

Transcript: A Conversation with Dr Mohammed Jassim

Mehiyar 00:00

Welcome to the Nahrein Network. My name is Dr Mehiyar Kathem, and today we're with Dr Mohammed. Jassim, Director of the Central Library of Mosul University. Hello, Dr Mohammed. How are you? I'm fine. Thank you so much. Dr Mehiyar, for it is a great opportunity to be with you today. Thank you. It's great to see you again. You were previously a British Institute for the Study of Iraq and a nahrein network scholar. You completed your scholarship at the British Library, and also you recently completed a doctorate program in Spain. Could you introduce us to your work and your recent experience working at the University of Mosul? Okay. Thank you very much again. Dr Mehiyar, my name is Dr Mohamed Jassim, and I am currently serve as the director of Mosul University Library. With over 23 years of experience, I have been deeply involved in the academic and cultural revival of Mosul University Library, which once housed over a million resources before its destruction by the ISIS terrorist group. My academic background includes a PhD in conference interpreting from Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain, which I completed with distinction. I actually began my journey with Mosul University Library in 2002

Mohammed 1 01:42

working across various departments and units, this hands on experience helped me understand the library system from the ground up. And in 2013 I was appointed as an assistant to the library director, and then I became a director for the library and served until 2000 or 2019 leading several development initiatives during a period of mounting challenges. In late 2018 I received a PhD scholarship from Spain to complete my doctorate studies, and I moved to Barcelona where I studied conference interpreting. However, I maintained my connections with international partners who were keen to support Mosul University Library. After returning to Iraq in 2022 I was selected by UNESCO as a consultant to participate in the restoration project of Mosul University Library with the subject with the support of Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, and UNESCO's initiative revived the spirit of Mosul, and starting from January 1 in 2025 I was honored to be reappointed again as the director of the library. My leadership has spanned both pre and post conflict phases, and I remain committed to transforming the library into a modern, inclusive and global, connected institution. For me, libraries are not just buildings filled with books, they are centers of peace, learning and cultural resilience.

Mehiyar 03:48

And of course, you've been working for UNESCO, which is leading a major recovery program for Mosul, Mosul's cultural heritage. But also, could you shed light on the education aspect of their work. Actually, as I mentioned earlier, that UNESCO is implementing a very productive project entitled restoring Musso university library with the generous support of Rhonda, Italian agency for development and cooperation. I was selected by UNESCO to serve as a consultant for the restoration of Mosul University Library.

Mohammed 1 05:35

system, which is an open and integrated system. We started in 2010 and then we trained some of our staff on how to use that. But I mean at that time, and before the invasion of Mosul city, so at that

time, we were like just only using the retrieving process of the record of bibliographical records. But then, within this project of UNESCO, we now start to develop other aspects,

Mehiyar 1 06:15

such as providing like RFID system security gates, readers, self check in and check out. Now our staff is receiving training courses by the Egyptian Prime vision company, which is, I think, very important to cope with the digital transformation. Another aspect of the project was the preservation and conservation of the library resources, because we believe that. I mean preservation is very important maintenance. Now we have a unit. We have trained our staff to just work in this stuff, like maintaining and using the new equipments and procurements that were provided by UNESCO, and with the support and help of the sacred Ambassador shrine, who, I mean people from them, they tried to help us on that. The fourth aspect of the project was establishing strategic partnerships, as you may know, nowadays, only 10% of the library collection is hard copies, while 90% is digital materials. In our case, we are an academic library, so our researchers are in urgent need for electronic materials such as E journals under the capacity building component, as most of the professional employees have retired, I will it was necessary to engage the library staff with training courses. In this regard, some staff members took part in a short term training program at Ulster University in Northern Ireland, which enriched their professional competencies. In addition, we developed a valuable partnership with the sacred a passage Shrine, which generously provided on site hands on training for our staff. These training sessions covered key areas such as cataloging book preservation, conservation and installing a digital repository. Another significant advancement in this project is the installation of a radio frequency identification RFID system, which includes sticking RFID tags into the library's book collections, enabling self check in and check out services, installing security gates for better collection management and user service. This comprehensive initiative is not just about restoring a library. I mean, we believe that it's about building a modern academic infrastructure that aligns with international standards and empowers the university community for decades to come.

Mohammed 1 09:20

And as you've mentioned, you've assumed the old role you used to have, which is director of the University of Mosul library, during the period or just before ISIS took over Mosul, and now, as of 2025 as you've said, You've reassumed that role as director of Mosul University Library. Could you tell us about your work there, and also the priorities that you've said for strengthening the role of that library

Speaker 1 09:48

in my new role as a director, my priorities are transitioning the library of Muslim university into a digital first research. Driven and student centered institution. This involves several areas of focus, actually. I mean, these should align with the projects that we are implementing in cooperation with the UNESCO so rebuilding the library collection is one of the our priorities actually, because, I mean, we lost a significant portion of our physical collections during the war. We are now in the process of rebuilding them, both in print and digital form, with the focus on quality academic resources. Keep in mind that we are an academic library, which means that we have to rebuild our collections based on scientific research and curriculum oriented policy. So we rely on the basic needs of our departments, and we have to provide them because Muslim University Library is the main library for the university, though, we have still have faculty or college libraries, but still the main library is the central library of Mosul University. What I did once being the post, I asked the university colleges. What I mean? The

first thing that I did when I became the director, I asked the university colleges to provide us with their needed electronic and physical resources to build a database which will help us in the process of, you know, building our collections. So another aspect I am working on, which is training the library staff, in addition to training the librarians who are working in the college libraries as well. So we are investing in the training of librarians in new tools and techniques, especially related to digital curation, electronic resources management and user services. You know that? I mean the technology, the developments every every day, is moving forward, so we have to cope with the I mean this with these technologies, another aspect we are working on, or I am, I mean, personally working on is the library information system, as I mentioned, Koha. I mean, this is one of the priorities, because it is part of the digital transformation objective that we are trying to achieve. We have recently got a membership with OCLC to retrieve the English bibliographic records, while the Arabic records have been retrieved through Arabic catalog union HCU, which we also have subscribed recently. The University Catalog is administered by the library and connects the college's libraries through an internet hub. The Central Library and the college libraries are retrieving the records and uploading the resources into APAC, into the main University line, so anyone can check if the resource is available or not in any I mean, from anywhere from his or her house or outside the campus. So with regard to digitization and preservation, I focus more attention on these units, as I believe, if we had digitized our materials before, I mean, the laws wouldn't have been like this. So some of our staff enrolled in training courses regarding digitization, and now they are working on uploading the rare books that are digitized and uploaded to the library repository.

Speaker 1 14:03

Once we digitize the resource, we send it to the library repository, that storage that was recently created. So we are working on establishing an integrated library system, improving metadata standards and introducing Open Access platforms for theses, dissertations and publications. As long as we are, like walking we are, we are just talking about the repository. We intend to upload about 10,000 theses and dissertations that were accomplished in Mosul University to be available in repository with their full metadata. Moreover, we have received 1000s of materials, such as old pictures, videos, documents that refer to the cultural heritage of the city of Mosul and that we intend. And to also upload them into the repository. I mean, in part of another part that I am also interested in is the international collaboration. So partnerships with organizations like the British Library Network UNESCO, are central to our development within the partnership perspective. I mean, we have agreed with UNESCO to get access to E journals that support our researchers projects. We are in the final stage of completing the subscription with suppliers, suppliers such as JSTOR research for life, Bringer nature and others. So before I came to London, I mean, we have agreed with with research for life, and they just sent us the password, username, and we were just like we are waiting for the final okay from the Ministry of Higher Education to go on with this contract or with the agreement.

Speaker 1 16:04

And of course, you're here in London on a scholarship supported by the mehi network, and that's a scholarship for international or global leaders in libraries. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

Speaker 1 16:22

Yeah, as you mentioned, Dr Mehiyar, so this is my third visit to British Library, and I consider this training part of my three phase journey that started in 2019 continued in 2022 and is now being completed in 2025 I am here in London as part of a scholarship supported by nahren network, and I want to express my deep appreciation for the vision and commitment this nine days training has been incredibly valuable for me. I mean, it includes shadowing professionals participating in practical sessions and engaging in dialogs about library futures. So my focus during this visit was primarily on digitizing or digitization workflows, metadata and cataloging for digital content preservation techniques, strategies for electronic resource collection and licensing project management in digital library environments. What I find especially in reaching is the opportunity to network with experts, exchange expertise and reflect on how to adapt world class practices to the unique context of Mosul. This experience reaffirms that our work back home is not isolated. We are part of global conversation about knowledge access and cultural recovery. As a member of the Mosul University and the director of its library, I want to take this opportunity to respond to certain misleading and unreliable assessments, such as the RIS index, which unfortunately failed to reflect the true academic and institutional progress that the University of Mosul has made in recent years. And I'm trying to get the chance to be with you in this great platform of UCL to just explain something related to this topic. The University of Mosul has 60,000 students and researchers and has 24 colleges with 142 departments and nine research centers. Let me be very clear with you, the RIS index doesn't provide a credible or fair assessment of our university's research outputs or academic standing, so just think about it. Between 2022 and 2025 scholars at the University of Mosul have published 3800 and something research papers indexed in Scopus, one of the most respected and rigorous global database for scholarly publishing. Of these, only eight publications were retracted, which represents less than 0.001% of the total output the subject or to talk about, just to just to suggest. That an institution which an institution like Mosul University with such a robust contribution in underperforming is both unfair and unsubstantiated. In contrast to these fluid assessments, the University of Mosul has achieved tangible academic recognition. It currently ranks fifth nationally in Iraq and 120th among Arab universities according to Qs Arab region university ranking, rankings globally respected for their comprehensive and transparent methodology. So I mean these rankings reflect our commitment to teaching research and international engagement. So Moreover, the University of Mosul has recently earned institutional accusation with high marks, a recognition that further affirms our academic quality and operational standards. In addition to that, we are now advancing toward program level accreditation, which highlights our continued efforts to align our academic programs with international equality bench markers. We must also consider the extraordinary context in which this progress has occurred. So the destruction the University of Mosul faced was massive and unprecedented. Most of our buildings, including labs, lecture halls and our historic Central Library, were either destroyed or heavily damaged during the conflict. For many observers, the idea that this university could rise again seemed almost impossible, but we did. The reconstruction of the library stands as a powerful symbol of resilience, not only for our university, but for the entire city of Mosul, in just a few years, we have rebuilt co infrastructure, restored academic activity, revived research productivity, and reconnected with the international academic community. This turnout is more than just recovery, it is a story of vision, determination and collective wealth. Wherever I go, I hear genuine admiration, admiration about and respect for the Muslim university people speak highly and are inspired by the courage of our students and recognize the hard work of the university admiration administration. So I mean, we therefore call for fair, transparent and evidence based evaluation assessment that reflect the reality of our progress, rather than rely on

outdated data or fluid metrics. So the road ahead is long, but the milestones we have already achieved are proof of what can be accomplished through perseverance

Speaker 1 23:17

and international cooperation and unwavering belief in education as a force for renewal. And thank you very much. Dr Mehiyar,

Speaker 1 23:27

on that note, thank you. Dr Mohammed Jassim, it's good to hear of the superb and good progress Mosul is doing in general and the university under your leadership as the Director of University motor library is doing, I wish you good luck for future efforts and also productive next few years for the work that you've started.

Speaker 1 23:55

Thank you very much, Dr Mehiyar, for this great opportunity again. Thanks for Narayan network, and thanks for all the support you have, I mean, provided us for library and the University. Thank you. Thank you very much. Bye.