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Current Status of University Libraries in Iran: Their Development, Organization, and Services

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Introduction

Throughout the development of civilization, right up to the modern era, libraries and books have played an integral part in people's cultural, political, and social development. Libraries earlier tended to serve an archival function. The role of the library and librarian was to store and provide access to materials, mostly books. The common view of libraries earlier was that they were storehouses of knowledge of civilization. However, a modern library, although still serving the archival function, also has an active and assertive role in providing information to users.

We live in a world in which increasing specialization is essential. Library could be a principal operator in promoting the intercommunication among the specialists. In this democratic age, all the people need a steady and balanced supply of reading material for their advancement of knowledge. University library has to satisfy the needs of the graduates, post-graduates as well as the requirements of the research scholars, and the much more complex and exacting demands of mature scholars and teachers.

Higher Education and University Library

University library is an integral part of an institution of higher education. Thomas Carlyle has rightly stated that: " True university of these days is collection of books." A university is an institution where teaching and research are conducted in more than one discipline of universe of knowledge, and which has authority to award degrees, diploma and certificates in their respective subjects. Students, research scholars and teachers are using university library for their advancement of knowledge in their subject of interest.

It is true that in the academic sense no higher education and research work can be developed without a strong library functioning as its heart. The place of library in the university is purely academic. The rich collection of books and periodicals attracts faculty members and an enlightened faculty in turn

makes others enlightened. Thus, the reputation of a university always depends on the reputation of its library.

Higher Education in Iran

Educational system in Iran comprises three levels: elementary, intermediate and higher education, and the government is responsible for all levels of education. The Ministry of Education looks after elementary and intermediate education and other two Ministers; i.e. Science, Researches and Technology (MSRT) and Health, Treatment and Medical Education (HTME) are responsible for general and medical higher education, respectively.

At the present there are 48 universities under MSRT and 31 under HTME. In addition, some other ministries such as the Ministry of Petroleum and a few also have their own universities. The number of these universities is seven then there is three private Universities (Azad-e Islam, Imam Sadegh and University of Science and Technology of Mazandaran.) The oldest university is the University of Tehran which was established in 1934.Universities, now are governed by the respective board of trustees. Still they rely on the funds allocated by the government and so, of course do their libraries.

Higher Education Library System

It is estimated that there are more than 1000 libraries in the higher education of Iran. According to the “Statistics of Higher Education of Iran” there are more than 89 major universities, 700 colleges, Institute of Higher Education, centers for Higher learning with more than 1400,000 students, 30,000 teaching staff, covering 2,200,000 Sq.m of country's area with an amount of Rials 1,254,019,548,000 as annual budgets. Thus more than 1000 libraries consists the Higher Education Library System of Iran.

Significance of the Study

The institution of higher education in Iran has the governmental and private origins as mentioned earlier. The governmental higher education institutions of Iran have divided between two ministries.

The MSRT is responsible for selecting the students for both groups of institutions of both ministries through an entrance competition every year. More than 150,000 students are chosen from about 1,450,000 candidates for almost all branches of human knowledge that are taught in Iranian Universities. Certainly the libraries of above mentioned institutions for meeting the need of such a vast scientific population, must have large collections, professional manpower, modern equipment and adequate, suitable and comfortable space for serving them. And for high quality of services, these libraries need to have a powerful organizational structure. However, due to lack of exhaustive information and research about these libraries, this study on “University Libraries in Iran, has been chosen as a research topic. The study analyses the topic in various angles such as historical aspects, the present situation, manpower, organization and services and gives suggestions for development in future. Another reason for doing research is that, now in most of the universities in Iran, postgraduate education and training (PhD, MD, Masters) is going on, therefore, it should be seen that the present university libraries are capable to meet the requires information for more than 1400000 students, that ended from Advanced Diploma to PhD and MD degrees?

Problem Statement:

The problem forward, which this study is directed, is to identity the relationship among organization, services and development in the university libraries with reference to Iran. In particular, this research will try to address the following problems:

1. How and by whom the university libraries are managed?
2. What are the specialties of manpower involved in running the university libraries?
3. What is the trend of development in these university libraries?
4. What are the procedures for collection building in university libraries?
5. What is the attitude of users regarding the different services provided by university libraries?
6. What are the problems and difficulties that university libraries are facing?
7. What is the organization of university libraries?

We do not know who and how and in with what degree of qualification these libraries are administered? Have they qualified personnel? What is their organization? What are the services that they have provided for the clientele? Are the users satisfied with the services of the library? What is their development during their existence? How many personnel do they have? All these questions cannot be met with clear and specific answers.

According to a survey of literature on university libraries in Iran, there is not a single comprehensive research study about these libraries. From all of them so far only three published surveys has been conducted during 1969-1974 And also three research articles on a limited topics as: "Human Resources in University Libraries Located in Tehran", "The Collection of University Libraries Located in Tehran", "Collection Development in University of Isfahan libraries."s Fundamentally, the research about University libraries of Iran has taken place after the establishment and expansion of Master of Library and Information science in some of Iranian Universities. Some of the M.LIS students of these courses prefer to conduct researches about some aspects of a university library or a group of university libraries located in a city such as Tehran as their dissertations. On the other hand some of university libraries, which has professional librarian, started to assess their libraries internally. The assessments are related to the libraries of the following universities Tehran11, Mashhad12, Shaheed Chmran13. These assessments have been done during 1982-83.

Therefore in such a situation, the need to investigate the university libraries in Iran especially after Islamic revolution that made possible the rapid growth and development, is much apparent.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted with an objective to investigate the status of university libraries in Iran, their organization development and services so as to:

1. Trace the historical development of the university libraries.
2. Trace the state of their development.
3. Understand their financial support.
4. Understand their organizational pattern.
5. Describe the situation of reader services in university libraries
6. Study the situation about their buildings.
7. Identify the problems and difficulties usually faced by them.
8. Make suggestions for the better organization so as function in order to more effectively, and efficiently, and
9. To suggest further areas of research related to the field.

Scope and Limitation

Among the academic libraries only the central libraries of major universities have been chosen for the purpose to this study. The total number of these universities is 89 and they are spread all over the country. These libraries may be belonging to a large university as the University of Tehran located in Tehran or to a newly established university in a town such as university of Ilam located at Ilam. A review of the literature on university libraries in Iran showed that only a few studies have been conducted on these libraries and there is a few available data about them. Some reports about them are often old and outdated. The central libraries have usually the following characteristics as:

1. They are usually the largest libraries in parent universities,
2. These libraries have professional, Para- professional and non-professional personnel,
3. They have usually separate buildings,
4. They are usually under the authority of the vice chancellors,
5. They are usually directed by teaching staff,
6. They have usually supervision to other university libraries,
7. Technical services is done in these libraries,
8. They have usually a fair and suitable budgets,
9. Internet access facilities is usually applicable in these libraries, and
10. Purchasing the foreign material is done in these libraries for itself and their parent libraries of the university

Hypothesis:

Taking into consideration objectives of this study, the following hypothesis is framed which can be summarized as:

1. Most of the libraries do not have the required financial support.

2. Most of the central libraries are managed by a university teacher who is approved as the librarian and are also shortage of professional qualified staff.

3. Most of the libraries have developed proper services for their users.

4. The users are generally satisfied from their library services, but they are generally not aware about several specialized services such as documentation service, inter library loan services and therefore the need for users education.

5. Most of the libraries are housed in their own separate buildings.

Research Methodology

As research is a systematic process of pre-designed and pre-programmed strategy and plan of action, an appropriate methodology is a prerequisite for channeling the ideas into the right direction. Keeping this in mind, the study was planned as follows.

Design of the Study

Bush and Harter define library survey as systematic, in-depth examination of libraries, library system or network of libraries. Descriptive survey method was used for the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data on current status and conditions of the University Libraries in Iran. A structured questionnaire was developed base upon modification similar to the studies by Gupta15 Prodhani, Dostdar, Bani-eqbal, and Taavoni.

The questionnaire developed for the survey contains multiple item questions designed to assess the current status of the libraries under survey. The questionnaire consisted of eight categories questions, focusing on organization budget, manpower (professional and non professional) collection, technical services, user services, computer application and their development during the last decade.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed to the central libraries through out the country by mail. One month time was given for response of the questionnaire and after sending two reminders annexed questionnaire and giving two months received 50 supplied questionnaires that is about 62.5% of the total selected university libraries of Iran numbered 89. However only 50 useable questionnaires were returned to researcher and according to replies from the university libraries nine universities had not the central library and these are: Police, Petroleum, Technology, Shaheed Sattari of Aerospace science. Defense Science and Technology, Ardabil, Imam Resza, Yazd, Ardabil Medical Science, Baquitollah Medical Science & Ilam medical Science University.According to the nature of surveys the collected questionnaires was enough for analyzing and generalizing on research findings.

User Questionnaire

Another questionnaire was arranged for users of the university libraries in Iran. This questionnaire consisted of seventeen sets of questions and distributed among the ten selected university libraries' users. Those university libraries numbered ten and selected from the university libraries that have replied to the first questionnaire and their selection had been base on random sampling. So the following university libraries users were surveyed.

1. Allameh-Tabatabaie University Library’s users (located in Tehran)
2. Az-zahra University library’s user’s (located in Tehran)
3. Sharif University library’s users (located in Tehran)
4. Isfahan University of Technology Library’s Users (located in Isfahan)
5. Razi University library’s users (located in Kermanshah)
6. Tabriz University library’s users (located in Tabriz)
7. Kashan University library’s users (located in Kashan)
8. University of Medical Science of Ahwaz library’s users (located in Ahwaz)
9. University of Medical Science of Babol library’s Users (located in Babol)
10. University of Medical Science of Yasouj library’s Users (located in Yasouj)

As the above list shows there is a suitable society of users provided: three universities in Tehran (capital of Iran and because of existing eighteen universities located on it.) And seven from the other cities (numbers 71). Among these universities also there are two from technological discipline and three from Medical discipline, University of Tabriz is one of the oldest universities of Iran and the University Medical Science of Yasouj is one of the youngest one and finally almost all universities are around in Iran.

The place of university libraries in the long history of Iran is divided into four sections as follow:

1. University libraries before Islam.
2. University Libraries after Islam (729 to 1979)
3. University Libraries after Islamic Revolution: 1979-, and
4. Importance of university libraries.

There is a review of related literature. Significant works especially

research articles about university libraries in Iran have been surveyed. Data collected through Librarians' questionnaire and consultant with literatures have been tabulated and analyzed, including: organization, budget, acquisition, cataloging and classification, collection, user services, automation and buildings of university libraries of Iran. The opinion of the users of university libraries' base on the collected data from the users' questionnaires has been analyzed. Conclusion, findings and suggestions that have emerged out of the data collected, has been presented. Recommendations for improving the present situation of university libraries in Iran and for conducting further research on the various problem found in the study have also been made. And finally, secondary data was collected from the Directory and reports of university libraries and publication for different years. Concerted efforts have been made to study the university libraries in Iran, from beginning to present time, in a more comprehensive manner. Since the development of libraries in higher education is inextricably related with the development of higher education as such, it would be appropriate to first make a brief survey of higher education in this country.

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