Habib Alizadeh

https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0791-4400
PhD student at the Department of Library and Information Resource Management, Faculty of Information and Document Management, Baku State University, Azerbaijan, habibalizade.91@gmail.com

Dashqin Mahammadli

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6875-8091
Doctor of Philosophy in History, Baku State University, Faculty of Information and document management, Department of library-information resources management, Azerbaijan, dashqin.muhammedli@gmail.com

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Problems of Promoting Multiculturalism Ideas in Libraries: Traditions, Contemporary Trends, Perspectives

Abstract

The article comprehensively examines the role of libraries in promoting the ideas of multiculturalism, scientifically analyzing the historical roots of this activity, current development trends, and future perspectives. The research shows that libraries function as strategic social institutions in preserving and promoting cultural diversity and serve as important tools in shaping a society based on multicultural values. At the end of the article, scientifically grounded recommendations are provided to eliminate existing problems and to more effectively organize the activities of libraries in preserving and promoting multicultural cultures. The presented findings are also relevant for the practical implementation of multicultural policies in libraries as information and cultural platforms.

Keywords: *Multiculturalism, Library, Cultural Diversity, Librarianship, Tolerance, Information Services, Intercultural Dialogue, Social Integration*

Kütüphanelerde Çokkültürlülük Fikirlerini Teşvik Etme Sorunları: Gelenekler, Çağdaş Eğilimler, Perspektifler

Öz

Bu makale, kütüphanelerin çokkültürlülük fikirlerini desteklemedeki rolünü kapsamlı bir şekilde incelemekte, bu faaliyetin tarihsel köklerini, mevcut gelişim eğilimlerini ve gelecek perspektiflerini bilimsel olarak analiz etmektedir. Araştırma, kütüphanelerin kültürel çeşitliliğin korunması ve teşvik edilmesinde stratejik sosyal kurumlar olarak işlev gördüğünü ve çok kültürlü değerlere dayalı bir toplumun şekillendirilmesinde önemli araçlar olarak hizmet ettiğini göstermektedir. Makalenin sonunda, mevcut sorunları ortadan kaldırmak ve kütüphanelerin çok kültürlü kültürleri koruma ve tanıtma faaliyetlerini daha etkili bir şekilde düzenlemek için bilimsel olarak temellendirilmiş öneriler sunulmaktadır. Sunulan bulgular, bilgi ve kültür platformları olarak kütüphanelerde çokkültürlü politikaların pratikte uygulanmasıyla da ilgilidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çokkültürlülük, Kütüphane, Kültürel Çeşitlilik, Kütüphanecilik, Hoşgörü, Bilgi Hizmetleri, Kültürlerarası Diyalog, Sosyal Bütünleşme

Introduction

In the rapid globalization and transition to an information society of the 21st century, social and cultural processes are dynamically changing. Worldwide, migration, ethnic diversity, and intercultural interactions are expanding, leading to the formation of multiculturalism as a relevant and necessary ideology in societies. Multiculturalism, as an approach that recognizes, respects, and develops cultural diversity within society, creates a foundation for social integration, tolerance, and dialogue. In this context, libraries—as key institutions for the preservation, collection, and dissemination of human information and culture—hold strategic importance in promoting multicultural ideas. Libraries are not only sources of information but also social and cultural environments where various cultures are represented. Here, the cultural heritage of different ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups is presented, creating conditions for fostering coexistence and mutual understanding within society. Promoting multiculturalism ideas in libraries is essential for the widespread dissemination and strengthening of intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and inclusivity principles in society. At the same time, this activity plays a significant role in ensuring the information rights of national and regional minorities, preserving their languages and cultures, and promoting social justice. In a country like Azerbaijan, rich in ethnic and cultural diversity, multiculturalism is one of the priority directions of state policy. The historical interaction of various peoples, religious communities, and cultural traditions in the country has become an integral part

of social and cultural life. Azerbaijani libraries also perform an important function in this environment by preserving and presenting information resources representing different cultures. However, the development of multicultural services still faces certain challenges and requires new approaches, methods, and strategies. This article examines the problem of promoting multiculturalism ideas in libraries from scientific-historical and theoretical-practical perspectives. First, the relevance of the topic, the objectives and tasks of the research, and a scientific analysis of existing problems are presented. Additionally, international and national experiences are comparatively evaluated, with descriptions of traditional and modern approaches. The main goal of the article is to identify the development prospects of multicultural activities in Azerbaijani libraries and to provide scientifically grounded recommendations for their improvement.

The reasons for the relevance of this study are as follows:

- The strengthening of information and intercultural relations in the context of globalization;
- The presence of ethnic and cultural diversity in Azerbaijani society and the priority of multicultural policy at the state level;
- The increasing role of libraries as social institutions in intercultural dialogue and inclusivity;
- The need to update and expand multicultural services through the wide application of digital technologies;
- The lack of a systematic and scientific approach in promoting multiculturalism within the library field.

The research methods used in this work include analytical, comparative-historical, systematic, and conceptual approaches, as well as the study of international experience in modern library and information science. The application of these methods allows for a complex and multidimensional analysis of the topic. As a result, the article analyzes the function of libraries in promoting multiculturalism ideas in a new contemporary context, reveals existing traditions and problems, and presents broad perspectives on future development directions and potentially applicable innovative approaches.

The Main Part

*The Concept of Multiculturalism: Origin and Development Stages

Multiculturalism is a socio-political and philosophical concept that responds to the global challenges of the modern era and promotes the coexistence of diverse cultures (Ismayilov, 2022).

This concept began to form in Western countries, especially Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, from the mid-20th century onwards as a response to ethnic and cultural diversity. The ideology of multiculturalism is based on fundamental principles such as human rights, individual freedoms, equality, tolerance, and inclusivity.

When examining the stages of multiculturalism's development, it becomes clear that its initial phase was shaped under the influence of liberal individualism. During this stage, the main focus was on protecting the rights of minorities and integrating them into society without assimilation. The second stage saw the legal recognition of various cultures at the state level and their support through institutional frameworks (Ismayilov & Khalafova, 2023; Khalafova & Ismailov, 2024a). At this stage, multiculturalism began to be incorporated as a state policy in official documents, educational systems, and public services.

The main models of multiculturalism include:

-*Pluralist model:* Ensures equal recognition of different cultures.

-Emphasizes integration into the dominant culture rather *Assimilationist model:* than preserving cultural diversity (Məhəmmədli, 2024).

-*Inclusive model:* Guarantees both legal equality and full, equal participation of diverse identities in social life.

*Library Work and the Cultural Function

Libraries are not only institutions engaged in providing information but also important social institutions contributing to the cultural development of society. Their cultural function is directly related to the spiritual development of society, the preservation, and transmission of cultural values (Balginova, Maydangalieva, Satygalieva & Mahammadli, 2018). Libraries play an irreplaceable role in promoting intercultural communication, disseminating ideas of tolerance, and supporting the rights of ethnic and cultural minorities.

For libraries operating in multicultural environments, the main goal is to ensure equal access to information and cultural services for all user groups—including national minorities, immigrants, and various religious and cultural communities. In this context, libraries transform into "unifying spaces," serving as bridges between different cultures.

*The following directions of the cultural function serve as the main vectors of multicultural activities in libraries

-Educational and Enlightenment Function: Libraries ensure public enlightenment by providing resources in various languages and on cultural topics.

-Social Integration: Library events promote mutual understanding and social harmony among different cultural groups.

-Information Equality: Every citizen is guaranteed equal access to information resources (Bayramov & Məhəmmədli, 2025).

*Multiculturalism and Information Rights

The issue of information rights is very important in multicultural societies. People must have equal access to information to preserve and express their cultural identities. Several international documents adopted by the UN and UNESCO recognize freedom of information as a fundamental human right and emphasize that this right becomes even more relevant in multicultural societies.

UNESCO's "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions" (2005) is one of the key documents in this regard. According to this convention, every nation and individual has the right to preserve, develop, and transmit their cultural identity to future generations. Libraries play a crucial role in the realization of this right (Kushzhanov & Mahammadli, 2019b).

When compiling and using library resources, the following legal principles should be taken into account:

- *Language Rights:* Libraries must provide publications and audiovisual resources in the languages of ethnic minorities. (Heydar, 2023).

- *Cultural Property Rights:* Educational activities should be conducted to protect cultural heritage objects and knowledge.

- *Equality and Non-discrimination Principles:* Equal service must be provided to all users, and any cultural or religious discrimination must be prevented.

Thus, the theoretical foundations of multiculturalism directly affect various aspects of library work—resource policies, user services, cultural events, legal support, and information equality. (Mahamadli, 2018). In this context, libraries serve not only as information sources but also as important platforms for intercultural dialogue and social integration.

*Historical Traditions of Promoting Multiculturalism Ideas in Libraries

The Soviet Period and Services to National Minorities

Although the term multiculturalism was not officially used in the Soviet Union, the coexistence of various peoples and ethnic groups and their provision of cultural services based on ideological grounds were systematically organized (Mahammadi, 2024). According to the USSR's ideological doctrine, ideas of equality and friendship among nations were promoted under the name "socialist international relations." In this context, libraries operated as cultural and educational institutions built on a broad social base, providing information services to ethnic groups.

While libraries in the Soviet period acted as tools of state ideology, the dissemination of literature printed in the languages of various ethnic and national minorities can be regarded as a form of promoting multicultural services to some extent (Askerova & Mammadov, 2025). For example, special book collections were created for small ethnic groups, and newspapers and magazines in their languages were made available to library users. Between the 1950s and 1980s, district libraries in Azerbaijan had literature sections in Talish, Lezgi, Avar, and Kurdish languages. These experiences show that multicultural librarianship is not only the expansion of information services but also a strategic tool for the formation of social values, mutual understanding, and the development of trust.The role of information technologies and digital multicultural services. The formation of the information society in the 21st century has led to the beginning of a new stage in library activities.

The development of digitalization and Internet technologies has eliminated the spatial and temporal limitations of library services, enabling multicultural ideas to reach a wider audience (Qasımlı & Məhəmmədli, 2024a). Modern libraries are not limited to physical spaces; they operate in virtual environments, ensuring the dissemination of resources related to different cultures and languages. Particularly in multicultural societies, digital library services play an important role in the following areas:

-Preparation of multilingual electronic catalogs: Access to books and other resources in the languages of various ethnic groups is provided.

-Virtual exhibitions and events: Events on multicultural topics are presented online, reaching a broader audience (Ismayilov, Ismayilov, & Mammadova, 2019).

-Digital awareness campaigns: Webinars, podcasts, and social media posts are organized to convey concepts such as tolerance, cultural diversity, and tolerance to wide audiences.

The digital environment also plays a crucial role in ensuring social inclusion. For people who cannot leave their homes, those with physical limitations, and socially isolated individuals,

electronic multicultural resources help maintain their connection with society (Ismayilov & Khalafova, 2022a; Muhammadli, 2023). Planning and organizing multicultural library services. To successfully implement multicultural services, libraries must base their activities on pre-planned programs, needs analyses, and strategic approaches. Such services should be user-oriented, participatory, and developed taking into account cultural specificity.

The following stages can be considered for organizing multicultural services:

1. Studying social needs: The library usage habits, information needs, and cultural demands of ethnic and cultural minorities should be identified.

2. Regulation of resource policies: Library collections should be balanced and organized in various languages and cultural topics (İsmayılov, Mahammadli & Gasimli, 2023a).

3. Staff training: Librarians should be equipped with multicultural skills and work according to principles sensitive to cultural differences.

4. Holding integrative events: Different communities should be brought together through book clubs, round tables, and intercultural dialogue forums.

Certain experiences have already been formed in this direction in Azerbaijani libraries. For example, the M. F. Akhundzade Republican Library in Baku, with the initiative of the Ministry of Culture, has been conducting a series of events since 2016 such as "Multicultural Exhibition Corners," "National Minorities' Literature Days," and "Cultural Bridges." Social inclusion and tolerance in the library environment. Multicultural library activity is not only about providing information; it is also an important tool in ensuring social inclusion and public equality. Libraries must become safe, neutral spaces that respect all differences for people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The following principles should be fundamental in creating a tolerant and inclusive library environment:

•   Principle of neutrality: The library must provide equal service to every citizen without taking sides on social, religious, political, or ethnic issues.

•   Principle of participation: Active participation of multicultural groups in library events should be encouraged, and their opinions and suggestions taken into account.

•   Principle of accessibility: Library services must be physically and informationally accessible to all social groups.

These principles strengthen the social function of the library, transforming it from merely an institution that provides information resources into a strategic platform that helps shape civil society.

Promotion of multicultural values among youth and children. The promotion of multicultural ideas among future generations of society holds special importance. In this regard, the activities organized by libraries for children and youth create significant strategic opportunities (Ismayilov, Mahammadli & Khudiyeva, 2022). The library environment should provide children with the chance to learn about the cultures, traditions, languages, and lifestyles of various peoples.

The following methods are widely used in this direction:

a) Story hours and folklore events: Stories, legends, and folklore examples belonging to different peoples are read to foster respect for diverse cultures among children (Nadir & Sevda, 2022; Mammadov, 2013; Mammadov, 2022b).

b) Multicultural book shelves: In children's sections, publications in different languages and books reflecting the lifestyles of various peoples are gathered in special collections.

c) Integrative games and projects: Through intercultural introduction games and educational projects involving groups, young people's social skills are developed.

As a result of such events, the younger generation develops into more tolerant, open-minded, and socially responsible citizens (Ismayilov & Aliyeva, 2023). Although promoting multicultural ideas in libraries is one of the current and strategic directions of the modern era, the activities carried out in this field face a number of objective and subjective difficulties. These problems are observed both in management and practical application areas. Their resolution requires a comprehensive approach and synergy between the state and cultural society.

Insufficiency of normative-legal regulation. The legal foundations of multicultural activities in libraries are not established directly but indirectly — through laws and normative documents regulating general library activities. This causes gaps in practice:

-There is no special provision about multicultural services in the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Library Work."

-The legal mechanism and funding model for services adapted to ethno-cultural diversity are not defined.

-State programs on information provision for national minorities are not accompanied by specific measures in the library sector (Ismayilov & Khalafova, 2022b; Ismayılov & Khudiyeva, 2023).

Because of this, libraries experience legal and financial uncertainties when organizing multicultural services.Limitations in material-technical base and information resources. One of the main tools for promoting multicultural ideas is intercultural literature and resources. However, serious deficiencies are observed in Azerbaijani libraries in this regard:

-Books in the languages of ethnic and religious minorities are insufficient, and existing resources are often outdated and not current publications.

-New literature in the field of multicultural education and enlightenment (translated works, analytical studies, aids) is scarce in the background.

Technical equipment — computers, multimedia, internet access — is weak in regional and rural libraries, limiting the organization of digital multicultural services (İsmayılov & Məhəmmədli, 2024).

As a result, the integration of various social and cultural groups into the library weakens, and the principle of equal access to information is violated.

Staff Training and Lack of Professional Competence

For the successful implementation of multicultural activities in libraries, it is necessary that staff have a culturally sensitive approach, language and communication skills, and intercultural training. However, in reality, the following problems exist:

a) The number of professional librarians with theoretical and practical knowledge of multicultural services is very small.

b) University curricula in library science do not offer separate courses or subjects specifically on multicultural librarianship (Ismayilov, Mahammadli & Gasimli, 2023b).

c) Professional development courses for librarians rarely include programs on intercultural communication, tolerance, and inclusive services.

This situation limits the practical promotion of multicultural ideas and also hinders libraries from taking initiatives in this direction.

Socio-Cultural Relations and Stereotypes in Society

As part of society, libraries are influenced by the cultural relations and public consciousness present there. In some cases, negative stereotypes towards ethnic minorities within society also permeate the library environment. These factors lead to the following difficulties:

-Weak mutual trust and intercultural dialogue between communities negatively affect participation in library events.

-Misconceptions that interpret multicultural services as ethnic "segregation" sometimes block initiatives.

-The principle of tolerant attitude towards cultural diversity is not sufficiently developed in regional libraries, limiting ethnic groups' access to library resources (Khalafova & Ismayilov, 2024 b; Mammadov, 2022a).

In such cases, it is critically important for library management and relevant institutions to pursue an open information policy, conduct public awareness campaigns, and promote inclusiveness.

Information   Inequality   and   Technological   Discrepancies Digital inequality and unequal distribution of access to technology negatively impact the effectiveness of multicultural promotion. In some regions:

1) Communities belonging to ethnic minorities have limited internet access;

2) Due to low digital literacy levels, the ability to use electronic libraries and e-resources is weak; (Karabalina, Maydangalieva, Satygalieva, Ahmetalina & Mahammadli, 2018).

3) Electronic services are provided only in the state language or Russian, and digital content in the languages of small ethnic groups is scarce.

These circumstances show that it is not enough to create resources alone; specific policies must also be implemented to ensure these resources are accessible to everyone.

Development Perspectives and Recommendations for the Promotion of Multicultural Ideas in Libraries

Libraries play an important role in preserving and promoting cultural diversity as one of the key pillars of the social and cultural development of society. The promotion of multicultural ideas serves not only tolerance and patience but also inclusiveness, social justice, and public harmony (Kazimi & Mahammadli, 2021). In this regard, the future development of multicultural activities in libraries can be assessed and expanded along several strategic directions.

Improvement of the Normative-Legal Framework

Establishing a legal basis for multicultural services or integrating them into existing legislation is an important and necessary step. Recommended actions include:

a) Adding a separate section or article on multicultural services to the "Library Work" Law;

b) Preparing separate sub-documents (guidelines, standards, methodological materials) that ensure the information rights of national minorities;

c) Adopting a state-level "Development Concept for Multicultural Activities in Libraries (2025–2035)."

This normative framework will enable the planned, consistent, and systematic implementation of multicultural initiatives in libraries.

*Enrichment of Information Resources and Renewal of Collection Policy

Library collections should reflect cultural diversity and be strategically updated accordingly. The following directions are considered important:

- Acquiring or preparing literature in the languages of ethnic and religious minorities (e.g., Lezgi, Talysh, Kurdish, Russian, etc.);

- Including multilingual publications and literature on intercultural topics in collections; (Kenzhebayeva, Urmurzina & Mahammadli, 2018).

- Creating electronic resources in various languages on digital library platforms;

- Organizing special collections dedicated to the cultures of Azerbaijan and world peoples (e.g., "Corner of World Cultures").

Alongside this, regular monitoring of collections and analysis of user needs should ensure a balanced multicultural composition of the collections.

*Staff Training and Establishment of Professional Development Programs
The effectiveness of multicultural activities directly depends on the knowledge, skills, and approaches of library staff. Therefore:

-Curricula for the "Library and Information Science" specialty at universities should include courses such as "Multicultural Librarianship" and "Intercultural Communication"; (Qasımlı & Məhəmmədli, 2024b).

-Regular training on multicultural topics should be provided for librarians through seminars, workshops, and webinars;

-Opportunities for professional development should be expanded through foreign experience and international cooperation;

-Intercultural management skills should be developed among library staff.

Increasing professional potential will positively affect both the quality and coverage of multicultural services.

*Collaboration with Society and Expansion of Inclusive Activities Libraries are not only information institutions but also spaces for social connections and social integration. In this regard, the following activities are recommended:

-Organizing joint events with representatives of national minorities (folklore days, literary evenings, cultural festivals); (Kushzhanov & Dashgin, 2019a).

-Signing memoranda of cooperation with NGOs, ethnic unions, and diaspora organizations;

-Implementing joint educational projects with multicultural educational institutions and kindergartens;

-Promoting library initiatives widely in traditional and digital media.

Thanks to these activities, libraries will operate as more flexible and open institutions, establishing trust-based relationships with various segments of society.

*Expansion of Digitalization and Use of Technological Innovations In the modern information environment, technologies have become the main driving tools for multicultural services. In this regard, the digitalization strategy of libraries should include the following elements:

-Implementation of multilingual websites and search systems;

-Equipping electronic resources with automatic translation algorithms;

-Development of the concept of a "Multicultural Digital Platform" (for example, the "Electronic Library of the Peoples of Azerbaijan");

-Presentation of different cultures using virtual reality and augmented reality technologies (interactive exhibitions, 3D cultural museums, etc.);

-Development of multicultural mobile applications (reading recommendations, video presentations, interlingual library guides).

Technological innovations play an important role not only in terms of functionality but also in terms of social inclusiveness and cultural mutual understanding.

Conclusion

Libraries are not only institutions where information exchange is organized but also social institutions that preserve and develop the cultural memory, spiritual diversity, and

intercivilizational dialogue of society. The promotion of multiculturalism ideas within the library environment acts as an important manifestation of the cultural function of this institution. Based on the results of the research, the following main conclusions and scientific recommendations can be made:

-The role of the idea of multiculturalism in librarianship is increasing. Against the backdrop of globalization, migration, and growing ethnic diversity, the relevance of libraries' role in contributing to intercultural relations has grown. Libraries serve as a primary platform for instilling this idea in society.

-Multicultural activities exist in Azerbaijani libraries but are not systematic. Research data shows that although individual initiatives are implemented in libraries across the republic, these activities remain unsystematic, episodic, and project-based.

-Several problems hinder the expansion of multicultural activities. The main obstacles include a weak legal-normative base, material and technical deficiencies, insufficient staff potential, public stereotypes, and information inequality.

-In the modern era, digital technologies create new opportunities for promoting multiculturalism. The digital transformation of libraries not only provides access to a wider audience but also facilitates the virtual presentation of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity.

-Multicultural activities in libraries require strategic planning. It is necessary to develop comprehensive concepts, institutional mechanisms, and management models in this direction.

-The normative-legal framework needs updating. The "Library Work" Law and other relevant documents should be expanded to support multicultural activities, and special sub-programs and strategies should be developed in this area.

-Cultural diversity must be reflected in library collections. Literature in the languages of various ethnic and religious groups and about their cultures should be systematically included in the collections, with appropriate bibliographic indicators and electronic catalogs created.

-Staff professional development must be ensured. Regular training programs should be conducted to enhance librarians' knowledge and skills in intercultural communication, tolerance, and inclusive services.

-Public awareness should be fostered. Through libraries, educational materials and events about the benefits of multiculturalism should be presented to society, and efforts to combat stereotypes should be carried out.

-Digital multicultural platforms should be established. Multilingual web portals, virtual exhibitions, and multimedia databases promoting Azerbaijan's multicultural values should be created.

-The potential of regional libraries should be strengthened. Material and technical support for organizing multicultural services in village and district libraries must be enhanced, and targeted programs implemented in regions where ethnic diversity is more actively felt.

-International cooperation should be expanded. Projects should be implemented within the framework of cooperation with international organizations such as UNESCO, IFLA, and ISESCO, and global experiences integrated into local practice.

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