

# Ensuring Access to Pangasinan Language Today and Tomorrow: A Librarian's Role

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## Abstract

Language, a medium in transmitting cultural heritage, has been identified as endangered or even dying by advocates in the Province of Pangasinan, the Philippines. Libraries are more focused on making themselves fit for 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners. This, however, is at the cost of traditional ways, folklore, and the community's cultural heritage as a whole. While several librarians have set up a local history collection in their libraries, many of their resources are in print rather than oral form. How then can the future generation know how to speak the local language? This article presents a study on the role of libraries in language conservation and preservation. The study surveyed nineteen librarians and analyzed the oral tradition and expression collections of nine selected public libraries in the Province of Pangasinan, as well as their safeguarding practices in the areas of conservation and preservation. The data collected showed that Pangasinan public librarians do not practice safeguarding measures for the conservation and preservation of oral traditions and expressions. Thus, the article proposes the *Pangasiniana Archive and Online Index to its Literature* (PAOIL) to contribute towards ensuring access to the language for generations to come.

## Keywords:

Language preservation, Oral traditions and expressions, Intangible cultural heritage, Pangasinan language, Language documentation

## Introduction

In the past, communities in different parts of the world used to come together to interact with each other in their local language orally. Often, stories and oral traditions were exchanged within these communities that were then passed on to their families over time. Little children used to sit on their grandparents' laps and ask many and varied questions, led by their curiosity, and were enthusiastically answered by their grandparents. Stories and oral traditions may include local history, traditional natural medicine, and family recipes, among others. Such information and knowledge is mainly transmitted orally by way of people's local language. These were scenarios that existed once upon a time.

Nowadays, our cultural ways have been changed, especially by communications technology (Combi, 2016). As observed by the author, grandparents now watch in dismay as their grandchildren cradle

their mobile phones instead of spending time with them listening to their stories. Nowadays, rather than exchanging ideas, people are typing into their mobile phones without the need to speak. It is because of such scenarios that people are starting to forget how to express themselves in their local language orally.

Oral traditions are "recollections and living memories of the past that are transmitted, recounted, and shared throughout culture" (Abdul Kargbo, 2008: 442), often transmitted inter-generationally. They include "an enormous variety of spoken forms including proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, charms, prayers, chants, songs, dramatic performances, and more." (UNESCO, n.d., para.1). However, Civallero (2007) would argue that the oral traditions and expressions of any local community must be captured and preserved as they convey emotions, feelings, ideas, beliefs, words and sounds of these groups, also known as their intangible cultural heritage.

Language, as the primary mode of transmitting culture, when not used or practiced by the community, can eventually lead to loss of oral tradition and expressions and, therefore, the loss of cultural heritage. Zimmerman (2017) emphasized the importance of language preservation, stating, "when we lose a language, we lose the worldview, culture, and knowledge of the people who spoke it, constituting a loss to all humanity" (Why do these extinctions matter? Para.1). Olaifa (2014, p.25) supported this by stating that language endangerment happens when its speakers are not passing it on to the next generation. Thus, "proper documentation and preservation of language will not only help the language from death but also help in the retention of its cultural diversity".

This study is founded on the belief that the different public libraries in various countries, being repositories of this valuable cultural heritage, oral traditions, and expressions, have vital roles to fulfill in society, especially in safeguarding them. It is for this reason that the author would like to determine the current practices of the Pangasinan public libraries in safeguarding their oral traditions and expressions. This article will present the results of a survey on the conservation and preservation practices of nine public libraries in safeguarding Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions.

## **Literature Review**

This article focused on the language of Pangasinan, a province north of Manila in the Philippines, where English and Filipino are the more conventional mediums of instruction in schools, and Ilocano is the primary dialect spoken. Anderson and Anderson (2007), wrote about Pangasinan being an endangered language, attributing this to "migration, relative cultural prestige, urbanization, interethnic marriage, and changing language use in various communicative settings" (p. 9). Cardinoza (2018) reported that the Pangasinan language is on the brink of extinction. Mary Ann Macaranas, the Kapisanan ng Wikang Filipino (KWF) Director for *Sentro ng Wika at Kultura* in Pangasinan, revealed the result of a 10-year survey (2000-2010) done by the Philippine Statistics Authority where Pangasinan was ranked the 43<sup>rd</sup> language spoken at home.

The National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 has identified the National Library of the Philippines as responsible for "rare and significant contemporary Philippine books, manuscripts...and libraries

and electronic records" (p. 21). According to Olaifa (2014), this marks the critical role of libraries in safeguarding cultural heritage because the library can preserve the language in written and spoken forms. Libraries and other similar institutions contribute towards collecting, documenting, archiving, and conserving data on intangible cultural heritage, as well as in providing information and raising awareness about its importance (Bonn, Kendall, & McDonough, 2017).

Many public libraries have set up a local history collection section. However, most libraries mainly have textual materials in their collection (Primadesi, 2012), deal with local history (Bateman, 2012), or are materials written in other languages (Magnus, 1979) instead of the local language. Some libraries have even set up local history digital libraries. However, most of those that were digitized are still print materials (Bateman, 2012). It could be argued that libraries should not be limited to collecting print or textual materials, but also audiovisual materials.

Civallero (2007) stated that "A library which wants to become "multicultural" should include this kind of material –orality, music, folk games- as well as the people who still transmit them: narrators, musicians, artists" (p. 1). Activities such as storytelling in the local language, recording oral traditions and expressions as told by a still-living elder and repackaging them into audiobooks, virtual books and talking books, among others, are examples of how libraries can safeguard oral traditions and expressions.

Libraries have a significant role in safeguarding cultural heritage in any documentary form (IFLA, 2017). Through this research, the state and practices of the Pangasinan public libraries in safeguarding Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions can be known. The documentation of the oral use of the language as part of their daily lives or performances in public of oral expressions is the best way in which to safeguard a language instead of preserving through textual forms (UNESCO, n.d.).

## **Key Concepts in the Study**

This study drew on frameworks from several documents to underpin the research; including the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) offers the main framework for this study. ICH, (mainly the focus on preserving oral traditions and expressions); UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore (1989); UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity; and IFLA's Multicultural Library Manifesto (IFLA, 2009) (the latter emphasizes the roles that libraries have in safeguarding cultural diversity through active use and protection of the local language).

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adds motivation to this study which calls on governments to "strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage (target 11.4) as well as to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements (target 16.10)" (UN, 2015). Public libraries government entities can contribute to this end.

This research aimed to determine the practices in safeguarding the available Pangasinan oral expressions and tradition expressions resources, particularly in terms of conservation and preservation in the different public libraries in the Province of Pangasinan, Philippines.

## Research Method

The study employed a descriptive survey method (Mitchell and Jolley, 2013), useful in collecting attitudes, beliefs, and self-reported behaviors. Data was gathered using a questionnaire administered to eighteen licensed librarians of nine selected public libraries in the Province of Pangasinan to determine the safeguarding practices they are employing within the areas of conservation and preservation.

The questionnaire was primarily based on the UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore (1989). The author-researcher administered the survey face-to-face at the public libraries in April 2019. The survey results were computed for their relative frequency (RF) and weighted mean average (WMA) utilizing a 4-point Likert scale, presented in Table 1.

Rating	Rating Scale	Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation
1	1.00 - 1.74	Not Practiced	The activity is not being done in the library.
2	1.75 - 2.49	Slightly Practiced	The activity is being practiced but only minimally and occasionally or only by a few library staff.
3	2.50 - 3.24	Moderately Practiced	The activity is being practiced widely but occasionally by most of the library staff.
4	3.25 - 4.00	Highly Practiced	The activity is being practiced regularly by most or all of the library staff.

*Table 1. Four-point Likert Scale*

## Results and Discussions

The amount of Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions materials available in the selected public libraries is a good indication of the extent of the librarians' safeguarding practices. This section presents the librarians' perceptions of safeguarding practices in their libraries as to whether it is (1) not practiced, (2) slightly practiced, (3) moderately practiced, and (4) highly practiced.

### Conservation

In regard to conservation practices of libraries relating to Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions, the librarian respondents rated their practice as **Not Practiced** (WMA=1.50). The four highest-rated activities for Conservation being practiced by the librarians are items one (1), two (2), four (4), and seven (7), with a WMA of **1.56** or **Not Practiced**.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>WMA</b>	<b>Descriptive Equivalent</b>
<b><i>B. Conservation</i></b>		
1. The library maintains an archive where Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions collection is properly stored and made available.	<b>1.56</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
2. The library has created a museum or local culture section where Pangasinan Oral Expressions in traditional and popular culture is exhibited.	<b>1.56</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
3. The library maintains its Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions collection in a temperature-controlled environment.	<b>1.39</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
4. The library gives priority to ways of presenting traditional and popular Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions that emphasize the living or past aspects of the culture.	<b>1.56</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
5. The library sends its staff for training on conservation of its Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions collection.	<b>1.44</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
6. The library maintains multiple copies of its Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions collection resources for dissemination and public use.	<b>1.44</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
7. The library adopts security measures for the original copy of its Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions collection resource.	<b>1.56</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
<b>Overall WMA</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>

***Table 2. Extent of Conservation Safeguarding Practices***

Stielow (1986) believes that oral traditions and expressions collections are more than just a collection of information; they also serve as an assortment of verbal impressions which libraries should be able to showcase. Maintaining the integrity of the original copy by reproducing the material to be used as user copies is a vital process and sound conservation practice. As shown in the survey, public libraries' conservation efforts are limited only to archiving or exhibiting the Pangasinan oral tradition and expression materials.

Providing proper storage for the oral tradition and expression collection is another area where the librarians feel safeguarding practices are **Not practiced** (WMA=1.39). These materials, generally audiovisual, must be stored in temperature-controlled environments (item number 3). Stielow (1989: 189) stated that the tapes of audio content must be stored in a dust-free physical environment with a constant temperature of 70 degrees (+/-10 degrees) and a constant relative humidity of 45 % (+/- 5%). Audio CDs and DVDs have different storage requirements. Byers (2003) has identified conditions that can affect these types of materials. However, owing to the lack of

budget, the survey showed that some of the libraries are not able to provide air conditioning, so they have no choice but to store them like the other materials in their libraries.

Another unfortunate practice of some of the librarians is that the only copy they have is also their working copy. As evidenced by the rating in item 6 (WMA=**1.44** – **Not Practiced**), the majority of the libraries visited as part of this study keep only one copy of their Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions. Matters (1995:7) stated that oral histories should be produced not only for documentation purposes but to make them more accessible and available to researchers and the community. Stielow (1986: 61-81) suggested that duplicate copies should be made from the original and these are used for processing, lendings, and circulation.

The (lack of) conservation practices adopted by these libraries may be explained by the fact that item 5 is 'not practiced' (WMA=**1.44**). As the librarians are not sent out for training on conservation, some of them are not familiar with protecting AV or archival materials. Sarkhel (2016) argues that librarians who have received proper training in oral histories should be able to document and preserve them as oral histories. However, the librarians in the present study argue that either there is no training available or that the library cannot fund it.

## **Preservation**

Preserving is also an essential aspect of safeguarding Pangasinan oral tradition and expressions. Language being the primary medium of these oral traditions and expressions, users need to use the materials available in order for them to use the language outside of the Library (UNESCO, n.d.). Access to these materials and support to the research community are only some of the ways in which libraries can help preserve oral traditions and expressions (IFLA, 2017).

<b>Activity</b>	<b>WMA</b>	<b>Descriptive Equivalent</b>
<b><i>C. Preservation</i></b>		
1. The library conducts forums on folklore or Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions and its protection to the community.	<b>1.33</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
2. The library guarantees the right of access to various cultural communities to their Oral Traditions and Expressions.	<b>1.67</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
3. The library supports the various cultural community in their work in the fields of documentation, archiving, research, etc., as well as in the practice of the Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions.	<b>1.89</b>	<b><i>Slightly Practiced</i></b>
4. The library provides moral and economic support to the study, promotion, cultivation, and storing Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions resources.	<b>1.61</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
5. The library promotes relevant scientific research on Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expression resources preservation.	<b>1.44</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
6. The library designs and introduces into both formal and out-of-school curricula the teaching and study of Pangasinan Oral Tradition and Expressions.	<b>1.28</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
7. The library has set up an interdisciplinary Pangasinan Oral Traditions and Expressions group or other similar coordinating bodies in which various groups will be represented.	<b>1.19</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>
<b>Overall Weighted Mean Average</b>	<b>1.49</b>	<b><i>Not Practiced</i></b>

***Table 3. Extent of Preservation Safeguarding Practices***

It was expected that the preservation practices would also receive a **Not Practiced** rating (WMA=**1.49**), taking into consideration the conservation practices of these public libraries presented earlier.

The librarians rated their practice of preservation in all but one item as **Not Practiced**. Item number five was **Slightly Practiced** (WMA=**1.89**). This means that the libraries show support, whenever possible, towards documentation work, archiving, and research. One librarian shared that they are very supportive of such activities, but that there are not many activities being conducted which needed support. Stielow (1986) suggests that the community should be informed of the collection's existence as a possible resource for research.

The libraries included in the study are also not very active in taking the lead towards preservation efforts of oral traditions and expressions, evidenced by the response to item 7 (**Not Practiced** - (WMA=**1.19**). Safeguarding oral traditions and expressions require the support of the local community. Stielow (1986: 40) urges libraries and librarians to develop proactive service to the community and assist in establishing the identity of the community through the groups within it. This was also pointed out by Abdul Kargbo (2008): librarians should assert themselves as intermediaries between the tacit knowledge that is available and the community that seeks it. Wamukoya and Mutula (2005), as cited by Mudogo (2014: 369), also suggested unconventional sources of oral traditions and expressions, i.e., chat rooms, newsgroups, and even virtual communities.

Putting these findings together paints a picture of librarians taking a supporting role rather than taking the lead when it comes to preservation of a "passive collection" of activities related to Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions. The librarians, in this case, need to take on a more active role in preserving the language through initiating activities or studies that promote the local language.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article presented a study that purported to determine the conservation and preservation practices of Pangasinan public librarians (n=19) in safeguarding Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions.

Based on the survey carried out, the safeguarding practices of the librarians in the area of conservation is **Not Practiced** overall (WMA=**1.50**). The librarians mainly conserve Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions through maintaining an archive and setting up a local culture section in their libraries (WMA=**1.56**). The librarians' main issue with conservation is there is little training available locally for library staff (WMA=**1.44**).

On safeguarding practices within the area of preservation, this is also **Not Practiced** (WMA=**1.49**) by the respondents. Pangasinan public librarians do not take the lead in preserving Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions (WMA=**1.19**). However, they are supportive of the local community that promotes such activities, i.e., research, documentation, archiving, among others (WMA=**1.89**; **Slightly Practiced**).

The results showed that Pangasinan public librarians, generally, are not actively practicing safeguarding activities of Pangasinan oral traditions and expressions. As recommended by UNESCO (n.d.) and IFLA (2017), librarians, as cultural workers, should work towards this goal and conduct activities to ensure access to the Pangasinan language and culture for the next generation. However, as evidenced by the survey results, Pangasinan librarians lack proper training on safeguarding oral traditions and expressions.

Therefore, to preserve and conserve the Pangasinan language, Pangasinan public librarians need training on safeguarding activities. One of the activities suggested is the setting up of an archive or online repository. Given that Pangasinan public librarians are somewhat practicing support of

preservation activities already, training should be provided on how they can promote their collection online and reach more users. Collectively, an online repository of Pangasiniana resources can contribute significantly to the promotion, preservation, and conservation of the Pangasinan language.

Towards this end, the author proposes that an online website be established featuring digital files of Pangasiniana materials, if Copyright allows, and index to available Pangasiniana resources from various libraries and locations. The site shall be called 'Pangasiniana Archive and Online Index to its Literature' (PAOIL). The data gathered from the public librarians in this study shall serve as initial data for the preparation of the website.

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