A STUDY OF CLASSIFICATION OF ARABIC MATERIALS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the classification challenges faced by academic libraries in Selected university libraries in Kwara State, Nigeria in organising Arabic materials. Traditional systems like Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and Library of Congress Classification (LCC) are inadequate for accurately categorizing Arabic texts, leading to frequent wrong classification, limited access, and hindrance to research in fields such as Islamic studies. The study's objectives were to (i) identify specific issues in classifying Arabic materials, (ii) assess the adequacy of current classification schemes, and (iii) propose improvements. A descriptive survey was conducted with librarians in cataloguing roles at three universities, yielding an 80% response rate from 50 copies of questionnaires. Findings highlight major issues, including insufficient librarian training (75%), inadequate classification schemes (62.5%), wrong classification of Islamic subjects (50%), and transliteration challenges (37.5%). DDC and LCC were primarily used, with limited hybrid approaches (12.5%). Recommendations include specialized training, development of localized systems, adoption of hybrid models, inter-library collaboration, and regular evaluation to enhance accessibility and support research.

Keywords: University libraries, Problem, Adequacy, Arabic materials, Classification

Introduction

The classification and cataloguing of library materials are critical components of effective

knowledge management, particularly in academic institutions where access to organized information is paramount for research and learning. University libraries serve as vital centers of academic and cultural scholarship. These institutions house diverse range of materials, including significant collections of Arabic language texts, which are essential for the study of Islamic studies, Arabic literature, and related disciplines. However, the classification of Arabic materials in university libraries presents unique challenges. The complexities of the Arabic language, its script, and the cultural and religious contexts of the texts often render traditional Western classification systems, such as the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and Library of Congress Classification (LCC) inadequate. These systems, designed primarily for English and other Western languages, frequently struggle to accommodate the linguistic nuances and thematic content of Arabic works (El-Sherbini & Klim, 2011).

Shaheen (2017) asserted that the wrong classification or inadequate organisation of Arabic materials can lead to difficulties in access and retrieval, hindering academic research and the effective utilisation of these resources. Moreover, this issue reflects broader challenges in integrating non-Western knowledge systems into global classification frameworks. Addressing these challenges requires a critical examination of existing classification practices and the development of strategies that are culturally and linguistically sensitive to the specific needs of Arabic materials. This study aims to investigate the classification challenges of Arabic materials across universities in Kwara State, exploring the limitations of current systems and proposing solutions that enhance accessibility and accuracy in cataloguing. By focusing on the experiences and practices within these academic institutions, the research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the adaptation of library classification systems to better serve diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Statement of the Problem

The classification of Arabic materials in Kwara State University Library is problematic due to factors such as language differences, script orientation, and the inadequacies of existing classification systems like the DDC and LCC in accommodating non-Western texts. Okpala and Ugwuanyi (2018) investigated cataloguing and classification issues in Nigerian academic libraries, noting that Arabic materials are often incorrectly classified due to the limitations of the DDC and LCC systems. Although, it addresses Nigerian libraries broadly. The findings are relevant to university libraries in Kwara State that also face similar challenges with Arabic resources. This wrong classification leads to difficulties in locating and utilising Arabic materials, which negatively impacts academic research and learning.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the problem of classification of Arabic materials in selected university libraries in Kwara State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the problems associated with the classification of Arabic materials in selected university libraries in Kwara State;
2. assess the adequacy of existing classification schemes in organising Arabic resources in

selected university libraries in Kwara State; and

3.   identify strategies for improving the classification and organisation of Arabic materials in selected university libraries in Kwara State.

Research Questions

This study sets out to provide answers to the following questions:

i.   What are the problems associated with classification of Arabic materials in selected university libraries in Kwara State?

ii.   How adequate are the current classification schemes for effectively organising Arabic resources in selected university libraries in Kwara State?

iii. What strategies can be identified to improve the classification and organisation of Arabic materials in selected university libraries in Kwara State?

Review of Related Literature

The classification of non-Western materials, particularly in languages such as Arabic, has been the subject of several scholarly inquiries. However, most of these studies highlight the limitations of existing classification systems like DDC and LCC in handling non-Latin scripts. For instance, El-Sherbini and Klim (2011) in their study on cataloguing and classification of Arabic language materials in US libraries, observed that the DDC and LCC often fall short in accommodating the complexities of the Arabic language. They noted that these systems were originally designed with Western languages in mind, leading to misrepresentation and inadequate categorization of Arabic materials. They argued that the nuances of Arabic, including its rich morphological structure and the presence of multiple roots for words, complicate the classification process when using conventional systems.

In a similar vein, Al-Farhan (2015) examined the cataloguing and classification practices in Saudi Arabian academic libraries. The study revealed that many librarians face significant challenges due to a lack of Arabic language proficiency and the absence of localized classification standards. Al-Farhan recommended the development of an Arabic supported classification system to address these challenges, highlighting the need for regional or linguistic adaptations of global standards. Moreover, a study by Shaheen (2017) on the application of the DCC to Arabic materials emphasized the cultural bias inherent in the system. He pointed out that the DDC, by its nature, reflects a Western worldview, which may not align with the cultural and intellectual traditions embedded in Arabic texts. This misalignment often results in the marginalisation of Arabic materials, placing them in categories that do not accurately reflect their content or importance.

In the African context, Okpala and Ugwuanyi (2018) investigated the classification and cataloguing challenges in Nigerian university libraries, with a focus on materials in indigenous and non-Western languages. Their study found that most Nigerian libraries, including those at institutions offering Arabic and Islamic studies, rely heavily on the DDC, which leads to significant challenges in properly categorising Arabic materials. They advocated for increased collaboration between Nigerian universities and international bodies to develop classification standards that are more inclusive of non-Western languages.

Arabic Language and Script

El-Sherbini and Klim (2011) noted that the Arabic language is characterized by its unique script, which is written from right to left and includes diacritical marks that can alter the meaning of words. The script's cursive nature and the contextual forms of letters further complicate the cataloguing and classification process. Arabic also has a complex grammatical structure, with words often derived from three-letter root patterns, making accurate classification challenging for non-native speakers. Ismail (2010) opined that transliteration is another significant issue in the classification of Arabic materials. The process of converting Arabic script into Latin script varies widely, leading to inconsistencies in catalogue entries. For example, the Arabic letter "ق" might be transliterated as "q" or "k," depending on the system used. This lack of standardization can result in difficulties in retrieving materials through library catalogues, as users may search for transliterated terms that do not match the entries in the catalogue.

The challenges of diacritical marks and transliteration are compounded by the fact that many librarians in non-Arabic speaking regions, including those in Nigeria, may not be adequately trained in handling Arabic materials. This lack of expertise can lead to errors in cataloguing, further reducing the accessibility of these resources. Al-Muomen (2016) highlighted the need for specialized training programmes for librarians to address these gaps in knowledge and ensure that Arabic materials are accurately classified and easily retrievable. In addition to transliteration challenges, Khurshid (2003) identified that the Arabic materials often suffer from inadequate subject headings in classification systems like LCC. The Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) system, while comprehensive for Western materials, often lacks the depth needed to categorize Arabic texts accurately. This limitation results in broad or incorrect subject assignments, making it difficult for users to locate specific materials. For example, an Arabic text on Islamic jurisprudence may be inappropriately categorised under general law or religion, obscuring its true content and scholarly value.

Al-Muomen and Suliman (2018) stated that the advent of digital tools and databases has introduced new possibilities for the classification of Arabic materials. Systems like the Arabic Union Catalogue (AUC) have been developed to provide a more culturally and linguistically appropriate framework for cataloguing Arabic texts. The AUC integrates traditional classification schemes with digital technologies, offering more accurate and accessible records for Arabic materials. However, the adoption of such systems in Nigerian universities remains limited, due to factors such as lack of awareness, insufficient funding, and resistance to change.

Cultural and Linguistic Bias in Classification Systems

The cultural and linguistic bias inherent in global classification systems such as DDC and LCC has been widely critiqued. Theorists like Hope Olson (2001) argued that these systems reflect the dominant Western intellectual tradition, which can marginalize non-Western materials. This bias is particularly evident in the classification of religious texts, where Western frameworks may not adequately represent the diversity and specificity of non-Western religious traditions, including Islam. This cultural bias can lead to the wrong classification of Arabic materials, as Western classification

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systems may not have the necessary categories to accurately represent Islamic jurisprudence, theology, or history. Furthermore, the issue of "classification imperialism," as discussed by scholars like Hjørland (2008) highlights the imposition of Western classification standards on non-Western libraries. This imposition often results in the erasure of local knowledge systems and the marginalization of non-Western intellectual traditions. In the context of Arabic materials, this can manifest as the inappropriate categorization of Arabic texts, making them less accessible to users who are unfamiliar with Western classification paradigms.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to gather data on the problems of classifying Arabic materials in selected university libraries in Kwara State. The survey was conducted among librarians from three major university libraries known for their collections of Arabic materials: University of Ilorin, Kwara State University, and Al-Hikmah University.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed and administered to librarians working in the cataloguing and classification sections of the selected libraries. The questionnaire was divided into three sections:

Demographic Information: This section collected data on the respondents' gender and years of experience

Classification Problems: This section focused on the specific problems encountered when classifying Arabic materials.

Adequacy of Classification Systems: Questions aimed at assessing the adequacy of the classification schemes used in the libraries.

A total of 50 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, with 40 completed and returned, representing an 80% response rate. The respondents included senior librarians, cataloguers, and classification specialists. The data collected from the survey was analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency and percentage. The results are presented below:

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Information

S/No.		Frequency		Percentage	
Gender					
1.	Male		30		75%
2.	Female	10		25%	
Years of Experience					
1.	1-5 years		10		25%
2.	6-10 years		15		37.5%
3.	11-20 years	10		25%	
4.	20+ years		5		12.5%

Majority of the respondents are male 30(75.0%), compared to 10 females, who make up 25.0%. This suggests that men are the predominant gender in the study. A significant portion of them (37.5%) had 6–10 years of experience, indicating the mid-level experience range. Those with 1-5 years of experience and 11-20 years each represent 25%, implying a balanced distribution between early-career and more seasoned professionals. Respondents with more than 20 years of experience make up the smallest group at 12.5%, showing a minority of highly experienced individuals.

RQ 1: What are the problems associated with classification of Arabic materials in selected university libraries in Kwara State?

Table 2: Challenges Associated with Classification of Arabic Materials in the Libraries

S/No.	Classification Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Lack of training on Arabic materials	30	75%
2.	Inadequate classification schemes	25	62.5%
3.	Misclassification of Islamic subjects	20	50%
4.	Difficulty in transliteration	15	37.5%

The most common challenge identified was the lack of proper training on the classification of Arabic materials (75%), followed by the inadequacy of existing classification schemes (62.5%).

RQ 2: How adequate are the current classification schemes for effectively organising Arabic resources in selected university libraries in Kwara State?

Table 3: Adequacy of Classification Schemes for Organising Arabic Resources in the Librarie

S/No.	Classification System	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Dewey Decimal Classification (DCC)	20	50%
2.	Library of Congress	15	37.5%
3.	Hybrid Systems	5	12.5%

While the majority of the libraries used DDC (50%) and LCC (37.5%), only a small number had adopted hybrid systems that integrate local needs (12.5%).

Conclusion

The study identified several challenges faced by academic libraries in the selected in Kwara State when classifying Arabic materials, including a lack of proper training for librarians, inadequate classification schemes, and difficulties with transliteration and subject classification. The use of Western classification systems such as DDC and LC, which do not fully accommodate the unique characteristics of Arabic texts, further compounds the problem. Wrong classification and difficulties in retrieval hinder effective access to Arabic resources, which negatively affects research and scholarship in Arabic studies.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. *Specialized Training for Librarians:* Librarians who work with Arabic materials should receive specialized training on the classification of Arabic texts. This training should focus on understanding the nuances of the Arabic language, cultural context, and Islamic subjects to ensure accurate classification.

2. *Development of a Localized Classification System:* Nigerian academic libraries should consider developing a localized classification system that reflects the specific needs of Arabic materials. This system can be designed to integrate elements of both DDC and LC while accommodating

the unique structure and subject matter of Arabic texts.

3. *Adoption of Hybrid Classification Systems:* Libraries should adopt hybrid classification systems that combine international classification standards with local needs. This approach would provide more flexibility and cultural relevance in organising Arabic materials.

4. *Collaboration Among Academic Libraries:* Collaboration between academic libraries in Nigeria is essential for sharing knowledge, expertise, and resources related to the classification of Arabic materials. A collective effort can help standardize classification practices and improve access to Arabic resources across institutions.

5. *Regular Evaluation of Classification Practices:* Libraries should regularly evaluate their classification practices and make adjustments where necessary. Feedback from users and librarians should be taken into account to improve the organisation and accessibility of Arabic materials.

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