Media Literacy in South Korea

JIWON YOON
Northwest University, USA

HYEON-SEON JEONG
Gyeongin National University of Education, South Korea

AMIE KIM
Gyeonggi Institute of Education, South Korea

Context of the South Korean media environment and education system

South Korea's dynamic media environment, comprised of advanced digital technologies and the prolific production of media content, has created a Korean Wave across the globe through its movies, TV shows and dramas, fashion, and K-pop music. Such an abundance of entertainment media, especially K-pop music, has resulted in the shaping of South Korean youth culture. Digital media as well have impacted every aspect of South Koreans' lives, with the younger generation the cohort most active in the adoption of these new technologies that in turn are forming their culture. With the fastest Internet connection speed in the world, 88.3% of the entire population over 3 years of age have Internet access, while 99% spend an average of 14.3 hours per week online. Half of the Korean population aged six and older play mobile games on average 12.6 times a week (Ministry of Science ICT and Future Planning & Korea Internet & Security Agency, 2017).

On the one hand, the heavy influence of this media culture and the widespread use of digital devices among young people have created a concern among parents and educators, generating more interest in recent years in media literacy to "protect" and shield young people from such harmful effects as addiction, age-inappropriate content, and violence. On the other hand, media literacy often is deemed a pedagogical approach that can provide an antidote via holistic education involving more hands-on, student-centered educational practices within South Korea's competitive educational environment where most in-school and out-of-school curricula and educational practices focus on the university entrance exam. Over time, South Korea has responded to this call for more direct interaction with media and developed media literacy education projects through the collaboration of independent grassroots movements and government-led efforts in the public education system (Jeong, 2009).

Out-of-school media literacy efforts

The origin of media literacy education in South Korea can be traced back to the early 1980s. The TV viewers' movement in the mid-1980s—led by nonprofit and religious organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Korean Women's Link, Citizen's Coalition for Democratic Media, Christian Ethics Praxis movement, Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice, and Protestant and Catholic churches—fought against governmental control of the media. More specifically, media activists and educators used critical analyses of TV content to educate viewers through civic education programs (Jeong et al., 2009). These projects, with their aim to bring about "viewer sovereignty," urged media industries to produce more positive and useful content for young people. Then educational projects, the objective of which has been to enhance young people's critical analysis skills, emerged as well in response to the growing concern over children's heavy media usage.

Media production has become a popular pedagogical approach within these South Korean media education projects. For example, refugee centers, women's organizations, and multicultural centers now incorporate storytelling via a variety of media technologies so that underrepresented groups can express themselves and discover ways to make their voices heard in society. MEDIACT (www.mediact.org), which derives its name from "MEDia Access CenTer" and "MEDia ACTivist," runs several educational projects utilizing critical media literacy and video/audio production programs among various social and marginalized groups of people, including underprivileged and disabled young people. Likewise, the Daum Foundation (www.daumfoundation.org) operates youth media activities through educational programs, supports production of films by young people, and helps nonprofit organizations through technological support.

Moreover, youth centers often run after-school programs that include the teaching of video production, while a number of alternative schools run media literacy classes in their curricula. The Haja Center (https://haja.net/), for one, works with Seoul city government to offer after-school programs, alternative education, and career education through student-centered, hands-on media production and cultural activities. City and state governments also oversee youth media centers that provide various media production and critical media literacy programs. For instance, SSRO NET (www.ssro.net), run by the Seoul city government, encourages youths to communicate with the world in a variety of ways: by teaching them how to tell their stories via the media technologies of radio, video, movies, photographs, and games, by renting media production devices, by offering them networking opportunities with friends with similar interests, and by providing media-related career experience workshops. This center also offers media addiction prevention programs, parent education, and counseling for those who want to change their media habits and usage. Similarly, the website of Media GyungChung (www.goeonair.com), operated by the Gyeonggi Provincial Office of Education, supports and offers screening venues for student media, including television, radio, and Internet periodicals. This site strives to be a journalistic venue that communicates the voices of teens. Yet people of any age can utilize these various media centers—run both

by the government, such as the Korea Communications Commission, and by private agencies—to access digital media and video production facilities.

In addition, major broadcast stations have become involved in media literacy by running community media centers (Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation, MBC) as well as video production projects (Korean Broadcasting System, KBS) or by creating TV programs that aim to hone viewers' critical viewing skills and increase awareness of their importance. For example, the Education Broadcasting System (EBS) aired *Understanding the Media* (1997–1998) and *Wow! Media Exploration* (2002) while KBS and the Korean Press Foundation later produced and aired documentaries about news literacy in 2015 and 2016.

In February 2017, media professionals, legislators, nonprofit organizations, educators, activists, and other interested citizens gathered together to announce the formation of the Media Literacy Education Support Act Commission. At this meeting, these diverse groups asked for more systematic support in the form of legislation and other assistance for media literacy education targeted to all age groups in and outside of schools. Such collective efforts demonstrate that civic power has the potential to influence policy and legislation, and in this way support the public.

Media literacy in schools and governmental support

Media literacy education in school settings has been incorporated both into after-school, extracurricular activities and into formal in-school curricula within the subjects of Korean language, social studies, ethics, arts, and practical studies (Jeong, 2009). The curriculum content and subject areas have been determined by the Ministry of Education, with each curriculum change since 2007 incorporating some aspect of media literacy education. The national curriculum revision in 2007 included the integration of such information technology as PowerPoint, video production, and digital textbooks. As a result of the national policy of information and computer technology (ICT) in the classroom since 1997, all South Korean classrooms currently are equipped with large-screen TV sets, computers, and high-speed Internet connections, while every teacher receives a computer along with relevant professional development training.

With such curriculum changes, those interested teachers have formed learning communities of their own and have held meetings in more formalized groups and associations. For instance, the Media Education Division was created within the National Association of Korean Language Education for the purpose of studying theories and practices of media literacy education, semiotics, critical media studies, youth culture, video production, and the basic use of ICT skills to offer appropriate language education in the age of multimedia. These members of the Media Education division also have developed curriculum and lesson plans, and even have written their own textbook, titled *Reading the Media in the Korean Language Classroom* (Division of Media Studies of the Association of Korean Language Teachers, 2005). Other teacher groups that have held study meetings and seminars and have developed curriculum materials include the Research Group for Media Literacy across the Curriculum, the Daejeon

Research Group for Media Literacy across the Curriculum, and the Teachers' Movement for Clean Media. Among these, the latter has been the most active, publishing books and curricula, training teachers, and recently concentrating on digital media literacy.

Furthermore, schools have been equipped with the necessary technology and infrastructure to enable these government-supported, technology-embedded lessons. As a result, media-related topics were integrated in 2007 across all education subjects into the national curriculum revision. For instance, in Korean language education, media literacy was incorporated for grades 1 to 10 into six strands: listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and literature. Although the term "media literacy" was not used, the textbook includes multimodal texts, such as picture books, news, advertisements, emails, online conversations and discussions on the Internet, radio programs, cartoons, comics, animation, drama, film, and digital media texts for students to interpret and produce. For grades 11 and 12, media language is now one of six courses that can be selected in the advanced Korean language course, in addition to speaking, writing, reading, grammar, and literature. These media language classes aim to enhance students' ability to read and write media texts.

Ethics, social studies, arts, and practical studies also employ some elements of media literacy education. As a result, the subject of ethics covers the importance of appropriate behaviors on the Internet along with protection of personal information and privacy. Likewise, social studies includes topics of media and freedom of speech as well as lessons that critically discuss the media industry and popular culture. Lastly, practical studies also has lessons to improve students' computer skills so that they can use computers for information retrieval and storage.

The national curriculum changes that came about in 2015 more actively addressed media literacy education by including "communication" and "information processing" as part of its core competencies. To address this need further, the Ministry of Education commissioned leading scholars in the field to research ways to best utilize and incorporate media literacy across the curriculum not only by interviewing scholars and teachers in and outside of South Korea, but also by reviewing curricula and programs offered in schools (see Jeong et al., 2015). The purpose of this project has been to inform policymakers, educators, and textbook publishers. While the government-designated textbooks are used for Korean, ethics, social sciences, and mathematics in elementary schools, other elementary-age subjects and all other subjects in middle and high schools use government-authorized textbooks that are published by private publishers. Thus, while these textbooks are independently published, they nonetheless have to follow the guidelines and address core competencies that are set by the Ministry of Education. As a consequence, such research projects serve as guidelines by which to meet these goals. In 2016, the Ministry of Education again commissioned the leading media literacy scholars and educators to review media literacy-related textbook units across the elementary and middle school curricula, to analyze media literacy education in other countries, and to develop models of media literacy units that could be adopted in textbooks (see Jeong et al., 2016).

Another form of governmental support is the training of media literacy education instructors and assigning them to schools. For instance, the Korean Press Foundation (KPF) used to train media educators and allocate them to schools and community

learning centers. They changed the program in 2014 by opening up opportunities to people in other fields, such as those who majored or have worked in journalism, media, Korean studies, Korean education, and social education. Similarly, the Korea Arts and Culture Education Service (KACES) runs artist-in-school programs in various genres of arts and culture, such as Korean classical music, theater, film, dance, photography, and animation. In addition, the Korean Film Commissions & Industry Network (KFCIN) and the Korean Culture and Art Foundation (KCAF) offer various media and culture-related educational programs. To accompany this training, the Korean Communication Commission (KCC) and the KPF have published and distributed media literacy education textbooks.

Another systematic support of media literacy occurs through the Creative Experience Activities program in secondary schools, which was first implemented with the national curriculum revision in 1997. Middle and high school students have one class period per week during regular school hours to select topics of particular interest to them. Media literacy is one of the topics that are offered during these sessions. In addition, since 2016 middle schools have been required to include one "free semester," where students are free of exams and get opportunities to participate in a selective curriculum in the afternoon. The selective curriculum includes arts, sports activities, courses that focus on one subject in-depth, career education, and other club activities. Media literacy-related courses and programs are often implemented as part of this selective curriculum.

Concerns and limitations

Since the Ministry of Education oversees curriculum development, there are concerns about whether such media literacy education can serve the needs of a democratic society (Keum, 2017). In fact, there are certain types of news articles and media content that cannot be included in textbooks, such as articles on politically sensitive topics as well as advertisements. At the same time, other educators and scholars argue that media literacy skills are a transferable competency. For instance, the government-supported project that developed media literacy lesson plans includes a critical analysis of the news about global warming during the first semester of the sixth-grade Korean language textbook, while the textbook for the following semester includes news production. Critical analysis skills taught from these lesson plans can be utilized when analyzing other media content that are equally politically sensitive. Such news production activities can help students to organize and express other topics and stories as well.

Additional commonly discussed concerns and limitations of these South Korean media centers and youth media programs that take place outside of school include students' predilection for solely media production education. Most students do not want to take classes that are designed to critically analyze the media in terms of their influence, economy, and other characteristics. Instead, most students lean toward only production-oriented, hands-on courses. Nonetheless, educators and scholars continue to undertake collaborative efforts with various agencies in and outside school for the purpose of broadening South Korean media education so that it provides diverse programs and meets diverse needs.

SEE ALSO: Adolescent Literacy in a Digital World; Literacy, Technology, and Media; Media Arts; Media Literacy and Social Activism; Media Literacy Education and 21st Century Teacher Education; Media Literacy in Teacher Education; Mediatization; News Literacies; Teaching with Media; Youth Digital Culture

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Jiwon Yoon (PhD, Temple University) is Associate Professor of Communication at Northwest University. She has published scholarly articles and book chapters and presented at national and international conferences on the topics of media literacy for global understanding, intercultural communication, popular culture in North and South Korea, and Pan-Asian identity. She has taught media literacy in the United

States, South Korea, and China in various educational settings, such as public/private schools, alternative educational settings, universities, and teacher education programs. Jiwon also has received Top Research Paper awards from BEA (Broadcast Education Association) and ICA (International Communication Association).

Hyeon-Seon Jeong (PhD, Institute of Education, University of London) is Professor of Media and Multi-literacy Education in the Faculty of Korean Language Education, Gyeongin National University of Education, South Korea. She has been teaching preservice courses and supervising Master's dissertations in mother tongue education and multiliteracy education. Her recent research interests include children and young people's media and multiliteracy practices within both in- and out-of-school settings, teacher education and classroom practices for media literacy education, development of the use of digital technology and media resources for literacy, and media literacy education and policy for media and digital literacy. She has published academic articles, policy reports, and books both nationally and internationally.

Amie Kim (PhD, Institute of Education, University of London) is a research fellow at the Gyeonggi Institute of Education (GIE). Her dissertation examined the media generation gap between teachers and students in South Korean middle schools. Her research interests include young people's media culture in and out of school, media literacy education in schools, digital literacy and empathy, and educational innovation in secondary schools. She has taken part in various research projects on media literacy education and curriculum development. Her recent research at the GIE examined fake news and young people's news experience in South Korea.