

Extent Difficulty of Cataloging Books as Perceived by Library and Information Science Students

Romel Rellon, Jessica D. Caubat, Josephine Revira, April Lina

Romel Rellon Library and Information Science, Tagoloan Community College,
Cagayan de Oro City, MISAMIS ORIENTAL, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Cataloging is essential for efficient information retrieval in library science. This mixed-methods study investigates the book cataloging challenges faced by Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) students at Tagoloan Community College, utilizing surveys and in-depth interviews. The results reveal that while most students showed satisfactory proficiency, they experienced mild difficulties in identifying access points, assigning classification numbers, and selecting subject headings. Crucially, a strong correlation emerged between students' perceived difficulties and their cataloging outcomes, proving these challenges directly impact academic performance. Qualitative data highlighted a critical need for more practical exercises, better access to cataloging tools, and collaborative learning spaces. Based on these findings, the study recommends enhancing instructional strategies and updating learning resources to prepare students for real-world professional demands.

Keywords: Cataloging, cataloging books, cataloging difficulties, access point, classification, subject heading, accuracy, reliability, accessibility.

INTRODUCTION

Cataloging is a cornerstone of library science, vital for managing information resources and ensuring efficient retrieval. Accurate cataloging allows users to locate materials quickly, facilitating research and learning (Mats University, 2024), while reliable practices bolster a library's reputation as a trustworthy information source (Billey et al., 2024). However, students often face challenges in mastering this process, particularly regarding access points, classification schemes, and subject headings.

Globally, cataloging complies with standards set by organizations like the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), whose International Cataloguing Principles (ICP) standardize bibliographic data sharing (IFLA, 2023). Yet, cataloging remains complex due to the rise of digital and multimedia formats. To adapt, many countries have implemented Resource Description and Access (RDA) frameworks, prompting global education programs to update their curricula accordingly (Smith, 2019).

In the Philippines, the National Library of the Philippines (NLP) guides bibliographic management, but widespread underfunding and resource scarcity hinder the process (NLP, 2023). Local Library and Information Science (LIS) students frequently struggle due to a lack of advanced cataloging systems and practical training. Nevertheless, library schools are increasingly adopting RDA to align future Filipino librarians with international standards (Cruz, 2020).

Libraries in Region 10 face identical constraints, relying heavily on manual methods due to limited budgets and outdated tools (NLP, 2023). Regional LIS students report persistent difficulties in mastering these tasks. Bridging these gaps in training and resources is vital to ensuring catalog records remain accurate and accessible (Hernandez, 2019).

At Tagoloan Community College, Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) students face these exact hurdles. They struggle to formulate effective access points and navigate complex classification systems across diverse collections (Rellon, 2025). Additionally, selecting precise subject headings to describe content accurately remains a significant barrier. These challenges directly compromise the accuracy, reliability, and accessibility of their cataloged materials.

Methods

This study used a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the perceived difficulty of cataloging books among Library and Information Science students. The quantitative component employed structured questionnaires to collect numerical data on students' experiences and challenges with cataloging. The qualitative aspect included open-ended questions and follow-up interviews to gather detailed insights into specific issues students faced during the cataloging process. By integrating both methods, this design ensured a comprehensive understanding of the topic, allowing for deeper analysis of the data and validation of findings from multiple perspectives (Dawadi, Shrestha, & Giri, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent's Profile

The respondent's profile covered the age, year level, and sex.

On Participant's age

The data shows that respondents aged 18–20 years old comprise almost half of the overall population with 64 (47.06%) responses, followed by those aged 21–23 years old with 59 (43.38%) responses. This indicates an increase in the number of new enrollees compared to the previous year. However, respondents aged 27 years old and above accounted for the lowest number, with only 5 responses. This suggests that older individuals are less likely to pursue enrollment, possibly due to work or family responsibilities. This further implies that higher education is still predominantly accessed by traditional-aged students.

On Participant's sex

The data shows that 99 (69.85%) of the people who answered were female, while 41 (30.15%) of the people who answered were male.

This indicates that women continue to have strong representation in higher education. Furthermore, this trend reflects the increasing participation of women in tertiary education, as evidenced by the 2023 female-to-male enrollment ratio of 1.30 in the Philippines (World Bank, 2023, page 13).

On Participant's year level

It has been noticed that most of the participants are second year students with 101 (74.26%) responses. This is a manifestation that more students are added to the profession, reflecting the continued growth of the profession. This is because second-year students are typically in the early stages of their academic journey, where enrollment numbers are generally higher due to initial interest and program accessibility. However, fourth-year students had the lowest representation, with only 10 (7.35%) responses.

This indicates limited enrollment in the BLIS program in previous years, which aligns with findings from Cameja et al. (2023, page 13), suggesting that many high school students are aware of the BLIS program but lack a deep understanding of its curriculum and career opportunities, leading to a lower inclination to pursue it as a college course.

Extent difficulty on cataloging books as perceived by the respondents

On Access Point

The data displays the distributed mean of each indicator, yielding an overall mean of 2.16. This score suggests that, on average, students perceive a moderate level of difficulty in understanding and applying access points in cataloging. The relatively low mean implies that while students possess foundational knowledge, practical application and deeper comprehension remain significant areas of struggle. Notably, the item "Selecting the right access points when cataloging books is difficult for me" registered the highest mean of 2.78, indicating that identifying appropriate access points serves as the most challenging aspect for the respondents. This difficulty likely stems from limited experience in interpreting bibliographic data and assessing the contextual relevance of various access points. This finding aligns with Ayık and Yılmaz (2021, p. 15), who noted that inconsistencies in assigning access points in academic settings often stem from variations in cataloging practices and insufficient exposure to real-world cataloging systems during training.

On Classification

"I have a hard time in choosing classification numbers for items" got the highest mean of 2.68. This means that students often find it moderately challenging to pick the right classification numbers, which are needed to help organize library materials properly. This could be because classification systems are detailed, and students need to understand the subject well to choose the correct number. A study by Pattah, Almah, and Taufiq (2023, page 17) showed that even in university libraries in South Sulawesi, different ways of using the Dewey Decimal Classification system sometimes lead to confusion, which may be similar to what students are experiencing. However, the question "Understanding classification systems like Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress is difficult" got the lowest mean of 2.49. This is still in the difficult range, which means students have a harder time learning and understanding how these systems work. This could be because these systems have many rules and can be confusing at first. Ajani and Sulyman (2023, page 17) explained that many catalogers, including students, need better training and support to feel more confident in using these systems.

On Subject Heading

The data shows the average mean for each statement, with an overall mean of 2.69. The question "I can use standard subject heading lists effectively" got the highest mean of 2.72. This means that students struggle when using tools like the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). Patel and Mathur (2020, page 18), found that students frequently experience confusion when deciding whether to assign a broad or a more specific subject term. However, the question "I can easily match subject headings to a book's content" had the lowest mean of 2.67, which also means slightly difficult. This shows that students have some trouble choosing the right subject heading that fits the book. This may be because it takes skill and practice to understand a book's topic and choose the best subject heading. This supports what Chow, Kao, and Li (2023, page 19) said: that students need more time and practice to get better at cataloging tasks like this.

Outcome of Cataloging Books by the respondents

On Accuracy

Table 9 presents the mean distribution for each indicator, yielding an overall mean of 2.64. This result indicates that while students possess a basic understanding of cataloging, they still encounter difficulties in applying rules accurately and consistently. Interestingly, the item "I am certain on the accuracy of my cataloging tasks" received the highest mean of 2.70, which falls within the "slightly difficult" threshold. This suggests that while students feel somewhat confident about the correctness of their work, a degree of uncertainty persists. As McAdie et al. (2023, p. 21) note, effective cataloging requires rigorous training and deliberate practice to improve students' accuracy and professional confidence. Conversely, the item "I can follow cataloging rules correctly and consistently" garnered the lowest mean of 2.56, also falling into the "slightly difficult" category. This lower score suggests that students struggle with the consistent execution of cataloging protocols, likely due to the

inherent complexity of bibliographic standards and the evolving nature of the discipline. This structural struggle aligns with Hertenstein's (2023, p. 20) observation that many library science programs lack sufficient specialized coursework, which often impedes students' mastery of complex cataloging rules.

On Reliability

The data reveals the average mean for each indicator, resulting in an overall mean of 2.60. According to the interpretation scale, this score indicates that students find maintaining the reliability of their cataloging work slightly difficult. This suggests that while students strive for precision and accuracy, achieving systematic consistency remains a challenge. Notably, the item "I can create records that accurately reflect the items cataloged" registered the highest mean score of 2.71, which also falls within the "slightly difficult" category. This finding implies that while students are successfully developing the skills needed to generate correct and comprehensive bibliographic records, they still encounter minor execution hurdles. This pattern aligns with the findings of Rellon et al. (2025, p. 22), who note that students demonstrate significant improvement in producing reliable records when provided with deliberate, hands-on cataloging practice and targeted feedback from instructors.

On Accessibility

The data presents the average mean for each statement, yielding an overall mean of 2.63. According to the interpretation scale, this score indicates that students find cataloging tasks slightly difficult, suggesting that while they possess a baseline theoretical understanding, applying these rules accurately and consistently remains a challenge. Notably, the items "It is difficult to follow Cataloging codes" and "Cataloging improves accessibility to users" tied for the highest mean of 2.66, falling within the slightly difficult threshold. This alignment implies that while students clearly recognize the value of cataloging in enhancing resource accessibility, they simultaneously struggle to navigate and apply complex cataloging codes. This dual dynamic reflects the findings of Luna and Rojas (2023, p. 23), who discovered that targeted training and robust support systems heavily influence how BLIS students perceive cataloging complexities; specifically, those with access to supplemental workshops, training materials, and technical support reported lower levels of difficulty. Conversely, the item "I consistently create records that are user-friendly and accessible" registered the lowest mean of 2.60. Though still interpreted as slightly difficult, this lower score highlights a persistent struggle among students to successfully translate their cataloging work into outputs that are both standard-compliant and user-friendly.

Academic performance of the respondents in Cataloging Course

The results in Table 14 reveal that the vast majority of students have achieved a commendable level of competence, with 94.85% falling within the "Satisfactory (Approaching Proficiency)" category. This indicates that a significant portion of the cohort demonstrates a reliable understanding of cataloging principles. Additionally, a small segment (3.67%) achieved a "Very Satisfactory" rating, reflecting a superior level of subject mastery. Conversely, a minor fraction of the students (1.47%) is classified under the "Fairly Satisfactory (Developing)" category, underscoring a distinct need for targeted instructional intervention to strengthen their skills. Collectively, these baselines underscore areas for pedagogical enhancement in the learning process. As emphasized by Rellon et al. (2025), technical proficiency in this domain is crucial for the effective organization and retrieval of library materials. Their findings reinforce that mastering bibliographic practices is essential for aspiring information professionals to ensure accuracy, noting that "cataloging is not merely about following rules; it involves understanding the underlying principles that facilitate access to information" (p. 22).

Significant Relationship between the Extent of Difficulty of Cataloging and the outcome of Cataloging Books

The test result revealed a relationship of Difficulty of Cataloging and the outcome of Cataloging Books. The table presents the variables that show a moderate positive correlation coefficient of 0.87 as indicated in the table of correlation coefficient. Additionally, the table shows the P-value of 0.0001 which means that the hypothesis test is statistically significant. This indicates that the challenges students face in aspects such as access points,

classification, and subject headings have a meaningful impact on the accuracy, reliability, and accessibility of their cataloged outputs.

Result of the in-depth interview of the respondents in Cataloging Course

In-depth interviews conducted with the BLIS students provided critical qualitative insights into the core challenges and essential support mechanisms required for effective mastery of cataloging and classification. A thematic analysis of the participants' responses yielded five major themes: (1) Practical Experience, (2) Availability of Learning Resources, (3) Collaborative Learning and Feedback, (4) Focus and Application, and (5) Institutional Support.

The most prominent theme identified by the participants was the critical necessity of practical experience. Students expressed a profound need for expanded hands-on training, specifically requesting authentic cataloging exercises and specialized workshops. They emphasized that direct, practical application is vital to bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and professional execution, which ultimately builds their technical confidence and aligns classroom learning with real-world library operations.

Concurrently, the availability of learning resources emerged as a critical determinant of student success. Participants noted that access to contemporary textbooks, online tutorials, sample bibliographic records, and digital authorities such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) is indispensable for clarifying complex standards. The data indicates that while resource scarcity severely restricts learning opportunities, a diverse and accessible repository of tools significantly accelerates professional skill development.

Furthermore, students heavily emphasized the pedagogical value of collaborative learning and feedback. Group discussions, collaborative brainstorming sessions, and structured mentorship from seasoned catalogers were highlighted as highly effective strategies for deconstructing intricate frameworks. Through these collaborative channels, students can cross-share knowledge, systematically resolve technical doubts, and receive constructive peer and expert feedback necessary for deep comprehension.

Another recurring theme centered on focus and application. The participants recognized that continuous, deliberate practice and the systematic application of theory to structured tasks are foundational to mastering cataloging competencies. They underscored that cultivating disciplined practice habits and maintaining high cognitive engagement are essential to long-term skill retention.

Finally, institutional support was identified as a decisive factor shaping the students' learning trajectories. Participants suggested re-evaluating instructional delivery by simplifying the presentation of dense cataloging codes and standards to make them more accessible. Additionally, they highlighted an urgent need for upgraded technological infrastructure, reliable access to cataloging software, and sustained faculty guidance. Implementing these structural enhancements would mitigate cognitive overload and render cataloging a far more approachable and manageable discipline.

Collectively, these qualitative findings underscore a critical imperative to align instructional methodologies with the localized learning needs of BLIS students. Enhancing practical training pipelines, optimizing resource distribution, fostering collaborative academic spaces, and solidifying institutional backing are all vital steps to ensuring student success in cataloging and classification.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, cataloging proficiency depends not only on mastering technical rules and tools but also on providing students with practical training and a learning environment that supports their development. Strengthening access to learning resources, enhancing instruction, and fostering collaboration can help students gain the necessary skills to produce accurate and accessible catalog records. These efforts may empower future librarians to better serve users and contribute to the overall effectiveness of library services.

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