

7. ‘Teacher! Teacher! I want “A”, teacher!’

ABSTRACT

This article broadly examines the teaching of journalism and media studies in the countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council and focuses specifically on the authors’ experiences of teaching these subject areas in the Colleges of Applied Science in Oman. Written partly in response to O’Rourke and Belushi (2010) and drawing on earlier work by Quinn (2001) and Al Hasani (2006), the paper addresses a number of broader questions about journalism and media education in the GCC countries. It asks whether the use of English as a language of instruction is sustainable in countries like Oman and whether its use is based on considerations of practicality or because of its perceived prestige. The article draws on debates about higher education language policy and questions about the viability of teaching ‘Western-style’ journalism in non-democratic societies raised by Josephi (2010) and others. The article argues that higher education policies which affect journalism and media education too often appear to be based on ideas about what will make the country look good or ‘modern’ while ignoring what might be its actual needs. The article argues that in some cases English language education in these subjects is not viable in its current form and that students themselves see the role of journalism in an utterly different light to that of their ‘Western’ or ‘Western’-educated instructors.

Keywords: Arabic, democracy, development journalism, education, ethics, media education, language, media freedom, modernity, nation building, transparency,

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Late last year, Susan O’Rourke from AUT University co-authored an article about what happened when the university was asked to supply the Colleges of Applied Science (COAS) in Oman with a bachelor’s degree in art and design and a bachelor’s degree in communication studies

(O'Rourke & al Bulushi, 2010). The article is an examination of the difficulties of managing a degree programme from a distance and of delivering timely feedback so that the programme could be tailored to meet local needs.

Problems began almost immediately. According to O'Rourke, the AUT team was under the impression that the Omani Ministry of Higher Education wanted a 'Western' degree, when in fact what was required was an Omani degree that would be taught in English. This meant that AUT supplied a curriculum, with a 'Western' orientation, a 'Western' level of English language usage, grading system and so on.¹ All materials were pre-prepared and delivered to the ministry by AUT. Lecturers in the COAS system in Oman were then given CDs on which were supposed to be full sets of course materials, including PowerPoints, sample exams and dozens of readings for each course, along with links to video material on YouTube. (O'Rourke & Bulushi, 2010)

O'Rourke was to visit Oman to meet with faculty delivering the programme, to meet with the programme director and members of the Ministry of Higher Education involved in the delivery and oversight of the programme and, working together, to ensure that the quality of the programme and its delivery was managed properly.

Meanwhile, three other New Zealand institutions that formed the New Zealand Tertiary Education Consortium, prepared other materials for delivery to COAS. Otago was to provide a Bachelor's degree in Information Technology, Waikato a Bachelor of Business in Tourism and Victoria University in Wellington was to provide English language courses.

From the outset, it was planned that the degrees would be modified to meet local needs and that the content would be changed and localised. The degrees were not to be conferred by the New Zealand providers but would become new Omani degrees conferred by COAS under the control of the Ministry of Higher Education.

This was New Zealand's first real foray into the region. To the best of my knowledge, there are no New Zealand universities in any of the Gulf Co-operation Council states.² Australian involvement in the GCC tertiary sector includes three university branch campuses in Dubai, an accreditation arrangement with Salalah University in Oman and a consortium of technical colleges in Kuwait. It is not proposed here to repeat everything O'Rourke and Al Bulushi say in their article, but there were clear administrative problems, areas where the expectations and attitudes of the Omani Ministry of Higher

Education were at best opaque and O'Rourke was constantly beset by those little surprises that make working in the Gulf so interesting. The biggest hurdle was the misunderstanding over the type of programme.

Writing a Western degree meant using Western theory and media scholars, many of whom write in an abstruse and academic style that is difficult for undergraduates in New Zealand to understand, let alone being suitable for students who entered the programme with an IELTS score of 4.5 or below and were expected to graduate with an IELTS of 5.5-6.0. (O'Rourke & Bulushi, 2010)

Many of the students were barely literate in English, had difficulty understanding basic concepts and in some cases had been passed out of the English preparation programme into the degree without really having achieved the desired level. The AUT material was aimed at students with an IELTS score of 6.5 when in fact many of the students had barely scored 5.0 and were often unable to comprehend what was being offered to them.

With campuses located in Nizwa, Salalah, Sohar, Sur and Ibri, the COAS system was meant to provide post-secondary education for local students who had failed to get into Sultan Qaboos University or one of the private institutions such as Nizwa University or Salalah University. (www.mohe.gov.om/tabid/153/Default.aspx) The COAS system runs in parallel with another post-secondary system of technical colleges run by the Ministry of Manpower. (www.act.edu.om/features/view/15/The-Seven-Dynamic-Technological-Colleges-of-the-Ministry-of-Manpower-)

The idea was that the colleges in the COAS system would all teach from the same CD, that everything would be co-ordinated closely and that all colleges would produce students who had all been taught the same material at the same level. This worked, very roughly, after a fashion.

Material was meant to be modified gradually to meet local needs, but since Omani academics teaching Communication Studies in the colleges were rare, this was difficult to achieve and since books, written records and anything except the official version of history were not readily available, there was little to go on for expatriate faculty. Since the COAS system was not one which encouraged much in the way of innovation or initiative or rewarded extra work, there was little incentive for faculty to do much. Faculty vented their feelings in end of semester reports which were fed back to O'Rourke, who

made a number of recommendations about how the system could be improved. Her recommendations were never acted on and not widely disseminated by the responsible authorities in Oman.

Faculty felt overworked (20 hour-plus teaching loads were not uncommon), unrewarded, ignored, cut off from any decision making and required to teach a programme that many regarded as fundamentally flawed and unsuitable in an environment where equipment frequently failed or was stolen, where students could harass faculty by constant frivolous complaints to the dean, where cheating and plagiarism was rife and where faculty were under constant pressure to inflate grades.

The response of the faculty in Nizwa was to grumble loudly, snort disbelievingly when the prospect of overtime was dangled in front of them again and then to work extremely hard to ensure that the students received the best education that could be given under the circumstances. It would have been understandable if cynicism and defeatism had been rife, but in Nizwa, most of my colleagues rose to the challenge with professionalism and dedication.

However, one or two people seemed to have given up completely. On my first day at Nizwa I was told that I really should not bother teaching. 'Your job is to help them remember the PowerPoints for the exam,' I was told. Later, a colleague told me that in a year I would stop fighting the system and be happy. She may have been joking.

And then there were the students, who were some of the loveliest young men and women I have ever taught. They were the ones who taught me about how Oman's newspapers began in Zinjibar and what happened when radio first came to their mountain villages. Some of them were also the most unashamed cheats I have ever met and they were certainly completely unashamed about wheedling and whining and demanding loudly: 'Teacher, teacher, I want "A", teacher!' One even brought her mother in to see me when she had only got a B+ and her mother sat in the corner and shouted at me in Arabic while her daughter wept theatrically.

But some of the students also asked perceptive questions: Why, they wanted to know, were they studying in English when they would most likely never use the language again once they graduated? What was the relevance of studying material from New Zealand when they lived in Oman? Why were they studying Western ethics without also studying Islamic ethics? What was the point of studying the media when everything in Oman was controlled by

the government and you could be jailed for saying the wrong thing? Why, if the dean would not let them write about the death in exile of the last Imam of Nizwa in the student newspaper, should they bother at all?

Tertiary education as an Omani development strategy

These were and remain serious questions and they throw open a whole range of other issues about post-secondary education in the Gulf, about the shift towards English as the dominant language of education in universities and the distortions in the market caused by the presence of foreign universities in the GCC.

To answer these questions even briefly, it is necessary to see tertiary education in Oman as functioning in an entirely different manner to the way it does in English-speaking countries. Tertiary education operates as part of Oman's development strategy and just as the media fulfill a nationalistic and quasi-developmental role, so universities are meant to produce cadres of graduates who can fill places in the government and the private sector and replace expatriates. To quote a Ministry of Manpower site:

The Oman government, with His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, has a broader ambition of promoting the Sultanate among the top developed countries in the world. Strategic planning as well as mega projects have been carefully implemented to enable the country to enter to the third millennium and establish a strong society and sustaining economy. Special attention is focused on strengthening the educational qualification and competency of the citizens with opportunities to participate in the economic and social development towards nation building process. This can be achieved by educating the youth of Oman. His Majesty envision for a productive labor work force particularly on their scientific, technical, and vocational capabilities. His speeches repeatedly stressed on the importance of their remarkable job and participation in various economic fields and urged them to take this role. He even encouraged the government and private sectors for cooperation to provide prospect jobs to ensure welfare of the Omani families and subsidiaries. (www.act.edu.om/features/view/15/The-Seven-Dynamic-Technological-Colleges-of-the-Ministry-of-Manpower-)

Oman's development strategy has transformed the country dramatically since the end of the Dhofari insurgency in 1974, four years after the beginning of

what is referred to in Oman as ‘the Blessed Renaissance’ when Sultan Qaboos came to power (www.statecouncil.om/kentico/Inner_Pages/News/141.aspx).

Oman has the longest history as an organised state of any of the six nations that make up the Gulf Co-operation Council. In the 19th century its trading empire stretched down the East African coast to Zanzibar and it controlled Baluchistan until 1958. Oman was first occupied by the Portugese, who were eventually driven off, but eventually it lost its empire to the British (Onley, 2009). Britain treated separately with Oman and it was not one of the Trucial States which signed a treaty with the United Kingdom—Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the seven emirates which now make up the UAE.

Most of Oman’s brightest and best moved to Zanzibar (or Zinjibar as they call it) and it became the centre of their trading empire. Oman itself grew impoverished and what we now know as Oman was shown on British maps as Muscat and Oman, Oman being the quasi-independent Imamate centred on Nizwa. (Onley, 2009)

The neighbouring Trucial States had a mixed economy—a mix of pearls, slaves, dates, smuggling and some light piracy. The British presence in the Trucial States was tiny—a political adviser here, an Anglo-Persian Oil agent there, an occasional warship cruising past, an Imperial Airways HP42 lumbering overhead. There were Trucial Scouts and Omani Scouts and other levies to protect the rulers, mostly Baluchi mercenaries with British officers and NCOs. In the 1930s the pearling industry collapsed and the Trucial States were reduced to a parlous state which did not improve until after the Second World War and the development of the oil industry. In mainland Oman, things were no better.

In the 1960s, as the revenues from oil began to trickle out, things began to change in the Gulf. In Abu Dhabi the dynamic Sheikh Zayed al Nayhyan had come to power and, with Sheikh Rashid al Makhtoum in Dubai, was already dreaming of uniting the Emirates and perhaps the other Trucial States as well. In Oman, things were far worse.

When Britain began to leave Africa in the early 1960s, it had granted independence to both Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Zanzibar remained independent for as long as it took the Tanganyikans to annex the island amid a general massacre of Indians and Arabs (Beetson, 2006). Omanis began to return home, but found the country little altered from the 19th—or indeed, the 12th—century. Sultan Qaboos’s father, Sultan Said bin Taimur, remained in

power only because the British had kept him there. The British had put down a rebellion by the Imam of Nizwa in the 1950s to keep him in power and the Saudis out, but by now Whitehall was rather fed up with his increasingly eccentric behavior. He banned electricity and spectacles, kept the city gates locked at night and when Qaboos returned from Sandhurst, had him locked up for good measure (Peterson, 1976).

After a palace coup, Qaboos took power and in a radio broadcast that could not be heard beyond about a mile from the palace, he declared that a new era had begun. Immediately, however, he had to contend with the Dhofari rebellion in the south, in which the Soviet Union-backed regime in Yemen supplied weapons and support to the local tribesmen. After five years of fighting and a carefully targeted civil reconstruction programme, Qaboos won the war and the subsequent peace (Onley, 2009; Gardener, 2006; Peterson, 1974). Between 1970 and 1974, Sultan Qaboos introduced newspapers and radio and then colour television to Oman, with duplicate services in Muscat and Salalah to make sure the south did not feel left out (www.oman-tv.gov.om/tveng/default.asp).

When Qaboos came to power, there were only two or three schools in the whole country and their pupils were chiefly the sons of Indian merchants. The only education available to most Omanis was in the madrassa (www.omanet.om/english/government/hmspage/tribute.asp). There were no female students. The wealthy sent to their children to Dubai or Cairo or Beirut for their education. Educating the population was as much a way of modernising the nation as introducing television. Given the poverty of Oman's resources—it has very little oil compared with the other GCC states—Oman imported its teachers and other professionals from Pakistan, Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Egypt. These teachers brought their own traditions and methods with them, which in most cases seem to have consisted largely of rote learning, unquestioning obedience and the belief that the teacher was always right. This method of education also led to an emphasis on memorisation, an over reliance on exams and the suppression of questions or dissent.

Education in English both blessing and a curse

When tertiary education was introduced in the Gulf states it was initially in the form of state funded and directed teaching and technical colleges. They taught in Arabic and used Arabic-speaking staff, among them a small but growing cadre of GCC citizens who had been educated abroad.³ Gradually

English became the language of instruction and Westerners, English-speaking Arabs and faculty from India, Pakistan and Asia were recruited. Education in English has proved to be both a blessing and a curse. English has been promoted as the international language that will transform the GCC states into truly global players and make its citizens able to compete with people from around the world. This has aroused some resentment, especially when Arabic speaking institutions have been told to switch to teaching in English.⁴ It has also caused controversy on a broader front, with one Saudi commentator questioning the effect of English curricula on Saudi education (Al Shehri, A. 2010; Puri, 2008). In the UAE there have been suggestions that teaching in English posed a cultural danger (Ahmed, 2010).

However, the simple fact is that in many Gulf states, GCC citizens are a minority. Unofficial estimates put the number of Emiratis as counting as anything between 10 and 25 percent of the UAE's population. While non-GCC Arab students can often enter government schools, other expatriate students usually have to attend private schools. Western parents prefer to send their children to western schools with curricula from their own countries or which offer the International Baccalaureate. So too do aspirational Arab families and parents from the subcontinent and South East Asia, who see Western style education as a key to prosperity and successful migration. These children will have totally different experiences, which may range from Indian crammers where the teachers may be lucky to be paid Dhs1000 (NZ\$300) a month to places like Al Qubairat ('madrassa Brittani' to Abu Dhabi taxi drivers) where students can study A levels and play cricket. What they all have in common is that the language of instruction will be English.

When they graduate from school they will expect to continue their education in English and so they will either look for a university overseas or they will look for a reputable institution in the UAE or Oman or Bahrain or Qatar which teaches in English. There will be no shortage of either, but finances, family ties and parental control will mean that many more students go to university in Muscat or Manama rather than Melbourne or Auckland.

However, this puts students who have been to government schools at a disadvantage. If they have studied English at a government school it will probably have been with a teacher for whom English is a third language and so even if they do come to university with some level of English there will be a certain amount of second language interference in pronunciation and sentence structure. In Nizwa I was one of only two Western teachers, so students

were most likely to be exposed to English spoken by second or third language speakers (Poole, 2006; Syed, 2003). In an English language environment, students from private schools will statistically do better. A recent survey by the *Middle East Economic Digest* found that poor foreign language skills (including English) was a major problem among GCC local school leavers (See Table 1) (www.meed.com/supplements/2010/gcc-education-survey/). One of the greatest achievements of the Gulf states has been the inclusion

Table 1: Percieved weaknesses in GCC local school leavers

Weaknesses	Percentage
Problem solving	52.1%
Foreign languages (including English)	39.2%
Numeracy/Mathematics	31.7%
Verbal communication skills	27.8%
Science	23.5%
Information Technology	13.9%
Literacy (Arabic)	11.8%

of females in education. Sheikh Zayed was an early promoter of women’s education and in Abu Dhabi and Dubai he established a university in his name that was initially intended to be exclusively for Emirati women.

UNESCO statistics show that in all GCC countries except Oman, more females than males as a percentage of the total population are in tertiary education, a fact which has raised a number of issues (Donn and Issan, 2007) (See Table 2). As a percentage of the total student population, female students normally outnumber males. In the UAE, it is estimated that 60 percent of all tertiary students are female.⁵ In the College of Applied Science Nizwa male and female students sat on different sides of the room, but had different student cafeterias. In the UAE, government universities are segregated, but private universities are not. In some Saudi institutions, male faculty teach female students by video. For many Arab parents the idea of sending their daughters to study overseas would be unthinkable. Sending them to an institute where they might meet men would be clearly an anathema to many parents so a mixed sex campus would be out of the question.

Tertiary education in the Gulf has become a big business. A recent report by Alpen Investments suggests the total number of all students (in primary,

Table 2: Male-Female tertiary participation rates

Year	Countries					
	Bahrain	KSA	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	UAE
2000	—	F 26 M 18	—	—	—	F 30 M 10
2001	—	F 26 M 19	F 29 M 15	—	F 33 M 9	F 36 M 13
2002	—	F 28 M 17	F 29 M 15	F 12 M 16	F 31 M 8	F 37 M 13
2003	—	F 32 M 20	F 28 M 14	F 12 M 16	F 30 M 6	F 37 M 13
2004	—	F 35 M 22	F 27 M 12	—	F 35 M 6	—
2005	—	F 35 M 24	—	—	F 33 M 6	—
2006	—	F 36 M 25	—	—	F 32 M 5	—
2007	—	F 35 M 28	—	—	F 31 M 5	—
2008	—	F 36 M 29	—	—	F 31 M 5	—
2009	—	F 36 M 29	—	—	F 30 M 5	—
2010	F 51 M 52	—	—	—	—	F 41 M 22

Note: UNESCO statistics for male-female participation rates in tertiary education in the GCC countries. These figures represent male and female participation as a percentage of the population. <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx> — No data available; KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia); UAE (United Arab Emirates).

secondary and tertiary sectors) in the GCC will rise from 9.5 million in 2010 to 11.3 million by 2020 and that ‘significant opportunities for private sector [investment] exist’ (*The GCC Education Industry*, 2010). *The Economist* predicts that by 2020 the GCC’s population will be 53 million, ‘the vast majority under 25’ (*The GCC in 2020*, 2009).

There are 21 colleges and universities in Oman alone. In the UAE there are, at a conservative estimate, at least 40 fully fledged universities, not including a myriad of dental colleges, technical schools, places which offer a BA in a year and hundreds of language schools. Most of these are private institutions fighting for a slice of a market which has been described by Austrade as saturated (www.austrade.gov.au/Education-to-the-United-Arab-Emirates/default.aspx).

While GCC citizens can find a place in something like the COAS system or its Emirati equivalent, the Higher Colleges of Technology, richer or more ambitious parents may try to find their children a place in a branch campus of a foreign university which is seen to be more prestigious and to offer better chances of working overseas. However, these local students will face competition from the children of non-western expatriate parents who see them as a stepping stone to a better chance of a work visa in the UK or the US or becoming a landed migrant in Canada (see Table 3).

Table 3: Foreign universities operating in GCC states

GCC State	Foreign universities and colleges									
	USA	Australia	Netherlands	UK	Germany	France	Canada	India	Phils.	Ireland
Kuwait	2	2+	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
UAE	24	3	-	15	-	2	3	12	-	-
Qatar	6	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Oman	1*	1*	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Bahrain	3	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1
KSA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: + University with technical college partnership, * Private university with accreditation arrangement with foreign university; UAE United Arab Emirates, KSA Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

While Western universities are a prominent part of the tertiary education marketplace in the GCC as a whole, there are only a few private institutions in Oman. Because of the size of its population and government policies designed to restrict the work expatriates can do, Oman does not face quite the same challenge of citizen vs expatriate competition for university places as the rest of the Gulf, especially since its main tertiary institutions are in any case restricted to Omanis.

In Qatar, the Emir asked a number of American universities to open up branch campuses, so that local students who want to, for example, study interior design, can go to an outpost of Virginia Commonwealth University. Elsewhere, there are branches of the American University system, with an American University of Dubai and an American University of Sharjah. In Abu Dhabi you can also find branches of New York University, the New York Institute of Technology and even the Sorbonne.

Most Gulf universities and colleges have focused on what are seen as ‘useful’ subjects like business and science, with little regard for the arts. Journalism and media-related courses like public relations and advertising have been sold to parents, who make the decisions about what their children will study, as a form of business or science. More than 30 media related courses, taught in English and Arabic, have been identified at GCC universities and colleges (see Table 4). If we consider the practical problems caused by the delivery of AUT’s media and journalism programme at the COAS system in Oman, we might also consider that some very real philosophical and pedagogical questions arise from teaching journalism in the GCC.

Table 4: Tertiary institutions teaching media subjects

GCC State	Institutions
Kuwait	American University of Kuwait, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait University
UAE	HCT system, Zayed University, UAEU, Abu Dhabi University, NYU, NYIT, American University of Dubai, American University of Sharjah
Qatar	Northwestern University, University of Qatar
Oman	Sultan Qaboos University, Colleges of Applied Science, Sohar University, Al-Bayan College
Bahrain	Al Ahlia University, Gulf University College, The Kingdom University, University College Bahrain
Saudi Arabia	El Ewam Mohammed ibn Saud Islamic University, Imam University, Institute of Public Administration, Islamic University of Madinah, King Abdul-Aziz University, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, King Faisal University, King Khalid University, King Saud University, Umm al-Qura University Makkah

Note: A sample of tertiary institutions teaching media related subjects (i.e. journalism, public relations, advertising, media, graphic design, video production, marketing, etc) in GCC countries. Information was derived from institutional websites.

Al-Hasani has identified significant problems in the relationship between what journalism students are taught at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat and the Omani media (Al Hasani, 2010). There is the not unexpected fact that what is taught in the university does not have much in common with the way the industry works. The Arabic language press is tightly controlled and graduates feel frustrated because they can't do the things they have been taught to do. The English language daily press is run by Indians who will not employ locals because they expect to be paid far higher salaries than Indians and the tiny part of the media that is staffed by Westerners publishes tabloid weeklies that do not offer much scope for 'real' journalism. (Al Hasani, 2010).

The problems that face students from Sultan Qaboos University are even greater for students in the COAS. The Colleges of Applied Science serve rural communities whose students are hours or even days away from the media centres in Muscat. Apart from the duplicate radio and television services in Salalah, there are no regional media to which they can turn for work experience or contacts. They do not have access to libraries except for the limited collection in the colleges. There are only two libraries in Oman, one at Sultan Qaboos mosque and the other a collection of old technical material from Petroleum Development Oman, both in Muscat. They have no ready

access to English language materials and therefore little chance of practising or using their English outside of college hours.⁶

They are, however, extremely technically savvy and are great users of the internet. They are well aware of the impact of the internet on the media and as a social and political forum, but they are also aware that bloggers who have offended the government have been jailed or forced to flee the country (Gulvady, 2009). They are well aware of the all pervasive censorship in Oman and the Gulf (Zarwan, 2005). They are loyal to their country, but students from Nizwa and Salalah may have been brought up on very different versions of the Imam's rebellion and the Dhofar war which run counter to the official version of events. Some students regarded the AUT course with bewilderment. One student asked his lecturer why they had to study obscure and difficult media theories and was told: 'These are Western ideas. Just study them for the exam.' It was practical advice.

Conclusion

Why would the Ministry of Higher Education want a foreign-designed, English language programme for their students in rural colleges? Partly, perhaps, because a Western curriculum seemed more prestigious than a locally designed one, even though the COAS faculty had many, many years of practical experience as journalists and educators and would probably have been much better placed to design and deliver a locally oriented programme. Unfortunately, in many countries Western education seems to have become a sort of cargo cult in which the fetish of English will produce a society that is somehow more 'modern.'

In her introduction to *Journalism Education in Countries with Limited Media Freedom*, Beate Josephi cites a UNESCO definition of journalism education which says that once they have been educated, journalists will help

to serve society by informing the public, scrutinising the way power is exercised, stimulating democratic debate and in those ways aiding political, economic, social and cultural development. (Josephi, 2010)

This, she says, is premised on the notion that journalism acts as a Fourth Estate in a democratic country where an informed people can debate issues. This is clearly not the case in Oman, nor in the other GCC countries. None of the GCC countries rank highly on Reporters sans Frontières' annual rankings of press freedoms, although their placings have varied, sometimes

dramatically, since the beginning of the 21st century (see Table 5). The dilemma, which remains unsolved, is whether ‘Western-style’ journalism should be taught in countries where censorship is common and where there is little hope that the press or society will ever be ‘Western.’

My former colleague at Zayed University, Stephen Quinn, once argued that unless countries in the Gulf embraced Western concepts of media freedom and transparency they would never take their place in a globalised economy. He argued that journalism teachers had to work even harder to inculcate these concepts in their Emirati students (Quinn, 2001).

It could be argued that journalism education should match the needs of the countries in which it is taught. Some of my colleagues in Oman would argue that given local conditions, students should be taught a form of journalism that is more closely oriented towards the classic developmental model. It would certainly seem to be more useful for students in the COAS system to be exposed to ideas about development journalism since they more closely adhere to notions of national development with which the students are familiar and feel comfortable. UNESCO has produced a number of model curricula for media and journalism education that might be usefully studied and specialised curricula on such areas as media literacy have also been proposed (Boame, S.T. 2002; Frau-Meigs, 2006; Cobden, M., et al, 2007; Barwind, J. and Piecowye, J. 2002.).

Table 5: RSF media freedom rankings

GCC State	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Kuwait	78	102	103	85	73	63	61	60	87
UAE	-	122	137	100	77	65	69	86	87
Qatar	-	115	90	104	80	79	74	94	121
Oman	-	152	-	-	-	-	123	106	124
Bahrain	67	117	123	143	111	118	96	119	144
Saudi Arabia	125	156	154	159	161	148	161	163	157
Immediate GCC neighbours									
Iraq	130	124	148	157	154	157	158	145	130
Iran	122	160	158	164	162	166	166	172	175
Yemen	103	136	135	136	149	143	155	167	170

Note: Reporters sans Frontières press freedom rankings for the GCC states and their immediate neighbours. Places are out of up to 170 countries surveyed. There appears to be a considerable gap in the record for Oman. <http://en.rsff.org/press-freedom-index-2010,1034.html>

At the time of writing, AUT's official involvement with COAS had ended. AUT's experiences in Oman were very specific to a particular set of circumstances, but they point to wider issues across the Gulf that are important for anybody involved in tertiary education, whether as an academic, entrepreneur or student. These issues are not going to go away and it is likely that they will remain as the expectations of modernising governments, aspirational parents, Western universities and students pull in different directions.

Notes

1. I dislike the terms 'West' or 'Western,' but there seems little alternative. Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Canada and the US are all 'Western' but all have different cultures, ideas and notions of press freedom.
2. The Gulf Co-operation Council includes Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman. Immediate neighbours, which are seen as a threat to the stability of the GCC include Iraq, Iran and Yemen.
3. The official language of the GCC countries is Arabic; but it exists in a variety of forms and is not the only indigenous language spoken. There is a high, formal version used in the Holy Qu'ran and among scholars and the educated classes and a variety of dialects influenced to a greater or lesser degree by other languages such as Farsi and Urdu. In Oman, there are large numbers of people, descendants of the Omanis who returned from Zanzibar in the 1960s, who speak Swahili and, reportedly, a tribe living near the Yemeni border who speak a dialect containing distinct traces of Hebrew. In other parts of the Gulf there may be more people speaking Urdu or Hindi or Tamil or Tagalog than Arabic.
4. At United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, for instance, anecdotal evidence suggests that many Emirati faculty were opposed to the change to an English language curriculum and there were reports that many newly hired, English speaking, Western faculty felt ostracised.
5. A lot of this has to do with the fact that in the UAE, boys can leave school at grade 10 and join the army while for girls, being at university offers a lot of personal freedom, a chance of a career and, for most, an opportunity to delay marriage.
6. Whether they will ever get to use their English skills professionally is a moot point. There are English language news services in the GCC, most notably Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, but also Dubai One and City 7 TV (also in Dubai), KTV2 in Kuwait and Saudi Channel 2.

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