Examinning the Opinions of Students and Parents on Oral History Studies within the Scope of Life Sciences Lesson

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Abstract: This research was conducted to determine the opinions of students and parents about oral history studies by examining journals kept by them within the scope of the primary school 3rd grade life sciences lesson. This research was held through an analytical research model. The data of the study were obtained from 28 journals selected by using criterion sampling method from a total of 34 individual journals, 17 of which were kept by primary school 3rd grade students and 17 belonged to the parents of these students, at a private education institution in the 2017-2018 academic-year. The data obtained were analyzed by content analysis method. In the research, from the journals kept within the scope of oral history studies, it was concluded that the students spend quality time with their family elders, listen to each other, try to understand each other, learn about their lives, compare the past with the present, feel like little historians, feel happy to know their family elders closely, experience empathy with family elders, and they started to comprehend change and continuity. In addition, it has been revealed that oral history improves students' skills such as expressing themselves, communicating, researching, using resources, and increasing their self-confidence and responsibility levels. It is recommended that oral history studies should be used in life sciences lessons due to their contribution to students' learning their backgrounds and improving their skills.

Keywords: Life sciences, oral history, parents, primary school

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Introduction

People begin to discover themselves and their environment after opening their eyes to this world. Their initial interaction with family members and people in their social environment expands with the school, helping people to gain awareness and get to know themselves better (Tay, 2017). In this context, life sciences lesson has an important place in the development of students in integrity, getting to know themselves and their environment, and gaining basic knowledge, skills, and values about life (Gultekin, 2015). In the teaching of life sciences lesson, which was created by selecting from different disciplines, integrated and adapted to the developmental characteristics of the students, the out-of-school education formed considering the appropriateness of the outcomes has a great importance for students to be prepared for life (Saglam, 2015). With out-of-school education, students can realize the relationship of life sciences lesson with daily life. Thus, students can learn to establish a connection between the classroom and real life, and elders of the family standing as a resource can support students' learning activities (Alleman & Brophy, 1994). In this context, oral history can be considered as one of the out-of-school teaching methods that enable the use of family elders as a resource.

Oral history can be deemed as the living memory of the past. It is known that all social information, including history, was passed on by word of mouth before the spread of writing. Over time, an oral tradition of this history has been formed, and through this tradition, it has become possible to transfer facts and events from generation to generation and focus on different types of history (Thompson, 1999). The integration of oral history into educational practices, beyond being a data collection tool, was possible because of its contribution to teaching and students' self-learning (Portelli, 2006). Oral history, which enables students to reflect on the data they have accessed as amateur historians (McLellan 2014), to put themselves and their families in the center, expanding the scope of history and becoming the subject of the public masses that cannot primarily find much place in official historical discourses, and evaluating personal witnesses of a certain period from the depths of memory (Danacioglu, 2001). Oral history can contribute to improving students' skills such as communication, interviewing, writing reports (Dere, 2017), learning local history, perceiving change and continuity (Kabapinar & Incegul, 2016; Kaya 2013), preparing questions, criticizing, editing, listening, and understanding other people (Thompson, 1999).

Through oral history studies, students can learn about the daily routines of people in the past, gain the ability to understand and appreciate the previous generations by learning the living conditions of people who lived in the past, they can see generational differences by comparing with their own lives, and so they can build a bridge between the past and the future (Saglam & Sayimli, 2018; Sari, 2009; Simsek, 2010). The life stories of people are in the past and in a manner constituting a source for oral history. With oral history, the past can become much real and concrete for students, rather than staying as a long shot (Avci-Akcali & Aslan, 2012). In accordance with the principle of recent to distant past, oral history is expected to contribute to the

student's understanding of the world based on students' self-understanding in the first place. Oral history can provide students with knowledge, skills and value, while also making it possible for them to develop socially.

Oral history can be used in life sciences lessons to help students prepare for life and benefit from the experiences of the elders, such as their grandparents. Thus, students can establish a link between school lessons and the real life (Dundar, 2017). The outcomes of the studies called "Let's Compare the characteristics of the childhood period of elders with the characteristics of your own childhood" and "Let's give examples of the importance of neighborly relations for the family and yourself" in the unit called "Life in Our Home" in the Primary School 3rd Grade Life Sciences Lesson (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018, p. 24) can be discussed in accordance with the oral history study. Thus, it may be possible to increase students' historical learning curiosity from near and beyond with this method.

There are studies about students' attitudes towards oral history in the literature (Akbaba & Kilcan, 2012; Akcali & Aslan, 2012; Arslan, 2013; Dere & Emeksever, 2018; Dere & Kalender, 2019; Incegul, 2010; Kabapinar & Incegul, 2016; Sari, 2007), skills (Beldag & Balci, 2017; Celik, Karadeniz & Cabul, 2018; Dere, 2019; Dere & Dinc, 2018; Dilek & Akbas, 2014; Lattimer & Kelly, 2013; Yang, Chen & Chen, 2002), and the effect of oral history on student's attitudes and skills (Dere & Kizilay, 2017; Kabapinar & Koc, 2013; Kaya, 2013; Yazici & Mert, 2017). Concerning students' attitudes towards oral history, Akbaba and Kilcan (2012) developed an oral history attitude scale for prospective history and social studies teachers. Akcali and Aslan (2012) stated that oral history enables students to participate actively in the teaching of history subjects of social studies course. Arslan (2013) stated that the inclusion of oral history in history lessons and textbooks increased students' love and interest in history lessons. Celik, Karadeniz and Cabul (2018) stated that students noticed change and continuity mostly in the oral history process, but they had difficulty in writing reports. Dere and Emeksever (2018) stated that the practice of oral history enables students to recognize the intangible cultural heritage elements in their immediate environment. Dere and Kalender (2019) stated that oral history activities improve students' historical thinking skills such as perceiving time and chronology, establishing cause and effect relationships, and perceiving change and continuity. Incegul (2010) stated that oral history makes it easier for students to understand the past. Kabapinar and Incegul (2016) found that most of the students were able to apply the oral history process and enjoy the process. Sari (2007) found that the oral history method contributed to the active participation of students in lessons and establishing a connection between lessons and real-life.

Regarding the effect of students on oral history skills, Beldag and Balci (2017) stated that the oral history method contributed to students in gaining knowledge, skills and value whereas Dere (2019) said it developed historical thinking skills. Dere and Dinc (2018) stated that students improve their communication skills, contribute to the skills

of using historical research steps, interviewing, learning local history and gaining self-confidence. Moreover, Dilek and Alabas (2014) stated that it contributes to the students' historical thinking process and develop their historical reasoning skills. Lattimer and Kelly (2013) stated that although oral history improved students' self-efficacy, self-confidence, responsibilities, attitudes towards research, decision-making, communication, and oral history, students had some difficulties in interviewing, planning, and writing. Yang, Chen and Chen (2002) revealed that oral history studies improve students' learning, interview, communication, language, asking questions, planning, empathy, and research skills.

Regarding the effect of oral history on students' attitudes and skills, Dere and Kizilay (2017) found that students like to use the oral history method, make comparisons, and perceive change and continuity. Kabapinar and Koc (2013) stated that oral history helps students gain knowledge about history and perceive change and continuity too. Furthermore, Kaya (2013) determined that students liked the oral history studies and were enthusiastic about it during the activities, and this method gave students many skills, especially communication skills. Yazici and Mert (2017) found that the oral history method attracted the attention of students, and that improved students' communication, change, and continuity perception skills. The improvement of students' aforementioned skills by the oral history method is important in terms of solving the problems encountered in the teaching of historical subjects in life sciences lessons. Since students in this age group make sense of the world with concrete operations, subjects such as time, chronology, past, change, and continuity can remain abstract; It is possible to benefit from oral history activities that include concrete activities in teaching abstract subjects (Dere & Kalender, 2019).

It can be said that parents' interests and contributions are as important as teachers' guiding and supportive approaches in conducting oral history studies in an effective and efficient way. Whether families encourage their students in interviews with family elders within the scope of oral history studies, whether they help the process to be carried out in accordance with the guidance of the teacher, and whether they remain indifferent to the wishes of the students may affect the quality of the knowledge and skills that are considered to be acquired through oral history. From this point of view, considering that the development of the aforementioned knowledge and skills is closely related to the attitude towards oral history, examining the opinions of students and their parents on oral history studies looking up their journals within the scope of the 3rd grade life sciences lesson was determined as the main purpose of the study. For this purpose, research questions can be presented as follows:

1. What are the thoughts of students and parents about oral history studies in their journals?
2. What are the opinions of the students and parents about whether they are willing to keep a journal within the scope of oral history studies?

3. What are the opinions of the students about whether they want to live a childhood like their grandparents from their journals within the scope of oral history studies?
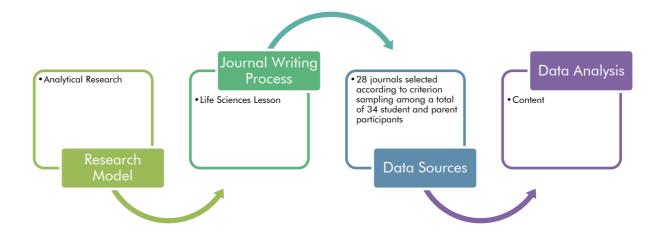
Method

Research Model

This research was designed as an analytical research model. Studies that do not fit into only quantitative and qualitative research classifications are called analytical studies. Analytical research is a research method in which documents, reports, records and other media are analyzed and examined in terms of events, ideas, concepts and artifacts. Analytical studies include qualitative and quantitative research features and are classified as historical analysis, legal analysis, concept analysis and mixed method research. In analytical research, documents and records are analyzed in terms of concepts, events and opinions (Ersoy, 2015; McMillan, 2004). In this study, journals written by primary school 3rd grade students and their parents were accepted as documents and the research was conducted as a document research. The research documents were composed of journals written by primary school 3rd grade students and their parents between November 27, 2017 and December 27, 2017 within the scope of life sciences lesson. The research process is included in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Schematic Representation of the Research Process

Study Group

The study group of the study consisted of the 3rd grade primary school students at a private education institution in Serdivan district of Sakarya in the 2017-2018 academic year and their parents. The distribution of the students and parents participating in the study according to their gender is given in Table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of Participants, Students, and Parents by Gender

Gender	Student		Parent		Total	
	f	%	f	%	F	%
Female	6	43	12	86	18	64
Male	8	57	2	14	10	36
Total	14	100	14	100	28	100

As it is seen in Table 1, 14 students consisting of 6 (43%) females, 8 (57%) males, and 14 parents of students consisting of 12 (86%) females and 2 (14%) males attended. When examined in terms of students and their parents, a total of 28 people, 18 (64%) females and 10 (36%) males, participated in the study. In the diaries written by students and their parents for learning with the oral history method, coding was used instead of student names. Coding is S1 for the first student, P1 for the parent of the first student; S2 code was used for the second student and P2 code was used for the parent of the second student. In order to increase the credibility of the study, we interacted with the students for about one and a half months, the students were asked to confirm the statements, and the suitability was determined as a result of expert review (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996).

Journal Writing and Data Collection Process

In accordance with the Primary School 3rd Grade Life Sciences Curriculum (2017, p.24), considering the unit of "Life in Our Home"; there are two titles of "comparing the characteristics of the childhood periods of elders with the characteristics of their own childhood" and "giving examples of the importance of neighborly relations for the family and the student". Regarding the acquisitions of these titles a total of 34 participants, 17 students and other 17 who were the parents of these students were asked to keep a journal between 27 November 2017 and 27 December 2017. Those 17 primary school students were at 3rd grade at a private education institution. In this 1-month period, activities including preparation for the study, the study process and the conclusion of the study were carried out during the 12-hour lesson process. During the study, the students and their parents were informed by the researcher, who is also working as a teacher in this class, about the oral history studies and the journals-to-be-kept, and the process was initiated on a voluntary basis with the consent of the parents. It was stated that students and their parents, who wish to do so, may refrain from keeping a journal at any stage of the research. The students posed various questions to their elders about their past such as the games they played in their childhood, household items they used, holiday celebrations, and neighborly relations. Students and their parents were asked to reflect their experiences about the life sciences lesson in this process with oral history method in their journals. In this context, students and their parents kept a journal on the days they worked in the determined format. The students wrote about the exercises of the day in their journals, noting the issues they had difficulties with and enjoyed. The parents also expressed their views on this process in their journals. These written structured journals were collected for the purpose of

obtaining data from students and their parents. In order to be analyzed in the research, a total of 28 journals picked among 34, 14 of which were students' and 14 of which were parents' journals, were selected by the sampling method. It was determined as the criteria that students and their parents wrote their journals completely without any gaps and reflected their views on oral history practices in a one-month period.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used in the analysis of the data. For this purpose, the data collected must first be conceptualized, then organized in a logical manner according to the emerging concepts and the themes explaining the data must be determined accordingly. Through content analysis, it is tried to define the data and reveal the facts that may be hidden in the data. The basic process in content analysis is to gather similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes and to interpret them in a way that the reader can understand (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). In this context, the researchers benefited from the thoughts of Miles and Huberman (2019) on the data analysis process for analyzing and interpreting the journals of the students and parents, and the researcher conducted content analysis, which is one of the data analysis processes suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). And also related to content analysis, they followed the stages of finding and arranging the sub and main themes of the data proposed by Yildirim and Simsek (2016), for defining and interpreting the findings. Inter-coder reliability was found as .93 by using the formula "Reliability = Consensus / Consensus + Disagreement" of Miles and Huberman (2019).

Findings

In this section, the findings obtained in the study are divided into main and sub-themes in the tables in line with the research questions. The main and sub-themes that emerged in the journals of the students and parents in line with their opinions on oral history studies are included in Table 2.

Table 2.

Students' and Parents' Views Regarding Oral History Studies in Their Journals

Main themes	Sub- themes	Student	Parent
Past	Learn about the past of family elders	✓	✓
	Comparing past with today	✓	✓
Feelings	Feeling Excitement	✓	
	Feeling happy	✓	
	Feeling like a historian	✓	
Skills	Developing communication skills		✓
	Controlling speaking anxiety		✓
	Developing research skills		✓
	Improving self-confidence		✓
	Taking responsibility		✓

In Table 2, the opinions of students and parents about oral history studies in their journals are grouped under the main themes of past, feelings, and skills. Students asked questions about the backgrounds of elders such as grandparents, and spent quality time together; listened to each other, understood each other, learned about the memories of family elders, their accommodation styles, games, lives, learned their past, and compared the past with the present. Thus, it is seen that they contribute to the understanding of change and continuity. This shows that students' curiosity about learning the past can be increased and abstract subjects can be concretized. Some examples are given below from the opinions of students and parents regarding this situation:

> He learned the past of his family and grandparents, I think he has an idea about the previous and new social life [P3].

> I learned my grandmother's background with this project assignment [S6].

> While I was doing my project homework, I learned that my grandmother's house was made of black stone [S3].

> They also had the opportunity to learn about the childhood of the elders of their families and compare and match the data they obtained with their own adventures [P2].

> I have witnessed my child's comparing the present time regarding the toys, houses, and the lives of children in that past time [P13].

> The child's conversation with the elder of the family and therefore witnessing a different childhood period than his own childhood in this conversation gave the child both feelings of luck and sadness at the same time, because all of these things he is granted in this period and also because he could not have that mentioned innocent sincerity in the past [P8].

In the study, it is understood that students feel like little historians, they are happy to get to know their family elders closely, this process excites them, and it nourishes the empathy between the parents and students. Some examples can be given from students' views regarding this situation:

> I felt excited while doing this study [S6, S9].

> I felt very good while doing this work [S9, S14].

> I learned how the historians felt in the interview [S4].

In the journals of parents, it is stated that the process of oral history studies improves students' skills such as expressing themselves, communicating, speaking, controlling their enthusiasm, researching, using resources, and increasing their self-confidence and responsibility levels. In this process, it is important for the students to develop these skills. Some examples can be given from the parents' opinions regarding this situation are as follows:

> He became an individual, he became a presenter, a journalist, a moderator, he took responsibility [P1].

This study contributed to the increase of communication between family members [P2].

He behaves very dull when he addresses a certain community or group. There has been good research for me to spot this attitude of our child [P7].

Researching and accessing new information, communicating and using resources have contributed positively as it is kid of different homework than the child has always done [P9].

When he felt confident, he made a program and took responsibility. He saw that success comes by itself when there is an effort [P1].

The main and sub-themes that emerged in line with the opinions of the students and their parents regarding whether they are willing to keep a journal or not within the scope of oral history studies are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Opinions of Students and Parents Regarding Whether They Are Willing to Keep a Journal Within the Scope of Oral History Studies

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Student	Parent
Willing	Laughing and having fun	✓	
	Learning new things	✓	
	Improved children's skills		✓
	Learning by experiencing		✓
	Decreased academic anxiety		✓
	Acquiring bonds by uniting		✓
	Providing discipline		✓
	Developing research skills		✓
	Fulfillment of certain conditions		✓
Unwilling	Reluctancy	✓	
	Finding it boring and difficult	✓	

In Table 3, the opinions of students and parents about whether they are willing to keep a journal within the scope of oral history studies are grouped under the 'willing' and 'unwilling' main themes. It is observed that most of the students are willing to keep a journal within the scope of oral history studies, find it fun and think that they learn new things from their family elders and that they will learn more. It is understood that parents of students think that oral history is inclusive, gives students a study discipline, puts academic anxiety behind, improves their research skills, and enables them to learn by experiencing. Some examples can be given from the opinions of students and parents regarding this situation are as follows:

Yes, it will be complex again, we will laugh a lot and have fun [S1].

I would like to do this project assignment again. Because I learned new things about my elder [S6].

Yes, it is useful. Because we are missing values when we concentrate on the world's rush and life's being hardship, livelihood concerns and routines like wash, cook, carry. We don't see the good things. We are missing out on social and cultural basis before

academic success anxiety. Unfortunately, we are not aware of it. Such assignments both develop the children and unite the family and even the whole big crowded family is better [P1].

It is a useful study. Since it will contribute to the social development of the child, it will enable them to learn practically by experiencing instead of learning theoretically from tests in the routine education system [P8].

I think that the child will work in discipline and order while accessing new information, thus this will increase the use of resources, and contribute positively to education life [P9].

It should be done at certain times. The weight of the homework should be well adjusted, and the homework that the students can do and the families can only control or guide should be selected [P4].

It is observed that a very small number of students find it boring and difficult to keep a journal within the scope of oral history, therefore they do not continue to keep it. Some examples can be given from the opinions of the students regarding this situation:

I don't want to do this project homework again [S9].

I don't want it because it is boring and difficult [S13].

In the study, the main and sub-themes that emerged in line with the opinions of the students in their journals within the scope of oral history studies about whether they want a childhood like their family elders or not are included in Table 4.

Table 4.

Opinions of Students Regarding Whether They Want to Live a Childhood Like Their Family Elders or Not Gathered from Their Journals Within the Scope of Oral History Studies

Main themes	Sub-themes	Student	Parent
Willing	Finding the childhood of elders beautiful	✓	
	Family elders making their own toys	✓	
	Desiring that was his/her own past	✓	
	To be tempted to play outside with old games	✓	
Unwilling	Limited opportunities of family elders	✓	
	Worry about not being able to see Sinem Teacher	✓	
	Being satisfied with her/his present life	✓	

In Table 4, the opinions of the students regarding their willingness to live a childhood like their family elders gathered from their journals within the scope of oral history studies are grouped under the 'willing' and 'unwilling' main themes. Looking up to the journals within the scope of oral history, it is seen that the majority of the students found the childhood of the elders of the family more beautiful than their childhood, learned that they made their own toys, and they wanted to live like their family elders for reasons such as curiosity they have about that past time. Some examples can be given from the opinions of the students regarding this situation like:

> Yes, I would love to because my grandmother's childhood is more beautiful than mine [S2].

> I would like to live like my family elder. Because they used to make their own toys [S4].

> Yes, I would. Because I would also have my past then [S10].

> I would love to live in that time. Because at that time because they were playing games outside [S12].

It is also observed that some of the students do not want to have a childhood like their elders due to the lack of white goods in their childhood, the limited possibilities of that day, and being satisfied with their own situation. Some examples can be given from the opinions of his students regarding this situation:

> I wouldn't want to live in the past. Because in the past days there was no refrigerator, water did not flow. That's why I don't want it [S11].

> I wouldn't want to because I couldn't see my Sinem teacher [S1].

> No, I wouldn't. Because I love my life [S14].

Within the scope of oral history, it is understood that students can compare the past with the present in the journals they have created based on the interviews they have made with their family elders, and based on their knowledge we can say they are aware of the opportunities they have.

Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions

In the study, it was concluded that oral history studies as stated in the journals of the students contributed to their learning about their own past and they were touched during the interviews they had. It was understood that the students learned about the memories of their elders such as their grandmothers and grandfathers, games and lives of grandparents, compared their own lives with their elders', and began to comprehend change and continuity in life. Parents of the students likewise argued that oral history studies are beneficial for children to learn about their own backgrounds and to develop research, communication, and self-confidence skills. Within the scope of oral history studies, it became possible for the students to spend quality time with their family elders, to listen to each other, and to understand each other by asking questions about the past of each other. It was observed that there was an increased empathy established between the parents and the students. From the journals of students and parents, it was concluded that oral history studies provided the opportunity to build a bridge between the past and the future. This result is similar to the result claimed by Ersoy (2015) that oral history contributed to the students' learning from their experiences in the research process, to discover their researcher identities and to discover themselves. It is also similar to Incegul's (2010) research results that oral history makes it easier for students to understand the past. Similarly, Beldag and Balci (2017) found that the oral history method contributed to students' gaining

knowledge, skills, and values. Bertram, Wagner and Trautwein (2017) and Celik, Karadeniz and Cabul (2018) stated that students noticed change and continuity most in the oral history process. Dere and Dinc (2018) stated that oral history improves students' communication skills. Moreover, Dere and Kalender (2019) stated that oral history activities improve students' historical thinking skills such as perceiving time and chronology, establishing cause and effect relationships, and perceiving change and continuity. Kabapınar and Incegul (2016) stated that most of the students were able to apply the oral history process and enjoy the process. Thompson (1999) stated that children who took part in oral history studies developed many skills such as preparing questions, criticizing, organizing, listening, and understanding other people. Furthermore, Lattimer and Kelly (2013) and Yang, Chen and Chen (2002) stated that oral history studies contributed to the development of some important skills of students. Yazici and Mert (2017) found that the oral history method improves students' communication, perception of change and continuity skills.

In the study, a significant portion of the students were eager to keep a journal within the scope of oral history because they found oral history enjoyable and thought that they learned new things from their family elders and that they would learn more. It was concluded that very few of them were deemed unwilling to keep a journal, thinking that it was difficult and boring. Although some of the parents put forward some certain conditions, it was determined that they were willing to keep a journal within the scope of oral history because it is uniting, develops a sense of responsibility of students, puts academic anxiety in the background, increases self-confidence, improves research skills, and allows learning by doing and experiencing. This result shows that as Barnard (2014) and Foulis (2018) put forward oral history practices contributed to students' data collection through one-on-one interviews to establish connection with real life. Dere and Kizilay (2017) stated that students like to use the oral history method. Kaya (2013) stated that the students liked the oral history studies and were eager during the activities. Yazici and Mert (2017) claimed that the oral history method is attractive to the students, and these studies all show similarities with the results of the research.

In the study, it was found that a significant part of the students wanted to live a childhood like their grandparents. It was concluded that a small number of them did not want to live a childhood like their family elders because they were satisfied with their lives, they were concerned that they would not be able to see their teachers, and because of the limited opportunities of their family elders. This result shows similarities with the results of Incegul's study (2010) that the oral history makes it easier for students to understand the past. Dilek and Alabas (2014) claim that the interviews with the witnesses of the past contributed to the historical thinking process of the students and developed historical reasoning skills. It is also similar to the research results of Sari's study (2007) that the oral history method has a positive effect on students' connection between lessons and real life. In the study conducted within the scope of oral history studies, it was shown that the students realized the limitations of the possibilities of the elders of the family compared with themselves, and they could make

some comparisons and were able to determine their preferences based on the comparisons they made. Accordingly, it was understood that they wanted their living standards to be good. The awareness of students who stated that they were satisfied with their lives was considered as a realistic and noteworthy situation. This situation was also considered important in terms of students' decision-making processes.

When the research results are considered as a whole, it is seen that oral history studies are liked by students. In the context of oral history studies, students compare the past with the present, try to make a bridge between the past and the future, feel like little historians, feel happy to know their family elders closely, experience empathy with family elders, begin to comprehend change and continuity, and develop research, communication, empathy, and self-confidence skills. It has been observed that it has made significant contributions in establishing a connection with the past. It has been determined that the results of the research are similar to the studies in the literature. Depending on the research results, the following suggestions can be included:

1. In life sciences lessons, it can be ensured that the oral history method is used in addressing the acquisitions related to oral history.

2. It can be ensured that studies on oral history are appropriate for the level of the students.

3. Informative and guiding studies for students and their families can be provided in studies related to oral history.

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