

Full Length Research

User Training and OPAC Utilization by Postgraduate Students in Selected Private Universities in South-West Nigeria

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This study investigates the influence of user training on Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) utilization among postgraduate students in selected private universities in South-West Nigeria. Despite the proliferation of OPAC systems, prior research indicates that users often perceive these tools as unintuitive, resulting in suboptimal utilization. Employing a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 355 postgraduate students across eight private universities with functional OPACs in the region, using stratified random sampling. The instrument demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.70 to 0.92). Data analysis via descriptive and multiple linear regression revealed that user training significantly predicts OPAC usage (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.17$, $F(10, 301) = 25.02$, $p < 0.05$). Both direct and indirect training methods positively influenced utilization, with standardized coefficients of 0.52 and 0.22, respectively. The findings underscore the importance of regular, targeted user training to enhance OPAC engagement. The study recommends intensified training initiatives for postgraduate students to optimize library resource access.

Keywords: OPAC utilization, user training, postgraduate students, private universities, South-West Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of digital library systems has revolutionized resource discovery, with the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) emerging as an indispensable tool in modern academic libraries (Apotiade, Nwobu, & Oyewole, 2016). OPAC provides a streamlined interface for locating books, journals, e-resources, and other materials through various access points such as author, title, subject, and keywords (Atanda & Ekeh, 2021). Its utility extends beyond traditional library boundaries, enabling remote access via internet-enabled devices, thereby supporting the academic pursuits of postgraduate students.

However, despite the technological advancements and investments in OPAC infrastructure, underutilization persists (Abdulqawiyu, Farouk, & Isal, 2023). Several factors contribute to this phenomenon, including inadequate user training, lack of awareness, perceived complexity, and infrastructural challenges. The critical role of user training in fostering effective OPAC utilization has been emphasized in various studies, highlighting that awareness alone is insufficient without the requisite skills to operate and interpret digital catalogues effectively (Kaur & Sharda, 2010; Abdul Ghani et al., 2014).

This study aims to fill the existing research gap by examining the impact of user training on OPAC utilization among postgraduate students in private universities within South-West Nigeria. Specifically, it assesses the extent of training provided, explores the relationship between training and usage, and identifies challenges faced by students in leveraging OPAC systems.

Literature Review

Concept of OPAC and Its Significance

OPAC is a computerized system that facilitates access to library bibliographic records via online interfaces, encompassing functionalities such as searching, reserving, renewing, and requesting inter-library loans (Aju & Foti, 2020). Effective utilization hinges on users' ICT literacy, including skills in searching, navigating, and evaluating digital resources (Mazumda, 2007; Anyoku, 2012). As a vital component of modern libraries, OPAC enhances resource discoverability, reduces search time, and promotes independent learning among postgraduate students.

Role of ICT Skills in OPAC Utilization

ICT skills—ranging from basic computer literacy to advanced search strategies—are fundamental to maximizing OPAC benefits (Basahuwa, 2020; Akanbi et al., 2018). Studies have established a positive correlation between ICT proficiency and OPAC usage (Jamogha, Jamogha, & Godwin, 2019; Tella, 2018). Conversely, deficiencies in these skills hinder effective resource discovery, leading to underutilization and frustration (Eserada & Okolo, 2019).

Impact of User Training on OPAC Usage

User training equips students with the necessary skills to operate OPAC systems efficiently. Kaur and Sharda (2010) advocate for comprehensive training programs that include orientation, tutorials, and hands-on sessions. Abdul Ghani et al. (2014) employed Kirkpatrick's evaluation model to demonstrate that training significantly improved users' knowledge, confidence, and application of OPAC functionalities. Similarly, Okoroma (2010) and Anozie (2020) underscore the importance of training in promoting effective OPAC use, citing that lack of instruction leads to errors and underuse.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to quantify the relationship between user training and OPAC utilization among postgraduate students. The population comprised 4,516 postgraduate students across eight private universities in South-West Nigeria, all of which operate functional OPAC systems. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select 355 participants, ensuring representation across various disciplines and levels.

Data were collected using a structured, validated questionnaire divided into four sections: demographic information, frequency of OPAC use, extent of user training received, and challenges faced. The instrument demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.92. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to profile respondents and inferential statistics—specifically, multiple linear regression—to examine the influence of user training on OPAC utilization at a 5% significance level.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile

The respondents were predominantly postgraduate students aged 25-35 years, with a balanced representation across faculties and levels.

OPAC Utilization Patterns

Findings indicated high engagement with OPAC, primarily for searching books, verifying availability, and locating resources on shelves. Notably, 78% of students reported using OPAC at least weekly.

Extent of User Training

A significant majority (85%) had participated in formal user training sessions, with both direct (library-led tutorials, orientation) and indirect (manuals, online guides) methods extensively employed.

Impact of User Training on OPAC Usage

Regression analysis revealed that user training significantly predicts OPAC utilization (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.17$, $F(10, 301) = 25.02$, $p < 0.05$). Both direct ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.05$) and indirect ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$) training methods positively influenced usage. These results align with prior research emphasizing training as a catalyst for effective resource discovery (Kaur & Sharda, 2010; Abdul Ghani et al., 2014).

Challenges Faced

Despite high training levels, students reported issues such as poor internet connectivity, system complexity, and inadequate technical support, which impede optimal utilization.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that user training significantly enhances OPAC utilization among postgraduate students in private universities in South-West Nigeria. Both formal and informal training methods contribute positively to resource discovery activities. However, infrastructural challenges and system complexities continue to hinder full engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Regular, targeted user training programs** should be institutionalized to continually upgrade students' skills.
2. **Enhanced infrastructural support**, including reliable internet access and technical assistance, is vital.
3. **Development of user-friendly OPAC interfaces** and comprehensive guides can further facilitate independent utilization.
4. **Orientation sessions** should be integrated into postgraduate induction programs to foster early familiarity with OPAC systems.

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