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## Perceptions and Comparative of Media Education Curricula in Arab Universities

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**ABSTRACT:** The emergence of new ITC in the Arab world has led many Arab institutions to meet the demands of the labour market. This study seeks to explore the MCJ programme curricula in nine Arab universities by looking at what they offer so as to understand better the needs of MCJ education in an ongoing growth field in the Arab world. Based on a qualitative approach via content analysis, the study found that most MCJ programmes seemed to be outdated, being influenced more by CF and CS courses than by OF, OS and elective courses (old teaching style). The results confirmed the hypothesis and the need to develop a new curriculum that goes beyond teaching the main faculty courses to focus on the labour market and on media industries' needs.

**KEYWORDS:** Arab countries, University education, Curriculum, Teaching, Qualitative research, Mass media and communication, Educational system

### I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades or so, the Arab world has witnessed changes in terms of technology use in education in order to expand and improve education systems to fit in with such changes. For example, huge investments have been put into education infrastructure in the Arab regions (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; D. N. Tahat et al., 2020) although these investments vary from one country to another (e.g., depending on countries' economic and political stability). However, most Arab countries are still affected by heavy political patronage, a lack of freedom and the low prestige of journalism (Abuyazid, 2001; Almenayes, 1995; Saleh, 2010). In terms of HE, this has had an impact on media / communication and journalism education (MCJ) in the region. For example, some MCJ programme outcomes are outdated and require reconsideration of the programmes being delivered to fit in with one of the fastest growing areas of the world (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Deuze, 2006; K. Tahat et al., 2017; K. M. Tahat et al., 2020), especially in the era of digital media and the Internet.

Such a development has required Arab institutions to make a more urgent appeal aimed at preparing qualified graduates and enabling them to use and understand effectively the modern technologies to communicate with their societies and institutions (Tweissi, 2015; UNESCO, 2013). However, several challenges face university graduates in practising MCJ skills in their real world (labour market) (Elamanza et al., 2013; K. Tahat et al., 2017). This study explores the MCJ curricula in nine well-established Arab universities to highlight the nature of these curricula in order to understand better the types of approaches being adopted in teaching MCJ in each country. It aims to contribute towards the ongoing research in developing MCJ programmes. Its implications result from offering an overview of current curriculum development in the Arab region.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Aspirants towards quality in modern Arab MCJ education may note that several media industries are suffering from a gap between theory and practice (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Deuze, 2006; Saleh, 2010; UNESCO, 2013). This reflects the reality of the system and the MCJ programmes in these countries (Alhamuwad & Eleaskur, 2002; Dissanayake, 2018; Stigbrand & Nygren, 2013; K. Tahat et al., 2017). The differences in curricula among Arab universities have already been discussed, highlighting that the Arab world is not a monolithic region when it comes to education (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Ali et al., 2021; Saleh, 2010; UNESCO, 2013). Studies have discussed (via forums, conferences and events) the importance of developments needed in MCJ programmes at academic and professional levels (Deuze, 2006; Dissanayake, 2018; Dugmore & Ligaga, 2014; Folkerts et al., 2014; Gutiérrez & Tyner, 2012; K. Tahat et al., 2017;

UNESCO, 2013; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). In particular, the attempt to preserve the quality of Arab MCJ education and to face up to its challenges in the Arab region commenced following the emergence and spread of satellite television channels and digital media in the mid-1990s (Mohammed et al., 2020) and (Al Nashmi et al., 2018). This transformation has been applied through an attempt to use digital technologies in teaching MCJ and to move from passive education aspects (traditional education) to new, active education (learning through participation and collaboration). The changes have also seen attempts to adopt the local culture of education to inspire the student (learner) regarding how to communicate and use media efficiently in their communities and in the region as a whole (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Dissanayake, 2018; Gutiérrez & Tyner, 2012; Habes, Ali, et al., 2020; Stigbrand & Nygren, 2013; Weaver & Willnat, 2012).

The standards of MCJ education depend on compatibility between the media and communication programmes and the requirements of the labour market (Alsamari et al., 2009; Berger & Foote, 2013; K. Tahat et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2013). They require the opening of these educational institutions to the national and regional media industry through communication with the institutions in an integrated manner that reflects qualitatively (not quantitatively) on the educational process of these programmes (Alhumaid et al., 2020; Berger & Foote, 2013; Dissanayake, 2018; Folkerts et al., 2014; Gutiérrez & Tyner, 2012; Stigbrand & Nygren, 2013; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). This is perhaps why most Arab educational institutions are seeking to revise traditional education systems and develop curricula that attract qualified specialized graduates who understand the advancement and integration of the digital world in terms of helping their societies (Alhamuwd & Eleaskur, 2002; Gutiérrez & Tyner, 2012; Habes, 2019; Huggett et al., 2020; Stigbrand & Nygren, 2013)

### **Early MCJ Training**

In the Arab world (Abdelfattah, 2012; Abu Baker et al., 1985; Abuyazid, 2001), the development of MCJ programmes has been underway since the mid-1930s when the first training programmes were provided by the Department of Journalism at the American University, Cairo (1935), followed by the Institute of Editing and Translation at Cairo University (1939) (which became the Faculty of Media in 1970). Furthermore, the Institute of Radio and Television Training, which belongs to the Arab Radio and Television Union (ARTU) (established in 1955), has also provided many short media training courses for TV and radio employees in various creative programmes including screen-plays, directing, programme preparing, audio-visual production, newsrooms and children's programmes (Abu Baker et al., 1985; Melki, 2009; K. Tahat et al., 2017).

During the 1970s, UNESCO organized a seminar in Cairo on media training and emphasized the need for effective MCJ education and training in the Arab and developing countries where there was a lack of qualified journalists and media professionals (Al Nashmi et al., 2018). UNESCO has also worked to support better outcomes in the educational process in some universities or media industries (Alhamuwd & Eleaskur, 2002; Melki, 2009; Saleh, 2010). Since then several Arab universities have started to hold meetings, conferences and workshops to develop more MCJ education and training programmes that reflect on the teaching and learning environment in these regions (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; K. Tahat et al., 2017). Such gatherings have highlighted several problems, such as limited academic freedom, outdated curricula, low faculty morale and a lack of transparency in administration (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Melki, 2009; K. Tahat et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2013). These challenges have led scholars to call for more studies to examine the nature of these programmes and to look at what they offer.

### **Media Qualification**

The current trend in MCJ education has focused on the possibility of formulating a *global* approach to defining its frameworks and concepts (Alsamari et al., 2009; Becker, 2003; Deuze, 2006). This initiative was led by US universities which have attempted to increase arts and social-science studies around the world since the early 2000s (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Habes et al., 2018). One of the aims of this approach is to work through the creation of international partnerships that result in *positive* MCJ developments for some countries, especially in the Arab world (ACEJMC, 2020). Furthermore, Knight and Hawtin (2010) have analysed and reviewed these developments and their impact on the host countries.

The current study has followed Al Nashmi et al.'s (Al Nashmi et al., 2018) recommendations for further studies examining the MCJ education in the Arab world. It has also adopted other studies' suggestions, such as those presented by Gaunt (1992), Becker (Becker, 2003) and Hanusch and Mellado (2014) regarding the formulation of MCJ education. For example, Becker (Becker, 2003) states that there is unanimity between the US and the EU on the need for homogeneous criteria related to comparing

approaches and exchanging knowledge about the teaching of journalism. These scholars provide examples of collaborative programmes between the US and the EU that aim to evaluate the needs and changes regarding the quality of research. Furthermore, the global concerns regarding MCJ education led to the establishment of the World Journalism Education Council (WJEC) in 2004 and its outgrowth following a meeting in Singapore in 2007 (WJEC, 2007). The WJEC has adopted a series of principles regarding MCJ education, such as a balance of conceptual, philosophical and skills-based content, for successful MCJ educators. Gaunt (Gaunt, 1992) said that regardless of the social or political context, MCJ researchers should recognize the existence of almost the same problems in teaching media and journalism.

The Accrediting Council of Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) (ACEJMC, 2020) set up the curriculum standards of MCJ education, which include a minimum of 72 credit hours to be taken outside the MCJ field, with a balance between theory and practical courses, and these became international standards (ACEJMC, 2020; Blom et al., 2019; K. Tahat et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2013). In the Arab world, between 2005 and 2013, the number of MCJ courses and programmes increased from 80 programmes (Kirat, 2005) to around 95 programmes (K. Tahat et al., 2017) and it continues to grow. However, regarding these curricula, studies have found that most of the delivered programmes are outdated and based on theory with a lack of practical aspects. Furthermore, Melki (Melki, 2009) indicated that MCJ programmes in Lebanon also needed more qualified faculty staff, resources and research.

It has recently been claimed that some Arab universities, especially those in the GCC region, have invested in their education systems and attempted to adopt an international model in teaching MCJ (ACEJMC, 2020; Blom et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2013). As a result, some of their MCJ programmes have been recognized by UNESCO, the US and ACEJMC (Al Nashmi et al., 2018). The literature has also analysed MCJ education in some Arab regions based on a quantitative approach (Al-Hizan, 2007; Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Becker, 2003; Deuze, 2006; Knight & Hawtin, 2010; Sharif, 1988; K. Tahat et al., 2017; Tweissi, 2015), with variable findings, highlighting the problems of MCJ programme sizes, outdated curricula, funding and international partnerships (Kirat, 2005; Knight & Hawtin, 2010; O'Rourke, 2011; K. Tahat et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2013). This study follows Al Nashmi et al.'s (Al Nashmi et al., 2018) and Deuze's (Deuze, 2006) structure by focusing only on MCJ programmes in taking an in-depth look at form and content in nine well-established Arab universities, using content analysis. In order to achieve such a focus, the analysis is underpinned by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do MCJ education curricula differ in each university?

RQ2: What is the ratio of specialized to general courses in each curriculum?

RQ3: What is the main language of instruction in each curriculum?

### III. METHODS

#### **The Sample**

The study, based on content analysis, examines the MCJ education curricula at nine well-established public universities across the Arab world (see Table 1). The main reasons for choosing these universities were: 1) they are the oldest-established and most prestigious universities in their countries, representing three different Arab regions: North Africa, Middle East and the GCC; 2) they are the first to offer taught MCJ courses; 3) they are public and have different MCJ education systems; 4) they are influenced by different political and economic aspects; and 5) Arabic is their main language of instruction.

Algeria, Egypt and Libya have the oldest universities in the Arab world and the former two are the home of the first MCJ programmes (Abu Baker et al., 1985), particularly Egypt. Although the Algerian education system is influenced by the French style, Egyptian education is influenced more by the British and American styles with the most reputable MCJ programme in the Arab world. The Libyan MCJ education, meanwhile, is one of the oldest in the Arab world (Elareshi & Bajnaid, 2019). Note that little is known about Algerian and Libyan MCJ education (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Elareshi & Bajnaid, 2019; K. Tahat et al., 2017).

Iraq, Palestine, Jordan and KSA are seen as important countries in this respect. Iraq is an oil-rich country with Sunni-Shiite orientation and its education system is a mix of the British and American styles. Palestine, and especially Jordan, are considered as being rich in human resources, although having limited funds and political struggles (Al Nashmi et al., 2018), with an emphasis on British education. KSA is also an oil-rich and a conservative Islamic-Sunni country with little liberation in its education system, although it has made an attempt to follow the American style. Despite being established in 1986, SQU is seen as a leading university in the region, aiming to achieve a high level of MCJ education (O'Rourke, 2011). The UAE has put a lot of effort and investment into all aspects of its infrastructure, including education, with

strategic plans for global recognition and achievement (Al Nashmi et al., 2018). Consequently, the country is already a media hub and training centre in the Middle East. Sharjah University is a strong and advanced institution and its programme was recognized and accredited in 2016 by the ACEJMC (ACEJMC, 2020). Table 1 summarizes the departments / divisions and the establishment of these universities.

**Table 1.** *The sample feature of the study*

Institution, Faculty, date of establishment	Country	Department / Division	Teaching Language
Cairo University (CU) 1908 Faculty of Media	Egypt	1. Journalism Department 2. Radio and TV Department 3. PR and Adv. Department	Arabic, English
Algeria University (AU) 1909 Faculty of Media and Communication	Algeria	1. Communication Department (Organizational Communication, Mass Communication) 2. Media Department (TV and Radio Studies, Writing Journalism, Multimedia)	Arabic, English, French
Benghazi University (BeU) 1955 Faculty of Media	Libya	1. Journalism and Publishing Department 2. Radio and TV Department 3. PR and Adv. Department 4. Theatre and Cinema Department	Arabic
King Saud University (KSU) 1957 Faculty of Media	KSA	1. Journalism 2. PR Department 3. Communication Department 4. Design and Directing Department 5. Marketing Communication Department	Arabic, English
Baghdad University (BaU) 1958 Faculty of Media	Iraq	1. Journalism Department 2. Radio and TV-Journalism Department 3. PR Department	Arabic, English
Yarmouk University (YU) 1975 Faculty of Media	Jordan	1. Journalism Department 2. Radio and TV Department 3. PR and Adv. Department	Arabic, English
An-Najah National University (ANNU) 1977 Faculty of Economics and Social Studies	Palestine	1. Communication and Digital Media Department 2. Radio and TV Department 3. PR Department	Arabic, English
Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) 1986 Media Department	Oman	1. Journalism and e-Publishing Specialization 2. Radio and TV Specialization 3. PR and Adv. Specialization	Arabic, English
Sharjah University (SU) 1997 College of Communication	UAE	1. Mass Communication Department (Journalism, e-Media, Graphic Design and Multimedia) 2. PR Department 3. Communication Department (in English)	Arabic, English

Note: most media faculties were launched as department or specialization before became a faculty.

### Procedure and Analysis Units

In terms of analysis, this study depended on an in-depth exploratory content analysis of university websites associated with each MCJ programme mentioned above. The content analysis of MCJ programmes allowed the study to discover and describe the focus on each MCJ programme in terms of trends and patterns (Ali et al., 2021; Stemler, 2000). In detail, the study addressed the six questions of Krippendorff regarding use of content analysis (1980): 1) the MCJ curriculum from each university was analysed; 2) each MCJ programme was *verified* by contacting some faculty and department members to confirm that data on their websites were up-to-date; 3) the data were drawn from well-established Arab universities; 4) the data were examined in relation to MCJ education in HE; 5) the boundaries of data were highlighted in the sample above; and 6) the data were analysed based on discussion of early literature. Once the MCJ programmes were confirmed, the study started to categorize and classify each curriculum based on its overall structure (Guest, 2013). This helped to identify the typologies of each programme separately. The second stage was to develop (our coding sheet) for each curriculum (attached in the

appendix) including all categories and sub-categories that were adopted from relevant studies mentioned in early literature, such as (Abdelfattah, 2012; Al-Hizan, 2007; Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Habes, Alghizzawi, et al., 2020; O'Rourke, 2011; Saleh, 2010; K. Tahat et al., 2017) in order to ensure content validity. Terminologically, it is worth mentioning that we analysed each curriculum based on the following definition: compulsory faculty (CF) and compulsory specialization courses (CS) refer to all the courses that belong to the programme and which students must undertake to graduate; optional faculty (OF) and optional specialization (OS) refer to all the courses that belong to the programme, in which students have to undertake certain credits to graduate; free-elective (E) courses refer to any course credits from other disciplines and do not belong to the faculty's main courses (see coding sheet).

The coding-sheet form was developed based on "emergent" coding with two coders asked to code the raw data and to produce a coding sheet (mentioned below) (Stemler, 2000). In procedure, the coding sheet was tested several times on a small sample to determine its competence. The preliminary results of the tests proved its ability and efficiency in line with the study objectives and questions (Salloum et al., 2019; Stemler, 2000) The whole of the raw data is available upon request.

Finally, the two main categories of analysis were as follows. Form category: Focuses on analysing the general form of curriculum in terms of: 1) the ratio of specialized and general courses in each curriculum; and 2) the language of instruction. Content category: Analysing the curriculum in terms of the contents of specialized and general courses.

### **Inter-Coder Reliability and Validity**

The initiative coding sheet was exposed to two expert content-analysis professors at Al Ain University, UAE, and Bahrain University, Bahrain, to verify the clarity of the coding items. The inter-coder reliability was run to test the consistency and relevance of the coding process using Holsti's formula  $PA_o = 2A / (N1+N2)$  where  $PA_o$  represents the percentage of agreement between two coders, A is the number of two coders' consensus decisions and N1 and N2 are the numbers of decisions that the coders have made respectively (Wang, 2011). The level of agreement between the two coders was 81.0%, indicating an acceptable level of agreement between the coders and confirming the validity of the coding process (Stemler, 2000; Wang, 2011).

## **IV. RESULTS**

The in-depth analysis of the MCJ programmes in the sample followed the classification of each curriculum, developed accordance to Guest (Guest, 2013) who indicates that the classification process of typologies must include the creation of all categories and be used to demonstrate the similarities and differences in each curriculum / programme. Based on this, the study seeks to explore how each curriculum distributes the credits and courses in terms of specialized and general courses.

As shown in Table 1, most of the universities named their MCJ programmes similarly. They concern with MCJ filed through a number of departments or specializations. Looking at these departments / specializations, they attempt to focus more on the media aspect (e.g., Journalism and e-Publishing, Radio and TV, Multimedia) rather than on the communication aspect. The communication aspect is almost exclusively found in PR programmes. Although some of these universities named their faculties as the faculty of communication, or the faculty of communication and media, in reality they are neither media nor communication. The only university offering both media and communication aspects is AU through four programmes: two in communication (Organizational Communication, Mass Communication); and two in media (TV and Radio Studies, Writing Journalism and Multimedia).

### **Specialized Courses in Each Programme**

In response to RQ1, most of the programmes (via their curricula) offer some specialized courses as compulsory faculty general (CF) requirements, meaning that all their students must undertake these courses in order to graduate. They also offer some specialized courses as compulsory or optional specialization (CS and OS respectively) requirements and again all students must undertake all the CS and some credits from OS courses (Al Nashmi et al., 2018). Others offer optional faculty (OF) which in most programmes is quite similar to those OS courses, depending on each programme's policies and requirements. Finally, most programmes offer free-elective courses (E), which belong to other disciplines and students must undertake some credits (again, this depends on each programme's rules).

**Table 2.** *The specialized and general modules in each plan*

Institution	Department / Division	General Courses	Specialized Courses
CU (44 course)	1. Journalism Department	8	(14OS + 15CF + 5CS + 2E)= 36
	2. Radio and TV Department	8	(14OS + 15CF + 5CS + 2E)= 36
	3. PR and Adv. Department	8	(14OS + 15CF + 5CS + 2E)= 36
AU (57 course)	1. Communication Department (Organizational Communication, Mass Communication)	26	(16CF + 15CS)= 31
	2. Media Department (TV and Radio Studies, Writing Journalism, Multimedia)	26	(16CF + 15CS)= 31
BeU (49 course)	1. Journalism and Publishing Department	8	(20CF + 4OF + 13CS + 4OS)= 41
	2. Radio and TV Department	8	(20CF + 4OF + 13CS + 4OS)=41
	3. PR and Adv. Department	8	(20CF + 4OF + 13CS + 4OS)= 41
	4. Theatre and Cinema Department	8	(20CF + 4OF + 13CS + 4OS)= 41
KSU (41 course)	1. Journalism	23	(11CF + 7CS)= 18
	2. PR Department	23	(11CF + 7CS)= 18
	3. Communication Department	23	(11CF + 7CS)= 18
	4. Design and Directing Department	23	(11CF + 7CS)= 18
	5. Marketing Communication Department	23	(11CF + 7CS)= 18
BaU (32, 28, 30 course respectively)	1. Journalism Department	10	(all CS)= 22
	2. Radio and TV-Journalism Department	8	(all CS)= 20
	3. PR Department	6	(all CS)= 24
YU (44 course)	1. Journalism Department	13	(21CS + 5CF + 5OS)= 31
	2. Radio and TV Department	13	(21CS + 5CC + 5OS)= 31
	3. PR and Adv. Department	13	(21CS + 5CC + 5OS)= 31
ANNU (41 course)	1. Communication and Digital Media Department	9	(28CS + 4OS)= 32
	2. Radio and TV Department	9	(28CS + 4OS)= 32
	3. PR Department	9	(28CS + 4OS)= 32
SQU (46 course)	1. Journalism and e-Publishing Specialization	17	(28CS + 2OS)= 30
	2. Radio and TV Specialization	17	(28CS + 2OS)= 30
	3. PR and Adv. Specialization	17	(28CS + 2OS)= 30
SU (41 course)	1. Mass Communication Department (Journalism, e-Media, Graphic Design and Multimedia)	24	(6CF + 8CS + 3OS)= 17
	2. PR Department	24	(6CF + 8CS + 3OS)= 17
	3. Communication Department (in English)	24	(6CF + 8CS + 3OS)= 17

Note: CF = Compulsory Faculty, OF = Optional Faculty, CS = Compulsory Specialization, OS = Optional Specialization, E = Elective courses.

Table 2 shows (column 4) that most studied programmes rely on the combination of compulsory and specialized courses. For example, BaU apparently requires 160 credits, equivalent to 32 courses, and depends 100% on CS courses (22-20-24 respectively); at SQU, students study 93% of courses (28) as CF and 7% (2) as OS courses. Meanwhile, ANNU offers 28 (88%) CS courses, leaving 12% (4 courses) as OS courses. CU offers 39% (14) of courses as OS courses, 42% (15) as CF courses and 6% (2) as elective courses. KSU includes 61% of courses (11) as CS courses and 39% (7) as OS courses. Other universities, such as YU, offer 68% (21 courses) as CS, compared with 16% (5) as both CF and OS courses. AU relies on 52% (16 courses) as CF, compared with 48% (15) as CS courses. Similarly, BeU offers 49% (20 courses) as CF and 32% (13) as CS, compared with 10% (4) as both OF and OS courses. SU relies on 35% (6 courses) as CF, 47% (8) as CS and 18% (3) as OS courses. The indication here is that almost all these curricula lack elective courses (apart from CU) that would allow students to learn subjects out of their specialized field. It is also noted that CU is the university providing the highest number of courses that contain optional specialization. It seems that, with AU, BaU and KSU, all their specialization courses are compulsory, while the BeU, CU, YU and SU curricula spread their specialization courses between compulsory faculty and specialization, and optional faculty and specialization.

This combination (compulsory vs. optional courses) is considered as an imperative model for improving the level of graduates from Arab universities because of the skills and competences currently required by the labour market (Abuyazid, 2001; Almenayes, 1995; Elareshi & Bajnaid, 2019; O'Rourke, 2011; Tweissi, 2015). The downside of these curricula is that they lack liberal-arts elective courses that would allow students to undertake courses from different disciplines. Our findings support the work of Alhamuw and Eleaskur (Alhamuw & Eleaskur, 2002) and Tahat et al., (K. Tahat et al., 2017) who found that graduates in general suffered from a lack of professional skills and who confirmed the trend (mixed courses) and recommended the need to re-consider the media courses in a way that served the needs of the labour market and the media industry.

### **Ratio of Specialized Courses to General Courses**

In response to **RQ2**, Table 2 showed that, in the BeU curriculum, there are more specialized courses than general courses (84% / 16% respectively) in each department. For CU, the division is 82% / 12%, for BaU around 71% / 29%, for ANNU around 78% / 22%, for YU 70% / 30%, for SQU 65% / 35%, for AU (54% / 46%). On the other hand, more general courses, as opposed to specialized courses, were found in the SU curriculum (59% / 41%) and the situation was almost the same in the KSU curriculum (56% / 44%). It seems that most studied programmes are heavily reliant on specialized courses, indicating that there is a lack of liberal courses available to their students and the courses might look redundant, as Al Nashmi et al. (Al Nashmi et al., 2018) indicate. Such curricula might not help graduates in the real world (K. Tahat et al., 2017; Tweissi, 2015; UNESCO, 2013). The difference found in the SU curriculum might be due to its placing an emphasis on more liberal courses to meet UAE education direction (Al Nashmi et al., 2018) and, as a result, its MCJ programmes were accredited by the ACEJMC in 2016 (ACEJMC, 2020).

### **Language Instruction**

Not surprisingly, the majority of MCJ education programmes are taught in Arabic (**RQ3**). This is clearly due to the fact that these are originally Arab universities that attract Arab students who have studied in systems based on Arabic as the main language, except for the Communication Department (SU) which offers one programme in English. It also appears that in the Media and Communication Faculty's (AU) four programmes (53 courses), 93% are in Arabic with two courses provided in English and two in French. BaU teaches 37 courses (97%) in Arabic and it is the same at YU with 42 courses (96%), KSU with 44 courses (96%), ANNU with 40 courses (95%), the two programmes at SU, offering 38 courses (93%), BeU with 45 courses (92%), SQU with 36 courses (82%) and CU with 38 courses (86%).

The AU's four programmes were the only ones that seemed not to offer specialized courses in Arabic grammar, morphology, literature and rhetoric. While the ratio of courses taught in English (mostly dealing with English grammar and vocabulary, rather than using the language as a medium of instruction or communication) is highest in the programmes at CU, BeU, AU and SQU. The ratio is almost equal in both YU and KSU and less in ANNU, BaU and SU (except for the SU programme for communication specialization which is taught entirely in English). This is a clear indication that these universities have less concern about utilising the English language in their teaching. The current results are consistent with previous studies which focused on evaluation of Arab MCJ graduates and praised the intensification of Arabic and English languages (Alrawas, 2002) and the need to review the requirements for students to be able to speak at least another language before enrolling in MCJ education.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

As a result of the information and technological (ITC) changes, the global media industry requires more courses based on the applied practices of professional skills and experience and the Arab world now tends to look at the outcomes of MCJ education in line with these changes. Hence, the present study attempts to examine the MCJ curricula of nine well-established Arab universities. Overall, it will take time before the process of change and development in MCJ education curricula is embedded at all institutional and academic levels. This is for several reasons such as weakness of economies, political patronage and cultural fragmentation (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Saleh, 2010; K. Tahat et al., 2017). Other factors include a lack of recognition of the importance of the scientific qualifications of graduates and the inability of the local market to absorb the graduates (Abdelfattah, 2012; Abuyazid, 2001; Alhamuw & Eleaskur, 2002; Alsamari et al., 2009; Dissanayake, 2018; K. Tahat et al., 2017; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). In the literature, concern has been expressed about MCJ teaching encompassing a number of different disciplines, so that it aspires to equip students in terms of modern science and knowledge (Weaver & Willnat, 2012).

In terms of the ratio of specialized courses to general courses, all curricula have a combination of the two, but in varying proportions. These differences may be due to the nature of education systems and the



trends in each country. This type of education system may not serve the requirements of the community or the local market Tahat et al., (K. Tahat et al., 2017) indicate, with some MCJ programmes suffering from insufficient specialized courses or a lack of educational practices (Al Nashmi et al., 2018; Saleh, 2010; K. Tahat et al., 2017). The SU programme is unique because it offers courses that would meet the local demand and the unique nature of its programme was accredited by ACEJMC (ACEJMC, 2020). The influence of Western curricula can easily be seen in many Arab universities, especially in the GCC region (Blom et al., 2019; Saleh, 2010).

It is clear that most curricula are taught in Arabic. This may be due to the education systems in most Arab countries relying on Arabic as the main language. The percentage of courses taught in foreign languages was low in most curricula. This is a clear indication that there is less interest at these universities in adopting foreign languages which seem to help neither the students nor the labour market. This might have an impact on students' futures in terms of meeting job requirements (Alrawas, 2002) and empowering media students (Egbujor, 2018).

Media education in Arab universities has an obviously robust environment which is full of ideas that attempt to cater to the needs of students and media institutions. Several studies have raised the relationship with modern communication technology and its implications for the field of media. However, the new curriculum in MCJ may have to go beyond teaching specialized courses and focus more on liberal arts courses and materials associated with modern technology and society (Abdelfattah, 2012), at the same time learning from all leading countries in the field (Almenayes, 1995).

The data analysed here were drawn from the main universities' websites. Although we tried to verify all information, we acknowledged this as a limitation as curricula may change. Although we tried to collect data from different Arab universities to represent the whole Arab world, such a decision might be seen as a bias and therefore future research should examine other universities, for example from Sudan, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and Morocco. Using other methods (e.g., observations and expert survey) to verify our data and extending the study to the market where graduates are supposed to work are also suggested for any future research.

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