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BRIDGING THE GAP: A CASE STUDY ON ALIGNING ACCREDITATION REPORTS WITH ALUMNI LIVED EXPERIENCES IN A COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT
The discrepancy between academic pedagogy and professional industry requirements remains a critical challenge in global Communication studies. This research evaluates the alignment between the formal curriculum and the workplace realities of Communication graduates from Davao del Norte State College. Anchored in Human Capital Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Social Capital Theory, this study examines the degree to which institutional training translates into professional value. Utilizing a qualitative, single-case study design, the research triangulates findings from Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACUP) reports with the lived experiences of alumni (N = 7). Findings reveal a significant alignment gap in technical infrastructure, while conversely highlighting the high transformative impact of faculty mentorship. While institutional audits offer data-driven assessments, alumni narratives provide the essential nuance regarding the practical utility of their education. This research offers a validated roadmap for curriculum redesign, ensuring that Communication program produces graduates equipped with the competitive competencies required for the modern global workforce.

Keywords:
Communication Curriculum, Human Capital Theory, Experiential Learning, AACUP Accreditation, Alumni Lived Experiences, Skills Mismatch, Alumni Lived Experiences

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum in Communication studies is structured to bridge the gap between theory and practice by cultivating student skills applicable to communication challenges in the workplace, ideally through experiences. Scholars argue that many nations struggle with the discrepancies between the skills taught to students and those needed in the profession. This problem has drawn much discussion from academics and decision-makers (Dauber & Spencer-Oatey, 2023). There is a gap between a program's official, data-driven evaluations and its practical impact because formal, top-down evaluations frequently fall short of capturing the observable results of education (Pereira et al., 2019).

In South African workplaces, companies spend money on training courses and seminars to improve workers' communication skills. Poor communication is one of the most prevalent abilities that needs to be improved in the job. The ongoing demand for this training raises the possibility that students' higher education-based communication abilities may not adequately prepare them for professional environments. Their relevance must be regularly evaluated to ensure that South African university curricula align with industry demands. Considering these worries, graduates are likely to join the workforce lacking the communication skills essential for success in a company. In order to close the gap between academic training and workplace reality, the communication curriculum must be continuously evaluated and adjusted (Khanyile et al., 2025).

In the Philippine context, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) underscored a problem in a recurring theme in the educational research, which is the mismatch of the skills taught in higher education and the skills required in the local job market (Bayudan-Dacuycuy & Dacuycuy, 2021). This problem is especially

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noticeable in communication programs, prioritizing creating media producers over preparing graduates to be critical media consumers. Tibaldo (2022) calls attention to this inequality by illustrating that, rather than being holistically embedded in the study of communication, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is often trimmed down to one, independent course. This approach could lead graduates to enter the job market with under-equipped skills, an issue that also occurs in other countries.

This research is based on the rationale that global and national issues manifest in their locality. While many studies, including (Coffelt & Smith, 2020) discuss the employer perceptions of communication graduates, a salient research gap still exists where little has been evaluated to evaluate the alignment of the accreditation reports and alumni lived experiences.

This is anchored in Human Capital, Experiential Learning, and Social Learning theories. Under this framework, the program is a vehicle for developing a graduate's professional value through hands-on practice and the cultivation of professional networks. While these outcomes are presented as verifiable claims in accreditation reports, they must be validated by the lived experiences of alumni to truly measure the program's effectiveness in preparing graduates for the workplace (Slaughter et al., 2015; Jonathan & Laik 2019; Filipovic & Arslanagic-Kalajdzic 2023).

This study addresses this gap by conducting a case study on the Communication program at Davao del Norte State College. By systematically comparing the formal data from the program's AACUP (Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines) accreditation report with the qualitative narratives of the alumni, this study seeks to provide a credible evaluation of the program's effectiveness. This process is crucial for bridging the gap between academic theory and professional practice. Thus, ensuring that a communication curriculum is directly aligned with the skills and knowledge required for success in the modern workplace.

OBJECTIVES

This proposed study would use a qualitative, single-case study method with triangulations based on the AACUP report to examine the issue of the gap between formal, institutional narratives and lived experiences. This will specifically aim to accomplish the following research objectives:

1. To explore the key strengths of the communication curriculum, faculty, and lab facilities as documented in the accreditation report with their alumni's professional success and experiences.
2. To identify and provide context for any discrepancies between the weaknesses in the accreditation report and the challenges and knowledge gaps reported by alumni.
3. To evaluate the alignment between alumni recommendations for the program's future and the official recommendations made in the accreditation report.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative method was applied in the research, and semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information regarding the lived experiences of the Communication graduates in Davao del Norte State College, Davao del Norte, Philippines. The researcher interviewed seven (7) alumni from the Communication program from different batches (2022-2025), and the alumni's consents were obtained prior to the interview. Thematic Analysis was used for analysis. The sample size of seven participants was determined by theoretical saturation, a point in qualitative research where further interviews no longer yield new thematic insights (Dworkin, 2012).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Alumni's Narratives	Core Ideas	Emerging Themes
"Sir Siggie…gave me the opportunity to be a broadcaster" (P1)	Faculty-Provided Career Opportunities & Transformation	Faculty Expertise and Transformative Mentorship
"Sir Sigfred…gave me a chance" (P6)		
"Sir Sai was not just a teacher, but also a coach" (P6)	Coaching Beyond the Course & Specialized Expertise	
"Sir Jez is into filming, Sir Saim into writing, Sir Sig into technicals." (P6)		
Detailed teaching and very approachable professors." (P7)	Effective Teaching Strategies	
"Media Law and Ethics was made easy." (P2)		
"Strong interpersonal skills…how to connect with people." (P1)	Strong Interpersonal Skills and Administrative Writing	Foundational Skill Mastery & Real-World Relevance
"Our writing was praised as better than other top universities." (P4)		
"Everything is research; it is the number one skill." (P2)		
"I engage with clients daily as a sales executive." (P1)	Direct Application in Client-Facing/BPO Roles & Niche Professional Skills	
"In BPO, communication is about building rapport and atmosphere." (P3)		
"IMC was effective because of the hands-on practice." (P6)	Hands-on, Simulated Projects & Learning by Doing	High Value of Experiential and Output-Based Learning
"We created our own business, found clients, and sold products." (P1)		
"Writing professional memos was a turning point for me." (P7)	Project-Based Realization & Turning Point	
"Competitions pushed me to become a director." (P6"		
"Thesis allowed me to anchor theories to reality." (P2)	Thesis/Capstone as Applied Theoretical Output	
"We truly apply theory to practice." (P4)		

Table 1. Documented Strengths and Lived Success of Communication Alumni

Faculty Expertise and Transformative Mentorship

Beyond formal AACUP accreditation, faculty expertise is evident in transformative mentorship. Grounded in Bandura's Social Learning Theory, professional identity is shaped through observation and modeling rather than just instruction. Alumni narratives credit faculty with being pivotal catalysts for career entry and skill development.

"Sir Siggie…gave me the opportunity to be a broadcaster" (P1)
"Sir Sigfred…gave me a chance" (P6)

This mentorship fosters self-efficacy and career readiness by building student confidence through real-workd encouragement (Camacho, 2020). While AACUP confirms faculty competence, the program operationalizes this expertise through a proactive culture that transforms student trajectories (Bueno, 2023; Adayemo, 2023).

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Foundational Skill Mastery & Real-World Relevance

The program's success, evidenced by high employment rates, aligns with Human Capital Theory, where the curriculum serves as a strategic investment in marketable skills. Alumni confirm that mastery of core competencies, specifically interpersonal and writing skills, serves as their most valuable professional asset (Dayola, 2024).

"Strong interpersonal skills…how to connect with people." (P1)
"Our writing was praised as better than other top universities." (P4)

This mastery reflects global 21st-century skill standards, meeting employer demand for transferable competencies (Koen et al., 2013). Validated by AACUP, the curriculum exceeds minimum requirements to forge a competitive, market-valued skill set that translates directly into workplace excellence.

High Value of Experiential and Output-Based Learning

The impact of the program's most memorable courses is best explained by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, where knowledge is constructed through a cycle of action and reflection (Kolb, 2014). Alumni identify high-impact learning in hands-on, output-driven projects rather than passive lectures.

"IMC was effective because of the hands-on practice." (P6)
"Thesis allowed me to anchor theories to reality." (P2)
"Writing professional memos was a turning point in my learning." (P7)

This pattern of building confidence through application is a deliberate pedagogical design validated by AACUP, which commends the integration of diverse teaching strategies. By bridging theory with real-world practice, the program ensures lessons, significantly improving professional readiness (Prestholdt, 2018).

Alumni's Narratives	Core Ideas	Emerging Themes
"Equipment is lacking; we need more cameras." (P1)	Critical Lack of Production Equipment	Critical Facility and Technical Resource Gaps
"Lack of equipment limits student creativity." (P6)		
"I lacked experience because I never used the radio console." (P2)	Under-Utilized & Missing Production Labs	
"We lack a dedicated recording room/" (P3)		
"A speech lab is important and would be a big help." (P1)	Identified Need for Speech/Voice Training Facilities	
"A speech lab would help us improve our communication." (P4)		
"The curriculum and teaching sequence need to be revisited." (P5)	Curriculum and Material Quality Control Issues	Faculty and Pedagogical Mitigation
"Modules need proofreading to fix confusing parts." (P2)		
"Major subjects should include seminars for extra learning." (P5)	Desire for Industry Integration	
"We need more partnerships and outside experts." (P2)		

Table 2. Contextualizing Institutional and Experiential Challenges

Critical Facility and Technical Resource Gaps

A consistent challenge identified by alumni is the limitation posed by inadequate technical facilities, which hinders the active experimentation phase of Kolb's Learning Cycle. This resource deficit creates an uneven earning environment where students without personal equipment face distinct disadvantages.

"Equipment is lacking; we need more cameras." (P1)
"Lack of equipment limits student creativity." (P6)

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These narratives are validated by AACUP audits, which cited a "shortage of updated specialized equipment" and a "need for better utilization of media curtailing specialized technical skill development (Olatunji, 2016).

However, a key mitigation strategy emerged: faculty ingenuity. Instructors leverage professional networks and alternative projects to buffer students against these institutional constraints. While the resource gap remains a structural weakness, student outcomes are preserved through the resilient and transformative role of the faculty (Mohammad et al., 2025; Sanchez, 2025).

Faculty and Pedagogical Mitigation

A critical tension exists between faculty dedication and systemic gaps in curriculum relevance. Alumni identified issues with instructional "hanging" modules and fragmented teaching sequences, echoing AACUP's call for updated materials.

> "Modules need proofreading to fix confusing parts." (P2)
> "The curriculum and teaching sequence need to be revisited." (P5)
> "Major subjects should include seminars for extra learning." (P5)

These findings align with Mian et al. (2020), emphasizing that modernized curricula are fundamental to sustainable education. Furthermore, alumni requests for industry-led seminars reflect Social Learning theory, where external partnerships boost professional self-efficacy. Resolving these gaps requires moving beyond individual faculty ingenuity toward an institutionalized strategy for regular curriculum review and industry collaboration (Olatunji, 2026).

Alumni's Narratives	Core Ideas	Emerging Themes
"Establish dedicated radio, TV, and speech lab facilities." (P4)	Urgent need for dedicated physical facilities	Infrastructural and Facility Augmentation
"Provide recording rooms with teleprompters and cameras." (P3)		
"Restore the program's official radio frequency." (P5)	Restore and formalize practical media platforms	
"Create a newsletter for student skill application." (P2)		
"Complete the thesis requirement by the third year." (P1)	Academic Workload and Assessment Redesign	Program Delivery and Curricular Reform
"Prioritize performance-based assessments." (P3)		
"Revert to individual thesis for better accountability." (P1)	Quality Control and Structure	
"Review the sequence and relevance of subject topics." (P7)		
"Hire more specialized faculty to match subject expertise." (P5)	Staffing and Expertise	Strategic Specialization and Professional Integration
"Address faculty overwork due to low staffing levels." (P5)		
"Implement majorings to allow student specialization." (P2)	Specialization and Relevance	

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"Diversify internships to include marketing and advertising." (P6)		
"Organize field activities and mini-tours." (P1)	Field Exposure and Global Linkage	
"Establish student exchange program opportunities." (P3)		

Table 3. Convergent Pathways for Program Enhancement

Infrastructural and Facility Augmentation

Alumni narratives and official audits converge on a single urgent mandate: the expansion of specialized physical facilities. Alumni (P3,4) specifically advocate for dedicated radio rooms, TV production labs, and recording spaces equipped with teleprompters and cameras. Under Experiential Learning Theory, these tools are essential for transforming abstract concepts into professional skills.

The AACUP report reinforces this, recommending dedicated funding for modern production equipment. This is supported by research from Omodan (2024) and Olatunji (2016), which is not merely an upgrade but a prerequisite for graduate employability and academic excellence.

Program Delivery and Curricular Reform

There is high alignment between alumni feedback and institutional evaluation regarding curricular updates. Alumni (P1, P5) suggest optimizing subject sequencing, such as completing the thesis by the third year, and shifting toward performance-based assessments (P3) to match the practical nature of the course. This mirrors AACUP mandates to review curriculum load and integrate production-based grading.

Supporting this, MsMillan et al., (2019) argue that aligning course processes with stakeholder expectations is a hallmark of good governance. By streamlining sequences and prioritizing applied outputs over rote memorization, the program ensures a more coherent pathway that maximizes student investment and professional readiness.

Strategic Specialization and Professional Integration

To evolve from a generalist program into a professional powerhouse, the curriculum must prioritize specialization. Alumni highlight that a shortage of faculty (P5) often leads to instructors teaching outside their domains (P7), and they strongly advocate for program majors (P2). Research by He et al., (2016) confirms that cultivating specialized staff skills is essential for the operational health of a scaling academic program.

This mandate is reinforced by AACUP recommendations to implement specialization tracks and expand international linkages. Ultimately, the proposal to separate from the Institute of Teacher Education (ITED) is a strategic necessity to clarify the program's professional identity, ensuring graduates possess the distinct competitive capital required by a specialized global industry.

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CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn regarding the Communication program: The program's success in producing competent graduates is primarily attributed to the high quality, expertise, and transformative mentorship of its faculty, who successfully leverage Social Learning to foster student confidence and professional opportunities despite institutional shortcomings. Physical Capital Limits Human Capital. The failure to adequately invest in modern, specialized physical resources and laboratory facilities is the single greatest inhibitor to program quality. This resource deficit prevents students from engaging in the necessary Active Experimentation and Concrete Experience phases of Experiential Learning, resulting in underdeveloped technical human capital upon

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graduation. Program Design Requires Strategic Maintenance. While the foundational curriculum is strong, the program suffers from inadequate maintenance of instructional materials and suboptimal sequencing, which compromises the efficiency of knowledge transfer. A Validated Improvement Roadmap Exists. There is a clear, institutionally and alumni-validated consensus on the necessary actions for program improvement, centered on addressing the resource gap and formalizing specialization to meet contemporary industry demands.

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