Gap in Subject Area Expertise in Islamic Collection Management in Malaysia: A Comparison with MELA Librarians¹

Najibah Abu Bakar
Librarian
Tel: 03-62073436
E-mail: najabakar@iium.edu.my

Norziati Mohd Rosman
Post-graduate student
Centre for Advanced Studies on Islam, Science and Civilization (CASIS), Jalan Sultan Yahya Petra (Semarak), 54100 Kuala Lumpur.
E-mail: norziati@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

At the pinnacle of Islamic empire, librarians were chosen from the ranks of renowned scholars. They were not merely collectors, conservators, facilitators or organizers of information, but providers of value-added intellectual services such as consultation, publication and translation. These services can be said to be only a minimal portion of tasks covered by Islamic Collection librarians in Malaysia, because our librarianship has been swept into the waves of contemporary practices of most modern libraries, emphasizing technical and information technology aspects. This article attempts to show 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). It also purported to investigate the probable reasons that contributed to the current model of Islamic Collection management and librarianship in Malaysia. The method to be used in collecting data is unobtrusive observation through content analysis of online information in public domain. The result shows the gap in Islamic collection management as practiced here. It is suggested that some of the best practices be adopted, and policies revamp considered for future practices in Malaysia.

Keywords: Muslim libraries, Muslim librarians, Islamic libraries, Islamic librarianship, Islamic collection, collection management

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Introduction

Malay civilization has gone through the wave of Islamization more than seven centuries ago, particularly in the period between the thirteenth to the sixteenth century (al-Attas, 1985). As of today, the position of Islam in Malaysia is crystallized by constitutional recognition in Article 3 of the Federal Constitution. The religion continues to play an integral part in decision-making process of the country and the culture of its inhabitants.

Based on the historical background, it is very natural that a number of public universities in Malaysia run Islamic studies programs. 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. For the purpose of this paper, the ‘Islamic collection’ is referring specifically to the collections in academic libraries of public universities, supporting courses on Islamic studies offered by the institutions. From these public universities, only three Islamic collections are selected, based on the number of courses related to Islamic studies offered by the universities and the strength of the collections.

The Islamic collections selected are managed by librarians with at least Arabic or Islamic studies qualifications at undergraduate level, coupled with postgraduate degree in Master’s in Library and Information Science (MLIS) or any other Master’s in information management. Obtaining Master’s in library science and information management is the minimum requirement to be a librarian in public university as stipulated by Public Services Commission of Malaysia (SPA).

The challenges faced by these librarians in managing Islamic collection had been discussed in various fora in Malaysia. Wan Mamat (2011) acknowledged the limitations of these librarians in respect of Arabic language mastery and also in selecting, cataloging, and providing research consultancy due to limited grasp of the Islamic language. Momin (2014) also discussed the competency of Islamic collection librarians in her paper two years later. In the same conference, Sulaiman & Baharuddin (2014) brought forward the issues of cooperation between Muslim librarians in managing Islamic collection.

These challenges we are all too well aware of. However based on previous research, 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. This research attempts to look into the current practice of Islamic collection management by a group of librarians known as Middle East Librarians Association (MELA). In the field of library science, Islamic librarianship falls under “area librarianship” hence the most widely used term would be Middle Eastern librarianship (Balqis, 2012, p. 92). While Salamon (2015) states that Middle Eastern studies librarianship is not sufficient a term to use in current practical reality, she agrees that they deal with mainly Muslim-related collections (p. 646). Thus the librarians under MELA can be considered as librarians involved in managing Islamic collection (Middle Eastern studies collection).
Librarianship in Islamic tradition

Before delving further into the research, it is best to paint a vivid mental picture of librarianship in Islamic tradition, because we will return to the concept of librarian-scholars frequently throughout this paper.

Islam upholds the importance of learning and knowledge as part of the religion itself. During the golden age of Islam and for some time after that, “learning (‘ilm)...engaged the interest of Muslims more than anything else...,” as evidenced by the body of literature their scholars produced (Pedersen, 1984, p. 37).

There are many instances in the Qur’an and sayings of Rasulullah (S.A.W.) that mentioned the importance of learning and knowledge. The first five verses revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) mentioned the word iqrā’ (قرأ) two times, to stress the importance of vocation in gaining knowledge (Rifai, 2014). Knowledge and knowledge seekers are both praised time and again, and encouragement to whom striding on the path of knowledge is given as many promised blessings. This culture of knowledge instilled as part of religious obligations contributed to the emergence of libraries throughout Muslim world (Monastra & Kopycki, 2009; Suja’, 2012a).

The religious encouragement influenced the rulers to support learning and thus libraries as institutions of learning. Damascus under Umayyad was the first Muslim city founding a palace library, which was opened “to use by serious students and scholars” and where “copies of books from all parts of the known world were obtained”. This was followed by the establishment of Bayt al-Hikmah in Baghdad by Harun al-Rashid, of which libraries were one of its famous parts during the reign of al-Ma’mun (813-844) (Harriss, 1984, p. 70 & 71). The involvement of the rulers with libraries did not stop short at providing library space and developing the collections, but include the ongoing support in financial terms and hospitality towards library visitors, who were mostly scholars. Nakosteen (1964) feed our inquisitiveness about Islamic libraries with these accounts:

Ibn Abbad not only allowed the free use of his famous library but gave each scholar up to 100 dirhams and a garment to encourage learning and scholarship. The library of the poet ibn Hamdan (d.935 A.D) in Mosul was open to all students, and and a free paper was given to penniless scholars; that of Adud al-Dawlah in Basrah was open to scholars, and those who ‘read and copied’ received a stipend. In Caliph al-Hakim's library of the House of Science in Cairo (circa. 395/1004), poor students were supplied with free ink, inkwells, reed pens and paper, as well as the case with most other Muslim institution of learning. Al-Hakim allowed a budget of more than 200 dinars a year for maintenance of his library, covering such items as paper for copyist, paper, ink, and pen for students, repair of damaged or over-used books, librarian's salary, and so forth (p. 67 & 68).

Shalaby (1979) in his doctoral thesis-turned-book reiterates that librarians during that time were chosen from among renowned intellectuals. Among them were scholars Sahl and Sa’id ibn Hārūn, and Salam of Baghdad Bayt al-Hikmah. The authority of the two brothers was clear as al-Jāhiz frequently quotes them in his writings. Two other librarian-scholars were the historian, Ibn Miskawayh who works at Ibn al-Amīd’s library and ‘Ali ibn Yahyā al-Munajjm who administers the library of al-Fath ibn Khāqān. While Fatimid library chose the scholar ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Shābusti as its librarian, he
was also a courtier in the palace. Similar practice was traced in Khizānat al-Sābūr, owned by Sābūr ibn Ardashīr. From the names mentioned by Shalaby, we know that these librarian-scholars worked in both public and private libraries. During that time, Islamic libraries can be categorized into three types: public, semi-public, and private (Nakosteen, 1964, p.66)

These librarian-scholars’ multi-disciplinary expertise allowed them to provide beyond facilitative advice to access knowledge; they were very actively involved in providing intellectual services such as translation and producing knowledge through writing (Sulaiman & Baharuddin, 2014).

**Librarianship in Ancient and Western Traditions**

The standards held by Muslims’ libraries during the peak of their civilization is not that strange a practice during ancient time. Librarians of Alexandria Library were also well-known scholars of their era. Among the firsts were philosopher-statesman Demetrius of Phaleron who was a legislator, writer and orator (Gagarin, 2009) and Zenodotus of Ephesus (Collins, 2000, p. 96). They were patronized by the rulers of Alexandria, who were known to be very supportive of libraries and learning, such as Ptolemy I Soter and his successors. In Pergamon, another seat of learning in ancient time, the library was headed by Crates of Mallus. He studied philosophy in Tarsus and Athens and became a well-known Stoic philosopher and grammarian who established his own school (Curnow, 2006).

On the account of Harriss (1964), during the time of Charlemagne (786-814) the emperor encouraged learning by inviting learned men to his court, including one English scholar named Alcuin. With the assistance of Alcuin, many books were copied in England and brought to his land, bringing forth new-found schools and monasteries throughout Western Europe. In the early Middle Age, before the Western universities sprang up, the libraries were maintained by cathedral, churches and monasteries. There were significant differences between the libraries in cathedrals with those in churches and monasteries, in which the former was more open to the masses and more secular in its collections. The position of librarians during this time was not attached to high scholarship, partly due to the small collections, thus we can found monks whose duties would include choir service. Older monks or incapacitated ones were also encouraged to tend to libraries. Harriss admitted that the libraries of the Muslims were better at this time in terms of collections and usage. Upon the emergence of university libraries in European cities during the fourteenth century, the student librarians or minor faculty members were entrusted with their care. The students were given the title of ‘conservateur des livres’.

Harriss (1964) further explanation on librarianship profession during that time warrants a quote: Librarians did not emerge as a professional class in the early universities. Instead, the keeper of the books was usually a minor faculty member or even a student.... Sometimes librarian was a scholar well versed in the contents of the volumes he guarded, but he was more often a ‘keeper of the books’, charged with their physical care rather than with the responsibility of mastering their contents. (p. 105).

We can safely say that somehow the influence of librarianship in Islamic and Graeco-Roman traditions has seeped into Western culture, because from time to time, we can found librarian-scholars in the profession. Other famous librarian-scholars in Western tradition worthy of mention were
Gottfried von Leibniz (1646-1716), David Hume (1711-1776), Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911) and Archibald MacLeish (b. 1892). Leibniz was a librarian at Hanover and Wolfenbuttel. He was also a well-known philosopher and mathematician. Hume was an “economist, philosopher and historian” who served at the Library of the Faculty of the Advocates at Edinburgh and wrote the History of England. Foss was a poet, author and columnist for Christian Science Monitor, once worked at a public library in Maryland. MacLeish won three Pulitzer prizes in his capacity as a playwright and poet. He served in the Library of Congress as librarian upon appointment by President Franklin D. Roosevelt (White, 2012).

**Librarianship in Malaysia**

**Brief history**

Librarianship in Malaysia can be said to be influenced by two factors; first by the early Malayo-Islamic tradition and secondly, by the emergence of modern librarianship during colonial era. According to Tee (1970), there were intellectual activities among the literati that had been supported by availability of library collection, albeit not in the grandeur of Arab libraries. However, libraries did not expand beyond the compounds of the Sultan’s palace and abodes of aristocrats. Only during British colonial era, libraries were established for the masses by traders, missionaries and colonialists; during this time librarianship began to take shape as a field of professional study. The influence of colonialism is said to be an impetus of modern librarianship not only in Malaysia, but in other Muslim countries as well (Monastra, 2009).

Even though libraries for the masses was not a noticeable concept in the Malay world before colonial era, the scholarly nature of Malay palace libraries were obvious. Other than representing the library of that era, the sultan’s palace plays another important role as the scriptorium, where knowledge are produced and multiplied by the literati. Printing press was unheard of in the Malay world between 15th to 18th centuries; thus the manuscript culture was active during that time. The scribes must be someone who was knowledgeable in religion and literature, to enable them to provide service to the Sultans. Among the palace literati were Muslim scholars and court dignitaries who were supported by palace treasury. A number of authors were from the ranks of sultans themselves, such as Raja Ali Haji, Raja Chulan, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Syah II of Kedah and Sultan Badaruddin of Palembang. These role played by the palace, soon was taken over by the colonials beginning in the early nineteenth century. Abdullah Munsyi for example, provided his services as scribe and translator to Stamford Raffles and a number of other British officials in Malacca and Singapore (Salleh, 2002).

Hence, the continuity of the Malayo-Islamic tradition in librarianship was set back, gradually replaced by the emergence of modern librarianship under British colonials. This brought to us the librarianship we are more familiar and equipped with today. According to Saad, Mohamad & Nazar (2012) the earliest record of library and information science (LIS) education in Malaysia was in 1955 by the effort of Malayan Librarian Group (MLG). It successfully evolves to university degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels that we have today at five higher educational institutions (UM, UiTM, IIUM, UNISEL and USIM).
Islamic Collection Management: Current Scenario

Based on a research by Abdoulaye (2004), curriculum-wise the librarianship education in Malaysia follows the guidelines provided by IFLA in 2000. In the field of Islamic collection management, IIUM offered “Islamic-oriented courses” at Master’s level as found in MLIS brochure for 2000/2001. Another course has since been taught by UiTM, as noticed by Sulaiman & Baharuddin (2014) while USIM allows its undergraduate students from the Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies to take an elective in Information Management (Suja’, 2012b).

This is a better scenario than the situation Salamon (2015) described in Europe and North America. So far only two library courses were ever offered in relation to the Middle Eastern studies, one directly during the 1980s and the other indirectly in recent years.

However in North America, it has become a course of tradition, to prioritize the appointment of scholars in special libraries collections based on their scholarly background which is related to the collection, rather than librarianship education and training (vd Luft, 2014). This is corroborated by findings in Salamon (2015) too, where she noted that there is “dominance of subject specialization over librarianship” (p. 647). Hence, the reasons behind double Master’s or even doctorate degrees that the librarians own in Middle Eastern studies that gives them competence as librarian-scholars and subject specialists in Islamic collection management, without much dependence on the elective courses offered through LIS schools.

In Malaysia, the scenario is 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).

There was an attempt to revive the librarian-scholar tradition in Malaysia at the former International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) (1989-2002) which Islamic collection are the best in Asia Pacific. The institution hired its first librarian-curator in the 1990’s. Dr. Muhammad Zainiy Uthman (currently a full Professor) whose experience working with rare books in the University of Chicago library, coupled with scholarly background in Islamic studies, allowed him to provide research consultations service to other scholars and develop the collection further. He was also actively publishing academic papers that highlight the library collections to academia in Islamic studies. The step taken by ISTAC was understandable, considering the emphasis on the importance of libraries by the institution. ISTAC holds the view that “the backbone of any institution of higher learning must be its library” (al-Attas, 1998). This stance was elaborated further by Wan Daud (1991, 2007) in his account on ISTAC library (p. 43-49, p. 128-131, respectively).

While the concept of librarian-scholars in Malaysia is still at the stage of scrutiny and being carefully weighed by the librarians who are not scholars, we are also faced with the lack of research culture in librarianship, as explained by Hamzah (2014). It could be said that because the nature of
librarianship profession in Malaysia is yet to embrace the scholarly culture, it further estranged the librarians from producing research to support their profession.

**Our Librarians in Academic Institutions: Gap in Subject Area Expertise**

For the purpose of comparison with data obtained about MELA librarians, a number of librarians from three main institutions in Malaysia with the strongest Islamic collection are chosen and the information about their academic qualifications, research presence, language proficiency and intellectual services are collected from public domain.

They are the librarians directly involved with Islamic collection as liaisons, bridging the faculties and libraries to provide the best options and solutions to Islamic research and information needs. The titles given to them are usually liaison or reference librarians, which do not reflect the subject mastery in Islamic studies. Even though Suja’ (2012b) is of the opinion that the titles ‘bibliographers’ and ‘subject specialists’ also do not reflect the librarian-scholars concept in the Western counterpart setting, we would like to contend that the most important aspects to determine the librarian-scholars concept, are their academic qualification and research presence and not the designations.

Based on our findings, the librarians entrusted with Islamic collection management in these three academic libraries are at least bachelor’s degree holders in Islamic studies or Arabic language and literature, somehow allowing them to better support the research needs of the faculty assigned to them. However, the lack of research presence of these librarians is glaring, either in the field of MLIS or Islamic studies. Language proficiency also seems not to be emphasized by our libraries, because none of the libraries advertised their librarians’ competency in Arabic language. Intellectual services are also very basic as seen from the practice of librarianship.

All of these show that the concept of librarian-scholars is almost non-existent in our libraries in cases of Islamic collection management. There is a wide gap in subject area expertise as will be shown by the data collected about MELA librarians below.

**Comparison with 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).

Based on its membership list of March 2016, there are 83 MELA institutional members. From this total, only 78 are from academic institutions. One librarian had already crossed into a department not related to our research and one no longer in the profession. This left 76 librarians that we establish as the whole population. From that 76, we were able to collect 59 data; the other 17 considered ‘unresponsive’ due to the scarcity of the online data related to their profession, making it insufficient to establish any meaningful conclusion. The confidence level for this size of sample and population is between 85 to 90%, with 5% margin of error.

For the purpose of this research, we did not directly contact the ‘respondents’, but choose the unobtrusive way of collecting data. This is made possible by the presence of public domains data on the
Internet. Mainly, the data were collected from these types of websites: university websites where the librarians are working, information supplied by the librarians themselves to public domain, interviews held between the librarians and other third parties and research related websites such as Google Scholar, Academia or ResearchGate.

However, we are aware of the obvious limitations in using unobtrusive approach to collect data. The main problem is when there is no research data available on certain samples. Another limitation is the precision and currency of the information which is important in research; we have no recourse to confirm it directly with respondents. For the purpose of this paper, we depend largely on the credibility of the websites. Currency of the data is not the main concern here insofar as it is available, but we strived to choose the most recent data wherever it is extant.

The research data collected are the librarians’ academic qualifications, research presence (either in LIS or Middle Eastern), language proficiency and intellectual services they provide.

On academic qualifications, we found that 19 out of 59 librarians (32.2%) own Doctor of Philosophy in various fields of studies. Interestingly, in some ways all the doctorate research are related to Middle East, Near East or Arabic language. One is a PhD holder in ethnomusicology whose research begins to steer into Arab music. Another PhD holder did research on comparative literature in Maghreb and Middle East. He also has Certificate in Translations Studies.

Double Master’s in combination between LIS education and Middle Eastern, Near Eastern or Arabic language studies are the most common among MELA librarians. From 59 samples, 29 librarians have this combination of double Master’s (49.2%). It is important to note that in at least two cases, double Master’s programs are actually offered at university level with the above-mentioned combination. If the university found out the MLIS candidate’s interest or degree background is in the Middle East, they will be offered to take another Master’s in Middle Eastern studies.

Table 1

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<th>Qualification</th>
<th>No. of Librarians</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy related to Middle East or its equivalent</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Master’s in LIS &amp; Middle Eastern studies or their equivalents</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree in Middle Eastern studies without MLIS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s in LIS, without second Master’s in Middle Eastern studies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.3</td>
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These data show that the group of librarians associated with MELA, are highly qualified in managing the Islamic collections. It can be said that the field of Middle Eastern/Near Eastern/Arabic
language are actually their passions, pulling them towards the librarianship in that areas. This can also be confirmed by their pursuing postgraduate studies to the highest level in that field, rather than in LIS.

On the question whether librarianship education is as important as scholarly background in Middle Eastern or Near Eastern studies, only 3 librarians have Master’s degree in Middle Eastern studies without MLIS or its equivalent; showing that those without MLIS are among the rare in the profession. We conjectured that if someone specialized in Middle Eastern studies hold the position in librarianship without MLIS or its equivalent, they are eventually forced to take courses in that direction to be at par with current practice in information science. Hence, it should not be seen as a factor diminishing to the librarianship profession, but changing its landscape into a more promising career options.

Another group of librarians are those holding the position with only MLIS or its equivalent, without the second Master’s. This group consists of 12 librarians (20.3%), with 3 of them either had PhD or still undergoing a journey towards PhD. We should notice that from this 12 librarians, at least 3 were trained in Arabic or Near Eastern studies as their bachelorship. This is showing that those without the second Master’s in the area studies, is still an acceptable group within the profession, albeit smaller in size.

Due to the high academic qualifications of many of these 59 librarians, at least 8 of them are faculty members who are actively teaching in either LIS fields or Middle Eastern studies.

The second findings are related to the librarians’ online research presence. We compared the research presence into two categories: MLIS-related research and Middle Eastern/Near Eastern/Arabic language-related research. The purpose is to know whether these librarians are countable as scholars in both fields or publish research only in their professional capacity as librarians. Out of 59 librarians, unfortunately 17 (28.8%) have no traceable research publications online. This does not necessarily mean that they do not contribute anything to the field; it could also mean that their publications are not distributed wide enough. However it is interesting to mention that these 17 are those without double Master’s, and join the profession with BA and Master's degree only, usually in LIS studies. From 42 librarians (71.1%) whose research presence are searchable online, 18 published in both fields (30.5%), 17 in Middle East fields only (28.8%) and 7 in LIS related fields only (11.9%). This finding is corroborated by the strength of the group of librarians who have double Master’s and PhD in Middle Eastern/Near Eastern/Arabic languages studies.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Types of research</th>
<th>No. of Librarians</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIS-related research only</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East/Near East/Arabic related research only</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In both fields of studies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research presence not traceable</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28.8</td>
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The next interesting data obtained is about the language proficiency of MELA librarians. Managing Islamic collection whose geographical boundaries are very wide, requires 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 Persian, Turkish, Ottoman Turkish, Bosnian, Uzbek, Urdu, Tajik, Syriac and Hebrew languages. Mastery of languages is important to assist in the duty of developing the collection, providing research consultations and processing the materials.

In the aspect of intellectual services, MELA librarians are actively involved in academic book reviewing, publishing works and giving talks in their area of specializations, providing research consultations, teaching as faculty members in either fields, translating or compiling works of others and contributing to encyclopedia entries. They are also involved in curating exhibitions, producing grant proposals that support and enhance collection access and providing opinions about the expansion of the discipline to the faculties.

The above findings on academic qualifications and language proficiency are corroborated by former research by Salamon (2015) on Middle Eastern studies librarians (based in North America/Canada and Europe). The author found that the community is “a highly qualified one”, “multilingual” and “field-committed”. Many of them have PhD and dual Master’s, can write and speak more than one Islamic language, and had experience traveling and staying in the Arab countries where they do their field research.

**Conclusion**

Libraries are part of human culture (Suja’, 2012b). According to Hon. Prof. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (2001) 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 intangible culture must be present in the tangible ones.

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.

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. But it is easy to be distracted by the tangibles which are easier to measure and to fulfill. For us who are already divorced from our own Islamic librarianship tradition which is represented by the existence of librarian-scholars in the libraries, it is our duty to strive and regain the exalted status of librarians by turning ourselves into scholars in the field of study of our choice, be it in Islamic studies or other branches of learning.

**Recommendations**
Based on the above information and findings, these are the recommendations worthy of thought:

- 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.

- The choice of students when doing MLIS should be more open and enhanced to allow for double masters, 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 specialised 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- Unwavering supports from the government and top management of the institutions are the main catalyst to enliven knowledge culture. Based on the libraries history 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.

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