

## **USE OF ONLINE PUBLIC ACCESS CATALOGUE (OPAC) FACILITY BY THE UNIVERSITY USERS: A SURVEY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The introduction of computers in the field of Libraries and Information Centres has brought many changes. Many automation tools and techniques have been introduced in operation of house keeping activities in the libraries. OPAC is one among them. Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is one of the services introduced along with library automation which is playing an important role in retrieving bibliographic details of publications in the library. This paper examines the use and functional lapses in operation of OPAC in the Rashrtiya Sanskrit Vidhyapeetha Library, Tirupati and presented the results here.*

**Key words:** Library automation, OPAC, University Library

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Libraries are considered to be centers of life-long learning and actively participating in the continuation education in disseminating the knowledge for intellectual development of the people. The librarians endeavor to equip the library with right kind of collections and other reading materials to satisfy the requirements of the users. The Library is a trinity made up of different types of publications, readers, and staff so it will not function without any one of these components. There are three types of libraries; i) Public Libraries; ii) Academic Libraries, and iii) Special Libraries. These libraries are part and parcel of the parent institution / organization and will work towards the building-up and organizing of reading materials that are suitable to the user's requirements in accordance with the programmes of their parent institution. The types of reading materials, categories of readers and quantum, and types of library staff will vary from one type of library to another.

The efficient functioning of any library will depend upon the right selection of reading materials based on value, volume and variety of demands from the users. Further, the organization of the library materials involves classification which is universally accepted in assigning call number / identification number for books to ensure shelving of books are in a classified and systematic order. Similarly the cataloguing of reading materials is necessary to prepare different types of entries under author, editor, translator, title, series, subject, etc. to meet the different approaches of the readers seeking for information so as to what books are available, where they are available, and how the required book can be located out of thousands of books shelved on the book racks in different areas of the library. The catalogue entry that provides the call number or

book identification number assists the reader to identify the required book quickly on the shelf. Thus classification and cataloguing of reading materials ensure shelving of books in a systematic and classified order but also ensures the physical accessibility of the documents on the shelves. Therefore catalogue is a key to library collection. Further the personalized services rendered by the professional staff of the library will ensure the accessibility of the required information is hidden inside the books as and when demanded by the readers.

IT has brought many changes in the libraries over the last two decades; the field of cataloguing is not an exemption to this. The emergence of an online catalogue has improved the access to the bibliographic data and slowly replaced the card catalogue in all types of libraries. That is popularly called Online Public Access Catalogue or OPAC.

## **2. OPAC**

OPAC is a modern and flexible form of catalogue which is available online. Without library automation it is not possible to prepare OPAC in the libraries. In the OPAC system, any document can be searched through a computer terminal. To achieve this goal, the OPAC is one of the effective and efficient information resources, which could be concurrently used by many people and it overcomes all the inadequacies of the card catalogue.

The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) of a library system is critical to ensure the user community is able to quickly and easily locate the most appropriate resources for their needs. The OPAC represents a huge investment in staff time, training, equipment, technical support and ongoing system requirement, networking and updating. It is pivotal in encouraging staff and students to maximize their use of the library, but is often under utilised and in some schools is little more than an inventory of the school's holdings. The automated library system should be managed to enhance the school's teaching and learning programs and to ensure that the online catalogue is integrated into the school's cross-curricular information skills and ICT programmes.

The OPAC serves as an index that is an access point to full-text information. In the same way students are taught how to use indexes, dictionaries and encyclopedias, they need instruction on using the OPAC's index of several thousand resources. When using the OPAC, students may have difficulties with spelling; using appropriate search terms; modifying search strategies; displaying, sorting and interpreting the retrieved records; and understanding the meaning of system messages. Students need to know about database organisation and how to evaluate search results. Using increasingly sophisticated OPACs can be a frustrating experience that requires the assistance of library staff to ensure students and staff to find the information they wanted.

## **3. RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha Library automated and introduced the OPAC during the year 2003. The feedback received from the users about the OPAC in the library was not adequate to know its effectiveness on the users. Hence, a survey was conducted to know about the use of the OPAC, search strategies used and the problems faced by the users while using the OPAC.

The main aim of this survey is to understand the usage of OPACs and problems faced by

the users in the University Library. The objectives including:

- a) to assess the prior knowledge of the users about OPAC;
- b) to know the users opinion about OPAC facility;
- c) to analyze the search patterns and strategies of the users while using the OPAC;
- d) to find out the problems faced by the users; and
- e) to suggest the solutions to over come the problems faced by the users.

#### 4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study is limited to only to the users of the Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidhyapeetha, Tirupati covering students and faculty members.

#### 5. METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted through survey method using questionnaire tool. Because this method is the most cost-effective to conduct in any environment and complete in a stipulated time. The study uses both primary and secondary data; the primary data is collected using questionnaire tool and the secondary data is collected through university annual reports and other related publications.

The sample covers the users of Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidhyapeetha including students (graduates, postgraduates and research scholars), faculty members and non-teaching staff. Of the total 1336 users that are enrolled as the library members, only 165 users were covered due to time and cost limitations. About 15 questionnaires were removed because of incomplete answers and data provided and finally 150 filled questionnaires were analyzed and presented the results here.

#### 6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Of the total survey population, 82% of respondents are males and remaining of them (18%) are females participated in the study. Most of the students are males because of the type of education they provide so the same reflected in the results also. In spite of trying to equalize the percentage of both genders however, the response from the female students was poor. It is because the female students are comparatively less in number in the university and those who are in the university are also not having much interest to participate in the study.

##### 6.1 Category of users

The users are requested to specify their course or designation so as to categorize them into four categories as shown in the following Table 1.

**Table – 1: Category of users**

<b>Category of users</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Teaching Staff	21	<b>14</b>
Research Scholars	33	<b>22</b>
Postgraduate students	39	<b>26</b>

Undergraduate students	48	32
Non-Teaching Staff	9	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows that a third of the respondents are undergraduates (32%), followed by a quarter of them are postgraduates (26%), over a fifth are research scholars (22%), about a seventh are teaching staff (14%) and the remaining (6%) are Non-Teaching Staff. This shows that almost two-thirds (62%) are active users that including academic staff, research scholars and PG students.

### 6.2 Frequency of visit to library

**Table – 2: Frequency of visit to library**

Frequency	No. of Respondents	% of respondents
Daily	82	54.7.
Twice in a weak	41	27.3
Fortnightly	18	12.9
Occasionally	9	6.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.0</b>

It is evident from Table 2 that the majority of the users (54.7%) are visiting the library daily, more than a quarter (27.3%) are visiting twice in a week, about eight (12%) are fortnightly and remaining of them (6%) are occasional visitors of the library. It was found that the majority of the users are having sufficient knowledge to operate the computers but over a third do not know how to use the computers. It is because that a considerable number of students come to this university from rural areas surrounding this university where such facilities are nor available. Moreover, in humanities subjects the students get the chance of using the computers and that resulted to over a quarter of the population were novice users of computers taking help in using the computes.

Regarding the working knowledge and use of computers, about two thirds (63.3%) of the users are having sufficient knowledge in the operation of computers and remaining of the respondents are fully not competent in using the computers.

### 6.3. Frequency of Use of OPAC

**Table – 3: Frequency of Use of OPAC**

Frequency	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Daily	82	54.7
Twice in a weak	41	27.3
Fortnightly	18	14.7
Monthly		
Occasionally	9	6.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

It is noticed from Table 3 that more than half of the respondents (54.7%) used OPAC daily, followed by a fifth used weekly (27.3%), about a sixth used fortnightly (14.7%), and the remaining small percentage (6 %) are used OPAC occasionally.

#### 6.4 Search patterns of OPACs

**Table – 4: Search patterns of OPACs**

Type of approach by	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Author	64	42.7
Title	48	32
Subject	39	26
Class No.	24	16
Keywords	18	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100</b>

(Respondents are permitted to answer more than one approach.)

Then the users were asked to indicate their search patterns while using the OPACs. The above Table 4 reveals that less than half of the users (42.7%) searched for required information through author, about a third by title (32%), over a quarter by subject (26%), about a sixth by class number (16%) and remaining eighth by keywords (12%). It is clear that search by author is more popular to access to information from OPAC over other approaches.

#### 6.5. Purpose for using the OPAC

**Table – 5: Purpose for using the OPAC**

Purpose of using the OPAC	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
To find out the location of the books in the library	99	42.1
To know the availability of the books in the library	64	27.2
To know the bibliographical details of the books	13	5.5
To compile bibliographies	2	0.9
To find the dissertations and theses in the library	57	24.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>100</b>

(Respondents are permitted to tick more than one answer)

The respondents were asked to indicate the purpose of using the OPACs. It is observed from the Table 5 that less than a half of the users (42.1%) consulted the OPAC for finding the various types of documents in the library. Over a quarter (27.2%) of the users searched the OPAC for knowing the availability of the books in the library, less than a quarter (24.3%) referred to find out the dissertations and theses for their project work, and a small percentage used for knowing bibliographical details of the books and for compilation of bibliographies. In general people use OPAC in locating the books in the libraries but here this was not the main reason so future researchers should work further and find out those reasons.

## 6.6 Help sought in use of OPAC

**Fig 1: Seeking assistance in searching OPAC**

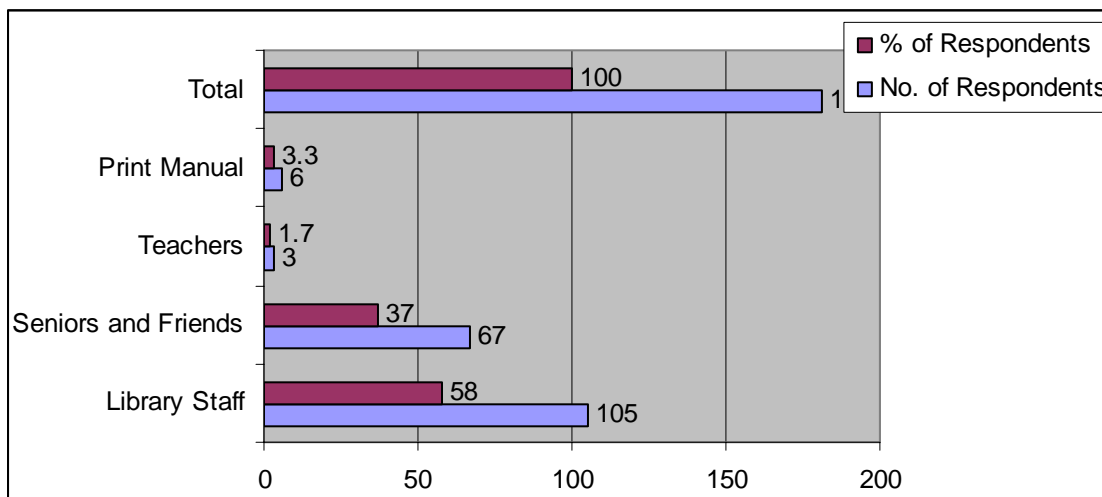


Fig 1 shows that the majority of the respondents (58 %) are getting assistance from the library staff in operating OPAC, over a third by their seniors and friends (37 %), a small percentage used manual (3.3 %) and a few took teacher's (1.7%) help for searching OPAC in their library. It is interesting to know that all the respondents are willing to undergo training in using OPACs in spite of their prior knowledge about computers. It is possible that none of these people used OPAC before so all of them would like to undergo training. To improve the use of the library and its resources, the library should provide training to their users on regular intervals. In general all universities conduct such training programmes at the beginning of the academic year when the students newly joins in their courses. However, it is better to conduct the training at least twice a year so that anybody missed to attend the first programme, they can still attend the second training programme.

## 6.7 Users Satisfaction

Since a third of the respondents not trained in using the computers, the users were asked whether they want any training from the library. All the users showed their interest to attend formal training programme if the library is able to conduct one for its users. For effective usage of the OPACs, the library should conduct training to its users in regular basis preferably every semester.

**Table – 6: Satisfaction in searching OPAC**

Level of Satisfaction	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Satisfied	67	44.7
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	33	22.0
Highly satisfied	28	18.7
Not satisfied	22	14.7

<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>
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No system is fully proof and meets all the needs of the users' requirements in the world. However, it is the duty of the designer to find out the level of user satisfaction so that the required improvements in terms of systems design, users interface and overall usage of the system could be done.

It is noticed from Table 6 that the majority of the respondents (63.7%) are either satisfied or highly satisfied in searching OPAC. At the same time, over a fifth (22%) of respondents are neutral, and the remaining one seventh of them (14.7%) are not satisfied in searching OPAC. The percentage of respondents who did not satisfied is considerable so library should take necessary steps in improving the use of the OPAC system in terms of its ease of use, required hands-on training and provide adequate staff help in the day to day use of the OPACs.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

The majority of the users (54.7%) are daily visitors of the library and over a quarter (27.3%) are visiting the library twice in a week. Out of those who are coming to the library, more than a half of the respondents (52%) are using OPAC daily. The majority of the users are searching OPAC through author and title approaches and consulting the OPAC for finding the documents in the library. The respondents are getting assistance from the library staff in operating OPAC however; more training is required on regular intervals. All the respondents are willing to undergo training in operating OPAC however, a small percentage are not satisfied with the design of the system.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the above results the following recommendations are made for the improvement of the use of the OPACs in the library.

- a) All the users are to be trained for maximum utilization of library resources.
- b) Necessary steps have to be taken to attract more number of readers to the library regularly.
- c) Regular library orientation and training programmes should be conducted every semester for fresher's in using the OPACs.
- d) OPAC facility should be provided in all the Departments in addition to the Central Library. At present there is no Internet connectivity in the Departments. If this facility is available, the Web version of OPAC will be accessible from the Department also.
- e) More OPAC terminals should be provided in the library to access OPAC by a large number of users at a time.
- f) Standardization should be maintained while transliterating the Sanskrit titles into English language to understand the users.

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