

Explanation of Disciplinary Possibility of Futures Studies as a Transdisciplinary Field

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Abstract

Purpose: Since futures studies was faced by the challenge of being established as a discipline, and many of futurists insisted on the necessity of this matter for futures studies, this research is to analyses disciplinary possibility of futures studies. Also, it is to determine its position between academic disciplines.

Method: At first part of this research, analysing of satisfying disciplinary criteria by futures studies from epistemological, social, and organisational approaches was used. At second part, position of futures studies between academic disciplines was determined through applying well-known disciplines categories.

Findings: The results showed that futures studies include particular object of inquiry; body of accumulated specialist knowledge; specialized theories and concepts; various practical methods; scientific paradigms; shared discourse, language, peers, identity; and application in action. It was identified that futures studies due to its disciplinary capabilities, can be considered as a discipline and in disciplines categories, it is an applied and soft discipline and is posited in the broader domain of applied social sciences.

Conclusion: While futures studies satisfies disciplinary criteria, it needs to be developed in two areas: first one is development of its philosophical and epistemological foundations, so that it exits from its baseless situation; second one is its academic development at different higher education levels so that to reach its real position in academy.

Keywords: Futures Studies, Discipline, Disciplinary Criteria, Discipline Category, Transdisciplinary Field

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Introduction

The field of future studies was born after World War II and developed in the second half of the 20th century. Despite this, futurists have not reached a consensus on whether futurism is a university science discipline or a form of art, method, etc. Some of them, such as Wendell Bell, Slaughter, and Malaska, have considered futurology to be an "interdisciplinary" or "super-disciplinary" field, and others, such as Marin and Junell, have refused to accept this. Marin considers futurism to be a field as one of the fruitless myths for futurists. (Marien, 2002: 263) In Marin's view, futurists' recognition of "being a field of futurism" lacks support in terms of providing a definition of what constitutes a scientific field. And it is not clear whether future research approaches those criteria or not. She also admits that one of the myths that hinder the development of futurism is that futurism does things that other fields do not. He is of the opinion that considering futurism as a scientific field makes it exclusive, while futurism is not like that and most futurists studied in other fields. (2002: 263-264 Marien,) Like Fargnani and Chermak, they have enumerated the most important reasons for the failure of future studies to become a scientific discipline in the university community. (Fergnani & Chermack, 2020: 1)

On the other hand, Ditor, in the article "Future research as applied knowledge", states that since future research is not similar to any of the established academic disciplines, it has been permanently misunderstood and misused. He emphasizes that futurism is different from any of the academic orientations, including science, history, art, or mathematics, to the same degree that science and art, or history and mathematics are different, and despite the fact that futurism , it has overlaps with each of these traditional academic fields, it is not identical to any of them. (1996: 5 Dator,)

As Masini has pointed out, "being a science is the most controversial feature of futurism, and according to the opinion of many thinkers, it cannot be considered as one of the features of futurism." (Masini, 1993, quoted by Bell, 2015: 311) Therefore, despite the efforts made by some future researchers in establishing this field as a scientific field; Still, the answer to the question "is future research a scientific field or not?" And if this is the case, "What is its place in the category of sciences?" is in an aura of ambiguity, and this has been constantly highlighted in the works of contemporary futurists over the past three decades. The importance of this issue is so great that in many countries, including our country, future research in the field of academia has faced an identity crisis. The necessity of investigating this issue has caused international publications to show special attention to this issue. At the same time, no serious research has yet been done to evaluate the possibility of futurology being a field, from the perspective of valid criteria. This weakness is

more evident in the research literature produced in Persian. In the researches published in Persian language, despite the publication of works that have tried to answer this question, and introduce future studies as a scientific and beneficial field; However, articles are still published that doubt and express doubts about the field of futurology and its usefulness. Golmoradi (1400: 64-65) in his article criticizing futurism in social sciences writes: futurism, as a scientific branch or approach, is of little use for obtaining authentic science, and despite the obvious claim of futurism to build a better world, Due to the dependence of the activists and thinkers of this field on the government and the market, which are the creators of the current situation; It lacks the ability and usefulness to follow such a path. Considering these ambiguities, it is important and necessary to address the issue of futurism, especially among Persian language researchers, and at the same time, the process of promotion and expansion of futurism in Iran. In this article, to answer the first question, we will explain the possibility of verifying the criteria of being a field by future studies, and then, in response to the second question, we will examine the position of future studies in the classification of academic fields in the framework of Biglan, Becher and Kalb's view.

Methodology

Future research, in the field of method, has had a very significant development, and apart from being a transdiscipline, in some ways, it borrows from other academic fields; It has produced many of its own methods, including Delphi methods and the Wheel of Futures. Glenn and Gordon (2009), in the reference group of prospective research methodology, analyze and review 31 methods. Altonen (2009) categorizes about 40 methods of future research in organizing research in the field of future research. Popper (2008), by examining 886 case examples of the use of forecasting methods, and in order to determine their selection method, analyzes 33 methods. Carlsen and Carlsen (2013) in an attempt to categorize forecasting methods, count 33 widely used forecasting methods.

The methods presented in the above researches only focus on the widely used methods in the field of future research. However, futurists, depending on each research, use different methods, which are very diverse. The development of methods in the history of modern futurism has been so much that some futurists have considered a method such as scenario planning, which is one of the most important methods of futurism, to be in "methodological chaos". (Bradfield et al., 2005: 796) One of the main reasons for this issue is that since the scenario has

brought methodological integrity to future research methods and all future research methods end with the scenario; Therefore, futurists have focused on this method.

In order to determine the position of futurism, it should be noted that the specific subject of research is the future; Futurists explore the thoughts and images of the future that exist in individual, organizational and social institutions to draw alternative futures (including possible, believable, likely, preferred, and even impossible futures). This is very important in determining the position of future studies. Slater (1993) considers futurism to be a fundamental interdisciplinary field of scientific research and believes that because it has a strong connection with other disciplines, a clear boundary cannot be drawn for it. This field is intertwined with the fields of systems thinking, education, hermeneutics, macrohistory, sociology, management, ecology, literature, ethics, philosophy, planning, action research, etc. (Ramos, 2002: 1)

Despite this, Bell (2015) introduces and calls futurism as a transdisciplinary and pragmatic science, despite the fact that futurism includes numerous disciplines - including natural sciences; But it is necessarily a social science. Because in addition to the basic issues involved in choosing the appropriate human action, decision-making and action are also social processes and are realized in a social context. Paya also sees future research as a category of humanities and social sciences (Paya, 2018: 6). There is a difference of opinion among future researchers as to whether future studies is a transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary field. Because in some aspects, it is considered interdisciplinary and in others, it is considered as supra-disciplinary. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, futurology is one of applied sciences and in terms of goals, it is very close to action research. Of course, the position of foresight (strategic) and future research in the pure-applied alien spectrum is not the same. In a way that (strategic) foresight is more result-oriented than future research and has more application in the field of action. Also, according to Biglan's classification of sciences, futurology is one of the soft sciences. Because, unlike hard sciences, it does not deal with generalities, and like social and human sciences, it deals with the understanding and interpretation of phenomena (including thoughts and images of the future). On the other hand, if we consider futurology among social sciences, it will deal with living issues; But this is not generalizable and in some of its subbranches, such as science and technology foresight, it is faced with non-living issues. The position of future research and foresight (strategy) in Biglan's category is shown in Figure 3.

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