

Media Content Analysis

South Korea

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INTRODUCTION

Large-scale skills assessments (ILSAs) engage with the broader societies they seek and improve. This paper mainly focuses on the impacts of the social media influences on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 in Korea. How and to what extent does social media actually affect the PISA? The PISA has gained popularity in educational debates and scholars argue that the tests influence national educational governance (Audun, 2012). It has further been analyzed that the PISA has penetrated the news media and affected the public opinion on education. But there was not enough empirical evidence for such statements. These debates have been widely discussed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) since 2000 (Audun 2012). Germany illustrated a good example of the impacts of media on PISA. In the beginning, Germany ranked 20th among 32 countries, which was further below the public expectations, so the negative stories and critical reports dominated the news media in Germany. Then the government proposed urgent reforms in education (Grek 2009). Also, Finland had a good performance in PISA, and the social media reported the results positively to confirm the current educational policies.

We can tell that social media plays an important and necessary role in education systems from the examples above. Hence, measuring and analyzing the influence points of media is essential to improving a country's education. The education system in South Korea is much more "free market" and international oriented and is one of the top-performing OECD countries in reading literacy, mathematics, and sciences, but it still along with catastrophic problems behind it. Even though they have limited reports about the PISA performance in 2018, by analyzing the previous media behaviors, we still can get some conclusions and determine factors that are beneficial to South Korea's education. Media analysis will provide a different perspective to

improve the system and would greatly help policymakers to reform the education system in South Korea.

BACKGROUNDS

South Korea - the Republic of Korea - is the most educated country in the world, and 70 percent of 24- to 35- year-olds in the nation of 51.5 million people have completed some form of tertiary education - the highest percentage worldwide and more than 20 percentage points above comparable attainment rates in the United States according to OECD (Mani, 2018). South Korea is usually described as “stressful, authoritarian, brutally competitive, and meritocratic.”, but competition over admission into top universities is consequently extremely fierce, which is underscoring Korea’s reputation of having such merciless education systems in the world. Influenced by the U.S. occupation of South Korea, the country adopted a school system patterned after the U.S. education system.

South Korea actively attended the PISA since 2000. Reading, Mathematics, and Science scores pivoted around 2006 and 2009 it reached the peak performance. As mentioned above, South Korea always has good performance in international assessments because of the stressful competitions and employment pressures. Newspaper readership is high and there are more than 100 national and local dailies. The press is often critical of the government. Many newspapers are controlled by industrial conglomerates (BBC News, 2017). South Korea is considered to have freedom of the press but it is subject to several pressures. It has improved since South Korea transitioned to democracy in the late 20th century, but declined slightly in the 2010s. Reports with negative attitudes might be controlled for the sake of some party’s interests, so the reports are very dependent on the consortium’s purposes.

DATA AND METHODS

To collect useful and trustful data for this analysis, my plan is to gather as much as information in public and filtered them to satisfy the analysis purposes. Utilizing different search engines to find out more reports eligible to use with trustful credentials. Then I would code every selected article or news in the coding protocol offered by professor Nancy L. Green Saraisky with the link https://tccolumbia.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3I68AUN6O48VEs6. This protocol will offer further helps on media analysis including analyzing news source, PISA results in presentation, details about PISA, tone of the article, the focus of the article, results in explanations, comparison among countries, call for reforms, and speakers' information.

I firstly used the Google search engine with certain filters, including the time period. In beginning, I searched South Korea PISA 2018 results from 2018 to 2020. The only eligible report was from forbes.com, titled What May lurk Behind Korea's Declining PISA Scores by Micheal B. Horn. It is a subjective analysis with a negative attitude. Forbes does not predictably publish news or opinion content favoring either side of the political spectrum and it is not controlled by the government. The article was published on Jan 9, 2020, to analyze Korea's declining PISA scores which contains a photo of students. In this article, the PISA score was not presented in a concrete number or percentage, but it compares with the previous one and gives audiences a tendency. This article mentioned the PISA's acronym, who is behind PISA, and the history of the country participating in PISA. The argument the article is trying to make is The latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores are out for 2018, and once again Korea's performance declined (Michael, 2020). It is a narrative and subjective observation followed by detailed analysis by Micheal. The focus is pretty limited within the scope of Korea's education system and situations. He mentioned a lot of the explanations for the declining PISA

scores and call for reforms as a response at the end. He quoted U.S. president John Adams to further illustrated the explanations of his analysis and proposals.

However, Forbes is not from Korea's local media, so I extended the initial date range back to 2015. There is an article published by Korea JoongAng Daily in association with The New York Times on December 9, 2016, by Nam Yoon-Seo. Korean students' scores take a tumble on the PISA assessment, and this title clearly stated the author's unsatisfied attitude on the Korean PISA performance with detailed reports on the comparison of 2012 and 2015 PISA results. This report includes a detailed analysis and cited many speakers' words to sustain his point of view.

Since I extended the date range, there are more reports and news on 2012 and 2015 Korea's PISA performances. All of these articles and news provided me with deeper findings on the hidden relationship between media and PISA scores.

FINDINGS

"Can the media actually influence a country's PISA performance?" I will discuss my findings with this question brought to my mind.

Observations of coded articles bring me uniform tones regards to the PISA results in 2015 in Korea. From the 10 coded articles and news, I found that most of the tones are negative to report the declining PISA scores in South Korea. There are 7 of them who reported the news negatively with critical analysis and 4 of them also proposed reforms to Korea's education systems. The rest of the reports neutrally stated the fact. It clearly demonstrated the overall tones of the media that reported the PISA 2015. It makes sense when the authors who saw the declining performance on PISA scores and felt disappointed to write the reports and wished to

raise the public attention to the education systems. They want to make the public reflect on their education policies with current performance to make some improvements since South Korea was always one of the top-performing countries before.

The key ways in which the media described PISA 2015 in Korea are by reading, mathematics, and science scores, percentages, and comparison with history. Almost all of the articles mentioned the PISA 2015 scores of around 517 in reading, 524 in mathematics, and 516 in science. To make sure the audience has a thorough understanding of these scores, they use the percentage of students' performance and PISA scores in 2012 to highlight the declination. Also some of these articles use the comparison with other countries' performances to locate Korea's education system in the world rank. Authors use these techniques to strengthen their points that based now on two consecutive PISA reports, it seems it will take a lot more to change the outcomes.

In Michael's article, "if Korea's schools can't explain Korea's past successes, then they are unlikely to explain its current decline either." (Micheal, 2020). This is the main argument made by those articles. They were really trying to find the reasons for declining performances and proposed rational improvement suggestions. There was a clear extrinsic motivation that encouraged students to do well academically to lift them and the nation out of poverty. With the changes in Korean society, there were multiple pathways to success, not only limited to academics and top university education.

In the Korea JoongAng Daily report, Jung Jin-gon said "An increase of poverty leads to more low achievers because some parents can't support their children's academics." (Nam, 2016). He further analyzes the declining reasons for the PISA 2015. And Kang Sung-Chul, who heads the National Curriculum Policy Division at the Ministry of Education said:" The central

government should cooperate with district educational offices to support students who score below standard academic levels.”. With concrete proposals that try to solve the problems, Korea also needs to transform its schools into places where students are intrinsically motivated to spend their time and engage deeply in learning. The coverages among those reports are quite similar. They reported the current situation and defined the problems with rational analysis, then proposed sound reforms to the policymakers. Authors also used citations to further support their arguments.

But back to the question - Can the media actually influence a country's PISA performance? Since I used most media reports about PISA 2015, then let us check the PISA 2018 results in Korea. Mean reading, mathematics and science performance in 2018 was close to the level observed in 2015, and below the level observed in 2009 and 2012. In reading and science, this recent decline in performance reversed earlier gains (PISA, 2018)! It cannot change the game only depending on several critical reports. Even though the public already acknowledged that PISA performance is declining and those experts offered concrete proposals, it cannot help to change the situation fundamentally. Because the media power plays an important role in education to attract public attention, only practical education policies can bring the improvements. PISA 2018 results gave solid evidence of media's influences on education. The issue is the degree to which the media influence policy narratives by selectively engaging with the findings. Also, the concerns are the timing of the release and coverage of PISA findings and the importance of taking a longer perspective on media responses. The media perhaps ignored the findings altogether, or give sparse and fleeting coverage (Mary, 2017).

CONCLUSION

As mentioned above, Germany has a good example of the importance of media in PISA and I illustrated that media influences might not be as essential to stopping PISA performance from declining in Korea as the public expected. The ILSA findings into national contexts give no simple answer to the question of how and to what extent social media actually affect the PISA. It does, however, more factors and insights need to be considered for the potential role of the media. Interested parties and the public addressed by the ILSAs emerge to actively manage the interpretation and circulation of survey results according to their own goals and priorities (Mary, 2017).

In most cases mentioned above, the tones and arguments are very clear and understandable to the public, but it does not mean that Korea will succeed in the next PISA tests. It still could shape the public apprehension of educational achievement and problems at a much more profound and ubiquitous level.

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