

Examining the Research Skills among Public Relations Students in Jordan

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Abstract

Purpose: This study intends to comprehend the degree to which students from the Yarmouk University public relations department have research skills, the difficulties they face, and their recommendations to further their scientific research skills about media research.

Theoretical framework: The particular focus will be on students from the Mass Communication department at Yarmouk University, providing the understanding of faculty members, policymakers, and strategies to design and implement new approaches to modify their research skills.

Design/methodology/approach: The Researcher adopted the descriptive approach as field surveys are used for data gathering purposes. The Researcher randomly selected a sample of n= 300 students.

Findings: Results revealed that students indicated a lower level of understanding of media research among the respondents. However, this lower understanding is mainly caused by the challenges faced by the students i.e., lack of equipment, instructors' less understanding of the media research, and others. Further, the students provided some recommendations to improve the quality of research to increase their research expertise and skills

Research, Practical & Social implications: it is concluded that the study administration, policymakers, and the relevant faculty should give strong consideration to developing research skills among the learners. For this purpose, adopting certainly improved approaches and addressing the concerns is the need of the day. Finally, the research limitations are highlighted accordingly.

Originality/value: Therefore, this study focused on highlighting the importance of research skills among the students of Public Relations, at Yarmouk University. The Researcher applied a descriptive approach and found overall weak research expertise among the study respondents. Respondents indicated several challenges hindering their research learning concerns, suggesting some primary recommendations to improve the quality of teaching style and approaches.

Keywords: *Public Relations; Mass Media Research; Jordan; Academic Research, Descriptive Approach.*

1. Introduction

Research skills are an essential part of a student's academic success. With the ever-increasing complexity of the modern world, students must have the ability to analyse various sources, synthesize information, and draw logical conclusions

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(Sultana, 2019). In order to help our students develop these skills, it is important to provide them with the necessary tools to effectively conduct research (Basu, 2020). One of the most important elements of research is the ability to use Technology. Students must be able to use computers and the internet for researching topics, gathering facts, and organizing data (Sweileh, 2021). A basic understanding of the fundamentals of search engines and awareness of reputable websites will be extremely beneficial. The ability to evaluate sources is another important research skill. Students should be able to differentiate between reliable and unreliable sources (Sweileh, 2021). They should be able to analyse whether the source has a bias or is supported by evidence (Defazio et al., 2010; Habes, Alghizzawi, et al., 2023). Furthermore, they should be able to determine which sources are current and up-to-date. Research skills are a critical component of a student's academic success. Providing students with the necessary tools and resources will help them develop their research skills and lead to more successful outcomes in their studies (Defazio et al., 2010). Although the majority of ministries in Arab countries have obligated employees to conduct different administrative level research studies, still there is much more to do. The current trends in research and development indicate the necessity to give scientific research the same importance as university education. In this regard, scientific research in the media and communication is the need of the day. Trends in media content, impacts, policies, strategies, and their impacts, all highlight a greater need to deeply examine them for a better understanding of the socio-cultural and political phenomenon (Cedep, 2015; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Megdadi et al., 2023) The importance of scientific research in media is also recognized in developing countries mainly focused upon the performance of media professionals, institutions, and the investigations to examine the media centered approaches. Mass communication research is regarded as addressing important issues during a specific period which, in turn, leads to the witnesses' emergence of new manifestations that entail scientific research to keep pace with the new trends in research (J. R. Brent Ritchie, 2016). The current research is conducted in a similar context. Specifically, keeping in view the importance of research in Arab countries, the Researcher examined the research skills among University students at Yarmouk University (Shanaida et al., 2019). As noted by (Habes, Ali, et al., 2022), students in Jordanian institutions are obligated to conduct research. Especially, at the graduation and upper educational levels, universities give special consideration to research leading to polishing their skills and improving critical thinking abilities. As a result, this research will also provide an in-depth understanding of the research skills among the students' research skills and expertise. The particular focus will be on students from the Mass Communication department at Yarmouk University, providing the understanding of faculty members, policymakers, and strategies to design and implement new approaches to modify their research skills.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Importance of Academic Research:

Academic research is an integral part of a student's education, providing them with the knowledge and resources they need to succeed in the modern classroom (Al Adwan & Eid, 2021). Academic research helps students to understand and analyses complex topics, develop critical thinking skills, and helps to prepare them for their future careers (Cedep, 2015). Academic research can also be beneficial outside of the classroom, as it helps to develop life-long skills such as research, analysis, and communication (Al Olaimat et al., 2022; Alghizzawi et al., 2019) Through researching various topics, students can

become well-informed about important topics in both their educational field and in wider social and political issues. Academic research also helps to expand a student's knowledge base and provides them with the skills necessary to become a successful professional in their chosen field (Habes, Al-Adwan, et al., 2022; Habes, Elareshi, Mansoori, et al., 2023). By researching topics and developing a good understanding of the material, students are able to gain a better insight into their academic subject matter and develop the skills to better interpret, analyses, and communicate their ideas (Langley & Rogers, 2017) as well the academic research is an important part of a student's education and provides them with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to become a successful and informed professional. According to Mohamed et al., (2019) It helps students to develop their critical thinking and communication skills, enabling them to interpret and analyses complex topics and gain a better understanding of material. Academic research is thus an invaluable asset to any student's education (Ostafin et al., 2015). The study of research skills among public relations students is an important topic, as these skills are essential for success in the field. (Sa, 2013) Public relations professionals use research to gather and analyse data to inform their communication strategies, and it is important for students to develop these skills early in their education and careers (Khator & Kenyatta, 2012). In order to assess the research skills of public relations students, educators and professionals can use a variety of methods, including exams, class assignments, and research projects. It is also important for public relations students to engage in continuous learning and professional development opportunities, such as attending conferences and workshops, reading industry publications, and participating in research projects, in order to stay up-to-date with the latest research methods and techniques (Fayoyin, 2011). There are several key areas in which research skills are important for public relations students to master, including data collection, data analysis, research design, and presentation of results. Research skills are essential for success in the field of public relations, and it is important for public relations students to develop these skills early on in their education and careers (Tahat et al., 2022). This can be achieved through a combination of coursework, practical experience, and ongoing professional development (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

2.2 Importance of Research Skills among Students:

Research skills are vital for student success in today's world (Jeljeli et al., 2018; Mazouz et al., 2019). By developing research skills, students are able to find relevant and reliable information, evaluate the credibility of sources, and draw logical conclusions from evidence (Almansour, 2016; Wang et al., 2022). This helps them become more independent and creative thinkers who can make informed decisions (Wang et al., 2022). According to Kwok & Assistant, (2018) Research skills help students identify and explore topics that interest them, develop an understanding of the context around a particular subject, and gain the ability to weigh evidence. Students who have a good grasp of research skills are also better equipped to critically analyze information and form their own opinions (Foundation, 2021; Gowda et al., 2020; Tomic et al., 2018). Connecting with reliable sources of information is also an important research skill. Students should learn to use databases, search engines, and other research tools to quickly and effectively find the information they need by understanding how to use these resources, students can save time and energy while completing school assignments. Good research skills help students become more confident learners who can tackle any challenge (Elareshi et al., 2022; Kanduri, 2018). They also help them develop communication skills and gain a better understanding of their own learning styles as well as research skills enable students to become independent learners who can seek out knowledge on any subject (Wang et al.,

2022). A study conducted by (Mohammad Mustafa, 2016), at Tehseen university also examined the importance of academic research among students. The case study approach used by the Researcher revealed that although students consider academic research as strongly important yet the approaches used by the university as insufficient. According to the respondents, institutions should improve research approaches, that may further help the students. Another study conducted by (Assaf, 2015) also examined the importance of academic research among the students of the University of Zarqa, Jordan. The researcher applied a cross-sectional approach and found that overall students acknowledge the importance of academic research as having positive constructive impacts on their academic performance and career development process. These respondents indicated an overall satisfaction regarding the approaches implemented and used by the faculty members and university administration.

3. Methods:

3.1 Approach and Data Gathering:

The Researcher applied the descriptive method in this research due to its suitability according to the study objectives. According to (Babbie, 1990), descriptive research provides an essential understanding of the social phenomenon (Alhumaid et al., 2022; Habes, Elareshi, Safori, et al., 2023). Further, the researcher applied surveys distributed directly among the respondents for a clear understanding obtained by the individuals having prior experiences of the relevant concerns (Salloum et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2002). a survey among public relations students in Jordan was provide quantitative data on their research skills The survey was include questions about their research experience, skills, and challenges they face in conducting research, The survey has been distributed electronically Via e-mail to each student through the university Further, the gathered data was coded and calculated by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) as also suggested by (Alhumaid et al., 2021; Aoun et al., 2022).

3.2 Study Population and Sampling:

As per the study objectives, the population involved students of Yarmouk University. The study population includes all student at Department of Public Relations, Faculty of Information, Yarmouk University the total number of student are 700 students aaccording to data from Yarmouk University. However, as the focus was mainly on the students of the Public Relations department, the Researcher randomly selected a sample of $n= 300$ respondents from the Public Relations Department, Yarmouk University, Irbid. Notably, the repose rate remained 45% as the respondents cooperated and carefully filled the questionnaires. Besides, the researcher also provided the respondents with the freedom to quit responding whenever they want. Also, the informed consent was granted as suggested by (Navarro-Rivera & Kosmin, 2013) including information about the research purposes, objectives, results, and finally the applicability of the findings.

3.3 Validity and Reliability of Research Tool:

The research instrument was examined by the two subject experts and one senior researcher currently working the Yarmouk University. Further, the Researcher examined the reliability of the research tool as suggested by (McDonough, 2017). Thus overall, the Cronbach Alpha value of the research instrument remained at 0.811. While Table 1 below provides an overview of the Cronbach Alpha values of each variable

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha and Pearson Correlation Coefficient of the Study Instrument

Field	Correlation coefficient	Cronbach Alpha
Availability of research skills among the sample	*0.74	0.82
Challenges of the research skills of the sample.	*0.72	0.9
Ways to improve research skills	*0.73	0.95
Total	*0.729	0.811

4. Data Analysis and Results:

4.1 Demographics of Respondents:

The Researcher first examined the demographics of the respondents. As Table 2 below shows the demographics, a majority of the respondents were females (n= 192 rate 64%) and n= 108 rate 36% were males the total becomes 300 respondents according to the selected sample . Regarding the academic year,

Table 2: Respondent's Demographics Calculation

Variable	Gender	Percentage	Frequencies
Gender	Male	36%	108
	Female	64%	192
Academic Year	First	20%	60
	Sophomore	40%	120
	Senior	25%	75
	Junior	15%	45
Accumulative Average	Accepted	13%	40
	Good	41%	123
	Very good	27%	82
	Excellent	19%	57

4.2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):

The main assumption in the current was to examine the research skills among the students of Public Relations at Yarmouk University, Jordan. Besides examining their responses, the researcher also assessed the statistical significance of their responses depending on the potential difference in the demographics of the respondents (Sarstedt et al., 2020). As shown in Table 3 below, with the significance value at $p > 0.584$, there are differences among the responses based on the respondents' gender. Further, based on the academic year, the significance value at $p > 0.004$ shows no differences among the obtained responses. Finally, according to the accumulative average of the respondents, the significance value of $p > 0.003$ indicates that there are no differences among the gathered responses, showing that both academic year and accumulative average as controlled variables.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA to Examine the Differences based on the Respondents' Demographics

Categories		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sign</i>
Gender	Male	2,70	0,610	0,297	1,430	0,584
	Female	2,74	0,585			
Academic Year	First	2,80	0,510	4,480	431,2	0040.
	Sophomore	2,77	0,502			
	Senior	2,73	0,780			

	Junior	2,50	0,622			
Accumulative Average	Accepted	2,77	0,472	4,710	428,3	0.003
	Good	2,70	0,365			
	Very Good	2,65	0,540			
	Excellent	2,73	0,595			

4.3 Descriptive of Responses:

4.3.1 Familiarity with the Research Skills among Students

Regarding the descriptive study responses, the Researcher noted down the respondents' answers and calculated them according to the measures of central tendency. First, the Researcher calculated their responses concerning their familiarity with the research approaches and methods. Thus, the respondents revealed an overall knowledge of research skills with the Mean value at $M= 2.65$ and Standard Deviation at $SD= 1.51$, indicating a medium range of their research expertise. Besides, the respondents had a lower level of research knowledge among them ($M=1.98$, $SD= 1.33$), along with low knowledge about formulating the significance and purposes of research ($M= 2.0$, $SD= 1.43^*$). On the other hand, the respondents further revealed a medium-range of their understanding of citing previous studies to take support their own research work ($M=2.75$, $SD= 1.49^*$), yet the range of knowledge about determining the suitable research methods ($M=1.77$, $SD= 1.29^*$), and population and sample selection remained low ($M=1.55$, $SD= 1.22$).

Similarly, the respondents revealed a low level of knowledge about the reliability and validity of the research ($M=1.82$, $SD= 1.30$), and also there understanding of research tools determination also remained low ($M=2.55$, $SD= 1.47$). Finally, the respondent's knowledge about using appropriate statistical methods ($M=1.70$, $SD= 1.23^*$) and writing findings and discussions also remained low ($M= 2.20$, $SD= 1.40^*$). Table 4 summarizes the findings regarding familiarity with the research skills among students:

Table 4: Familiarity with the Research Skills among Students

S/R	Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1	I know the concept of research	2.65	1.51	Medium
2	I have knowledge of formulating questions and hypotheses.	1.98	1.33	Low
3	I have knowledge about the importance and purpose formulation.	2.0	1.43	Low
4	I have knowledge of previous studies research to draw upon.	2.75	1.49	Medium
5	I have knowledge about determining research methodology.	1.77	1.29	Low
6	I have knowledge about the population and the study sample.	1.55	1.22	Low
7	I know the credibility of the research.	1.82	1.30	Low
8	I have knowledge to choose study tools.	2.55	1.47	Medium
9	I have knowledge about the use of statistics in research.	1.70	1.23	Low
10	I have knowledge about results and ways to discuss them	2.20	1.40	Low

4.3.2: Challenges Faced during Introduction to Media Research

Concerning the potential challenges faced by the respondents, it was found that a medium range of respondents revealed that they remain unclear about the basic concepts of research even during and after the lecture ($M= 2.20$, $SD= 1.40^*$) as they also find the designed courses as insufficiently providing them research skills and understanding ($M= 3.70$, $SD= 1.65$). According to a larger number of respondents, media research course is difficult for them ($M= 3.85$, $SD= 1.72$) and the schedules for the teaching of media research are problematic to them ($M= 2.42$, $SD= 1.37$). On the other hand, a medium range of students also indicated that their instructors also have a lower understanding of research ($M=$

2.88, SD= 1.40), however, the instructors seem satisfied with teaching the course theoretically (M= 3.55, SD= 1.60). A medium range of respondents further revealed that their institution does not have enough instructors to teach media research (M= 2.78, SD= 1.39), and the appointed teachers do not provide enough opportunities to ask questions (M= 2.90, SD= 1.42). Thus, a higher range of students indicated that their institutions do not have enough tools and technology to teach them research skills through video lectures and demonstrations as the capacity of the classes is large which impacts their comprehension of a media research course (M= 4.32, SD= 1.93). Table 5 summarizes the findings regarding the challenges faced by respondents during their introduction to media research:

Table 5: Challenges Faced by Respondents during their Introduction to Media Research

S/R	Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1-	Clarity is not available in the course for students	2.40	1.35	Medium
2-	There are no courses to enhance scientific research skills	3.70	1.65	High
3-	There is difficulty in learning scientific research skills.	3.85	1.72	High
4-	The times of the sessions vary in the morning and evening	2.42	1.37	Medium
5-	The lack of knowledge of a teacher in the course.	2.88	1.40	Medium
6-	The course instructor is satisfied with teaching the course theoretically.	3.55	1.60	Medium
7-	There are no specialized teachers available to teach the research.	2.78	1.39	Medium
8-	The coach does not give the freedom to ask questions	2.90	1.42	Medium
9-	Tools, laboratories and databases are not available during the educational process.	3.94	1.81	High
10-	Classes with a large number of students influence the understanding of media research skills.	4.32	1.93	High

4.3.3 Improving Research Skills among the Students

Concerning the question about potential methods or suggestions to improve the research skills, a higher range of students indicated that their institution should assign more than one course to teach media research (M= 2.24, SD= 1.36), also containing one course of the junior level students (M= 4.33, SD= 1.67). A higher range of students further answered that teaching research skills to higher-level students is also important (M= 4.62, SD= 1.78) as it is important to learn both theoretical and practical approaches in media research (M= 4.19, SD= 1.57). Further, most of the students also agree with the fact that there is a need to establish a comprehensive approach to media research courses (M= 4.67, SD= 1.85).

Similarly, a higher range of students considered it important to obligate the students to attend the masters' theses defense sessions (M= 4.57, SD= 1.70), besides organizing research workshops, symposiums, and specialized sessions (M= 3.97, SD= 1.49). Finally, students also revealed that there is a need to design graduation-level projects based on the media research (M= 4.10, SD= 1.53), and allocating rewards for best students' research should also be taken under consideration (M= 4.59, SD= 1.76). Table 6 summarizes the findings regarding improving research skills among the students:

Table 6: Improving Research Skills among the Students

S/R	Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1-	Teaching more than one media-related course.	2.24	1.36	High
2-	Whether to teach the course to juniors or seniors.	4.33	1.67	High
3-	The requirement that secondary pupils take a course in scientific research.	4.62	1.78	High

4-	Educating students in theoretical or practical media research methods.	4.19	1.57	High
5-	Creating a thorough methodology for the media research course.	4.67	1.85	High
6-	Involvement of the teacher in scientific research for the students.	4.21	1.62	High
7-	All students should be required to attend master's thesis defenses.	4.57	1.70	High
8-	The department should plan symposiums and workshops on scientific research.	3.97	1.49	High
9-	The requirement for a media research project for graduation.	4.10	1.53	High
10-	The administrative professors presenting prizes for the outstanding student study.	4.59	1.76	High

5. Discussion and Conclusion:

Thus, media research is an important arena for the students to increase their understanding of the media proceedings, content, and impacts. Generally speaking, research provides a pathway for the students and learners to increase their general understanding of the world, observe both macro and micro-level changes, and identify the root causes of these changes (Kwok & Assistant, 2018). Historically, speaking, media research has witnessed several social, cultural, political, and even economic transformations in society. Although the formal origins of media research started around a century ago, all the studies provided a broader picture of how these changes were witnessed by media and how media platforms played their role in bringing up these changes (Cedep, 2015).

Current research also focused on these changes as providing a pathway to learn and understand the importance of research among the young generation (Bevan & Parsons, 2016; European Science Foundation, 2010; López-Alvarado, 2017), particularly, the students of Yarmouk university. Results revealed a comparatively low understanding of research and expertise among the students, which also lead to raising several concerns and suggestions about improving the research quality among the students of Public Relations (Elareshi et al., 2021). The main concerns raised by the students are their unclear understanding of the research concepts (Shanaida et al., 2019). On the other hand, these students also indicated their appointed instructors as having a low understanding of research that further leads to lower understanding among the students. Also, students consider media research courses insufficient to meet their needs. Further, the unavailability of sufficient technological equipment and lack of instructors' interest to understand and addressing the students' queries also accelerate students' uncertainties and unfamiliarity with the basic research concepts.

As noted by (Sweileh, 2021), despite research having an utmost significance in our lives, our institutions have comparatively poor consideration towards facilitating the young generation with a wider understanding of research. Also today, the commodification of research and centralized power accompanied by higher financial interest, further lead to many weaknesses in providing research skills to the young generation (Stafford, 2006). Further, improving the research quality, hiring expert Researcher, and providing the students with suitable opportunities to showcase their research can also help the students to increase their interest in media research (Hine, 2013). The same suggestions are given by the respondents from the Public Relations department at Yarmouk University. Besides, students also agreed with the fact that the university should obligate their students to attend thesis defense sessions and also provide them with opportunities to conduct and attend specialized media research-based workshops (CRACOLICE, 2012). Hence, proved that despite students remaining unsatisfied with their research skills and research courses allocated by their institutions, they

want some primary level improvements to bring positive constructive changes in their academic level research. Overall, the students remained optimistic and showed a positive attitude towards learning research skills to further modify their skills on the professional level (Chitiyo, 2014).

Therefore, this study focused on highlighting the importance of research skills among the students of Public Relations, at Yarmouk University. The Researcher applied a descriptive approach and found overall weak research expertise among the study respondents. Respondents indicated several challenges hindering their research learning concerns, suggesting some primary recommendations to improve the quality of teaching style and approaches. On the other hand, senior-level; students have comparatively better skills than junior ones. Thus, by keeping in view the importance of research, it is concluded that the study administration, policymakers, and the relevant faculty should give strong consideration to developing research skills among the learners. For this purpose, adopting certainly improved approaches and addressing the concerns is the need of the day.

5.1 Practical Recommendations:

This research highlighted important findings regarding the importance and role of research at Yarmouk University. Besides, the students' opinion about their research expertise is also addressed. In this regard, this research comes up with important implications. First, it is important to each research at secondary level education. Students with basic research skills are even abler to conduct improved research. Second, students should be begun teaching research skills from the basic level to laid a foundation for a strong understanding of research and its importance. Third, students should be provided the research courses instructed by skilled, senior-level Researcher to teach them practical research skills. Finally, the fourth implication involves engaging the students as assisting the instructors in different research projects can also polish their research skills leading to improved understanding and expertise research skills are critical for success in the field of public relations, and it is important for public relations students to develop these skills early on in their education and careers.

5.2 Limitations:

Public relations are a field that requires strong research skills, as professionals in this field are often responsible for gathering and analysing data to inform strategic communication decisions. It is important for public relations students to develop strong research skills in order to be effective in their careers. In order to assess the research skills of public relations students, educators and professionals can use a variety of methods, including exams, class assignments, and research projects. It is also important for public relations students to engage in continuous learning and professional development opportunities in order to stay up-to-date with the latest research methods and techniques. This research contains some primary limitations. First, this research is conducted only in the PR department of Yarmouk university, however, focusing on other departments could have brought even broader insights. Second, applying a descriptive approach further narrowed down the scope of current research. Finally, the geographical generalizability of results is another major limitation of this research.

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