



## Use of Online Learning Resources by Students: The Case of Crawford University, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** In the past, access to library holdings was through cabinet boxes via card catalogue system which took time and warped users. Not anymore. From the comfort of one's remote location, uninterrupted access to learning resources through the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) system is now the standard. This study investigates the level of awareness and the use of OPAC services by the undergraduate students of Crawford University, Nigeria. Focus is on the challenges encountered and possible solutions. Findings from 115 respondents show that majority of the respondents, 81.8%, are not aware of the OPAC services, 97.3% heavily rely on the library staff and the shelf list to locate and retrieve library resources, 90.0% rely on their peers, 94.5% wander from one shelf to the other while 65.5% scatter the shelves before they find what they are searching for! Orientation and re-orientation of the students toward OPAC and publicity hold the key to a visible and optimum use of the system.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Use, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), Undergraduate Students, retrieve, resources.

## **Introduction**

Librarians use globally accepted rules and classification schemes to catalogue, classify and organize library holdings, but this varies with the type of library. Therefore, every library resource has a unique call number or class mark given to it to ensure that subjects are either grouped together, differentiated or separated accordingly to ensure easy access.

The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) became operational following the rapid advancement in information and communication technologies, automation, digitalization and development of social networks in 1970's. Before then, access to library holdings were basically through cabinet boxes, either by subject, title, or author. The cards were usually in 3x5 inches with the bibliographical information of the resources entered on them and filed into the cabinet boxes. They were the directories, the bibliographical list of holdings and pointers to where the resources are available in the library. Users were expected to search through the cabinet boxes or check the book catalogues to be able to locate what they wanted on the shelf.

OPAC is a software package for library holdings. It is an online database for learning resources held by a library or group of libraries,

which provide the platform for users to search and locate books and other materials that are physically available in the library. Many libraries do develop a software package for their OPAC services while others install or adapt existing ones to suit their collections. Kumar (2010) recommends that libraries should develop and maintain integrated OPAC with both internal and external resources as well as printed and other formats of knowledge. Some libraries' OPAC are internet-based and can be accessed globally. Others are installed on stand-alone computers and can be accessed remotely offline via an intranet. Tanja & Maja, (2008) note that while global online clients such as Elsevier, Google Scholar and Amazon are significant learning resource depositories operating on the Web 2.0 technologies, OPAC still has its own advantages in the era of internet.

For any university to thrive, there must exist students who learn, study and acquire knowledge. There must also be a group of staff (academic and non-academic) who instruct, teach, motivate and examine students as well as evaluate learning outcomes, carry out research and discover new ideas, theories and principles. However, the aims of the students and staff in a University environment cannot be fully achieved without a well-staffed and

stocked library that is saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that learning resources are acquired from time to time, processed and made accessible to users. Onuoha, Umahi & Bamidele (2013) note that no university program can be accredited without a well built and well stocked library. Lena (2008) discusses the usability of OPAC systems in large libraries with a color-coded classification system showing the status of the book like the green highlight for available books, yellow highlight for borrowed books and red highlight for reference copies.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Awareness promotes usability (Morah & Omojola, 2011) and accessibility with regard to the usage of library. Rarely can one benefit from resources he or she does not have prior knowledge of. The first of five laws proposed by respected Indian librarian Ranganathan (Srivastava, 1977) emphasizes the importance of every book but asserts that there are certain books in the library that would never get used simply because the user does not have knowledge of their existence and availability in the library. Moreover, the awareness is not limited to resources but also to the means by which those resources can be located. This work investigates OPAC's access to library resources in Crawford University, Nigeria.

The university did not do its own but had adapted an OPAC service for easy access to its collections. Two terminals points were made available for this purpose. The major searching options are subject, author, and title, International Standard Book Number (ISBN), International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) and publishers. The OPAC only provides access to the bibliographical record of the resources and not the full text of the content of the resources as indicated earlier. By making access to library holdings easy, OPAC saves the time of readers and eliminates all the shortcomings of catalogue boxes.

However, in spite of OPAC, students of some Nigerian universities that use the system have complained they find it difficult accessing books, journals and other materials through it. Crawford, a typical private university in Nigeria, is not exempt from the challenge. This elicited our interest to investigate the profile of users' awareness, use, challenges faced by the few who have access and suggest possible ways to tackle those challenges.

### **Rationale for the Study**

The advent of computer and ICT technologies brought about enormous changes in library practice. OPAC is one of the most widely used cataloguing formats. It enables librarians to store

bibliographic records in a database. Many university libraries and other institutions of academic orientation prefer the OPAC system because of the claims of its flexibility, up to date and easy to use functions as well stress-free maintenance. However, the claim of some students that they find it difficult to access the system counters the software developers' claims and put the system to the test. Incidentally, students constitute the largest set of OPAC's target users. The students' worries should be investigated with a view to finding solutions to them. Jia & Cathy (2008) in their research attempted to find answers to the following questions: Why is the OPAC ineffective? What can libraries and librarians do to deliver an OPAC that is as good as search engines to serve their users in a better way? In this study we domesticate some of these questions to Nigeria and particularly Crawford University as a way of widening solutions to the challenges and expanding the literature on the subject.

### **Research Questions**

To support the objectives of this research, four research questions were formulated thus:

- What is the extent at which students of Crawford University are aware of the OPAC service?
- What are the methods used by students of Crawford

University in retrieving resources from the University Library?

- What are the challenges faced by students of Crawford University when using the OPAC?
- What are the possible solutions to the challenge affecting the awareness and use of the OPAC by students of Crawford University?

### **Literature Review**

Sales (2004) affirms that the card catalogue was the most widely used type of catalogue until the early 1990s. Entries were divided into author cards, title/series cards, and subject cards and alphabetically arranged within each category. Studies by Kao (2001) reveal that the OPAC provides wider access, since users can retrieve information from any participating library or even search online from their home computer. Madu (2004) perceives the OPAC as a system that allows the user to quickly and effectively search the computer-held files of the library/libraries. According to Sanni & Idioidi (2004), OPAC enhances cataloguing procedures in libraries, thereby making the retrieval information resources more effective. Aina (2004) states that OPAC is the most modern form of library catalogue, whereby bibliographic records of all the documents in a collection are stored in the computer memory disk. Guha

& Saraf, (2005) add that the system allows users to access resources of libraries, publishers, and online vendors with ease.

Ruzegea (2012) describes the awareness of OPAC as the knowledge of it, stressing that this is the first step to the usage of literature materials and other relevant information inside and outside the library. This view is supported by Oresanya et al. (2017). Nisha & Naushed (2011) describe the awareness of OPAC as the degree of users' knowledge and availability of the services and the extent made use of them. Fati & Adetimirin (2015) emphasize that setting up an OPAC without the target user being sensitized about the purpose, functions, and benefits can be considered a waste of resources. To corroborate this, Ebiwolate's study (2010) reveals that majority of the undergraduate students in Niger Delta University, Nigeria were not aware of the library catalog and its uses. Another research carried out on Babcock University by Bamidele, [Omeluzor](#), [Onoyeyan & Aluko-Arowole](#) (2014) reveals that 71.4% of the respondents were not aware that they could retrieve call numbers of resources they needed before going to the library.

Fabunmi & Asubiojo (2013) investigated the awareness and use of OPAC by Students of Obafemi

Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (in Nigeria) and found out that 68.7% of respondents were aware of the OPAC service but only 19.8% actually used it. About 51.9% undergraduate and 16.2% postgraduate students did not use OPAC at all, owing to irregular electricity supply, network failure and shortage of OPAC terminals.

The study of Onuoha, Umahli & Bamidele, (2013) on the use of OPAC among final year students of Redeemers University (RUN) and University of Agriculture (UNAAB) in Nigeria shows that 75.38% and 49.5% from RUN and UNAAB respectively did not use OPAC. Mulla and Chandrashekara (2009) investigated why target users did not use OPAC. Their report shows that 91.06% complained of shortage of terminal point in the library while 55.69% were not interested due to lack of awareness of the OPAC service. Asari & Amita (2008) conducted a study on awareness and use of OPAC in five Delhi libraries and discovered that not many of the users were aware of the expert search function in the system. The research carried out by Mansor (2007) on *Heuristic Evaluation of Interface Usability for a Web-based OPAC* at the IIUM University Library discovered that there was a lack of visibility of interface status in IIUM Web PAC interface. Mansor also notes that the most obvious weakness of the interface is

the lack of a proper messaging system to inform users on the system's status during delays, as reported by 60% of respondents.

Bemidele, Omeluzor, Onoyeyan & Aluko-Arowole (2014) state that the awareness and use of OPAC are low and attribute the problem to unstable software application, erratic power supply, and insufficient funds to support automation projects. In the same vein, Fabunmi & Asubiojo (2013) outline irregular power supply, network failure and the shortage of computer systems designated for OPAC as inhibiting factors against the use of OPAC. Yusuf (2012) identifies lack of awareness in the community of library users, low familiarity with the use of software, shortage of terminals and poor electricity supply among others as the hindrances to the use of OPAC. Ifijeh (2011) recommends publishing and distribution of handbills, placing posters in strategic places, mailing list programs, use of billboards and library awareness programs for all students to boost users access.

## Method

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The undergraduate students of Crawford University constituted the population of the study. There were approximately 1,200 undergraduate students as at April, 2017 when this information was sourced from the Registry of the university.

Stratified random sampling technique was deployed to select 10% of the total population, bringing the total sample size to 120. This figure correspondent to the copies of structured questionnaire that were administered, 115 were returned, out of which, only 110 were found useful for the investigation. The questionnaire was titled the *Awareness and Use of OPAC services in Crawford University Library*. It had two sections. The section A captured the demographic data while section B consisted of variables on awareness and use of OPAC services. We agreed that simple percentages were good enough to exhibit the outcome expected.

**Data Presentation**

**Table 1: Frequency of questionnaire representing respondents' department**

Departments	<i>f</i>	%
Mass Comm.	7	6.4
Pol. Sci. & Int. Rel.	14	12.7
Accounting & Fin.	15	13.6
Economics	9	8.2
Bus. Admin.	5	4.5
Sociology	5	4.5
IRPM	9	8.2
Computer Sci/ ICT	7	6.4
Physics/ Elect	5	4.5
Bio. Chemistry	7	6.4
Micro Biology	13	11.8
Geology	6	5.5
marketing	4	3.6
public administration	4	3.6
Total	110	100.0

Table 1 indicates that the departments of *Accounting and Finance* had the highest number of respondents with 15 (13.6%) among the 14 departments in this study, the

departments of *Geology* and *Marketing* had the least number of respondents with 6 and 4 respectively.

**Table 2: Frequency of questionnaire retrieved from the colleges**

<i>Colleges</i>	<i>f</i>	%
CBSS	71	64.5
CNAS	39	35.5
Total	110	100.0

Table 2 indicates that College of Business and Social Sciences (CBSS) had the highest respondents

with 71 (64.5) while the College of Natural and Applied Sciences had 39 (35.5) respondents.

**Table 3: Frequency of questionnaire showing students level**

Students Level	<i>f</i>	%
100	7	6.4
200	23	20.9
300	47	42.7
400	33	30.0
Total	110	100.0

Table 3 indicates that 300 level students have the largest number respondents 47 (42. %) while the

100 level students have the least respondent 7 (6.4%).

**Table 4: Awareness of OPAC services**

	Variables	Yes	%	No	%
1.	I am aware that Crawford University Library offers OPAC services	33	30.0	77	70.0
2.	I use the OPAC to locate resource in the library	9	8.2	101	91
3.	I am not aware of OPAC services in Crawford University Library	90	81.8	20	18.2
4.	I am aware of OPAC services but not familiar with its operations	29	26.4	81	73.6

Table 4 above clearly indicates that 90 (81.8%) of the respondents were

not aware of the existence of OPAC services in the library.

**Table 5: How do you access and retrieve materials from Crawford University Library?**

	Variables	Yes	%	No	%
1.	I seek assistance from the librarian	107	97.3	3	2.7
2.	I use the shelf list	107	97.3	3	2.7
3.	I search through from one shelf to another until I get what I want.	104	94.5	5	4.5
4.	I seek help from my peers	99	90.0	11	10.0
5.	I scatter the shelves until I get what I want.	72	65.5	38	34.5



Table 5 reveals that 107 (97.3 %) retrieve library materials through the

assistance of librarians and shelf list respectively.

**Table 6: What are the challenges affecting the use of OPAC services**

	Variables	Yes	%	No	%
1.	I don't usually get feedback on my searches	60	54.5	50	45.5
2.	Inadequate access terminal points	97	88.2	13	11.8
3.	The OPAC is not user- friendly	95	86.4	15	13.6
4.	Instability power supply	104	94.5	6	5.5
5.	Inadequate users' education and orientation programs	106	96.4	4	3.6
6.	Why the OPAC? Google solves all my academic problems	103	93.6	7	6.4
6.	Lack of technical support	92	83.6	83.6	83.6
7.	Network failure	102	92.7	8	7.3
8.	The OPAC requires user ID and password and I don't know the user ID and password	103	93.6	7	6.4

Table 6 reveals that 106 (96.4%) of the respondents agreed that inadequate user education and orientation programs constitute the major threats to the use of OPAC. 104 (94.5) attributed their hindrances in use of OPAC to lack of adequate electric power supply. 103 (93.6%) claimed that Google solved their academic content search, so no need for OPAC. This is in spite of the claim that doubts search engines in this capacity (Omojola, 2012) Another 103 (93.6) revealed that the challenge they had

with the OPAC was that the OPAC required user ID and password and they did not provide them. 102 (92.7) indicated that their inability to use the OPAC was as a result of network failure; 97 (88.2%) blamed the inability to use OPAC on inadequate access terminal points, 95 (86.4%) claimed OPAC was of no use because the system was not user-friendly, while 60 (54.5%) attributed their grouse to unproductive outcome in their previous searches on OPAC.

**Table 7: Possible solutions to the challenges of awareness and use of (OPAC) in Crawford University Library?**

	Statements	Yes	%	No	%
a.	Organize regular and continuous user education	104	94.5	6	5.5
b.	Teach the Use of OPAC as part of GST course in one hundred level	106	96.4	4	3.6
d.	Publish and circulate memo among the students on step by step approach on how to use OPAC services,	103	93.6	7	6.4
e.	Place public notices informing the students about the existence of OPAC services in bulletin boards and strategic places around the campus	104	94.5	6	5.5
F	Compulsory library user's education programs for all new students	108	98.4	2	1.6

The result in table 7 clearly indicates that majority of the respondents supported the suggestions presented as the required solution to the challenges affecting the awareness and use of OPAC in Crawford university, Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

As a recap, the students of *Accounting and Finance* department had the highest number of respondents with 15 (13.6%) among the 14 departments in this study. *College of Business and Social Sciences (CBSS)* had the highest respondents with 71 (64.5%) while the *College of Natural and Applied Sciences* had 39 (35.5%) respondents. 300 level students had the largest number of respondents 47 (42. %). From the findings, 90 (81.8%) of the respondents were not

aware of the existence of OPAC services in the University library. These findings largely uphold those of Ebiwolate (2010) which revealed that majority of the undergraduate students in Niger Delta University were not aware of the library catalogue and its uses. They also validate the claims of Bamidele, Omeluzor, Onoyeyan & Aluko-Arowole (2014) on the ignorance of respondents. Their report had shown that 140 (71.4%) of their respondents were not aware that they could retrieve call numbers of books they would need on OPAC before going to the library.

The result of the research further shows that 107 (97.3 %) retrieved library materials through the assistance of librarians and shelf list respectively. This also supports the findings of Kannapanavar & Manjunatha (2010) that 48.8% of

the users consulted the librarian and library staff to locate documents in the library. This means that 104 (94.5%) searched through from one shelf to another until they got what they wanted, 99 (90.0%) sought help from their peers, while 72 (65.5%) would get the shelves scattered until they got what they wanted. All these could be attributed to the suggestion that the students were not comfortable or satisfied using the OPAC services. This finding also supports the claims of Onuoha, Umahli & Bamidele (2013) that revealed poor OPAC utilization among respondents from RUN (75.38%) and UNAAB (49.55%) where almost half of the study respondents confirmed that they did not use the OPAC at all.

The result in Table 7 indicates that majority of the respondents supported the suggestions presented as the required solution to the challenges affecting the awareness and use of OPAC in Crawford university. The result was in line with Ifijeh (2011) who suggested publishing and distribution of handbills, placing posters in strategic places, milling list programs, use of billboards and library awareness programs such as library week or library orientation for all incoming students. The result also corroborates with the findings of Ebiwolate (2010) who recommended that there should be high-quality user education;

orientation programs and demonstrations on the use of catalogue as the solution to the problems encountered by library user in using the catalogue.

It is evident that the findings of this study align succinctly with those of several studies that have been cited. The question then arises: what have university authorities in Nigeria done to address the issues raised in these findings? Literature is scanty on the efforts at addressing these issues. In the event that some universities have done some work in solving the problems associated with OPAC, then the findings on the efficiency of the policies and actions that have been formulated and executed to this end should be published and made public. This is necessary to enable scholars and observers properly evaluate those policies and actions to determine how reliable they are and whether they can be adopted elsewhere or not.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. Lack of awareness remains the major reason for the low level of OPAC utilization by the respondents. Sensitization programs such as, orientation talks, users' education, demonstrations on the use of OPAC, publishing and

- circulating handbills, placing adverts on boards and digital screens (Morah & Omojola, 2014) in public and strategic places around the campus, banners and radio jingles should be adopted to create awareness. Hopefully many universities have radio stations that can help tremendously in this regard.
2. Library staff should be trained and re-trained to handle the issues of technical know-how.
  3. Standby generator should be acquired to handle the issues of power failure.

4. More terminal access points should also be made available to eliminate the challenges of queuing;
5. OPAC software should be designed in a simple way in order to make it user-friendly.
6. In the event that efforts have been made to tackle the challenges that have been identified, the time is now for scholars to explore these efforts and make their findings public.

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