# A Study of the Subject of "Public Libraries" in Web of Science and Islamic World Science Citation Center

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the subject of "public libraries" in the Clarivate Analytics Web of Science (WoS) and Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC). The present study is a descriptive-analytical research adopting scientometrics approach in terms of data collection. The statistical population of the study consisted of 3122 documents indexed in the WoS during 1900-2019 as well as 232 documents indexed in the ISC during 1999-2017. To collect data, we refined the search to title as (TI=Public Library*) and limited it to the time span (PY=1900-2019) in WoS in order to avoid diversity in the retrieved documents. The same approach was followed to retrieve documents from ISC databases. Research findings showed that foreign researchers were interested in "information science and library", "computer sciences", and "architecture" in relation to public library studies. On the other hand, Iranian researchers focused on "public library studies", "assessment", and "staff studies including managers and librarians". Considering the journals publishing research on public library issues, the findings showed that the American *Library Journal* (n=749) and the Iranian *Research on Information Science and public libraries* (n=134) published the largest number of articles on the subject at the global and local levels, respectively.  USA, Canada, and England were the most productive countries in "public libraries" research area. Besides, University of Illinois and Islamic Azad University were the most active institutions publishing in this field at international and national levels with 62 and 57 documents, respectively. This study aimed to survey and compare research on public libraries in WoS and ISC. An examination of the subject area of public libraries revealed the trends of research fronts at the global level and in Iran and determines whether or not the topics of interest to world-class researchers are close to that of national researchers or if domestic researchers have addressed public library issues with an indigenous approach.

**Keywords:** Public library, WoS, Islamic World Science Citation Center, ISC, Scientometrics.

## Introduction

Libraries play an important role in providing access to accredited information resources. In fact, public libraries specifically serve the whole society (Chandrasekar & Sivathaasan, 2016). In the past, libraries were considered as a warehouse for books. They had no facilities to provide inclusive access to resources to the public before the emergence of information and

communication technologies. However, the structure and performance of libraries dramatically changed with the introduction of new technologies such that every individual may readily gain unlimited access to information resources nowadays. New technologies have affected various library sections so that libraries are facing new challenges. The same challenges apply to public libraries as well. Competent management is required for public libraries to provide optimal services, do needs analysis, collect and distribute resources, and train users. Overall, effective organizations drawing on their past achievements tend to control service quality, user satisfaction, innovation, creativity and lifelong training so that they can keep up with the changes. The same applies to libraries so that they need continuous changes in their mechanisms to achieve success. In other words, effective management is necessary for libraries and may guarantee their success. Considering their extensive activities, public libraries have been studied from different approaches. Salman, Mostert, and Mugwisi (2018) reported insufficient budget, lack of stakeholders' participation in library administration, and faulty legislation as the main barriers to good management. On the other hand, Velasquez, Evans, and Kaeding (2016) assert that risk management is neglected in public libraries. Participatory management has been addressed in public libraries as well. In this regard, research findings have shown average intra-organizational and above-average extra-organizational participation (Babolhavaedji & Pashazadeh, 2011). Structural and behavioral barriers to participatory management emanates from a lack of an adequate administrative hierarchy (Siamian, Latifi, & Mahdizadeh, 2011). Obviously, adherence to scientific management and organizational excellence by library managers can affect the quality of performance (Hariri & Kiani, 2011). What should be addressed in the studies on public libraries is organizational culture and knowledge management, which may lead to better services in the management process. Research has shown a significant positive relationship between these two components in public libraries (Osareh, Morovati, & Hosseini, 2013; Ghaderi, Jafari & Familrohani, 2016). In the studies reviewed above, the emphasis is placed on knowledge management. With the increasing volume of information resources, it is almost unlikely for a library, especially public libraries, to cover a comprehensive collection. Therefore, libraries have to be selective in picking their materials to derive users' satisfaction via providing a consistent collection. Researchers have frequently addressed the inconsistency of library collections (Shear et al., 2015). Therefore, knowledge management in libraries dramatically decreases users' dissatisfaction with material borrowing procedures (Pourebadi, Mirhosseini, & Neshat, 2015) and library collection development (Mohammad Esmail & Salehi Fathabadi, 2011). Previous findings suggest that libraries should seek ways to develop a consistent collection and gain users' satisfaction. Shahmirzadi and Fahimnia (2009) contend that short-term collection assessment and weeding practice may help develop a relatively adequate collection.

Information literacy is another issue in public library management. Information literacy was introduced due to the massive accumulation of information, which made it more difficult to distinguish between right and wrong and to select the right information. A public library is an information center serving people; thus, library employees, as information experts, should have necessary qualifications in finding information. On the other hand, since public libraries are supposed to train the users as well, they aimed at promoting information literacy in them (Chowdhury, Islam & Islam, 2011; Yılmaz & Soylu, 2014). It is noteworthy that librarians' skills in information literacy can meet the exploitation of new ideas (Kermani & Solhdoost, 2017) considering library citizenship behavior to meet the objectives. Ever since, ample

research has been done to capture information literacy and training in public libraries. The findings suggest that users are content with public librarians' information literacy so that they could effectively search for the relevant information (Nielsen & Borlund, 2011). However, some studies have reported inadequate information literacy in librarians (Rezvan, Kokabi, & Bigdeli, 2009). Age, work history, field and level of education, and English proficiency are the factors contributing to public librarians' information literacy (Abdollahi & Jokar, 2014). Tajdaran, Karbala Aghaie, and Ameli (2013) concluded that public libraries failed to develop information literacy in their users. They contended that a lack of necessary resources in the library collection was the key barrier to the development of information literacy in the users. Thus, principled solutions such as cooperation with other organizations in teaching information literacy (Lai, 2011) are required to promote information literacy in both librarians and users. Moreover, librarians' job satisfaction at workplace is a powerful incentive addressed by researchers (Hariri & Ashrafi Rizi, 2009; Bahadori Khosroshahi, Hashemi Nosratabadi, & Beyrami, 2013; Norouzi & Chamarlu, 2013; Mansouri, Hosseinzadeh, & Novah, 2014; Pors, 2003; Munuera & Triant Ofilo, 2015; Sani et al., 2016; Sani et al., 2017). With job satisfaction, employees eagerly make any endeavor to help realize organizational goals.

User satisfaction is an important issue in public libraries. In fact, a library may be considered successful only when the users are satisfied with resources, physical facilities, and librarian accountability. Over the last decades, researchers have studied users' satisfaction with public libraries (Choshaly & Mirabolghasemi, 2019; Tabatabaie Nasab, 2013; Moslemi, Ziaie & Sharif Moghadam, 2016; Fahimifar & Farzin Yazdi, 2014; Mohammadi & Motaharinia, 2015; Chandrasekar & Sivathaasan, 2016; Tan, Chen & Yang, 2017). These studies tended to pinpoint what factors contributed to user dissatisfaction.

Literature cites ample studies on library management, collection development, information literacy, job satisfaction, and user satisfaction in public libraries. In addition to improving public libraries through providing guidelines and solutions, these studies have led to increased scientific output on the subject. Obviously, control and monitoring are essential contributors to transcendental goals. Thus, it is crucial to identify research fronts in public libraries. Control and monitoring of research output in various fields is accomplished in different ways. Evaluation of research output via scientometric measures and prioritization of research are two approaches to apply control and mentoring to research productions. For example, Heidari, Ghanadi Nezhad, and Saghaie Talab (2016) classified the research needs of public libraries in Khuzestan province in 9 categories and 100 topics. Accordingly, they reported that "public library studies", "user-related research", "information technology", and "management and administrative section" were the most important research subjects.

Evaluation of scientific productions and comparison of research growth rate not only reveal the scientific status of a country but they also contribute to policy making and planning in different countries. However, a review of previous resources showed no study on the evaluation of research output on public libraries. Thus, the present study aims to investigate research output on the subject of public libraries indexed in the web of science (WoS) and the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC).

**Research questions**
1. What is the growth rate of research on public libraries in WoS and ISC?
2. What is the status of different countries with regard to research on public libraries in WoS?

3. What are the most active institutions in doing research on public libraries?

4. What are the research areas within the subject of public libraries?

5. Are there any differences in public library research areas between Iran and other countries?

6. What is the status of target journals in covering research on public libraries?

## Methodology

The research adopted a descriptive-analytical method with a scientometric approach. The research population consisted of all research, regardless of research formats, on public libraries indexed in WoS during 1900-2019. It also included all researches by Iranian scholars indexed in ISC from 1999 until now. The query TI= "Public Library" was inserted into WoS advanced search to retrieve the relevant data from WoS databases, which resulted in the retrieval of 3122 documents. To collect the relevant data from ISC databases, the search term "public librarie(s)" [in Persian] was typed into the topic field on SCI Advanced Search resulting in the retrieval of 232 documents. The documents were then analyzed and recorded for publication year, institution, and source titles. The research areas of the retrieved documents were identified by examining titles, abstracts, keywords, and results section. The quartile rankings of WoS- and ISC-indexed source titles were extracted from InCites Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and Persian Journals Citation Reports (PJCR), respectively.

## Results

As shown in Figure 1, the growth rate of research on public libraries was variable across different time spans so that it fluctuated between positive and negative values. Overall, the growth rate was negative during 1900-1914, 1915-1929, 1945-1959, and 1990-2000 while it was positive in other periods. Moreover, the period 1930-1944 marked the highest growth rate (9.68%) while the lowest rate was observed during 1900-1914 (-8.83%).
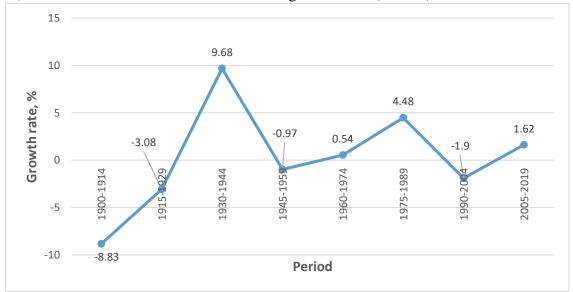


*Figure 1.* Growth rate of WoS-indexed documents on public libraries over time

Figure 2 illustrates the growth rate of research on public libraries by Iranian researchers over time. The initial period of 1999-2003 marked a negative growth rate (-6.94%); however, the publications skyrocketed by a rate of 41.42% during 2004-2008, which marks the highest

growth rate of research on the subject in Iran. Still, the growth rate of research output on the subject declined by 1.63 and -9.47 during 2009-2013 and 2014-2017, respectively. Accordingly, the lowest growth occurred during 2014-2017.
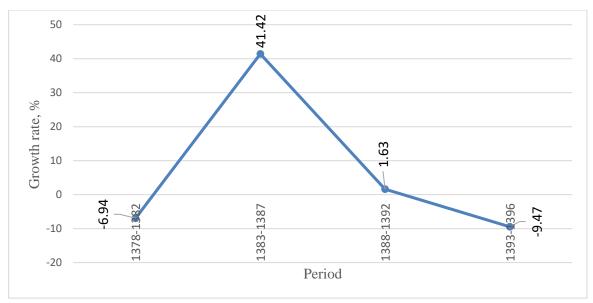


*Figure 2.* Growth rate of ISC-indexed documents on public libraries over time

Analysis of WoS documents during 1900-2019 revealed that 71 countries/regions contributed to publications on public libraries. Table 1 illustrates the top ten most active countries and their number of publications. Researchers affiliated with the United States of America published the largest number (n=1111) and thus the largest share ($\approx$ 36%) of all documents. Canada and England ranked second and third with 184 and 133 documents and a share of about 6% and 4.26%, respectively. The fourth to tenth ranks were held by Australia (n=39), Japan (n=28), China (n=25), Spain (n=22), Scotland (n=22), Norway (n=20), and Brazil (n=18), respectively.

*Table 1.*
*Top 10 most productive countries contributing to research on public libraries in WoS*

| No. | Country | Records | % of 2976 |
|-----|---------|---------|-----------|
| 1 | USA | 1111 | 35.586 |
| 2 | Canada | 184 | 5.894 |
| 3 | England | 133 | 4.260 |
| 4 | Australia | 39 | 1.249 |
| 5 | Japan | 28 | 0.897 |
| 6 | China | 25 | 0.801 |
| 7 | Spain | 22 | 0.705 |
| 8 | Scotland | 22 | 0.705 |
| 9 | Norway | 20 | 0.641 |
| 10 | Brazil | 18 | 0.577 |

As shown in Table 2, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS published the largest number of documents (n=62) on public libraries constituting 1.986% of all retrieved documents.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MADISON ranked second with 40 documents (1.281% of total documents). And PUBL LIB ranked third with 39 documents (about 1.281% of total documents). For a breakdown see table 2.

*Table 2.*
*Top 11 most productive institutions contributing to research on public libraries in WoS*

| No. | Institution | Record | % of 3122 |
|-----|-------------|--------|-----------|
| 1 | UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS | 62 | 1.986 |
| 2 | UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MADISON | 40 | 1.281 |
| 3 | PUB LIB | 39 | 1.249 |
| 4 | FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY | 38 | 1.277 |
| 5 | NEW YORK PUBL LIB | 32 | 1.025 |
| 6 | UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SYSTEM | 27 | 0.865 |
| 7 | INDIANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM | 27 | 0.865 |
| 8 | UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN | 26 | 0.833 |
| 9 | UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO | 26 | 0.833 |
| 10 | UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA | 24 | 0.769 |
| 11 | UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA | 24 | 0.769 |

At the national level, the data illustrated in Table 3 reveals that Islamic Azad University (co)-produced the largest number of documents (n=57) on the subject of public libraries (24.57% of total documents). Iran Public Libraries Foundation and Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz ranked third and fourth producing 49 and 32 documents doing a share of 21.12% and 13.79% of all documents, respectively. The top 10 most productive Iranian institutions are listed in Table 3.

*Table 3.*
*Top 10 most productive institutions contributing to research on public libraries in ISC*

| No. | Institution | Record | % of 232 |
|-----|-------------|--------|----------|
| 1 | Islamic Azad University | 57 | 24.57 |
| 2 | Iran Public Libraries Foundation | 49 | 21.12 |
| 3 | Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz | 32 | 13.79 |
| 4 | University of Tehran | 25 | 10.78 |
| 5 | Payame Noor University | 22 | 9.48 |
| 6 | Firdowsi University of Mashhad | 15 | 6.47 |
| 7 | Isfahan University | 14 | 6.03 |
| 8 | Tarbiat Modares University | 12 | 5.17 |
| 9 | Yazd University | 12 | 5.17 |
| 10 | Graduates of Library and Information Science | 10 | 4.31 |

Analysis of the research documents indexed in WoS on the subject of public libraries during 1900-2019 revealed that scholars had already addressed 70 topics within the subject. Table 4 illustrates the top 10 most frequently studied topics. Accordingly, "Information Science Library Science" was the most frequent subject category with 2375 documents (76.073% of total documents). "Computer Science" and "Architecture" ranked second and third with 222 and 115

documents and did a share of 7.111% and 3.684% of all documents, respectively. The research priorities of international scholars in public libraries are illustrated in Table 4.

*Table 4*
*Top 10 most frequently studied subject categories in public library research in WoS*

| No. | Subject Category | Frequency | % of 2976 |
|-----|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Information Science Library Science | 2375 | 76.073 |
| 2 | Computer Science | 222 | 7.111 |
| 3 | Architecture | 115 | 3.684 |
| 4 | Arts Humanities Other Topics | 101 | 3.235 |
| 5 | Literature | 84 | 2.691 |
| 6 | History | 72 | 2.306 |
| 7 | Education Educational Research | 65 | 2.082 |
| 8 | Social Sciences Other Topics | 56 | 1.794 |
| 9 | History Philosophy Of Science | 43 | 1.377 |
| 10 | Business Economics | 38 | 1.277 |

As shown in Table 5, Iranian researchers addressed 18 topics within the subject of public library. Accordingly, a number of 136 documents were published in the category of "Public Library Related Studies" that ranks first as the most frequent area of research (58.62% of total documents). Research with a focus on "Assessment" ranked second with 96 documents and a share of 41.38%. "Staff Studies" (including managers and librarians) held the third rank with 70 documents and a share of 30.17%.

Table 5
*Subject categories of research on public libraries indexed in ISC*

| No. | Subject Category | Frequency | % of 232 |
|-----|-----------------|-----------|----------|
| 1 | Public Library Related Studies | 136 | 58.62 |
| 2 | Assessment | 96 | 41.38 |
| 3 | Staff Studies (including managers and librarians) | 70 | 30.17 |
| 4 | User Related Studies | 67 | 28.88 |
| 5 | Library Service | 33 | 14.22 |
| 6 | Collection Development | 31 | 13.36 |
| 7 | Information Technology | 29 | 12.50 |
| 8 | Management | 29 | 12.50 |
| 9 | Geography | 16 | 6.90 |
| 10 | Reading | 14 | 6.03 |
| 11 | Psychology | 14 | 6.03 |
| 12 | Needs Analysis | 13 | 5.60 |
| 13 | Building and Facilities | 12 | 5.17 |
| 14 | Training | 9 | 3.88 |
| 15 | Webometrics & Scientometrics | 7 | 3.02 |
| 16 | Future Studies | 5 | 2.16 |
| 17 | Law | 1 | 0.43 |
| 18 | History | 1 | 0.43 |

In this regard, domestic research on public libraries in Iran hinged on general issues, management and library performance assessment. However, the documents retrieved from WoS showed that "Information Science Library Science", "Computer Science", and "Architecture" were the focal points of interest to international researchers (Table 6).

Table 6
*Top subject categories within public library studies in Iran and the world*

| ISC documents | Rank | WoS documents | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|
| Public Library Related Studies | 1 | Information Science Library Science | 1 |
| Assessment | 2 | Computer Science | 2 |
| Staff Studies (including managers and librarians) | 3 | Architecture | 3 |
| User Related Studies | 4 | Arts Humanities Other Topics | 4 |
| Library Service | 5 | Literature | 5 |
| Collection Development | 6 | History | 6 |
| Information Technology | 7 | Education Educational Research | 7 |
| Management | 8 | Social Sciences Other Topics | 8 |
| Geography | 9 | History Philosophy Of Science | 9 |
| Reading | 10 | Business Economics | 10 |

As shown in Table 7, *Library Journal* published a number of 749 documents (23.991% of total records) in the field of public libraries during 1900-2019. Thus, it holds the first rank among other source titles covering the subject. *Library Quarterly* had the second rank publishing 281 documents (9.001% of total records) on the subject. Finally, *Library Trends* stood in the third place with 100 documents on the subject (3.2036% of total records).

Table 7
*Top 5 most productive journals publishing research on public libraries in WoS*

| Rank | Journal Title | Record | % of 2976 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Library Journal | 749 | 23.991 |
| 2 | Library Quarterly | 281 | 9.001 |
| 3 | Library Trends | 100 | 3.203 |
| 4 | Journal of Librarianship and Information Science | 84 | 2.691 |
| 5 | Canadian Library journal | 83 | 2.659 |

Iranian researchers were found to have published their works on public libraries in 26 journals. Table 8 illustrates the top five most productive journals publishing research on the subject. The results revealed that *Research on Information Science and Public Libraries*, *Library and Information Sciences*, and *Journal of National Studies on Librarianship and Information Organization* ranked first to third in terms of the number of documents published on the subject with 134 (57.76% of total records), 25 (10.78% of total records), and 14 (6.03% of total records) documents, respectively.

Table 8
*Top 5 journal titles publishing research on public libraries in ISC Sci*

| Rank | Journal | Record | % of 232 |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | Research on Information Science and Public Libraries | 134 | 57.76 |
| 2 | Library and Information Sciences | 25 | 10.78 |
| 3 | Journal of National Studies on Librarianship and Information Organization | 14 | 6.03 |
| 4 | Journal of Studies in Library and Information Science | 12 | 5.17 |
| 5 | Library and Information Science Research Journal | 10 | 4.31 |

Analysis of the data revealed that public library scholars published their research findings in the journals with various quartile (Q) rankings during 1900-2019 (see Table 9). Accordingly, a number of 63 documents were published in Q1 journals while 75 documents were published in Q2 titles. Furthermore, a number of 146 and 200 documents appeared in Q3 and Q4 journals, respectively. The rest of the documents, a total of 2638, were published in journals with unknown Q rankings.

Table 9
 *Q ranking distribution of the journals publishing research on public libraries in WoS*

| Quartile | Record |
|:---:|:---:|
| Q1 | 63 |
| Q2 | 75 |
| Q3 | 146 |
| Q4 | 200 |
| Unknown | 2638 |
| Total | 3122 |

Table 10 illustrates the data extracted from ISC PJCR. Of all 232 documents on the subject of public libraries, a number of 50 documents were published in Q1 journals. Besides, 32, 50, and 12 documents appeared in Q2, Q3, and Q4 journals, respectively. The rest of the documents (n=88) were published in the journals with unknown Q rankings.

Table 10
*Q ranking distribution of the journals publishing research on public libraries in ISC*

| Quartile | Record |
|:---:|:---:|
| Q1 | 50 |
| Q2 | 32 |
| Q3 | 50 |
| Q4 | 12 |
| Unknown | 88 |
| Total | 232 |

## Discussion

The present study examined research output on the subject of public libraries in WoS and ISC. In this regard, a number of 3122 and 232 documents on the subject were retrieved from WoS and ISC, respectively. The time span of publication years was refined to 1900-2019; thus,

a growth chart was used to illustrate the status of publications over time. To this end, the documents retrieved from WoS and ISC were temporally divided into 8 and 4 periods, respectively. The results demonstrated that the growth rate of WoS-indexed publications varied across different periods so that it did not follow a consistent trend. The lowest growth rate was observed during 1900-1914. Scarcity of research on public libraries in the early years of the twentieth century is understandable since literacy began to develop in Britain and USA in the late nineteenth century (Sturges, 1994). This created a situation where local communities in both countries had the opportunity to establish public libraries. Thus, the present findings as to research scarcity on public libraries is not surprising for this period. On the other hand, the highest growth in publications occurred in the third period, 1930-1944. This is the era when the world suffered two grave crises: the Great Depression of 1929 and the World War II (Leavitt, 2015). Research on public libraries came into vogue then as a social institution that could prove effective in critical situations. The highest growth rate of ISC-indexed publications was observed in the period 2004-2008, which might have been prompted by the adoption of the national law on *Establishment and Management of Public Libraries* in 2002-2003. The lowest growth in publications on the subject occurred during 2014-2017, which might have been affected by a 5-year discontinuation of *Journal of Research on Information Science and Public Libraries* since 2004.

Research output on public libraries varies from country to country. One may conclude that prolific countries attach greater importance to the development of public libraries. The results showed that developed countries such as USA, Canada, and England had devoted considerable theoretical effort in developing public libraries. It is asserted that public libraries are information institutions serving the public. Therefore, one should identify and resolve the problems public libraries typically face (Michnik, 2014). The analysis also revealed the most productive institutions in terms of research output on public libraries. In this regard, University of Illinois was the most active institution publishing on the subject. This is consistent with the ranking results of Library and Information Studies Schools (U.S. News, 2017) whereby School of Information Sciences at University of Illinois achieved the highest rank. Likewise, Islamic Azad University was the most productive Iranian institution in terms of research output on public libraries. All authors affiliated with different branches of Islamic Azad University cite a consistent affiliation so that the university is identified as unit, which might account for its top position. As the institution in charge of public libraries, Iran Public Libraries Foundation held the second rank. It, however, is not surprising why the foundation focuses on the issue of public libraries.

Analysis of the topics within the subject of public libraries showed that *Information Science Library Science* was the most frequent subject category studied by scholars in WoS. With regard to the documents indexed in ISC, analysis of the key terms extracted from document titles, abstracts, keywords, and results section revealed 18 different thematic subject categories within the macro-subject of public libraries. In this regard, *Public Library Related Studies* proved to be the most frequent topic of interest. The findings suggested that research output by Iranian authors was quite different from what is done by international authors. Review of the research at the global level suggests that procurement and storage of library materials are not the main concerns of public libraries. Rather, they actively participate in many areas of practice so that their research subjects are much broader than that in Iran. For instance, computer science and architecture are two most frequent research areas within the subject of public libraries in

the world, which held the second and third ranks, respectively. However, the former had the seventh and the latter held the thirteenth ranks in the research output by Iranian authors. Pew Research Center reports that users attach profound importance to media- and book-related services provided through computer science (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014). The present findings corroborated a difference between subject categories addressed by Iranian and foreign researchers. These findings are consistent with Heidari, Ghanadi Nezhad, and Saghaie Talab (2016) who studied the research needs of public libraries in Khuzestan province. They reported the main research subjects to be "public library studies" and "user-related research". Reading is another research subject examined and emphasized by Iranian authors (Fadaie, 2016; Soheili, Solgi & Mimanatabadi, 2019; Pishgou & Mollazehi, 2019).

The local and international journals publishing research on public libraries were also identified in the present study. The results showed that *Library Journal* was the most prolific title publishing 749 documents on the subject, which is consistent with Keshvari and Hemmati's findings (2018). The Iranian *Research on Information Science and public libraries* was the most prolific journal publishing 134 documents on the subject. Thus, one may consider the above journals as the core journals publishing on the subject of public libraries in Iran and the world. The study also assayed the quality of the target journals. Analysis of the journals publishing research on public libraries in WoS demonstrated that the majority of them had no Q ranking. Iranian researchers published 88 documents in the journals with unavailable quartile ranking as well. On the other hand, they published a number of 82 articles in Q1 and Q2 journals, suggesting that researchers paid attention to journal quality. With regard to the WoS-indexed documents, the majority were published in Q3 and Q4 journals, which is a notable finding. No doubt, it is unacceptable to compare the quartile ranking of journals in two different citation systems covering different languages. Therefore, these findings are not compared or interpreted.

## Conclusion

Public libraries and associated issues deserve careful attention. Unlike national studies, international researches have devoted less attention to the general subject of public libraries. In other words, there has already been enough research on public libraries so that the focus has shifted to more effective social and technological issues. Since public libraries substantially contribute to culture and society, it is necessary that Iranian researchers study potential areas of improvement and likely issues of this social institution. The research area of future studies within the broader subject of public libraries ranked sixteenth in Iranian research output. It is, thus, untenable to neglect the future of public libraries as an effective social institution. Iranian researchers need to follow research fronts in public library research with a local focus so that they can align themselves with global changes.

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