# Utilization of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) at the Lagos State Polytechnic Library in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper aimed at presenting the results of a survey conducted to determine the effective use of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) at the library of Lagos State Polytechnic Ikorodu. The study adopted survey research design. Four hundred copies of the structured questionnaire were distributed randomly to staff and students of the Polytechnic in Ikorodu campus for the 2011/2012 academic session. Out of the four hundred copies of questionnaire distributed 91.14% of the respondents identified the use of OPAC while 8.86% signified that they don't use the OPAC to access Library collections. The data collated were analyzed using frequency distribution table and simple percentage. Some of the problems observed from the study in the use of OPAC at the library include: lack of awareness amongst the library users community, lack of instruction in the use of software package, shortage of terminals, instability of electricity supply among others. Hence, the study recommends among others, the need for continuous instructions for library users on how to search information materials within the library using the OPAC.*
*Keywords: OPAC, Library, Lagos State Polytechnic, book shelves, terminals*

## INTRODUCTION

Library activities and functions have undergone changes over the years. The libraries today are more proactive in their activities. The application of Information Technology to all library operations including services, functions, methods and techniques for collection, development as well as dissemination of information have actually brought about efficiency and effectiveness in library services. Lagos State Polytechnic is one of the higher institutions of learning in Lagos State, offering courses in Engineering, Technology and Environmental Sciences among others. The library servicing the institution is an academic library which is expected to support the academic objectives of the institution which it serves, particularly in the areas of learning, teaching and research, through the provision of relevant library resources and adequate library services to the users. As a result of the technological development taking place all over the world, the amount and rate at which information is generated is so high, coupled with its storage and dissemination makes electronic assistance necessary. Amune (2004) states that man generates and uses information daily. Hence, the last two decades have experienced more than ever before, the proliferation of literature. Omoloju (1985) states that the volume and rate of information generation as well as demand for information have made conversion, storage and manipulation by electronic means imperative in an information conscious society. The automated library system was introduced for effective and efficient information handling especially in academic libraries.

To achieve the academic objectives of the institution, it becomes imperative for the library to acquire relevant information materials and make such available to the users' community when needed. To be able to achieve this, Lagos State Polytechnic library has automated its housekeeping operations. With this in mind, the researcher collected data to investigate only the use of OPAC at the Library. Many scholars have put up numerous writings up on the use of OPAC and the search for information/information resources in the libraries. Therefore, it is not out of place to describe information retrieval systems (IRS) as well as its importance in the contemporary information age. Information retrieval system(s) is a device that helps the user to filter through a pool of information sources, so that only those documents that are relevant to his or her information need are actually retrieved. Harter (1986) describes information retrieval system as a device interposed between a potential user of information and the collection itself. It is designed to facilitate the information retrieval process for example OPAC, indexing, Card Catalogue e.t.c Mutshewa (2008) notes that information retrieval system ought to be flexible tools, capable of providing the users with information on various subject areas, as well as allowing the user to perform a wide range of information activities which include allowing the searcher to refine his/her search without losing the search history. Chowdbury (2004) classifies information retrieval systems into two broad categories: In-house and Online. In-house are those that are developed in-house with the objectives of serving mainly the users within the organization for example, Library catalogue, while Online are those information retrieval systems that are designed to provide access to remote databases to a variety of users.

The importance of information retrieval system cannot be overemphasized given the volume of information that we are at present exposed to and the rate at which those information are needed. Information retrieval system facilitates extraction of relevant documents or information from a large collection of documents in response to a user request. Wikipedia describes information retrieval system as an online database of materials held by a library or group of libraries while OPAC is an online catalogue, as the public interface to the system`s inventory. Adedibu (2008) studies catalogue use by Science students at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State. 500 copies of questionnaire were randomly distributed to users in the 2004/2005 session. It was observed that the users of the OPAC represented a small portion with 33 respondents (7.9%) while 90.1% used the library catalogue to gain access to the library stock among others. The paper concludes that Library Users' Education based on subject would be more beneficial to the users.

Egberongbe (2000) notes that manual descriptive cataloguing has been observed to be time consuming. As a result, many libraries experience cataloguing backlogs, which prevent the information materials from being accessed since the entries will not be represented in the catalogue. Hence, users cannot access such information materials at the right time. She highlights that many of these problems could be reduced or eliminated by the replacement of card catalogue with On Line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). She also observes that with the use of OPAC more subject searches could be carried out. Mula and Chandra Shekara (2009) studies the effective use of Online Public Access Catalogue at the libraries of Engineering Colleges in Karnataka, India, 1338 questionnaire were

received for analysis. It was observed that 1092 (81.61%) of the respondents were using OPAC, while 246(18.39%) of the respondents were not using this facility. The paper identifies some of the constraints for the use of OPAC, which include OPAC software is not user friendly, lack of awareness between user communities. The study highlights the need for an education programme module for users to promote the effective usage of OPAC. Salaam (2000) studies Users' reaction to an On Line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) in a Nigerian Agricultural University Library, Abeokuta. 300 copies of questionnaire were randomly distributed among students of the University out of which 82% responses were received for analysis. The outcome of the study shows that users of Nimbe Adedipe Library appreciate the services provided through On Line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). The study also reveals that most of the searches were not known item searches, rather, users preferred the keyword and subject approach. The study highlights the need for provision of more access points, mounting special non credit earning courses for those who may wish to gain in-depth knowledge on the use of OPAC among others. The use of Information Technology has brought positive changes to library practices. OPAC has made the library collection easily accessible to everyone by breaking the physical boundaries of the library. It is important to know from time to time, how users make use of OPAC as a retrieval device in order to make the service more effective. To this end, the objectives of the study include:

1.      To study the status of OPAC facility at the LASPOTECH library
2.      To study the extent of utilization of the OPAC services by the Library Users.
2.      To suggest suitable measures to improve OPAC services for the benefit of all users in the library.

## METHOD

The study adopted survey research design. The population of this study comprises all the library users in the Lagos State Polytechnic Library, Ikorodu. Four hundred copies of the structured questionnaire were administered on the staff and students of the Polytechnic in Ikorodu campus for the 2011/2012 academic session. The questionnaire were distributed randomly to full time students in Higher National Diploma (HND) and National Diploma (ND) levels for the 2011/2012 academic session, Lecturers and Non teaching staff members of the institution who use the Library during the period. A total number of 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed randomly, out of which 395 (98.15%) were returned. The data collated were analyzed using frequency distribution table and simple percentage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of 395 questionnaire returned, 8.86% of the respondents signified non usage of OPAC, while 91.13% duly filled with all the relevant information requested signified usage of OPAC. The analysis was based on the responses received from the users. Questionnaire distributed to the respondents and the responses received from them are presented on the tables below. Table 1 shows that 400 questionnaire were distributed to Library Users who

visited the Library for one reasons or the other on that day. Out of the 400 distributed, 98.75% were returned and found usable for analysis. 91.1% of respondents identified the use of OPAC while 8.86 stated non-usage of OPAC. The highest number of returned questionnaire can be associated to the fact that, the first semester examination was about to commence, hence the large turnout of users especially students. The questionnaire were distributed to respondents when they were already seated and monitored by the researcher. Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents were students, while the staff were 18.99%. This is an indication that the students are majority users of the library. This may be influenced by the fact that students need more information to pursue their academic activities, if they want to really achieve their academic desires, there is need to complement what they have been taught in the class with information resources from the library.

Table 3 shows that 91.1% of the questionnaire returned signified the use of OPAC in the Library. 4.17% of the respondents were Higher National Diploma Students, 41.5% were National Diploma Students, 11.64% were Lecturers while 3.79% respondents were Non teaching staff of the Polytechnic. This shows that majority of the respondents can access the library collection through OPAC. Table 4 shows that 8.86% of the respondents do not use OPAC as a means of accessing the library collections. Out of the respondents who do not use OPAC, 42.85% were HND, 17.14% ND, 31.43% were Lecturers and 8.57% were Non Teaching Staff respectively.

***Details about the library software in use in the library:*** The library is uses LIB PLUS software package. All the modules are being activated, that is Acquisition, Cataloguing, Circulation as well as the Serial modules. The software is user friendly and an integrated software. The software package is user friendly which improves the ability of users to retrieve information much more easily without having to learn complex terminologies. It also allows the use of natural language searching technology which enables the users to use their everyday language to retrieve information rather than learning complex search languages when they want to retrieve information.

Table 5 shows the frequency of usage in which 36.94% of the respondents indicate that they use the OPAC twice in a week, 16.66% state that they use the OPAC daily, followed by those who use it once a week with 15.83%. 14.72% of the respondents identify with once in two weeks, 11.95% mark once in two days while 3.89% signify they use the OPAC once in a month. The highest numbers of frequency were those who use the OPAC twice in a week with 36.94% this can be attributed to the number of time they visit the library. On each occasion, they consult the OPAC to locate needed information materials. Table 6 shows how the users choose their books and other materials for their use. Analysis shows that 100% respondents use OPAC for finding information materials about books and other reading materials. 71.66% of the respondents browse shelves to search for information materials, 54.16% seek information materials, through help from friends. 40.27%, consult library staff for information on information materials while 22.22% use the card catalogue. From the above, it can be deduced that, the users are becoming more familiar with the use of OPAC for searching for information/information materials. Consulting library staff is common with Lecturers with 86.95%, this may be due to the

relationship that exist between staff, so they find it easy to ask for such assistance. Table 7 shows the responses of respondents on the basis of the usage of OPAC. It shows that a total of 100% of the respondents use the OPAC only in the library premises. The OPAC cannot be accessed through the Wide Area Network. Since the library does not have such facilities, Table 8 shows that 100% of the respondents consult the OPAC to locate books in the library, followed by 98.88% which indicates a check whether the required book is available in the library or not. Also 86.66% indicates using OPAC to compile bibliography. This is particularly high with lecturers with 97.82%, this may be due to the fact that, they need to update their knowledge in their discipline and for research purposes. To check the number of copies in library stock has 20.55% while none of the respondents shows that they use the OPAC to find non print materials.

Table 9 shows the different approaches users use when searching for information materials in the library. The search elements include: Author, Title, Subject, Call Number, Classification Number, Series and International Standard Book Number (ISBN) as search elements. The table reveals that majority of the respondents, 100% search the OPAC by subject; this is an indication that, the users are more concerned with relevant information materials on their area of study rather than the title or author of such materials. Also, 93.33% respondents search through the title, followed by 91.38% of the respondents that search by author. 30.55% of the respondents indicate searching through Call Number and the least search element used is the Classification Number with 8.33% of the respondents. Looking at the table, Call Number and Classification Number have the least used elements while Series and ISBN were not used at all. This may be due to the fact that most of the respondents are not familiar with such search elements, since they believe they are not Librarians. The most convenient search elements are the author, title and subject. None of the respondents made use of Series as well as the International Standard Book Numbers.

The study investigates the reasons given by some respondents for not using the OPAC services. Table 10 shows that majority of the respondents indicate shortage of terminals, OPAC not working properly and systems not near to stock area as reasons for not using the OPAC. They believe that they don't have to queue up in the library because they want to know the whereabout or existence of information materials. Sometimes the system is not functioning well, at times in the process of checking the OPAC the electricity supply is cut off meaning you have to start all over again. All the respondents believed that it is time wasting, stressful and uncalled for. This is followed by lack of orientation on how to use the OPAC with 85.71%. They cannot use it, since they don't know how to use it. This is followed by respondents not getting the books required with 57.14%. Other reasons have 31.42% while access password protected with 22.85% and lastly not aware of the facility with 20% respondents. Table 11 shows that 71.39% of the respondents indicate that they seek assistance from library staff, while 28.61% do not seek assistance form library staff. This shows that library staff render assistance to users when necessary. Table 12 shows that 76.39% respondents, more than half of the respondents rate the assistance received from staff good, 16.67% rate the assistance as very good, while 6.94% respondents believe that the assistance they receive from library staff was fair. It can be

deduced that 93.05% respondents were satisfied with the assistance given by Library Staff. It is assumed that users encounter certain problems in making proper use of the OPAC. Based on this, the researcher seeks to know from the respondents point of view, what should be done to improve the use of OPAC in the library. Table 13 shows that majority of the respondents 53.67% prefer library orientation/ practical for promoting the use of OPAC. 32.40% respondents prefer distribution of instructional materials such as fliers. 7.84% respondents prefer other services which include pasting of step by step guide near the OPAC. 4.81% opt for lectures/talk while 1.26% respondents prefer Seminar. Respondents believe that with all these, the use of OPAC can be improved upon.

**Table1:** Questionnaire distributed and received

| Category of Users | Number distributed | Number received/usable | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| HND | 150 | 150 | 37.5 |
| ND | 170 | 170 | 42.5 |
| Lecturers | 60 | 57 | 14.25 |
| Non Teaching Staff | 20 | 18 | 4.5 |
| Total | 400 | 395 | 98.75 |

*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 2:** Category wise distribution of respondents

| Category of users | No of respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| HND | 150 | 37.97 |
| ND | 170 | 43.04 |
| Lecturers | 57 | 14.43 |
| Non Teaching Staff | 18 | 4.57 |
| Total | 395 | 100 |

*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 3:** Those who use OPAC

| Category of Users | Questionnaire received | Questionnaire usable | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| HND | 150 | 135 | 34.17 |
| ND | 170 | 164 | 41.5 |
| Lecturer | 57 | 46 | 11.64 |
| Non Teaching Staff | 18 | 15 | 3.79 |
| Total | 395 | 360 | 91.13 |

*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 4:** Those who do not use OPAC

| Category of respondents | Questionnaire received | Questionnaire usable | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| HND | 150 | 15 | 42.85 |
| ND | 170 | 06 | 17.14 |
| Lecturer | 57 | 11 | 31.43 |
| Non Teaching Staff | 18 | 03 | 8.57 |
| Total | 395 | 35 | 100 |

*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 5:** Frequency and category wise of respondents

| Frequency | HND( 135) | ND(164) | Lecturer(46) | Non Teaching Staff | Total(360) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Daily | 30 (22.22%) | 30 (18.30%) | _ | _ | 60 (16.66%) |
| Once in two days | 15 (11.11%) | 26(15.85%) | 2 (4.35%) | _ | 43(11.95%) |
| Once a week | 10(7.40%) | 38(23.18%) | 7(15.21%) | 2(13.33%) | 57(15.83%) |
| Twice in a week | 45(33.33%) | 60(36.58%) | 20(43.49%) | 8(53.33%) | 133(36.94%) |
| Once in two weeks | 30(22.23%) | 6(3.66%) | 12(26.08%) | 5(33.33%) | 53(14.72%) |
| Once in a month | 05(3.70%) | 04(2.43%) | 05(10.87%) | _ | 14(3.89%) |
| Total | 135 | 164 | 46 | 15 | 360 |

Note that figures given in parentheses indicate percentage in respective category of users.
*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 6:** Locating required documents in the library and OPAC

| Locating Document | HND (135) | ND(164) | Lecturers(46) | Non Teaching Staff (15) | Total(360) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Through OPAC | 135(100%) | 164(100%) | 46(100%) | 15(100%) | 360(100%) |
| Browsing books on shelves | 110(81.48%) | 137(83.53%) | 06(13.04%) | 05(33.33%) | 258 (71.66%) |
| Consulting library Staff | 60(44.44%) | 30(18.29) | 40(86.95%) | 15 (100%) | 145(40.27%) |
| From card catalogue | 55(40.74%) | 25(15.24%) | __ | __ | 80(22.22%) |
| Through help from friends | 80(59.25%) | 110(67.07%) | 05(10.86%) | __ | 195(54.16%) |

Note: Total percentage will not be hundred because responses are more than one
*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 7:** Usage of library OPAC

| Frequency | HND( 135) | ND(164) | Lecturer(46) | Non Teaching Staff | Total(360) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Only Library Premises | 135(100%) | 164(100%) | 46(100%) | 15(100%) | 360(100%) |
| Stand Alone System | ____ | ____ | ____ | ____ | ____ |
| Wide Area Network | ____ | ____ | ____ | ____ | ____ |
| College Campus Network | ____ | ____ | ____ | ____ | ____ |
| Total | 135(100%) | 164(100%) | 46(100%) | 15(100%) | 360 (100%) |

*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 8:** Purpose of using the library OPAC

| Frequency | HND( 135) | ND(164) | Lecturer(46) | Non Teaching Staff | Total(360) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| To locate books | 135(100%) | 164(100%) | 46(100%) | 15(100%) | 360 (100%) |
| To find non-print materials | ____ | ____ | ____ | ____ | ____ |
| To find out whether the required book is available in the library or not | 135(100%) | 160(97.56%) | 46(100%) | 15(100%) | 356(99%) |
| To compile bibliography of books on a particular subject | 122(90.37%) | 135(82.31%) | 45(98%) | 10(66.66%) | 312 (86.66%) |
| To check the number of copies in library stock | 20(14.81%) | 18(10.97%) | 31(67%) | 05(33.33%) | 74(20.55%) |

Note: Total percentage will not be hundred because responses are more than one
*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 9:** The different search elements used

| Frequency | HND( 135) | ND(164) | Lecturer(46) | Non Teaching Staff | Total(360) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| By Author | 135(100%) | 142(86.58%) | 42(91.30%) | 10(66.66%) | 329(91.38%) |
| By Title | 132(97.77%) | 162(98.78%) | 30()65.21% | 12(80% | 336(93.33%) |
| By Subject | 135(100%) | 164(100%) | 46(100%) | 15(100%) | 360(100%) |
| By Call Number | 80(59.25%) | 20(12.19%) | 10(21.73) | -------- | 110(30.55%) |
| By Classification Number | 20(14.81%) | 10(6.09%) | _____ | _____ | 30(8.33%) |
| By Series | ------- | ---------- | ---------- | -------- | --------- |
| By ISBN | ---------- | ---------- | ----------- | ------- | --------- |

Note: Total percentage will not be hundred because responses are more than one
*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 10:** Reasons for not using the library OPAC services

| Frequency | HND( 135) | ND(164) | Lecturer(46) | Non Teaching Staff | Total(360) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| OPAC access is password protected | 2 (13.33%) | 2 (33.33%) | 2 (18.18%) | 2(66.66%) | 08(22.85%) |
| Not aware of the Facility | 2 (13.33%) | 2 (33.33%) | 1(9.09%) | 2(66.66%) | 07(20%) |
| Shortage of Terminals | 13(86.66%) | 06(100%) | 11(100%) | 3(100%) | 33(94.28%) |
| OPAC not working properly | 13(86.66%) | 06(100%) | 11(100%) | 3(100%) | 33(94.28%) |
| OPAC not close to stock area | 13(86.66%) | 06(100%) | 11(100%) | 3(100%) | 33(94.28%) |
| Lack of instruction from Library Staff | 13(86.66%) | 06(100%) | 8(72.72%) | 3(100%) | 30(85.71%) |
| Did not get the book(s) required | 6(60%) | 4(66.66%) | 7(63.63%) | 3(100%) | 20(57.14%) |
| Others | 4(60%) | 4(66.66%) | 3(27.27%) | ____ | 11(31.42%) |

Note: Total percentage will not be hundred because responses are more than one
*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 11:** Respondents seek assistance from Library Staff

| Frequency | HND(135) | ND(164) | Lecturer(46) | Non Teaching Staff(15) | Total(360) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 90 | 120 | 35 | 12 | 257(71.39%) |
| No | 45 | 44 | 11 | 3 | 103(28.61%) |
| Total | 135(100%) | 164(100%) | 46(100%) | 15(100%) | 360(100%) |

*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 12:** Qualities of assistance rendered by Library Staff

| Rating | HND(135) | ND(164) | Lecturer(46) | Non Teaching Staff(15) | Total(360) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very Good | 15 | 30 | 10 | 5 | 60(16.67%) |
| Good | 105 | 130 | 30 | 10 | 275(76.39%) |
| Fair | 15 | 4 | 6 | ----- | 25(6.94%) |
| Poor | ------ | ------- | ----- | ----- | ------ |
| Total | 135(100%) | 164(100%) | 46(100%) | 15(100%) | 360(100%) |

*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

**Table 13:** Programmes for improving the use of OPAC

| Description | HND(145) | ND(179) | Lecturers(51) | Non Teaching Staff(20) | Total (395) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Orientation/Practical | 90 | 120 | 2 | --- | 212(53.67%) |
| Lecture/Talk | 5 | 8 | 6 | --- | 19(4.81%) |
| Seminar | 2 | 3 | --- | ---- | 5(1.26%) |
| Instructional materials | 40 | 40 | 33 | 15 | 128(32.40%) |
| Any other services | 8 | 8 | 10 | 5 | 31(7.84%) |

*Source:* Survey 2011/2012 Academic session.

## CONCLUSION

This paper aims at presenting the results of a survey conducted to determine the effective use of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) at the library of Lagos State Polytechnic Ikorodu. Considering the analysis, it can be said that library users make use of OPAC to access library collections. They find it more convenient, easy and quicker to locate information on existing library materials, despite some hindrances. Effort should be geared towards increasing/encouraging the use of OPAC in order to achieve some of the Ranganathan, the Law of Librarianship. Acquisition and processing of library materials is a continuous process and their use must be facilitated by the libraries, by creating easy access to the information materials, this can be mostly or easily achieved through the proper use of OPAC. It is also observed that, lack of adequate instructions, inadequate information and lack of interest are some of the problems that cause non usage of OPAC. Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations are given for better utilization of OPAC services in Lagos State Polytechnic Library. The library should from time to time organize orientation for library users on the use of OPAC. The orientation should not be limited to only the newly admitted students, but to every member of the academic community. This will not only showcase what the library has but also develop good relationship between the library and its users' community in order to facilitate meeting their information needs. It will also increase the use of library materials, hence justifying the money spent on acquisition of library materials. Librarians should update entries in the OPAC from time to time, to keep it up to date. Users should be able to get needed information/ information material without wasting time. This will encourage them in the use of OPAC, if they can be sure that, whatever information they want on accessibility and existence of library materials can be provided or sought from the OPAC without wasting time. OPAC should be placed

closer to the reading areas instead of its present position. Also, the book shelves should be well labelled, so that users can easily locate or identify the shelves for marching of shelf reference against the physical book itself. Key instructions on how to use the OPAC can be provided, if possible, pasted on a board and placed close to the OPAC area, so that when librarians are not available, users can follow the instructions step by step to access the OPAC. The software package in use has very good user interface; the implication is that, it will be easy to learn and users with little or no experience in using automated library system can use it effectively, because it is menu driven. Library staff should continue to strive for provision of excellent services. They should not hesitate to encourage the use of OPAC. Their workload will reduce, if the users are able to do it on their own. Stable electricity supply should also be provided, since users complain of unstable electricity supply, which discourages them from using the OPAC. Users survey should be conducted at intervals to know if the uses of OPAC as information retrieval device is actually meeting their expectation since its use will facilitate the use of library materials and bring about effectiveness of the library hence justifying the Library existence.

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