

STATUS AND EVALUATION OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARIES BEFORE THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN IRAN

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Abstract

The basic purpose of the study was to assess the problems which existed and impeded the development of public high school libraries before the Islamic Revolution of Iran. An overview of the literature concerning school libraries in Iran, before the Revolution shows that these problems included a general attitude of neglect toward school libraries, coupled with accessible materials, inadequate facilities, lack of materials organization inadequate collections, and shortage of trained librarians. A critical comparison of librarianship in Iran with those in other countries has also been carried at different points in this article.

Introduction

Developing nations face multitude problems in their growth. Economical, political, social and educational concerns confront policy makers who must decide on priorities, secure capital, and implement programs to improve their citizens life condition. In a country such as Iran, the problem of educations are many-faceted due to the growth of literacy and economical expansion. A potentially important resource to Iranian education is the school library system which will assume an ever increasing importance, but which is beset with a host of problems. An overview of the literature concerning school libraries in Iran will show that these problems include a general attitude of neglect toward school libraries, coupled with inaccessible materials, in adequate facilities, lack of organization of materials, inadequate collections, shortage of capital, and shortage of trained librarians. Whenever analogies can be drawn between Iran and other countries, pertinent literature will be included.

A. The Problems and Scope of Iran's School Library System

The problems of Iran's contemporary school library system can be traced partly to the traditional era, before the constitution emphasized education.⁽¹⁾ An agricultural society in which the illiteracy rate was over ninety-five percent, and in which women were traditionally kept illiterate was hardly conducive in forming positive attitudes toward reading.⁽²⁾ Furthermore, books printed in Farsi in Iran were not available until the early nineteenth century, and even then they were not available to everyone because "Books were preserved very carefully as a valuable heritage...."⁽³⁾

Today, while there exist many kinds of libraries in Iran, including national libraries, university and college libraries, public libraries, children's libraries, and special libraries, the progress of school libraries has been "...neglected almost completely."⁽⁴⁾

According to Sinai and Harvey "Good school libraries are almost non-existent ... There are approximately one

thousand five hundred public school libraries, almost all very small..."⁽⁵⁾ Rastin investigated school libraries and found that "Ninety-five percent of Iranian schools do not have libraries."⁽⁶⁾ Saidi states that "...there are actually no public school libraries in the real sense."⁽⁷⁾ She further contends that "School libraries are still neglected and are not supported by the government."⁽⁸⁾ Karrouby also notes the lack of libraries, and states as follows: "labs and workshops are either non-existent, or ill-equipped, or unused..."⁽⁹⁾ The beginnings of a real library system are only dimly seen. Hendershot finds that "...embryonic libraries are being established in the high schools..."⁽¹⁰⁾ Lhorer also found a lack of school libraries of all kinds. She states that "The economic and social changes that are rapidly taking place in...Iran are now developing a need for libraries of different types. The time is ripe for the expansion of library education, the preparation of library teachers..."⁽¹¹⁾ Ebrami believes that "Up to this time, school libraries of Iran have not undertaken their vital role in education."⁽¹²⁾

One might encounter similar problems in other countries; Hathorn commenting on a similar situation in Lebanon, states that "Education in Lebanon, whether public or private, is on the whole textbook-oriented, which means that libraries imply do not loom large as part of the total educational program."⁽¹³⁾ Anwar⁽¹⁴⁾ and Haider both discuss the problems of libraries in Pakistan which are similar to those encountered in Iran.

Haider says the problems are:

First, defects in the educational system; second, with good school library programs. On the part of unfamiliarity of school authorities; third, absence of organized leadership in the promotion of school library ideas; fourth, lack of money (though not true in all cases); fifth, famine sickness of children's literature; sixth, failure on the part of library planners to achieve professional standards for school libraries; and seventh, above all, the absence of competent human resources.⁽¹⁵⁾

In Uganda, a similar developing nation, Haidar sees the greatest problem of the school library as being the inadequacy of collection.⁽¹⁶⁾ This situation exists because "Uganda, like most developing nations, is still facing a shortage of adequate financing resources."⁽¹⁷⁾ Haidar makes some specific recommendations for overcoming the limitations of school libraries, by stating that "The minimum standards should cover the school library philosophy, its purpose and function, and organization and administration, the personnel, the library resources, both printed and nonprint mate-

rials, the accommodations, furniture and equipment, financial aspects, and the kind of program that must be provided."⁽¹⁸⁾

B. Problems of Inaccessibility to the Library Materials

One of the most important problems of school libraries in Iran is in accessibility to the library materials. Ebrami states that:

Generally a current school library in Iran is...housed in a room or in one of the offices of the school, and open only a few hours a day after the regular hours when the students have gone home and the loaning of books is not permitted. Such a library either has no one in charge or the so called "librarian" is one of the teachers, or the employees, or he may even be the director of the school.⁽¹⁹⁾

Sinai and Harvey describe school libraries as "...often locked in a small room or closet, and unstaffed. The typical Iranian school library is a little-used collection of gifts from USIS and other such sources."⁽²⁰⁾ Afshar has found that "The existing libraries are mostly collections of books, not selected properly, placed in principals' offices. The access to them is limited during the class hours; as soon as schools are closed, no access is available to books."⁽²¹⁾ Even at the university level, Sinai and Harvey note that "Most libraries of all kinds require a deposit fee, an identification photograph and card before a book may be used."⁽²²⁾ Koh states that "A great number of schools do not have regularly scheduled library periods. The few schools that have library periods occasionally are restricted to some classes only....books are kept in locked cupboards."⁽²³⁾

Wiese states that, in developing countries, books are often in-accessible. Wiese points out that in Malaysia and Singapore, as in Iran, "Locked library doors and locked book cabinets are symbols of the school libraries which put emphasis on preserving books and preventing losses, rather than on using books and libraries to extend and enrich knowledge."⁽²⁴⁾ Evans describes a similar situation in school libraries of Ceylon by observing that:

A few "library" books are housed in locked (almirahs) in the school hall, in corridors, in classrooms, in storerooms, or in the Principal's room. Even where a separate room is available for the library, it is often found that the teacher-librarian is either not interested or considers the other aspects of school life more important than the library.⁽²⁵⁾

C. The Problem of Adequate Space, Physical Lay-out of Library Facilities

Along with the problem of inaccessibility is the problem of adequate space and physical lay-out of library facilities. Saidi notes that "very few school libraries possess an adequate collection, budget, suitable equipment, or proper quarters."⁽²⁶⁾ Thompson states that in "...the Islamic countries, most libraries are in old mosques..., deficient in heating, light, and ventilation...[and that] collections are in urgent need of new buildings and adequate equipment."⁽²⁷⁾ Edwards holds that an adequate plan requires a building whose internal aspects can be easily reorganized.

Most high school staffs, however, have had to apply those new methods in buildings designed on inflexible traditional lines wherein small, bleak rooms are arranged along many yards of corridors and provision for practical work is severely segregated.⁽²⁸⁾

Mohanraj, in describing a parallel situation in India, states "Most of the secondary schools in our country lack adequate library facilities..."⁽²⁹⁾

D. Problem of Library Materials Organization

Another problem related to the lack of space is the common situation wherein materials are not organized in a consistent system. Lohrer found that in a high school near Ahvaz in Iran, "Books were arranged by accession, not by subject."⁽³⁰⁾ Sinai and Harvey note, too, that most books in Iranian libraries are arranged by "...accession number with fixed shelf location" and that a few libraries use Library of Congress cards and some use the Dewey Decimal Classification System.⁽³¹⁾ On the other hand, in the universities, Mangla states that in 1970 "Ninety percent of the libraries followed Dewey, L.C., or U.D.C. systems for classifying collections, while the other ten percent arranged their collections by the fixed location system, or by size, or by some locally devised system."⁽³²⁾ Moreover, Lohrer further notes that "Bibliographic tools are singularly lacking."⁽³³⁾

E. Problem of inadequate Literature in the Native Language

The establishment of adequate collections has been complicated by several problems. Publishing, especially in the area of newspapers, has been subject to governmental controls. Newspapers were first published in 1837, and were issued by Mirza Saleh Shirazi.⁽³⁴⁾ Before Reza Shah came to power, about one hundred up to one hundred and fifty newspapers circulated in Iran, "...but the number

gradually decreased so that by 1940, there were at the most fifty publications of various kinds in the whole country"⁽³⁵⁾ Arasteh notes that government control was established in 1941 through a Martial Law Regulation, giving the military governor of Tehran the right to close any newspaper.⁽³⁶⁾ According to Arasteh, this power was freely used.⁽³⁷⁾ In 1942, a food shortage in Tehran which resulted in bread riots was severely criticized by the newspapers. In response to this criticism, the government increased censorship of the newspapers.⁽³⁸⁾ Another problem for publishing newspapers beside government control was technology. According to Filstrup, before 1958, "...techniques for the production of printed materials in Iran were fifty years behind the U.S."⁽³⁹⁾

More recently, efforts have been made to publish material for schools. Filstrup states:

In 1965 the Franklin/Tehran office in cooperation with the Ministry of Education created the Educational Publications Center (EPC) to produce classroom materials for schools. Under the direction of Iraj Jahanshahi, this center issues five bi-weekly magazines for elementary and secondary school children during the school year and a sixth for teachers and parents.⁽⁴⁰⁾

However, on the whole, collections are basically inadequate. Rastin says that "The lack of appropriate reading materials has made the selection of good collections difficult. So the librarians have generally ended up by buying duplicate copies of single titles to expand their collections."⁽⁴¹⁾ Karrouby found that "the books observed in the school libraries were almost all of the same type."⁽⁴²⁾ Mangla states that during 1972-1973, "The total number of titles registered at Tehran National Library was just 1800 which includes reprints and some textbooks."⁽⁴³⁾ Lohrer points out that literature in the native language, Farsi, is "...either non-existent, poorly translated, or not well written."⁽⁴⁴⁾ Arjomand, writing about her experience in working in the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, observed "There were not sufficient stories written by Iranian authors on Persian themes, nor were there enough informative books about the various provinces of Iran."⁽⁴⁵⁾ In addition, other children's literature is lacking. Filstrup states that "...translation of outstanding foreign children's books is, during this critical period of development, seen as an essential complement to original children's books in Persian..."⁽⁴⁶⁾ On the other hand, Gaver reports good progress being made in children's literature by the same institute, which is housed in a central building.

...three excellent small collections; the standard collection of about 1,300 titles, which present those books automatically provided (in varying multiples) for each branch; a small collection of books for staff reading; and a fine collection of children's books in many languages, constantly augmented by purchase and gift for the use of the editors and illustrators involved in the book production program.⁽⁴⁷⁾

In addition to the lack of materials in the native language, existing school library collections may not be of high quality, and, in terms of providing an adequate collection, Woolls recommends that:

All materials, locally produced and commercially produced, should be evaluated and removed from the collection when they are no longer valid for the purposes of the individual collection... Media Programs: District and School recommends a base collection of 20,000 items for a school with 500 users, or 40 items per student.⁽⁴⁸⁾

F. Problem of Financial Support

Inexorably tied to space and collections are budgetary considerations. The shortage of capital is a problem faced by most school libraries. Rastin says that "The shortage in the library budget is a problem faced by most school libraries in Iran, and is the major reason for the meager stock of books, magazines, and other facilities."⁽⁴⁹⁾ Mangla contends that "Schools and high schools should allocate a part of their budget for the development and completion of their libraries and reading rooms"⁽⁵⁰⁾

This is problem for most developing nations. Ward, investigating the secondary school libraries in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and New Guinea, concludes that, as in Iran, "One problem common to the governments of these countries is shortage of finance compared with needs."⁽⁵¹⁾ It is also a problem in the U.S.A. in urban public libraries and school libraries. Gheatham, in describing budgets in U.S. libraries, says "The situation is critical in large urban libraries caught in a bureaucratic vise queezing every penny from existing budgets."⁽⁵²⁾

Simone states that:

In the school districts where there was no money appropriated for print and/or non-print materials, the needs of the students and teachers could not possibly be met. The librarian could not possibly fulfil the responsibility of keeping materials current and popular if he/she cannot

purchase new materials throughout the year.⁽⁵³⁾

Funding is a problem in Iran for other types of libraries also. Mangla, in writing about financial considerations in Iranian universities remarked that:

Till recently, there was no proper financial support for the development and functioning of these libraries. There are still not properly evolved norms to calculate their financial requirement. It would however be interesting to point out that in some libraries even the limited financial allocations remained unspent or partly spent because of various reasons, such as, lack of properly trained staff, complicated administrative procedures, etc., and...this has often been used as an argument by the administrators to curtail the financial support for these libraries.⁽⁵⁴⁾

In terms of budgetary planning Mccauley further states that, in general, library "...budgeting should be viewed as an opportunity to apply analysis and constructive thinking to the activities of the past and planning for the future, ...to think about what one is supposed to be doing for whom, for what purpose, and with what resource."⁽⁵⁵⁾

G. Problems of Training and Number of Professionals

Finally, and perhaps most critical to an effective library system is an adequate number of trained professionals, knowledgeable in all facets of librarianship. Ebrami says that "The number of librarians in Iran ranging from those with junior college degrees to those who hold higher degrees hardly reaches to 400."⁽⁵⁶⁾ Thompson, in writing about librarianship in the Middle East states:

So far there are virtually no trained school librarians, and there are no positions which would be attractive to a competent school librarian. Perhaps this situation exists primarily because the need for school libraries is seen more clearly by to-level officials than by the teachers, most of whom have only a remote conception of true function of the library in school.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Saidi finds that "Although a school library law was passed a number of years ago, there are very few school libraries and even fewer full-time librarians or part-time teacher-librarians."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Mangla states that:

The demand for properly educated library personnel to work at various levels in libraries is expected to increase with gradual spread of literacy. (It is necessary) to attract good quality stu-

dents to the profession of librarianship by making provisions for Incentive Scholarships' for students and by improving the status, salary scales and working conditions, etc., of the library personnel.⁽⁵⁹⁾

In a report prepared by TEBROC investigating the problems common to all library education programs, it was stated that:

There is a growing demand for professional librarians in all institutions having libraries. The library education programs now in operation do not meet the needs either in quantity or in quality...(There is a) low attraction of the library profession for capable and promising individuals, especially those with science backgrounds and fields other than English.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Haider, too, in studying library education feels that:

Iran needs qualified library personnel for various positions...It is evident that thousands of library personnel for various positions in the existing libraries and library organizations, are needed for an effective and efficient modern library service based on scientific lines. On the other hand, the existing manpower does not exceed 125 in any case.⁽⁶¹⁾

A similar situation is found in Uganda. Haider states

...the lack of full-time, well-qualified personnel is one of the most pressing problems facing the development of school libraries in Uganda, and unless this problem is solved there can be no progress in the present status of school library services.⁽⁶²⁾

As with funding, professional staff is needed in other types of Iranian libraries. Mangla also reports a shortage of manpower. He states in a 1970-1 survey of Iranian universities and libraries of institutions of higher learning that "Only 20 percent of the staff was professionally qualified, with either a four-year or a two-year library science degree at the undergraduate or post-graduate level."⁽⁶³⁾

There are several reasons for the death of adequately trained librarians in Iran and in other developing nations. Thompson feels that a major reason is the "...extremely low salary scale for librarians who are classified so low in government pay plans that it is difficult to attract the ablest young people into the field."⁽⁶⁴⁾ Sinai and Harvey feel that other reasons include the librarian's responsibility for lost or stolen books, the "...low status of education, of government employment, (and) or women..." who are attracted to jobs not wanted by men, such as librarians.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The third,

and probably most important reason is "...the total lack of awareness on the part of those who are responsible for initiating educational reform of the value of school library services."⁽⁶⁶⁾ Haider also notes the lack of appreciation by the government and educators for "...the important role the library can play in socio-economic development of the country."⁽⁶⁷⁾ He sees those who are unaware of the vital role of the library to include "...authorities within the Ministry of Education, headmasters, and teachers."⁽⁶⁸⁾

Saidi also sees a lack of awareness as a problem.

She states "...as long as the educational authorities, administrators, and teachers do not understand the importance of the role of library services in educational programs, ...and as long as educators and teachers are unfamiliar with books and non-book materials for children and young people and are not interested themselves in books and other media, Iranian methods of teaching and school libraries will remain as they are now."⁽⁶⁹⁾

The training of librarians is discussed by many in literature pertaining to libraries in the United States as well as those of Iran and other developing countries. Madaus, discussing the role of professional school librarians, states that "The well trained professional school librarian should anticipate service as both a teacher and as an instructional materials specialist."⁽⁷⁰⁾ Henry, in the U.S.A., determines the need for unique kinds of professional training for the personnel who will manage the newly unified media programs at the school building level. He recommends the establishing of:

...inservice training programs for up-dating the librarians in their role of administering and supervising the unified media program ... (and the setting up of a)...consortium with several of the approved library science schools to provide graduate credit for the additional training.⁽⁷¹⁾

Madaus, in Texas, investigated the influence and the relationship of the extent of librarian curriculum involvement, librarian background factors, librarian personality factor, and teaching structures present relative to school lending resource programs in a senior high school. He concluded that:

School librarians are normally educated as teachers and meet state requirements for regular teaching certificates. They must receive special training in analysis, educational evaluation, selection, organization, systematic distribution, and the use of instructional materials. The pro-

professional education of school librarian should contribute to this basic knowledge as well as provide understanding of fundamental learning processes, teaching methods, and the psychology of children and adolescents. Also, school librarians must be familiar with the history and current trends in development of school curricula.⁽⁷²⁾

Because one goal of school librarians is to encourage the use of the libraries, and library materials, a necessary task of school librarian is to instruct the students how to use the available facilities. Haidar analyzed and evaluated the current situation of school libraries, and found that certain aspects must be taught to the students so that they might derive maximum benefits from the library. Haidar holds that:

Among the essential elements to be covered in order that the student may become familiar with the library's resources and their use, as well as the services the library provides, are the parts of a book, the proper care of books and how to handle them, card catalogue and its relationship to the arrangement of materials on the shelves, the location and use of basic reference materials, and the library's rules and regulations.⁽⁷³⁾

Lack of familiarity with these essential skills prevents much real utilization of library facilities available in Iran. Lack of essential skills in teachers may also extend the program.

The role of the school librarian and the library must become important to teachers in Iranian schools. Beilke discusses the media usage by teachers and discusses in-service needs, money needs, and personnel needs as they relate to U.S.A. school libraries.⁽⁷⁴⁾

In summary, Lohrer in writing about the significant problems of libraries and librarians in the Near East, stated that:

Illiteracy, in adequate schools, shortage of teachers, limited published materials in the native languages, lack of publishing houses, the low prestige of authors, and limited professional library personnel all contribute to the meager status of libraries and librarians.⁽⁷⁵⁾

These problems must be dealt with positively in order for Iran's school library system to achieve positive gains and to help eradicate illiteracy. Ebrami contends that the planning of school libraries in Iran should include "... the concept of modern librarianship and the significant role of libraries in elementary schools and secondary schools "but

that these concepts have" ...not been fully recognized by the officials."⁽⁷⁶⁾

Hendershot looks for

... the changing of the role of the Ministry from detailed administration to one of leadership, setting of standards, accreditation, research and planning; local financial support and management; school consolidation; adequate facilities for the schools, including libraries; professionally educated administrators; and full-time resident teachers.⁽⁷⁷⁾

It is time to begin considering these aspects to improve the library system of Iran.

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