

Authority control of Arabic persons names in the union catalog of Egyptian Universities Libraries Consortium (EULC): an evaluative study

Research – English
Summary

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Abstract

The study aims to monitor the reality of the Authority control of Arabic names in the Union Catalog of Egyptian Universities Libraries Consortium (EULC), in terms of identifying the rules and mechanisms used when drafting Arabic persons names entries in the bibliographic records on the Future Library System (FLS), the procedures that cataloguers perform when drafting Arabic names entries, the extent of their ability to carry out the Arabic names reference control process in bibliographic records and create reference records on the future system, and identifying the obstacles and issues that they face when drafting Arabic names entries and proposals.

One of the most prominent findings of the study, there is no unified nor standardized policies and practices for catalogers rely when drafting entries for Arabic persons names in the bibliographic records in the Union Catalog, as the drafting process depends on catalogers' diligence, whether or not they possess the skills, without relying on an already existing authority file.

The study also recommended that the necessity of developing work tools and policies that are applied to train and qualify catalogers on working in the Union Catalog in accordance with modern trends in the field, and not to pay attention to quantity at the expense of quality.

Keywords

Authority control, Authority records, Names authority, Arabic name entries, Union catalogs, Academic libraries, Egypt

The Methodological Framework of the Study

1.1 Problem Statement

The lack of attention from those responsible for the unified index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association regarding authority control and the creation of various authority files—particularly for Arabic names—has led to inconsistencies and conflicts in name entries. This issue arises due to the instability of name entry formats and the difficulty of maintaining uniformity across libraries. Each library, and even individual indexers, standardize names based on personal judgment rather than established guidelines.

In many cases, indexers rely on the name format as it appears on the title page, without verifying its accuracy or adhering to a consistent entry format. This practice results in multiple variations of the same author's name across different member libraries—and even within a single library—causing the dispersion of an author's works in the index. Consequently, this leads to inefficiencies in information retrieval and creates confusion for users during search and retrieval processes.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study stems from the urgent need to implement authority control for Arabic names in the bibliographic records of the unified index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association. Establishing a standardized authority file is essential for several reasons:

- The unified index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association serves as a crucial research tool that significantly supports scientific research and researchers in Egyptian and Arab universities.
- Arabic name entries are among the most frequently used access points in the catalogs of Arab libraries.

- A dedicated authority file for Arabic names would help member libraries in the unified index standardize name entries efficiently, saving time and effort.
- The presence of an authority file for Arabic names in the unified index could serve as a foundational step toward developing a national authority file for personal names.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to assess and evaluate the current status of authority control for Arabic names in the unified index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association. To achieve this main goal, the study sets out the following specific objectives:

1. Identify the rules and mechanisms used for formulating Arabic name entries in bibliographic records within the unified index.
2. Assess the technical capabilities of indexers working in the unified index and their ability to implement authority control for Arabic names.
3. Examine the issues arising from the absence of a standardized authority file for Arabic names.
4. Define the necessary requirements for establishing an authority file for Arabic names within the unified index.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following primary question:

What is the current state of authority control for Arabic names in the unified index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association?

To address this overarching question, the study will explore the following sub-questions:

1. What rules and mechanisms are currently used for formulating Arabic name entries in bibliographic records?
2. What are the technical capabilities of indexers in carrying out authority control for Arabic names?
3. What challenges have emerged due to the absence of an authority file for Arabic names?

4. What are the necessary requirements for creating an authority file for Arabic names within the unified index?

1.5 Scope and Delimitations

The study examines the authority control of Arabic names in the Egyptian University Libraries Association within the following parameters:

- **Objective Scope:** Authority control of both historical and contemporary Arabic name entries in bibliographic records available in the unified index.
- **Linguistic Scope:** Arabic names written in Arabic script.
- **Temporal Scope:** The study covers the period from the establishment of the unified index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association until January 26, 2022.

1.6 Study Methodology and Tools

1.6.1 Study Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive analytical approach using the case study method. As Abdul Hadi (2005, p. 114) states, an in-depth examination of a specific case allows for a thorough understanding of its dynamics. In this study, the focus is on analyzing the authority control process for old and modern Arabic personal names in the bibliographic records of the unified index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association.

The study consists of two main components:

1. **Descriptive Analytical Component:** Reporting and analyzing the current state of authority control.
2. **Planning Component:** Identifying challenges and proposing solutions to correct any negative trends.

1.6.2 Data Collection Tools and Methods

The study relied on a questionnaire targeting indexers working on the Future System for Library Management. The questionnaire aimed to:

- Gather indexers' insights and suggestions regarding authority control for Arabic names.
- Identify the rules and mechanisms currently used in formulating Arabic name entries in bibliographic records.

Stages and Procedures for Preparing the Questionnaire:

1. **Reviewing Literature:** Analyzing previous studies on name authority control, cataloging rules, and the Future System for Library Management.
2. **Questionnaire Design:**
 - The questionnaire consisted of **36 questions**, including:
 - **Optional and mandatory questions**
 - **Multiple-choice questions** (allowing more than one response)
 - **Open-ended questions** (to capture indexers' opinions and suggestions)
 - The questions were categorized into three main themes (see Figure 1).



3. **Expert Validation:** The questionnaire was reviewed by specialists in the field, who provided feedback on wording and content. Adjustments were made based on their recommendations.
4. **Pilot Testing:**
 - The questionnaire was tested on six indexers, who provided feedback on question clarity.
 - Complex or redundant questions were revised or removed.
5. **Electronic Distribution:**
 - The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms.
 - It was distributed via system-wide messages, direct communication with university digital library directors, and direct outreach to indexers.
6. **Response Collection and Validation:**

- The questionnaire was open for one month, receiving 98 responses (72.6% response rate).
- After eliminating two incomplete responses, the final valid responses totaled 96 (71% of the targeted sample).

Response Distribution Across Universities

- The 96 respondents came from 21 universities, covering 78% of Egypt's 27 public universities.
- Six universities (22%) did not respond: Suez, Matrouh, Arish, Luxor, Aswan, and New Valley.

1.7 Study Population

The study targeted indexers in digital library units across Egyptian public universities.

- The total target population: 135 indexers (an average of five indexers per university across 27 universities).
- The final valid sample: 96 indexers (after 37 non-responses and 2 exclusions).
- Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study population.



Table 1: Characteristics of the Study Population of Indexers in Digital Library Units in Egyptian Universities

Variable	Category	Males (T%)	Females (T%)	Total (T%)
Age Group	20-30 years	0 (0%)	6 (6.3%)	6 (6.3%)
	31-40 years	22 (22.9%)	40 (41.7%)	62 (64.6%)

Variable	Category	Males (T%)	Females (T%)	Total (T%)
	41-50 years	6 (6.3%)	18 (18.7%)	24 (25%)
	51-60 years	2 (2.05%)	2 (2.05%)	4 (4.1%)
Total		30 (31.25%)	66 (68.75%)	96 (100%)

4. Study Results and Recommendations

4.1 Study Results

Based on an analysis of the authority control process for Arabic personal names in the unified index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association, the study identified several key findings. These results are presented as answers to the study's research questions:

1) What rules and mechanisms are used when formulating Arabic name entries in bibliographic records within the unified index?

- There are no unified or standardized policies, procedures, or practices governing the formulation of Arabic name entries. Instead, catalogers rely on personal effort, regardless of their experience and skills, without adhering to specific rules or referencing an established authority file.
- Catalogers do not follow specific sources when verifying and formulating Arabic name entries; they primarily rely on the name as it appears on the title page.
- No comprehensive authority control guide exists, particularly for Arabic personal names. The available guide in the Mostaqbal System only provides quality standards for bibliographic records (last updated in 2010) and a basic overview of MARC 21 authority records (updated in 2018). It does not explain the rules and standards for authority control or best practices for formulating name entries.
- The creation of authority records for Arabic personal names is left entirely to the indexers' discretion, relying on their individual experience and skill level. This lack of consistency negatively impacts the accuracy and quality of Arabic name entries in bibliographic records.

- Indexers face numerous challenges and obstacles when formulating Arabic name entries, including:
 - Duplicate entries for the same author under different variations of their name.
 - Similarity of many Arabic names, making differentiation difficult.
 - Challenges in determining name-associated dates, leading to inconsistencies.

2) What are the technical capabilities of indexers working in the unified index to perform authority control for Arabic personal names?

- Many indexers lack adequate training and qualification in authority control processes according to modern standards, which prevents them from properly performing authority control for Arabic names in the unified index.
- There is little awareness or concern among indexers regarding the importance of authority control. Many do not prioritize name verification and entry formulation due to:
 - Limited knowledge of the significance of authority control in bibliographic records.
 - Lack of interest from project administrators in implementing strict authority control measures.

3) What problems have arisen due to the absence of an authority file for Arabic personal names in the unified index?

The lack of an official authority file for Arabic names in the unified index has led to several issues, including:

- Inconsistencies and lack of standardization in authority name entries within bibliographic records.
- Incomplete authority entry data, leading to missing or inaccurate information.
- Absence of authority entries for 25% of the analyzed bibliographic records, particularly in the 600 (subject – personal name) field.
- Missing date fields in 80% of analyzed authority records, making it difficult to distinguish between individuals with similar names.

- Numerous errors, including:
 - Linguistic and typographical mistakes
 - Incorrect punctuation and spacing
 - Duplicate entries, causing author work dispersion
 - Misplacement of multiple names in a single authority field
 - Incorrect handling of pseudonyms, leading to fragmented records under real and pseudonymous names
 - Misidentification of entries for individuals with similar names

The absence of fixed rules for processing Arabic names has led to the mismanagement of information sources within the index, causing confusion among indexers working on the project and difficulties for users during search and retrieval operations. This issue has also made accessing certain names more challenging.

Requirements for Creating an Authority File for Arabic Names in the Unified Index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association

Building an authority file for Arabic names is a complex, resource-intensive, and ongoing task that requires substantial technical, human, and financial capabilities. Several key factors must be considered when planning the development of this file, as detailed in the proposed plan.

Modern technologies offer significant advantages in creating an authority file for Arabic names. Libraries can leverage automated systems to facilitate the creation, maintenance, and exchange of bibliographic and authority data. These technologies also enhance search and retrieval capabilities through online indexes, fostering greater collaboration among libraries and bibliographic information institutions.

Study Recommendations

Given the importance of an authority file for Arabic names in the unified index of the Egyptian University Libraries Association and the numerous benefits it offers, this study recommends the following:

1. **Collaboration with Experienced Institutions**

Establish cooperation with Arab organizations that have expertise in authority control, such as the Unified Arab Index and the Library of Alexandria, to benefit from their experience in planning and implementing the authority file project.

2. **Engagement of Egyptian University Libraries**

Ensure active participation of Egyptian university libraries affiliated with the unified index in the preparatory and planning phases of the project.

3. **Utilization of Modern Technologies**

Adopt advanced technologies in authority control, including automated library systems that support the creation, maintenance, and exchange of bibliographic and authority data. These systems also enhance search and retrieval efficiency and promote collaboration among libraries.

4. **Documentation of Previous Experiences and Project Phases**

Record all information on previous authority control experiences and comprehensively document each stage of planning and implementation to serve as a reference for future development.

5. **Financial Support and Training**

Secure necessary funding to initiate the authority file project and invest in training indexers based on modern authority control practices. Regular updates and improvements should be ensured post-implementation.

6. **Standardization of Data Entry Rules**

Develop comprehensive guidelines detailing work procedures, data entry policies, and specific rules for encoding names, including the handling of diacritical marks, spacing, and punctuation. These guidelines should be provided to project personnel from the outset to ensure consistency and minimize later modifications.

7. **Training and Capacity Building**

Train and qualify the designated team on authority control procedures, ensuring they understand the importance of creating accurate authority records and their impact on index quality and performance.

8. Prioritizing Quality over Quantity

Focus on the accuracy and reliability of authority records rather than sheer volume, as poorly structured records may require extensive modifications, consuming more time than creating them correctly from the start.

9. Enhancing Arabic Bibliographic Record Quality

Maintain high-quality Arabic bibliographic records within the unified index to ensure consistency and reliability.

10. Subject Authority Control for Names

Implement strict authority control over subject entries, particularly for personal names, to enhance the accuracy of bibliographic records.

By implementing these recommendations, the authority file for Arabic names will improve the efficiency of indexing, enhance search and retrieval accuracy, and facilitate cooperation among libraries in the Egyptian University Libraries Association.