

Challenges of teaching in new media in Algerian universities**A field study using semi-structured interviews**

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Abstract:

The aim of our study is to identify the challenges associated with media education in new media in Algerian universities, based on the perspective of a sample of university professors, using a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews. After obtaining the results, the main challenges were identified as follows: difficulty in explaining and simplifying technical terminology for media students, difficulty in teaching modern methodologies in media studies, limited technical knowledge among media and communication students, predominance of theoretical aspects in teaching and neglect of various practical aspects.

Keywords: Media training; teaching media and communication sciences; higher education in media; new media.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The specific nature of Media and Communication Studies has led to numerous challenges in teaching, especially with the emergence of new media that have redefined conventional concepts and transformed theories and methodologies. The following question therefore arises

What are the challenges of media teaching in the new media from the perspective of university professors?

By challenges, we refer to the various obstacles and issues that university professors face in teaching subjects related to new media.

Looking at the relevant literature, numerous studies have addressed the issue of Teaching media and communication sciences, or the relationship between university professors and technology. Among these studies, one that is closely related to our research topic is:

The study conducted by Balmahi and Massoudan (2020)¹, the main objective of their study was to explore the nature of the relationship between the teaching experience of professors in Algerian universities and their use of modern media and communication technologies. The researchers used a descriptive methodology, supplemented by some comparative techniques. Using a questionnaire as a research tool, the study was conducted with a sample of 183 professors from Hassiba Ben Bouali University in Chlef and Abdelhamid Ibn Badis Mostaganem .

The study found that as the teaching experience of university professors increased, their use of media and communication technologies decreased.

As we find in the study conducted by Hadadi (2018)², its aim was to reveal the reality of higher Education of media in Algeria and the educational and training challenges that hinder its contribution to the preparation of knowledgeable and professional media professionals. Although our study is closely related to these previous studies in terms of the general topic, which is the issue of media and communication sciences education in Algerian universities, it differs in terms of methodology and objectives. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to elucidate the various challenges of media teaching in the new media and, finally, to provide some suggestions and recommendations to overcome these challenges.

The importance of our study lies in its subject matter. Media education continues to pose numerous problems and issues that require us, as professors and researchers, to address and accurately describe them in order to identify areas of deficiency and call for their resolution.

In order to achieve the desired objectives of the study and to answer the research question, we adopted a qualitative methodology and used semi-structured interviews in both traditional and electronic formats as the most appropriate direct techniques to investigate and obtain information from the participants. These interviews allowed us to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by media education, and ultimately to conduct a qualitative analysis and draw general conclusions.

Our research community consists of all the professors of media and communication sciences in Algeria. Due to their large number and the difficulty of accessing them, we selected a sample of 20 professors, equally divided between men and women, from different Algerian universities (University of Mascara, Guelma, SidiBelAbbès and Oran). The interviews lasted a whole month in January of this year.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. The challenge of translating terms:

One of the most prominent challenges confirmed by the majority of professors and researchers in teaching media-related concepts in new media is the multiplicity of technical terms for a single concept. This issue stems from the problem of translating foreign terms into Arabic. Studies in the history of modern languages have shown that mass communication has played a decisive role in many terms, and these means have been described as the largest distributors of terms³.

"The translation of technical terms is a significant educational, scientific and research obstacle, as it is subject to the interpretations of each professor, and most of these interpretations are imported from foreign references, in the absence of real scientific councils that deal with the translation of concepts and research terminologies. A prominent example is the term 'new media' and the significant translation challenges it poses due to its foreign origin and local applications. The second problem is that we import all sciences, theories and concepts from abroad, just as we import other materials".

As one of the professors stated.

The field of media and communication studies is considered one of the disciplines that have recently witnessed an increasing translation movement from various foreign languages into Arabic, due to its close association with contemporary technological developments and its direct connection to various human activities.

However, it has not been spared from the confusion of terminologies resulting from the crisis of specialised translation in the Arab world⁴.

2.2 The challenge of explaining technical terms:

Perhaps the most notable example of the difficulty in explaining technical terms is provided by one of the professors who states: "There is a great difficulty in explaining anything related to technical matters and ensuring that students understand it properly, such as explaining the characteristics of new media according to Nicholas Negroponte when he compared the key features of this medium with its predecessors, especially in the aspect that states:

"Replacing physical units with digital ones, or bits instead of atoms",

she added:

"How do you explain the concept of bits? And I personally do not favour a literal translation".

Here is the need for scientific simplification. It is an attempt to present scientific ideas in such a way that any ordinary intellectual can understand the basic concepts and get an idea of the nature of science. It involves interpreting and clarifying technical terms and explaining the meaning of ambiguous concepts by explaining scientific discoveries in a simple and understandable way, making them accessible to a wider audience, including children, adolescents and non-specialists⁵.

Educational simplification aims to impart knowledge in a smooth and simple way so that students can understand it. However, there are those who oppose this idea because the process of scientific simplification is not able to achieve the goals of the educational process due to the difficulties it faces, in addition to the inability of learners to verify the information provided by teachers.

The difficulty in explaining technical terms is related to the limited technical thinking of students on the one hand, and the difficulty of professors in understanding technical matters due to their educational background on the other. Moreover, the teaching challenges are not limited to explaining technical terms alone, but also extend to the difficulty of explaining certain concepts and modern methodologies used in new media research, which rely on algorithms and programming.

2.3 The challenge of understanding emerging technological issues by professors:

"Understanding technology is linked to the absence of digital culture in Algerian society, which makes it difficult for us to study it, let alone establish its theoretical foundations."

This difficulty is particularly evident among older professors who did not receive training in these new media during their academic careers.

The lack of specialised training for older professors is evident when compared to more recently hired professors who have received training in modern technologies, including specialisation at the doctoral level and a one-year training programme after being hired. This training is related to the use of modern technologies in the teaching process, such as the use of platforms such as *Moodle* and the learning of different pedagogical software.

In addition, the extent to which professors use information and communication technologies depends on their age and experience.

The study of Belmahdi & Messaoudane, found that only 22% of highly experienced teaching professors use information and communication technologies, while 56% of professors with little teaching experience use them extensively⁶.

The nature of communication professors' training also plays a role. Some are trained in communication and media studies, others in sociology of communication or sociology of the media. The general training in sociology requires additional effort and diligence from professors.

When scholars try to educate their people through simplification, which is achieved through the acquisition of scientific knowledge, they themselves learn from the educational process. The process of simplification is a reciprocal relationship between scholars and the public, in which the specialist becomes an ordinary learner, and thus both have something to learn and teach⁷

Furthermore, the availability of the same specialisations in media and communication sciences in all universities and academic centres in Algeria leads to a dispersion of supervising professors, rather than their concentration in one academic centre focused on a specific specialisation.

This is different from the situation in Tunisia, for example, where the Institute of Press and Information Sciences monopolises media training throughout the country.

One of the main technological issues that professors find difficult to explain is the modern methodologies in media and communication studies. As far as the curriculum is concerned, one of the most prominent modern methodologies used in new media research is the course "Methods of Measuring Audiences and Users of New Media", which is aimed at second-year master's students specialising in public communication and new media.

The course programme includes various traditional methods of measuring audiences, such as surveys, as well as modern methods of measuring users of new media, such as online surveys, network analysis and sentiment analysis. However, the official curriculum does not provide detailed information on these new methods and tools focused on digital and new media. They are mentioned in a broad and expansive way.

One of the characteristics of these modern methods is their reliance on programming, algorithms and mathematical equations. Sentiment and opinion analysis has achieved remarkable success and has attracted the attention of researchers in a variety of fields.

However, computer programmers and developers have dominated the study of content and various interactions on social networks.

Therefore, researchers in the social and human sciences need to develop their technical skills and capabilities. Collaboration between social researchers and computer programmers within research teams is necessary to carry out serious studies, given the continuous development of technology and the constant updating of programmes.

This highlights the need for professors to make an effort to update their technological knowledge and expertise.

However, media and communication teachers face difficulties in understanding technological issues, on the one hand, and the lack of updating of educational programmes with successive technological advances, whether by professors or the relevant ministry, on the other hand, in the context of the limited technical thinking of students.

2.4. Limited technological thinking of students:

This is where the paradox becomes apparent, because despite the extensive use of digital and new media by students, their professors have noticed limited technological thinking among them, considering that they are humanities students who have been educated far from technology in secondary schools. This is due to the absence of computer-related subjects in their university education, except for the first year of the common humanities, where they study computer science. According to one of the research professors:

"There is a small percentage of students who interact with new media, while the majority are only connected to the use of smart phones through social networking sites. As for scientific or research purposes, I don't think the percentage is high".

This highlights the need to increase enrolments in media studies and to return to a competitive system for admission to this field, which requires high pedagogical skills. This is something that cannot be regulated by the current standards⁸

In addition, students should be encouraged to make more effort, as expressed by one of the researchers:

"This is the dilemma; I wish students would make an effort to understand and comprehend the lessons, not only in matters related to new media, but in different subjects and specialisations".

Another professor added:

"The specialisation in Media and Communication Studies, like some other specialisations, should include students who have behavioural, cognitive and even physiological characteristics that are in line with the characteristics of the field".

2.5. Student absenteeism:

One of the major issues raised by the research professors is unexcused absenteeism from lectures. As one professor put it:

"Students no longer care about attending lectures. Part of the blame lies with the disengaged and irresponsible student, but another part is attributed to the current university system, which is characterised by routine, monotony and a lack of innovation in content and teaching methods. Students are only interested in exams".

Contrary to what one of the professors observed in a previous study, *"... the number of students enrolled in the department each year is excessive, which does not allow for proper training"*.

Each cohort consists of about 85 students, and if we take editing techniques as an example, we have a weekly session of 90 minutes, which means that if we divide the time by the number of students, we get one minute per student per week, which is unacceptable"⁹.

The researching professors noticed that the number of students in master's programmes related to modern technologies, such as public relations and new media, print and electronic journalism, and audiovisual communication, is very low.

Most students tend to choose communication and public relations or organisational communication for job market reasons. The latter specialisations offer more job opportunities in various industrial and service institutions that require specialists in public relations, organisational communication and the

management of their external communication, public relations, advertising and more.

Despite the relatively small number of students in these specialisations, where a single cohort does not exceed fifty students, their attendance is very low, especially in lectures. One of the professors stated:

"There is a significant reluctance among students to attend lectures compared to directed assignments".

This is because students do not face any consequences for missing lectures as attendance is optional, unlike directed assignments where attendance is mandatory and graded, with the possibility of exclusion if a student has more than three unexcused absences. However, the exclusion policy is not applied consistently across all departments.

2.6. The dominance of theory and the neglect of practice

For various reasons, directed assignment sessions have become "*boring*", as described by one Researcher, where they have become mere routines in which students mark their attendance out of fear of exclusion and a desire to earn attendance points (since attendance is worth three to five points in the continuous assessment of directed assignments).

The professor presents research topics and students form small groups of two to four students and present their research in subsequent sessions.

The essence of directed assignment sessions is to encourage discussion and build on the knowledge acquired in lectures. However, due to students' absence from lectures and their reliance solely on attending directed assignment sessions, coupled with their lack of interest in discussing and asking questions, these sessions have become far from achieving the intended goals.

Some professors have also linked this issue to the lack, or even absence, of material resources, especially in certain specialisations such as print and electronic journalism and audiovisual communication at Master's level.

"There are material constraints, which mean that students need laboratories to practice theory through action. The student's work must be practical to the extent that it complements the theoretical aspect".

2.7. The nature of the LMD educational system:

During the interviews, some researchers pointed out that the nature of the LMD (Licence-Master-Doctorate) system itself is a current challenge and obstacle to the teaching of media subjects compared to the classical system. In the new system, the duration of the bachelor's degree was reduced from four to three years.

Instead of the first year being dedicated to media and communication studies, it became a common foundation year in the humanities, with students choosing their specialisation in the second year from options such as media and communication studies, library science or history.

In the third year, students choose Media and Communication Studies as a minor. In addition, some courses are now taught over a semester rather than a full academic year.

Some professors emphasised that the new system has reduced the number of credit hours for certain courses that used to be taught over a full academic year. They noted the significant impact of the reduced credit hours and the lack of proper organisation in some courses.

Others mentioned the fragility of this system and how it undermines students' academic performance.

They stated that after the initial enthusiasm for the system, everyone began to complain about a system that had undermined students' academic performance and no longer produced the academic output expected for more degrees.

3. CONCLUSION

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Footnotes:

- ¹ - Belmahi M and Messoudane A. The Relationship Between Teaching Experience of Universities Teachers and Their ICTs Usage, *Al-Bahith Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(03),2020, p.p.657-660.
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- ³ - Dhiyaf, Fatima. Zohra. Difficulties in translating Internet terms into Arabic. *Journal of Linguistic Practices*, 04(03),2013, p.72.
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- ⁵ - Mechtaoui,O, Khelil N. A Study of the Relationship between Popular Science Text and Scientific Translation Teaching. In *Translation*, 08(01), 2021, pp. 157-158
- ⁶ -Belmahi M and Messoudane A. op.cit, p 664.
- ⁷ - Mechtaoui,O, Khelil N, op.cit, p. 159.
- ⁸ -Barkoun Kahina . The educational system of media and communication sciences in Algeria: A historical and critical reading. 05(13), 2018; p.84.
- ⁹- *ibid.*

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