PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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1. INTRODUCTION

Investing in public libraries is investing in the potential of the community in the information age where a well-informed society is the need of the day. Public libraries represent the equal right of every member of the community to find information for their education and development.

This chapter looks at the status of public libraries in the Asian Arab world (total of 12 countries), an area known for its deep respect to knowledge and reading which are interwoven in the teaching of the Holy Qura'n.

The main areas covered in the chapter are: history, development, and organizational setup of public libraries; resources and services and an investigation of the availability of OPACS; staff and building, and the main challenges that face public libraries in the region. It is noteworthy that the literature found about the 12 countries varies is amount, depth, and recentness. So, all the aspects could not be covered for all the countries covered in this chapter.

2. HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT, AND ORGANIZATIONAL SETUP

The genesis of most public libraries in the Asian Arab world was through the efforts of individuals and also through mosques, which traditionally housed books especially religious ones.

The practices of organizational setup or governance in this region vary from one nation to another. But the general trend is for the Ministries of Education or Culture to provide legal and administrative setups for public libraries. Below are the details of the historical development of public libraries and the practices of public library governance in each country.

2.1 Bahrain

Public libraries in Bahrain are supervised by the Directorate of Public Libraries in the Ministry of Education. There are nine public libraries. The largest public library is Manama Public Library that was established in 1946 and it is the depository for the United Nations Publications since 1975 and is also the national depository library of Bahrain (Ministry of Education in Bahrain n.d.). The situation where a public library serves the needs of the national library is not common. The decision was based on a recommendation made in 1982 by W.G. Alison, the past president of the UK Library Association who was invited by the Ministry of Edu-

cation in Bahrain. He recommended that the public library should function as the national library since the population in Bahrain is small. (Young & Ali1992)

The second largest library in Bahrain – Muharraq Public Library (renamed in 1997 to Bahrain National Bank Library) – was established in 1969. It includes several special collections including a special collection for the blind (Ibraheem 2006).

Other public libraries are: Isa Town Public Library (established in 1972), Sitra, Riffa, Hidd, and Jidhafs public libraries (established in 1976), Arad Public Library (established in 1979), and Salmanya Medical Center branch of public library (established in 1979) (Ministry of Education in Bahrain n.d.).

2.2 Iraq

In his book about the history of libraries in Iraq, Kazanchi (2000) points out that the first public library was Alsalam Library, which was established in 1920 with the efforts of the citizens. In 1926, after the library ceased providing its services, its collection was taken over by the Ministry of Education. In 1929 the Ministry opened its first library with the command of King Faisal of Iraq. Another library followed in 1930. In 1956 it was legislated to establish local administrations in the 14 governorates of Iraq, and these administrations started to establish public libraries. In the 60s, the Ministry of Interior Affairs, responsible for managing the governorates, decided to solve this duality by taking care of public libraries but keeping the technical supervision at the Ministry of Education. After the revolution of July 1968, the National Library took over the supervision of public libraries. A national conference was held in the same year and it recommended that either the Ministry of Interior Affairs or the Ministry of Local Government might supervise public libraries. Eventually the practice has been that the parent ministry of public libraries is taking care of these public libraries. In 1998, there were 127 public libraries (Kazanchi 2000).

According to Johnson (2005), there are 144 public libraries in Iraq now. Many of these libraries were damaged or looted due to the political circumstances. Recovery and reconstruction efforts are undergoing though. Arnoult (2004) stresses that the reconstruction agenda should include: working on finding suitable premises since many libraries were totally burnt, and efforts should be made to preserve what is left of the old collections. The second thing should be rebuilding catalogues. Computerisation is necessary, yet a prude decision has to ensure that the choices of libraries are compatible with each other.

Mosque libraries and private/public libraries are also common in Iraq. There are 33 public libraries in the mosques, supervised by the Ministry of Endowments.

As far as private/public library are concerned. Abdulqadir Aljeelany Library has 1700 manuscripts and 41,000 volumes (Kazanchi, 2000).

2.3 Jordan

Public libraries in Jordan are run by the city council of each municipality (Zash 1989, cited by Abu Shaikha and Younis 2006). There are 100 public libraries in Jordan. The first library was established in Irbid in 1957. The municipality of Greater Amman established Libraries Department to maintain its public libraries, and so did Irbid municipality (Qandeel, 2000). There are 38 public libraries and 11 IT centers supervised by the Municipality of Greater Amman (Alali 2007).

2.4 Kuwait

Al-Maktabah Al-Ahliyah or the people's library was the first public library in Kuwait; 18 citizens established it in 1923. It had 1500 books, most of which were lost or damaged (Abdel-Motey & Al-Ansari 2003). In 1936, the library received government supervision through the Department of Knowledge (later the Ministry of Education), and a branch library was opened in 1953. More public libraries were established as the means for the service was constantly increasing. In 1979, the supervision over public libraries was transferred from the Ministry of the Education to the National Council of Culture, Arts, and Literature. In 1988, public libraries came back under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. As of 2001, there were 25 public libraries (Alroomi, Alateeqi, Basha, Hafith, & Alali 2001).

2.5 Lebanon

The Ministry of Culture supervises public libraries in Lebanon, a country that still suffers from the aftermath of a long civil war.

The Ministry of Culture signed a number of agreements of cooperation with society and municipality libraries, making them "associate libraries" in the mission of promoting reading. As of February 2003, there were 22 associate libraries. And in 2005, ten more libraries joined (Ministry of Culture in Lebanon, 2007).

Baaklin National Library is actually a public rather than a national or depository library.

2.6 Oman

According to Al-Mufaraji (1992), the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture supervises public libraries in Oman. The oldest library is the Islamic Library of the Ministry, which was founded in 1980. A branch of the library was planned back then to be open in Salalah in southern Oman.

2.7 Palestine

Mosque libraries are common in the Islamic world and especially in Palestine. According to Alaqla (2002), Alaqsa Mosque Library is one of the most important public libraries in Palestine. Apart from mosque libraries which act as basically

specialized public libraries, Bergan (2000) makes note of two types of public libraries in Palestine: municipal public libraries which are the official ones, and private public libraries that were founded by the citizens.

Ghanim (2002) points out that in 1948 Israel confiscated hundreds of Palestinian public libraries and thousands of private ones. Later 13 new public libraries were established; five in the West Bank, and eight in the East Bank. Bergan (2000) adds that Nablus Municipality Library was established in 1960 and that was the first public library. The catalogue of the library is partially computerized. There are other public libraries, such as Ramallah Public Library and El Bireh Library.

2.8 Qatar

According to Khalifa (1992), early public libraries in Qatar appeared in the form of "Majalis Al Elm" or knowledge circles in private libraries that were open to the public and even to the illiterate by offering reading circles. Khalifa adds that the first official public library was established in 1956. In 1962 it was merged with the Central Library of the Ministry of Education, and then it started to act as both the national and the public library. In 1977 new public libraries started to emerge. Ahmad (2005) points out that this national/public library named "Dar Alkutub" or the house of books is under the supervision of the National Council of Culture, Arts, and Heritage since 1998.

Apart from Dar Alkutub, there are five public libraries in Qatar:

Alkhor Public Library (established in 1977), Ashamaal Public Library (established in 1979), Alkhansaa Public Library (established in 1981) and it offers its services to females only, Arrayaan Public Library (established in 1982), and Alwakrah Public Library (established in 1985) (National Council of Culture, Arts, and Heritage n.d.).

Kahlifa (1992) points out that apart from these six public libraries, there are two public libraries run by the Ministry of Mass Communication, 15 libraries administered by the Qatari Armed Forces, and the private library of Abdullah Alansari, which was opened to the public by his family. Ahmad (2005) also adds Sheikh Ali Bin Abdullah Al Thani's Library, which is a private library that acts as a public one. Both of these libraries are run by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs.

2.9 Saudi Arabia

As in the case of most countries in the Islamic world, the mosque is more than a place of worship; its role extends to act as a public activity center of education. According to Siddiqui (1995), most libraries evolved around the two Holy cities of Islam: Mecca and Medina.

Alharam Almakki (Meccan Haram Mosque) library (situated in Mecca, the spiritual capital of Muslims) is one of the oldest libraries in the Islamic world. Its roots date back to 160 H/776 A.D. In 1357 H/1938 A.D., King Abdulaziz formed a committee of scholars to study and organize its situation ("Library of the Holy Meccan Mosque" 2006). Alharam Almadani (The Medina Mosque) library, located in Medina, is the second holy city for Muslims after Mecca. It has also housed a public library for a long time. ("Library of the Holy Mosque of the Prophet", 2006). According to Siddiqui (1996), "Libraries of the two Holy Places (Makkah and Medina) are supervised by the Department of Holy Mosques" (p. 197).

Abbas (1993) points out that 1959 is the year when public libraries in Saudi Arabia were reborn. Abbas adds that this happened when the Ministry of Education established the General Directorate of Public Libraries (G.D.P.L.) with the responsibility to supervise public libraries. Technical operations such as acquisitions, cataloguing, indexing, and book selection are performed centrally by the G.D.P.L. There are 59 libraries, 47 of which are managed by the GDPL. The Ministry of Pilgrimage and Endowments manages seven public libraries, the Department of Holy Mosques manages three, while the Department of Religion, Ifta, Dawah, and Guidance manages one public library (Siddiqui, 1995).

Since 2004, the Ministry of Culture and Information took over the responsibility of public libraries. The total number of public libraries has now increased to 80 libraries ("Public Libraries", 2005).

2.10 Syria

Public libraries in Syria are called cultural centers and are supervised by the Ministry of Culture. There are 64 cultural centers that offer library services in addition to other activities such as workshops, exhibitions, and lectures. The collections are expected to have the diversity that meets everyone's taste. There are also mobile libraries that are called mobile cultural units (Al-Laham, 1992). Administratively, in each Syrian governorate, there is a Cultural Department (Mudeeriyat Al-thaqafah), which supervises cultural centers (Ministry of Culture in Syria n.d.). In the capital Damascus, there are eight cultural centers, three of which have a collection of 95300 volumes (Damascus Cultural Department, n.d.).

Al-Laham (1992) points out that very few centers have library specialists. The Cultural Department coordinates the standardization of cataloguing and classification, but the centers are supposed to take care of their catalogues and acquisitions.

A review of eight cultural department websites showed that none of them has an OPAC.

2.11 United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates is a federal country, so it is normal that each state or emirate of the seven has its own way of dealing with public libraries. The Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Society Development, however, coordinates these efforts and offers a collective OPAC at: http://www.libraries.gov.ae.

There are six public libraries in Dubai. The main library was established in 1963. Five branch libraries were established later on as the need increased. In 2003, the Governor of Dubai issued a decree that organized public libraries . These are supervised by the Public Libraries Section, which falls under the Department of Administrative Affairs in the Municipality of Dubai (Abu Eed & Alareedy 2005).

Dubai public libraries' OPAC is available at: http://www.libraries.ae.

The Cultural Foundation Library (Daar Alkutub) is the main public library in Abu Dhabi. It was established in 1981 (Dubai Cultural Council n.d.). Daar Alkutub has an OPAC available at: http://horizon.cultural.org.ae

Sharjah Public Library was established in 1971 and it was supervised by the Ministry of Information and Culture. But in 1980, the Department of Culture and Information was established in Sharjah that assumed its role. Now the Sharjah Library has five branch libraries (Sharjah Library, n.d.). There are branch libraries in Kalbaa, and in Khor Fakken, both established in 1989 (Dubai Cultural Council n.d.).

Sharjah Library OPAC is available at: http://www.shjlib.gov.ae/

Fujairah Public Library was established in 1974, and it is under the supervision of Fujairah Cultural Center. While Ras Alkhaimah Public Library was established in 2004 under the supervision of Ras Alkhaimah Cultural Center (Dubai Cultural Council n.d.).

2.12 Yemen

According to Alqurashy (2003), Public libraries in Yemen are maintained by the Public Authority of Books, which was established in 1990 as a part of the Ministry of Culture. Between 1999 and 2003, 15 new libraries have been opened. . It is noteworthy that the Public Authority of Books provides books to some public libraries that were established by some citizens, and it also works on the "Books Corner" Project, which aims at making books available in schools.

3. RESOURCES, AND SERVICES

The statistics available about the collections and resources of public libraries were meager and outdated. Services available are mostly traditional such as circulation and basic reference service. Public libraries are commonly used by students who

look for a quiet place during exams period. OPACs are not common and so are other electronic services.

3.1 Bahrain

Young and Ali (1992) pointed out that public libraries have had a big percentage of title redundancy, which is normal due to the need to provide basic collection to everyone.

3.2 Iraq

The collection of public libraries in Iraq is 2,110,000 items, and circulation is the main service provided due to the political unrest (Kazanchi 2000).

3.3 Jordan

The collections of public libraries in Jordan are around half a million books and 300 periodical titles. The libraries serve around 1000 users daily and loan 136,000 books yearly (Alali 2007).

3.4 Kuwait

By 1990, the total collection of all public libraries numbered 294,033 items and the total staff numbered 87. In addition, the central State Library, which was opened in 1986, had a collection of 140,000 volumes and a staff of 52 employees (Abdel-Motey & Al-Ansari,2003). Due to Iraqi invasion on Kuwait in 1990, a big percentage of these items were either looted or vandalized. Abdel-Motey and Al Humood (1992) point out that 261,752 items were lost with an estimated value of 4.5 million US dollars.

The holdings of public libraries are 442,262 volumes, 17% of which is on literature, 15% on geography and history, 17% on social studies, 12% on religion, 8% on pure sciences, 10% on applied sciences, and 7% are non-Arabic materials (The Libraries Administration, 2000, cited by Abdel-Motey & Al-Ansari 2003). Abdel-Motey and Al-Ansari also point out that this is way too far from IFLA/UNESCO standard for public libraries which requires 1.5-2.5 books per capita. To meet this standard, the public library collection has to add 3,957,738 books.

A section for technical services in the Libraries Department in the Ministry of Education takes care of cataloguing and classification of items. Public libraries receive books with catalogue cards ready to be used (Altammar & Badawi 1994).

Al-Qallaf and Al-Azmi's study in 2002 shows that only "eight (34.8%) libraries have at least one PC while 15 (65.2%) libraries are not using any form of information technology" (P. 294).

Libraries Administration has an OPAC that allows users to search the collections of eight of the 25 public libraries. It is available at: http://library.moe.edu. kw/.

3.5 Oman

As of 1992, the Islamic Library had 21,937 books and it also has a collection for children. Lack of staff was evident in the library (Al-Mufaraji, 1992).

3.6 Palestine

Alaqsa Mosque Library has 1000 manuscripts and over 10,000 books (Alaqla 2002) while Nablus Public Library has 70,000 volumes and 24 employees. Journal subscriptions are available but Israeli censorship and restrictions make the acquisition difficult. The library receives 500 visitors and 300 book loans a day. Other Public libraries include Ramallah Public Library, which has 40,000 volumes. El Bireh Library has 15,.000 volumes (Bergan 2000).

One of the private/public libraries is Ansari Library, which was founded in 1985 and is only 135 square meters in size. Its collection is relatively large compared to its size. According to Bergan (2000) it has:

> "Over 40.000 books in Arabic, many of them unique, including about 65 % of all the books that were ever published in Palestine since 1862. It contains maybe the most extensive and growing collection of Palestinian newspapers and periodicals – dating back to 1910. It also contains a growing collection of some 25.000 books, periodicals and reference works in English and French" (Bergan, 2000).

3.7 Qatar

According to Ahmad (2005), the total number of users of the six public libraries and the two private/public libraries in 2004 was 25700, with Sheikh Ali Bin Abdullah Al Thani's Library being the most heavily used; it had 15875 patrons due to the religious nature of its collections which appeals to the public. Ahmad points out that the main collection in the eight libraries she studied is of traditional materials; there is a shortage of other materials such as audio-visual and electronic resources. Three of the eight libraries use software to enable their patrons to search the collection. In terms of buildings, only four public libraries have buildings that were initially constructed to be public libraries (Ahmad, 2005).

3.8 Saudi Arabia

Alharam Almakki (Meccan Mosque) library has more than 500,000 books, 3000 magazines, and more than 8000 manuscripts. Many public library owners donated their collections to Alharam Almakki Library. Its collection contains religious books, along with books on Arabic language, history, education, psychology, sociology, geography, economics, and even medicine ("Library of the Holy Meccan Mosque", 2006).

Alharam Almadani (The Medina Mosque) library has 60,000 book titles, 5000 manuscripts, and 31,829 audio items. The library has 75 employees ("Library of the Holy Mosque of the Prophet", 2006).

3.9 United Arab Emirates

The six public libraries in Dubai had a collection of 225,824 items in 2003 (Abu Eed & Alareedy 2005). Sharjah Public Library has 171,000 monograph titles and 794 periodical titles. Kalbaa branch library has 24,538 book titles, and 1500 periodical titles. Khor Fakkan branch library has 25,554 book titles and 1680 periodical titles (Dubai Cultural Council n.d.).

The Cultural Foundation Library (Daar Alkutub) in Abu Dhabi has 300,000 book titles, 1450 periodical titles, 4000 e-journals, 12,000 manuscripts, and 7000 audio-visual items (Dubai Cultural Council n.d.).

Fujairah Public Library has 14000 titles, while Ras Alkhaimah Public Library has 15000 titles (Dubai Cultural Council n.d.).

3.10 Yemen

On the average, the libraries in the capitals of the governorates have 10.00 monograph titles. Dar Alkutub (the House of Books), the public library in the Governorate of the Capital (Sanaa) was visited by 72,000 persons in 2003 clubs, universities, and societies (Alqurashy 2003).

4. PERSONNEL AND PHYSICAL FACILITIES

Availability and preparedness of professional staff is one of the primary concerns in most Asian Arab countries. A master's degree is not required for employing professional staff. Mostly they require a library degree, which is also not commonly found in these libraries in this part of the world; this appears to be a major challenge for staffing of public libraries.

In 1992, in Bahrain only one employee in public libraries had a master's degree in library science. And although this statistic is very old, h concern is found in almost all public libraries in the Arab world (Young & Ali, 1992). Only 17% of the employees in Iraqi public libraries are professional (Kazanchi, 2000). The situation in Kuwait is better, but does not meet the bottom-line though. There are 148 employees in public libraries in Kuwait. Only 25% of them have college degrees in librarianship. IFLA/UNESCO standard requires 33% (Abdel-Motey & Al-Ansari, 2003). In Qatar, the six public libraries and the two private/public libraries have a total of 115 employees (Ahmad, 2005).

The situation is not brighter when it comes to public library building, but documented information is not available on this issue. In Iraq only one third of the Iraqi

public libraries have suitable buildings (Kazanchi 2000). In Kuwait, availability of suitable buildings has always been a concern in Kuwaiti public libraries. Zehery (1975) noted that the need is pressing for "functional, friendly, and accessible library buildings to replace the present poor facilities." (P. 169) In 1994, Altammar and Badawi pointed out that although that Libraries Administration in the Ministry of Education set standards for the buildings of school libraries in 1987, both school and public libraries do not meet these standards. The situation was not better in 2003, as reported in the findings of Abdel-Motey and Al-Ansari's study; 63% of public librarians complained that there is a shortage in buildings and areas, and 48% described the furniture as unsuitable.

5. NON-GOVERNMENTAL CONTRIBUTION

Non-governmental contribution is more visible in public libraries buildings that have been sponsored by benevolent personalities such as Abdul Hameed Shoman Public Library in Jordan, King Abdulaziz Public Library in Saudi Arabia, and Juma Almajed Center for Culture and Heritage Library in the UAE. There are libraries donated by the corporate sector such the Public Knowledge Library in Oman. Other examples include public libraries run by non-governmental institutions such as Assabil Association in Lebanon and other smaller libraries in Palestine and Oman.

5.1 Abdul Hameed Shoman Public Library in Jordan

A noted public library in Jordan is Abdul Hameed Shoman Public Library, established by Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation in 1986 and it had a computerized reference system, the first of its kind in Jordan (Natour 1988:276). Alali (2007) points out that 96,666 users visited the library in 2006, and that it houses 118, 000 book and audio-visual titles and 10.000 journal issues. All the operations of the 2100 square meter library are fully digitized and it has several database subscriptions. It is the national distributor in Jordan for CDS/ISIS (currently WINISIS) library system which was developed by the UNESCO. Shoman Library offered the system to around 60 academic, school, and public libraries in Jordan. The library had 25400 subscribers in 2002. There are no fees to subscribe and the subscribers are entitled to receive a group of services including circulation, reference service, photocopying, and manual and electronic current awareness service. It has specialized services such as journal listings for researchers and library training for other librarians and library science students in Jordan. The library is active in several vital projects including a mobile library project since 1998, working on a unified union list of periodicals in Jordan since 1988, Arabising Dewey Decimal Classification System in cooperation with ALECO (Arab League Educational, Cultural and

Scientific Organization), and cooperating with Dubai Municipality and Juma Al-majed Center Library to publish a trilingual thesaurus, a CD version of which was launched in 2001 that had 50,000 terms. The library has also contributed to the establishment of several public libraries in Jordan and Palestine (Abu Eed 2000). Abdul Hameed Shoman Public Library has an OPAC available at: http://www.shoman.org

5.2 Lebanese Case

Assabil Association, Friends of Public Library, is a non-governmental organization that has been working on establishing public libraries in Lebanon. Assabil was founded in 1997 and it runs 25 public libraries and has distributed over 100,000 books to public libraries and schools, in addition to organizing training sessions to librarians. Between 2001and 2005, the two municipal public libraries in Beirut received 94,431 visitors, and 350 school visits (Assabil, 2007).

The Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) established 14 Reading and Cultural Activity Centres. OIF is an intergovernmental organization that has more than 60 French speaking countries. During the period 2002-2004, these centers received 186,198 visits, had 10,086 annuals subscribers, and loaned 47,036 books (Weber, 2007).

5.3 Oman

There are public libraries in Oman that were established by foreign institutions. This includes the public library of the British Council, which had 80,000 volumes in 1991, and the library of the United States Information Services USIS that was established in 1986. The collections of both libraries are mostly in English (Karim 1991).

Back in 1990, the Petroleum Development Oman Company established the Technical Public Library that was renamed as the Public Knowledge Library because its collection expanded to cover other disciplines. 1996, Petroleum Development Oman Company gave the Library to the Diwan of Royal Court that now manages the library (Petroleum Development Oman n.d.).

The Public Knowledge Library has an OPAC at: http://www.publiclibrary.gov.om.

5.4 Palestine

There are some public libraries set up by non-governmental organizations such as Bethlehem Bible College Library which is open to the public, Pontifical Mission Library at Notre Dame, and the public library run by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (Bergan 2000).

5.5 Saudi Arabia

One of the noted public libraries in Saudi Arabia is King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh. The library is a non-profit organization and was established in 1985 (Aldobaian 1995). The library was opened to the public in 1987, and it added an independent building for female patrons in 1996, and opened a branch of the library in 1999 ("About the Library" n.d.). The library receives 250.,000 users annually, and houses one million items (Alali 2003). The library has an OPAC available at: http://ipac.kapl.org.sa/elib/.

5.7 United Arab Emirates

One of the noted public libraries in Dubai, United Arab Emirates is Juma Almajed Center for Culture and Heritage Library, named after Juma Almajed, a UAE businessman. It was established in 1988 and its main collection came from acquiring a number of private collections (Boumarafi 1996). The center has a collection of around 500.000 items ranging from privates collections which were acquired from 48 private collections and also a collection of references (Bamiflih 2003).

6. CHALLENGES

Public libraries in the Asian Arab are facing numerous challenges. Most serious problems are related to staff, physical infrastructure, and provision of services. In some countries, financial problems also pose a serious challenge while in other place organizational and management issues are aiding the development of public library systems and services. Affluent nations lack strategic planning. Specific problems reported in the case of distinct nations are reviewed in this section country-wise.

6.1 Jordan

Qandeel (2000) summarises the challenges the Jordanian public libraries face.

1. Little value is given to public libraries in the structure of municipalities. A crucial decision was taken that no municipality budget would be approved unless it has a library in the hope that it would promote the cause of public libraries at the lower grass root level.. The steps taken by Irbid and Greater Amman municipalities in establishing a department for pubic libraries was a very positive step to alleviate the status of public libraries;
2. Lack of awareness about the importance of public libraries; citizens are not fully aware of the potential role of the public library;
3. Lack of a plan to establish an infrastructure to expand public libraries;
4. Absence of adequate commitment on the part of the Ministry of Culture;

5. Weak children resources and services; and
6. Difficulties with regard to digitization due to lack of qualified staff.

6.2 Kuwait

After an exploratory study by Alansari, Abu Zayd, Alqudsi, Alabdullah, and Al-sharekh in 1999, 17 recommendations were made to develop the status of public libraries in Kuwait. The study pointed out that 50% of the surveyed members – in particular housewives and retired members of the community – did not use public libraries. A need was felt to make an improvement in the areas such as budgeting, collections, non-traditional media, buildings and furniture, computers and IT facilities, Internet service, children materials and services, availability of qualified staff, and circulation and reference service. These recommendations overlap with the findings of the study of Abdel-Motey and Al-Ansari study in 2003. Most obvious problems they had identified included lack of staff incentives, shortage in allocated budgets, lack of IT and modern communication, lack of user's information literacy, shortage in buildings and areas, lack of professional development, shortage in qualified personnel, lack of standards and guidelines, unsuitable furniture, problems/policies, procedures, shortage in collections and lack of cooperation (p. 33).

6.3 Palestine

The Palestinian public libraries are constrained due to the political unrest, financial limitations, availability of professional staff, and lack of standards (Bergan 2000).

6.4 Saudi Arabia

Sharayah (2007) noted that the Saudi public libraries faced several problems that included absence of needed legislation, the inadequacy of grants in annual budgets, shortage of qualified personnel, scarcity of suitably furnished buildings, absence of book selection policy, lack of coordination and cooperation between public libraries, and lack of media coverage and publicity, absence of libraries in larger community centers in cities as large as Riyadh and Jeddah.

6.5 Syria

Al-Laham (1992) analyzed the situation of the Syrian cultural centers and noted that these faced two main challenges. First, these are housed in buildings that were originally built as residential buildings. These buildings are so small for the functions of public libraries. Secondly, these centers are not located in suitable quarters. Another problem was related to the non-availability of professional staff.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The rich history of knowledge and scholarship appreciation in the Arab world in general and in the Asian Arab world in particular has exhibited its effects on public libraries. Mosque libraries along with private libraries were often open to the public and these played the role of public library for an extended period of time. These served like gateways to knowledge, scholarship, and enlightenment.

Common characteristics that can be noted for the public library institution in this region is as follows

1. The parent institution or ministry responsible for organizing public library services in a country has its inherent merits or demerits. In some countries, the responsibility of public libraries has shifted from one place to another, which reflects the indecision about where this vital establishment fits. (See Table 1). Another observation is that public libraries are viewed differently in several nations. In some countries, public libraries have their own department as part of a ministry, while in others they are maintained by municipalities with little, or even no central coordination.
2. Benevolence and individual philanthropy have made a major contribution in the recent developments in public libraries in the region. Many of these individual donations provided the foundation for public libraries. The corporate sector rarely contributes to that. Only three libraries sponsored by the corporate sector could be tracked;: Shoman Public Library in Jordan, The Knowledge Library in Oman, and The National Bank Public Library.
3. The location and conditions of public library buildings are not inviting in most of the cases. Vast majority of public library buildings were not initially constructed for the specialized purposes of a public library. Equipping libraries with suitable furniture also needs to be addressed in many public libraries.
4. Professional staff is a prerequisite for public library services and most libraries in this region lack in this area.
5. Political circumstances always adversely affect public libraries in Palestine. Iraqi capture of Kuwait had a devastating effect on Kuwaiti public libraries.
6. Non-traditional materials are growing slowly and so is the IT infrastructure. Most public libraries do not have OPACs.

Table 1. Facts and Figures About Public Libraries in the Asian Arab World

Country	Population	Literacy Rate	Approximate Number of Public Libraries	Supervising Institution/ Minisrty	Notes
Bahrain	708,573	86.5%	9 (year not available)	Ministry of Education	

Iraq	27,499,638	74.1%	127 (as of 1998)	Ministry of Interior Affairs	
Jordan	6,053,193	89.9%	38 (as of 2007)	City Council of the Municipality	
Kuwait	2,505,559	93.3%	25 (as of 2001)	Ministry of Education	
Lebanon	3,925,502	87.4%	32 "associate libraries" (as of 2003)	Ministry of Culture	
Oman	3,204,897	81.4%	2 (as of 1992)	Ministry of National Heritage and Culture	
Palestine	Gaza Strip: 1,482,40 West Bank: 2,535,927	Gaza Strip: 92.4% West Bank: 92.4%	13 (year non available)	Municipalities	
Qatar	907,229	89%	5	Ministry of Education	
Saudi Arabia	27,601,038	78.8%	80 (as of 2005)	Ministry of Culture and Information	
Syria	19,314,747	79.6%	64 (as of 1992)	Ministry of Culture	Public libraries are called "cultural centres"
UAE	4,444,011	77.9%	Dubai: 6 (as of 2005) Abu Dhabi: 1 (data not ascertained) Sharjah: 1 with 5 branches Other Emierates: accurate data could not be warranted	Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Society Development with indepen-dency to each emirate's muni-cipality	
Yemen	22,230,531	50.2%	NA	Ministry of Culture	

Populations and latentcy rates are according to CIA Factbook available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html.

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