

**A STUDY ON THE USE OF ONLINE PUBLIC ACCESS CATALOGUE (OPAC) BY  
STUDENTS AND FACULTY MEMBERS OF UNNAMALAI INSTITUTE OF  
TECHNOLOGY IN KOVILPATTI (TAMIL NADU)**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper aims to present the results of a survey conducted to determine the effective use of online public access catalogue (OPAC) at the library of Unnamalai Institute of Technology in Kovilpatti. The paper examines the result from a questionnaire-based survey conducted at the library. 150 samples of the questionnaire was distributed randomly between the staff and students of Unnamalai Institute of Technology in Kovilpatti, out of which 130 completed and valid questionnaires (86.67 %) were received for analysis. The data received from the respondents through these questionnaires was analysed. The paper discusses various aspects of OPAC such as frequency of use, purpose, ease of use, satisfaction level, etc. An attempt is also made to explore the reasons for the least used search options of OPAC. The results of the study reveal that a significant number of users search information regarding the library material through OPAC despite encountering problems. Lack of basic skills among users was found to be the major reason for not utilising full features of OPAC. It is suggested that library should organise quality instruction programmes to improve knowledge and skills of the users.*

**Keywords:** OPAC, Online public access catalogue, Library automation, Effective usage.

**INTRODUCTION**

OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) changed the traditional card catalogue system. In the new system, data can be spread within computer and then the required entry can be retrieved immediately through OPAC system in any format. Online Public Access Catalogue is an increasingly familiar piece of equipment in libraries. Today, a large number of libraries have automated their operations and services using this technology to fulfill their users' needs. Public

catalogue, which is an important service of the library is not exceptional to computer technology. Computerised catalogue is termed as Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). It acts as an information retrieval system for the user. OPAC has revolutionized access to bibliographic information through search capabilities such as keyword searching, Boolean searching, truncation, proximity searching, and item identity number searching. These were not possible in the traditional catalogue.

A large number of libraries are providing OPAC service to their users to find out their documents. In such a situation, the libraries should examine periodically how much comfort the users feel with this service so that some initiatives could be taken timely to improve this facility. Therefore, a study has been undertaken on the use of OPAC by the users in Unnamalai Institute of Technology, Kovilpatti.

### **WHAT IS OPAC ?**

OPAC stands for Online Public Access Catalogue. An OPAC contains all the bibliographic information of an information centre or we can say it is a gateway to information centre's collection. OPAC is the modern and flexible form of the catalogue, usually instantaneous and sophisticated access to any recorded information within a computer. Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science (ODLIS) defines OPAC as, "An acronym for online public access catalog, a database composed of bibliographic records describing the books and other materials owned by a library or library system, accessible via public terminals or workstations usually concentrated near the reference desk to make it easy for users to request the assistance of a trained reference librarian. Most online catalogs are searchable by author, title, subject, and keywords and allow users to print, download, or export records to an e-mail account.

ALA Glossary defines OPAC as, "A Computer based and supported library catalog (bibliographic database) designed to be accessed via terminals so that library users may directly and effectively search for and retrieve bibliographic records within the assistance of a human intermediary such as a specially trained member of the library staff.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

**Shiv Kumar (2011)** have conducted studies on Effect of web searching on the OPAC: a comparison of selected university libraries, the study adopted a questionnaire-based survey. A structured questionnaire was administered to 500 users comprising faculty, research scholars, and postgraduate students of selected university libraries to collect data regarding the influence of web search engines on OPAC users. The study showed that a majority of the users in all three universities made use of the web-based resources. Ready access to information through search engines considerably increased the expectations of library users while searching OPAC. Web searching influenced their OPAC searching process greatly, as the majority of searches were performed on OPAC-like popular search engines. Simultaneously, users did not know the difference between inner-workings of OPAC and common search engines such as Google.

**Shiv Kumar and Ranjana Vohra (2011)** study is examined the Online Public Access Catalogue usage by the students and faculty of Panjab University Library, Chandigarh. OPAC, an information retrieval system, has revolutionised access to bibliographic information through search capabilities such as keyword searching, Boolean searching, truncation, proximity searching, and item identity number searching. A questionnaire-based survey on use of OPAC

was conducted for A.C. Joshi Library on various categories of users such as faculty members, research scholars and postgraduate students, covering different disciplines such as basic sciences, applied sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The paper discusses various aspects of OPAC such as frequency of use, purpose, ease of use, satisfaction level, etc. An attempt is also made to explore the reasons for the least used search options of OPAC. The results of the study reveal that a significant number of users search information regarding the library material through OPAC despite encountering problems. Lack of basic skills among users was found to be the major reason for not utilising full features of OPAC. It is suggested that University library should organise quality instruction programmes to improve knowledge and skills of the users.

In the study on the applicability and utility of OPACs in 5 libraries in New Delhi, a questionnaire was distributed randomly to 128 users of which 100 were selected for analysis. The study revealed that OPAC is still one of the most important interfaces among the user and the collection of library. A study on the effectiveness of a OPAC is useful in this respect. However, the data showed that a high percentage of respondents were using the OPAC as a search tool for retrieving documents. Also, most of the users handled the OPAC themselves. Significantly, the satisfaction level of users rose higher as with the availed OPAC facilities. Nevertheless, not many users were aware of the expert searches provided by OPAC. The Librarians, especially those from the developing nations, may choose their library software catalogue data into terms that the library user understands, making books more easily accessible via OPACs and fostering a sense of community around library collections (Harris, 2008).

#### **NEED FOR THE STUDY:**

The Library is automated using integrated software called “MODERN LIB” with the Bar code Technology. It is developed by Sakthi Technologies. This software provides flexibility and versatility. Any bibliographic structure, including all types of digital resources, can be managed by this software and created by itself along with non-bibliographic structures.

The Online Public Access catalog allows for the access of bibliographic databases of the books, CD-ROMs and journals available in the library. The catalog includes a word-based search facility using Boolean operators that can narrow down a search to meet very specific needs. Additional features of this catalog are:

- Periodic list of recent additions to the library
- Members can find the materials checked out to them
- Details of the status of the Books can be accessed while browsing and searching for Information.

The Usage of OPAC has created enormous changes in the library practices. Further it has made the library fields easily accessible to everyone by breaking the physical boundaries of the library itself. The Present study focuses on the use of online public Access Catalogue in Unnamalai Institute of Technology Library, by the Undergraduate students and the faculty members. Attempts have been made to know the information requirements of students and faculty members and how these are met satisfactorily. The main focus of this study is to describe the needs and requirements in general and analyze the use of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) in Unnamalai Institute of Technology Library.

## METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of any research is to discover the methods and principles that are universal in their application. A survey of the use of OPAC in Unnamalai Institute of Technology Library. Random sampling technique was used in this study. Accordingly the questionnaires were administered to the users of the library and responses of the users were solicited. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to the students and faculty members of Unnamalai Institute of Technology, Kovilpatti. Out of 150 questionnaires, 130 answers were received from the respondents. The questionnaire sought information on the state of automation, use of OPAC, problems identified by users in using the OPAC and comments on the ways of improving the use of OPAC as an information retrieval tool.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- To assess as to what extent the users are using OPAC.
- To find out the purpose of use of OPAC.
- To know whether the users face problems while using OPAC.
- To study the satisfaction of users while using OPAC.

### ANALYSIS OF COLLECTED DATA

Table 1 -Distribution of questionnaires and the responses received

Category of users	No. of questionnaires distributed	No. of questionnaires received	% of responses
UG students	100	87	87
Faculty	50	43	86
Total	150	130	86.67

The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and the responses received from them are presented in Table 1. From the Table 1, 150 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents of engineering college in Kovilpatti and the response rate was 86.67%. Among the total responses 87 respondents are UG students and 43 respondents are faculty.

Table-2 Gender-wise distribution of respondents.

Sl.No	Category of Users	UG Students	Faculty	Total	%
1	Male	56	28	84	64.62
2	Female	31	15	46	35.38

Table 2 exhibits that 84 (64.62%) users were males. Out of which 56 were undergraduate students, 28 were faculty, only 46 (35.38 %) users were female, out of which 31 were undergraduate students, 15 faculty members.

Table 3- Frequency of OPAC Usage

Sl.No	Frequency	UG students	Faculty	Total	%
1	Daily	35	16	51	39.23
2	Once in two days	20	12	32	24.62
3	Once in a week	14	5	19	14.62
4	Twice in a week	9	5	14	10.77
5	Once in two weeks	6	3	9	6.92
6	Once in a month	3	2	5	3.85

### Frequency of OPAC Usage

It is important to know how frequently the users use OPAC to locate their required documents. The frequency of using OPAC indicates its value in the library. Table 3. A question was asked to find the frequency of OPAC usage. The results showed that 51 (39.23 %) of the respondents were using it daily, 32 (24.62%) of the respondents used it, once in two days. 19 (14.62%) used it, once in a week and 14 (10.77%) used it, twice in a week. Similarly 9 (6.92%) of the respondents used it, once in 2 weeks, Only 5 (3.85 %) of them used it, Once in a month. Nearly 40 % of the members used the OPAC at library, almost every day.

### ANOVA Summary Result

	Sum of square	Degrees of Freedom	Mean square	F	Table value
<b>Between Column</b>	161.34	1	161.34	1.19	6.6
<b>Between Rows</b>	735.67	5	147.13	1.08	5.05
<b>Residual</b>	678.99	5	135.79		

Here the calculated values are less than the table values at 5% level of significance. The hypothesis is accepted. Hence there is no significant difference among the users with regard to the frequency of using OPAC (Hypothesis 1).

Table 4- Purpose of Using OPAC

Sl.No	Purpose of using OPAC	UG students	Faculty	Total	%
1	To know the availability of required document	52	23	75	57.69
2	To know whether required document issued	9	5	14	10.77
3	To know the location of required document	26	15	41	31.54

### Purpose of Using OPAC

Table 4 shows the purpose of using OPAC is indicated. It depicts that 75 (57.69 %) users consulted OPAC to know the availability of the required document in the library, 14 (10.77 %) to know whether the required document issued/checked out, and 41 (31.54 %) to know the location of the required documents. It is clear from Table 4 that majority of users consulted OPAC to know the availability and location of the required documents.

#### ANOVA Summary Result

	Sum of square	Degrees of Freedom	Mean square	F	Table value
<b>Between Column</b>	322.67	1	322.67	3.88	18.51
<b>Between Rows</b>	934.34	2	467.17	5.61	19
<b>Residual</b>	166.32	2	83.16		

Here the calculated values are less than the table values at 5% level of significance. The hypothesis is accepted. Hence there is no significant difference among the users with regard to the purpose of using OPAC (Hypothesis 2).

Table 5-Locating required information in the library and OPAC

Sl.No	Locating documents	UG Students	Faculty	Total	%
1	Through OPAC	83	39	122	93.85
2	Browsing book(s) on Shelves	56	25	81	62.31
3	Consulting library staff	34	23	57	43.85
4	From card catalogue	25	18	43	33.08
5	Through help from friend(s)	23	17	40	30.77

Table 5 showed how the users chose their books and other materials for their study. Analysis showed that 122 (93.85%) of them chose the OPAC for finding information about books and other reading materials, 81 (62.31%) of them directly go to the shelves and browse books, without using OPAC. Nearly 57 (43.85 %) of them got the required information with the help of library staff. Similarly 43 (33.08 %) of them get their materials by consulting from the card catalogue, followed by 40 (30.77 %) of the surveyed users, who got the information through peers. From the table above, it is clear that OPAC has made a beginning with the users and will definitely dominate the scene in the years to come.

### Users information search on OPAC

Whenever the users want to confirm the availability of a required document in the stock of the library, they can approach the OPAC with any of the search elements viz., author, title, subject or call number, classification number, series and ISBN, shown in Table 6.

Table 6- Users information search on OPAC

Sl.No	Searching of Information	UG Students	Faculty	Total	%
1	By author	84	40	124	95.38
2	By title	82	37	119	91.54
3	By subject	28	15	43	33.08
4	By call number	17	8	25	19.23
5	By classification number	20	9	29	22.31
6	By series	26	15	41	31.54
7	By ISBN	12	6	18	13.85

Table 6 shows that, 124 (95.38 %) of the respondents approached the OPAC by author, 119 (91.54 %) under the title, 43 (33.08 %) approached the OPAC through the subject, similarly 25 (19.23 %) and 29 (22.31 %) of respondents approached through the accession number and classification number respectively. About 41 (31.54 %) respondents did it, under the series search and 18 (13.85 %) of respondents searched by ISBN. It is further observed that, when we compare all the approaches of the users, query approach through the author string is most popular followed by title, subject, series, classification number and call number.

Table 7- Orientation Programme Received by Respondents

Orientation received	No. of Response	%
Unaware	86	66.15
Yes	35	26.92
No	9	6.92

Table 7 shows the responses from the users about attending user orientation programmes. In this programme, the users are oriented about library facilities and services including OPAC. The Table highlights that majority of the users constituting 86 (66.15 %) were not aware of such programmes. Almost 35 (26.92 %) users attended orientation programme, whereas 9 (6.92 %) users did not attend while they were aware of it. It is clear from the data that a small proportion of users attended orientation programme. During informal interview with the users, it was found that this programme helped in searching OPAC.

Table 8- Skill and support on information seeking problems

Sl.No	Ratings	UG Students	Faculty	Total	%
1	Excellent	35	15	50	38.46
2	Very Good	22	10	32	24.62
3	Good	12	9	21	16.15
4	Average	13	6	19	14.62
5	Poor	5	3	8	6.15

### Library staff skill and support on information seeking problems

The study found that, a high percentage of users, that is, 50 (38.46%) were happy with the excellent services provided by librarians. 32 (24.62 %) and 21 (16.15 %) respondents have expressed very good and good respectively, regarding the behavior and skill of library staff. But 19 (14.62 %) and 8 (6.15%) of the respondents have stated average and poor response, to this query. This needs immediate attention by the librarians (Table 8)

Table 9- Reasons/Problems for not Using OPAC

Sl.No	Reasons/problems	UG Students N=34	Faculty N=12	Total N=46	%
1	Lack of knowledge	75	12	42	91.30
2	Complicated/confusing to use	17	9	36	78.26
3	No output/null retrieval	11	5	16	34.78
4	Lack of on-screen help	13	7	29	63.04
5	Lack of assistance from library staff	8	4	17	36.96
6	Slow speed	9	3	15	32.61
7	Lack of computer systems	4	2	8	17.39

The study also investigated the reasons for not using the OPAC services by the respondents. From the analysis these respondents were asked to give the reasons/problems for not using OPAC. Table 9 shows that 42 (91.30 per cent) of 46 respondents expressed 'Lack of knowledge', 36 (78.26 %) expressed 'Complication in use', 16 (34.78 %) expressed 'no output/null retrieval', 29 (63.04 %) express 'Lack of on-screen help', 17 (36.96 %) expressed 'lack of assistance from library staff', 15 (32.61 per cent) expressed 'slow speed' and 8 (17.39 %) expressed 'lack of computer systems'.

Table 10 - Overall Satisfaction Level in Using OPAC

Sl.No	Satisfaction level	No. of responses	%
1	Fully satisfied	25	19.23
2	Satisfied	65	50.00
3	Moderately satisfied	12	9.23
4	Dissatisfied	24	18.46
5	Very dissatisfied	4	3.08

Table 10 exhibits overall satisfaction level of users in using OPAC. It highlights that out of 151 users a very few, i.e., 2 (1.3 per cent) were fully satisfied with OPAC use, almost one-fourth were satisfied a little more than and one-third moderately satisfied with OPAC use. Almost one-third were dissatisfied with OPAC use, 11 (7.3 per cent) were very dissatisfied with OPAC use. Evidently, it is clear that only a large portion of users is satisfied (fully satisfied and satisfied) with OPAC working.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

On the basis of the findings, the following suggestions have been made for optimum utilisation of OPAC facility in the College library:

- The study indicates that OPAC system is difficult to use. The major reason of complexity of use is that OPAC is DOS-based system. Therefore, the library should provide Windows-based OPAC system that has simple search options.
- It is observed that the OPAC does not offer various essential features such as spell-check software, quick search, online reservation, online renewal, new arrivals and book cover display facilities. Besides these features, there is no provision for links to electronic sources/content pages. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the said features must be incorporated in OPAC. Such features may enhance its optimum utilisation and also make it more attractive and useful.
- To facilitate the users, the college library should organise quality instruction programmes on the use of different techniques and strategies in retrieving information about the documents. The instruction programmes may enhance user knowledge and basic skills for searching OPAC. In addition to this, printed instruction may be provided to understand the functions of OPAC.
- Students and Faculty members have requested to locate the OPAC near the book stocks there by the faculty members can use it conveniently without wasting much time.

## **CONCLUSION**

Users usually come to OPAC when they want to search the required materials on the topic of their interest. In this process, OPAC, as a retrieval tool, plays an important role for finding out the required documents. 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. From the study, it is evident that OPAC is used by most of respondents. This is due to the fact that respondents seek up-to-date information to augment their research work and on latest research methods that they can apply. The use of OPAC by students and faculty members has increased their information, retrieval rate especially in locating books and other reading materials in the library. This is evident in the fact that all the respondents are satisfied with their search outputs. In order to meet the challenges of the new millennium, without wasting further time, it is recommended that the libraries in the country must reintroduce and upgrade their information technology and computerized systems to render better services to the library users.

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