VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2, DECEMBER 2013 ISSN 2231-8836

JOURNAL OF INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

JOURNAL OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT
Volume 3, Number 2, December 2013
ISSN 2231-8836 (E-ISSN 2289-5337)

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- to assist academicians from local and foreign universities, business and industrial sectors, government departments and academic institutions, on publishing research results and studies in the areas of information management, records and archives management, library management and knowledge management through scholarly publications.

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Suggested Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Journal of Information and Knowledge Management
Vol.3, no. 2, (2013) -
Shah Alam : Faculty of Information Management
ISSN 2231-8836
1. Library Science – Periodicals 2. Library Science Malaysia – Periodicals I. Z671

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LIBRARIANS WORKING WITH ISLAMIC COLLECTIONS: MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: *Literature revealed that studies on the history of books or bibliography show the glaring focus on western books rather than Eastern and Islamic book production. The development of libraries in Muslim World, such as the mosque library, royal library, public library and private library has be neglected. The problem arises mainly because of the weakness of Muslims themselves. Prior to Middle Ages, the Muslims were in the frontline in the development of knowledge, but since then, the development of knowledge, albeit knowledge on Islamic religion were monopolized mainly by Europeans. During the period there were hundreds of universities in Muslim World. Almost every major cities, such as Cairo, Baghdad, Cordoba, Damascus etc. have universities. The same condition happened with library development in Muslim societies. The development of libraries and universal knowledge declined substantially since then, except on Islamic religion. The library development and services which were not given proper attention.*

Keywords: *Muslim Librarians, Islamic Collections, Islamic Knowledge.*

INTRODUCTION

Librarianship as it is understood today is very much influenced by Western or European approach. The study of library management, begins with the introduction to the different types of libraries, such as national, public, academic, special, school libraries etc. The classification systems used in libraries are based on the Western division of knowledge. For example, on the subject of religion, the classification is very much focused on Christian religion vis-à-vis other religions, including Islam. The same situation occured with subject headings available for cataloguing purposes, especially on the knowledge of religion and history. Literature on the history of books or bibliography focus on western books rather than Eastern and Islamic book production. The development of libraries in Muslim World, such as mosque library, royal library, public library and private library were very much ignored.

The problem arises mainly because of the weakness of Muslims themselves. Although prior to Middle Ages, the Muslims monopolized the develoɾ ɹent of knowledge, the development of knowledge, albeit knowledge on Islamic religion were monopolized mainly by Europeans. During the period there were hundreds of universities in Muslim World. Almost every major city, such as Cairo, Baghdad, Cordoba, Damascus etc. have universities. The same condition happened with the library development in Muslim societies. The development of libraries and universal knowledge declined substantially since then, except on Islamic religion. The same happened to library development and services which were not given proper attention.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In order to have a better understanding on the matter, a look at historical background of Islamic civilization will be useful. The rise of Islamic civilization was strongly related to libraries. One important factor that contributed towards the development of Islamic civilization was the positive role of mosque as an institution that promoted learning. The roles of mosque then have th erole as, not be the place of congregation for *'ibadah* only, but also a place for learning.

In the Islamic history, the most important library in Muslim societies was mosque library. Almost every major mosque (jami' mosque) had library. It was no coincidence that in those periods, there were so many mosque libraries in the Islamic territories. The most important collection in any mosque library was the Qur'an collection, followed by Hadiths. Donation of books to mosques in the vicinity was a habit of many Muslims. For them, books should be kept in mosque rather than in own houses so that more people can read them, including the donor themselves rather in our own house. Besides that there were many persons donated their entire personal collections or private library to the mosques. Many of them believed that if the collections were in the house, in due course they would deteriorate, especially if the children were not book lovers.

ISLAMIC LIBRARIES IN MALAYSIA

There are many Islamic libraries in Malaysia and their numbers are increasing. Normally, they are attached to Islamic institutions like universities, colleges, institutes, mosques and societies. Balqis, (2012: 78-113) listed 210 of them consisting of 46 universities and college libraries, 92 mosque libraries, 39 government departmental libraries, 16 statutory bodies and private institution libraries and 13 in association and societal libraries. Her listing was not final and she acknowledges it is expected that their

numbers are increasing from time to time considering the increasing number of institutions associated with Islam being set up in the country. It is apparent that the number of mosques in the country has exceeded 6000 in 2012 and increasing. A few of them especially those in urban areas will have libraries in due course.

The term Islamic libraries is often used but in reality is it really understood in terms of its meaning? It is a term often associated with libraries with emphasis on its Islamic collections vis-à-vis other collections, in order to meet the needs of its potential users. According to The International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science (2003: 330), Islamic library is a library that focuses on Islamic – or Muslim – sources of information. Balqis (2012: 2) is also of similar idea, and stipulated that "*the term Islamic libraries corresponds and encompasses libraries established by the Muslims for the Muslim's community's religious and learning centers or developed by the Muslims and non-Muslims for the study of Islam.*" She further explained that Islamic libraries are libraries found in Islamic institutions, a library having Islamic or Arabic collection as a major component (p. 3).

In categorizing the libraries in the country as to whether they can be classified as Islamic libraries or otherwise, can sometimes be problematic. If the library concerned are attached to parent bodies associated with Islamic objectives like universities and government departments they can be classified easily as Islamic libraries. Problem arises when the parent body is not associated with Islam. For example, a university or an academic library which has strong collections in many sectors, including Islamic collection in such institutions such as University of Malaya, National University of Malaysia and University Putra Malaysia? Can they be considered them also as Islamic libraries? Balqis considers them as Islamic libraries since they have strong Islamic collections also. This is a problematic issue that needs to be relooked into in the future. For practical purpose however, the Islamic Library Group of Librarians Association of Malaysia included them as part of Islamic library group since they have strong Islamic collections.

ROLE OF LIBRARIAN

According to Choy Fatt Cheong, (2008) the role of a librarian is changing and the boundary of library information science has become more blurred than before. In the past, the role of a librarian has been focused almost equally to collection development, collection management and service to users, that is the focus a library service has been on the librarian as a person. A more experience could theoretically offer better services

to users, and users look upon a librarian as the crucial point in getting quality library services.

In recent years, the role of a profesional librarian has somewhat changed, stressing more on services rendered to users and her effectiveness is very much tied up with ability to offer information services provided by information technologies. In other words, the emphasis has changed more on service to users as compared to the others. In order to gather the information, she did a statistical survey via E-mail: among librarians in the Nanyang Technological University Library, Singapore. From the 40 librarians who responded to the survey, the three major roles of librarians identified are, assist users, provide information and train users. The librarian's role is more intermediary in nature between the resources and users. In a nutshell, she opined the present role of a librarian, "*What is interesting but not so surprising is that there is a strong emphasis on users and less on library collections and resources*" (p. 2).

In the past, users were very much dependent on librarians. In other words users need librarians more than librarians need users. However, with the advent of information technology, more and more information can be accessed from the internet than before especially from the convenience of home, rather than library premise. The apparent detachment of users from librarians which has been specifically created to serve them is very much felt in libraries with weak collections. This development made some librarians to feel that users do not make good the resources in the library and the services being offered and there a need to encourage users to interact with the users. The introduction of information literacy programs in libraries are partly aimed to overcome the gap between librarian and users. She even posed a question as to whether users today need librarian to help them obtain information or otherwise (p.3). She even posed a question as to whether users today need librarian to help them obtain information or otherwise (pp. 3-4).

In Malaysia, to be a librarian, one has to have a bachelor's or Maters degree in Library or Information Management from University Technology MARA or its equivalence from local or foeign universities. University Selangor is another univeristy which has produced graduates in Librray sience at the bachelor's degree level and the International Islamic University Malaysia similar program is in the pipeline.
Application for the post can be accepted from post-graduates in library and information management or its equivalent. A librarian with a bachelor's degree in almost all cases does not have subject specialization like history, geography, science, law etc. because during the years at the university they learnt and specialized papers under the scope of information management or library and information science, although they can opt for

subjects in socia sciences, such as sosiology or mass communication. Only those with Masters' or PhDs' do have subject specialization if their basic degree were from streams other than information management.

LIBRARIAN WORKING WITH ISLAMIC COLLECTION

Although there are many Islamic libraries in the country but most of them are very small in size, especially mosque library. Most of the mosque libraries have collections between 100 to 1000 copies of books. The author has come across a mosque library that has a collection of less than 100 copies of books. In such condition the collections are normally not catalogued, but grouped on the shelves based on categories and broad subjects like Al-Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, tasawwuf, novels, children books etc. Most of the mosque libraries do not have staff to look after them. If they have mosque volunteers they do not know the technicalities of processing the books. However, it is acknowledged that there are a few mosque libraries that are managed reasonably well like Putra mosque library in Putrajaya, State of Selangor mosque, Shah Alam and National Mosque library Kuala Lumpur.

Many other Islamic libraries in the country often have to endure continuous human resource problem because the librarians concerned do not know Arabic language and to a lesser degree do not have Islamic subject expertise. The libraries concerned often rely on those who can help them like non librarians in the same office who know Arabic and graduates in Islamic studies. In order to catalogue Arabic books, they sometimes requested book suppliers for assistance for fee. In such condition, the libraries concerned will face difficulties in giving the best service to users including reference and dissemination service. However, to the best of my knowledge, university libraries normally have librarians with Islamic studies qualification and mastery of Arabic language to be in charge of their collection. In addition, users will be more confident dealing with such librarian in reference services.

What are the roles of librarian in charge of Islamic library or 'Islamic librarian'? I have some hesitation to use the term Islamic librarian because in some libraries overseas the librarians in charge of Islamic collection may not be Muslims. However, it is not surprising that some of them have PhD's in Arabic language and Islamic studies. The term Muslim librarian, then may not necessarily refer the a Muslim librararian. Are their roles similar to modern librarians? When the roles of modern librarian with Islamic librarian are compared it is comparing librarians from two traditions – the Western and Islamic traditions and two eras – the present and the past. It is agreed that the role of librarian, whether from the Western tradition or the Islamic tradition will undergo changes from time to time. The same could have happened to Islamic librarians over

time. However, whatever changes that occur, the fundamental differences between both traditions would still exist. Librarian in Western tradition (modern librarian) will focus more on the technicalities of processing the resources so as to disseminate and make them available more easily to users. On the other hand, Islamic librarian would focus more on disseminating the content of the resources, apart from improving the technicalities of library work.

To be a modern librarian, one does not really need to have subject expertise, whereas for Islamic librarian subject expertise is very much a necessity, especially expertise in Islamic studies and mastery of Arabic language. In addition, he/she should also able to read Jawi script because some literatures on Islam of the past were written or printed in Jawi script. According to International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science (2003: 333), "*The principal duties of [Islamic] librarians included acquisition and preservation of resources, facilitating supplies for scholars, supervising the collation and correction of books in the collection, and coordinating with the library's endowment and management in administrative matters*". A short survey on notable Islamic librarians of the past will easily show that they were scholars like al-Kawarizmi was a famous mathematician, Ibn Sina was famous in medicine and Ibn. al-Sa'i was a notable historian. Therefore, it was not surprising when librarian was a honorific title designated only to individuals for their scholarship (Balqis, 2012: 10-11).

CONCLUSION

Islamic librarianship in Malaysia has great potential. There are already many libraries with strong Islamic collections in the country, such as in universities offering Islamic studies, their numbers are increasing. Some of the smaller Islamic libraries at present will probably have bigger collections in the future. Besides that, some of the mosque libraries may require librarians in the future, especially those at national and state levels and in urban areas. To be effective in managing Islamic collection and offering service to users, in addition to having professional qualification in library and information sciences, Islamic librarians should have Islamic subject expertise, mastery of Arabic language and reasonable command of Jawi script because some of the older resources are in Jawi. In the present circumstances, such librarians are available mostly at post-graduate level because prior to enrolling in library science they already have subject related degrees.

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