Use of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) By Undergraduates in Selected Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the use of the online public access catalogue (OPAC) among undergraduates in selected universities in Nigeria. A sample was drawn from among undergraduate students in five selected Universities. Survey design was adopted in the conduct of the study while data was collected through a self-designed/administered questionnaire. A total of 2,240 undergraduates were initially sampled and administered the questionnaire, but only two thousand copies were properly filled in and good for data analysis representing an 89.3% return rate. This 2000 represent the sample for the study. The results revealed that the majority of undergraduate students used the OPAC on a weekly basis while the majority of respondents (57.5%) spent fewer hours (between 0-3) using the OPAC. Places of accessing the OPAC identified include the school library, respondents’ homes, cyber cafés and lecture rooms. The major uses of the OPAC by the undergraduate students include: to locate books and other materials; and to find non-print materials.

KEYWORDS

Boolean Operators, Catalogue, Knowledge Areas, Nigeria, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), Satisfaction, Undergraduate students, University Libraries, Use of Library

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are mainly entrusted with a host of predetermined task like acquiring, organizing, preserving, retrieving and disseminating information to the users. Information Technology (IT) has influenced the very nature of libraries especially university libraries; as they are undergoing significant changes not only in outlook but also in function, services, methods and techniques for collection development, processing and dissemination of information (Shongwe & Ochola, 2014; Yadav & Bankan, 2016; Raju, 2017). The analysis of user searches in catalogue has been the topic of research for over many decades, involving numerous studies and diverse methodologies (Ville´n-Rueda, Senso & Moya-Anegó´n, 2007; Wilson & Given, 2014; Arshad, 2014; Booth, 2016). Measuring the effectiveness of the use of electronic catalogues has been a very interesting one since it has replaced the manual catalogue. Libraries’ Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC) is one of the highly visible end user search tools which offer university students the opportunity to consult more information sources than ever
before (Fabunmi & Asubiojo, 2013). For the most part, students’ approach the search for information on the basis of a known item (author or title search) or a topic (Rodman, 2000). The OPAC allow users to access resources of libraries, publishers and online vendors (Guha & Saraf, 2005). OPAC can be accessed from anywhere in the world, even from the palm of one’s hand. According to Guha and Saraf (2005) the new generation of OPAC incorporate advanced search features and new designs from other types of Information Retrieval (IR) systems, such as allowing users searching. OPAC interface were designed to minimize online connect time and printing options (Brantley et al., 2006). It is therefore expected that a user-friendly designed interface would have for instance, a simplified menu-driven interface utilizing off-line storage of search strategy, automatic logon procedures and software-controlled navigated searching techniques. Search and retrieval of library materials has been observed in some instances that users are not coping with this change (Ruzega, 2012). There seems to be two reasons for this. Firstly, some users lack computer knowledge and hence are reluctant to accept the change and secondly, the design of the interfaces of some system are not user friendly (Umarani et al., 2008). Umarani et al. (2008) observed that personal and extended help is possible from the library staff to the users to search OPAC effectively within the library. But it becomes difficult to provide such a help to online users. Therefore, it becomes essential to find out how undergraduate user of OPAC uses it to satisfy their information needs.

Among the various information retrieval systems that can be used in a digital library is OPAC which is the most widespread in traditional and university libraries. OPACs are mainly concerned with searches for bibliographic records, searching at the level of items rather than full-text content. Some studies (Mulla & Chandrashekar, 2009) have actually indicated that the use of OPAC is growing. In some other similar studies (e.g., Fabunmi & Asubiojo, 2013; Ruzega, 2012) the use of OPAC was found to constitute the majority of usage while some others found a gradual decline in the use of OPAC, the frequency of title, and key word searching exceeded that of subject searching over a period. When buttressing the increasing usage of OPACs, Anderson (2009) remarked that on inventory process and emerging use of OPAC is much more sophisticated. However, despite the increasing use of OPACs reported in the literature (Arshad, 2014; Wilson & Given, 2014) observed that few studies were available on the use of online catalogues. Similarly, limited studies are available in the Nigeria context on the effective use of OPAC particularly among the undergraduate students. This bothers the researcher so much thinking that studies on the use of OPAC and usage effectiveness will assist on how to further improve the use of the tool particularly in the Nigeria University’s libraries context. With this development, it seems this kind of study has been ignored especially in the university libraries context particularly among the undergraduate students. It is in the light of this that the present study aims at examining the use of OPAC among LIS undergraduate in selected Nigeria universities. This study is significant in many respects. This is because it is expected that the study will constitutes one of the pioneer studies on the use of OPAC among undergraduate students in Nigeria. Studies such as this is very important in view of the revolution brought by information communication technologies (ICT) which is now a driving force in online information retrieval. The outcomes from the study will assist the university libraries’ stakeholders on how to improve the use of OPAC to further meet the information needs of the undergraduate students and other users. Moreover, it will enable libraries to further understand the difficulties undergraduates encounter when using the OPAC. It is expected that data and information that will be made available at the end of the study will serve as the foundation on which the future related studies will be based.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the use of OPAC among undergraduate students in selected Nigeria universities. To achieve this main objective, the following specific objectives are developed:

1. Examine the extent of OPAC usage among undergraduate students in selected Nigeria universities;
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