally address language in terms of student proficiency thresholds for admission. They do not address what the choice of medium does to the transmission of hazard information.

3. The Monolingual Default in Transnational Climate Education

Bringing the three literatures together makes visible a mismatch that is ordinarily invisible because each of its components is individually unremarkable. In a transnational program teaching climate adaptation or urban resilience, four languages are potentially in play at once: the language in which the underlying science was published, the language

of instruction, the language in which the student thinks and reasons most fluently, and the language of the hazard environment in which the student actually lives. In an Anglophone-designed program delivered in English to Korean-dominant students in Korea, these are English, English, Korean, and Korean respectively.

The consequence is not merely that some content is harder to understand—a familiar EMI finding—but that the risk signal is calibrated in one language and received in another. A student may learn the term "storm surge" in English, encounter 폭풍해일 in a municipal alert, and hold no reliable mapping between the perceived severity of the two. The instructional term and the operational term are lexically unlinked in the student's processing even when they are semantically equivalent in a dictionary.

Coastal reclaimed-land districts in Northeast Asia illustrate the stakes without requiring exotic assumptions. Such districts frequently host international branch campuses, are exposed to typhoon and storm-surge risk, and operate civil-defence and municipal alert systems exclusively in the national language. A student body drawn from multiple linguistic backgrounds receives its formal instruction on coastal flood risk in English and its operational hazard warnings in Korean. Nothing in the institution's quality assurance apparatus registers this as a problem, because each component is separately compliant: the curriculum meets the awarding institution's standards, the alerts meet the municipality's.

We therefore state the governance claim plainly. An institution that has chosen a medium of instruction has, whether or not it deliberated on the matter, chosen a risk-communication channel. Where the curriculum concerns hazards to which students are personally exposed, medium-of-instruction policy is risk-communication policy. It should be governed as such.

4. The Multilingual Risk Transmission Framework

The MRT framework decomposes the path from scientific content to perceived risk into four sequential layers, each of which can attenuate or amplify the risk signal, and each of which can diverge across languages independently of the others (Figure 1). Divergence at any single layer is sufficient to produce different perceived risk from identical scientific content. The framework is deliberately modular: it is intended to locate where a cross-linguistic difference arises, not merely to record that one exists.

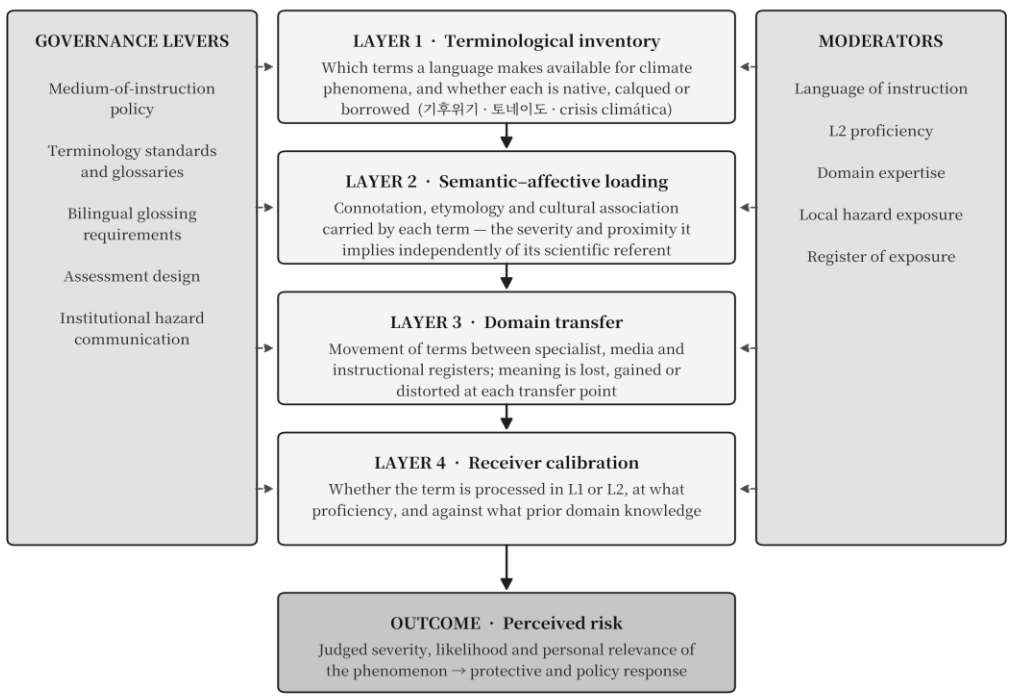


Figure 1. The Multilingual Risk Transmission (MRT) framework. Terminological choice intervenes between scientific content and perceived risk at four distinct layers, each subject to moderation and each addressable by institutional governance.

4.1 Layer 1: Terminological inventory

Languages differ in the set of terms they make available for climate phenomena, and in the morphological status of those terms. Some are native coinages, some are calques, some are phonological borrowings. Korean discourse distinguishes 기후변화 (climate change), 지구온난화 (global warming) and, increasingly, 기후위기 (climate crisis); discourse-analytic work has shown that these circulate with distinct thematic profiles rather than as synonyms (임연수 et al., 2021), and that 기후위기 emerged as a discursive formation with its own trajectory (강희숙, 2023). Spanish offers cambio climático, calentamiento global, crisis climática and emergencia climática. English offers the corresponding five-term set examined by Bruine de Bruin et al. (2024).

Inventory is not merely a list. What a language lacks is as consequential as what it has. Where a language has no routine, non-technical term for a phenomenon, that phenomenon is difficult to make salient in public or instructional discourse regardless of the speaker's intent. The Ilsan case is precisely an inventory failure: the required term—an inland, moderate-severity funnel storm—did not exist as a distinct lexical item, and the two adjacent items both misrepresented the event in opposite directions.

4.2 Layer 2: Semantic–affective loading

Each available term carries connotation, etymology and cultural association that operate independently of its scientific referent. The dragon etymology of 용오름 is the clearest illustration in our material: a term whose morphological transparency links it to an auspicious mythological figure is unlikely to transmit hazard with the same force as a term with no such association. Conversely, a phonological borrowing carries the affective profile of the contexts in which its source-language use is most visible. 토네이도 imports the severity distribution of American tornadoes into Korean, irrespective of the severity distribution of Korean funnel storms.

Loading also operates on the abstract terms. Commentators writing in both German and Spanish have noted that "crisis" carries an implicature of episodic disturbance—crises are resolved, or they pass—which sits awkwardly with a phenomenon that is secular and irreversible on human timescales. Whether that implicature attenuates perceived severity is an empirical question; that it differs across languages with different lexical histories for the term is a reasonable prior.

4.3 Layer 3: Domain transfer

Terms move between registers: from specialist publication to mass media to instructional materials. Meaning is lost, gained or distorted at each transfer. Two features make this layer language-sensitive. First, specialist registers are more standardised than general ones, and standardisation is partly a function of the size and dispersion of the language community. Second, and more consequentially, English functions as the lingua franca of scientific publication, with the great majority of indexed natural-science output appearing in that language (Ammon, 2012; Hamel, 2007). For speakers of other languages, transfer from specialist to general register is therefore frequently also translation, adding a step at which divergence can enter.

The literature on risk communication supplies the reason this matters. Risk perception is socially constructed and mediated through the categories available to describe it (Garvin, 2001); media representations of scientific work shape public perceptions of climate risk (Nerlich et al., 2010); and lay audiences defer more heavily to expert framing in domains where they hold little independent knowledge (Siegrist & Cvetkovich, 2000). Where the expert framing arrives in translation, the translator's lexical choices acquire consequences that neither the scientist nor the reader can inspect.

4.4 Layer 4: Receiver calibration

The final layer concerns the receiver: whether the term is processed in L1 or L2, at what proficiency, and against what prior domain knowledge. This is where the foreign-language effect enters. The prediction from Section 2.2 is that L2 processing attenuates perceived risk through reduced affective engagement.

A competing prediction must be distinguished. Bruine de Bruin et al. (2024) found that unfamiliar terms depress concern and urgency. Because L2 vocabulary is on average less familiar than L1 vocabulary, an observed L2 attenuation might reflect familiarity rather than affect. The two mechanisms make different predictions under proficiency manipulation: familiarity effects should diminish sharply as proficiency and exposure rise, whereas affective attenuation is expected to persist, in reduced form, even at high proficiency. Any adequate design must therefore measure proficiency continuously rather than dichotomizing bilinguals against monolinguals.

4.5 Moderators and governance levers

Figure 1 also identifies two sets of variables that act on the layers rather than sitting within them. Moderators—language of instruction, L2 proficiency, domain expertise, local hazard exposure, and register of exposure—condition the magnitude of transmission at each layer. Governance levers—medium-of-instruction policy, terminology standards and glossaries, bilingual glossing requirements, assessment design, and institutional hazard communication—are the subset of variables that an educational institution can actually manipulate. The distinction is the practical payoff of the framework: it separates what a transnational provider must accommodate from what it can decide.

5. Illustrative Application: English, Spanish and Korean

Table 1 maps the three languages against the framework's first two layers. The material is drawn from published discourse-analytic work, lexicographic sources and media reporting. It is offered as illustration of the framework's analytic traction, not as evidence for its propositions.

Table 1. Comparative terminological map across English, Spanish and Korean, by MRT layer.

Concept / MRT layer	English	Spanish	Korean
Superordinate term (L1)	climate change; global warming; climate crisis; climate emergency; climate justice	cambio climático; calentamiento global; crisis climática; emergencia climática	기후변화 (gihu-byeonhwa); 지구온난화 (jigu-onnanhwa); 기후위기 (gihu-wigi)
Morphological status (L1)	Native compounds throughout	Native compounds; partial calques from English	Sino-Korean compounds; conceptually calqued from English
Evidence on relative loading (L2)	"Climate change" and "global warming" most familiar and most concerning; no urgency gain from "crisis"/"emergency" (Bruine de Bruin et al., 2024; Feldman & Hart, 2021)	Documented shift toward crisis framing in media and institutional discourse; little experimental evidence on comparative loading	Distinct thematic profiles per term rather than synonymy (임연수 et al., 2021); 기후위기 traceable as an emergent discourse (강희숙, 2023)
Hazard term: funnel storm over land	tornado (native; catastrophic association)	tornado (borrowed; regionally variable exposure)	토네이도 (phonological borrowing; associated with North American catastrophe)
Hazard term: funnel storm	waterspout (native; low-consequence	tromba marina; manga de agua	용오름 (native

Concept / MRT layer	English	Spanish	Korean
over water	association)		compound, lit. "rising of the dragon"; auspicious association)
Inventory gap identified	None for the land/water distinction	None for the land/water distinction	No routine term for an inland, moderate-severity funnel storm (Online News Department, 2014)
Register dispersion (L3)	High: pluricentric, many national media systems	High: pluricentric across Spain and Latin America	Low: single national media system, geographically concentrated

5.1 English

English is the best-evidenced case and simultaneously the least representative. Its five-term inventory has been experimentally tested at scale, and the finding is that the traditional terms outperform the newer ones on familiarity and concern, with no urgency advantage accruing to crisis framing (Bruine de Bruin et al., 2024). English is also pluricentric: because it serves as a first language across multiple continents with sharply different hazard profiles, it has developed a rich and regionally variable vocabulary for climate-produced meteorological events. This richness is a property of English's sociolinguistic position, not of the phenomena, and it is precisely the property that transnational programmes export.

5.2 Korean

Korean presents the opposite profile: a single national speech community, geographically concentrated on a peninsula, with a comparatively narrow hazard range. Its superordinate climate vocabulary is calqued from international discourse but has

acquired independent discursive trajectories in domestic circulation (강희숙, 2023; 임연수 et al., 2021). Its hazard vocabulary mixes native compounds with English borrowings in a pattern that appears to track whether the phenomenon is domestically frequent or foreign-associated. The 토네이도/용오름 pair encapsulates both features: the borrowed term does the catastrophic work, the native term does the routine work, and the space between them—which is where the Ilsan event fell—is lexically empty.

5.3 Spanish

Spanish is pluricentric like English but has been studied like Korean, which is to say hardly at all in experimental terms. The available literature is predominantly media-analytic and social-perception research examining how the crisis frame has propagated through Spanish-language reporting and institutional communication. This asymmetry—a major world language, spoken across radically different hazard environments from the Iberian Peninsula to the Caribbean and the Southern Cone, with almost no comparative experimental evidence on terminological loading—is itself a finding worth stating. It also makes Spanish the highest-value case in a three-language comparison, because it varies from English on evidence base while matching it on pluricentricity, allowing the two properties to be separated.

6. Propositions

The framework generates the following testable propositions. P1 through P3 concern the terminological landscape (Layers 1–3); P4 through P7 concern its perceptual consequences (Layers 2 and 4).

P1. The sets of terms available for climate-produced meteorological phenomena in English, Spanish and Korean are not related by simple translation equivalence; each language contains at least one item with no single-item counterpart in the others.

P2. Divergence between specialist and general registers will be greater in English and Spanish than in Korean, because pluricentric languages sustain greater regional variation in general-register usage while specialist registers remain internationally standardized.

P3. Terminological differentiation for a given phenomenon will track the historical frequency of that phenomenon in the relevant speech community's hazard environment, measurable against national meteorological records.

P4. Perceived-risk ratings for hazard terms will diverge from the objective severity of their referents in proportion to the affective loading identified at Layer 2, with the largest divergence for phonological borrowings.

P5. Bilingual participants rating semantically equivalent terms in L2 English will report lower perceived risk than the same participants rating those terms in their L1.

P6. The attenuation predicted in P5 will decrease as measured L2 proficiency increases, but will not reach zero at high proficiency; a familiarity-only account predicts that it will.

P7. Domain expertise will reduce but not eliminate cross-linguistic divergence in perceived risk, because expertise operates on Layer 3 standardization without neutralizing Layer 2 loading.

P6 is the framework's principal diagnostic. If attenuation disappears entirely at high proficiency, the parsimonious explanation is unfamiliarity rather than affective distance, and the framework's Layer 4 should be reformulated accordingly. P1 is likewise falsifiable in a strong sense: if the three inventories prove translation-equivalent, the framework's foundational premise fails.

7. An Empirical Program

Testing the propositions requires two strands of evidence that are uninterpretable in isolation. Strand A establishes what each language makes available; Strand B measures what speakers of that language perceive. Figure 2 sets out the design.

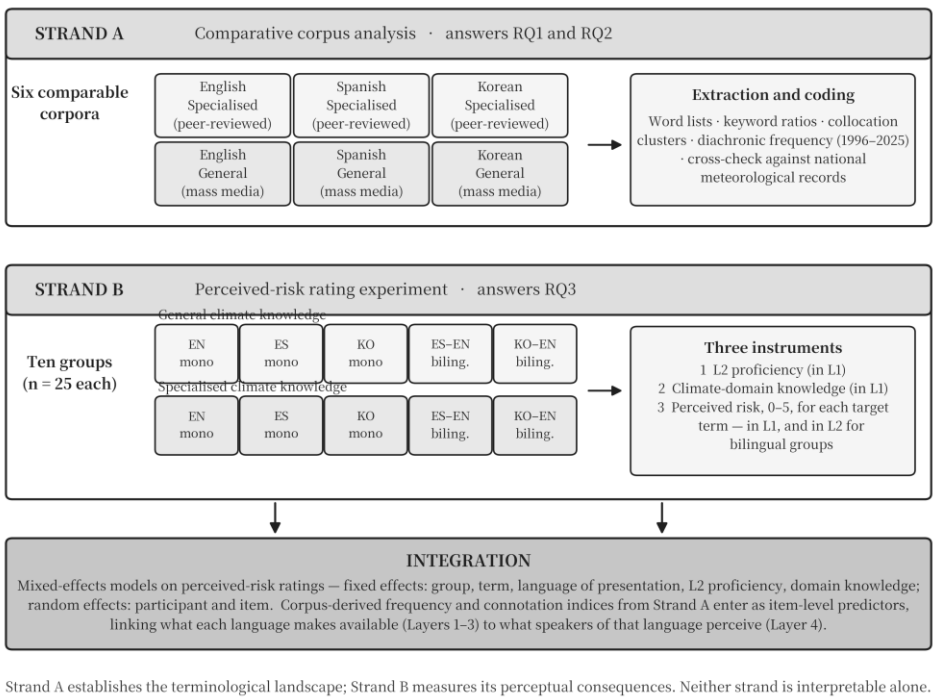


Figure 2. Two-strand research design. Corpus-derived indices from Strand A enter the Strand B models as item-level predictors, linking the terminological landscape to its perceptual consequences.

7.1 Strand A: Comparable corpora

Six corpora are constructed on a two-by-three design: specialist and general registers crossed with English, Spanish and Korean (Table 2). Comparability rather than parallelism is the sampling criterion—the corpora are matched on domain, period and

approximate size, not composed of translations of one another, since translation would eliminate the very inventory differences under investigation.

Table 2. Strand A corpus architecture.

Parameter	Specialist corpora	General corpora	Rationale
Source type	Peer-reviewed climate, meteorology and adaptation literature	National mass media: broadsheet, broadcast and major digital outlets	Captures the transfer step at MRT Layer 3
Languages	English, Spanish, Korean	English, Spanish, Korean	Varies pluricentricity (EN, ES) against concentration (KO)
Period	1996–2025	1996–2025	Spans the pre- and post-2019 nomenclature shift (Schäfer et al., 2023)
Sampling	Stratified by subfield and year	Stratified by outlet, editorial orientation and year	Prevents outlet or subfield dominance
Extraction	Word lists; keyword ratios against reference corpora; collocation clusters; diachronic frequency	Identical procedure	Comparable indices across all six corpora
External comparison	National meteorological records for each speech community	Same	Tests P3: terminology against actual hazard frequency

Analysis proceeds by regression on the extracted indices, with language and register as predictors, addressing P1 and P2. The meteorological cross-check addresses P3. Two outputs are carried forward to Strand B: a frequency index for each target term within its language, and a coded connotation profile derived from collocation patterns.

7.2 Strand B: cross-linguistic perceived-risk experiment

Ten participant groups of twenty-five are recruited on a five-by-two design (Table 3): three monolingual groups and two English-bilingual groups, each at two levels of climate-domain knowledge, with specialist-knowledge groups recruited from relevant university programs.

Table 3. Strand B participant groups (n = 25 per cell; N = 250).

Language profile	General climate knowledge	Specialized climate knowledge
English monolingual	Group 1	Group 6
Spanish monolingual	Group 2	Group 7
Korean monolingual	Group 3	Group 8
Spanish–English bilingual (intermediate to advanced L2)	Group 4	Group 9
Korean–English bilingual (intermediate to advanced L2)	Group 5	Group 10

Three instruments are administered online. The first measures L2 English proficiency and is delivered in the participant's first language. The second measures climate-domain knowledge and is likewise delivered in the first language, so that neither instrument confounds the construct it measures with the language competence under investigation. The third elicits perceived risk: participants rate each target term on a scale from 0 (not risky at all) to 5 (very dangerous situation). Monolingual groups rate in their first language only; bilingual groups rate in both languages, in counterbalanced blocks separated by a filler task, giving a within-participant test of P5 and P6.

Stimulus construction is the design's most delicate element. Target terms are selected from the Strand A inventories to span three categories: superordinate terms, native hazard terms, and borrowed hazard terms. Because the propositions concern non-equivalence across languages, item sets cannot be strictly matched; instead, items are

linked by referent rather than by lexical form, and referent-level severity is coded independently from meteorological definitions so that divergence between rated risk and referent severity is measurable.

7.3 Analysis

Perceived-risk ratings are modelled using mixed-effects regression with fixed effects for group, term category, language of presentation, continuous L2 proficiency, and domain knowledge, and random intercepts for participant and item. Corpus-derived frequency and connotation indices enter as item-level predictors, which is the point at which the two strands join: it allows the analysis to ask whether what a language makes available (Layers 1–3) predicts what its speakers perceive (Layer 4). The critical test for P5 and P6 is the language-of-presentation term and its interaction with proficiency in the bilingual subsample.

7.4 Design limitations and ethical considerations

Three limitations warrant statement in advance. First, twenty-five participants per cell yields limited power for detecting the moderation effects specified in P6 and P7; item-level replication partially compensates, but the study should be understood as a calibration exercise whose function is to establish effect sizes for a subsequent adequately powered design rather than to deliver definitive estimates. Second, monolingual and bilingual groups differ on more than language profile, and comparisons across them are correlational; only the within-participant bilingual comparison supports directional inference. Third, participants recruited from university climate programs differ systematically from general-population samples in ways beyond domain knowledge.

Ethically, the study presents low risk but two considerations. Hazard stimuli may be distressing to participants with direct disaster experience, and the protocol should include screening and withdrawal provisions. Second, participants are not debriefed on the terminological manipulation until completion, since foreknowledge would compromise the measure; standard deferred-debriefing procedures apply. Ethical approval would be sought from the institutional review boards of both participating institutions.

8. Implications for Transnational Education Governance

The framework's practical value lies in separating what institutions must accommodate from what they can decide. Table 4 maps the available levers to the layers they act on.

Table 4. Governance levers by MRT layer.

Lever	Layer targeted	Institutional owner	Indicator
Bilingual terminology glossary for hazard and climate terms	1, 3	Program committee; discipline lead	Proportion of hazard terms in course materials with host-language equivalents supplied
Medium-of-instruction policy reviewed against risk-relevant content	4	Academic board; partner institution jointly	Existence of a documented review; identification of risk-critical modules
Bilingual glossing requirement in risk-critical modules	3, 4	Module convener	Compliance rate across designated modules
Assessment permitting host-language demonstration of hazard comprehension	4	Assessment board; awarding institution	Availability of the provision; uptake rate
Campus hazard communication issued in all major campus languages	1, 2, 3	Estates, safety and student services	Languages covered; time lag between first and last language issued

Lever	Layer targeted	Institutional owner	Indicator
Staff development on terminological transfer	2, 3	Academic development unit	Participation among staff teaching risk-critical content

8.1 Terminology standards and glossing

The lowest-cost intervention is also the most immediately actionable: programs teaching hazard content should maintain a bilingual or multilingual glossary linking instructional terms to the terms students will encounter in the host jurisdiction's operational communications. This is not translation for comprehension, which EMI programs already do informally; it is deliberate lexical bridging between the instructional register and the civil-protection register. The framework predicts that the bridge matters most precisely where the terms are least obviously problematic—where a dictionary equivalent exists but carries different affective loading.

8.2 Medium of instruction as risk-communication policy

The stronger claim is that medium-of-instruction decisions should be reviewed against the risk-relevant content of the curriculum, not only against internationalization objectives and proficiency thresholds. This does not entail abandoning EMI. It entails identifying the modules in which perceived risk is a learning outcome that matters operationally—coastal flood risk, heat exposure, seismic and typhoon preparedness—and asking explicitly whether those outcomes are being achieved through a channel that the evidence suggests may attenuate them. Given Macaro et al.'s (2018) finding that faculty and students are rarely consulted on medium-of-instruction decisions, the governance deficit here is procedural before it is substantive.

8.3 Assessment and quality assurance

If a student can define storm surge in English but cannot recognise the corresponding term in a municipal alert, the learning outcome has been assessed but not achieved. Assessment design in risk-critical modules should permit or require demonstration of comprehension in the operational language of the host jurisdiction. This is a departure from standard transnational practice, in which assessment language follows instruction language as a matter of course, and it would require negotiation with awarding institutions and accreditors.

Quality assurance frameworks for cross-border provision currently treat language as an input variable—admission thresholds, staff proficiency—rather than as a mediating variable affecting outcomes. Extending review criteria to ask how risk-relevant content is transmitted across the language boundary would be a modest addition with disproportionate reach, since accreditation requirements propagate through partner networks in a way that individual institutional policy does not.

8.4 Equity

A distributive consideration follows directly from the framework. Under the Layer 4 prediction, students with the lowest proficiency in the medium of instruction receive the weakest risk signal from identical content. In a transnational cohort, those students are disproportionately from the host country and from lower-resourced educational backgrounds, since higher prior English proficiency correlates with prior access to international schooling. The institution has thus distributed a safety-relevant good in inverse proportion to prior advantage—without intending to, and without any mechanism that would detect it. Whatever the eventual empirical verdict on effect sizes, this is the reason the question deserves institutional attention rather than only scholarly attention.

9. Limitations and Boundary Conditions

The primary limitation of this work is clearly stated at the beginning and reiterated here: this is a conceptual paper. While the framework is based on published evidence and documented cases, it has not been empirically tested. The propositions outlined in Section 6 are hypotheses rather than confirmed findings. The comparative material presented in Section 5 is illustrative and drawn from secondary sources; it serves to establish plausibility rather than quantify magnitude.

Three significant boundary conditions apply to this framework. First, the study focuses on only three languages—English, Spanish, and Korean—selected for analytical contrast based on their linguistic characteristics (pluricentric versus concentrated) and research depth (well-evidenced versus under-studied). This selection does not represent the diversity of the world's languages. Consequently, the findings may not readily extend to languages with different relationships to English or differing traditions in scientific publishing.

Second, the literature on the foreign-language effect is not consistent. Replication of findings has varied across different tasks and populations, and the underlying mechanisms are still debated. This framework builds on the foreign-language effect while acknowledging it as a variable with uncertain impact. Thus, Proposition 6 is framed as a diagnostic tool rather than a firm assumption. If the effect proves to be unreliable, particularly regarding hazard stimuli, significant revisions to Layer 4 will be necessary.

Third, it is essential to distinguish between perceived risk and actual behavior. Evidence from Anglophone contexts indicates that the effects of terminology on individuals' willingness to act are much smaller than those on their expressed concerns. Moreover, political orientation has a more significant influence than terminology on both

willingness and concern (Bruine de Bruin et al., 2024). Any assertion that terminological governance will alter student behavior during a hazard event exceeds the support provided by current evidence. A more defensible claim is that institutions are currently making consequential choices without recognizing that they are indeed making choices.

10. Conclusion

When Korean media could not decide what to call the Ilsan storm, the difficulty was not journalistic incompetence. It was a structural feature of the language's terminological inventory meeting an event that inventory had not been built to describe. Transnational education institutionalizes a version of the same difficulty and does so continuously rather than episodically: it takes hazard concepts formed in one linguistic and geographic context and transmits them, in a language that is foreign to most recipients, to students living in a third context whose operational hazard communications use different words again.

This paper has argued that the resulting transmission is neither transparent nor neutral and has proposed a framework that locates where it can fail. The framework's four layers are individually well grounded in existing scholarship; what is new is their combination and the specific prediction that follows from it, that English-medium delivery of hazard content may attenuate perceived risk relative to first-language delivery. That prediction is testable, and Section 7 specifies how.

For the governance of transnational education, the implication does not depend on the eventual effect size. Medium of instruction is currently set by internationalization strategy and adjudicated by proficiency thresholds. Where the curriculum concerns risk to which students are personally exposed, it should additionally be adjudicated by

whether the risk signal survives the crossing. That is a question institutions can begin to ask before the evidence is complete, and the levers in Table 4 are available now.

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