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Intellectual Transformation: Harnessing and Preserving Islamic Knowledge and Resources towards the Renaissance of Ummah

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Abstract: Preservation and conservation are emerging as an important area of research and education for library and information science. School of Library and Information Science worldwide are presently aware of the need to develop curriculum in this growing area of research and practice. Millions of dollars have been invested in preservation and conservation research since the early 1990s including research on how digital preservation can aid education but there has been no parallel investment to support teaching and learning about preservation and conservation. Without investment in education related to preservation and conservation, we face a future in which the problems of degradation of our cultural heritage will be more striking. There was a study done in the West that concluded that there is an urgent need for development of preservation and conservation education programmes worldwide amidst a burgeoning growth of digital library research and practice by librarians. While many LIS schools in western countries have developed preservation and conservation courses such as at School of Information, University of Texas, Austin, the state of education in preservation and conservation in the Muslim World is unknown. Therefore, it is the aim of the proposed paper that a survey on the preservation and conservation programme in the Muslim World be conducted.

Keywords: Education, Preservation, Conservation, Muslim World

Introduction

One of the main problems facing information professionals is the conservation and preservation of library materials. This is an area which has long been neglected. With the rising cost of library materials and the rapid deterioration of collections from the ravages of time information professionals have no choice but to treat this as a calamity facing our society and should be addressed immediately. Preservation and conservation keeps our library materials whole and available for use so that they can be used to document our heritage and our society. As (Ward, 1986) pointed out “Our heritage is all that we know of ourselves, what we preserve of it, our only record. That record is our beacon in the darkness of time; the light that guides our steps”.

Conservation and preservation programmes enable our core materials to be kept in usable condition for the benefits of onsite users working in today’s environment. The programmes include maintaining appropriate heat, humidity, light and pest control as well as maintaining optimal level of effectiveness in the reprographic laboratories.

The conservation of the collections of libraries and archives- books, manuscripts, photographs, magnetic tapes, maps, and related records media-is, then, a vast, complex and highly technical task whose dimensions and urgency are just beginning to be appreciated. (Banks,1981). The task of preserving the
library materials is becoming more complicated as environmental factors, which are beyond the scope of many countries to grapple with, are causing a lot of damage to the materials. It has been pointed by (Mwiyeriwa, 1988) that the rate of library materials deterioration is highest in tropical countries especially in Africa. The factors that caused the deterioration which include physical (light, humidity, acid, heat), biological (moulds, rodents, insects) and human handling due to recklessness are more prominent in Africa than elsewhere in the world. This finding is corroborated by other research findings done by researchers in Africa recently. For example, (Akussah, 1991) pointed out that of the 2511 total book acquisition of the University of Ghana in 1986, up to 600 physically disintegrating books were taken to the bindery section for repairs. In the National Archives of Ghana (Akussah, 2006) revealed that 51.1 per cent of the documents had deteriorated.

The importance of preservation and conservation of library materials is not only being felt by developing countries but also by developed countries. As a matter of fact the New York State has a special grant to be distributed for the purpose of conservation and preservation of research library materials.

Since a shortage of trained and educated personnel exists in these areas, library schools must take the responsibility for education about preservation and conservation by designing and implementing their own programs. In the United States, the School of Library Service of Columbia University implemented the conservation and preservation programmes in 1978. It is imperative for any successful implementation of conservation and preservation activities there must be adequate and trained manpower around who have knowledge in the physical and chemical nature of the library materials. They should know the causes of deterioration and how to tackle these problems from the outset. These skills need to be taught formally at the library schools.

The question that need to be addressed in the context of Muslim countries is the extent of courses related to the subject of preservation and conservation being offered by library schools in the Muslim countries. As the survival of the heritage of Muslim countries is dependent greatly on the competencies of information professionals in these countries, therefore, there is an urgent need to survey the state of education related to the preservation and conservation programmes, especially in relation to the type of courses offered by the library schools.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It is the aim of this paper to survey the situation of preservation and conservation courses being offered by the library schools in the selected countries of the Muslim World. The survey is limited in scope as only major universities in the Muslim World are selected in this study.

METHODOLOGY

By using convenience sampling universities that are well known in the Muslim World were selected. Only universities websites that are accessible to the author are surveyed. Universities websites that are in a language other than English are not selected in this study, such as those in Arabic, Turkish and others. Based on this premise fourteen universities websites from eleven major countries in the Muslim World were selected and analysed.

FINDINGS

Table A shows the situation of the preservation and conservation courses being offered by library schools in the respective countries.
Table A Preservation and Conservation courses offered by library schools in the following countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/University</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Name of courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh; University of Dhaka</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt; Cairo University</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran; University of Teheran</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Preservation of Library Materials; Introduction to Manuscripts and rare materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan; University of Jordan</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia; Universitas Indonesia</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Preservation and Conservation of information media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Table A only in Iran there seems to be a serious inclination towards offering courses related to preservation and conservation. If a survey is done on centres and institutions in Iran that are responsible for ensuring the safety and integrity of vast volumes of handwritten Persian and Islamic manuscripts you will find there are a good number of centres and institutions which are performing these roles. Hence, it is expected that library schools in Iran should produce competent information professionals in these areas by offering courses related to preservation and conservation. Similarly in Indonesia, there are a good number of centres and institutions that are keeping Indonesian and Islamic manuscripts, hence there is a need for library schools to offer preservation and conservation courses at the bachelor level.

Table B shows the situation of the preservation and conservation courses being offered by library schools in the respective countries.

Table B Preservation and Conservation courses offered by library schools in the following countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/University</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Name of courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait; University of Kuwait</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia; International Islamic University Malaysia</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Preservation and Conservation of library materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia; University of Malaya</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia; University of Technology MARA</td>
<td>Bachelor, Master</td>
<td>Preservation of archival materials; Preservation of information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on Table B it is pertinent to note that the library schools in Africa should educate more information professionals who are competent to handle the deterioration of library materials as the factors that cause paper deterioration are pronounced in Africa as compared to other continents. More research on conservation and preservation should be undertaken in Africa. As opined by (Zyska, 1997), while considerable efforts have been devoted to research on degradation of library materials in Europe, there is paucity of such information on library materials in Africa. In addition, (Ojo-Igbinoba, 1993) expected African Universities to view seriously the issues of preservation and conservation so that they can play the expected roles of preserving the cultural heritage of the continent and support research.

In the case of Malaysia, there are a good number of Malay manuscripts as well as Islamic manuscripts that are suffering from the hazards of deterioration of paper-based materials. Usually the high temperature and relative humidities facing Malaysia because of its location in the tropics contribute greatly to accelerating the rate of paper deterioration. According to (Bankole, 2010) paper deterioration could be grouped into four categories:

1) Chemical deterioration due to natural ageing occurs in paper, made with wood pulp sized with rosin in an acidic medium resulting in yellowing and rapid loss of their original structure.

(2) Mechanical deterioration entails changes in the structure (size and shape) resulting in cracking, splitting and warping, for example, when bindings become broken or warped resulting from improper handling.

(3) Incidental deterioration occurs due to accidents such as flooding, fire, vandalism, etc.

(4) Biological deterioration is when living agents are involved in the degradation of library and archival materials.

It is not surprising therefore to find library schools in Malaysia are engaging in the preparation of adequate manpower to handle conservation and preservation problems by offering courses at both the undergraduate and post graduate levels.
Similarly in the case of Turkey the remnants of past glory of the Ottoman Empire, an empire inspired and sustained by Islam, and Islamic institutions, it is expected that Islamic manuscripts and Turkish manuscripts are in abundance. Therefore, these manuscripts again required people with skills in preservation and conservation to handle the process of deterioration. Library schools should offer courses in these areas as shown in the case of Hacettepe University.

In Saudi Arabia the number of Arabic manuscripts available are large enough to warrant the offering of courses by library schools to cater for the needs of the skilled manpower required for conservation and preservation responsibilities. In addition the library schools are also involved in providing skills in digital preservation which are needed in our globalized world.

In table A and table B it is imperative to note that most of the library schools in the Muslim world offer courses on preservation and conservation at the undergraduate level. Only in the case of Malaysia the library schools offer their courses at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In the case of the International Islamic University Malaysia the courses on preservation and conservation are offered at the post graduate level because it does not have an undergraduate programme.

CONCLUSION

The above findings have revealed that there are more library schools in the Muslim countries that are currently offering courses on preservation and conservation as compared to those which are not offering any such courses. It also shows that most of the courses on preservation and conservation are being offered at the undergraduate level. The type of courses offered by the library schools are apparently not similar in terms of their emphasis. Some retain the tradition of tackling issue related to paper-based deterioration while others are more concerned with digital or electronic deterioration. Generally, it can be concluded that most of the countries in the Muslim world have made conservation and preservation programmes as an important agenda for the survival of their Islamic and national heritage. In other words the past glories achieved by Muslim scientists and technologists need to be preserved and made available for current and future generations so that they are able to emulate their stirling contributions.
References


