

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING THE USE OF OPAC FOR INFORMATION RETRIEVAL IN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

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Abstract

This study investigated strategies for promoting the use of OPAC in information retrieval in Nigerian libraries. On a specific note, the study examined the concept of OPAC, benefits of use of OPAC; challenges associated with the use of OPAC and strategies for enhancing the use of OPAC in Nigerian libraries. Some of the challenges affecting utilization of OPAC include complexity of options, lack of skills and poor attitude towards the use of OPAC. Some of the strategies proffered includes training of users, provision of orientation programmes, creation of awareness and others. The study concluded by recommending that libraries should organize training for the users on the use of OPAC, make every effort to simplify the use of OPAC and create awareness programmes to educate users on the importance of OPAC all of which will further promote the use of OPAC for information retrieval in Nigerian libraries.

Keywords: OPAC, card catalogue, Web OPAC, information retrieval, Nigerian libraries

Introduction

Activities and functions in university library have undergone changes over the years. The libraries today are more proactive in their activities especially with the introduction of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) facilities to Nigerian libraries, which has brought about an advanced way in the techniques of accessing and retrieving information resources that a library acquired to serve its users; it has also changed the ways of providing services offered to user community. That is why Swaminathan , (2017) opined that “OPAC is a device of change in today’s libraries as it helps users search for library resources and to find out the availability of such documents in the library at a given point in time. OPAC system is one of the technologies that provide access to any of the information contained in the records of the library.

Libraries in universities are now moving from the manual retrieval system in terms of traditional card catalogue to the use of OPAC as an information retrieval system characterized by short bibliographic records, mainly of books, journals, and audio-visual materials available in a particular library (Thanuskodi, 2012). The OPAC has greatly influenced the very nature of libraries and users of information resources by opening them to a variation of portals through which they can access and retrieve information.

In Nigeria, measuring the effectiveness of the use of computer catalogue (OPAC) according to Villen-Rueda, Senso & Moya-Anegon, (2007) has been a steady realm of study for some decades, this has led to perceiving how data extraction systems might be improved, to better satisfy the informational needs of the users. In Nigerian libraries, it is observed that most users are not aware of the availability of OPAC in the library. Those who are aware find it difficult to use it as they see the procedure as too complex to use. Also most of them who lack the skills prefer the traditional method of information retrieval. This has affected the use of OPAC to a great extent. It is on this backdrop that the researcher sought to study the strategies for promoting the use of OPAC in information retrieval in Nigerian libraries.

Concept of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)

Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) may be defined as a database of bibliographic records describing the holdings of a library. It allows users to search a document by authors, titles, subject and keywords from a terminal and also allows printing, downloading or exporting of records via different electronic means (Gohain & Siakia, 2013). OPAC has revolutionized the traditional accessibility to resources of libraries in general and academic libraries in particular. It is an interface of information retrieval system which assists information searchers to access resources of libraries using several access points (Fabunmi & Asubiojo, 2013). According to Rouse (2018), OPAC is an online bibliography of a library

collection that is available to the public. The ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science (2000) defined OPAC as a computer-based and supported library catalogue (bibliographic database) designed to be accessed via- terminals, so that library users may directly and effectively search and retrieve bibliographic records without the assistance of a human intermediary such as a specially trained member of the library staff. 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.

The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is an information retrieval system characterized by short bibliographic records, mainly of books, journals, and audio-visual materials available in a particular library (Thanuskodi, 2012). Information resources are the information bearing item acquired, processed and made available in the library to the patrons (Adomi, 2009). Informed library users know that libraries have resources that are more comprehensive and scholarly than most Web sites provide. Libraries provide access to scholarly literature that, as a rule, is not freely available on the Web, or may not be online at all. Often, it is in universities that users become aware of libraries' information resources, usually while having to write research papers or do an assignment (Waldman, 2003). Information resources located in the library catalogue according to Adomi (2009) include the following-Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Bibliographies, Biographies, Yearbooks, Handbooks, directories, Manuals, Gazetteers, index and Abstracts, textbooks, periodicals, electronic-books and electronic journals. Universiteit Leiden (2014) stated that the catalogue contains not just books, journals and articles. Through the Catalogue (file tab Special Collections) you can look for manuscripts, letters, illustrations, maps, prints and photographs.

In simple language OPAC is an electronic version of the card catalogue; OPAC is the gateway to library's collection. This is to say that OPAC is an online bibliography of the library collection, which includes print and non-print such as books, journals, magazines,

newspapers, audio-visuals, government publications, theses and electronic resources. That is why

Ukpebor (2012) highlighted the features of an OPAC as a system that: provides the public with direct access to a library bibliographic database through the use of terminal that is searchable through a variety of access points greater than those available through card form catalogue; is searchable with a common command language, which may be transferred when the public moves from one library to another; retrieve information from local library field, and if not successful, locally, retrieves information from other libraries' files; provides instructional help and display search result in readily understandable form; provides link card catalogues, reference help, circulation files etc. and maybe access remote library's location; and multiple users can query the database simultaneously unlike the traditional catalogue box where users have to queue when they are searching for similar materials with same search option.

Benefits of use of OPAC in Information Retrieval

In using the library OPAC, information seekers can access bibliographical records of a variety of available information resources independently. As a means of meeting up with the challenges of ensuring that information materials are available and accessible, libraries provide catalogues to display what is available in the library and where they can be obtained. Aina (2004) opined that OPAC is the most modern form of library catalogue whereby bibliographic records of all the documents in a collection are stored in the computer memory disk; it is efficient and possesses all the advantages over other forms of catalogue.

It is important to occasionally assess the effectiveness of the OPAC especially from the users' point of view. This is necessary considering the uniqueness of each Nigerian library and the fact that periodic assessment will provide a realistic picture of OPAC

performance; therefore, aiding managerial decisions on issues affecting the library catalogue (Onuoha, Umahi & Bamidele, 2013). OPAC thus provided users a means of searching and accessing information, users can see the collections and issue status of each document of the library and can reserve and renew a document of their interest when needed (Swaminathan, 2017).

Furthermore, numerous users can make inquiry on the database simultaneously unlike the traditional card catalogue. Bibliographic records are stored in a database and can be quickly retrieved for display on computer terminals. The development of OPAC has made users as well as library professionals to locate and access library resources easily without wastage of time and energy.

Ansari and Amita (2008) opined that the frequent use of OPAC among students has brought about the decline in the use of the traditional card catalogue in the library. Similarly, Join (2009) reported that the frequency of the OPAC use has increased tremendously among students in recent years due to the enormous benefits derived from the use of OPAC system and this has equally led to the decreased use of the manual catalogue in the library. That is why Danskin (2006) noted that OPAC plays an essential role in helping users to locate library resources effectively; but there is some evidence of a decrease in student usage of OPAC. The question of how frequent patrons use the OPAC cuts across so many dimensions which makes it important to investigate the rate at which users use OPAC to locate their required documents, this is to assist the library management to find out if the purpose of the OPAC is been achieved and they on their part may be able to proffer solutions to problems arising from their investigation.

Automation of library resources and the use of ICT have brought about significantly different products and services in the library among which the online public access catalogue (OPAC) is one. Library users are in need of timely access to relevant information and

information sources. Without any reasonable doubt, one can state that the main duty of the library is to use every techniques of modern science to accelerate access to printed books and other information sources (Adenike & Akin, 2014). The basic purpose of a library catalogue is to provide a record of the library holdings so that the resources in the library can be better utilized (Jetty et al 2011); it has also made some other services possible for the very first time. Aina (2004) opines that OPAC is the most modern and most efficient form of catalogue because it possesses all the advantages of other forms of catalogues due to its flexibility. Kani-Zibihi, Ghinea and Chen (2008) reported that regardless of user's information technological backgrounds, their expectations of the functionality of OPACs were the same because users continued to expect OPACs also to facilitate easier ways to achieve their tasks.

The purpose of OPAC according to Gohain and Saikai (2013) includes- location of document on shelves, to know whether a particular book is on the shelves or not, to know what a library have on a given author, title and subject, to know about a document without visiting the library ease to search different categories of documents such as books, thesis, back vol., CD by changing the types of documents.

Challenges associated with the use of OPAC for information retrieval

The challenges includes the following:

Complexity of options in OPAC: As a means of meeting up with the challenges of ensuring that information materials are available and accessible, libraries provide catalogues to display what is available in the library and where they can be obtained. Kumar and Vohra (2013) opined that OPAC provide great flexibility and numerous varied options to users to access information pertaining to library resources by combining two or more bibliographic fields or access point. However, many of the search options available in OPACs tend to create complexity for users. User expectation from any information system is to make available

directly or remotely and in real time the needed information, format notwithstanding. In the university environment, the library is a major information providing system that supports teaching, learning and research with information materials of various types (Anunobi & Edeka, 2010).

Lack of skills in the use of OPAC: Despite the attention that OPAC is receiving worldwide, little seems to have change in Nigeria. Studies report that users have great difficulties because their design does not incorporate sufficient understanding of searching behaviour. Wilson and Given (2010) discovered that users experience difficulties in using OPACs. Users also lack the basic skills required to search an OPAC, tending not to use all facilities and features offered by OPACs (Markey, 2007).

Poor attitude towards the use of OPAC: Besides OPAC now faces another challenge from the internet search engines because users generally prefer search engines (Google in particular) to conduct their searches (Urquhart et al 2005; Urquhart & Rowley, 2007). The OPAC is an important tool in helping users for the localization of library resources effectively. But the usage of OPAC is decreasing among users (Danskin, 2006). According to Adenike and Akin (2014) Research in information seeking indicates that users formulate questions in stages gradually coming to the point where they can begin to articulate a query.

Strategies for Effective Use of OPAC for Information Retrieval

The following strategies were provided for effective use of OPAC:

Training of users on the use of OPAC: Necessary training should be provided for using software in efficient way (Mehtab and Amita, 2008). Mulla and Chandrashekara (2009) emphasized the need of education programme module for users to promote the effective usage of OPAC. Ahmad et al., (2012) also suggested that short-term training should be given to OPAC users for the effective utilization of advance search facilities in all the libraries.

Onuoha et al., (2013) recommended that the students should adequately be trained to make maximum use of OPAC and more computer and power supply should be provided in Nigerian libraries. The study on catalogue use in Nigerian Libraries suggests that library use instruction should be included in the university curriculum and the librarians should provide practical demonstrations on the use of various catalogues to students during orientation programs (Owolabi and Salaam, 2013). The introduction of an OPAC rather than the traditional library is necessary (Ajala and Aderinto, 2013). Li and Wanigasooria (2015) suggested that regular appropriate training for users, and technological advancement and native language searching facilities should be provided for the identified problems.

Updating of OPAC: Also, OPAC should be kept up to date by adding new entries speedily, which would be helping in the effective use of OPAC (Ravichandran and Balasubramani, 2008). Also, spell check and book review should be added in the existing OPAC as an additional feature (Sawant et al., 2012). Kumar (2013) suggested that Nigerian libraries should provide an orientation program to the users and assistance facility near the OPAC system. Furthermore, there is need for training of students on the use of OPAC in the library (Madhusudhan, 2012). Xiaojuan and Na (2012) observed that users' feedback cannot reach to cataloging process, which is really needed for cataloging control, and the users should participate in all of library operations, and the feedback could be helpful for library to improve not only cataloging but also in acquisition, collection, circulation and other operations. **Creation of awareness:** There is need for library to create more awareness and effective education for the students at various levels to ensure maximum utilization of library resources (Fabunmi and Asubiojo, 2013).

Organizing orientation programmes: There is need for high quality orientation programme, guidelines and demonstrations on the use of catalogue as solution to the

problems encountered by the students in using the catalogue (Ebiwolate, 2010). Proper user education program for using OPAC and catalogue for the retrieval of books and other information resources should be organized and made mandatory for all users, and guidelines on the use of catalogue should be prepared and displayed where users can easily read them (Islam, 2010). Study on the use of OPAC in Medical Libraries, Chandigarh strongly advocates that the librarians should assist users in learning the use of OPAC, search engine, e-mail and CD-ROM techniques and inform the library users about the websites available through various networks (Kaur and Sharda, 2010). Study on the use of OPAC in library of Panjab University suggests that library should organize quality instruction programmes to improve knowledge and skills of the users (Kumar and Vohra, 2011).

There is a need for proper orientation and provision of more OPAC terminals to acquire necessary software (Adigun et al., 2011). Bamidele et al., (2014) suggested that the librarians should organize orientation and sensitization programmes in order to create awareness and encourage the university community especially the faculty members at various schools for the use of OPAC effectively. Kaur and Kathuria (2015) recommended that library should conduct orientation programme at the start of every academic session since it is very important and useful for students. Swaminathan, K.S.M. (2017) suggested that library should be conducted quality instruction programmes to improve the knowledge and skills of the users.

Recommendation

The following are recommended for use of OPAC for effective information retrieval in Nigerian libraries:

1. The library should organize training for the users on the use of OPAC. This will expose them on the skills and steps needed in utilization of OPAC.

2. The library should make every effort to simplify the use of OPAC to make the process user friendly.
3. The OPAC should be updated from time to time to include new library resources.
4. Awareness programmes should be carried out to educate the users on the importance of OPAC.

Conclusion

This study revealed that lately, retrieval of information has improved to a great extent following the introduction of OPAC in the library. Most of the Nigerian libraries are now making use of Web based OPAC in place of traditional catalogue. The study discussed the concept of OPAC, benefits of use of OPAC; challenges associated with the use of OPAC and strategies for enhancing the use of OPAC in Nigerian libraries. If the strategies are applied, it will further enhance the use of OPAC for information retrieval in Nigerian libraries.

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