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Awareness and Use of Online Public Access Catalogue by Students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Abstract

This study investigated the awareness and use of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) by students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. A questionnaire was distributed to 800 students at various faculties and in different levels of studies in August 2012. Five hundred and twenty copies of the questionnaire was retrieved and used for the study. The study revealed that 68.7 % of the respondents were aware of the OPAC services; students who were aware of the library OPAC and did not use it to access library resources were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 82.073$; $df = 2$; $\alpha = 0.001$); 23.8% of the respondents used OPAC independently; only 3.2% of the respondents accessed library resources from their hostels, 0.2% access it from homes. Similarly, majority of the respondents lacked information searching skills while lack of awareness, irregular power supply, network failure and inadequacy of computer terminals designated for the use of OPAC were among the problems identified as factors inhibiting the use of library OPAC. Therefore, the study concludes that majority of the students used manual catalogues to access library resources due to lack of awareness, skills to use OPAC and problems encountered during usage. Hence, students have not been making effective and efficient use of the library OPAC. Therefore, we recommend that the Library should create more awareness and effective education for students at various levels to ensure maximum utilization of library resources.

Keywords: OPAC; library users; library resources; information skills; access to library resources.

Introduction

An Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) has revolutionized traditional accessibility to resources of libraries in general and academic libraries in particular. It is an interface of information retrieval system which assist information searchers to access resources of library(ies) using several access points. Traditionally, it is concerned with searching for and retrieving bibliographic records of information items instead of full-text of the content of resources. It has made searching and retrieval of bibliographic records of materials easier and faster. Studies show that most information searchers tend to use easily available information sources rather than sources that require considerable efforts. For instance, library users will prefer to search a database that is fast, easy and retrieve precise records of items they actually need. However, it has been observed that many library patrons use manual catalogues most often times while the OPAC is up and running in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Moreover, it is expected that information searchers with access to the Internet whether at homes, offices, hostels or even on their smart mobile phones should be able to access library web-based OPAC before coming to the library to borrow their needed materials. Hence, this study investigated students' awareness of Library OPAC; the use of library OPAC and their experiences so as to gain insight into why they use manual catalogues most often in order to ensure that they make maximum use of OPAC services. Of course, OPAC availability should translate to its accessibility and effective usability. Therefore, it is imperative to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the OPAC services provided for library patrons from time to time so that all necessary adjustment could be made to ensuring maximum exposure and utilization of library resources.

The ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science (1983) defines OPAC as a computer-based and supported library catalogue. It is designed to be accessible via terminals, so that library users may directly and effectively search and retrieve bibliographic records without the assistance of a human intermediary. This implies that an OPAC is a computerized library catalogue that is available to the public which provides bibliographic information about information resources in the library. It is noteworthy that this definition specifically state that searchers use OPAC without human assistant which suggest that information searchers should be information skills and computer literates. Similarly, Wikipedia (2012) describes an OPAC as an online database of materials held by a library or group of libraries which provide a platform for users to search and to locate books and other materials physically available in the library. This is to say that an OPAC is an online bibliography of the library collection which includes prints and non-prints such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, audio-visuals, government publications, theses and electronic resources. Therefore, using the library OPAC, information searchers can access bibliographical records of a variety of available information resources independently.

Ansari (2008) reveals that a high percentage of library users in five academic libraries in New Delhi use OPAC as a search tool for retrieving documents. His study also shows that most of the users handled the OPAC themselves. One can conclude here that users of those five academic libraries have gone through the training offered by the libraries which help information searchers to use OPAC without requesting for the assistant of the library staff.

Similarly, Mulla and Chandrashekara (2009) study indicates that 81.61% of 1,338 of their respondents use OPAC to search for library resources while 40.02% of library users at Devi Ahilya University consult library staff to access materials they need in the library; 20.60%

consult card catalogue and 24.91% consult their peers. This report shows that a good number of users at Devi Ahilya University cannot search for materials they need to solve their information problems independently. Perhaps that is the more reason Mulla and Chandrashekara study shows that when the library at Devi Ahilya University launched its OPAC, users were expecting the library to appoint staff who will help them in searching and retrieving records of documents they need. Although, their study does not indicate that their respondents consult card catalogue which may imply that those libraries must have completed their retrospective conversion exercises.

Moreover, Yusuf and Iwu (2010) study indicates that 61.9% of students use OPAC to access library materials. They attribute this positive development to the result of compulsory orientation programmes organized by the library for the first year students of Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria. Although the study shows that only 10.0% of faculty respondents use the OPAC. This may be as a result of lack of awareness of OPAC service or skill to use it. It is expected that faculty members should use OPAC more since they have access to the internet in their various offices and or laboratories. Ordinarily, they will want to be sure of that the library has the materials they need before they come to library to borrow the materials. This may likely trigger the use of OPAC although the study do not show that the library under study operates a web-based OPAC. However, with the development in information technologies and the trends in the provision of effective library services, information searchers should be able to access library OPAC in their offices, homes, hostels, lecture rooms or laboratories at any time before coming to the library to borrow the materials.

Furthermore, a survey conducted by Mulla and Chandrashekara (2009) shows that 52.% of library users access the OPAC within the library premises while only 10.44% access through

the Internet and 9.34% access it on the network on the college campus. Although, their study does not show reason why majority of library users access library OPAC only within the library premises, perhaps it is due to lack of awareness or cost of internet connectivity that is preventing information searchers from accessing OPAC outside the library premises.

Similarly, information searchers can access library resources by using various access points such as author, title, series, subjects, keywords in titles; editors, ISBN, ISSN and water view. Malliari and Kyriaki-Manessi (2007) investigate the type of searches conducted by users of OPAC in the University of Macedonia and their report shows that 41% of the users prefer to use the title of information materials for their first search in OPAC; 27% prefer to search the OPAC using author's name; 23% prefer subject search type while 8.0% use basic keyword, series, ISBN/ISSN. Their study shows that only four percent actually claim that they use ISBN and ISSN to search OPAC. These are bibliographic data that information searchers cannot easily remember because it requires notes and precision. Moreover, most of the respondents do not use all the available search facilities in the OPAC. Therefore, they conclude that users do not use all of the OPAC potential for searching. Their study reveals that only two percent of the users that combine term using Boolean operators. They thereby infer that users do not know the systems capabilities and or they hesitate to use it. The low usage may also be as a result of OPAC system not being user friendly which may not readily provide the search options, its layout and proper setting of the system screen. Hence, they advocate the need for user education and support systems.

In the same way, Mulla and Chandrashekara (2009) examine users' pattern of approach to OPAC and find out that 96.70% search OPAC through author; 92.6% through title; 30.22% through subject; 18.68% through accession number and 19.32% through classification number;

23.53% use series title; 13.74% search through ISBN and 18.68% search through book call number. It is noteworthy that most of the information searchers who responded to their study already know the materials they are searching for from the OPAC. While a good number of their respondents who search through subjects may not have any specific author or title in mind.

Moreover, there are several search facilities in OPAC that user can use to fast track retrieval of exact bibliographic records of any document without having to skim through long list recall of records retrieve in one search. Dinet, Favart and Passerault (2004) reiterate that Boolean operators must be used to combine keywords when searching electronic databases because using these operators might lead to a more focused, quick and easy search and retrieval of the needed bibliographic records. However, Ansari (2008) study shows that not many users are aware of the expert searching feature of OPAC system. Experts search helps users to do a precision search using a combination of keywords, search types, search operation and parentheses. Information searchers can combine keywords, search types, Boolean operators and parentheses. Moreso, searchers can include or exclude any particular type of information resource for example bibliographies, dictionaries, abstracts, etc. from their search. However, Ansari's study does not show the level of their respondents' information searching skills. It may be necessary to examine their information literacy skills.

Malliari and Kyriaki-Manessi (2007) study shows that 58% of information searchers who use OPAC are graduate students, 25% are undergraduate students while 11% are teaching faculty. Moreover, their study shows that academic disciplines of searchers do not produce any significant differences in the use of OPAC. The low percentage of undergraduate students and faculty members who use the OPAC signify a vacuum that must be filled. The study does not show the reasons for low usage of OPAC by undergraduate students and faculty members.

However, Mulla and Chandrashekara (2009) investigate the reason for users not using the library OPAC services. Their report shows that 91.06% complain of the shortage of system terminals put in place by the Library; 55.69% attribute it to lack of awareness of the OPAC services while 52.03% link it to the improper working of OPAC module; 20.33% state that the system is far from stack area; 15.85% attribute it to lack of orientation from library staff and 10.98% state that they cannot locate the books they need through the OPAC. These are genuine reasons that Library must seek to address so as to maintain its status as information providers and meet the need of the digitized library users of the 21st century.

The literature reviewed such as Dinet, Favart and Passerault (2004); Malliari and Kyriaki-Manessi (2007); Ansari (2008) and Mulla and Chandrashekara (2009) are foreign based while local studies such as Yusuf and Iwu (2010) do not measure users' awareness of library OPAC; use of library OPAC and their experiences while using the OPAC. Hence, the results of this present study are expected to provide crucial information on:

- Users awareness of library OPAC;
- User access to library resources;
- Use of library OPAC;
- Place of access to library OPAC;
- Users information search skills; and
- Challenges that users experience while using the OPAC.

Methodology

The study's target population consisted of students at all levels in Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. The researchers used a relatively wide but nonrandom sampling of the target population. In August 2012, 800 copies of questionnaire were distributed to both undergraduate and postgraduate students out of which 520 (65%) copies were retrieved. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to students in Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library and at various classrooms on campus. The research tool was a structured questionnaire which consisted demographic data and use of the Library OPAC. Data collected were analysed using percentages, frequencies and Chi-Square.

Background of the Study

The Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) is a federal institution established in 1962 as The University of Ife. The University is situated on a vast expanse of land totaling 11,861 hectares in Ile-Ife, Osun State, southwest of Nigeria. It has a student population of over 30,000 and runs a centralized library system. The Library is named after the second Vice-Chancellor, Professor Hezekiah Oluwasanmi. The library is called Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library. It has a collection of about 700,000 print volumes of books and subscribes to over 5,000 print journals and several electronic databases and subscribed to Virtua library management software in 2008. The fund for this was a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. So far, about 80% of the bibliographic records of the total collections had been converted to electronic format and can be accessed through a functioning Web-based Online Public Access Catalogue.

Demographic Data

About 76.9% of the respondents were undergraduate students while 23.1% were in their postgraduate programmes. Some 21.9% were less than 20 years; 38.7% of the respondents were in the 20–24 age group; 25.0% were in the age group 25-29; 12.1% were between age group 30 – 34 and 2.3% were 35 years and above. Majority of the respondents (18.8%) were studying in Social Sciences followed by Sciences (15.4%); Education (14.2%); Administration (13.1%) while (9.6%) were in Environmental Design, Agricultural Sciences, Arts and Law respectively. Male constituted 53.3% of all respondents.

Awareness of OPAC services

Respondents were asked to indicate if they were aware of the library OPAC services. They were to respond affirmatively either yes or no. Their responses vis-à-vis their age, gender, level and faculty were committed to Chi Square analysis and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Awareness of OPAC

Variables	X^2	df	α
Age	36.927	4	0.001
Gender	0.120	1	0.729
Level	37.323	5	0.001
Faculty	48.019	7	0.001

Table 1 shows that the age of the respondents who were aware of the library OPAC were statistically significant. The expected frequencies for users between ages 20- 24 and 30–34 were higher than the observed. However, the gender of the respondents was not statistically

significant. Similarly, the difference between users at various level of study and their awareness of OPAC were statistically significant. Respondents in 400, 500 and postgraduate levels were less aware of the library OPAC. The frequency expected for 400 level students was 37.8 but 36 was observed. Frequency expected for 500 level was 9.6 but 8.0 was observed and at postgraduate level 82.4 was expected but 60.0 was observed. Moreover, faculties of the respondents who were aware of the OPAC were statistically significant. Respondents in the faculties of Education, Sciences, Arts and Social Sciences were less aware of the library OPAC.

Access to Library Resources

Some possible options were presented to the respondents to indicate the interface they use to access resources in the library. Table 2 shows their general responses vis-à-vis their level of study.

Table 2: Access to Library Resources

Access	Undergraduate (%)					Post Graduate (%)	Total (%)
	100	200	300	400	500		
	OPAC	8.1	4.6	1.2	0.8	0.6	4.6
Card Catalogue	10.6	17.9	6.2	3.7	1.3	18.5	58.1
Library Staff	2.5	0.4	4.6	2.5	0.4	-	10.4
Friend/Colleague	2.5	1.7	3.5	3.7	0.4	-	11.7
Total	23.7	24.6	15.4	10.6	2.7	23.1	100

Majority (8.1%) of the respondents who used OPAC to access library resources were in 100 Level in their various faculties. Respondents in the postgraduate level (18.5%) constituted the

majority who used the card catalogues to access library resources. However, none of the postgraduate students consulted library staff or their friends and colleague to access library materials.

Use of Library OPAC

In order to ascertain those who use Library OPAC to access library resources independently; those who usually seek the assistance of library staff and those who do not use it at all, respondents were given options to choose the one that best described their status in using the OPAC. Figure 1 presents the result.

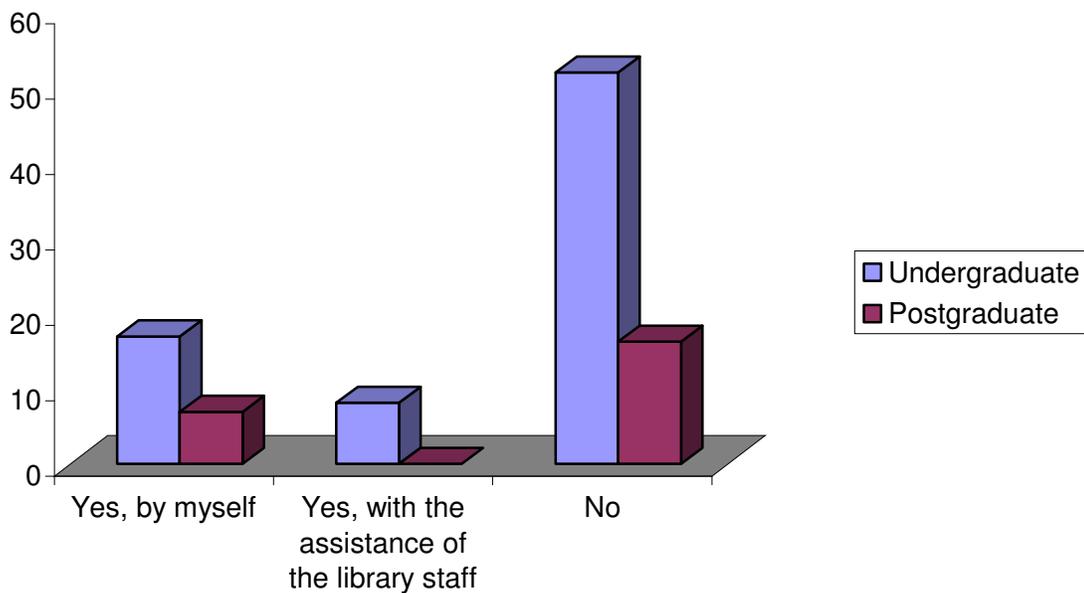


Fig. 1: Use of OPAC

Fig. 1 shows that 23.8% of the respondents claimed to use OPAC independently while accessing library resources. Out of which 16.9% were undergraduate and 6.9% were postgraduate students. About 51.9% undergraduate and 16.2% postgraduate students did not use OPAC at all.

The gender spread of the respondents who used OPAC independently shows that 14.8% were males while 9.0% were females; As regards the age of the respondents, data collected shows that 10.0% were less than 20 years; 3.7% were between ages 20 – 24; 8.1% were between ages 25 – 29; 2.1% were 30 years and above. Moreover, their faculties spread shows that 5.0% were in Environmental Design and Management; 2.9% were in Education; 6.7% were in Sciences; 0.6% were in Administration; 2.7% were in Arts; 1.3% were in Law; 4.6% were in Social Sciences; while none of the respondents in the Faculty of Agriculture used the OPAC independently. Similarly, the study level of the respondents who used OPAC independently varies as about 8.3% (100 level); 6.5% (200 level); 1.3% (300 level); 0.8% (400 level); 6.9% (Postgraduate) while none of the 500 level students use OPAC independently.

Based on the data collected, Chi-Square was used to find out the difference between users who were aware of the availability of the library OPAC and those who used it to access library resources. The result shows that the difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 82.073$; $df = 2$; $\alpha = 0.001$). The difference was between those who were aware but did not use the OPAC.

Place of Access to OPAC

The Library OPAC is web-based which can be accessed anywhere and at any time of the day. Hence the study sought to find out where respondents access Library OPAC for their bibliographic information needs. Fig. 2 presents the results.

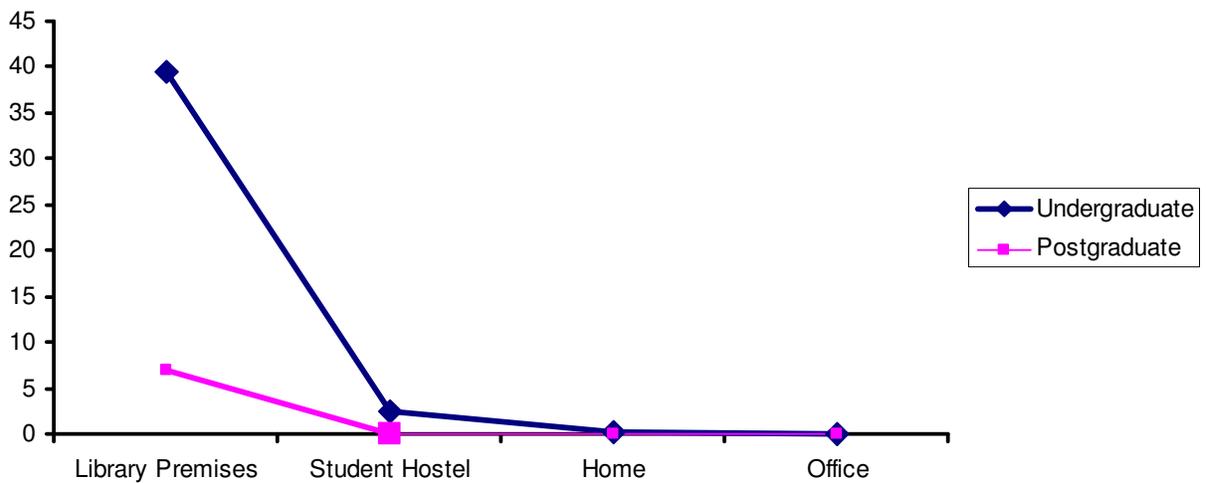


Fig. 2: Place of Accessing Library Materials

Fig. 2 shows that 39.4% undergraduate and 6.9% post graduate students accessed the OPAC within the library premises. Moreover, 2.5% who were all undergraduate students accessed OPAC in their hostel of residents; 0.2% accessed OPAC at home while none of the respondents access OPAC in their offices.

User's Information Searching Skill

To establish the level of respondents' information searching skill, respondents were asked to show the search feature they would use to access all books having keyword "Knowledge" in the title, book with keywords "Dehumanizing housing by Necdet Teymur" and book with the exact title "The autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr".

About 27.7% indicated that they would use browse searching feature to search for all books having keyword "Knowledge"; 15.2% indicated that they would use keyword searching feature for book with keywords "Dehumanizing house by Necdet Teymur" while 13.5%

indicated that they would use Heading keyword to access book with the exact title “The autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jnr”.

Factors Militating against the Use of OPAC

In order to find out the challenges that users encounter in the course of using the library OPAC to access library resources, the researchers asked an open ended question. Respondents were provided with line spaces to offer their free comment on any challenge they may have encountered. Their general comments hinged on the following extract:

- “I searched for a particular text, it showed the bibliographic information of the text but excluded the call mark of the book”.
- “I don’t really get what I need from the OPAC”.
- “Irrelevant search result”.
- “Never heard of it before”.
- “Unavailability of information about books that I’m searching for”.
- “I have never used OPAC”.
- “I don’t know anything about library OPAC”.
- “I don’t know how to get the book I needed from the OPAC”.
- “Network problem”.
- “I didn’t understand how it works”.
- “Am not aware of OPAC”.
- “Problem to get a particular book while author and title is not known”.
- “Power outage”.
- “It is stressful before you could get the exact book you need”.

- “Time allotted to use OPAC at a time is very short”.
- “Systems provided for the use of OPAC are not enough”.

In addition, the researchers observed that there were only three computer terminals that were provided for the use of OPAC at the Circulation foyer of the library. Fig. 3 portrays students who were using the facilities with the assistance of a library staff to access library resources.



Fig. 3: Computer Terminals for the Use of OPAC in Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library

Findings

- The study shows that 68.7 percent of the respondents were aware of the OPAC services.
- Respondents in the faculties of Education, Sciences, Arts and Social Sciences were less aware of the OPAC services.
- Respondents in 400, 500 and Postgraduate levels were less aware of the OPAC services.
- Only 19.8 percent of the respondents used OPAC to access library resources.

- Majority of the respondents who claimed to use library OPAC to access materials were in 100 level.
- Only 23.8 percent of 124 respondents used OPAC independently.
- Only 3.2 percent of the respondents claimed to access OPAC from their hostels.
- Moreso, 0.2 percent of the respondents claimed to access OPAC from their homes.
- Most of the respondents lacked the basic information searching skills to make maximum use of the OPAC.
- Respondents' information searching skill is very low.
- Some respondents do not know how to access full bibliographical information of the resources they retrieved from the OPAC.
- Some respondents experienced irrelevant search results while using the OPAC.
- Most of the respondents complained of the irregular power supply, network failure and shortage of computer systems designated for OPAC as inhibiting factors against the use of OPAC.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is an indispensable information retrieval tool of library(ies) resources throughout the globe. It is still the only gateway to library resources which every library users must be aware of and use it to fulfil their bibliographic information needs. The study conclude that a good number of library users were not aware of the library OPAC while those who were aware do not use it. Although, the library operates a web-based OPAC, majority of the users access library OPAC only within the library premises. It was also clear that both undergraduate and postgraduate students used manual catalogue more than the OPAC to

access library resources due to the fact that majority lack the basic information searching skills, power outage and network failures among other problems. Therefore, it is clear that library users of Obafemi Awolowo University have not been making effective and efficient use of the library OPAC services despite the huge amount of funds expended on it. Hence, it is imperative that the Library make drastic adjustment to ensuring maximum awareness and utilization of the OPAC services by doing the following:

- Create more awareness of library OPAC.
- Provide effective education on who to use OPAC
- Providing effective training on information searching skills to all students in all faculties and at various levels.
- Providing more computer terminals for accessing OPAC within the library premises.
- Encouraging students to use OPAC in their hostels, homes and offices at any time of the day.

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