Chapter 7

User Awareness and Use of OPAC by Female Students of Faculty of Arts, Alagappa University:
A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

OPAC in present scenario provides a standard measure and insight into Alagappa University students. The objectives of the chapter are to discuss the searching options and the presentation of results along with various parameters. The frequencies of using the respondents in Online Public Access Catalogue used in the female students of Faculty of Arts in Alagappa University, Department of Tamil are 27(10.63%); Centre for Tamil Culture, 28 (11.02%); Dept. of Fine Arts, 29(11.42%), Department of English and Foreign Language 27(10.63%), Dept. of women studies 28; Department of Social Work, 29 (11.42%); Department of Economics and Rural Development, 29 (11.42%); Department of History, 28 (11.02%); Dept. of Library and Information Science, 29 (11.42%). The advanced facilities provided by these universities are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The Information Explosion has revolutionized the thinking and outlook of the librarians during the recent years. This phenomenon has triggered a series of changes posing corresponding challenges necessitating the re-examination of technical policies of library and information centres. Traditionally, one of the keys to retrieve the information has been the catalogue along with classification. The catalogue which started in the book form did not remain stable. It went on growing in its character and complexities over the years both in the physical and inner forms. The users of the library system expected certain advantage from the catalogues. But they have always remained incomplete and deficient.

Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)

Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) Library OPACs first emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s and have gone through several cycles of change and development. The basic purpose of the OPAC is to create a database of library holdings which provides an online catalogue to help users to identify and find resources easily (Theimer, 2002). In fact the OPAC was probably the inspiration for many of the cutting edge services we find on the Internet today. Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is an electronic catalogue which contains complete bibliographic and holding information of all items in the library. With the arrival of the Internet, most of the libraries have made their OPAC accessible from a server to users all over the world.

DEFINITIONS AND MEANING

Pierre Le Loarerl defined OPAC as" a database describing documents via bibliographic entries composed of fields some of which may be queried (essentially the author, title and subject fields for querying by the public, a query function providing access to the data base indexes: the user specifies the field lie criterian) via which he or she wishes to query the catalogue. Either that or the system implicitly chooses several criteria and then suggests the entries found under the different criteria, according to the result of the search and a set of referential or authority lists that allow a given item to be consistently expreamd in the same way, in the database and consequently retrieved in the same form."

Access Points and Level of Usage of OPAC

OPAC has been the most common tool for library users and librarians, and it will be also commonly used in digital libraries. It is obvious that well designed GUI improves user-friendliness especially for novice users. Various access points provided in OPAC enables the user to locate document as well as to filter the query for obtaining result of an advanced search. Advanced search provides details of the documents that satisfy particular features or characteristics. Question was asked to disclose the access points generally used by the respondents. Choices were given and users were allowed to specify the access points used by them. The most used search key is the author and is followed by the title and the subject. Words in the title were also found to be made use by many users while the usages of other points were too limited.

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