Globalization Challenges and Opportunities for Developing Countries: Iranian Academic Libraries Approach

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Abstract
Globalization is a multidimensional concept and consequently has interdisciplinary character. Library and information science (LIS) and globalization have mutual effects on each other. The purpose of this study is to review and analyze the changes brought on by globalization in Mashhad universities’ libraries—excluding Ferdowsi University, Azad University, and Medical University and the perspectives of their librarians towards this phenomenon. This research employed a survey of 50 academic librarians in 3 universities by a questionnaire to find the current status of them. An interview was conducted then to investigate Mashhad librarians’ point of view regarding globalization. Findings showed that Ferdowsi university library performance better than the two other libraries and Mashhad academic librarians have positive perspectives to globalization.

Keywords: Globalization, Challenges and Opportunities, Developing Countries, Information and library science, Iranian Academic Libraries

Introduction
There are several definitions of globalization in the related literature. Castle defines globalization as the advent of networked society which affects all aspects of human life. Albrow [1] believes that global age is an era in which all people are connected to each other in a united community. Watters [2] defines it as a social process which leads to the elimination of geographic boundaries from socio-cultural systems. Reviewing the definitions of globalization in different contexts, one can notice some common points—such as networked world, being inclusive, integration, and elimination of geographic [3], [4]. As Gerard [3] stated all people who has access to international networks can use the newest and up-to-date information in their interested areas.

Libraries are, by their very nature, complex organizations where the main reason is to provide equal access to information and recorded knowledge for the society it serves. Living in an era known as “information age” and knowledge-based society, libraries are more upbeat on the possibilities opened up by the globalization. On the other hand, in the latter decades of the 20th century the pace of social change has quickened dramatically as a result of increasing connectivity among people and countries worldwide through information and communication technologies (ICT). In fact, both library and information science (LIS) and globalization depend heavily on ICT to meet their objectives. Innovations in ICT let people share information and knowledge more. In the other words it has been the central and driving force for globalization process. Academic libraries also have been affected. Globalization is a trend whereby various kinds of global relations emerge, proliferate, and expand. Developments in communications and data
processing have allowed global links between libraries to become denser, faster, more reliable, and much cheaper [3].

**Background**

Globalization is the case of study from different aspects such as economical, political, and cultural ones. One of the important aspects regarding this phenomenon is the informational one. Today information exchange has become a necessity for the international relations [6]. Although at first it was assumed that globalization would lead to the greatest improvements in economical, cultural, and political aspects, informatization was as important as the other ones [5]. In other words, globalization of economics, politics and cultures is dependent on information flow and exchange.

Studies carried out regarding information exchange and information flow have lead to different theories and patterns which are used as a basis for connecting LIS and globalization. These theories prove that information, as the basic context of library functions, is coordinated with the goals of globalization. The nature of information allows it to expand worldwide through communications. Some of these theories are taken from physics, biology, and social science. Goffman’s epidemic theory, Fourier’s law, and Hall theory are some examples. All of these theories show the nature of information which makes it portable, transferable, and usable in vast areas. There are also theories based on the information exchange among countries and use of knowledge in information era. The more countries are active in information cycle, the more they use the opportunities brought on by globalization. Cheng's pattern [8] -which consists of theory of tree, theory of crystal, theory of birdcage, theory of DNA, theory of fungus and theory of amoeba - is one of them.

There is numerous research which has studied the effects of globalization on universities and libraries. Oladele [9] examined the extent to which globalization has affected library development in Africa. He carried out an empirical survey of challenges affecting the development of Nigerian libraries. He found out that government frequent policies, funding inadequacy, weak national information infrastructure are among all other factors responsible for underdeveloped nature of most libraries in Nigeria.

Becker [5] investigated the role of librarians in Australian universities by a qualitative method. She studies the practices and perspectives employed by librarians in the library and university, and within higher education. This study revealed that models of globalization at universities vary according to the institution’s values, mission and goals. She also found that proactive librarians stimulate globalization process.

**Globalization and LIS**

Since both globalization and LIS are dependent on information, they have interaction with each other. Globalization has affected functions and process of LIS. The followings are some of these affected functions.

**Globalization and LIS education**

Dramatic and fast changes in ICT are challenging the knowledge of librarians. Thus to overcome these challenges they have changed the content and curricula of the information and library science education. Distance education in LIS has become more common so that developing countries can benefit from this opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills. Traditionally, libraries are responsible for teaching information literacy to their clients. Since there have been dramatic changes due to the ICT innovations, firstly they had to acquire the teaching knowledge before they could teach information literacy skills. Therefore, information literacy skills should be included in their educational programs.

**Globalization and Standards**

Globalization acquires standardization and integration. In order to reach its global aims, LIS needs to standardize its functions and activates. This leads to decrease expanses and improve the quality of library services. Standardization helps libraries to share information and enable them to use the services of other libraries according to their needs. For instance, in order to offer services to the users worldwide it is necessary to design the library website according to the global standards.
Globalization and Library Services and Functions

Globalization has caused many changes in library functions. Not only globalization has affected the way users access to information but also it has influenced the process of resource selection and acquisition, information organization and reference services.

Collection development and acquisitions
It is essential that libraries select the information resources based on the information needs of its users. Because of the developments in ICT, libraries are moving towards electronic and digital collections. They don’t rely anymore on their own resources to meet the need of y make use of the information resources all around the world.

Information Organization
The advent of global bibliography, union catalogues, online public access catalogues (OPAC), and institutions who offer bibliographic services to libraries (like OCLC and WorldCat) are some of the changes caused by globalization.

Reference Services
The aim reference service is to help clients to use resources both in the library and other information centers. Today an electronic reference service has become common. This is done through the facilities offered by World Wide Web such as email, telecommunication, and online chat.

Problem Statement
Regarding the close relationship between LIS and globalization, it is imperative that Librarians see this phenomenon as more of an opportunity than a threat in order to reach library's global goals by strategic planning. It seems that librarians has doubt in coordinating their library with the fast pace of globalization. To solve this problem, they need to be fully aware of current situation and understand the circumstances. If libraries want to play an effective and key role in future of the communities –as their social mission requires- it is inevitable to make librarians aware of new circumstances. It is obvious that in order to be proactive in proving their effective role in society, librarians need to enhance skills to confront challenges. Studies show that academic libraries have the key role in globalization process through providing information sources for academic community. The academic library has a special function as the gateway to information in all of its forms for the university (academic community) to bring the broadest possible international dimensions to research by collection development and acquisition. Libraries and information centers need a context in which they can generalize and internationalize their services and resource sharing. Globalization can provide this context. The nature of information as the main context and material of library functions is completely coordinated with objectives of globalization. Not only globalization has increased the access to information but also facilitated the information flow worldwide. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the current status of Mashhad academic libraries and identify perspectives of librarians regarding this phenomenon.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions
Being under the pressure of globalization, library services have changed considerably and go beyond the old frameworks. The main question of this research is: What are the elements of globalization that drive change in academic libraries and how do Mashhad university libraries have responded to the changes? This study aims at examining Mashhad university libraries’ activities to determine their current status. It also tries to uncover the approach they use to help globalize their services. This study aims to find out whether globalization is valued and funded within the libraries of Mashhad universities. This study investigates whether the factors such as international conference attendance, foreign language abilities, and international organizational collaboration affected the libraries’ activities.

Research Procedure and Data Collection
This study was carried out in 2 phases. At the first step a survey was conducted by a questionnaire to determine those librarians who are particularly active in globalization practices. The survey questions were based on the questions and statements identified while reviewing the relevant literature. The aim of
survey questionnaire was also to explore what and to what extent (degree and depth) globalization procedures are valued and supported in Mashhad university libraries. Questions about university and library policies regarding globalization, criteria for hiring new personnel, budget support for librarians trying to gain international experiences were included in the questionnaire to clarify whether international practices are valued and supported. At the second step interview was conducted to gain a rich understanding of the practices and perspectives of librarians which actively engage in international activities in order to work effectively within their own institutions and with external organizations to internationalize the library.

The designed questionnaire was distributed among academic librarians in the central libraries of Ferdowsi University, medical science, and Azad University in Mashhad. This questionnaire was designed to gather data concerning the programs and strategies being used in Mashhad university libraries. The survey questionnaire was distributed to all 50 Mashhad university librarians. 44 university librarians responded, yielding a response rate of 88%. Respondents were asked to evaluate to what degree (ranging from very low to very high) the activities proposed in the question was considered in library. The questionnaire was used to determine the current status of the studied libraries regarding policies, budgets, administration and organizational structures, holding/participating international conferences/workshops, international collaboration with other organizations, information literacy, and hiring criteria. Data collected through the survey were analyzed using quantitative statistical techniques. 15 librarians were chosen for interview phase of the study. Then interview was conducted to investigate the perspectives and point of view of Mashhad academic librarians. In the second part of the study interview was conducted. In the interview process they were asked to explain about their general opinion about changes brought on by globalization to the world, community and in particular to their library. They also provided examples of policies and practices in their library in responding to globalization. Librarians offered some suggestions about globalization related programs to be done in the future. Their overall points of view were concluded from their answers.

**Findings**

Since a mixed methodology is used in this study, the findings are going to be discussed in 2 parts. The first part is related to the survey. Demographical information collected through questionnaire showed that 77% of librarians working in Mashhad academic libraries were female and only 23% are male.

Table 1 shows the educational status of Mashhad academic librarians.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Librarians Degree</th>
<th>Ferdowsi</th>
<th>Medical</th>
<th>Azad</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.S</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.S</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Educational status of librarians

As table 1 indicates, the majority of respondents were had B.S in Library and Information Science.

Table 2. Language skills level of librarians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English level Library</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ferdowsi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Language skills level of librarians

As discussed before, the aim survey questionnaire was to explore to what extent globalization is considered in Mashhad academic libraries, results of questionnaire showed the point of view of the Mashhad academic librarians in 6 categories consisting of policies and strategies, technical and public services, collection development and
acquisition, management, and ICT. Table 3 shows the performance of Mashhad academic libraries from the point of view of librarians. The responses were coded from 1 to 5 presenting the performance excellence from very weak to excellent. In this table the mean of answers of each library's staff is shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library performance</th>
<th>Ferdowsi</th>
<th>Medical</th>
<th>Azad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical services</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection development</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public services</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Performance of Mashhad academic libraries regarding globalization from the point of view of librarians

Results showed that transforming towards globalization is taking place in Ferdowsi University. Different parts of studied universities acted in various ways. Effective practices have been done in Ferdowsi University in technical services, collection development and acquisition, and ICT. For example, in technical services there is a good collaboration with international information centers. They also follow the universal standards. They have provided the ICT infrastructures necessary for globalization.

There has been a good attention to foreign languages in collection development and acquisition. Contrary to Ferdowsi University, Medical and Azad Universities responded passively to globalization effects. They had great basic problems in ICT infrastructures.

The interview part provides us with the point of views of librarians, examples and suggestions.

In the interview process they were asked to explain about their general opinion about changes brought on by globalization to the world, community and in particular to their library. Here are some examples of librarians' quotations about their opinion towards globalization:

“I think that globalization is an opportunity for extending our services and use other libraries services.”

“In my opinion globalization can provide a rich context for sharing our knowledge with other librarians worldwide.”

“I see it both an opportunity and a challenge. It provides a competitive environment for libraries and the ones who want to survive should be active. Small libraries may not survive in such an environment.”

“I consider it as a threat for developing countries since there is a gap between us and developed ones.”

They also provided examples of policies and practices in their library in responding to globalization. The following quotations are some examples they provided:

“Virtual education and virtual courses have affected the library’s collection development policies.”

“We don’t offer any special services to our foreign clients.”

“Library or university doesn’t have any strategies to encourage librarians to participate in research activities.”

“Our library is active in collaborating with other information centers –both national (NLI) and international (LC and OCLC) - in doing its technical chores such as organization.”

“Our library uses international standards like MARC, Z39.50 and Dublin Core in doing tasks.”

“Although we don’t use FRBR or RDA in library’s technical services yet, there have been many workshops and seminars about research aspects of it.”

“Collection development policies have a great focus on providing materials and resources in English and then Arabic.”

“We use publishers’ online catalogues for selecting material.”

“Our library website contains a gateway to open access resources.”

“Our website access links to library’s online public access catalogue OPAC.”

“Our library website is available in Persian and English.”
“We offer virtual reference desk via our website.”
“We offer electronic document delivery services to our clients.”
“There is no funding for librarians who want to participate in international activities”
They offered some suggestions about globalization related programs to be done in the future.
“Workshops can be held to make librarians familiar with different cultures.”
“New criteria for hiring new staff will be more helpful.”
Their overall points of view were concluded from the answers.

Conclusion
The results of this study indicate a progressive approach towards globalization in Mashhad academic libraries. Responding to the increasingly changing environment, Mashhad librarians try to present new ideas and operational methods to the library.
Librarians working in Mashhad academic libraries see the globalization as an opportunity. They believe that information sharing, standardization, international collaborations along with decreasing expenses and avoiding waste of time are the benefits of joining the globalization phenomenon.

Research Recommendations
- Providing the necessary context for knowledge-based global community
- Respecting freedom of thought and global civilization through offering services to users
- Being fair in offering services to users in order to eliminating inequality in accessing information
- Eliminating digital gap to reach a democratic community
- Paying enough attention to user education to reach constant development
- Implementing new ICT in library services
- Providing digital libraries of available resources for global use
- Attending international conferences and workshops to share ideas
- Serving the users by making the information accessible and information sharing

References
[8] 1/nayyer/