

2019

# The Role of Academic Libraries in Creating Oral History Collection

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Seifi, Leili; Kazemi, Raziye; and Khademizadeh, Shahnaz, "The Role of Academic Libraries in Creating Oral History Collection" (2019). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 2756.

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# The Role of Academic Libraries in Creating Oral History Collection

## Abstract

This study aims at reviewing the role and place of academic libraries in creating oral history collections with the aim of its preservation and application in these libraries. The research methodology is systematic review. To this end, the related studies were searched and identified from 10 international databases in 1983 to 2019. Out of which 23 most related ones were used for present study. For validation purpose, other experts than research team were used. The research findings indicated that academic libraries could stabilize their role and place in creating collections based on oral history through its identification, preservation, promotion and accessibility, recreation of the role of librarians, archive and documentation, organization and digitalization. The systematic review of oral history in academic libraries highlighted the need to carry out practical and theoretical studies at library level. Oral history is an instrument for extraction of history from depths and has determining role in connecting modern world with traditional knowledge at research communities; therefore, preservation and promotion of oral history by libraries and information centers should be taken into account.

**Keywords:** Oral history, Libraries, Public libraries, Academic Libraries

## Introduction

The significance of the study of history is on that history embeds a source of rich information of the behavior of individuals and the history of communities. In fact, history helps human being to perceive change and revolution and realize the way the community where he lives has been formed. It helps realization of identity and is undoubtedly one of the reasons why the advanced countries encourage teaching history in different ways. The historical findings include evidences of how the families, minorities and countries had been formed and progressed (Nathaniel Stirner, 2019). Before the invention of writing, the oral transmission of historical and cultural data was considered an ancient tradition. Although the oral history dates back to contemporary era and 1948 simultaneously with the use of tape recorder, it originates from the time before invention of writing when the human concepts were transmitted through oral narrations by generations (Hassan Abadi, 2006). In fact, oral history is a report of first hand experiences, recalling of past events and communication by interviewer for historical purposes (Lumys, 2006).

Oral history is a primary source accessible through recording of all spoken opinions, mainly interviews with those who appeared to have some information, recorded by tape recorder (Grimsley, 2009). The main aim of oral history is expansion of historical knowledge in areas where documented evidences are rare or there are essentially no available evidences (Ghorbani, 2004). On contrary to other written documents and resources which are mostly monologue, oral history is mostly relied on dialogue. The active interviews in oral history could discover the hidden elements, missing

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loops and happenings in events. Oral history adds value to oral evidences and the experienced and trained interviewer could direct the narration by interviewer in such a way that the individual could recall the events that are forgotten for many years (Rasoulipour, 2008).

One of the appropriate ways to respond information needs is the use of oral history services in libraries. The mission of libraries is collection and documentation of data related to identity and background of that society. The identification of main cultural and political characters in society, communication and interview with them, documentation and dissemination of interviews to make them accessible to researchers are the main activities that could be performed in oral history sector of libraries. The study of oral history background in the world shows that the oldest and biggest center keeping oral history records is Colombia University created by Alen Noise (Hassan Abadi, 2006). Columbus State University is another center keeping a record of oral history (Turner, 2017). In 1984, the Research Center of Colombia Oral History was established. In mid 1950s, the oral history gained significance in libraries and archive and consequently, in 1960s and 1980s, the use of texts and papers related to oral history using library study increased and at the end, in 1969, oral history was established by Code of Ethics for Archivists of America (Swain, 2003; Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2017).

The review of research background (For example Sabzipour & Fadai, 2008; Yap & Barsaga, 2018). showed that despite the significance of the application of oral history in universities and the role and mission of libraries as organizational memory for identification and documentation of the identify of ancestors, there is a need to create collections and documents based on oral history in libraries. The awareness of the process of researches and information needs of users, continuous evaluation of processes based on patterns and historical resources and awareness of the gaps of the collection are the main issues that should be considered by the librarians (Swain, 2003; Labert & Frisch, 2013).

The research review (for example White & Radick, 2017 & Hill, 2017). Shows that a few studies have been performed in this area. Therefore, the present study intends to study the role of academic libraries in creating collections based on oral history to highlight the knowledge gap for future researches as well as to investigate the barriers and challenges. To this end, the following questions will be answered:

1. In what types of libraries are the oral history researches carried out?
2. What approach and methodology are taken for oral history researches?
3. What are the most important categories for creating collections based on oral history in academic libraries?
4. What are the barriers and challenges on making collections based on oral history in academic libraries?

## **Methodology**

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A considerable number of methods used in librarianship and information studies are quantitative systematic review (Ullah & Ameen, 2018). While local studies have seldom utilized systematic review. In recent years, a new trend of using systematic review in local studies has merged. In present study, in which systematic review has been utilized, the checklist presented in (Xu, Kang & Song, 2015). Study was used for developing the quantitative systematic review based on the following steps:

**First step:** Identification of the need to review studies

Recognition of the significance of systematic review in general and identification of research gap in this field is one of the main objectives of this step. In so far as libraries are the knowledge-based organizations, it is possible to associate the users and local history through presentation of oral history and making it accessible (Yap & Barsaga, 2018). Therefore, the systematic review of the status of these studies and analysis of studies based on the role of types of libraries in making oral history collections seems to be necessary.

**Second step:** Identification of related databases

In responding to research questions, March 1983 was considered as the beginning of and December 2018 as the end of search period for external resources using textual databases (Google Scholar, Science Direct, Emerald and Ebsco).

**Third step:** Search and retrieval of related resources

For retrieval using research resources related to oral history, the bibliographic databases were searched. The searches were performed using Boolean operators and retrieval of totally related resources to oral history in libraries in title, abstract and keywords fields.

**Fourth step:** Systematic review of literature reviews

The condition for identification and selection of related researches was the existence of one "oral history", "oral tradition" and "local history" keywords in libraries in title, abstract, keywords and conclusion. At the end, 23 related studies were identified and studied in libraries.

**Table 1: The search strategies**

English keywords	Results
Oral history OR Local history OR Traditional history	
And "Libraries OR Public Libraries OR Academic Libraries OR Special Libraries OR National	23

### **Fifth step: Inclusion criteria and validation**

The research papers that included method and results were used for the present study. Due to limited number of studies, the library studies were also studied. For validation of research procedures, other expert apart from research team was consulted for identification, search and retrieval of related resources to oral history and also inclusion criteria of this systematic review and the proposed points by the expert were applied.

The list of 23 final resources were reviewed and compared with the retrieved resources in database prepared in this study. To ensure the validity of results' classification, another control on 20% of the studied resources in this study was performed by other expert than research team. The selected papers by the mentioned expert were again classified. This classification didn't differ much from the research classification except in a few cases in the title of categories.

### **Findings**

#### 1. The studied context

The findings of this systematic review showed that these systematic review studies were performed in public libraries context (17.39), academic libraries (8.69), and libraries in general (60.86), national libraries (8.69) and specialized libraries (4.34).

#### 2. Applied approach and methods

This part contains the methodology and systematic review studies. The research methodology included survey (56.52), case study (13.04) and review studies (3.43). The research approach included qualitative (21.73) and mixed (78.26) approaches.

**Table 2: Used approach and methods in studies**

<b>Studies Reviewed</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Tool Used</b>	<b>Research Methods</b>	<b>Context</b>
White, K. & Radick (2017)	Mix	Interviews and Surveys	Survey	<b>Academic Library</b>
Russell (2002)	-	-	Documentary	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Grimsley & Wynne (2009)	Mix	Interviews and Surveys	Survey	<b>Academic Library</b>
Yap & Barsaga (2018)	Qualitative	Interview	Survey	<b>Libraries in general</b>
McKether & Jeter (2013)	Qualitative	Interview	Survey	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Giese (1999)	Qualitative	Interview	Case Study	<b>National library</b>

Lee (1989)	Qualitative	Interview	Survey	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Baum, Anderson & Leary (2009)	-	-	Documentary	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Augustine (1987)	Mix	Interviews and Surveys	Survey	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Songhui (2008)	Qualitative	Interview	Survey	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Coombes (2009)	Qualitative	Interview	Survey	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Hill (2017)	Qualitative	Interview	Survey	<b>Public Library</b>
Taylor & Francis group (2011)	-	-	Documentary	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Palmer (1983)	Mix	Questionnaires, interviews and surveys	Survey	<b>Public Library</b>
Russell (2015)	Qualitative	Interview	Case Study	<b>Special Library</b>
Featherstone, Lyon, & Ruffin (2008)	Qualitative	Interview	Case Study	<b>National library</b>
Civallero (2017)	-	-	Documentary	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Alemne (1992)	Qualitative	Interview	Survey	<b>Public Library</b>
Paul (1989)	-	-	Documentary	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Barry, & Tedd (2008)	Mix		Survey	<b>Public Library</b>
Kargbo (2008)	Qualitative	Interview	Survey	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Zachert (1968)	-	-	Documentary	<b>Libraries in general</b>
Baum (2017)	-	-	Documentary	<b>Libraries in general</b>

## Findings

The categories related to creation of collections based on oral history in academic libraries are:

### Collection, identification and protection of oral history works

Oral history covers a wide range of information in different fields and benefits from a prominent value in study of culture and civilization process of any community. It makes users familiarize with ideas and opinions of ancestors; therefore, its identification and protection is a necessity. The consideration of oral history by historians, some methods will be found for collection of historical documents and their application for completion of written documents and archives which is highly significant for future of field of history (Kargbo, 2008). Based on this, oral history inherited from ancestors should be preserved and kept properly so that in case of necessity, it could be used by the generations seeking these types of resources. Meantime, libraries are knowledge-based organizations with significant role in protection of oral history and cultural development (Nypan, 2003). Identification and

collection of works of oral history is done aiming at their presentation and dissemination to users. Based on this, the survival of these works relies on their transfer from one to another generation.

### Dissemination & access of works of oral history

Protection and preservation of sources of oral history is insignificant without consideration of its dissemination. Dissemination of information is one of the aspects of information services covering transfer of updated data and on time distribution for the purpose of satisfying the needs of users. As far as libraries are service-oriented, they should be able to disseminate and transmit oral history. The emergence and application of information technology in libraries provide the opportunity for better transmission of these resources (White & Radick, 2017). Provision of some services such as collection of resources, creation of online collections, archives and development of collections are prerequisite of the policy of accessibility to oral history collections (Giese, 1999). Various strategies are used for dissemination of oral history in libraries such as:

- Creation of a section for oral history projects

First an independent section should be installed for oral history in libraries. Then the local resources should be collected for development of this section.

- The study of oral history background

The study and awareness of the principles of international oral history collections, content and the used technologies are required for awareness of the successful experiences.

- Teaching various skills to librarians for conducting interviews

Libraries should provide the opportunity for training librarians and encourage them to communicate with libraries and other information organizations (Swain, 2003).

- Effort to increase budget and financial resources

Financial resources and budget are a main condition and prerequisite for creation of oral history in libraries. Libraries should seek interaction with other organizations to encourage partnership and attract budget (Songhui, 2008).

### Recreation of the role of librarians and managers in oral history services

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The creation of oral history collections in libraries requires cooperation of organizations such as local data generation companies for expansion of oral history. The benefits of interaction with other organizations are so much that lead to sharing of knowledge and skills, expansion of audiences, cost reduction and so on. To this end, the librarians should show their incline and effort as the active and constructive role to present such services. They should be able to identify individuals with knowledge and information and record their oral traditions through communication with them (Kargbo, 2008). Interview is the main pillar of oral history, and interviewer and narrator have close relation in interview process. Interviewer as active listener plays a significant role to enable the respondent (narrator) to explain his approaches and attitudes in a peaceful environment. The role of interviewer is a dynamic role and the conversation between them with application of standard methods lead to clarification of hidden angles and its reconstruction. The librarians are required to acquire required skill and expertise in playing the role of interviewer. Moreover, the libraries should be equipped with updated technologies (Barry & Tedd, 2008). Electronic publication as a new framework for dissemination of information has created new challenges, one of which is the copy right (Baum, 1978). The librarians are required to take into account the issues related to protection of privacy of interviewer, the risk of misuse and manipulation, "unsupervised accessibility" and reduction of supervision of interviews. As far as the copy right limits publication and dissemination, the organizational managers are required to develop some strategic policies to get acquainted with some issues such as dissemination of resources, accessibility and use of audio collections (Reef, 2014).

### Documentation of oral history works

National Records and Archives Act has emphasized on the significance of oral tradition and the need to its documentation as private and confidential records (Sabzipour & Fadai, 2008; Kargbo, 2008). Although most librarians benefit from the potential of oral history documentation, some consider this type of history skeptically due to reliance on subjective memory (unwritten) and the possibility of error (Swain, 2008).

As far as librarians are informed of the library and the clients' needs they could evaluate the resources and decide on which source to be selected and which one to be withdrawn. To this end, the libraries' resources collection is to some extent representative of the true and proper selection of librarians (Jean Dryden, 1981). The collection of oral history in library does not mean the withdrawal of the principles of selection of library resources, rather, recognition of oral history resources and discovering of new dimensions are highly effective in development and enrichment of the library (Wallot, 1998). The responsibility of protection and defending the authenticity of documents and archives are the main tasks of librarians. They are required to possibly keep and preserve them as they have received without changing their content and appearance (William & Moss, 1988).

### Organizing and standardization of oral history works

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The emergence of new technologies has made libraries heavily dependent on these technologies such that most of them continuously prepare and receive electronic documents for most activities, which makes their maintenance and management highly significant. One of the highly significant activities is now organization and standardization of resources. With these changes, the librarians have taken new approaches to utilize this opportunity to their best and make use of added values of technology in terms of protection of volumes and making oral history collections available to users (Russell, 2015).

Concerning the standardization of oral history collection, it is required to take into account some principles such as creating conscious and deep vision in librarians on the organizing and standardization processes, supplying infrastructures and hardware and software equipment which should be planned in these procedures (Civallero, 2017).

### Digitalization of oral history

Libraries could collect different formats of audiovisual materials including video documents, speech, interview and etc. in an effort to digitalize the oral history of libraries and make them available to users through web-based digitalization. The audiovisual materials accelerate the transmission of data (William & Moss, 1988). The points that should be considered in digitalization of oral history collection by libraries are as follow:

- Creation rather than mere collection of materials and resources.

The creation of oral history collections in library provides unique opportunity for librarians to become aware of the gaps and deficiencies of their collection in addition to gaining research expertise and learning new skills (Blouin, 1999).

- New responsibilities and skills

The librarians, as interdisciplinary experts, are required to go beyond their field of expertise in developing services and resources and learn other skills such as documentation in creation of oral history in their collections (Ronald, 1996).

- Integration in the collections of libraries

The oral history belongs to libraries and should be made accessible to public like other library resources; although the cataloguing of these resources is different from other written resources, it is required to consider the integration principle using appropriate standards and strategies (Burke, 1976).

- The program of accessibility to oral history resources
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This program aims at provision of accessibility to resources in a wide area for users (1981). The accessibility program intends to promote the accessibility to publishers in all levels from local to national and in all processes from publication of new resources to preservation of past versions through playing constructive role and removing the existing barriers (Bruemmer, 1995).

### **The barriers and challenges on creation of collections based on oral history in libraries**

The societies with rich oral history play significant role in culture making; however, a few researchers study the oral history due to inaccessibility to this type of resources. There are various barriers and problems on the way of creating collections based on oral history in libraries such as:

- Deficiency of expert librarian, lack of information management and financial resources management skills
- Lack of full time archive for accessibility to resources in digital era for those in need of rapid and online information (Turner, 2017).

Moreover, while printed resources require storage facilities, digital resources impose technological and financial challenges and should be placed somewhere which is possible to transfer. Some of the challenges of technology in oral history resources are related to keeping of materials in their main formats, persistent copying problems, change of media, control of temperature and moisture for storage of main files (Svard, 2008). The managers and librarians are required to make some consideration on removing the barriers and challenges and take practical measures.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The results of this study showed that there are a few studies on the role and place of libraries in making oral history collection in academic libraries; therefore, the managers and librarians are required to take actions on provision of services and resources and various functions of libraries such as provision, dissemination and transmission of data concerning the significance of this issue and concerning the potential capacities of academic libraries in providing information and research services. In this regard, empowering librarians through teaching and learning skills is effective in actualization and realization of this objective.

The research methodology was qualitative and mixed (quantitative-qualitative) and the researches were carried out in public, academic, specialized and national libraries. The findings of this systematic review showed that libraries could play some role in identification and preservation of oral history, dissemination and accessibility, recreation of the role of librarians and managers, documentation and

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organizing and digitalization of oral history on creation of collections based on oral history documents.

Concerning the significance of this issue and as far as oral history fills the gaps in historical studies and enrich the historical resources, the authorities and managers of libraries, especially academic, public and national libraries are recommended to take actions on creating oral history collections in libraries in developing strategies, policies and instruction which in addition to promotion of the place of libraries in societies, lead to cultural and intellectual growth of society.

The effective strategies in protection of oral history include digitalization and making policies, standardizing and cataloguing the oral history works by the main organization with the aim of homogenization. In this regard, the libraries are required to be equipped with the most advanced equipment and tools concerning the updated technologies. The expansion of resource sharing and inter-library collaboration could prevent reworking in addition to enriching the oral history collections. It is also recommended to design appropriate and standard library software for documentation and cataloguing oral history which helps the homogenization of oral history.

Basically, the systematic study of the status of performed researches on oral history in academic libraries indicates that concerning lack of studies on the role of libraries in creation of oral history, this field requires more practical studies in libraries so that the results could help the authorities in dissemination, documentation and application of oral history by researchers in different types of libraries and protection of oral history.

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