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## Rethinking Knowledge Organization: The Imperative for a Simplified Book Classification Scheme in the Age of Digital Transformation

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### Abstract

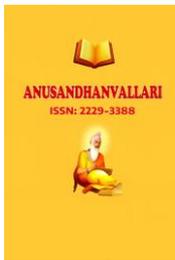
In the context of rapid digital transformation, traditional book classification schemes such as Dewey Decimal Classification, Library of Congress Classification, and Universal Decimal Classification are increasingly perceived as complex, rigid, and misaligned with contemporary user behaviour. This study examines the imperative for a simplified, user-oriented book classification scheme that can effectively support knowledge organization and information retrieval in both physical and digital library environments. Using a quantitative descriptive research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to academic librarians, library professionals, and library users in West Bengal, India. The survey measured perceptions regarding the complexity of existing classification systems, their impact on information retrieval, and the perceived need for simplification and digital compatibility. Findings reveal a strong consensus among respondents that current schemes are difficult to interpret, inadequately support interdisciplinary and digital resources, and place excessive cognitive burden on users. A significant majority emphasized the need for classification systems that prioritize user navigation, plain-language subject representation, and integration with digital metadata standards. The study concludes that simplification of book classification is no longer optional but essential for enhancing usability, discoverability, and relevance of library collections in the digital age. The findings provide empirical support for rethinking traditional knowledge organization practices and inform the development of future-ready, user-centric classification frameworks.

**Keywords:** classification, DDC, UDC, LC, simplified classification, knowledge organization, digital transformation

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### Introduction

A library classification scheme serves a vital role within the information retrieval process. It determines arrangements for easier access and helps library professionals in searching and identifying information materials. In the 1960s, the Dewey Decimal, Library of Congress, and Universal Decimal classifications were found to be the most common book-classification schemes worldwide. People may still access information at the library and often cannot find what they are interested in. Small-scale, one-time exits on classification schemes have been conducted by library professionals, but wide-spread classifications schemes-popular to modify adaptation and didactic subject needs today remain neglected until now. More consideration has gone on the role of library classification upon building a world-wide consortium towards resource-sharing goal. The digital era empowered artificial intellect and machine learning. This survey documents major classification schemes from library points of view, users' point of view. such as relevance, human-centric, temporalization, mutability, machine-readability, level of granularity, and bibliographic access fidelity.



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### Objectives:

- Evaluate the limitations of traditional book classification schemes.
- Finding the difficulty faced by Librarians and readers for complexity of classification schemes.
- Adapt classification strategies to the needs of modern libraries and digital platforms.
- Enhance user experience in both physical and digital environments.

### Literature Review

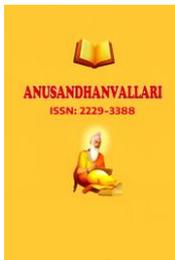
The body of work on simplifying and modernizing book classification in libraries traces a clear trajectory from acknowledging limitations of traditional schemes to advocating inclusive, flexible frameworks suited for digital contexts. Nwosu, Tuyo, and Aniche (2014) foreground the practical shortcomings of law libraries that relied on alphabetical shelving and treated law as part of the social sciences, underscoring the need for a classification approach that reflects legal reasoning and improves research accessibility. They argue that current schemes such as Dewey and Library of Congress, while functional, often fail to capture the logical structure of legal materials, signalling the necessity for a simplified, modern system tailored to legal resources and interdisciplinary connections (C. Nwosu et al., 2014).

Building on the same imperative for modernization, Haider and Sharma (2017) extend the discussion to the broader library landscape, emphasizing that both physical and digital collections require a streamlined, adaptable scheme. They critique outdated components of traditional classifications and highlight the value of leveraging and updating established frameworks to accommodate contemporary knowledge, new subject areas, and the management of electronic resources. The authors advocate for a flexible, cost-effective system that integrates with current digital infrastructures, supporting more efficient browsing, searching, and access in modern libraries (Haider & K. Sharma, 2017).

Complementing these calls for modernization, Slavic (2017) focuses on the mechanisms and benefits of faceted classification as a path to improved information retrieval. The work stresses semantic decomposability, exposure of structural and functional characteristics, and standardization to enable machine processing. Slavic notes that automation and unified databases can enhance library management and user access, aligning technical design with practical usability in a digital age (Slavic, 2017).

Expanding on the social dimensions of classification, Dierking (2018) provides a contextual case study of reform within out on The Shelves Library. The shift away from an alphabetically arranged system is framed as a response to exclusionary and problematic practices, such as providing separate, stereotyped classes for marginalized identities. Dierking's project demonstrates how reimagined, context-based classification can reflect a library's mission and values while addressing critiques of conventional schemes like LCC and subject headings. The emphasis is on developing an inclusive, equity-oriented framework that better supports diverse communities and contextual understandings (Dierking, 2018).

Together, these articles illuminate a progression from recognizing limitations in traditional schemes to proposing concrete, inclusive, and digitally capable approaches. The literature argues that a simplified and modern classification system should (a) reflect the logical structure of disciplines and interdisciplinary connections; (b) be flexible to accommodate digital resources and evolving subjects; (c) support automation and machine processing through standardized, faceted design; and (d) align with social equity objectives by incorporating contextual and inclusive perspectives. These themes collectively inform considerations for developing a simplified and modern book classification scheme that serves diverse users and evolving library environments.



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### Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design using a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The design is appropriate for examining perceptions of complexity in existing book classification systems and assessing the need for a simplified classification scheme in digitally transformed library environments.

### Population and Sample

The population comprises academic librarians, library professionals, and academic library users (undergraduate and postgraduate students). Purposive sampling is used for selecting librarians, while stratified random sampling is applied to library users across disciplines ensuring adequate representation.

### Research Instrument

Data are collected through a self-administered structured questionnaire consisting mainly of closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire covers:

- (a) awareness and use of existing classification schemes,
- (b) perceived complexity of classification notations,
- (c) impact on information retrieval and browsing, and
- (d) perceived need and acceptance of a simplified classification scheme.

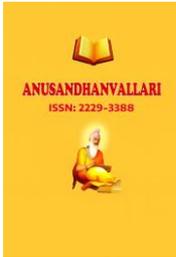
### Scope and Limitation

The methodology is limited to perception-based survey data collected from geographical area of west Bengal state of India and does not include direct observation of retrieval behaviour. However, it provides empirically grounded evidence to support the conceptual argument for simplifying book classification systems in the digital age.

### Rationale for a Simplified Classification

The classification of books in libraries is a critical tool for access to information. However, many current schemes in use are complex and elaborate. The need for a simplified classification that is user-friendly and easily understood is imperative if libraries are to continue being viable sources of information for the greater community. Public libraries have moved towards simplified classifications to meet the needs of community patrons. Such schemes allow patrons to easily find the material they are looking for or identify material of interest in a very efficient manner (I. Amusa & O. Iyoro, 2011).

A simplified classification allows patrons to find information that satisfies their informational needs. Once the initial information is identified, patrons can easily find similar information through identification of subject matter. Many library patron inquiries centre around topic rather than author or title information. Classification that is topic based rather than author based allows patrons to find appropriate materials without assistance (M Potter, 2016).



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## Theoretical Foundations of Classification

Most current book classification schemes are based on principles established over a century ago (e.g., Dewey Decimal Classification). New literature presents further theoretical ideas that can complement the earlier principles and guide the development of a simplified classification scheme. Information scientists have identified two radically different types of classification: user-centric and system-centric. The former helps users extract and navigate a collection of information, while the latter constitutes a background classification that is independent of the user.

### User-Centric vs. System-Centric Classification

Academics and library practitioners have long debated whether user-centric and system-centric approaches to classification address the same problems or aim to achieve similar goals. User-centric approaches seek to accommodate the browsing patterns and needs of users in accessing library resources (M Potter, 2016). Criteria such as simplicity, familiarity, and ease of access remain central in many classification design systems. However, it has been shown that library systems worldwide are prone to the phenomenon of “classification inversion,” defined as a disconnection between cataloguing and classification systems. Inversions occur when classifications based on the same standards diverge over time, leading to different and incompatible interpretations of the classification. In such contexts, classification aimed at user orientation has little operational significance; the classification remains systematic and necessitates a cue corresponding to the order of the given classification system. At times, the emphasis on user-oriented classification is misconstrued. Research shows that classification may have size and content, yet the user remains an option for selection.

## Review of Existing Schemes

### Dewey Decimal Classification

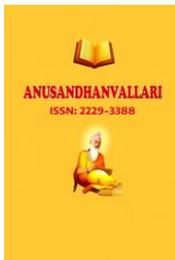
In Dewey’s Decimal Classification, the universal focus is on ‘knowledge’ instead of ‘document’ or ‘information’. Dewey, analysing the nature of literature, proposed a classification on “the relation of books to Knowledge.” Knowledge is classified as ten ‘simple ideas’, and each is assigned to a respective number. Dewey, while being a librarian at the Boston Public Library, worked in 1873 to classify library documents. With this experience, he published the first classification in 1876 – a revolutionary event in the field of Library Science (Luther Henderson, 1975).

### Library of Congress Classification

The Library of Congress classification system organizes library collections broadly. It employs uppercase letters for major classes, double letters for subclasses, and Arabic numerals for subdivisions. The principal designation for law, “K,” accommodates a wide range of specialized legal topics. The Library of Congress classification, in addition to the Dewey Decimal system, highlights the unique aspects of legal documentation. It encompasses law, philosophy, jurisprudence, criminal investigations, and enforcement processes. There are further refinements for specific subjects, such as international administrative law, international financial law, international commercial law, and international treaty law (I. Amusa & O. Iyoro, 2011).

### Universal Decimal Classification

The Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), adopted by the International Federation for Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) as one of its core standards, has been characterized as being based on the principles of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). However, some researchers believe that the UDC, developed by Paul Otlet



and Henri La Fontaine, follows a different philosophical approach (I. Amusa & O. Iyoro, 2011). The UDC has been asserted to represent one of the greatest alternatives to DDC, particularly in relation to its facet classification. Furthermore, UDC is viewed as completer and more flexible compared to DDC. UDC adopts a specific notation, which limits and constrains the freedoms deemed important in the present society.

UDC, focused on human knowledge and non-analytical objectives, has maintained an updated and practical vocabulary. A first edition of UDC was published in Brussels in 1905.

### **Requirements for a Modern Scheme**

The selection of a modern classification scheme must fulfil the requirements of contemporary libraries, offering user-friendly, yet effective and universal ways of organizing their collections and inventories be these physical or digital (I. Amusa & O. Iyoro, 2011). Now more than ever, with the advent to libraries of digital resources such as the Internet, eBooks, and streaming services, the activity of classification is becoming paramount.

A scheme based on the material of a collection must not only meet the aforementioned requirements, it must also remain simple, unambiguous, coherent, clear, consistent, and comprehensive.

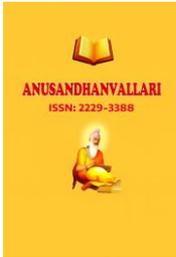
### **Granularity and Facetization**

Book classification comprises grouping books according to subjects or topics; other terms used include 'book classification' and 'information classification', with the former preferred and the latter applicable beyond the domain of documents. Subject indexation, literature classification and library classification, which refer specifically to collection of library catalogue classification plans, classification and information retrieval, and bibliographic classification and bibliographic notation, are also used. A classification scheme comprises classes or groups, without regard for notation (Slavic, 2017). Granularity and facetization relate to the degree of detail in a classification scheme.

Granularity refers to a book classification scheme's classification observability, or breadth of its chosen areas and their coverage. A simplified scheme aims at high observability through coarse homework and a broader filing space; specific items may be deeper partitioned as required. Granular schemes help distinguish library items more clearly during contemporary information retrieval, reducing time overhead (Broughton, 2017). The literature on subject classification cites statements and approaches that can be usefully applied. Although terminology varies slight, subdividing a collection simplifies a complex book collection into a smaller selection according to certain aspects of item grouping (Mills, 2004). Academic libraries generally offer a limited granularity; broader selection from a well-stocked library still make retrieval laborious, and material outside commonly accepted standards seem wholly irrelevant.

### **Digital Compatibility and Linked Data**

Metadata published as Linked Open Data improve discoverability and foster data enrichment through semantic relationships with other datasets. Metadata offer a summarization and address a different information need, especially concerning unknown content, compared with full-text extracts. Datasets lack specific guidelines on publication that considers extra facets and enrich the dataset's data. Classifications, organized into concepts, not only provide a structural overview, deduce different facets and granularity from existing datasets, but also remain accessible and retrievable to general users online. They are present in Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms, Geonames, the International Standard Serial Number and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. They are used as intellectual units to capture topic coverage of works, support enrichments with authority vocabularies and interlink through equivalents with encyclopaedia landmarks (Slavic, 2017).



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### **Multilingual and Multicultural Accommodation**

Librarians serving linguistically and culturally diverse communities struggle to provide equitable collection access. These challenges arise from a lack of support for multilingual display, searching, and retrieval in existing classification schemes; the use of multi-script literature across languages sharing the same script; the absence of comprehensive schemes addressing various languages and cultures; and the availability of wide-ranging materials covering language and culture in addition to subject. The proposed scheme overcomes these barriers using conventional Romanized transcriptions for languages that share the same script facilitates language identification while omitting unnecessary diacritics (Mandal, 2018). Such standardization ensures consistent representation and diverse, customizable search options through freely available transliterators. Core facets covering literature devoted to languages national, regional, historical, and cultural enable users to locate resources with acute cultural value (Idrees, 2012).

### **Scalability and Maintenance Procedures**

Library classification schemes have long been employed to organize information systematically. Designed to serve general library needs, these schemes may skip or treat certain subjects as peripheral. A simplified scheme facilitates subsequent usage, evolution, and building of complementary models. Scalability extends to revision and maintenance, enabling necessary adaptation as academic knowledge and community interests develop. The proposed framework acknowledges a growing collection of digital objects not only in libraries and addresses new subjects and areas of interest. Periodic evaluation by other librarians, support staff, and users can provide further engagement with evolving academic disciplines, ensuring attention to desirable and relevant aspects.

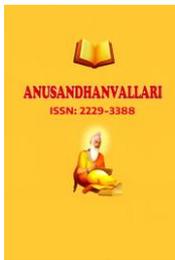
### **Evaluation and Validation**

Quality assessment of classification schemes requires evaluation and validation (L. Miller, 1986). An approach comprises comparative analysis against the requirements and characteristics of established ranking systems. User-centred evaluation involves feedback from members of the intended user base, either through structured interviews or targeted surveys and questionnaires alongside the deployment of the framework in appropriate environments (Xiao, 2022). Tracking the longitudinal impact of scheme adoption, such as variations in user engagement or total circulation before and after the transition from a legacy scheme, may also serve as a viable measure of its effectiveness (Idrees, 2012).

### **Comparative Studies**

Library collections and associated cataloguing practices remain an ongoing topic of debate in the field of library and information science. The comparative analysis of selected library classification schemes and cataloguing practices is an effective means of determining operational standards and effectiveness for the organization of collections in ways that promote increased access to selected items and engender more positive library user experiences. Such comparative studies of cataloguing practices apply to examination of a much broader range of classification schemes than that indicated by localized perspectives.

Library classification is a systematic and organized means of grouping and arranging outstanding information sources for the purpose of managing and intellectual access to source material. Following the preliminary physical arrangement of library sources, the library classification process involves the systematic grouping of sources according to subject contents along with the assignment of classification codes or markings that represent particular subject matter interests. These coding schemes, also known as call numbers or class marks, facilitate the logical, organized arrangement of both predominantly textual and non-textual materials, assist in the efficient retrieval and replacement of materials and enable brief, rapid, at-a-glance identification of the disciplines



addressed by individual works. The classification process itself conventionally requires the identification of the main subject of an information source, the consultation of the appropriate subject heading for the identified topic and subsequently the determination of the classification number that corresponds to the subject heading selected from the governing classification scheme's index and schedule. Broadly-implemented, universally-accepted classification systems such as the Dewey Decimal Classification, the Library of Congress Classification and Moys Classification System for Law Books feature hierarchical organization with multi-tiered divisions and subdivisions assigned to subject topics across a comparatively wide range of materials in multiple relevant disciplines (I. Amusa & O. Iyoro, 2011).

The collection and arrangement of library materials for intellectual access represent only one single aspect of a more involved process that considers the needs and preferences of library users more directly. While examination of current library collections and the classification schemes employed within them may help inform the initial stages of the classification design process, the Pyramid project employed a more access-focused perspective that addressed wider user groups. The pre-existing library classification scheme in use exhibited considerable dissatisfaction on the part of the library staff members responsible for overseeing the collection (M Potter, 2016). The traditional arrangement of library materials by a restricted set of attributes, collectively referred to as facets, did not adequately represent the true nature of the collection or the manner by which users engaged with the information contained within the various works. User interest in works produced and the inevitably well-known popularity of particular authors led library patrons to request specific titles and books rather than approach selection processes according to the Dewey Decimal Classification scheme. Furthermore, a wide-ranging literature review covering at least two decades of experimentation with alternative classification schemes specifically designed for juvenile literature drew the same conclusion that systemic arrangements based purely on author or title did not accurately reflect the actual selection practices of information seekers. Patron profiles and survey responses suggested that users increasingly and prefer to select works based on genres, categories or subject topics rather than by the name of a familiar author.

The collaborative comparison of design strategies governing a collection that specifically addressed fiction materials and juvenile audiences also heightened awareness and interest in supplementary classification systems. Text reproduced supported book selection according to query patterns and literature content as a logical means of enhancing access and exposure. The systematic grouping of books by topic plus supplemental symbol systems to increase the visibility of the classification scheme similarly aligned with the objectives being pursued. Consideration for easing the classification task extended to physical as well as intellectual aspects, thereby engaging material selection opportunities more directly rather than via a purely abstract mechanism. One of three primary, twelve-colour-language substitutes described in the Dewey Decimal Classification overview employed colour-coding elements specifically for this reason. The enhanced clarity, flexibility and improved coverage exhibited in the British Standards Institution/Standard Book Number classification alternatively addressed catalogue compatibility with a centrally-controlled, content-based approach to supplementary topical arrangements that pursued coordination of individual works across larger target domains. Works produced in the same field, direction or group formed the thematic core of the Dewey Decimal Classification construction, making the existing classification scheme inadequate.

#### **User-Centred Assessments**

Public, school, and academic library services continue to evolve to meet changing user needs. Libraries increasingly see themselves not just as passive repositories of books but also as key portals of information, entertainment, and community engagement. Traditional book classification schemes designed to facilitate the discovery and retrieval of knowledge publications are more often perceived as cumbersome and irrelevant, especially for younger audiences with more visual and conceptual interests (M Potter, 2016). Schmid, as part of a longitudinal impact study of 88 public libraries in the USA and Canada employing the Simplified Classification

Scheme, notes that user-centered assessments of public, school, and academic library services offer critical insights into how the modern public library is perceived and evaluated by the community it serves.

### Longitudinal Impact Tracking

Prolonged periods of impromptu use and perpetual cataloguing adaptation from a preliminary authority-structured base over the course of very diverse cataloguing phenomena have ultimately induced an individual into looking into connections between such varied uses. The perspective of dimensions set forth by Ranganathan appears as an interesting grid through which to informally superimpose multiple activities, plotting along the grid dimensions produces indicative results worth pursuing further. Although serious examination of the scheme had not yet been undertaken, preliminary consideration had evoked interesting reflections on how to tighten proposed specifications, degree of repetition, and extensive parallels with standardized forms (L. Miller, 1986). Common consequential study and further development remain to be motivated. The concept of relating successive cataloguing acts to express longitudinal changes among books from their extensive side propounds a corresponding reduced scheme of stages conveying explicit books joining a reader constituency.

### Data Analysis and Results

Data collected through questionnaires are presented here. –

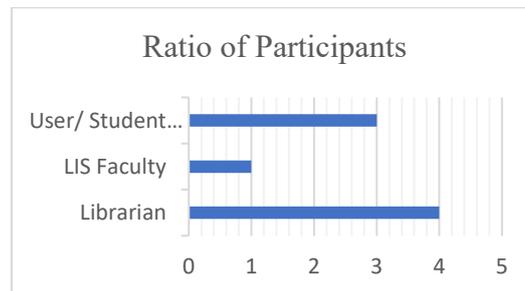


Figure 1

Figure 1: The highest participants are librarian and next are uses.

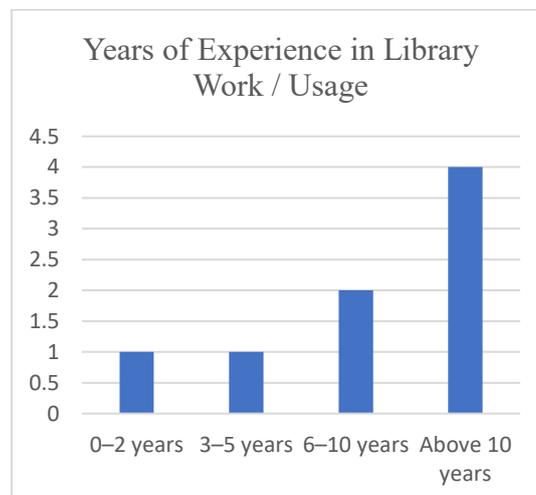


Figure 2

**A. Data collected from Library Professionals**

Figure 2: Librarians respondents having more that 10 years of experience are highest.

Which classification scheme(s) are currently used in your library?

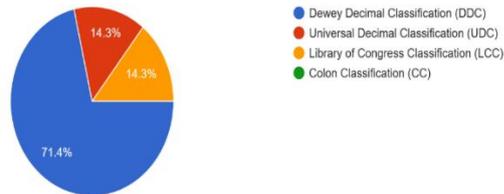


Figure 3

Figure 3: DDC is being used more than any other classification scheme.

Do you think existing schemes are too complex for digital resource organization?

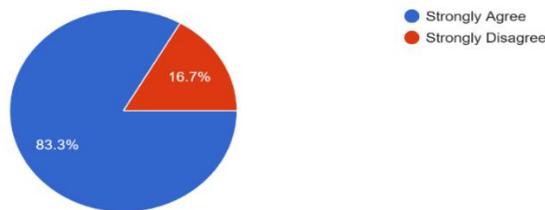


Figure 4

Figure 4: 83% respondents considered the existing schemes are complex for digital resource organisation.

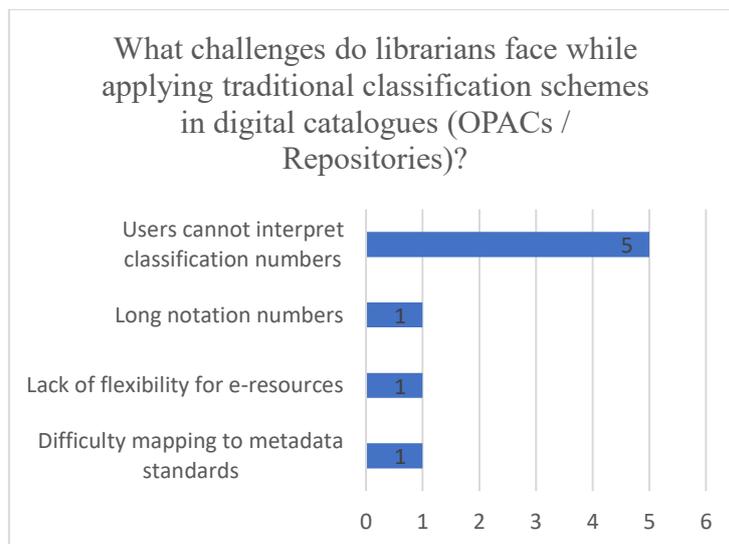


Figure 5

Figure 5: Challenges do librarians face while applying traditional classification schemes in digital catalogues is that users cannot interpret classification numbers.

Have you made any local modifications or simplifications to classification in your system?

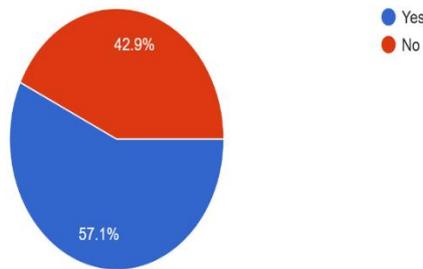


Figure 6

Figure 6: 57% librarians made local modifications or simplification to classification scheme.

Do you think classification systems should integrate with digital metadata standards (e.g., MARC21, Dublin Core, BIBFRAME)?

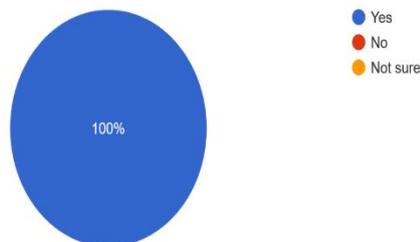


Figure 7

Figure 7: 100% library professionals thinks that classification system should integrate with digital metadata standard.

Do you think existing classification schemes are keeping pace with the digital transformation of libraries?

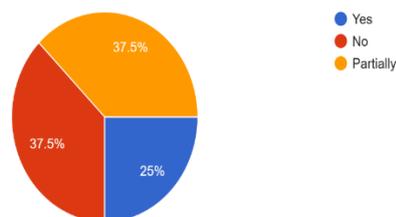


Figure 8

Figure 8: 37% library professionals opined that existing classification scheme cannot keep space with the digital transformation.

Should future classification systems prioritize user navigation or bibliographic control?

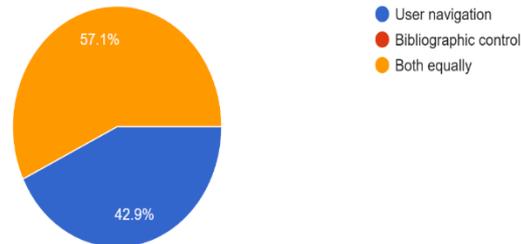


Figure 9

Figure 9: Professionals think future classification system should prioritize user navigation or bibliographic control.

Rate the importance of a simplified classification scheme in the digital revolution.

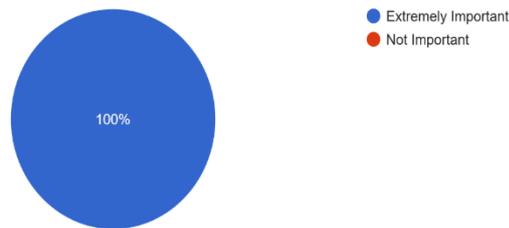


Figure 10

Figure 10: professionals expressed that need of a simplified classification scheme is required in this digital era.

## B. Data collected from Library Users / Students / Researchers

How often do you use the library catalogue (OPAC / online system)?

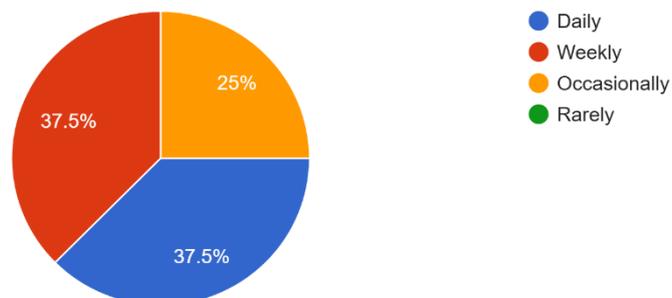


Figure 11

Figure 11: 37% Library Users / Students / Researchers use library catalogue (OPAC) daily, while other 37% uses weekly.

Do you find digital searching (keywords, subjects, tags) easier than searching by classification number?

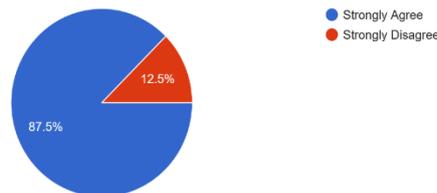


Figure 12

Figure 12: 87% Library Users / Students / Researchers strongly agree that digital searching is easier than searching by classification.

Would a simplified or user-friendly classification (e.g., thematic or color-coded) improve your library experience?

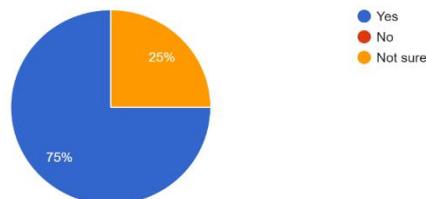


Figure 13

Figure 13: 75% Library Users / Students / Researchers confirmed that a simplified or user-friendly classification scheme will improve their library experience.

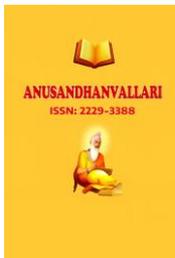
This analysis is based on the survey responses collected, which include input from a small sample of 621 respondents, predominantly highly experienced library professionals and users. The key findings highlight a widespread consensus on the need for modernizing and simplifying traditional classification systems to better serve the digital library environment.

**Importance of Simplification:** All respondents rated a simplified classification scheme as either "Extremely Important" or "Very Important" in the digital revolution.

**Need for Digital Integration:** A large majority believe that classification systems should integrate with digital metadata standards (e.g., MARC21, Dublin Core, BIBFRAME).

The majority of respondents indicate that existing classification schemes are not keeping pace with the digital transformation.

**Future System Priority:** When asked whether future classification systems should prioritize "user navigation" or "bibliographic control," the vast majority chose either "User navigation" or "Both equally". This suggests that prioritizing user navigation, or at least balancing it with bibliographic control, is the accepted way forward. There is near-unanimous agreement on the importance of simplified classification and its role in a modern library.



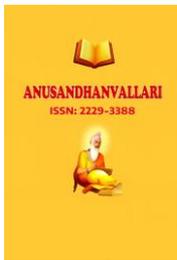
## Conclusion

The goal of developing a simplified and modern book classification scheme for library science has found strong approval among the library community. Existing classification schemes have been characterized as complex and cumbersome because of their sheer size and intricacies. Consequently, face-to-face user support from librarians is required during library visits for effective information retrieval. A shortened scheme devoid of unnecessary technicalities and excess granularity is advocated instead. Such simplification is anticipated to facilitate quicker learning and broader application in many contexts. Supplementary expectations regarding the emerging support library education, information literacy, collection building, and publication sharing further endorse the need for an elementary scheme.

The application of modern digital technology has brought forward systemic shifts in library service delivery. Developing a modern framework that reinforces and associates with the simplified classification initiative would thus remain imperative. Alternatively, any already-published simplified scheme could be taken as a reference system for subsequent modification.

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