

## Research Notes

# Principles in Planning Library Education Programs in the Muslim World

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### ABSTRACT

Four major principles for planning library education programs in [the] Muslim World are considered of importance: the environmental needs, the application of programs, the cultures, backgrounds and traditions of the nation, and the future changes. The Muslim World is acquiring expertise largely from non-Muslim nations through recruiting expert planners or through sending their students to developed countries to acquire knowledge, then apply it. Both approaches are seen to have some problems at the time of acquisition and application of planned programs. These problems are discussed and planners are expected to be aware of these principles before they start their plans. Blind application of library technology is considered the main reason for the failure of library education programs in some Muslim World countries. A balance of application, in accordance with the four principles, is recommended.

### Introduction

#### I. The Muslim World

What is meant by the phrase "the Muslim world" is those countries which have a high percentage of Muslims compared to non-Muslims. The Muslim World is a part of what is called "less developed countries," "developing countries," the "Third World," or the "South." The phrases are used to refer to those countries—including the Muslim world—which are less advanced in technologies due to the existence of many factors, some of which are:

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- A. The lack of human resources.
- B. The lack of natural resources.
- C. The lack of political stability.
- D. The resistance to imported ideas.
- E. The fear of cultural interference.
- F. The lack of awareness of technology, as well as those factors involving the locality that cannot be generalized.

A portion of these countries has been able to overcome many of the above factors and has begun rapidly developing at an astonishing rate of progress. This rapid change has its effect on education in general and the library education as a distinguished field of knowledge.

## II. Nature of the Study

Four principles are to be considered when planning for library education programs in Muslim countries. Generalizations of the application of these principles are determined and the discussion is meant to cover all Muslim countries.

The four principles considered in this discussion are:

- A. What the environmental needs are.
- B. What could be applicable to this particular environment.
- C. How conducive is the planned program to the traditions and culture of the particular environment, and
- D. What the possible future trends are.

## Planning and the Environment

### A. *The Environmental Needs*

It should be emphasized that what is planned for one environment may not be applicable to another for geo-physical scientific reasons, some of which are: 1) Weather conditions, 2) the climate, and 3) the geographical location.

In a desert situation, for instance, most materials and equipment are not expected to last unless they have been suitably manufactured to cope with the natural stresses placed upon them by the environment. For example, computers which run smoothly in a mid-temperate zone as in the United States may not efficiently operate in regions as the "Middle East" and North Africa because of the cumulation of dust which causes "parity errors."

Microfilms, microfiche and other non-print materials will also deteriorate at a quicker rate. The maintenance of these materials and equipment can become quite costly and "one should certainly be aware of the possible consequences of "down time" (and) the fact that unacceptable temperature and humidity levels may cause expensive



machinery to become inoperative.”<sup>1</sup>

But, adaptability of materials and equipment should not present an obstacle to their use; because the level of technology is usually dictated by material acquisition and designed according to environmental and financial circumstances.

### **B. Application of Programs:**

The field of library and information science has witnessed a rapid pace since World War II, having its content closely paralleling those of the “technical science” field

The advancement has made library and information programs emphasize the automation and computer application on the curriculum of their schools. The trend has leaned toward comprehensive studies in statistics, mathematics, and computer science, being natural requirements welcomed by the scholars of the field.

In Muslim countries, such studies are not often necessitated, for there is no apparent apprehension of the effectiveness of information technology, which is considered a premature step among most scholars and scientists. Until these concepts are overcome by understanding and acceptance, computer technology in the library field will not permit these countries to make satisfactory application within this domain. Consequently, one sees these countries in a paradoxical state by the observance of the many students sent abroad to acquire a high degree of competency within these same fields where technology has not yet advanced to the utilization of the “traditional” classification schemes.

As Lester Asheim points out: “I am not here advocating that we-Americans temper our programs of library education to spare the poor shorn lamb from another country. I am really suggesting that we raise our standards rather than lower them.” However “I would urge that our upgraded programs emphasize the need to adapt basic principles to specific purposes and conditions and demand of the student that he reach his own conclusions based upon a consideration of all the relevant factors. This will require him to analyze and to think, not just to listen and to repeat.”<sup>2</sup>

In some Muslim countries, there is a tendency to start developing from that point where the others have reached or ended. This tendency is quite dubious because the foundation, on which this prior knowledge is based, is not taken into consideration. This approach has been tried in one academic institution in a Muslim country but the negative outcomes seemed to overwhelm the positive ones which made its planners reconsider dropping the implementation of this approach and begin their

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<sup>1</sup> Ballard, R.M. (1980) “Library Education and Library Problems in Developing Countries.” *International Library Review*. 12:65-70.

<sup>2</sup> Asheim L. (1966) *Librarianship in Developing Countries*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1966. pp. 62-95.

programming from the very beginning.

This situation is typical of the many experienced by countries whose planners do not take into consideration the educational and technological background of the societies for which they are developing programs. Lawrence Thompson on being asked to investigate and recommend library development procedures in Turkey wrote: "In the beginning, the library school should be an institution of a rather general character, giving the customary courses in cataloging, classification, bibliography, and library administration; and it should not attempt to sponsor advanced study and research until it feels strong enough to do so. I recommend strongly that you select as soon as possible two or more competent young librarians with a sound academic background and send them to one of the larger American library schools, . . .to be prepared to teach in your library school."<sup>3</sup>

### C. *Cultures, Backgrounds, and Traditions:*

Planning a library program is a failure if it doesn't consider the culture, background and the traditions of the people affected by the plan. These factors have a great impact in everyday life. Their influence is rarely noticeable in developed countries due to the mixture of cultures, backgrounds and traditions. Unlike most developed countries, Muslim countries are reluctant to accept any outside influence which might, in their own view, corrupt their own values and morals. "Every culture has its own unique and rich qualities and these should never be ignored."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately most of these qualities are ignored in planning and developing programs. The basic reasons for this ignorance may be counted as:

1. Planners do not understand the qualities of a culture because they are sought from abroad (usually developed countries) to plan a local program.
2. The planners are nationals and they understand the qualities of their culture but they ignore them for they think that the qualities are the reason why they are or their country is considered to be lesser developed. But on other hand, they need to apply the developed countries' approaches which might not fit the qualities of their own culture and thus make them unacceptable!

One does not expect the experts, who are invited to participate in library education programs or to conduct one, to be knowledgeable of the

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<sup>3</sup>Witten, B. and T. Minder (1974) "Education for Librarianship in Developing Nations: The Hacettepe Experience." *Journal of Education for Librarianship*. 14:220-233.

<sup>4</sup> Ballard, R.M. "Library Education and Library Problems in Developing Countries."



culture they are planning for. Time, lack of cultural sources, and lack of emphasis on the cultural values may be considered valid factors in disallowing experts to understand and be aware of the qualities of the culture. It has been observed that most of those experts become very interested and enthusiastic in implementing such programs. They spend more time and effort than expected.<sup>5</sup> Some, however, tend to over-emphasize their personal assets rather than those of the program due to self-proclaimed expertise in the field. An expert manipulates this aspect by saying that experts should see themselves as equal partners in an exchange rather than as a "condescending Lady Bountiful." He indicates that experts should develop an ear as well as a voice. He states, firstly that "we must listen as well as tell, learn as well as teach (and) receive as well as give." And secondly, he points out: "we must recognize, much more tangibly than we now do, the need to adopt the methods and procedures that we happen to favor for our own purposes."<sup>6</sup>

Another approach of getting expertise is sending students in training and full-time programs to study what is needed and could not be offered locally. Those students are sent to developed countries which are essentially different in culture, traditions and background from their own. Each individual is faced with many social problems with language being being most predominant. Very often the numerous cultural differences affect the individual to the extent where performance is hindered and the minimum achievement is only attained. It is stated by Maurice Bucaille in his work entitled "The Bible, The Quran, and Science" that "...Following the Renaissance, the scientists' natural reaction was to take vengeance on their former enemies; this vengeance still continues today, to such an extent that in the West, anyone who talks of God in scientific circles really does stand out. This attitude affects the thinking of all young people who receive a university education, Muslims included."<sup>7</sup> He points out that the scientists' former enemies are those people who claimed to be the Judeo-Christian Revelation servants, not the Judeo-Christian Revelation itself.

In addition to these differences, there is the aspect of programming being oriented to one particular developed country's technology rather than being international in scope. The programs have some required course that must be taken without regard to the background, therefore international students have no choice but to take them even though they may not apply to their own circumstances. Some of the students are given the chance to link those requirements with their own environment. But the percentage decreases at the undergraduate level.

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<sup>5</sup> Keshmiri, Mahvash and A. Robert Rogers (1979) "Education for Librarianship at Pahlavi University, Shiraz, Iran." *International Library Review*, 11:259-267.

<sup>6</sup> Asheim, L. (1966) *Librarianship in the Developing Countries*. pp. 33-43.

<sup>7</sup> Bucaille, Maurice (1978) *The Bible, The Quran and Science*. Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1978. pp. 116-117.

By the time those international students realize the actual academic programs and the implications upon their real needs, the program is practically finished and has little relevance to their own countries' situations. They return to their countries and futilely attempt to begin their application of program fully realizing that the venture is premature and has no present basis in their lesser technological societies. An expert who has dealt with this problem states that: "we may have to be more strict in our screening of applicants from other countries. If the student does not have the background he needs to carry our courses, he must get it; we should not dilute our courses on his account. If the applicant lacks sufficient proficiency in the language to carry the level of reading, writing, and class participation that our course demand, he is not yet ready to enter our program. This is a tough policy, but it is the only one that will accomplish the aims that both the "foreign" student and the American teacher profess. It will eliminate some of the students who today are creating the most serious problems for us, and for their home countries upon their return. As for the better students, it may defer but need not eliminate those who will truly benefit themselves and the profession of librarianship."<sup>8</sup>

#### D. *Future Changes:*

The definition of developed is based on the premise of advancement. This is then the determining factor in distinguishing between lesser and developing countries. Some of those countries are rapidly and surprisingly developing due to the availability of natural resources. The revenues obtained from the natural resources are compelling governments of some Muslim countries to invest their income in tangible commodities which are nationally needed and recognized; therefore those governments are applying developmental procedures as time development plans, e.g. the five-year development plans adopted by the government of Saudi Arabia.<sup>9</sup> Those plans are drastically changing the traditional image of the countries, but they are not able to change the attitudes of the people. The orientation toward the change is very poor resulting in skepticism, self-consciousness, and resistance. But this refers more to the analysis of the socio-psychology of people and their views toward rapid change rather than the intent of this discussion in the consistency of change and its implication on library education planning

For the Arab world, for instance, the last decade, the seventies, witnessed this type of change. It appeared to the continuous seminars of 1971, 1972, 1973 and 1976 which were considered the first activity of an introduction of a general national conceptual framework for the

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<sup>8</sup> Asheim, L. (1966) *Librarianship in the Developing Countries*. pp. 33-43.

<sup>9</sup> Namlah, Ali I. (1982) "Manpower Deficiency in Saudi Arabia: Its Effect on the Library and Information Profession." *International Library Review*. 14:3-20.



development of library education. The latter, 1976, is the most important seminar "in the history of the development of library education."<sup>10</sup> Its objectives were to discuss common problems connected with the training of manpower, harmonizing curricula, and exploring the possibility of exchanging teachers and instructional materials.

The transfer and adoption of modern technology in librarianship, is only one facet of the handling of information. It is more important to develop a national competence by establishing an anticipatory intelligence function—a special function for spying on the future.

We are not concerned with only the present implications of events. Instead we ask: what is going on in the world, and how shall we interpret the future implications of what we know? Therefore, when the decision is made in a Muslim country to send young students abroad for studies in the library and information field, they have to be instructed to find answers to questions like:

- What kinds of development in the world could help my
- What kinds of development in the world could help my country?
- How soon could these things happen?
- What might be the first signs of change?
- Where and how might new opportunities be manipulated?
- Who in my country or abroad is in the position to observe the changes or indicators of new opportunities?
- Which people need to be informed about what kinds of events, etc.?

When students find answers to these questions, suggested by V. Tell Bjorn in his article entitled "The Changing Role of Library and Information Center Specialists," they will be capable of being future planners, programmers, and may be the administrators of their own libraries and library school.<sup>11</sup>

All those who are involved either as students, planners or administrators are expected to realize the need of a permanent library curriculum development committee at the national level for formulating standards, evolving guidelines for curriculum development, and acting as a link among the schools of library and information science in the country,<sup>12</sup> and it might expand its service to include those countries which share the same region and have a lot in common.

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<sup>10</sup>Sharif, A. (1981) "The Development of Professional Library Education in the Arab Counties." *International Library Review*, 13:87-101.

<sup>11</sup>Bjorn, V.T. (1979) "The Changing Role of Library and Information Center Specialists." *International Forum on Information and Documentation*, 4 (number 1) . . .

<sup>12</sup>Kashyap, M.A. (1979) "Curriculum Development and Design Process: A System Approach." *International Library Review*, 11:353-365.

## Summary and Conclusion

Four principles were recommended for consideration in planning library education programs for Muslim countries:

- I. The environmental needs.
- II. The application of programs.
- III. The culture, background and tradition of the nation, and
- IV. Future changes.

The recommendation for consideration of these four principles was based on the belief that these principles differ from one environment to another.

It has been assumed that the application of developed countries' methods by Muslim countries without adjustment is apt to failure and resistance, and therefore the slowness of progress. It is the responsibility of the planners to be aware of these four principles and it is the responsibility of the recruiters to keep the planners aware of what type of planning is needed to fulfill the objectives of programs.

The idea is to apply what is applicable to the environment of Muslim countries, it is not the application of technology as a measurement of development.