

The role of rural libraries in preserving the indigenous knowledge of rural residents

Indigenous
knowledge of
rural residents

The case of South Khorasan Province

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the potential or actual role of rural libraries in preserving indigenous knowledge (IK) of the rural residents in South Khorasan province.

Design/methodology/approach – The study, based on a qualitative research, was carried out by employing the grounded theory method. Data were collected by semi-structured interviews from the research sample population which included 20 rural males, 10 rural females, 8 librarians and 3 well-informed regional IK specialists. The validity of the research was confirmed by peer evaluation, compounded by detailed thorough explanations and external reviewers' reaffirmations.

Findings – The rural residents of the South Khorasan villages across the province, after having realized the vitality of carrying out this project, were fully motivated and cooperative to provide indigenous knowledge. On the basis of the results from the rural libraries, due to being the solitary knowledge center in the area, these libraries could actively participate in preserving the knowledge and contribute toward the documentation of the indigenous knowledge. This required motivating librarians and increasing their professional, technical, research and verbal skills. The results of the study indicated that, even if the rural libraries of the South Khorasan province did not participate in documentation, preservation, and promotion of the IK and opt for the present form of non-participation, due to their inherent nature, they could become a focal point and play an indispensable role in achieving the objectives by aiding and leading the process at country level and become a focal point for the new generations of rural inhabitants to enlighten themselves and become fully aware of the value of the ancestral knowledge.

Originality/value – Hitherto, none of the researchers in Iran has covered the role of the libraries in general and rural libraries in particular in preserving the indigenous knowledge.

Keywords Documentation, Grounded theory, Indigenous knowledge, Preservation, Rural libraries

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

Indigenous knowledge (IK) is directly associated with the culture of a region, the evolution of which encompasses its entire history. The kind of knowledge has had interactions and transactions with the world outside its geographical area, and adapting itself dynamically and systematically with the internal and external evolutions and changes. Because of its holistic and comprehensive characteristics, IK has helped local communities to meet their

needs during several centuries. Studies indicated that IK systems have a high potential power, not only to meet the needs of people living in the area but also advance their knowledge (Hezar-Jaribi and Safari-Shali, 2010, 2015).

IK and experience are both usually remain unwritten and therefore are transmitted verbally and subjectively, the inevitable consequence of which is some degree of distortion. Since it is directly related to art, music, language, agriculture, medicine, handicrafts, play and natural resource management, it is imperative that it is documented and used as a necessary tool to access its useful resources. IK provides the basis for problem-solving approach for communities; however, formulating IK is difficult, as it is tacit and implied. Since it is enwrapped in actions and conventions, it belongs to families, folks and communities and consequently belongs to no one particular, and finally it is dynamic and not static (Sithol, 2007).

Public libraries are the bridge between information poor and information rich. Sometimes they call them poor man's university, i.e. where local information services help people to solve their everyday-life problems in order to improve the quality of their life. For many years, public libraries have played the role of the change agencies (Kargbo, 2005).

Information and library science is an interdisciplinary profession and one of the advantages of this profession involves supporting the research and development in other disciplines and science. The development of technology has changed the nature of this profession, rendering it more dynamic. Despite the attempts of information and library professionals to adapt themselves with the changes and its consequent challenges, they disregarded the main purpose of libraries, which is the fair access to information for all communities and cultures, particularly in remote areas. Some studies have been carried out on how information services, particularly in multi-cultural communities, were delivered. This is despite the fact that delivering information services to small communities with different cultures and conventions in line with their information requirements will further add to the service quality of the library (Rivera, 2013). In Nigeria, librarians play a critical role in supporting native researchers and the authors to collect and publish indigenous data, information and knowledge. The National library of Nigeria, public libraries and libraries of research institutions have turned into centers for identifying and producing indigenous knowledge. To do so, they have hired committed experts for testing and confirming indigenous information (Okorafor, 2010).

IFLA has had a commendable role in developing library and information science and preserving IK by holding symposiums and conferences at international level (Allaga, 2004). The life of poor villagers depends totally on particular knowledge skills which are critical to survive (Rao, 2006). Since the only knowledge center in most of the villages is the rural library and since one of the goals of rural libraries is increasing insight and awareness of rural residents, these organizations can play an important role in public education of rural population and specially the adults. These organizations can easily meet their educational needs as the librarian can perceptively and delicately identify the needs of rural residents, give consultation service, suggestions, guidance and improve the quality of their lives. Suggesting solutions to the farmer to increase the quality of his crops, identifying native arts of rural women to increase the productivity of the village and advance their knowledge are some examples of the helps that a librarian can offer toward cultural, social, economic and political development of the rural community (Farzin and Nikkar, 2001).

A brief review of the history and civilization of Iran, the evidence in the books and theses and talks to the experts and people in charge of rural development programs all confirm that there is a rich context of IK all over the country which is merged into the culture and conventions of the rural population. The main purpose of this research is to study the

potential or actual role of rural libraries as a center for preserving and disseminating IK of rural population. This paper looks to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. In which fields is the IK of villagers in South Khorasan?
- RQ2. What is the point of view of rural residents about using their ancestors' IK?
- RQ3. What trainings do rural residents need to cooperate with librarians?
- RQ4. In what circumstances do rural residents share their ancestral knowledge?
- RQ5. What do rural residents expect from people/organizations who use IK of South Khorasan's rural residents?
- RQ6. What is the need for documentation of the villagers' IK in South Khorasan?
- RQ7. What are the reasons for rural libraries to be active in collecting and documenting IK?

Literature review

A grounded theory research was carried out by Papzan *et al.* (2007) in Bilevar, Krmanshah, Iran aimed at finding an appropriate extension approach with the help of indigenous and new knowledge. The results showed that it is necessary and inevitable to pay attention to rural residents and their IK in extension programs. In other words, no goal is reached in any model or approach without the active cooperation of rural residents.

IK of migratory nomads of Kalhor tribe was the subject of the naturalistic-qualitative research by Papzan and Afsharzadeh (2011). The results indicated that Kalhor nomadic tribe keeps special sheep breeds appropriate to the climate, geographical condition and their own believes. Researchers found out that their decision for preferring their native breeds and not accepting original breeds is not irrational, but has deep roots in their experience and knowledge.

Arfaei and Zand (2011) carried out a research on the effective factors of IK in water consumption. In this descriptive-correlational research, they used a questionnaire to collect data. Results of Pearson's correlation coefficient showed a significant positive relationship between independent variables – including educational-extensional, economic and management factors – and using IK for optimizing water consumption. Multivariate regression was run for testing the effect of independent variables on the use of IK and economic factors. Results indicated that independent variables had a positive effect on using IK for optimal water consumption.

In a participatory qualitative research, Zamanipoor *et al.* (2011) investigated the application of IK on domestic animals such as goats, sheep and chicken in Hardang area in Khosf town. They found out that IK was very rich in animal husbandry and could be an important factor in increasing animal products in this province.

Lwgoa *et al.* (2010) did a research on the Knowledge management approaches in the social context in developing countries. Findings showed that knowledge management approaches could be used for managing and integrating IK with other knowledge systems and also to develop agriculture in developing countries, such as Tanzania.

In his research about the management and preservation of traditional knowledge by library and information science professionals, Maina (2012) referred to the importance of preservation, maintenance and continuous communication with IK and traditional cultures. Research population consisted of natives of Ontario State in Canada. Elders and native noblemen participated in the semi-structured interviews. Findings showed that libraries were the potential trustees and main knowledge guards. Findings also indicated that librarians and information professionals were responsible for the ways of preserving IK – including classifying, organizing, dissemination and elimination of knowledge challenges. It was also

recommended that libraries and information centers revise the western ways and preserve IK of their people with a new worldview.

Crnkovic (2012) studied the rural libraries of Serbia in the information technology era. Findings showed that rural libraries needed to deliver services for all kinds and ages of villagers and to adapt their budgets and activities with the needs of rural residents.

Stilwel and Munyua (2013) carried out a research titled about identifying agricultural knowledge systems of African farmers. They concluded that integrating IK with external knowledge would increase production, profit, learning, environment preservation, pest management, crisis management, food safety and decrease production expenses.

In their research, Lilley and Paringatai (2013) studied implementing IK of natives living in northern islands of New Zealand called "Maori." They described how Maori principals influenced the LIS education in New Zealand and were incorporated with it. The results showed that one of the circumstances for disseminating IK was preserving the intellectual property.

In a case study at the University of Fiji, Ali (2016) emphasized the importance of establishing a Native Studies Center to preserve Fiji's beliefs, arts and cultures. Performing a semi-structured interview with the university students and staff who were themselves natives Fiji residents, he showed that the establishment of a small, native studies center, not only could affect students' perceptions of their native culture and knowledge, but also facilitate the learning of new sciences through native knowledge and culture, and it had a significant role in promoting and maintaining traditional cultures and norms.

Sandy and Bossaller (2017) in a study on access to IK through knowledge organizing systems (KOSs) concluded that although the librarians who deal with IK sources have created some ways to accessing IK in recent years, information professionals need to have collaboration with indigenous people, followed by systematic application of the KOSs by the information center. They proposed that one of the best ways to ensure access to IK is to recruit indigenous people into the profession.

Literature review revealed that researchers have identified the importance of the relationship between knowledge management and the development of IK and pointed to the crucial role that libraries can play in this regard, and that there are several organizations and institutions which can play a role in preserving IK; however, in many countries, libraries accepted this role and planned for improving their functions. In Iran, no attention was paid to the role of rural libraries in preserving and maintaining IK. In this research, grounded theory is used to study the perspectives of librarians working in rural libraries, rural residents and people informed about South Khorasan's IK about the potential or actual role of rural libraries in preserving IK.

Methodology

In their paper, "applying grounded theory for understanding indigenous knowledge," Hezar-Jaribi and Safari-Shali (2015) referred to the necessity of studying IK and its capabilities, and they introduced grounded theory as a research tool and an important method in understanding and applying IK in universities and research centers of Iran.

This research is a qualitative research carried out by grounded theory. Qualitative approach is appropriate for research which is seeking for understanding meaning or the nature of individuals' experiences. Qualitative research is an efficient approach for understanding complex details about phenomena such as feelings, intellectual processes, and emotions whose understanding is not easily possible by common methods (Mark and colleagues, 2005).

Research population consisted of three groups: villagers with expert, experience and information about traditional knowledge living in villages with rural libraries; librarians of

eight rural libraries of Iran Public Libraries Foundation in South Khorasan (located in Karit, Esfandiar, Zirak-Ababd, Dashtgharan and Hoodar in Tabas; Ghale-Zari in Khoosf, Khansharaf in Nehbandan; and Boorang in Birjand); and people informed about the IK of South Khorasan whose papers were found on the topic during the research.

A sample of 20 men and 10 women was selected from the first group of research population by purposive and snowball sampling methods. The villagers were selected from the knowledgeable people in IK in the villages where there were rural libraries because the selected interviewees were familiar with the rural library and its role. They were selected in two ways. First, we went to the Promotion Unit of Agriculture Office (PUAO) of the cities in order to identify successful farmers and villagers based on their information. After going to the villages and talking with some villagers, they were asked to introduce knowledgeable and experienced villagers so their selection went through snowball sampling. In most cases, the information provided by the PUAO of knowledgeable and successful residents was the same as the villagers provided. The reason for using the two ways was that no knowledgeable person was ignored. Since the number of librarians – second group – was few, all of them were included in the research. A sample of informed people was also selected first by purposive and then by snowball methods. The informed people of IK meant those who have some work about the IK in South Khorasan, one of them hold a PhD in Environmental Science and was Chairman of the Jihad Agriculture Organization of South Khorasan (JAOSK). He had written a book on IK of jujube breeding, another specialist on oral history, and collected that of the South Khorasan villages. And one was a PhD in Agricultural Promotion and an Associate Professor at the University who had several papers on the IK of the South Khorasan. Finally, one who had a MS on Agriculture Promotion and an employee of the JAOSK had a book and several papers on the IK of South Khorasan.

Creswell (2013) suggested eight ways for ensuring the validity of qualitative research. He believed considering at least two ways in which a qualitative research can yield acceptable validity. The validity of the present research was ensured by three ways suggested by Creswell, i.e. confirmed by peer evaluation, detailed and rich explanation and external reviewers' judgement.

All of the interviews were recorded as video and audio and after the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. After interviewing 30 expert villagers, data reached saturation point. In order to ensure the saturation point, some miscellaneous samples were also interviewed. Coding is the core of analysis in grounded theory. It helps the researcher to be both systematic and creative. Coding includes three steps: open, axial and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

The main goal of analysis was to move from specific to general. Therefore, analysis was started by analyzing first interview, this helped to make researcher's mind on different meanings, features, and dimensions of research subject. Questioning was the first analysis tool; questions that interviewer asked herself not only did help her to understand the circumstances and state of subject, but also showed her the gaps that could be filled in the next interview and following analysis. The second analysis tool was comparison. The researchers compared all the words in the list and selected a word or a phrase – which was synonym of the other words or included the meaning and intention of other words – as the main tag. Phrases were placed under relevant tags. In this process, open and axial coding was carried out simultaneously and in selective coding, the recommended protocol was obtained.

Findings

After open coding, 119 concepts were extracted from the interviews in the form of concepts, phrases and words. In the next step, axial coding was done where close concepts were tagged with one phrase according to the similarities and formed 20 sub-categories.

Then, relationships were found between sub-categories and finally six main categories were identified. The results of this categorization are shown in Table I. Following, the results are offered based on the main questions.

Idigenous knowledge: definitions and fields

To answer the first question, they were asked about the definitions and fields of IK. The main categories derived from 19 concepts and two sub-categories of IK are listed in Table I.

As shown in Table I to answer the *RQ1*, IK had several and different definitions by IK informed people and they considered old knowledge, traditional knowledge and local knowledge as IK. One of the IK informed people emphasized that IK and Indigenizing knowledge were not the same. Idigenizing knowledge refers to the external knowledge indigenized according to the circumstances and region. He considered IK in the new era as a comparative and adaptive knowledge for he believed that recently rural residents get the modern new knowledge from experts and promoters and merged it with their IK to achieve a comparative knowledge. The informed people and librarians considered equal, in addition to comparative knowledge, the terms such as traditional knowledge and oral history with IK. The villagers knew the old knowledge as IK because it had survived form ancient times. Some also called it rural knowledge or local knowledge because it was that knowledge which could respond to their problems in the specific conditions of the climate, customs, and facilities.

The findings indicated that field of South Khorasan IK is very wide and various. The rural residents have precious experiences in traditional medicine including orthopedics, midwifery and treatment by herbal medicines. They had traditional knowledge in agriculture including gardening and farming productions such as saffron. They also were skilled in animal husbandry, animal products, and so on.

The villagers and their beliefs about using IK

To answer the second and third questions, they were asked about their own IK, using and learning it, and the trainings they needed to cooperate with librarians to document it. The results are shown in Table II.

The findings showed that some of the villagers undervalued their IK because of the beliefs and inductions from their children, young villagers and some other people. They did not believe and trust their IK and underestimated their IK in comparison with new knowledge; however, they willy-nilly used their IK. They used their ancestor’s knowledge, since they were young. Their traditional knowledge is dominant in their mind and as they said it is like “carved on stone,” so they hardly accepted new knowledge and modern technologies. Sometimes it sounded like holy for them. As one of the informed people pointed out “Farmers, who have learned from their IK and their ancestors that grafting jujube is impossible, hardly accept (agriculture) engineers and promoters who tell them it is possible.” It takes time and effort to make them accept this new knowledge. In fact they found their IK more useful and effective in their climate, environment and life-style. One of the informed people believed that farmers and villagers are sometimes right not to accepting suggestions of agriculture

Main category	Sub-category	Concept
IK	Definitions	IK, adaptive or comparative knowledge, traditional knowledge, oral history, local knowledge, old knowledge, rural knowledge
	Fields	Traditional medicine, agriculture, irrigation, cultivating saffron, jujube, barberry, herbal medicine, animal husbandry, midwifery, orthopedics, architecture, handicrafts

Table I.
IK definitions
and fields

engineers and promoters. He said: “when we suggest farmers new genetically modified seeds which produce more crops, they reject. It is because they believe these modified seeds have less hay, so they have to buy forage for their farm animals. Modified seeds also need a 7-day watering but in their village watering period is 14 days. Since the condition of their villages and watering plans are not changeable, they prefer their local wheat seeds and they are right.”

Third question was about trainings necessary for villagers to cooperate with the library. As it was shown in Table II, it was clear that villagers need to increase their self-confidence and be aware of the value and importance of their IK. This needed librarians to talk and exchange ideas with them. They also need to be trained about the new knowledge and science according to their needs, so that they merge the new knowledge with their traditional knowledge. The results showed that villagers who were successful in farming had hectares of farmlands, and had many workmen on their farmlands who were very interested and motivated to cooperate with rural library. On the contrary, villagers whose expenses exceeded their income from selling their farm crops had low self-confidence to state their IK. The findings also indicated that they were interested to learn new knowledge in addition to their IK so that they had more and better products and earn more money from those products. For example, a woman in Boorang village, whose husband was disabled, was the head of village cooperative. She attended the courses held by agriculture ministry and planted button mushrooms at home. She was interested in cooperating with rural library for documenting and preserving IK.

The villagers’ expectations or conditions to share their IK

Regarding fourth question, it was found out that none of the villagers puts conditions to share their IK. They shared their IK for pleasing God, helping people and the youth of the village and preserving their village. They believed that “to pay taxes for your knowledge, you should disseminate it.”

Some of the villagers talked about some problems they were facing such as lack of time and extra workers, drought and financial issues. Regarding these problems, they proposed some of their expectations which were the answer to the RQ5. Villagers believed that low-interest loans, insurances, village facilities, and solving problems, such as lack of irrigation facilities, doctor, etc., could motivate youth. Motivating young villagers to stay at the village is one of the main ways to preserve IK, according to the villagers. They asked help from the government and relevant organizations to find a solution for encountering drought and preventing rural residents from migrating to cities. They also asked for backup workers at their busy and peak time.

IK documentation capacity and necessity

The interviewees were asked about the capacity and necessity of documenting IK. They all believed that it was very important to make this and they had some reasons (Table III).

Main category	Sub-category	Concept
Villagers	Believing in one’s own IK	They believe, they do not believe
	Using IK	They do not use, they use
	Trainings needed to help rural library	Increasing self-confidence and self-esteem, information technology, specialized training
	What the villagers expect in return for sharing their IK	Insurance, low-interest loan, extra workers, encouraging young people, preserving IK, rural development, without any expectation
	People from whom I learned IK	Father, mother, grandfather, myself, neighbors, friends, time shortage
	Problems they face to cooperate with the library	Weakness and aging, Lack of self-esteem, Lack of backup workers, migration, there is no reason to help

Table II.
Villagers’ believes
about using and
learning IK

To answer the sixth question, the results showed that there was a great potential capacity among rural residents and also librarians of rural libraries for documenting, preserving and disseminating IK. According to the news, inquiry and the statement of the librarian, Khansharaf library was the biggest rural library of Iran. It seemed that rural residents of South Khorasan relied on their knowledge and experiences because of several droughts and privations in comparison with other villages; however, these droughts and privations might have led to abandon villages and consequently their precious IK would have been forgotten without documentation. One of the informed people stated that “villages of Iran are rich resources of IK. Villages of South Khorasan are richer in IK since the bad weather and privations. It is necessary to document IK in Iran and it is critical to document IK in South Khorasan because of the droughts and migration of villagers” (Table III).

Rural libraries, librarians and IK

All interviewees were asked about the role of rural libraries and librarians in documenting IK. They all believed the critical role of them in this regard. The main characteristics of rural librarians and the role of rural libraries are presented in Table IV.

Answering question seven, it was found out that rural libraries in South Khorasan were the only knowledge centers for keeping knowledge and they were also a place for villagers to interact and communicate with each other. Since most of the villages had rural libraries and their goal was to serve rural residents, they were appropriate places for preserving IK of villagers. One of the informed people said to us: “how many centers can be founded for preserving villagers’ IK? How many organizations is enough to take the responsibility of this task? But, each village has a library. If we want them to accept the responsibility of preserving IK, they must change their present attitude.” The findings showed that all the librarians working in rural

Table III.
Reasons for
documenting IK

Main category	Sub-category	Concept
Documenting IK	Necessity	Preventing destruction Preserving for next generations More usable and applicable than modern knowledge

Table IV.
Rural librarians’
characteristics and
rural libraries
role in IK

Main category	Sub-category	Concept
Librarians of rural libraries	Field of study	Theology, accounting, management, English language translation, library and information science
	Needed skills and competencies	Knowing research methods, knowing computer skills, filming and photography skills, communication skills, expertise in library and information science, familiarity with the area under study
	Characteristics	Patient, interested, commitment, love, serious ness, respectful attitude, trustworthy, avoiding bias, male, compassionate, native
	Expectations	Insurance, financially support, extending working hours, backup staff, attention of parent organization to the issue, culture building practices, government support, delegation of authority
Rural library	Reasons for non-cooperation	Boredom, lack of interest, lack of time, fear of villagers’ lack of attention, fear of superiors, lack of attention
	Reasons for acting in the field of IK	Rural library is the only knowledge center in some villages. It is a place for villagers to interact with each other. It is a place to keep knowledge. It is useful for the library. It is available in most of the villages. Its goal is to serve villagers

libraries were from the natives and the participants considered this as one of the most important factors, since natives were more responsible, had commitment, and were familiar with the accent and dialect of rural residents. It is also easier for a native librarian to identify the fields and areas of IK and who had IK in villages (the one that was referred in question one).

The villagers believed that if a librarian was a man, he would be better off for recording and filming IK in harsh areas and far away locations, although informed people and librarians did not believe it and deemed that some of the IK owners of the villages were women so the women were more comfortable with women to give information on many of their empirical issues.

Discussion and conclusion

As mentioned before, it is necessary to preserve the IK of rural residents. This is more important and critical in villages of South Khorasan because of the recent droughts and migration to cities. According to the findings, there are wide areas and various fields of IK in South Khorasan. There also may be some undetected areas in traditional knowledge and experiences of South Khorasan villagers. There is no doubt that these undetected areas must be discovered, the owners of knowledge must be identified, and the IK must be documented according to the priorities in different villages.

The findings were in line with those of Papzan and Afsharzadeh (2011), Papzan *et al.* (2007), Zamanipoor *et al.* (2011), Arfaei and Zand (2011), Stilwel and Manyua (2013) and Maina (2012). They also found out that not only natives used their IK, but also did worry about losing IK without passing it to the next generation. It seems that droughts, financial issues, and high expenses disappointed the villagers, especially farmers. It is inferred from the interviews that villagers had low self-confidence. Statements such as “we are not educated enough” or “we are not high class” were not the consequences of undervaluing or underestimating their IK and traditional knowledge, but, as one of the informed people said: “villagers need something like a garden with enough products and high income to be proud of.” Therefore, the government and relevant organizations and institutions should first meet their expectations – including low-interest loans, insurances and so on – and then take their role in preserving their IK.

Findings also showed that villagers need to increase their self-confidence to understand the value of their IK. It is also recommended to teach them new knowledge and science to add it to their treasure of traditional knowledge. This result was similar to the findings of Crnkovic (2012).

Lilley and Paringatai (2013) believed that one of the main factors for preserving intellectual property is disseminating it. Maina (2012) showed that owners of IK wanted to preserve their knowledge against illegal use. The findings were not in line with those of Maina's. It is obvious that members of developed communities are more aware of copyrights and these rights are applied in all fields. It seems this is the reason for contradiction in findings. In Iran, copyrights are not applied widely. Rural residents and low-educated people are hardly aware of the copyrights of their products. The other reason for this contradiction may be the modesty and courtesy of Iranian villagers. They also believed that God is the absolute owner of everything including knowledge. They had a strong commitment to help their fellows and countrymen. Findings revealed some of the expectations of villagers such as low-interest loans and more facilities in the village. However, they did not ask for their expectations in return for their IK. They believed that meeting their expectations can be a motivating factor for cooperating with rural libraries.

Findings were similar to Papzan *et al.* (2007), Lwgoa *et al.* (2010) and Manyua and Stilwel (2013) which all emphasized on the necessity of documenting IK in order to preserve it for the next generations and use it in indigenous communities.

Some findings were in line with Lwgoa *et al.* (2010), Maina (2012) and Crnkovic (2012) on showing the importance of rural libraries, their role in preserving IK, the nature of library

and information science, the role of information professionals as knowledge managers, rural libraries as the nearest knowledge centers to villagers and the goal of rural libraries in preserving and disseminating IK.

The study aimed at identifying actual or potential role of rural libraries as the nearest knowledge centers to knowledge owners. As mentioned before in the literature review, in many countries, natives, villagers and experts considered librarians as the leaders of the teams preserving IK and the guards of the precious treasure of IK. It is obvious that this point of view roots from the belief that librarians had or accomplished the competencies needed for documenting, preserving and disseminating the IK. Surprisingly, the research found out that no one believed in the role of librarians in preserving IK. One of the informed people was surprised and stated that “librarian should be at the library and keep books; what can he do to preserve IK?!” It seems that this attitude may arise from the poor performance of librarians working in rural libraries. Some of these librarians are not educated in library and information science and work in library simply because there was no one to work there. Mokhtari *et al.* (2005) pointed out that librarians are mostly behind schedule and involve just in circulation desk, so they forget their main role as knowledge workers.

The findings also indicated that even if the rural libraries of South Khorasan do not accept the responsibility for documenting, preserving and disseminating IK of villages, as they have not up to now, they can have a potential role to reach these goals due to their nature as the knowledge centers in villages. They can help and guide IK centers in Iran, introduce villagers’ IK to these centers, and motivate young villagers to study and obtain knowledge in order to preserve their ancestral knowledge. But if librarians of rural libraries, as knowledge managers, accept the responsibility of documenting, preserving and disseminating IK of villagers with the help of experts, informed people, Iran Public Libraries’ Foundation, and other institutions, they can play an effective role in this effort.

The fields of IK are vast and, and many organizations, such as Public Library Foundation, agricultural research and education centers, Children and Youth Intellectual Development Centers, radio and television, universities, Education Office, Housing Institutions, Cultural Heritage Office, can play a role in the preserving and disseminating of IK. What matters is that these institutions and organizations, such as a team, each have a duty to document, preserve and disseminate IK. IK is essential to human development, so if it is neglected in any society, human development is ignored. The documentation, preservation and dissemination of IK, which reflects many generations of experience and problem solving by so many ethnic groups in the world, are crucial for all the countries and communities.

At the end, it is suggested that the LIS Departments develop rural library major at bachelor and master levels. Furthermore, it is also recommended to increase the number of rural libraries of South Khorasan province.

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