

**An Assessment of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) Utilization in Two Selected University Libraries in Lagos State, Nigeria.**

**By**

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**Abstract**

The main purpose of this study was to assess the computerized catalogue and its utilization in university libraries in Lagos state. Survey research method was employed for the study. The population for the study was drawn from two university libraries in Lagos state that have automated their catalogues. These libraries are the University of Lagos (UNILAG) and the Lagos state University (LASU). Four research questions were formulated for the study. The instrument used to collect data for the study was the questionnaire. Undergraduate student, Postgraduate student, Researchers and Staff constituted the respondents for the study. The data obtained were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. It was found out that the computerized catalogue is a very important service for any library system, because this has helped the users in their information seeking. Some problems faced with Computerized Catalogues include shortage of terminals, improper working OPAC modules and lack of proper orientation. The need to acquire necessary software, need for proper orientation as well as provision of more OPAC terminals were recommended.

**Introduction**

The Library is the heart of the education enterprises. It is also the reservoir of knowledge communicated through information resources Yusuf (2010). Olanlokun and Salisu (1985) cited by Olajide and Yusuf (2005) described a library as the nerve centre of educational development of man at any level, more particularly so in any academic pursuit. This postulation was upheld earlier by Odusanya and Amusa (2002) when he stated that library and education are two vital institutions of socialization and perpetuation of human race. The two, he noted cannot be separated in all round development of a child. Aiyedogbon (1997) cited by Yusuf (2010) stated that the library is a necessary part of the researchers tools without which he cannot make the most efficient use of his talent.

An academic library is any library attached to post secondary or tertiary institutions. Academic libraries are established to support teaching, learning and research in ways consistent with, and supportive of, the institution's mission and goals (Yusuf, 2010). Academic libraries are therefore as varied and distinct as the institutions which they serve. The main purpose of any academic library is to support the objectives of the institution which set it up, which includes learning, teaching, and research. The university library is an example of an academic library. The users of a university library are mostly students, researchers, lecturers and support staff. The university library is regarded as the heart of the intellectual system of the university. To a large extent, the quality of a university is measured by the services provided by its library.

For a university to perform its myriad of functions, the library collections must not only include books

and journals but also other materials such as generalized and specialized collections, news papers, magazines, manuscripts, museum objects, photographs, theses and dissertations, audiovisual materials and microforms service such as CDROM services, photocopying, Selective Dissemination of Information and internet services ought also to be available. Necessary equipment such as microfiche and microfilm readers, computer system and servers, are also needed in order to use some of the resources in the collection. Materials relevant to the users information needs should as much as possible be made available and easily accessible in the library. For accessibility to information, the most important of the retrieval tools for organizing a library collection is the catalogue. It is a list of the information resources such as books, microforms, audio recordings that can be found in a library collection; most times it is alphabetical in nature. It is a record that contains the bibliographical details each item present in the library collection. Wynar (1980) defines catalogue as a list, arranged by alphabet, by number, or by subject, of books, maps, cans, stamps, recordings, or any other medium that comprises a collection. Olanlokun and Salisu (1985) cited by Yusuf (2010) define the catalogue as a record of materials held by the library ranging from books, magazines, journals to documents, theses and dissertations to non print media and resources. The manual information retrieval system among others include the card catalogue, the shelf list catalogue and the book catalogue which provide information to library patrons and staff on whether or not the library has certain material by a given author, of a given title or subject. Before the advent of the computer, the manual information retrieval system had long been assisting in library operations, and users identified and located available materials by

checking the card catalogue. The system was seen as convenient and uncompetitive. Today, it could be deduced that the environment is more complex than before while fast information retrieval could be measured by the adoption of manual system, which was time consuming and subjected to perennial backlogs and errors in card production and filling. The on line public access catalogue (OPAC) complements the card catalogue and provides access to library collection in more convenient and easy ways. The online public access catalogue (OPAC) is a retrieval system that provides multiple ways to search for books and other library materials.

#### **History of Automation in the University of Lagos Library**

The establishment of the University of Lagos was made possible by its act passed in April 1962, after the submission of the report of the detailed planning for the new university by the UNESCO advisory commission as set up in 1961 by the Federal Government.

The fact that no university can adequately function without essential component units, made the existence of such unit as library mandatory. As it were, the library is regarded as the backbone of any university for academic excellence. It was in realization of this position that right from the beginning of the University of Lagos that consideration was given to the establishment of its library. Hence, the library of the University of Lagos came into existence around mid October 1962, with 12,121 volumes and 300 bounded serials in 1965. The library has built comprehensive collection of research and teaching materials in all major field of knowledge in support of teaching, learning and research. It now has a stock of over 475,545 volumes and subscribes to about 6,823 journal titles, organized using the Library of Congress Classification Scheme. The university library is presently using GLASS (an Integrated Library Software - ILS) Library software package for the organization and administration of its collections.

#### **History of Automation in the Lagos State University Library**

The University Library was one of the foundation departments, which took off on the facilities of the Government College, Ojo, and the then newly completed site of the Methodist Boys' High School. The temporary site has gradually metamorphosed into a developed permanent site with a tastefully designed new master plan that will change the University main campus to a beautiful architectural layout befitting of a University campus in the 21st century and beyond.

The Library with its initial 2,281 volumes of books in 1984 now has about 300,000 volumes in the year 2010. Similarly, the academic journal subscription rose from 741 to 6,000 in 2010. The previous 87 local journal titles of 1986 have risen to over 500 local journal and newspapers in year 2010. The University Library has collections in various fields of study to support teaching, learning and research. Library services to the staff, students and the community include photocopying, inter-Library loans, microfilm reading, CD-Rom search, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), EBSCO Host Online Journal Search (NULIB). Detailed instruction and teaching in Library use is provided to undergraduates as part of the General Studies programme. With its automation project, the University Library currently uses Alice for Windows Library Software to launch it into the 21st century. The software being an integrated library package comes in 3 modules (circulation, acquisition and management). The Library is on its way to having a virtual/e-Library compliment which will link the Library with the world via Internet.

The University Library now comprises the Fatiu Ademola Akesode Library (main Library), the Taslim Olawale Elis Law Library, the Medical Library in LASUCOM Ikeja, the School of Communication Library in Surulere and the Engineering Library in Epe. It is the plan of the university to link up the resources of the satellite libraries with the main library for easy access and utilization.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Considering the level of development in the rendering of library services today, especially with the incorporation of ICTs, the use of the card catalogue as a retrieval tool is becoming inadequate. Sonaike (2000) observed that the manual way of accessing information materials through the use of the card catalogue is inadequate for effective and efficient library services. The reason for this includes the lack of adequate knowledge of the use of card catalogue, and at times improper filing of the cards, which leads to frustration. Hence, it's none usage and ineffective use of library materials. Also it is becoming more important to have more access points to information in the library other than author, title and subject to bring about effective use of library materials, libraries especially academic libraries automate their catalogue to facilitate the use of library materials and it services.

Based on this, the research intends to assess the utilization of the computerized catalogue of two selected university libraries in Lagos state.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the status of OPAC facilities available at the selected university libraries?
2. What is the level of utilization of the OPAC service by the library users?
3. What are the problems associated with automated catalogue?
4. What measures can be adopted to improve the OPAC services for the benefit of library users?

**Methodology**

Descriptive survey research method was adopted for this study. The application of descriptive social survey design in this study enabled the researcher to obtain opinions and data from the population sample of the undergraduate, postgraduate and researchers in the selected university libraries in Lagos in respect of the utilization of computerized catalogue in their libraries. Undergraduates, postgraduates and researchers formed the population of the study, while purposive sampling technique which is a non-probabilistic method of determining samples was adopted to arrive at the needed sample for this study from the University of Lagos Library and Lagos State University Library. The choice of purposive sampling was informed by the fact that the method is characterized by the use of judgment and a deliberate effort to obtain representative sample by including typical area or groups in the sample (Research Design in Occupational Education, 1997). The rationale for purposively selecting the university libraries under study is because these are the libraries

whose resources have been automated although at different levels of automation. The instrument used for data collection includes questionnaire and interview. Questionnaire was used as the major instrument to elicit data from respondents. Oral and formal interview was used as complementary instrument to obtain information from the respondents. Questions were posed to designated heads of the two university libraries under study. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics of frequency distribution tables.

Table 1 clearly, indicated that a total number of four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were distributed to the two universities, (i.e. 200 copies to each of University of Lagos and Lagos State University respectively). From University of Lagos Library, 182 (91%) of the respondents responded to the questionnaire while 174 (87%), responded from the Lagos State University Library. The table also reflected the response rate by categories of respondents. Overall, 356 (89%) responded to the questionnaire

Table 2 reveals that, UNILAG Library uses GLASS which was manufactured by Electronic Online System International (EOSI), with a total no of seventeen (17) computers system used for OPAC. While LASU Library uses Alice for Windows which was manufactured by Soft Link Pty Ltd, with a total no of twenty (20) computer systems used for OPAC.

**Results and Discussions:**

**Table 1: Response rate by Category of Respondents**

Category of Respondents	Total No. Distributed to Each Lib.	UNILAG Library		LASU Library		Total (%)
		Response	%	Response	%	
Undergraduate	100	92	46	93	46.5	92.5
Postgraduate	50	48	24	46	23.0	47.0
Researchers	30	26	13	22	11.0	24.0
Others (Staff)	20	16	08	13	06.5	14.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>87.0</b>	<b>89.0</b>

Source: Field Survey Data

**Table 2: Status of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) Facilities at the Selected University Libraries**

Libraries	Software Packages in Use	No of Computers Dedicated to OPAC
UNILAG Library	Graphical library Automation System (GLASS)	17
LASU Library	Alice for Windows	20

Source: Field Survey Data

**Table 3: Level of OPAC Use**

Response Type	UNILAG Library		LASU Library	
	Response	%	Response	%
Very Often	90	49.45	92	52.87
Often	68	37.36	60	34.49
Occasionally	13	7.14	11	6.32
Rarely	8	4.40	7	4.02
Never	3	1.65	4	2.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey Data

**Table 4: Problems Associated with Automated Catalogue**

Associated Problems	UNILAG Library		LASU Library	
	Response	%	Response	%
Shortage of Terminals	102	56.04	98	56.32
OPAC Module not Working Properly	50	27.47	46	26.43
System not Near to Stack Area	20	11.00	16	9.20
Lack of proper Orientation from Library Staff	6	3.30	10	5.75
OPAC Access Password Protected	4	2.19	4	2.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey Data

It is necessary to find out how frequently, the staff and students are using the OPAC facility in the selected university libraries, which is shown in table 3. The result showed that at University of Lagos 90(49.45%) of respondents were using it very often, 68(37.36%) of the respondents used it often, 13(7.14%) used it occasionally, 8(4.40%) used it rarely, while only 3(1.65%) never used the OPAC. At Lagos State University 92(52.87%) respondent used the OPAC very often 60(34.49%) of the respondent used it often, 11(6.32%) used it occasionally, 7(4.02%) rarely used it and only 4(2.30%) never used the OPAC. This finding is almost in consonance with that of Adedibu (2008), who found that most science students of University of Ilorin claimed to know how to use the card catalogue and OPAC but only few of them actually use the catalogue. But this is in disagreement with the finding of Abdulazeez (2011) that most users of both card catalogue and OPAC only do so occasionally or never

The study also investigated the problem associated with the use of OPAC services by the respondents.

From the analysis in table 4 it is evident that, majority of the respondents at the University of Lagos 102(56.04%) faced problem of shortage of terminals, 50(27.47%) faced problem of OPAC module not working properly and 20(11%) feels the OPAC systems are not near to stack area. Similarly at Lagos State University 98(56.32%) of the respondents faced problem of shortage of terminals, 46(26.43%) reported improper working of the OPAC module, while 16(9.2%) feels the systems are not near to stack area. It can therefore be concluded that most of the respondents faced challenges such as shortage of terminals, the OPAC not working properly and lack of guidance or orientation from library staff respectively. The above is in agreement with the findings of Ajala and Aderinto (2011) that improper orientation is one of the stumbling blocks to proper use of catalogue most especially OPAC. Abolaji (2002) also reported a similar poor use of the catalogue (most especially the OPAC) in Latunde Odeku Medical Library, attributed to lack of proper user education/ orientation programme.

### Measures to Improve the OPAC Services for the Benefit of Library Users

Some measures were suggested by respondents of the libraries studied for better utilization of the online public access catalogue (OPAC) services at the university libraries studied. The suggestions include:

- a. Keeping OPAC up to date by adding new entries quickly and replacing the old entries.
- b. There is need to train the users to acquire basic skills in searching.
- c. The users suggested assistance for the use of OPAC by the library staff and also user orientation programmes.
- d. Research scholars requested for the location of the OPAC closer to the book stack area, so that they can access it conveniently without wasting much time.
- e. There is also the need for the distribution of up to date library guides explaining how to use the OPAC and other library services.

### Conclusions

Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) has become a very important service in any library system, because it aided information seeking and reduced significantly the time users spend while searching for relevant contents. The search process in OPAC has more or less remained the same, as in the card catalogue but with increased access points, varieties of search features and increased complexity of the process. End user are not only expected to have technical searching skills but also conceptual and semantics knowledge relating to the query. OPAC is an instrument of change in today's libraries. Automated library system in general and specifically online catalogue will continue to be productive and enhance the usage of library collections. The OPACs of different university libraries can be used as a basis to produce a union catalogue to promote resource / knowledge sharing for better utilization of the resources in a region. This type of cooperation could evolve into a consortium. Librarians must continue to play the role of a 'Mediator' and "Agent of change" in the delivery of information services.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings in this work, the following recommendations are made, which if implemented will bring about improvement in operations and services of these libraries most especially their OPAC services and that of other academic libraries:

- Libraries should select and acquire appropriate software package that can stand the test of time and justify the huge amount of funds invested in their automation projects. Alternatively, libraries could take advantage of Open Source

Software such as Koha, for the integration of their library services.

- Libraries studied as well as others should make online public access catalogue (OPAC) more user friendly in their search terms and search functionality by translating catalogue data into terms that the library users understand.
- Librarians should be more proactive and embark on self development by taking advantage of training and retraining opportunities in computerized information services so as to help their present and intending users.
- Government and management of academic libraries in Nigeria should provide adequate funding for library development. This will enable these libraries to acquire relevant software and update the necessary infrastructure to effectively deliver services through their OPACs.
- There is also the need to train the users on how to acquire basic skills in searching as well as offering necessary assistance on the use of the OPAC by the library staff. This can be achieved through proper training workshops as well as orientation programmes. Libraries should also make provision for an up to date library guides explaining how to use the OPAC and other library services.
- Lastly, libraries should make provision for more OPAC terminals that should be located closer to the book stack area to facilitate easy access and close proximity with the book stacks.

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