



Current Status of the Knowledge Classification in the Public Libraries of Sri Lanka : problems and future directions (A case study in Anuradhapura District)

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Abstract

This paper analytically investigates the Current Status of the Knowledge Classification in the Public Libraries of Sri Lanka with the perspectives of its problems and future directions as a case study within the Anuradhapura District. The major objective of the study was to gain an understanding of the current classification systems in Sri Lanka's public libraries and other objectives of the study were to determine the root causes of not using formal classification systems in these libraries if so and finally to guide the authorities for the further implementation about the productive classification systems. A survey method was used for this research. All the 30 public libraries in the Anuradhapura district of the North Central Province (NCP) were used as the Population for the research and the questionnaire was distributed among the librarians of those libraries to cover the entire population. Duly filled 24 questionnaires were returned (Response rate = 80%) and from them, the primary data was collected. The data was computerized through Excel software and the final results were analyzed. Tables, graphs and diagrams were used to present the information uncovered in the research. Secondary data for the study was collected from the Annual reports, websites and the Department of Census. In the observation of the study results, it was mainly revealed that the knowledge classification system implemented in the public libraries of the North Central Province is at a successful level. However, it was observed that about 65% of the respondents used colour codes to identify the books in an informal way. Using separate colours for species classes belonging to the same Dewey taxonomy revealed no uniformity among libraries. The majority of the respondents stated that there is no formal guideline for classifying knowledge. At the end of the study, it was revealed that the methods used to classify knowledge in public libraries should be monitored from a scientific background. For this



purpose, it was recommended that relevant local government bodies and policy-making bodies should act directly on the library profession.

Keywords: Anuradhapura District, Colour code, Knowledge classification, Public Library, NCP, Sri Lanka

01. Introduction

Due to the development of information technology and the increase in internet facilities, the use of libraries is decreasing day by day. Despite the above situation, the library still holds a leading position as the institution where all the tasks of identifying universal knowledge, separating it by subject, organizing it, storing it and providing it again in a short period of time when someone asks for it are carried out scientifically. Therefore, even though other sources are able to provide information in an efficient manner, the number of people still used libraries to get reliable and timely information does not yet appear to be decreasing. One of the main reasons why libraries have gained this recognition is the scientific and extensive method provided for easy access to the universal knowledge stored in it (Yi, 2006).

Although superficially referred to as the classification of information and knowledge, this is a phenomenon with a strong acceptance in society and a very easy understanding for the reader. The main duty of a library is to classify knowledge and implement indexing so that it can be easily accessed by the reader. The main objective of library classification is to arrange the library documents in a systematic sequence for the convenience of both the readers and the staff in the library.

In fact, According to Dr S.R. Ranganathan, library classification mechanizes the correct placement of library documents after use, fixes the most helpful place for a newly added document or a book amongst the other books available in the library on a similar subject and files the most helpful place for the first document on such other already existing subjects which are related to it. Although there have been various classification systems in the world (Universal Decimal Classification – UDC, colon classification system – CC, Dewey Decimal Classification system -DDC) since time immemorial, the most popular



classification system among many libraries today is the Dewey Decimal Classification system (DDC).

The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system colloquially known as the Dewey Decimal System is a general knowledge organization tool that is continuously revised to keep pace with knowledge. The system was conceived by Melville Louis Kossuth "Melvil" Dewey in 1873 and first published in 1876. It is a classification method, which allows new books to be added to a library in their appropriate location based on subject under 10 x 10-class number system. 000, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800 & 900 are its main subject classes and again they will be divided into next 10 class according to the spread of the subject into the deep level.

DDC takes a fair amount of time to maintain the process of classifying and shelving the books received by the libraries, as well as requiring an experienced staff. Nowadays, in Sri Lanka, most libraries, including academic, public and special libraries, are using some sort of classification system to make it easier for the reader to divide and separate the sources of knowledge, including the books they receive. Whole public libraries of Sri Lanka suppose to use a certain classification system and when they use DDC for that advise to use at least 2nd level class numbers for that.

The National Library Service Board of Sri Lanka regulates the knowledge management activities in the public libraries of Sri Lanka, and in the past period, classification methods other than the standard classification methods have come into use. There is also a tendency for some public libraries to use colour-coded classification systems to suit their needs. Therefore, finding out whether the knowledge management activities taking place in the public libraries of Sri Lanka are being done properly will be very useful to ensure the continuity of its knowledge classification systems.

02. Literature Review

Arianto (2006) stated that a Library classification scheme is a major means to organize book collections with various knowledge contained. They are the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), Library of Congress Classification (LCC), and Universal Decimal Classification (UDC). DDC 21, for instance, has been used in more than 200,000 libraries



worldwide in 135 countries and has been translated into over 30 languages. Having been used internationally. All major classification schemes are built on clearly identifiable systems of knowledge, and all classification schemes, as discursive formations, regulate the ways in which knowledge is made accessible of particular interest in determining how knowledge is represented in classification schemes are main classes and national language (Rafferty, 2001).

Classification is a means; it must also have a goal such that, in libraries, it will aim to contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of information retrieval. In archives, they have been traditionally been related to organization and control, in order to obtain efficacy and efficiency in managing records. So, in both cases, there are similarities in the intellectual and physical processes that give rise to the organization of information and knowledge. Simões et..al, (2016) pointed out that classification is a means, it must also have a goal such that, in libraries, it will aim to contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of information retrieval. In archives, they have been traditionally been related to organization and control, in order to obtain efficacy and efficiency in managing records.

Maker (2008) has done a survey on “Reader-centred classification of adult fiction in public libraries” and explained that organizing knowledge into different subjects will increase circulation, but it cannot be ignored that a reader-centric method is better than the current genre-based method for classifying books. Public libraries should pay attention to this, as it has traditionally been associated with the division of works into different genres.

Hsu (1995) conducted a survey on "The Classification Schemes of The Research Libraries of The New York Public Library "and identified that the Research Libraries of The New York Public Library use two unique classification schemes ,One is the Billings Classification, a broad subject classification and another one is a fixed order scheme arranged by the size of books.

Albrechtsen (1997) done a survey on “The order of catalogues: Towards democratic classification and indexing in public libraries” and explained that In the modern electronic library environment, the role of classification systems in public libraries is changing.



Central institutions prepared Standard classifications are distributed to libraries and their user communities. As the library's role changes from collection custodian to that of facilitator, the catalogue's role shifts from managing collections to facilitating communication, collaboration, and maintaining a shared conceptual context. However, approaches differ according to their view of the social world of library users, and future developments in democratic indexing and cooperative classification should be guided by a theory of knowledge and gain a greater understanding of the relationship between user access and collective knowledge structure in libraries.

It is the basis of knowledge production. There is no adequate research related to the Knowledge classification of Public libraries had been done at the Sri Lanka so the literature review revealed that it is essential to use a formal classification system for libraries.

03. Problem Statement

At present, the global disasters that the world has faced, as well as various economic crises, show a rapid decrease in the number of people recruited for the services of libraries. This situation has also had a very strong impact on public libraries in Sri Lanka. While running the day-to-day operations of libraries, they are facing acute problems of utilization of human resources for library management, book conservation and maintenance of modern technology-based reader services etc. Due to this, there are often cases where some library work is assigned to people who do not have professional qualifications or any basic knowledge. Because of this, is the effort and time that should be devoted to the classification of library knowledge being done properly? Remains a problem. Therefore, it is significant to conduct an investigation on the efforts made for knowledge classification in public libraries at least provincial levels of Sri Lanka.

04. Objectives

The main objective of the study was to understand the current status of the Knowledge Classification in the Public Libraries of Sri Lanka. Other specific objectives of the study were;

1. To gain an understanding of the current classification systems in Sri Lanka's public libraries.



2. To investigate the root causes of not using formal classification systems in these libraries.
3. To guide the authorities for further implementation of formal classification systems.

05. Methodology

Survey methodology was used to conduct the study. Out of the 2 districts belonging to North Central Province, Anuradhapura district was used as the study area. All (30) existing public libraries in Anuradhapura district were used for the study. For this, a questionnaire was created using Google Form and the link was sent to the above libraries and the relevant responses were obtained. Only 24 libraries responded and the response rate was 80% accordingly. The primary data obtained in this way were analyzed and the related results were presented with the help of graphs and tables. The secondary data required for the study was obtained from annual reports, internet websites and publications of the Department of Census and Statistics.

06. Result and Discussion

i. Demographic Data of the Libraries

Following Demographic Data was found when analyzing the secondary data set provided by the Library Services Board of NCP

Table 1: Demographic Data of the Libraries

Demographic factor	Total No
Grade I Librarians	03
Grade II Librarians	04
Grade III Librarians	12
Library Attendants	25
Other Positions (Labour, Wacher, Development officer ect)	15
Grade I Libraries	01
Grade II Libraries	01
Grade III Libraries	20
Libraries with <1000 Members	10



Libraries with >1000 Members	20
Libraries with <5000 Books	18
Libraries with >5000 Books	12

Source: Library Services Board, NCP

Table 2 represented some demographic statistics of the libraries and it shows there are 18 libraries having more than 5000 collection sizes and 10 having more than 1000 active members. Further, the table shows that there are 20 libraries under the Grade III category.

ii. The existing Classification System used

Based on the existing classification system, the data was collected and found the following results.

Table 2: Existing Classification System used

Classification System used	No of Libraries (N=30)
DDC (Up to the first level)	06
DDC (Up to the second level)	09
DDC (Upto the third level)	15
DDC with Colour Code	15

Source: Library Services Board, NCP

Table 2 shows that most libraries have classified their knowledge collections (books) in more than 3 levels (for example first level= 300 - social sciences, second level= 330- economics, third level = 333 - land economics). 15 libraries used colour coding with DDC.

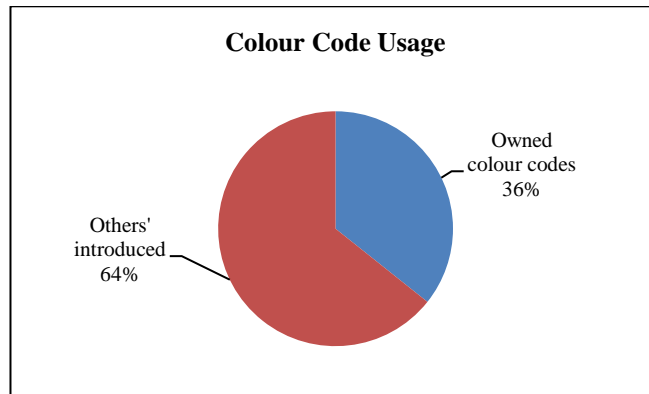


Figure 1: Nature of the colour code usage
Source: Survey data, 2021

Figure 1 shows that 36% of the responded libraries used their own colour codes and 64% used colour codes introduced by another library or institution.

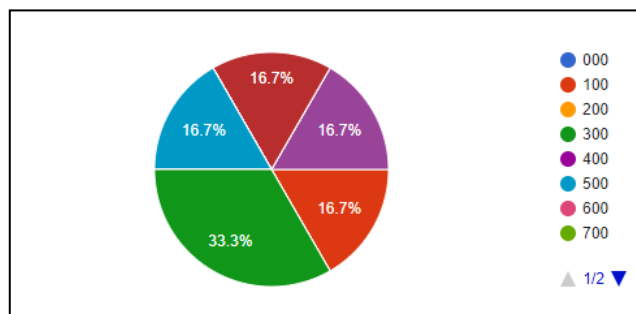


Figure 2: Colours used to code DDC main classes (Eg: Red)
Source: Survey data, 2021

Figure 2 shows that respondents' libraries used the colour Green to represent different knowledge classes, 33.3% used green colour to code social sciences books – 300, and 16.7% libraries have been used same colour to code Science – 500, Philosophy – 100 and Technology – 600.

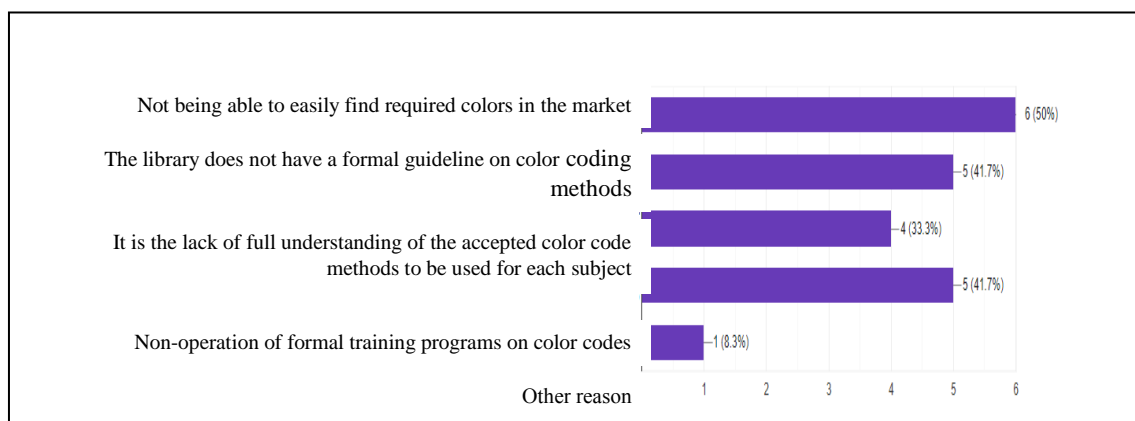


Figure 3: Major problems encountered in using colours for knowledge classification



Source: Survey data, 2021

In addition to the above key research findings, only 27% of respondents stated that they had attended training programs related to bibliography, while 80% stated that such training was needed. A major plus point of the research was that from the point of view of librarians, it was revealed that users are highly satisfied with the existing classification systems currently used by public libraries in NCP.

07. Conclusion and Recommendations

In the analysis of the research data, it was revealed that most of the public libraries in the North Central Province have used a formal classification system to classify the knowledge they acquire. It was revealed that 100% of the respondents use Dewey Decimal Classification System (DDC) for knowledge classification. About half of the responding libraries were found to use colour coding outside of the main type system. It was not observed that they used a formal colour code to categorize their knowledge. It was observed that there was no uniformity among libraries in the use of colour codes. A high percentage of research participants stated that training opportunities on classification systems should be provided.

Thus, it can be recommended to the relevant local authorities that they should conduct a scientific analysis of the methods currently used to classify knowledge in the public libraries of the North Central Province and find out how far they are able to save the reader's time.

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