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# Education for librarianship in Iran before the 1979 Islamic Revolution

## A historical review of American roles and influences

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – To record and evaluate the impact of the American contribution to Iranian librarianship education.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Describes how American support created modern librarianship in Iran, thanks to a range of initiatives such as the American development foundations and programs, and the Fulbright Program, which helped the country to renovate its higher education. Reviews the advantages and disadvantages of the American model of education for librarianship, which was implemented by a number of Iranian universities. This paper also describes how American library educators were influential in the creation of some major professional library organizations such as the Tehran Book Processing Centre (TEBROC), the Iranian Documentation Centre (IRANDOC) and the Iranian Library Association (ILA).

**Findings** – Concludes that, despite the fact that modern librarianship in Iran came to life after the Second World War due to American assistance, the major shortcomings of the American model of library education in Iran led to lack of creativity in Iranian students, lack of independent research capability, and lack of integration between what students learned and what the Iranian library profession actually needed.

**Research limitations/implications** – Establishes the context of influence behind the growth of Iranian library science education, which can inform further research on such cultural impacts.

**Practical implications** – Since many other countries have based LIS education on an American model, they may find some similarities in the discussions in this paper with their own case.

**Originality/value** – This paper documents an important period of growth and development in the history of Iranian librarianship.

**Keywords** History, Libraries, Iran

**Paper type** Research paper



### Introduction

This paper reviews the development of education for librarianship in Iran based on an American model. It also shows how the American model of education was adopted by the major Iranian universities. These universities – such as the University of Tehran

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and the Pahlavi University – established library schools with Master's Courses headed and taught by American library educators. Since many other countries have based LIS education on an American model, they may find some similarities in the discussions in this paper with their own case.

### **Iran in need of development plans and the role of American expertise**

The use of American expertise in the socio-economic development of Iran began in 1922 when the first Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty (1921-1941) was in power. Arthur Millspaugh, an American expert who had gained an international reputation in policy-making and in the design of financial and economic systems, was invited to Iran. His major task was to modernise the Iranian financial system, which remained in an archaic condition. He was able to create an infrastructure, which Iran badly needed. His assistance and advisory mission had other impacts on relationships between the two countries. The Iranians realized that the US had a great financial and technological potentiality on which they could rely. To Americans, Iran was a country with rich mineral resources and a growing economy. So it attracted the attention of American consultants and development planners.

With American expertise hired for the purpose, the Plan Organisation promulgated the First Seven-Year Development Plan (1949-1955) (Mehner, 1978). This Plan canvassed a number of highly expensive projects, some of which were already under development, including a number related to education (Pesaran, 1985). The United States government actually set up a division in the Iranian Ministry of Education to enable the Ministry to provide advisory services and technical assistance throughout the country. The education components of the community development programs had an important impact on Iranian development policy because they demonstrated that education could be an important factor in introducing significant change (Taban, 1979).

### **An overview of libraries in the 1950s**

There was a major growth in the number of libraries in Iran after World War II. By the end of the 1950s there were about 79 special, college and public libraries in Iran (Ta'avoni, 1992; The Board of Trustees of Public Libraries, 1991). There were also several private libraries, which were opened to the public. Also, a number of libraries were established by foreign institutions and were staffed with foreign professional librarians. Among these were the British Council library, the Abraham Lincoln Library, and those of the Iran-American Societies in Tehran and Kermanshah (Homayoun-Farroukh, 1965). However, despite the primitive state of Iranian libraries, the will for developing library services was strong among library staff and there was a growing enthusiasm for better and more extensive education for librarianship (Saidi, 1977). Harvey (1989), an American library educator and consultant who worked in Iran for a long time, maintains that the establishment of some foreign libraries in Iran encouraged Iranian librarians in special and academic libraries to learn modern librarianship.

#### *The setting-up of short courses and workshops by Americans*

From 1952 to 1965, many short courses and workshops were organised for the training of librarians in Iran (Saidi, 1977, p. 162). Short courses were the best medium for foreign library educators, especially American librarians and library educators to

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develop professional librarianship in Iran. Some of these courses were offered by American library educators, or jointly by them and International library specialists (Eicher *et al.*, 1976). The curriculum taught the elements of library science, with emphasis on cataloguing. Some years later, a number of students who enrolled in these courses continued their education in LIS in the US, took higher degrees, and played prominent roles in the development of librarianship in Iran on their return.

The University of Tehran established a short course from October 1954 to April 1955. The course was also sponsored by the American Specialist Program and the Smith-Mundt Act Brewster (1976). Lacking references to modern librarianship, the curriculum included lectures on the history of books, calligraphy and the alphabet, bibliography, and the cataloguing of Persian manuscripts only. A similar course was offered in Shiraz University in 1956. Nevertheless, the presence of qualified American professional librarians and educators encouraged some Iranian undergraduates and graduates to pursue their library studies in Western universities (particularly American universities) where they sought higher degrees.

Library education offered by foreigners in short courses in the period 1952 until 1966 were not without difficulties. Gaver, for example, stated that one of the problems was the failure of students who graduated from short courses to distinguish between the promotion of librarianship suitable to local and national needs and librarianship based solely on American principles and experience. She added that the danger was that the graduates of short courses tended to apply solutions to local Iranian problems, such as Americans might apply in their libraries (Gaver, 1953). Akers (1955) observed that most students participating in the library workshop were graduates of intermediate high schools. This kind of student lacked the basic competencies needed by librarians to become effective librarians. Lohrer (1969) believed that one of the problems was that students who had graduated from short courses were given the title of librarian. She added that in a country like Iran where there were no job descriptions and job classifications, this might cause a certain tension among library staff.

### **LIS developments in the 1960s**

#### *American library advisers and the establishment of library schools*

In keeping with its development policy, the Iranian government encouraged institutions, whether public or private, to propose development projects on their own initiative. For example, in the 1960s some universities, such as the University of Tehran and the Pahlavi University of Shiraz, decided to improve their educational systems with reference to American university models (Eicher *et al.*, 1976, pp. 40, 175). Consequently, these two universities decided to develop their libraries as part of their comprehensive development programs undertaken in conjunction with the University of Southern California and the University of Pennsylvania, respectively[1]. Both universities employed American library consultants to assist them to draw up plans and to implement development projects.

The reasons for inviting advisers from American universities, rather than inviting study teams from European or any other countries may have been based in part on the Shah's belief that the American system was superior to others. Moreover, the presence of so many American experts in the country as well as the resources and expertise available in American universities to advise overseas countries, lent weight to the decision.

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American library advisers and Iranian library administrators realized that the need for qualified librarians to run academic libraries could not be met by graduates of short courses. There were two options for providing professional librarians: one was to send more qualified Iranian students to the US or the UK to study librarianship at one of the accredited library schools[2]. The second option was to establish a model library school in one of the Iranian universities (Saidi, 1977, p. 84).

An aspect of the adoption of an American university model at the Pahlavi University of Shiraz was to create comprehensive, modern library services. To develop library services, the Pahlavi University employed H. Vail Deale, an American library educator, as Chief Library Adviser in 1965[3]. These librarians rapidly became convinced, especially Deale, that Iranian University libraries needed trained Iranian librarians[4]. Deale suggested that the best way for Iran to meet its urgent need for trained librarians was to establish an American-type library school in Shiraz[5,6]. However, the suggestion for the establishment of a library school at Pahlavi University was not successful, because of the lack of properly trained Iranian professional librarians available at this university.

Similarly, the University of Tehran asked for assistance from the Americans. In May 1958, a team of six experts from the University of Southern California arrived in Iran (Hendershot, 1975). Their report recommended the establishment of a central library, expansion of library holdings, improvement of library services, and recruitment of professional and competent librarians. In addition, the need to provide library-training programs for library staff was stressed (Hendershot, 1975, pp. 221, 223-4). In developing its educational programs, the University of Tehran had emphasised the need to recruit academic staff who had graduated from Western universities, especially in the US and UK.

The urgent needs for the University of Tehran were the establishment of a central library and then the setting-up of a library school. The Central Library was established in 1965. Hopkins (1976), an American professional librarian sponsored by the Fulbright Program came to Iran to assist the University of Tehran to set up a centralized library system. The establishment of this library system and the existence of Margaret Hopkins were preconditions for the setting up of a library Master's course in this University.

#### *The establishment of a library school at Tehran University*

Sponsored by the Fulbright Program, Professor Alice Lohrer came to the University of Tehran in 1966 to establish the first Library School in Iran (Brewster, 1976, table 5). The University of Tehran agreed to open the Library Department from autumn 1966 in the College of Education (The University of Tehran, College of Education, 1967). This decision was based on the fact that there were, as potential staff, a number of Iranian librarians with Master's Degrees. The Fulbright Commission in Iran agreed to provide one library educator each year to administer the Library Department and teach in its programs (Harvey, 1989). A provisional curriculum for the Master's course had already been developed jointly by Margaret Hopkins, a number of Iranian professional librarians, and Alice Lohrer who prepared the final version[7].

Although the objective of the Masters course was to educate professional librarians for academic, school and public libraries, it had a general approach to the curriculum. It covered all the main areas of library science, such as collection building, cataloguing

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and classification, library information services, and bibliographies. The curriculum made provision for the students to gain practical experience regardless of the type of libraries. Among the subjects were an introduction to information science, and subjects dealing with indexing and abstracting. Although the curriculum was created with the assistance of Iranian professional librarians, it neglected the needs of local libraries in such matters as the cataloguing and classification of Persian monographs and library services using Persian books. Students also had to prepare a research paper which was the equivalent of a Master's thesis (Saidi, 1977 p. 232).

It is interesting to add that 95 graduates applied for the course in 1966, but only 25 of 37 actually enrolled to do the course (Hopkins, 1976, p. 523). The dropout rate was high and this was to become usual for library schools in Iran. The reasons were various and reflected in part a lack of understanding of the library profession and of the possibility of working in libraries. Some students of the Master's course also dropped the course because they found its level of practical work too burdensome and not intellectually challenging[8].

#### *John Harvey's administration, 1967-1968*

In September 1967, John Harvey, who was Dean of the Graduate School of Library Science at Drexel University, succeeded Alice Lohrer under sponsorship by the Fulbright Program. In the period 1967-1968, the number of foreign lecturers and Iranian instructors in the Library Department increased. Three foreign lecturers supported by the Fulbright Program joined the Library Department.

Harvey established a faculty curriculum committee to revise the curriculum of the Master's course and tried to adapt the curriculum to local needs (Harvey, 1973a). For example, in some subjects, such as reading materials for children and young adults, cataloguing and classification, and reference materials, the samples were selected from Persian books as well as from the existing English language collection of the library of the College of Education (Harvey and Mansurzadeh, 1969). In order to be sure that students understood their subjects, John Harvey employed a variety of modern methods of teaching, such as library tours, term papers, audio-visual materials, panel discussions, and visiting speakers.

The Library School encouraged students to prepare as research papers compilations such as directories and bibliographies of libraries, publishers, printing presses, and bookshops. A subject analysis of the research papers of the Master's courses of the Library Department of the University of Tehran shows that in the period from 1966 to 1974 about 77 percent of research papers were bibliographies, catalogues and directories. While preparation of these tools was probably appropriate in the initial phase of development of the program, this was probably not the case for the later period when the preparation of reference tools had become the function of other professional library organisations and special libraries. Harvey also encouraged students to translate basic English textbooks and manuals into Persian. Although many of the bibliographies and directories compiled in this way were published by the Iranian Documentation Centre (IRANDOC) and later by commercial publishers, their quality was low (Harvey and Mansurzadeh, 1969, p. 80; Majzoobsafa, 1971; Ganjian, 1974)

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*The establishment of an undergraduate minor course, 1968*

The Library School of the University of Tehran established an undergraduate minor course in the Spring of 1968. The objectives of this course were to disseminate the idea of school librarianship, and produce trained librarians with professional skills to run school and public libraries. In this way, the Library Department responded to the educational developments of the mid-1960s that related to literacy, children's libraries and attempts to create more school and public libraries throughout the country (Harvey, 1973a, p. 10). Harvey hoped that undergraduate students in the colleges throughout the University of Tehran would enrol in the undergraduate minor course. However, the course attracted undergraduate students from the College of Education only.

As originally developed, the curriculum had several problems, which made it difficult to meet the objectives of the course. Although the course was to train public and school librarians, there was no subject in public librarianship, and there was only one subject in school librarianship. It also appeared that the technical knowledge that students acquired for cataloguing and classification and other areas of librarianship, was not sufficient to carry out technical tasks efficiently (Saidi, 1977, p. 251). In 1971, there were 50 students in the undergraduate minor courses, of whom about 20 graduated. Ten went into librarianship, mostly in academic and special libraries, the rest were employed as teachers[9].

*The establishment of IRANDOC and TEBROC*

In 1968, John Harvey who was Chairman at the Library School of the University of Tehran (1967-1968), submitted to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education two proposals for the establishment of twin institutions, a national documentation centre and a national book processing centre. The Iranian Documentation Centre (IRANDOC), and the Tehran Book Processing Centre (TEBROC) were created as part of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education's policy to develop research institutions[10]. These two institutions played a vital role in formulating recommendations for national policies on the development of national information networks, standards, and information services in Iran. They also advised on other matters, but they were especially effective in bringing forward new concepts of special information services and promoting the value of professional librarianship to the Iranian community. Links were established by them with international bodies such as FID and Unesco. In addition, they set up short-term training courses for librarians and documentalists and their academic staff taught some library and information science subjects in library schools.

Although TEBROC and IRANDOC were not directly involved in education for librarianship, they, especially TEBROC produced some basic cataloguing tools and standards, which were badly needed for the development of this type of education in Iran. TEBROC began to study how to adapt American library principles to local conditions and how best to encourage the adoption in Iran of standard procedures (Harvey, 1973b). The technical processing of Persian books involved TEBROC in creating a series of fundamental technical and reference tools, such as authority files for main entry, especially for Iranian names (The Institute for Research and Planning in Science and Education, TEBROC, 1977; Sharify, 1959). Other tools prepared by TEBROC were adaptations of the schedules of the Library of Congress Classification



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and Dewey Decimal Classification for use in small public and school libraries (Fani, 1986; Taheri Eraghi, 1979; Kashefi, 1984; The National Library of Iran, 1987). However, despite all these efforts by TEBROC, which imitated the American approach in cataloguing and classification, TEBROC failed to produce an Iranian cataloguing code based on the resolutions of the International Conference on Cataloguing Principles, Paris, 1961. Iranian libraries still remained dependent on the Anglo-American cataloguing code.

### **In the 1970s**

Library education in Iran witnessed both some criticisms and developments in the 1970s. After Harvey's term as Head expired in 1968 the Library School was without a Head for a short time since there was no qualified Iranian who could be appointed at this position and the Faculty of Education now hesitated to appoint another American to the position. Criticism of the operations of the Library Department had begun to emerge. Saidi reports that some academic staff of the University of Tehran criticised the Library Department for being too American and considered that the curriculum of the School could not satisfy the needs of Iranian libraries. They preferred librarians to be scholars with a wide book knowledge who could work on Persian and Arabic classical works. The critics demanded that the curriculum should be adapted to the specifics of Persian language and to Iranian library needs. They also proposed that the curriculum should be taught in Persian (Saidi, 1977, pp. 248-9). Harvey states that there was a high pressure on the Library School to use Persian in all aspects of education (Harvey, 1973a, p. 9). However, the Library Department was unable to meet this demand, because there was a lack of trained Iranian academic staff and there were few effective textbooks in Persian available at this time. Ultimately, the Faculty of Education appointed Miles Jackson, who was already in the University as a Visiting Professor, as the Head of the Library School.

#### *The Pahlavi University library school*

After Vail Deale's failure to establish a library school at Pahlavi University in 1965, there was no other attempt to set up a library school there until 1971. At the beginning of the 1970s, Hooshang Ebrami, an Iranian with a doctoral degree from Pittsburgh University, came to Shiraz to play his part in the development of education for librarianship at Pahlavi University. At that time Pahlavi University had four colleges with their own libraries. There were altogether eight professional librarians in college libraries. Four were Americans, one in each of the colleges, which were, as Ebrami (1971) states, highly dependent upon them. He adds that Iranian professional librarians were dissatisfied with their jobs at Pahlavi University, because they felt discriminated against by the University in comparison with the Americans.

In 1971, Ebrami whose first plan for the establishment of a course at the undergraduate level was not admitted by Pahlavi University proposed another plan at the Master's level which was successful this time. Ebrami maintains that the university rejected his undergraduate course because essentially it did not follow American lines. In other words, to say, it was not a course at the Master's level[11] (Keshmiri and Rogers, 1979). The need to establish the course was stressed in a report given by Dr Guy A. Marco, Dean of the School of Library Science, Kent State University, on his visit to the University in Autumn 1973. The course was finally established in 1974 by

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recruiting Beverly Brewster who held a doctorate from Pittsburgh University and who had been adviser for the development of technical processing in TEBROC from November 1971 to 1973 (TEBROC, 1972). She had also taught part-time at the Library School of the University of Tehran in the academic year 1972-1973.

#### *New curricula*

With the new Master's program under way, Ebrami once more proposed that an undergraduate degree be introduced. He suggested that the undergraduate course might begin in 1976-1977. The Library School argued that librarians at levels lower than the Master's level were needed to do technical jobs in libraries. Moreover, it could argue that the Master's course in the University was highly dependent upon the presence of the American library educator, and Beverly Brewster pointed out that this dependence could easily place library education in Pahlavi University at risk if circumstances should change with regard to the employment of American educators such as her[12]. In 1976, the Library School was at last able to hire new academic staff to teach the Master's curriculum. In the second session of 1977-1978, the Library School recruited three more academic staff, two Americans and one Indian. Later, a Pakistani and one more Indian educator joined the staff.

#### *The School of Health Library and Information Science, the Imperial Medical centre*

The political stability, economic prosperity and rapid development of its educational and research institutions in the 1970s gave Iran a leading role in the region. In 1977, the World Health Organisation (WHO) undertook to support the establishment of a medical library school in the Imperial Medical Centre of Iran. Among its objectives was the training of qualified medical librarians for Middle East medical libraries. In summer 1977, the University of Illinois undertook to create and manage a School of Health Library and Information Science set up at the Medical Centre for this purpose (Harvey, 1989, p. 184). As Harvey (1989, p. 184), pointed out, the establishment of a library school in a medical institution of this kind was a new phenomenon for Iran, as it was in other countries.

Besides teaching the standard aspects of librarianship, because of the availability of advanced information technology in the Centre, the School also focused on information technology. The two-year Master's curriculum was similar to the curricula of other library schools in the middle 1970s except for its medical librarianship and technology related subjects. Students had to prepare a Master's dissertation. The first group of students had only finished their first term of instruction when the three American full time academic staff left the country because of the Islamic Revolution.

#### *Jundishapur University Library Education Programs*

In the academic year 1977-1978, Larry and Janet Barr, American Assistant Professors of librarianship and a group of four Iranian librarians, all graduates of the Master's course from the University of Tehran were hired as teaching staff for a Library School at the Master's level in the University of Jundishapur, Ahwaz *Library Journal* (1976). The admission requirements to the course were similar to those for other courses organised by Americans, or what had been established along American lines elsewhere in Iran. However, the Barrs' family did not stay long in Ahwaz because of the



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revolutionary disturbances which suspended all university classes, including the Library School in the second session of the academic year 1978-1979.

*The School of Library and Information Science, Farah Pahlavi University*

The Master's course at Farah (Women's) University was established in 1978 on the eve of the Revolution and closed in 1979. The Library School was set up by Nooriyeh Moosavi, an Iranian woman with a doctoral degree in Library and Information Science from Pittsburgh University. In August 1978, the Library School hired John Harvey as a full-time academic staff. In addition, as a way of improving limited resources for Farah Pahlavi Library School, a cooperative program to share teaching staff resources began with the School of Library and Information Science of the Imperial Medical Centre of Iran which had employed a number of qualified American library educators as discussed above. In early 1979, when the Library School recruited its second group of students, the classes were closed because of the Revolution (Harvey, 1989, p. 183).

### **Conclusions**

The 1960s saw the beginning of the implementation of comprehensive development plans in Iran. Education for librarianship was a part of this national endeavour to provide an infrastructure for research. The adoption of an American model for the creation and development of some Iranian universities led them to set up modern libraries, which needed professional librarians. The training of professional librarians required quality library educators and experienced librarians who were not available at that time in Iranian universities. Therefore, the Iranian government invited American library educators and professional librarians sponsored by American Foundations and Programs to Iran to establish library schools. The Americans set up library schools in the University of Tehran, Pahlavi University (then called Shiraz University), The Imperial Medical Centre (then called the University of Medical Sciences of Iran), Ahwaz University (then called Shahid Chamran University) and Farah Pahlavi University (then called Alzahra University). The American library educators set up Master's Courses and introduced American librarianship to Iranian students.

Library schools set up by Americans had considerable advantages for LIS in Iran. The library courses made Iranian students and library personnel familiar with new concepts and practices such as collection building, library cataloguing and classifications, modern library services and standards. Although the courses had difficulty in enrolling qualified candidates they showed that librarianship, as did other professions, needed university education. This was a new phenomenon in Iranian universities.

Despite these fruitful contributions from American library educators the Master's courses set up by them had some shortcomings. Most research papers dealt with compilation of bibliographies, directories, technical services tools and the like. While preparation of these tools was probably appropriate in the initial phase of development of the program, this was probably not the case for the later period when objectives such as creativity in practice, capabilities for independent research, and application of modern technology to local libraries were more relevant to the library profession in Iran.

In addition, the content, direction and readings of almost all courses focused on the literature from English speaking countries, particularly the US and the UK. The students became familiar with values and practices, which were meaningful in the civilized Western countries. There were many problems at the local libraries, such as poor reading materials in Persian and the low level of literacy at the national level, which were not covered by the Master's courses.

### Notes

1. Deale to Copeland, Shiraz, 22 September 1965.
2. In line with the first option, at least four qualified students (N. Sharify, F. Omid, A. Sepehri and H. Ebrami) had already gone to American library schools to study for higher degrees in librarianship.
3. Deale to Copeland, Shiraz, 22 September 1965.
4. Deale to Asheim, Shiraz, 4 October 1965.
5. Deale to Copeland, Shiraz, 22 September 1965.
6. Deale to Asheim, Shiraz, 4 October 1965.
7. P. Soltani. Interview by Z. Hayati. Tehran, 10 October 1993.
8. From the observation of the author as the student of the Master's course in the Library Department of the University of Tehran from 1976 to 1979 and Chairman of the Library Department of Shiraz University from 1986 to 1992. The same circumstances no doubt held in the School's early years in this respect as later.
9. M. Haghighi, Secretary of I.L.A. after the Revolution and graduate of the library minor course interview by Z. Hayati. Tehran, 3 October 1993.
10. The original proposals could not be found and Dr John Harvey has indicated that he does not retain copies of them.
11. Ebrami to Hayati, Los Angeles, 23 June 1993.
12. Pahlavi University "A new plan for establishing an undergraduate and a Master's courses from 1976/77", (Mehner, 1978).

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