

Chapter 17

Economic Journalists’ Qualifications in the Arab World: A Proposed Interdisciplinary Academic Program Offered by Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman

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ABSTRACT

As regards the issue of journalists’ qualifications and media professionals in general in the field of media work, evidently including economics, the countries of the world are divided into two main directions: the direction of general scholastic qualification, and the trend of specialized qualitative qualification that separates work fields and distinguishes between the skills and conditions to be provided by journalists working in a specialized field. In fact, working in the field of economic journalism requires a qualitative qualification that responds to the nature and special work conditions in this area. Furthermore, when some international universities offer quality qualification programs in the field of economic journalism, the majority of Arab world media qualification institutions continue to adopt the classical approach in qualifying economic journalists. Actually, academic institutions give professional institutions, where journalists are supposed to work after graduation, the task of compensating for their lack of information and skills in deferent areas of specialization. Hence, this study presents a proposal for the establishment of an academic program between the media and economics, called “Economic Journalism”, throughout which journalists specialized in economics, are trained through a university qualification program that combines journalism knowledge and its arts with the fundamentals and principles of economics. This program is suggested to be offered by Sultan Qaboos University, in the Sultanate of Oman and could be adopted by other Arab universities and could well benefit from international experiences in qualifying economic journalists so as to build an academic program model that would reflect the importance of an overlap across science disciplines. This will help in having qualified human cadres in the economic journalism. Eventually, the study is based on an analysis of the current global economic journalists’ qualification trends through a close reading of the available university programs worldwide.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Interdisciplinary

In simple and concise terms, many dictionaries and scientific sources agree to define the term Interdisciplinary as an area that combines two branches of knowledge. The Oxford Dictionary, for example, defines "Interdisciplinary as relating to more than one branch of knowledge."

A number of researchers (Newell & Green, 1982, p. 24) define this term as: "specialized area of knowledge which critically draws upon two or more disciplines and which leads to an integration of disciplinary insight". It may seem obvious that interdisciplinary studies would involve the integration of disciplinary materials or insights, but considerable misunderstanding exists on this point among purported interdisciplinarians themselves-a fact which has resulted in the overuse and misuse of the term.

Interdisciplinary relations have affected modern human knowledge, be it at the level of knowledge production in general, or at the level of advancing new solutions to problems that could not be solved when dealt with from one limited and narrow knowledge portal. This could be added to the skills generated by the interrelationship between sciences and what it offers to researchers and intellectuals acting in different fields of knowledge. Interdisciplinary relations between disparate disciplines are of a remarkable importance in modern human knowledge, because of their contributions to the rapid development in the distinct fields of knowledge, scientific research and its methods. The interrelationship between social sciences and other sciences in modern times is one of the modern trends in the fields of university education and scientific research which has begun to renew its characteristics and review its traditional approaches; these are unable to provide explanations and solutions to some complex social problems. Therefore, social sciences have recently moved to interact and collaborate with other sciences in order to solve many contemporary social and humanitarian problems.

Social sciences interests in interdisciplinary scientific approaches has evolved as a product of human thought in interrelationship with other sciences, and since the social aspect in other fields of science has become recognized and sometimes necessary. Many instances can exemplify this case. For example, medicine is not limited to diagnosing physiological factors and diseases treatment solely, but again to taking social and psychological factors into account, and many social and human sciences look at the physiological aspects as they often affect the level of social performance, mental health or individuals' social relationships. Consequently, there is a continuous confluence between the two fields, but this does not diminish from their distinctiveness because they are separate areas of knowledge.

Social and human sciences need for numbers, ratios and mathematical equations is indispensable to understanding trends and responses and turning them into indicators through which accurate plans can be drawn up to solve problems. At the same time, there will be no place for 'mute' figures unless they contribute to humanitarian and theoretical explanations and relate them to the societal reality through social statistics. The same applies to the science of biomechanics which is co-developed by the science of physical education, mechanical engineering and physiotherapy. The study of economics can, for instance, tackle the phenomenon of desertification in terms of its impact on the level of production and national income. In sociology, it deals with its influence on social relations and prevailing culture. Geography studies it as a geographical phenomenon, while psychology analyzes its impact on the behavior of individuals. Hence, it is a phenomenon that calls the attention of economic, social, psychological, geographical and environmental sciences all at once.

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