The Challenges of Strengthening Islamic Librarianship: Retrospect History to Shape the Future

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Abstract

This article briefly browses through the role of Islamic librarianship based on the history of the Islamic scholarship tradition which saw the emergence of the idea of Islamic librarianship as the discussion focus of this article. There are librarianship scenarios in the Muslim world discussed briefly, initiatives that have been taken towards the idea of Islamic librarianship and the challenges to make it a reality.

Keywords: Islamic librarianship, Muslim librarian, Library science

1. INTRODUCTION

In general, the field of librarianship is a profession that is directly involved in the dissemination, collection and retrieval of information or information management and knowledge. Oli Mohamed (1986) has described this area as… "devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship, has natural infinities to anything that constitutes knowledge of facilitates its promotion and use." Meanwhile the librarian as managers of information and knowledge is in a position that is 'noble' in the dissemination if knowledge. Edward Edwards (American famous librarian in the 19th century) described the librarians not only as 'man of the universal learning' but should also possess the robustness of the quality of the original self as "a lover of books, a man of methodical habits and of an organizing mind, a man of genial temper and of courteous demeanour: (Thompson, 1977). In the study of the Islamic librarianship bibliography, Mohamed Taher (2006) describes the role of the librarian in the history and tradition of Islamic scholarship as a scholar or is more prominent and dominates from his duties as a distributor of knowledge.

This is fairly interesting because in the 21st century, it has been widely discussed and debated about the emergence of 'knowledge workers' (Drucker, 1993; Brooking, 1996; Horbie, 1999; Sveiby, 1997). Can librarians be classified as 'knowledge worker' or 'information worker'? In many discussions among Western scholars, in particular, the librarian is categorized as 'information worker'. Islamic perspective certainly see further and more holistic based on the historical and Islamic knowledge tradition that raised librarian as 'knowledge worker' at once as scholar. This is supposed to fulfil the soul and conscience of Muslim librarian behind their exterior and professional skills.

2. WHY EMPOWER THE ISLAMIC LIBRARIANSHIP?

Based on the vast wealth of Islamic history, conceptual and philosophically, Muslim librarian had been significantly real even though in reality we do not see clearly about what is said regarding Islamic librarianship (Balqis, 2012). Trials by some scholar-librarian such as Anis Khurshid (1985), Mohamed H. Razvi (1986), Ziauddin Sardar (1988), Mohamed Taher (2006), Balqis Suja' (2012) to conclude what was said by 'Islamic librarianship' is a huge and meaningful attempt to show the image of Islamic librarianship. Therefore, we no longer have to waste time to criticise the existence of Islamic librarianship but focus on strengthening the idea of Islamic librarianship instead. The idea of the existence of Islamic librarianship actually started from the pure intention of every Muslim

librarian as a manifestation of their worship as to see the emergence and development of Islamic librarianship that is capable of shaping the future (Ziauddin, 1988).

3. ISLAMIC LIBRARIANSHIP AND MUSLIM LIBRARIANS AS CATALYST OF CIVILIZATION

The library is a great borderless empire, with the influence and role in the construction process of human civilization. "I have imagined that paradise will be a kind of a library", an expression by Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), stressed the role of the library in building the future of civilization until it (the library) becomes heaven (Benge, 1970). What a joy and comfort it is to be in the library because that's where all the adventures to gain knowledge take place, and the experience associated with the library is something aesthetic and harmony, which give advantages to make a difference.

Library is a world full of sundries, a place to think and feel, with the opportunity to return to the pass, or intersects with the present, and of course tests the confidence in the predictions of the future (Abu Hassan, 2011). Library is where the best human minds are united either of the past, present and even future. In the words of Rene Descartes (classical philosopher), "To be in a library is just like reading of all good books is indeed like a conversation with the noblest men of past centuries who were the authors of them, nay a carefully studied conversation, in which they reveal to us the best of their thoughts." (Downs, 1956)

The power of the library as a builder of civilizations is undeniable, especially with the emergence of rapidly growing Islamic libraries in the golden age of Islam which has shown how they managed to influence the world civilisation (Nakosteen, 1996). Ahmad Shallaby (1976) has classified the libraries in Islamic civilisation into three categories; Public library which is usually a part of the mosque, madrasah or other educational institutions. Libraries of this type are open to the public. The second category is the partial public, half open only to a certain groups consisting of scholars and nobles. This type of library is often found in palaces. The third category is personal library, which is owned by individuals who are a graduate and even those who collect books as private collections. Usually, in major cities of Islam, there are many great libraries that serve the scholastic spirit of the surrounding community.

Several of the libraries are great and magnificent institution where there is a large number of valuable works. A library in the Fatimid period in Egypt has forty rooms that each accommodates 18,000 books (Ahmad Shallaby, 1976). Avicenna, during his visit to the Sultan Nuh ibn Mansur (976-997)'s library in the palace, the ruler of the Samanid dynasty in Bukhara has express his admiration for the library with the following words: "There I found some rooms filled with books on Arabic language and poetry; another room for Islamic books; and the next group of books in specific areas have their own space. Then I (Avicenna) studied a catalog of ancient Greek writers and find the books I needed. In the collection of the library, I found a number of books which are only known by a few people and books that i had never even seen again thereafter (Nakosteen, 1996)".

Librarians also have the most special place of honor in the society. Only the really knowledgeable and multi-disciplinary can become a librarian. According to Ruth S. Mackensen in his "Four Great Libraries of Medieval Baghdad" book as reported by Mohamed M. Sibbai (1987) as follows: "The position of librarian in Muslim land during the medieval ages must have been an honorable one, for in these four libraries, as in others, it was filled by great scholars, chosen apparently for their knowledge of books. They were figures important in society of their time and often at court, members, rather than mere servants, of the cultured and learned groups which gathered in the libraries".

Among those librarians, there are many who went on to write great works and translating previously written works. For instance, Hunain ibn Ishaq translated the works of Aristitle and Plato from the

works of Hippocrates and Galen in the field of Physics; notably the seven volumes of Galen's Anatomy, which spread to western Europe a few years later; Musa Al-Khawarizmi, the inventor of Algebra, wrote a masterpiece known as Kitab Al-Jabr wa Al-Muqabillah (Abu Hassan, 2011); Al-Khindi wrote 270 books in various fields of knowledge; Al-Farabi who was very influential in the field of philosophy, logic and theology. His works were translated into several languages, among them: Al-Mukhtasar, wa Al-Wahid al-Wahdah and dozens of other works; Ibn Maskawaih, most influential and well-known in the field of philosophy in the western world. Among his great works are Al-Fauz al Akhbar, Al-Fauz al-Ashghar, As-as-Sulthaniyah Siyasah and others (Muhsin Labib, 2005)

In the context of the history of civilization, 'human' librarian has encyclopedic mind characteristics and plays a role in the development of culture. Ziauddin Sardar (1988) himself acknowledged the role of the librarian as a catalyst to Muslim civilisation and that it must be forwarded by the Muslim librarians in the era of information and communications technology (ICT).

4. INITIATIVES TOWARDS AN ISLAMIC LIBRARIANSHIP IN MALAYSIA

There are several initiatives that have been undertaken towards the creation of an Islamic librarianship in Indonesia. According to wan Fazli Ali and Omar (2011), the Annual General Meeting of the Librarians Association of Malaysia 2004/2005 have proposed that the association (PPM) should form a steering committee for Islamic library for the following purposes:

a. Provide a platform for networking among Islamic libraries and parties that are interested in the development of librarianship.
b. Raise awareness and aspirations of Islamic librarianship system, the essence of knowledge that needs to be worked and the role of Islamic library.
c. Promote professionalism in the development of Islamic library.
d. Improving the effectiveness of dissemination of knowledge on Islam by Islamic library to a satisfactory level.
e. Promote the sharing of knowledge among librarians and library managers in the Islamic government, and non-governmental organizations, Islamic research institutes, public universities, Islamic colleges, religious departments, mosques and other bodies that are involved.
f. Hold an informal coordination in cooperating projects that benefit the Islamic library.
g. To show the world about the ability of librarians and librarianship in Malaysia in providing excellent services in the field of Islam, in line with Malaysia's status as the leader of Islamic countries and the educational center of the region.

With regards to the matter above, this has shown that the initiatives towards Islamic librarianship has long existed and has already become a reality. Among the initiatives are:

i. **Islamic Library Group**
   Islamic library group has been established to carry out activities such as providing a guide to the library of the mosque, courses on the mosque's library management and seminars related to Islamic librarianship.

ii. **Publications related to Islam by National Library of Malaysia**
   Publications related to Islam are a very important element in the construction of information resources. PNM as the leading institution of librarianship has issued relevant publications that are accessible mostly through their website.

5. CHALLENGES

5.1 The Need for Intellectual Courage

During this time, a librarian in the Muslim world becomes the user to any progress in the field of librarianship and information management that are controlled by the Western World. This reliance scenario has extended for so long that it cannot liberate Muslim librarians to act with courage in order to face things that are related to the field. For example, we are still dependent on Dewey Classification System, Congress Classification system; and now with the RDA. We do not say that these systems are not suitable or their classification in Islamic subjects is very restricted or that there are not coherent to the Islamic view but what has happened to the Islamic classification system that once was built and expanded by Islamic scholars. Ziauddin Sardar attempts with 'Outline of Islamic Classification Scheme' are praiseworthy despite having many weaknesses. There should be intellectual courage' which is great among Muslim librarians to explore this issue further. This is where the role of WCOMLIS comes are relevant and has a substantial role.

5.2 Roles of WCOMLIS

WCOMLIS or formerly known as COMLIS (Congress of Muslim Librarians and Information Scientist) is a platform that has successfully brought together Muslim librarians and Islamic information experts from throughout the Islamic world. Since then, the first congress was held in 1982 in West Lafayette, Unites States. WCOMLIS held a follow up conference in 1986 in Kedah (COMLIS II), 1989 in Istanbul, Turkey (COMLIS III), 1995 in Tehran, Iran (COMLIS IV), 2008 in Kuala Lumpur (WCOMLIS V) WCOMLIS held a follow-up conference in 1986 in Kedah (COMLIS II), 1989 in Istanbul, Turkey (COMLIS III), 1995 in Tehran, Iran (COMLIS IV), 2008 in Kuala Lumpur (WCOMLIS V) and subsequently in 2011 and 2014. Various issues and matters related to the theme of librarianship and information management field were discussed. But so far, we have not been able to watch the action and the framework of an 'Ummatic' quality that has been completed. We do not want to see this WCOMLIS as just an academic conferences or meetings without clearly formulating WCOMLIS direction for the good of the community.

COMLIS I, COMLIS COMLIS II and III are based through discussion through its proceedings have formulated several global framework that should be implemented such as World Islamic proposed Bibliographic Centre that was proposed by Mumtaz Ali Anwar in 1983, World Bibliographic Centre for Information on Islam, which is suggested by Anis Khurshid in 1986 and bibliographical Universal Control of Islamic Literature in COMLIS III in Turkey (Balqis, 2012). Until now a network of global collaboration that is much needed to make it a reality has yet to be completed. Perhaps WCOMLIS should has a clearer structure as to its establishment as an officially registered organization that can play its role more clearly.

5.3 Islamic Librarianship as Disciplines

Librarianship has changed significantly as a result of changes in technology and social development, as well as other factors that have changed the existence of the information and its use. These changes have forced information and library studies program to be updated in line with market demand and developments in this field at the international level. Apart from the inclusion of elements of ICT, many new areas such as marketing, knowledge management, metadata, taxonomy and Islamic elements have been combined with this program.

In summary, the School of Library and Information professionals in Malaysia has been offered by five universities namely Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Selangor (UNISEL) and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). Malaysia is moving towards a knowledge-based economy (K-Economy). Therefore it is necessary to formulate policies for human resources development to its full potential, talent, skills and energy in all sectors, including librarians and library staff (Ismail Norillah, 2006). In addition, the program also aims at producing professionals for the library and information market and to meet the manpower needs of libraries, information centers, records centers, archives and information systems positions (Mohd Sharif Mohd Saad & Norma Abu Seman, 2005). Table 1 identifies the programs run by UiTM, IIUM, UM, UNISEL and USIM. This program is related to information and

library studies. It is run by full-time, part-time as well as flexible learning (E-learning). This is the opportunity provided by the universities for librarians who want to continue to learn and gain knowledge in the field that they need and achieve higher qualifications. Overall the training of Library and Information Studies professionals in Malaysia are being offered by five universities, namely Universiti Teknologi MARA University of Malaya, International Islamic University, Islamic Science University of Malaysia and University of Selangor (Mohd Sharif Mohd Saad and Mohammad Fazli, 2013). By comparison, the programs are offered in two stages, namely post-graduate and undergraduate students. Level programs include undergraduate and postgraduate doctoral degree and first degree includes bachelor's degree and diploma.

Table 1 Information and Library Studies Program in Malaysia

	UiTM Faculty of Information Management	UIAM Dept. of Library and Info. Science	UM Dept. Of Library and Info. Science	UNISEL Dept. Of Library Science	USIM Faculty of Quran and Sunnah Studies
Postgraduate	a. Doctor of Philosophy (Info. Mgt) b. Master of Library Science c. MSc. Information Management d. Master Knowledge Management	a. Doctor of Philosophy b. Master of Library and Information Science	a. Doctor of Philosophy b. Master of Library and Information Science		
Undergraduate	a. BSc. (Hons). (Lib. & Info. Mgt.) b. BSc. (Hons) . (Info. Syst Mgt.) c. BSc. (Hons) Records Mgt. d. BSc. (Hons) Resource Ctr. Mgt) a. Diploma in Information Management			a. Bachelor in Library Science b. Diploma in Library Science	Bachelor of Sunnah Studies & Info. Mgt

If we observe the Table 2 as shown below, there are two universities that offer courses in librarianship program involving Islam, namely the Faculty of UiTM Information Management and Library and Information Science Department, IIUM. This shows that the field of librarianship in Islam can be made as another branch that should be addressed in the field of information and library studies. Islamic library in Malaysia is developing and growing rapidly. According to a study by the Balqis Suja' (2012), there are 180 Islamic libraries in the country. Some of these libraries can be regarded as a sound library such as university and college libraries. Therefore, a university program based on Muslim librarian should be established.

In a preliminary discussion of the article, the author says, based on the history, concept and philosophy; Islamic librarianship has already exists. It becomes a problem as it is seen through the framework of modern disciplines that in the process this discipline, we are easily influenced by Western perspective. We do not deny the tendency of Western and Orientalist scholars who are interested in the studies of the Middle East, the Far East (Far East), the Islamic collections including manuscripts has contributed some elements within the Muslim librarianship although it is not recognized as a discipline.

Table 2 Courses on Islamic librarianship offered

UiTM Faculty of Information Management	UIAM Dept. of Library and Information Science
1. Management of Records in Islamic Institutions 2. Islamic Information Management	1. Management of Islamic Manuscript Collection 2. Bibliographic Access to Islamic Literature 3. Information Sources and System in Islamic Revealed Knowledge 4. Libraries in Islamic History and Civilization

Ballqis Suja' (2012) in her book "Islamic Malaysian Islamic Librarianship and Libraries" has made a bold early exploration in the development of Islamic librarianship as a new discipline in the branch of study in librarianship and information.

In the context of Islamic librarianship, many things need to be explored in greater depth, such as cataloging, indexing, acquisition, bibliographic control, Islamic information systems and others. However, a holistic approach is needed which includes the position of Islam in the sociology of science, the development of modern science, librarianship and professional awareness of the influence and contribution of Islam to librarianship (Balkis, 2012). Islamic Librarianship actually has the large potential in the future, at least for a strategic advancement of Muslims (Sardar, 1988) in facing the challenges of the information age and the increasing sophistication of communication. Every big business started as a small business; at least it happens in Malaysia if not the case at the global level or any other Muslim countries.

5.4 Increased Arabic skills and Librarian Network Cooperation

The author wishes to adopt the recommendations made by Wan Ali Wan Mamat dan Fazli Omar (2011), which emphasizes the importance of Muslim librarians to master the Arabic language because most of the Islamic librarianship materials are in Arabic. Wan Ali and Fazli also suggested the need for an effective network of cooperation among librarians in Malaysia. This is because if there is no network cooperation, it will be complicated in order to control the Islamic bibliography, the loan transactions between organizations and the development of a good database.

5.5 Developing Islamic Information Analysis Center

Advanced development and outstanding information and communication technology have made a significant influence over the dissemination of information related to Islam. Undoubtedly, these developments have a significant contribution to Islam, but on the other hand, it has an alarming impact. It should be noted that any information is filled with system and cultural from the information's producers, and we do not want this situation to cause chaos in the values of Muslim community.

It's important to Muslim librarians and information scientist to understand the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the information. Emphasis on quantitative shaped the mechanistic approach to information so that give a negative impact which information will separate from traditional bonds in the form of knowledge and wisdom. The earliest Islamic scholars, librarians, such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Maskawaih are aware of 'information dichotomy' or separation of science and wisdom as they lead to a void of meaning. According to Ziauddin Sardar (1994): "We have to understand and take advantage of information technology, as well as consciously use it to achieve our goals and

their goals are not the makers and creators of these technologies. Ideally, we need to develop special competence in creating and harnessing this technology. While all types of technology comes with a 'trap' ideology and culture of the civilization that created it can be changed and in such a manner panda thus can be utilized. "

Perhaps it is high time for librarians and information scientists Muslim to think about the appropriate approach in analyzing information related to Islam. What are the needs are a combination of expertise in librarianship, Islamic information scientists and experts in Islamic studies. Ideally, the Islamic Information Analysis Center should be built. In Malaysia, it can be extracted as we already have institutions such as the Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM), Institute of Advance Islamic Studies, Malaysia (IAIS) which is best suited to carry out this role.

Ideally, the Islamic Information Analysis Center has the following objectives:
a. Disseminate and collect information about the progress and development of science and technology in Islamic world and the contributions of Muslim scientists.
b. Critically evaluate books and writing materials that were written by non-Muslim writers.
c. Publish information sources Islam and help train the users, including fulfilling the information needs for Muslims scholars, intellectuals, researchers and journalists.
d. Bibliographic control that affect the entire Muslim world. Bibliographic control can be carried out in various fields, especially in relation to education.

6. CONCLUSION

In empowering Islam librarianship, Muslim librarian plays a significant role both in terms of improving professional skills, mastering the languages and improve the network collaboration of Islamic sciences librarian. Efforts to realize the idea of Islamic librarianship actually has to be started as a small business that requires sincerity and earnest commitment. All this is done as a manifestation of good deeds and worship to the Creator. It is true of what has been said by the scholar-librarian, Dr. HA Khan (1986): *"….Librarians and Information Scientist of the Islamic World need to give all their support to the spread of all such information, learning and knowledge, where the blessing of the Creator are discerned and to refrain from all actions which bring his displeasure. Therefore, seeking the pleasure of Allah becomes the guiding principle for the librarians of the Islamic countries of the world".*

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