



GAP IN SUBJECT AREA EXPERTISE IN ISLAMIC COLLECTION MANAGEMENT IN MALAYSIA

A COMPARISON WITH MELA LIBRARIANS

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

- Islam in Malaysia is crystallized by constitutional recognition in Article 3 of the Federal Constitution.
- The religion plays an integral part in decision-making process of the country and the culture of its inhabitants.
- A number of public universities in Malaysia run Islamic studies programs (IIUM, UM, UKM, UiTM and others)
- By existence of such programs, arose the need for library collections pertaining to Arabic and Islamic research, to cater the needs of researchers, scholars and students.

Introduction

- “Islamic collection” in this research refers to the collections in academic libraries of public universities.
- The challenges faced by these librarians in managing Islamic collection had been discussed in various fora in Malaysia.
- Acknowledged limitations in language mastery (Arabic), cataloging and providing research consultancy – Wan Mamat (2010) & Momin (2014)
- Issues of cooperation between Muslim librarians were brought forward by Sulaiman & Baharuddin (2014)

Introduction

- There is still a gap where a comparative study is yet to be made between Islamic collection management practices in Malaysia with another group of librarians managing similar type of collection.
- Middle East Librarians Association (MELA) was chosen as comparison.
- Islamic librarianship falls under “area librarianship” hence the most widely used term would be Middle Eastern librarianship (Balqis, 2012).
- Salamon (2015) agrees that Middle Eastern librarians under MELA deal with mainly Muslim-related collections.



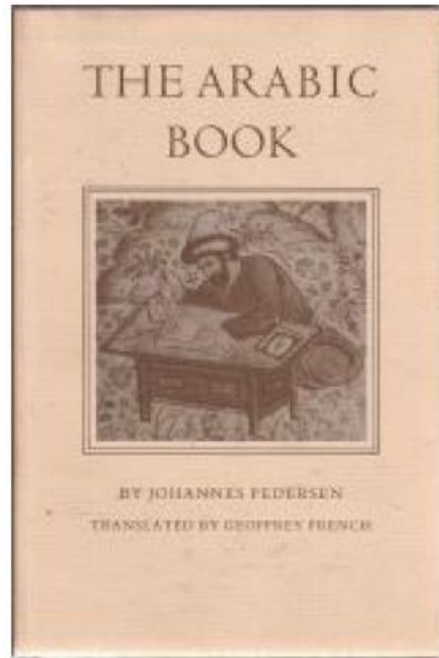
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research Objectives

- To highlight the concept of librarian-scholars' in Islamic and Western traditions, and how it influenced modern librarianship.
- To understand how far behind we are, in the realm of value-added intellectual services, as compared to Islamic collection librarians collaborating under the aegis of Middle East Librarians Association (MELA).
- To investigate the probable reasons that contributed to the current model of Islamic Collection management and librarianship in Malaysia.
- To suggest that some of the best practices be adopted, and policies revamp considered for future practices in Malaysia.



LIBRARIANSHIP IN ISLAMIC TRADITION



- Al-Marzubani wrote 37,580 pages
 - Yaqut wrote 33,180 pages
- Ibn Hazm wrote 400 manuscripts, 80,000 pages
- Al-Tabari wrote 40 pages every day for 40 years
- Jalaluddin al-Suyuti wrote 600 pages manuscripts.

Librarianship in Islamic Tradition

- Islam upholds the importance of learning and knowledge as part of the religion itself.
- The first five verses revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) mentioned the word 'iqra' 2 times, to stress the importance of vocation in gaining knowledge (Rifai, 2014).
- This culture of knowledge contributed to the emergence of libraries throughout Muslim world.



Librarianship in Islamic Tradition

- The first Muslim city founding a palace library was Damascus. It was opened “to use by serious students and scholars” and the place where “copies of books from all parts of the known world were obtained”.
- Bayt al-Hikmah was later established in Baghdad (Harriss, 1984)
- There were many other important libraries throughout Muslim empire.



Librarianship in Islamic Tradition

Supports in the form of financial terms and hospitality towards library visitors by the rulers and library owners were numerous (Hariss, 1984)

- Scholarship of 100 dirhams and a garment for library users.
- A stipend for those who read and write.
- Free paper, ink, inkwell and pens.



Librarianship in Islamic Tradition

Librarians during the peak of Islamic empire were chosen from among renowned intellectuals.

(Shalaby, 1979)

Sahl and Sa'īd ibn Hārūn

Ibn Maskawayh

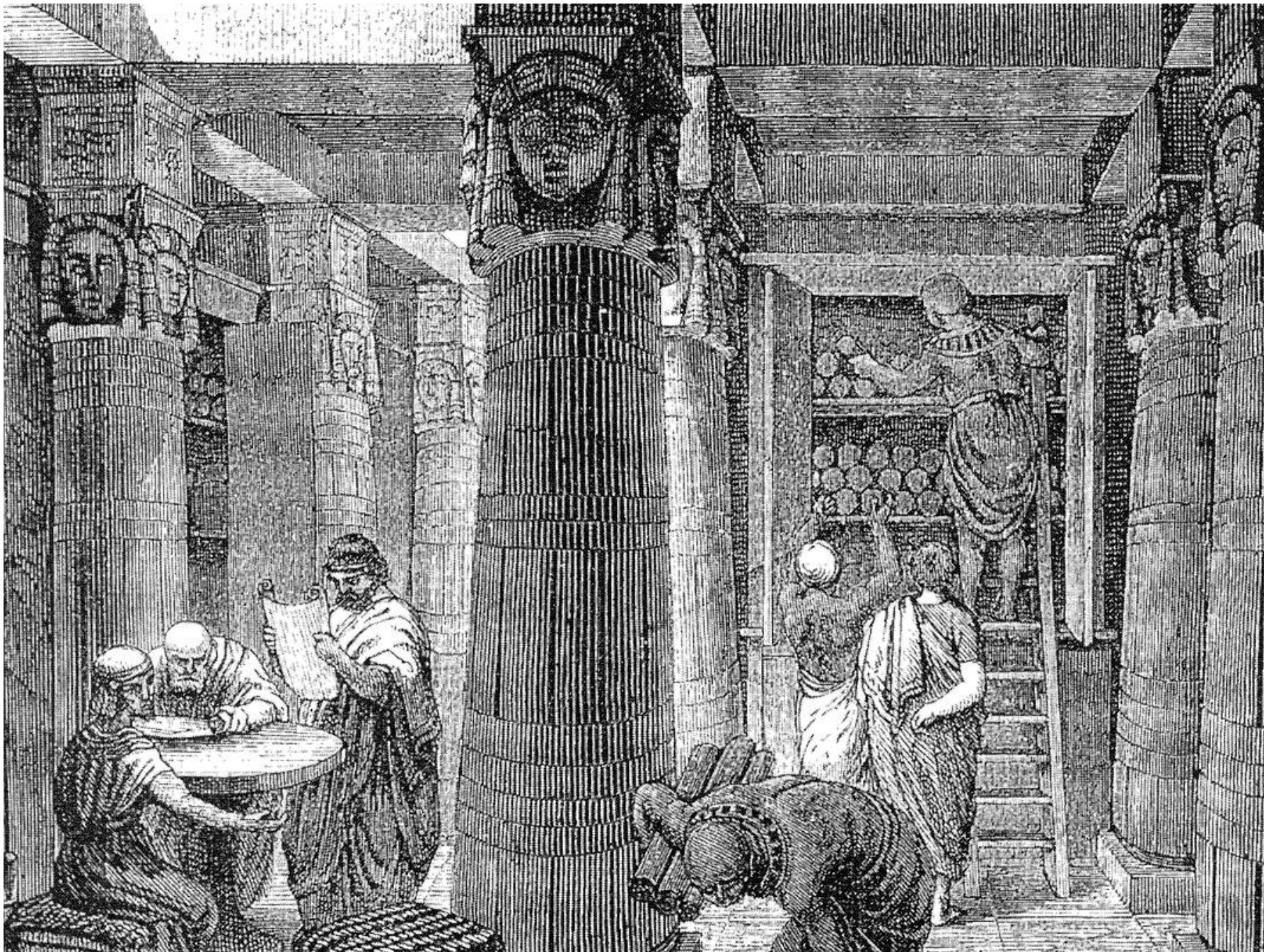
'Alī ibn Yabiyā al-Munajjim

'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Shābustī

These librarian-scholars worked in both public and private libraries.



LIBRARIANSHIP IN WESTERN TRADITION



Librarianship in Western Tradition

Librarians of
Alexandria Library
and Pergamon
Library were well-
known scholars.

*Demetrius of
Phaleron*

*Zenodotus of
Ephesus*

Crates of Mallus



Librarianship in Western Tradition

Rulers were
supportive of
libraries and
learning.

*Ptolemy I Soter and
his successors*

Charlemagne



Librarianship in Western Tradition

Famous librarians of modern era.

- *Gottfried von Leibniz*
- *David Hume*
- *Sam Walter Foss*
- *Archibald MacLeish*



LIBRARIANSHIP IN MALAYSIA

Brief History

- Influenced by two factors:
 - Early Malay Islamic tradition
 - Emergence of modern librarianship during colonial era
- Libraries were extant in Malay world, evidenced by intellectual activities among palace literati (Tee, 1970)
- But only in Sultan's palace and abodes of aristocrats.
- During colonial era, libraries were established by traders, missionaries and colonialists.
- The establishment of modern libraries after colonialization not only happened in Malay world, but in other Muslim countries too (Monastra, 2009)

Brief History

- The palace libraries were scholarly in nature.
- It also housed scriptoriums, where the literati (Muslim scholars & court dignitaries) acted as 'publishers'.
- Sometimes the authors were from the ranks of Sultans themselves. Raja Ali Haji, Raja Chulan, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Syah II of Kedah and Sultan Badaruddin of Palembang were among them.
- There was no printing press in the Malay world between the 15th to the 18th century. Manuscript culture was active.
- This role was taken over by the colonials beginning in the early 19th century.
- Abdullah Munsyi provided his services as scribe and translator to Stamford Raffles and other British officials (Salleh, 2002)

Brief History

- Continuity of Malay Islamic tradition in librarianship was set back, gradually replaced by the emergence of modern librarianship under British rule.
- Earliest record of LIS education in Malaysia was in 1955 by Malayan Librarian Group (MLG).
- Today, we have university degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels at 5 higher education institutions in Malaysia (USM, UM, UiTM, UNISEL, IIUM).

Islamic Collection Management: Current Scenario

- Islamic-oriented courses in librarianship are offered at IIUM, UiTM and USIM (Abdoulaye, 2004). In Europe and North America, 2 such library courses were offered (Salamon, 2015).
- However in North America, it is a tradition to appoint scholars to manage special collections (vd Luft, 2014).
- In case of Islamic collection, there is “dominance of subject specialization over librarianship” among librarians (Salamon 2015).

Islamic Collection Management: Current Scenario

◦ Scenario in Malaysia perfectly described by Suja' (2012b) in her book:

“In the academic libraries, the professional workforce is made up of librarians who have inherited knowledge on managing Islamic collections from dedicated seniors within the organisations, or obtained the competency through self-developed skills and work experience. In the more recent years, there are more Islamic or Arabic studies’ undergraduates enrolled in library schools’ graduate programme and some of them later held positions managing the Islamic collections. There is [sic] still a considerable proportion of librarians without Islamic or Arabic studies background involved in the management of Islamic libraries....” (p. 25)

Islamic Collection Management: Current Scenario

- ISTAC (1989-2002) tried to revive librarian-scholar tradition by hiring its first librarian-curator in the 1990's.
- It holds view that “the backbone of any institution of higher learning must be its library.”
- The librarian-curator at ISTAC played important role as research consultant and wrote publications about the library collection academically. He is well-versed in a number of Islamic and Western languages.
- The concept of librarian-scholars in Malaysia is still not openly accepted.
- It could be said that the nature of the profession in Malaysia is yet to embrace the scholarly culture, hence the lack of research by librarians (Hamzah 2014).

Gap in Subject Area Expertise

- A number of librarians from 3 public universities in Malaysia with the strongest Islamic collections were chosen.
- The information about their academic qualifications, research presence, language proficiency and intellectual services are collected from public domain.

Gap in Subject Area Expertise

- Their titles are liaison or reference librarians, not reflecting subject mastery in Islamic studies.
- Titles usually used for positions related to Islamic collections in Western libraries are bibliographers and subject specialists.
- Suja' (2012b) opined that the titles bibliographers and subject specialists were not reflective of librarian-scholars' concept too.
- We are of the opinion that to determine librarian-scholars' concept, their academic qualification and research presence are more important than their designation.

Gap in Subject Area Expertise

Academic qualifications	Research presence	Language proficiency	Intellectual services
At least Bachelor's Degree in Islamic studies or Arabic language, combined with MLIS. One of them undergoing PhD related to information science.	Lack of research presence are glaring, either in the field of MLIS or Islamic studies.	Their language ability not advertised on website, even though they have good background in Arabic.	Basic reference services usually provided by reference librarians.

MELA Librarians

- Middle East Librarians Association (MELA) is an association that allows anyone employed by their institutions in professional capacity to manage Muslim related collection, as well as anyone interested in that kind of materials, to be its members (MELA, 2016).

83
institutional
members
(March 2016)

78 members
from
academic
institutions

1 crossed to
another
department;
1 retired.

MELA Librarians

Research population are 76 academic librarians; 59 librarians with sufficient public domain data used as sampling.

Confidence level between 85% to 90%, with 5% margin of error

Methodology

- Unobtrusive way of collecting data
- Data were collected from: university websites, information in public domain, interviews in online magazines or newspapers, and research related websites such as Google Scholar, Academia & ResearchGate.
- It has its limitations: precision and currency of information online.
- We depends on credibility of websites & choose most recent data available.
- The research data collected are the librarians' academic qualifications, research presence (either in LIS or Middle Eastern), language proficiency and intellectual services they provide.

Findings – Academic Qualifications

Qualification	No. of Librarians	Percentage
Doctor of Philosophy related to Middle East or its equivalent	19	32.2
Double Master's in LIS & Middle Eastern studies or their equivalents	29	49.2
Master's degree in Middle Eastern studies but without MLIS	3	5.1
Master's in LIS, without second Master's in Middle Eastern studies	12	20.3

Findings – Academic Qualifications

- Is librarianship education is as important as scholarly background in Middle Eastern or Near Eastern studies?

Only 3
librarians trained
in area studies
without MLIS

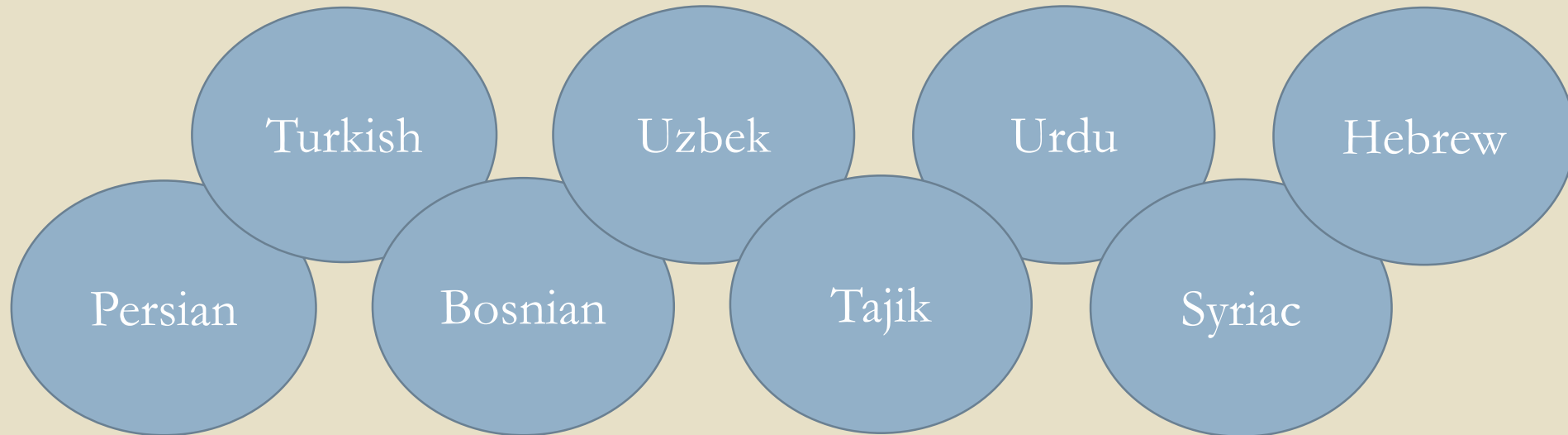
12 librarians hold
position without
Master's in area
studies
(3 depends on
degrees)

Findings – Online Research Presence

Types of research	No. of Librarians	Percentage
LIS-related research only	7	11.9
Middle East/Near East/Arabic related research only	17	28.8
In both fields of studies	18	30.5
Research presence not traceable	17	28.8

Findings - Language Proficiency

- Mastery of not only the main Islamic language i.e. Arabic. Many of these librarians are proficient or at least have limited working proficiency in other Islamic or Middle Eastern languages as well.



Findings – Intellectual Services

Professional
reviewing of
academic
books

Publishing
research

Giving talks in
their area of
specialization

Providing
research
consultation

Teaching as
faculty
members

Translating or
compiling
scholarly
works

Contributing
to
encyclopedia
entries



CONCLUSION

Conclusion

- According to Hon. Prof. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (2001) in his *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin*, culture can be divided into two distinct but related/integrated whole: tangibles and intangibles. Culture which is tangible is at a far lesser level than the intangible ones. In order to find balance in cultural life and achieve the highest cultural foundation the intangibles part must be extant in the tangibles.
- The balance that needs to be struck between these two sides of cultural coin is how the current practice can be weighed philosophically. The intangibles in librarianship are the permanent *akali* part represented by the knowledge and its scholarly nature, while the constant changes and fluctuations to the physicals are the tangibles, represented by the library and IT infrastructures, bowing to demands of current market.

Conclusion

- When the libraries start to sprang up in Western Civilization, the fact that they inherit it through two cultures, i.e. Graeco-Roman and Medieval Islam, left them with these important philosophy of managing libraries; libraries are intellectual centers that should count the intellectual aspects and services. Among the residue of these services are being provided by bibliographers and subject specialists. These intellectual services stay as a priority or at least put at par with technological considerations in the libraries.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

- Librarians who are already in service and interested in pursuing courses in Islamic studies should be encouraged by the institutions where they work. Because the nature in Malaysia is to hire librarians from library schools across the board without much consideration to their subject area expertise for any specialized positions, pursuing higher studies should not be limited to Doctor of Philosophy in LIS fields. It is high time to train the librarians to be scholars in Islamic studies, while maintaining their posts as librarians. This is not only true of this field alone, but should be expanded to other fields of studies such as Science & Technology.

Recommendations

- The choice of students when doing MLIS should be more open and enhanced to allow for double Master's, not only in combination of LIS education and Islamic studies, but in other fields as well to produce librarian-scholars.
- Their academic and intellectual skills must constantly be improved, at least in providing specialized library guides (LibGuides) or reviewing books as kick-starters. For the purpose of this exercise, workshops on academic book reviewing should be organized by the libraries. LibGuides should be part of liaison librarians' main task.

Recommendations

- Only learned librarian-scholars can provide the best service and build confidence in scholars during consultation sessions with the librarians. Hence, the effort to produce librarian-scholars should be the Key Performance Index (KPI) in Islamic collection management. How many Islamic collection librarians in Malaysia can confidently answer that they are capable of tracing an unknown quotation from the 37 volumes of Ibn Taimiyya's *Majmu' Fatāwā* for example, in order for the scholar to cite it. How many of our librarians can correctly suggest to the consulting scholar, that the tragedies in Shakespearean drama are related to certain works from the Islamic *weltanschauung*?

Recommendations

- Other than taking language classes, immersion program in the related language should be encouraged to the librarians managing Islamic collection. By immersion program is meant some time abroad in the countries whose main language is Arabic, or any other Islamic languages such as Turkish, Urdu, Tajik, Uzbek, etc. Research fellowship stint in other libraries where Arabic is the main language spoken, and the collections managed are Islamic in nature, should also be considered.

Recommendations

- Unwavering supports from the government and top management of the institutions are the main catalyst to enliven knowledge culture. Based on the history of libraries since ancient time until today, libraries patronized by the rulers or scholars who are genuinely interested to spread knowledge, would prosper during their time and highly regarded beyond. If the libraries are seen only as the peripheral part of the institutions of learning, it is indeed a sad and mistaken perspective to hold. Thus, continuous support from the government and top management is very much called for.



THANK YOU