

**ASSESSING THE ROLE AND POSITION OF THE ONLINE PUBLIC ACCESS  
CATALOGUE AT SAM JONAH LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study examines the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) at the Head Library of the University of Cape Coast as an information seeking tool. The study aimed to find out the role the OPAC at the library plays in the information seeking pursuits of students and their general awareness and impressions about the facility. The descriptive survey design was used as the methodology with the population of the study totaling 1000. A simple random sampling of 110 students was chosen to represent the population. Results indicated the role the OPAC plays in facilitating access to information resources and publicizing same to outsiders. While the findings show students' awareness of the existence of the OPAC, it was revealed that the OPAC facility does not enjoy widespread use in the library. Infrastructural issues and lack of relevant skills were deemed to be some of the challenges preventing an optimum use of the facility. The study recommends the involvement of students in the search process and the provision of instructional materials to enhance students' search skills generally.

Keywords: Online Public Access Catalogues, Information Seeking, Library Automation, Cataloguing.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Academic libraries in the opinion of Entsua-Mensah (2015), are libraries attached to higher education institutions and mandated to serve the curricular needs of students, faculty members and staff of the parent institution (college or university). The main function of the academic library is to support the teaching, learning and research activities of the institution. It develops its collection of resources based on the programmes offered in the institution. Academic libraries in Ghana are made up of University libraries, College libraries and Polytechnic libraries. Among the services provided by academic libraries are reference services, lending services, inter library lending and document delivery services, electronic support services, reprographic services and user education (Entsua-Mensah, 2015). All these services are geared towards aiding the user find the information required for their academic work.

The last three decades have brought about noticeable changes in the whole landscape of information seeking in academic libraries. The revolution in computers and technology in the 1980's and early 1990's ushered in new and better ways of creating and preserving information. Web publishing and searching technology born as a consequence of the revolution in information and communication technology, facilitated and accelerated the access to information to a great extent. Libraries which have traditionally being the reservoirs of knowledge and intermediaries for disseminating or propagating knowledge, correspondingly adapted and automated most of their operations. The ubiquitous nature of the impact of information and communication technology on the librarianship profession has been attributed to as the reason for the proliferation, adoption and use of various integrated library management systems. These systems have radically changed the way and manner the library's operations are carried out and informed the decision of most academic libraries to convert their library catalogues from their earliest

forms like the card, sheaf, microform and book into online digital catalogues popularly referred to as Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC). Attempts have also been made to digitize print collections and as a result make all of the library's resources accessible to patrons on their websites and other electronic platforms (Jian, 2013).

Academic libraries have always been the first point of call for people who have a need for educational information. Thus, the satisfaction of users' information needs and knowledge improvement has always been one of the core mandates of academic libraries. In the execution of this crucial mandate, various information seeking aids have been engaged over the years with the objective of assisting users and clients of the library to access the collection of academic libraries that usually run into the hundreds of thousands mainly as a result of the varied fields of study they seek to serve.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Sam Jonah Library receives a lot of visitors daily. These visitors are the users of the library and they visit the library to seek information for their academic and research pursuits. The library in its quest to meet the information seeking objectives, provide many aids to its collection. These include the library catalogue, the subject index, bibliographies and many more.

However library users are usually seen approaching the reference desk for basic information and enquiries. It must be said that approaching the reference desk with enquiries is in itself not a bad thing, however it is also a fact that the library invests quite a sizeable portion of its already dwindling budget on the provision of aids that can assist the library user be independent to some extent in his search for information. Popular among these aids is the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). The minimal use of the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) therefore

defeats the concept of self- help and independence in the Sam Jonah Library and rather results in long queues at the reference desk for basic information. Krubu and Osawaru (2010) lay this problem to bare more plainly when they said library patrons shy away from OPAC most of the time because they lack the search skills necessary to interrogate the catalogue efficiently.

The minimal to virtually non-use of the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) has been a problem that has bedeviled the Sam Jonah Library for quite some time. It has indeed led management to sometimes question the need to continuously invest and maintain the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) when the statistics of its usage is not encouraging. Adeleke and Olorunsola (2007) are of the opinion that classification and cataloguing online is an expensive venture especially in our side of the world and as such library management must ensure that their implementation have positive effects on the other operations of the library. The non use of the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) ultimately tend to create problems and frustrations at the reference desk as a result of the pressure that is piled on that section and these unfortunately are the same problems and frustrations the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) was instituted to alleviate.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study seeks to:

- To determine the level of public awareness of the availability of the OPAC.
- To determine the usefulness of the OPAC in information seeking in academic libraries.
- To reveal how user-friendly the interface is.
- To investigate the challenges of using the OPAC as a search aid.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The practice of cataloguing and classification is pervasive in many libraries. Its essence is even more pronounced in academic and university libraries as a result of the magnitude of their collections and the need to bring some form of organization into such huge collections. Tanui (1992) defines cataloguing practically as the compilation of a list of documents in a library according to a set of standards so as to inform a library user of a material's availability and its document identifier if the material is available. Gorman (2004) perhaps gives a more contemporary definition of cataloguing. He defines it "as the logical assembling of bibliographic data into retrievable and usable records and is the one activity that enables the library to pursue its central missions of service and free and open access to all recorded knowledge and information". Rowley and Farrow (2000) identify the creation of a library catalogue as the most recognizable and viable end product of the entire cataloguing and classification process. In the opinion of Taylor and Tillet (2004), academic libraries provide bibliographies, library catalogues, subject indexes, finding aids and registers to their clients as information retrieval tools. They however agree with Aina (2004) that the library catalogue is the most used information retrieval tool in academic libraries.

The relevance of the library catalogue in the operations of the academic library is immense especially when viewed from the perspective libraries operating without a recognized library catalogue. In this regard, Reid (2003) opined that "a library without a catalogue is rather like a town without a sewer; you may get away with it for a while, but sooner or later something will start to smell. The bigger the town, the bigger the smell". Similarly, Foskett (as cited in Reid, 2003) puts the essence and role of the library catalogue more elegantly: he contends that "...instead of the individual store of knowledge, we have the corporate store: the library; instead

of the individual memory, we have the corporate memory: library catalogue and other bibliographical tools. And just as the individual whose memory fails him cannot pass on wanted information when it is needed, so a library whose corporate memory (library catalogue) is inadequate will fail in its purpose”.

Library catalogues in academic libraries have evolved from its earlier forms such as card, book, sheaf, microfiche and microform to the current computer access or online form enabled by the library automation initiative brought about by the introduction of information and communication technology into librarianship (Rowley & Farrow, 2000).

Most academic libraries in Ghana have automated their operations or at least are in the process of doing so. The shift to the online catalogue has been perverse and rightly so as a result of the advent of technology. Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) have become popular as a result of the advantages they have over the other forms of library catalogues. Online catalogues tend to give instant feedback, are quite easy to update and are not subject to the wear and tear that are reminiscent of the card and book catalogues. The cost of its operation and maintenance however prevents many academic libraries with limited budgets from benefitting from the role it plays in cataloguing in academic libraries (Amekuedee, 2005)

Fathahi (1995) provides a comprehensive outline of the areas the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) surpasses the other forms of library catalogue especially the card catalogue which is generally regarded as the most reliable of them all with outside the online catalogue.

Firstly, Fathahi (1995) alludes to the fact that online catalogues tend to be more beneficial than the other forms of library catalogue in the aspect of bibliographic records and Machine Readable Catalogue (MARC) formats. MARC in serving as a standard for the identification, storage and

communicating of cataloguing information is more akin to the online catalogue than the other forms of the library catalogue. The use of the MARC format has enabled more precision and better flexibility than is possible under the other forms of library catalogue. This also allows the records on the OPAC to be created and tailored according to the specific needs of the library without compromising the quality of the cataloguing work done or circumventing the standards guiding the process of cataloguing. The online catalogue through its use of the MARC format also makes it significantly easier to accommodate bibliographic records from other sources like bibliographic utilities, shared cataloguing systems and OPACs of other members of a Union catalogue with minimal effort.

Again, online catalogues tend to support a more complex and yet more flexible structure than the other forms of library catalogue. Through the improvements in earlier versions of the online catalogue specifically the first generation catalogues, that were more or less an electronic version of the card catalogue, the modern versions of the OPAC provide features such as the granting of access to circulation information, status information and holding information (Fathahi, 1995).

Fathahi (1995) argues that perhaps the area where there is a vast difference between the online catalogue and the other forms of library catalogues is in the searching, retrieval and display of bibliographic records. While the card, book, sheaf and microform catalogues offers self-evident mediums with a clear physical existence, the online catalogue provides the user with a system to interact with although users usually find it difficult grasping the workings of the system initially.

Potter (2002) in defending his preference for the online catalogue opined that the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) should be seen as a lens for exploring a much greater bibliographic universe than a single library could ever hope to contain. He identifies three functions of the



Online Public Access Catalogue as the library catalogue function, the circulation control function and the authority control function.

The library catalogue function of the OPAC is effectively an attempt to improve upon the functionalities of the earlier forms of the library catalogue especially the card catalogue. The library catalogue function of the OPAC goes beyond the capabilities of the card catalogue by providing features like keyword access, labeled screens, Boolean searching and interactive instruction. Notwithstanding these new features that accompanied the OPAC, the fundamental thrust of the library catalogue function is to inform users and patrons of the availability and unavailability of books in the collection of the library. Thus the library catalogue function is restricted to the provision of bibliographic information just as can be found under the card, book, sheaf and microform catalogues. This function translates into the OPAC informing users of the availability of books and where they can be located if available. The library catalogue function thus falls short of the real need of the user who needs accessibility to information resources and not just information pertaining to their availability (Potter, 2002).

The OPAC in an attempt to satisfy the real need of users perform the circulation control function. This second function of the OPAC involves the linking of the OPAC database and the circulation system. This function enables the OPAC to provide not only bibliographic information, but also the provision of status information at the same point. The circulation control function thus eliminates the deficiencies of the library catalogue function and provides information regarding availability as well as accessibility to the information resources in the collection of the library (Potter, 2002).

Potter in articulating the third function of OPACs points to an agreeable fact that bibliographic information and status information is useless if the user cannot find different books by the same author, different books on the same subject required or different books with similar titles and authored by different authors. This need necessitated the authority control function which provides a means for cross referencing variant forms of titles, author names and subjects to the correct and universally used forms and ensures that similar information resources are pooled together (Potter, 2002).

The functions of the OPAC have afforded users of the online catalogue many advantages as set out by Potter in 2002.

According to Potter (2002), Online Public Access Catalogues offer interactivity. This is the ability of the catalogue system to allow communication between the user and the catalogue system in a conventional mode. This interactivity is what really sets apart the online catalogue from the other forms of the library catalogue which do not offer such interactions with users. Seal et al (2000) in their exposition of interactivity as a feature of online catalogues said “Online catalogues can be reactive and be able to respond to the user in an intelligent way. This is indicated by searching options, correction of operational errors, suggestion of alternative items which might particularly match the search criteria and guiding the user through longer searches. The reader can then be given help and feedback from the system itself without the need to consult library staff”.

Another advantage of the Online Public Access Catalogue is its ability to identify user input errors and provide user assistance. Seal (2000) asserts that online catalogues can sometimes be

unforgiving on errors and that this can consequently be ascribed to computers' general weakness with dealing with mistakes.

Breeding (2007) contends that for users to get maximum satisfaction from the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) in terms of their information seeking pursuits, two broad strategies need to be considered and engaged. The first is a set of strategies and actions that seek to improve the OPAC itself in terms of its core functionalities, features and abilities. These set of strategies are centered on the OPAC facility itself. The second set of strategies and actions are centered on the users of the OPAC facility and are geared towards the training of users in the interrogation of the OPAC and the fine tuning of search strategies and techniques that are more user oriented and inclined, easy to grasp and at the same time capable of providing desired results (Breeding, 2007).

### **Challenges of Using The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)**

The introduction of the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) into the operations of the library as a direct consequence of the advent of information and communication technology has had beneficial implications on the information seeking activities of users and patrons. The OPAC has indeed enabled patrons to search and retrieve information from the library without the assistance of a librarian. This has strengthened the case for the concept of 'Self-Help' and independence to some extent in academic libraries (Hildreth, 2000).

In spite of the outstanding role the OPAC plays in information seeking in academic libraries there are several factors that militate against the OPAC and have culminated to the current situation of dire under-utilization of the OPAC facility.

Adeleke and Olarunsola (2007) identified power failures, internet down times and slow cyber speed or low bandwidth as infrastructural constraints that militate against the OPAC as an information seeking aid. The unreliable power situation in Ghana and Africa to a very large extent has led to the situation where the OPAC is often shut down and incapable of providing the service for which it was instituted. Then again the low bandwidth and its associated frequent internet down times, which unfortunately are characteristic of majority of African countries has contributed to the minimal to virtually non-existent use of the OPAC. Internet connectivity is not yet a public utility in Ghana and many other African countries and this makes it very expensive. The OPAC being a facility that requires consistent internet connectivity to operate is as such rendered incapacitated and useless in the opinion of the patrons.

Another constraint of the OPAC identified by (Adeleke and Olarunsola, 2007) is the lack of the relevant skills needed to effectively interrogate the online catalogue. Mercun and Zumer (2008) found it unsurprising, the fact that users found it difficult interrogating second generation catalogues when it has been put on record by (Fathahi, 1995; Akeroyd, 2004) that users lacked the skills needed to use the simplest form of the library catalogue, the card catalogue effectively.

Contemporary models of OPACs like the second generation catalogues and the next generation catalogues require users and patrons to have some bit of familiarity with information retrieval techniques and skills as a result of the features that accompany these contemporary OPAC models. The lack of these relevant search skills has led to the underutilization of the OPAC and the lack of appreciation of the role OPACs play in information seeking in libraries (Krubu & Osawaru, 2010).

Mercun and Zumer (2008) identified the proliferation of web sources of information seeking as posing considerable challenges to the OPAC as a search aid. The authors acknowledging (Yu & Young, 2004 and Novotny, 2004) asserted that the continuous use of web sources of information has had an influence on users' mental models, their expectations, behaviours and strategies engaged in the interrogation of the OPAC. Novotny (2004) postulated that users get accustomed to the natural-language searching and other common practices on the web and expect the OPAC to function like their web counterparts. Finding the OPAC relatively difficult to use, unintuitive and ineffective in comparison to search engines and other web sources, users chose to look for their information elsewhere thereby casting the view of the OPAC as the most important information seeking aid in libraries into doubt. This struggle between the online catalogue and the web sources especially search engines is settled by a statement ascribed to Berkeley Professor Peter Lyman who is quoted by the Washington Post as having said "there's been a culture war between librarians and computer scientists". He adds that "the war is over and Google won".

Byrum (2008) draws attention to the innate weakness of the online catalogue that continues to pose great challenges to the OPAC facility. Users and patrons often register a hint of disappointment when they realize that the OPAC is only as good as providing bibliographic information for the location and retrieval of information resources in a library. The fact that OPACs do not provide direct physical access to information resources like other web sources like search engines and electronic databases continues to hamper the universal acceptance of the OPAC as an information retrieval tool.

Online Public Access Catalogues are also severely constrained by their inability to provide bibliographic access to information resources such as electronic journals, citation databases, full

text aggregations, online reference tools and other forms of remote access resources freely available to the user or available by subscriptions or licenses (Byrum, 2008).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive survey design under the Quantitative Approach was adopted as the methodology for the study. Questionnaire was the main data collection instrument used with a combination of closed ended and open ended questions. The population of the study included all categories of users who used the Sam Jonah Library for their information needs. The total population of the study was pegged at 1000 as evidenced by the number of visits the library receives averagely in a day. A sample size of 110 representing 11% of the population was selected to represent the population through a simple random sampling technique.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Out of the 110 questionnaires administered, 102 were retrieved putting the response rate of respondents to 92.73%. Data retrieved from respondents were analyzed by the use of simple frequencies, percentages and charts.

### **Background Information of Respondents**

The need to provide an overview of the respondents whose views and opinions formed the outcome of the study informed the decision to provide some background information regarding these respondents. To this end, the age and gender distribution of respondents as well as their length of use of the library were analyzed to bring perspective into the study.

## Gender Distribution

The study sought the opinions and viewpoints of 62 males and 40 females representing 60.78% and 39.22% respectively as depicted in the table below.

**Table 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents**

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Male          | 62            | 60.78%            |
| Female        | 40            | 39.22%            |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>102</b>    | <b>100%</b>       |

**Source: Field data 2018**

## Age Distribution of Respondents

The vast majority of the respondents engaged in the study were in the 20-29 age brackets which is reminiscent of the large numbers of undergraduates who patronize the Sam Jonah Library. Out of the 102 respondents, 56.86% were in 20-29 age brackets while 21.57% were in the 30-39 age range. The table below shows at a glance, the age distribution of the respondents engaged in the study.

**Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents**

| <b>Range</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 20 – 29      | 58            | 56.86%            |
| 30 – 39      | 22            | 21.57%            |

|              |            |             |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 40 – 49      | 10         | 9.81%       |
| 50 – 59      | 9          | 8.82%       |
| 60 and above | 3          | 2.94%       |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>102</b> | <b>100%</b> |

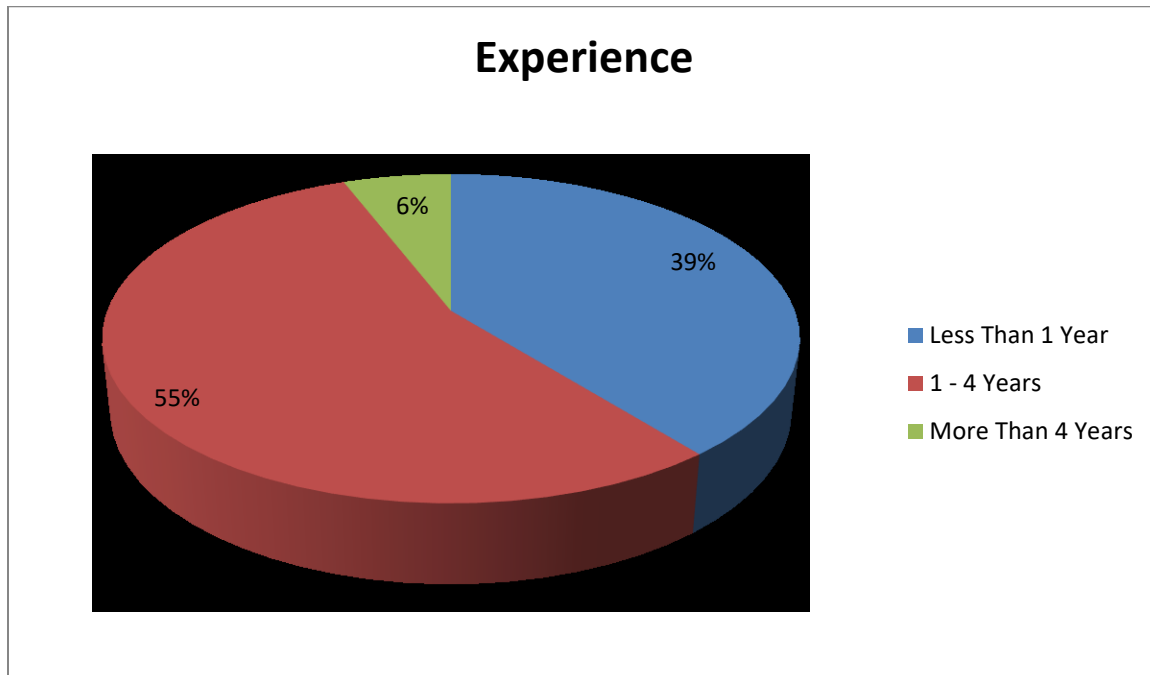
**Source: Field data 2018**

### **Experience (in years) over the use of the OPAC**

The study sought to seek the viewpoints of respondents who have used the library for their information seeking purposes and have a general idea of the existence of the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). From the figure below, it is apparent that 39.22% of the respondents have less than a year experience in the use the OPAC while 54.90% and 5.88% of the respondents have one to four years and more than four years experience respectively in the use of the OPAC at Sam Jonah Library. This is diagrammatically represented in the figure below.



**Figure 1: Experience (in years) over the use of the OPAC**



**Source: Field data 2018**

## **B. AWARENESS AND USE OF THE OPAC**

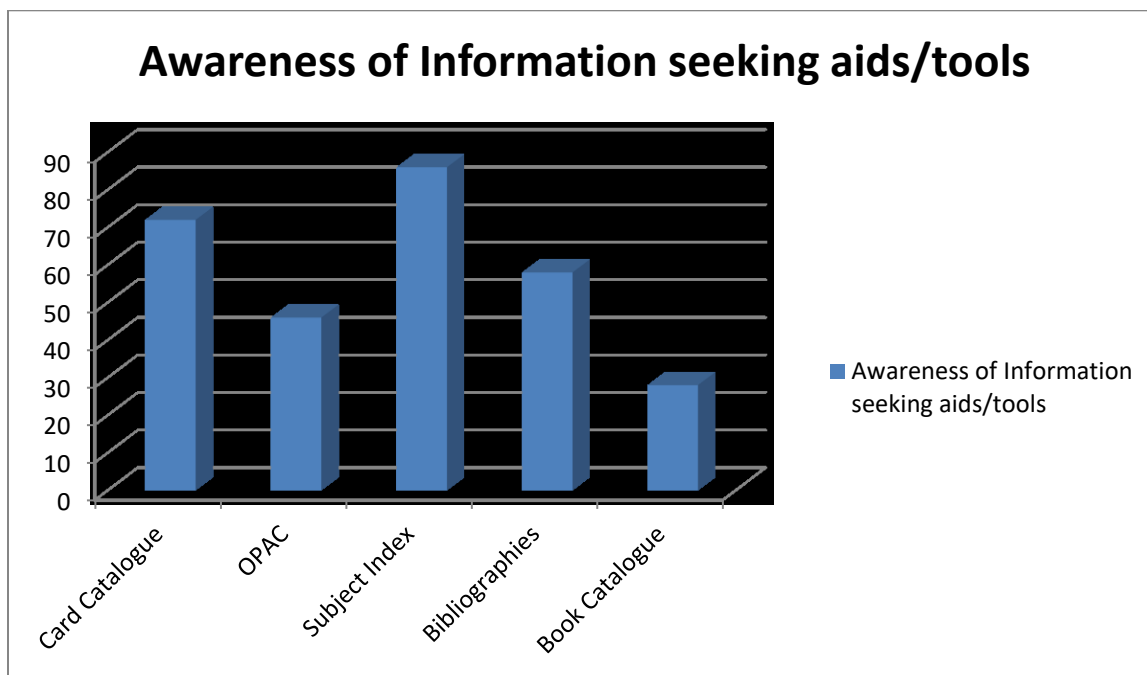
The study set out to determine the level of awareness and use of the OPAC among respondents with the view to ascertaining their opinions on the role OPACs play in information seeking in academic libraries as well as the challenges of using the OPAC as an information seeking aid.

### **Awareness of Information seeking aids and tools in Sam Jonah Library**

The Sam Jonah Library provides an array of information seeking aids and tools to facilitate the retrieval of information resources from the library. The figure below shows the users awareness of the various information seeking aids in the library. The figure shows that users are very

conversant with the subject index, card catalogue, bibliographies, Online Public Access Catalogues and the book catalogue with the subject index very popular among users. This is in conformity to the findings of Taylor and Tillet (2004) that academic libraries often publicizes their information seeking tools to ensure maximum use by users.

**Figure 2: Awareness of information seeking aids/tools**



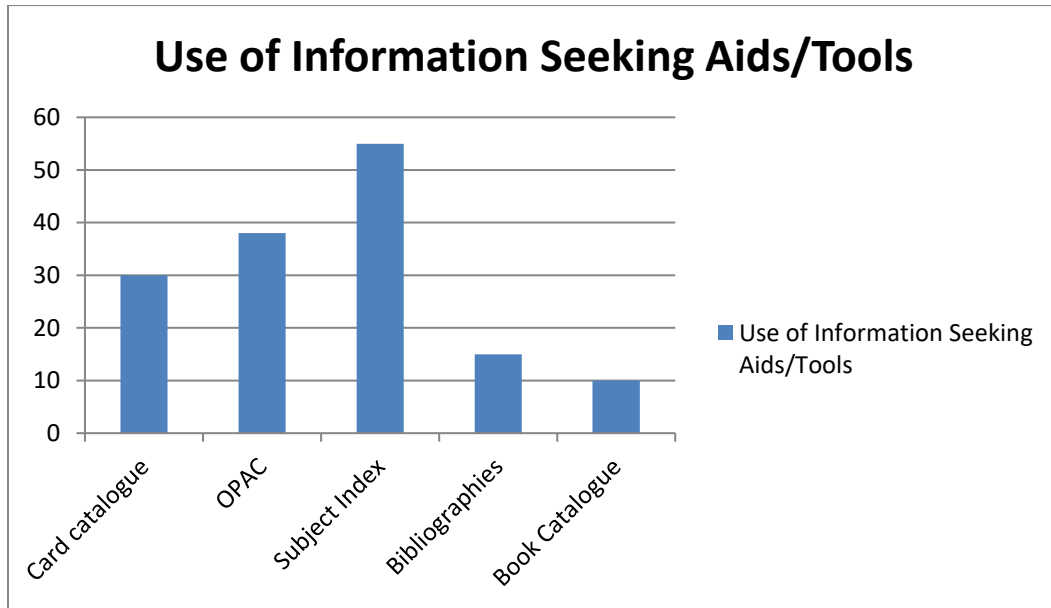
**Source: Field data 2018**

### **Use of Information Seeking aids and tools in Sam Jonah Library**

The information seeking aids provided by the library are used by users albeit in varying degrees. The figure below shows the extent of use of the information seeking aids indicated. The figure shows the subject index as the most used information seeking aid in the library followed by the Online Public Access Catalogue and the card catalogue. This contradicts the findings of Taylor

and Tillet (2004) who found that library catalogues are the most used information seeking tools in academic libraries.

**Figure 3: Use of information seeking aids/tools**

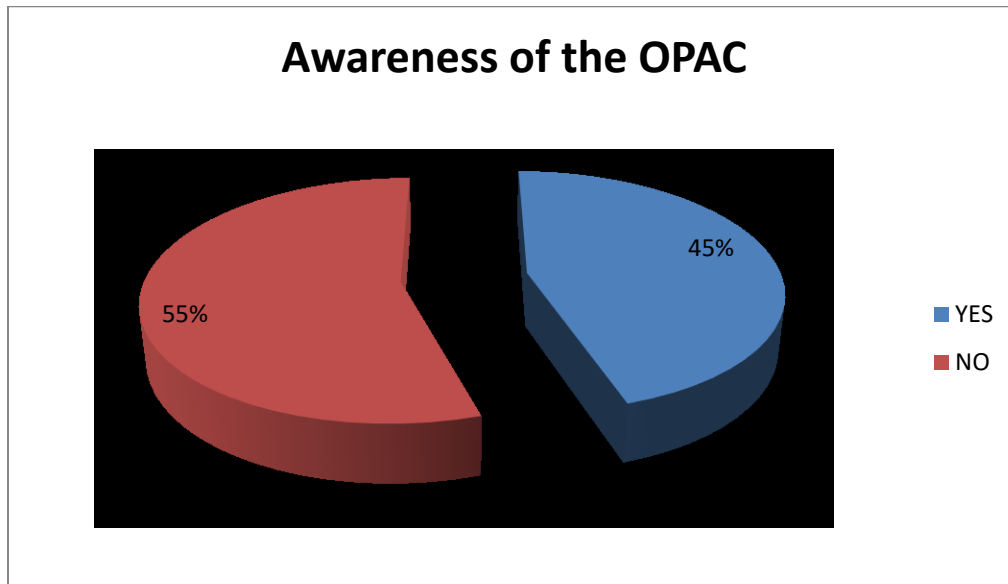


**Source: Field data 2018**

### **Awareness of the Presence of OPAC in Sam Jonah Library**

The study sought to determine the extent of awareness of users to the existence and operability of the Online Public Access Catalogue at the library. Out of the total respondents of 102, 46 representing 45.10% were aware of the existence of the OPAC in the library while 56, representing 54.90% were not aware of its existence and operability. This is depicted in the table below and mirrors the findings of Krubu and Osawaru, who found that most users of academic libraries more often are unaware of the existence of OPACs in these libraries.

**Figure 4: Awareness of the presence of OPAC in the library**

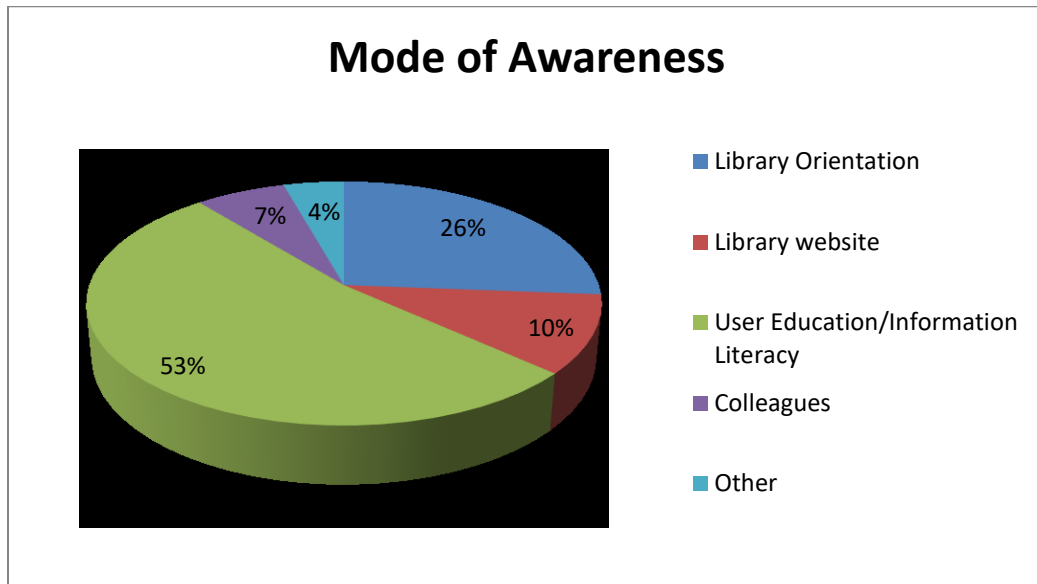


**Source: Field data 2018**

### **Knowing about the OPAC in Sam Jonah Library**

The study sought to find out the avenues through which respondents got to know about the availability of the OPAC in the library. From the 46 respondents who were aware of the presence of the OPAC in the library, 24 representing 52.17% got to know about the OPAC through user education provided through the Information Literacy programmes run in the university. A further 26.09% got to know through library orientation. Figure 5 shows other avenues that brought the existence of the OPAC to the notice of users of the library. This finding is in conformity to that of Adeleke and Olarunsola (2009) who found that user education remains the most effective way of publicizing the products and services of academic libraries to the users.

**Figure 5: Mode of awareness**



**Source: Field data 2018**

Out of the 46 respondents who were in the known of the existence of the OPAC in the library, only 21 representing 45.65% were aware of the possibility of accessing the OPAC outside the premises of the Sam Jonah Library with the remaining 25 (54.35%) not aware of this particular feature of the OPAC.

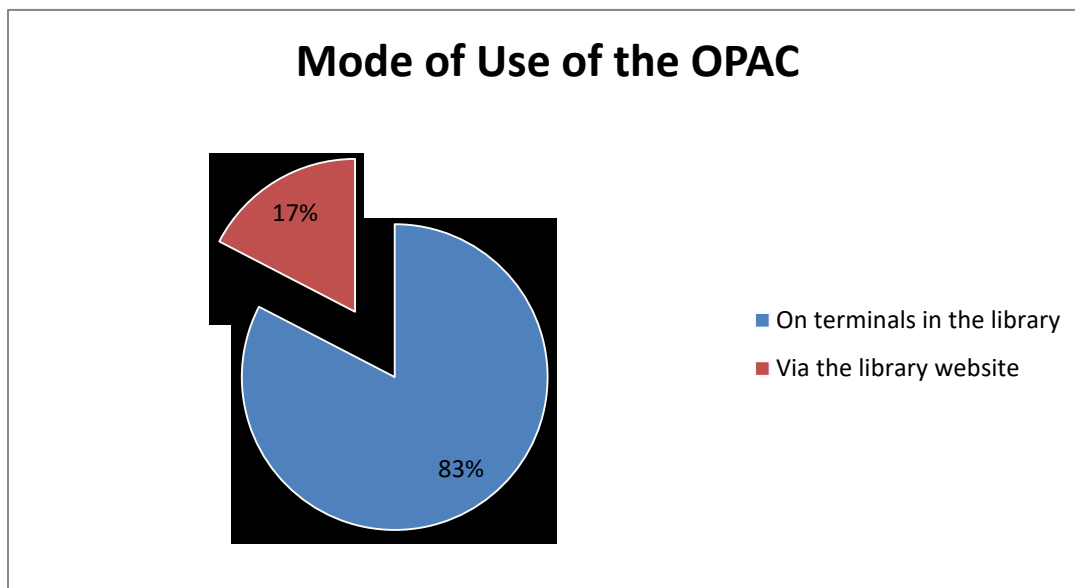
Again, it was revealed by the study that the vast majority of respondents, 38 out of 46, representing 84.78% were aware of the possibility of accessing the OPAC on terminals provided at various locations of the library while a small minority representing 15.22% were not conscious of this practice.

The OPAC at Sam Jonah Library is facilitated by the Koha Integrated Library Management System. The study revealed that only 43.14% of the 102 respondents were aware of the

Integrated Library Management System facilitating the OPAC of the library with the remaining 56.86% not aware of this fact.

The study also revealed that out of the 46 respondents who were aware of the presence of the OPAC in the Sam Jonah Library, only 38 representing 82.61% had actually used the OPAC before with the remaining 17.39% yet to use the OPAC for their information seeking purposes. It again became apparent that 18 out of the 38 representing 47.37%, who had actually used the OPAC before primarily accessed the OPAC on terminals in the library while the remaining 52.63% accessed the OPAC mainly through the library's website. This is shown diagrammatically in figure 6 below. This revelation corresponds to that of Krubu and Osawaru (2010) who found that patrons of academic libraries shy away from using the OPAC most of the time because of their apparent lack of the skills required to interrogate and use the OPAC facility effectively.

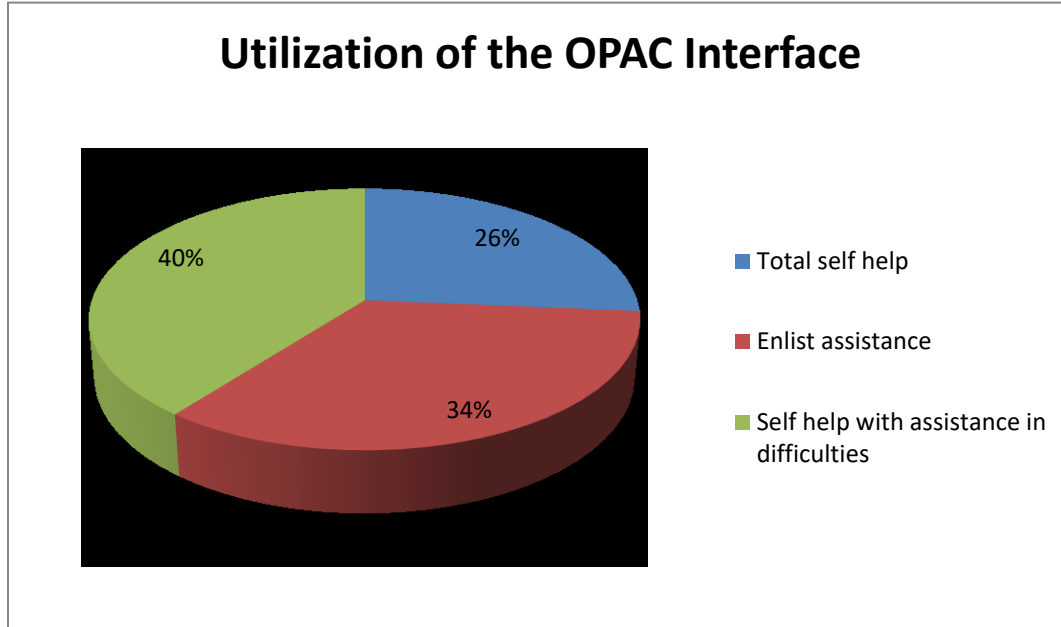
**Figure 6: Mode of use of the OPAC**



**Source: Field data 2018**

Again, some respondents indicated the enlisting of assistance from librarians in accessing and using the OPAC while some indicated their proficiency in using the OPAC without any assistance whatsoever. Out of the 38 respondents who had used the OPAC, 10 representing 26.32% were sufficiently proficient in the use of the OPAC to require no assistance whatsoever in the use of the OPAC. 13 of them, representing 34.21% indicated they need comprehensive assistance from librarians in order to use the OPAC while the remaining 39.47% indicated they use the OPAC themselves and enlist the assistance of librarians when they encounter difficulties. This is indicated in figure 7 below. This finding is supported by Mercun and Zumer (2008) who found that the inculcation of web 2.0 features in current generations of OPACs has made OPACs complicated to use for first time users and the not so technological savvy and as such users require some form of assistance in learning about the OPAC and interrogating it effectively.

**Figure 7: Utilization of the OPAC interface**



**Source: Field data 2018**

### **C. ROLE OF THE ONLINE PUBLIC ACCESS CATALOGUE**

The study in revealing the role the OPAC plays in information seeking in the Sam Jonah Library showed that majority of respondents identified the OPAC as a crucial tool for information seeking in academic libraries. Respondents agreed that the OPAC minimizes the time spent in seeking and retrieving information from the library. They identified the ability of the OPAC to direct users to a pool of related works from which a choice can be made as a significant function. Again, respondents identified the ability of the OPAC to broaden or narrow the search results for a user as another relevant role key to the information seeking or retrieval process. This is supported by Rowley and Farrow (2000) who found that the access points engaged by OPACs enable it to direct users to similar information resources.



#### **D. END USER OBSERVATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THE OPAC**

The OPAC at the Sam Jonah Library does not enjoy widespread use in the library. The study revealed that while 29 of the 38 respondents representing 76.32%, who had actually used the OPAC before found the OPAC at Sam Jonah Library user friendly, the remaining 23.68% of the respondents however did not find the OPAC as user friendly. The user friendliness of the OPAC however seemed to pale in comparison to that of commercial search engines as indicated by 68.42% of the respondents finding the interfaces of commercial search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing as more user friendly than OPACs. Conversely, 31.58% of the respondents found OPACs as more user friendly than commercial search engines. This is confirmed by Novotny (2004) who found that users after experiencing the use of commercial search engines tend to find OPACs less friendly to use than commercial search engines.

Respondents in proffering the reasons for their below par utilization of the OPAC at the Sam Jonah Library identified several challenges that constrain them in their quest to optimize the use of the OPAC. Issues identified by respondents as posing challenges to the use of the OPAC as an information seeking aid include unreliable internet connectivity and low bandwidth, low level of knowledge and skills needed in interrogating the OPAC and inadequate computer infrastructure that has led to inadequate terminals for the OPAC. This finding is mirrored by Adeleke and Olarunsola (2007) who similarly identified internet connectivity issues, power uncertainties and low level of required skills needed for interrogating the OPAC as some of the challenges of using the facility.

## **CONCLUSION**

Providing access to the collection of academic libraries has been achieved through a variety of initiatives. From predominantly manual information seeking aids like book catalogues, subject indexes and card catalogues, the emphasis has shifted to technology assisted information seeking aids notably the Online Public Access Catalogue. Evidence from the study indicates a clear under-utilization of the OPAC facility at the Sam Jonah Library. The existing state of affairs while not encouraging, shows the potential for the prospective exploitation of the OPAC of Sam Jonah Library. Antelma, Lynema and Pace (2006) delivered a punch line when they said web sources and search engines no matter how functional they may seem to users do not play the role OPACs play in information seeking in academic libraries. They just do not give the bibliographic information relevant to the location and retrieval of information resources in an academic library. OPACs always have the capacity to broaden their core functionalities to include those of the web sources and search engines, same cannot however be said of web sources.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered with the aim of elevating the role the Online Public Access Catalogue play in information seeking in the Sam Jonah Library and maximizing its utilization in the library.

Firstly, it is recommended that the number of terminals dedicated as OPAC terminals be increased exponentially while providing comprehensive signage to their locations.

Secondly, it is recommended that librarians stand ready and available to assist users in the use of the OPAC in retrieving their required information.

Again, the provision of audio and video tutorials to assist users new to the OPAC facility would enable users to interrogate the OPAC facility with some knowledge thereby increasing their rate of success.

It is also proposed that concerted efforts are made to improve internet connectivity which is fundamental to the unencumbered running of the OPAC facility.

Again it is recommended that the library takes concrete steps to publicize and create awareness about the existence of the OPAC facility in the library.

Finally it is proposed that premium be placed on the instruction of users on interrogating the OPAC preferably by involving them in the search process during both user education and regular attendance to users' queries.

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