

# **An Evaluation of the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) Utilization at Fountain University, Osogbo, Nigeria**

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**Bello, Mujidat Adeola**  
Fountain University, Nigeria

**Bakrin, Sirajudeen Femi**  
Fountain University, Nigeria

## **Abstract**

Online Public Access Catalogue gained traction in the developed world decades ago, while its adoption has gradually peaked in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. Just four years ago, the facility was installed at Fountain University Nigeria. Literature over time has shown that the availability of OPAC does not necessarily translate to use, hence this paper seeks to evaluate the level of usage of OPAC by students of Fountain University to contribute to ongoing discussions on better appreciation, effective implementation as well as the productive application of OPAC in libraries. The study adopted quantitative methods using a survey. Total sampling was employed using the entire nine hundred and eighty-two students as the sample size to give equal representation to all the departments and courses in the university, most importantly those that have few students. A questionnaire consisting of a set of close and open questions was designed as a research instrument to elicit data from the respondents. Five hundred and ninety (590) respondents returned the questionnaire which was further collated for further interpretation and analysis based on descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and percentages. The findings show a general awareness of the existence of OPAC devoid of deep appreciation of its essence and operations among other challenges. There is therefore a pressing need to widen the scope of user education and orientation classes to include all the intricacies.

## **Keywords**

Fountain University Library, OPAC utilization, user interface, student-clients

## **Introduction**

University is a high-level educational institution where students study for degrees and conduct intensive academic research. University library is a library attached to a higher education institution that serves two complementary purposes; supporting the school's curriculum, as well as research activities of the university faculty and students. University libraries are dedicated to aiding

### **Corresponding author:**

Sirajudeen Femi Bakrin, University Library, Fountain University, Osogbo, Nigeria  
Email: sf.bakrin@gmail.com

university education and teaching. The significance of the library as an information resource centre in the university system cannot be overemphasized. The university library is synonymous with the nucleus of the intellectual system of the university. To this extent, the quality of a university is measured by the services provided by its library. In the discharge of its duty, the university library acquires processes and stores relevant information materials that will serve the information needs of both staff and students of the institution. Additionally, an array of professional staff is always on hand to organize these available information resources to aid faculty and students in the retrieval process and use of these resources. The university library in its bid to ensure that information resources are made available and accessible to patrons displays its stock through the library catalogue; an organized set of bibliographic records of the library collection. The traditional library catalogue contains a bibliographic description of library resources done on a card and filed in a cabinet. The traditional system for information retrieval embraces the book, shelf-list, and card catalogues which enables users and library staff access to the information content of the library. Today, the emergence of Information Technology has brought about vicissitudes in the way information resources are accessed and retrieved through the use of online catalogue in libraries. The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) as a contemporary but pliant model of the catalogue which typically avails swift and revolutionary gateway to all documented data on a computer. It is a database that contains bibliographic information outlining the books, journals, and other reference materials possessed by the library or easily accessible over computer terminals. OPAC can be searched through additional access points different from those available in the traditional catalogue. Therefore, OPAC is an electronic library catalogue which provides bibliographic details about information resources in the library made accessible to the populace. Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is an interface of information retrieval system which assists information searchers to access resources of the library using several access points. OPAC is considered to be more efficient as it possesses several advantages over other forms of the catalogue.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Information resources in the library are meant for maximum exploration by the users. Obstacles to access these resources may come in the form of an inability to know what a library has on a particular subject or title. Locating materials in the library can also be frustrating or disturbing if there is no means of ensuring and assisting users in locating materials on the shelf, especially libraries with large collections. The introduction of KOHA library software in Fountain University Library (FUL) in 2015 had the onerous objective of simplifying the numerous routine tasks in the library. Furthermore, its OPAC was expected to ease the burden of discoverability of available literature and facilitate ease of access to the library collection; a hitherto near frustrating exercise for the

clients. Recent queries emanating from the patrons at the desks of both the Circulation and Reference librarians suggest that a challenge with the familiarity of the OPAC with the users is not completely over. The availability of OPAC does not necessarily translate to use, hence this paper seeks to ascertain the level of usage of OPAC by students of Fountain University.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to determine the efficacy of OPAC usage as an information retrieval tool. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the level of awareness of OPAC.
2. Assess the frequency of usage of OPAC by the users.
3. Find out the purpose for which they use OPAC.
4. Ascertain the level of satisfaction with OPAC use.
5. Identify the challenges faced by users when using the OPAC.

### **Significance of the Study**

In recent years, the information need of academic library clients has changed drastically. The proliferation of internet search engines poses a lot of challenges to the academic library, especially when many patrons inadvertently feel satisfied with the answers they find on the internet for their assignments, and they end up not taking advantage of the many quality resources in their libraries (Ukpebor, 2012). Before the advent of the Internet search engine, library catalogues served as the lone doorway for information-seekers. Mi and Weng (2008) revealed in their study that, just as the one-time industry giant Kodak has lost ground to digital photography, online search engines are gaining ground at the expense of the academic library.

Fortunately, OPAC came to fill this gap in information dissemination to the admiration of information professionals as well as library users. All along, academic librarians have devotedly and assiduously produced good cataloguing records for the public to utilize. They have diligently and faithfully educated and helped their faculty and students to locate proper library resources to fulfill their research needs and assignment requirements. Equally, literature has recorded a myriad of efforts geared towards enlightenment of the populace for better acquaintance. Therefore, it is now imperative for librarians to continuously engage robust discussion on better appreciation, effective implementation as well as the productive application of OPAC in libraries to ensure maximum and optimum use of these exclusive library resources.

## Research Questions

The research questions that will guide the study are:

1. What is the level of awareness of OPAC in Fountain University?
2. What is the frequency of usage of OPAC by students of Fountain University?
3. What are the reasons for which they use OPAC?
4. What is the level of satisfaction with OPAC use?
5. What are the challenges faced by users when using the OPAC?

## Literature Review

The concept of OPAC in academic libraries can be regarded as contemporary. Literature has shown that users of the library are satisfied with the use of OPAC as it eases their search for books in the library. Searching for a particular title or subject out of the array of books on the shelves can be frustrating and puzzling. Hence the introduction of the online catalogue has brought ease of locating information resources in the library. There have been several studies conducted on the use of OPAC in libraries. Ashokan and Dhanavandan (2015) surveyed the use of OPAC in Aalim Muhammed Salegh College of Engineering library revealing the overall satisfaction level of users in using OPAC. Similarly, Thanuskodi (2012) researched the use of the Online Public Access Catalogue at Annamalai University Library showing clearly that the majority of the users were satisfied with the working of the OPAC. Lalnunpuii and Verma (2018) discovered that though most users learned about the OPAC through user education conducted by the library, they were comparatively satisfied with its services and ease of use. Kumar and Singh (2017) noted that in the university library of GGIPU, it was discovered that the majority of users were largely satisfied with the search facilities provided by the OPAC, especially that it allowed them to locate required documents. Ogbole and Atinmo (2017) identified the ease of location of books using author, title, and subject as access points and satisfaction with recalls as the major factors responsible for the sustainable deployment of OPAC by undergraduate students in two Nigeria university libraries. OPAC allows users to search for information resources outside the University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos and offers two or more users access to the same electronic resources (Adenike & Akin, 2014). Rout and Panigrahi (2018) noted that most library users indicated a relatively favourable search exercise. Kumar and Singh (2017) however said that daily users of OPAC topped the table of frequency of use followed by those who used it twice or more in a week. They used the facility mainly to find bibliographic details of required documents and subsequently locate such documents on the shelves.

The card catalogue was the most widely used type of catalogue until the early 1990s (Ukpebor, 2012). OPAC started in the late 1970s and is now the most widely used format. Bibliographic records are stored in a database and

can be quickly retrieved for display on a computer terminal. Studies by Kao (2001) and Eserada and Okolo (2019) revealed that OPAC provides wider access since users can retrieve information from any participating library or even search online from their home computer. Mulla and Chandrashekara (2009) found that though there is a similarity in the search process for both the OPAC and card catalogue, users at engineering college libraries considered a plurality of access points and varying search features as distinguishing elements that stood OPAC out. They proposed the adoption of OPACs of various institutions in a particular region as a union catalogue. Tella and Oso (2019) observed that the advantages - convenience, user-friendliness, time management, and ability to access it anywhere within the campus - that OPAC possesses over and above the card catalogue has endeared it to users in some Nigerian university libraries. Kumar and Singh (2019) noted that recently, several university libraries have adopted the provision of an online catalogue for the use of its patrons with the intent to ease accessibility to its resources and services. Though a highly organized platform, adequate skills are required by the patrons to attain the benefits of that organization in terms of relevant search results (Campbell & Fast, 2004). The desire of the users to access up-to-date information is enhanced greatly when OPAC which primarily displays the bibliographic details of available materials in the collection is explored. Kumar and Singh (2014) stated that when OPAC is integrated to the Web it provides a wide range of opportunities such as knowledge of the status of information materials in the collection, reservation of materials online, renewal of the loan, improved quality of service, speedy service delivery and accelerated interlibrary loan services. Kumar, Singh, Singh, and Rana (2018) in a review of available literature on OPAC and Web-OPAC, revealed that findings in the immediate past decade indicated a significant change in the operations of university libraries and their users who now show a preference for Web-based OPAC. In a study on the relevance and usage of OPAC, Mohammed and Saka (2016) reported that there was a popular discovery that the framing of the library user interface (OPAC) provides an opportunity for owners of mobile phone and computer system to access information through these devices when outside the university environment (provided they are connected to the Internet and the OPAC is Web-based). This would solve the challenge of lack of access to information resources due to the non-availability of public libraries as observed by Olowonefa and Musa (2011).

Rout and Panigrahi (2018), Chewe and Chitumbo (2018), Ozoneuwe, Lateef, and Nwaogu (2018), Mohammed and Temboge (2019), and Eserada and Okolo (2019) discovered there was low students' use of OPAC in Odisha, India, Zambia University, Crawford University Nigeria, Federal University of Kashere Nigeria and university libraries located in the South-South region of Nigeria respectively. The majority of these patrons were uninformed of valuable resources obtainable within the OPAC. This has therefore exposed

them to avoidable hitches while searching. Thus, they relied on the library personnel, shelf list, colleagues, and unguided surfing of the entire shelves to locate and subsequently retrieve information resources of their choice. This has led to constant disruption in the organization of books on the shelves, thereby denying other users access to the displaced materials. Despite the huge investment devoted to its installation, the users rarely explore the services it was meant to provide. In contrast, Fati and Adetimirin (2015) in their findings revealed that undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University and the University of Lagos had abysmally low patronage of OPAC in libraries of these institutions despite their acknowledgment of high level of awareness of its existence on campus. This affirms that non-usage was not an indication of low acquaintance as witnessed in other similar universities. This is more so when some universities have regular orientation for their students in the use of library facilities. Garba and Emoknohoro (2012) revealed that skills needed to navigate the facility were acquired via user education embedded in the orientation programme for newly admitted students and successional mandatory university courses in the use of the library. Lalnunpuii and Verma (2018) contended that the majority of the respondents were familiar with OPAC, could apply it, and used it to find documents. Also, Kumar and Singh (2019) said users of university libraries in the state of Haryana, India, were mostly conversant with the benefits and functions of OPAC, even though the libraries did not provide library personnel who could assist users who ran into difficulty during the searching process. A longer stay in the university has served as a boost to awareness and enthusiasm of students to explore the OPAC as suggested by Ogbole and Atinmo (2017) and Emiri (2015) who found that most of those regular users and who are conversant with its operations in universities in South-West and South-South Nigeria were returning students.

Several studies conducted on the usage of OPAC have shown that there are challenges peculiar to the use of OPAC in libraries globally. In a study conducted by Adigun *et al.* (2011), it is evident that the majority of the patrons at the University of Lagos and Lagos State University faced the problem of shortage of terminals, inefficient working of OPAC module, lack of guidance or orientation from library staff, and distance of the workstations from the stalks. Also in a related study, Bamidele *et al.* (2014) researched factors inhibiting faculty members at Babcock University, Nigeria from using the library OPAC. Among many, lack of orientation and awareness of OPAC was high. Furthermore, Mohammed and Saka (2016) in their work found out the challenges involved in the accessibility of OPAC in three university libraries (the University of Jos, University of Ilorin, and African University of Science and Technology, Abuja) in North Central Nigeria include lack of adequate ICT skills, awareness of University Library website addresses and indifference of library staff. Wanigasooriya (2008) and Eserada and Okolo (2019) considered the remarkably low patronage of OPAC services by the users as a consequence

of a barrage of challenges ranging from poor operational knowledge of OPAC to inadequate electricity supply, absence of familiarity with OPAC to insufficient workstations, absence of library staff support to unfriendly display by the OPAC. Rout and Panigrahi (2018) reported that a handful of these difficulties embrace: a paucity of guidelines in the OPAC software, inadequacy in its functionality, and dearth of counseling from library personnel. Lalnunpui and Verma (2018) summarily noted that shortfall in computer terminals and the absence of required expertise for independent manipulation of the OPAC were identified as major obstacles. The complexity of its operations requires conceptual knowledge as well as technical searching skills to navigate the platform by library patrons (Mulla & Chandrashekara, 2009). Chewe and Chitumbo (2018) also stated that due to inadequate user education and orientation, distance students of Zambia University would rather do shelf-to-shelf browsing in search of information materials from the library. Despite the potentials that OPAC portends for both the library and its patrons, nonetheless, cases of lack of privacy, having to take a turn to use the workstation due to insufficient terminal and difficulty in decoding retrieved information by users remained unending challenges to use of OPAC (Tella & Oso, 2019). Kumar and Singh (2017) corroborated this position by saying that despite satisfaction, poor awareness, and inappropriate positioning of OPAC workstations still posed great challenges. Ogbole and Atinmo (2017) nevertheless noted poor user education and enlightenment from library personnel and insufficient power supply as the major challenges confronting the sustainability of the OPAC.

## **Methodology**

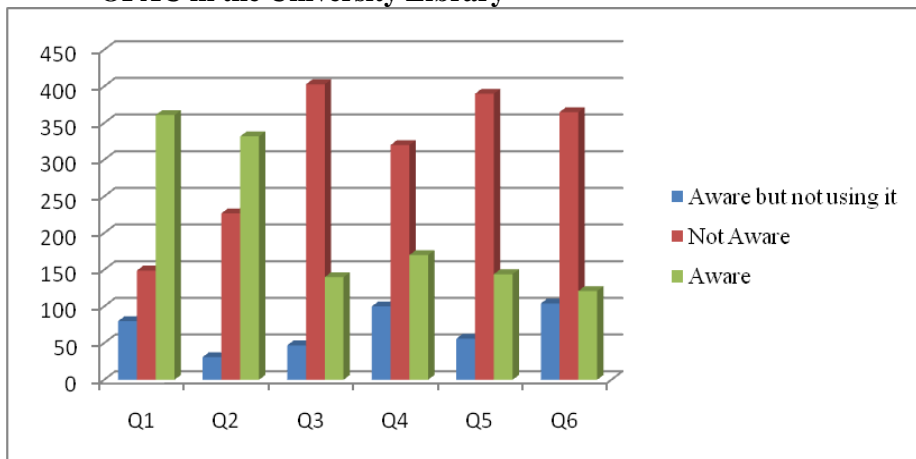
Fountain University Library introduced KOHA Library Management software for the operation of its daily normal routine in 2015 inclusive of its patrons' interface component; OPAC. The interface is intended for the use of its staff and student clients, the general public, and fellow librarians in collection development and cataloguing units of sister libraries. This study is targeted at evaluating the usage of the platform by the student-clients who form a larger percentage of the users four years after its installation. The study adopted quantitative methods using a survey. To evaluate the use of OPAC by undergraduate students of Fountain University, the total sampling technique was chosen to select all undergraduate students of the university. This gives a total of nine hundred and eighty-two students as the sample size to provide equal representation to all the departments and courses in the university most importantly those that have few students. A thirty-three item questionnaire consisting of a set of close and open questions was designed as a research instrument to elicit data from the respondents. The questionnaire had been outlined and afore-tested in the departments of accounting and microbiology of

the university before it was modified for subsequent administration on the respondents. It was later administered physically on the respondents a total of Five hundred and ninety (590) respondents returned the questionnaire – a response rate of 60.08% - which was further collated for further interpretation and analysis based on descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and percentages.

## Data Analysis

### SECTION A: Awareness of OPAC

**Fig. 1: Bar chart showing the level of awareness about the existence of OPAC in the University Library**

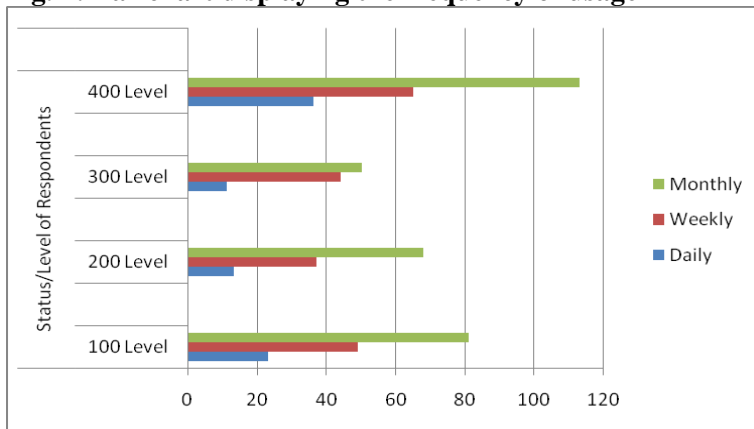


In the chart above, Q1 showed that over 61% (361) of the respondents were aware of the existence of OPAC at FUL, the remaining figure of eighty (80) and one hundred and forty-nine (149) respectively are those who were aware but decided not to use the services of the catalogue and those who were not aware of its availability. This is an indication of a high level of awareness amongst the student-clients of the University library. More than half of the clients (332, 56.27%) as shown in Q2 knew that OPAC is a tool to locate material and find out if it is available in the library apart from a minority (31, 5.25%) that would not use the OPAC for this purpose despite its awareness. An extremely large percentage of the populace (403, .68.30%) in Q3 was oblivious of the possibility that call number(s) of a book(s) could be retrieved by prospective visitors to the library before venturing to so do. Similarly, a little above average of the respondents to Q4 (320, 54.23%) were unaware of the likelihood of accessing library materials via the OPAC outside the walls of the library. This is a clear ignorance of the networking model employed beyond the radius of the library building to link the OPAC to its numerous vendors; a unique feature of the OPAC that places it above other forms of catalogue in service delivery. In terms of the acquaintance of the student-client with the

reality of navigating subscription-based electronic databases that could be accessed via the OPAC users' interface, Q5 presents a large percentage (390, 66.10%) who indicated they were not aware of this facility. In the same vein, 365 (61.86%) did not know they could gain access to the FUL OPAC through other media such as personal computers and mobile phones. The implication is that most students would get to the University library to utilize the electronic catalogue.

**SECTION B: Frequency of OPAC Usage**

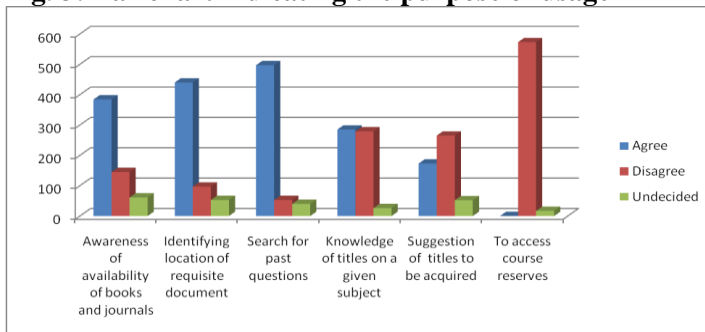
**Fig. 2: Bar chart displaying the frequency of usage**



Monthly users of the OPAC led the pack with 312 (53%) respondents that consist of 400 level, 100 level, 200 level, and 300 level in descending order. Weekly users came in distant second position with 195 (33%) and alternation of position between 200 level and 300 level. Daily users were represented by the lowest figure of 83 (14%) in a similar order to that of monthly users.

**SECTION C: Purpose of Using OPAC**

**Fig. 3: Bar chart indicating the purpose of usage**



The above presents graphically the purpose for which the use of the OPAC was deployed by the student-clients. The majority of them (384, 65.08%) agreed that the essence of OPAC is to gain knowledge of the books and journals available to readers at the university library. In the same trend, a remarkably higher proportion of the respondents (440, 74.57%) concurred to the proposition suggesting that identification of requisite documents was the principal reason why users accessed the library OPAC. Similarly, an even higher figure (497, 84.23%) agreed that their motivation for using the platform was basically to search for past questions in their various programmes and departments. Thus, the immediately mentioned tripods were the factors that gingered the interest of the clients in the newly introduced user interface. However, there were observed shifts in the position of the students with regards to knowledge of titles on a given subject, a suggestion of titles for acquisition in the library, and lastly access to course reserves on the OPAC. While the figure for those who agreed (285, 48.30%) and those who disagreed (279, 47.28%) on awareness of titles on certain subjects were almost even, the majority (265, 44.91%) did not consider the suggestion of titles to the librarian for purchase as a priority purpose of using the OPAC, and almost the entire students (573, 97.11%) disagreed that they accessed the facility to gain access to course reserves.

## SECTION D: Satisfaction of Using OPAC

**Table 1: Level of Satisfaction**

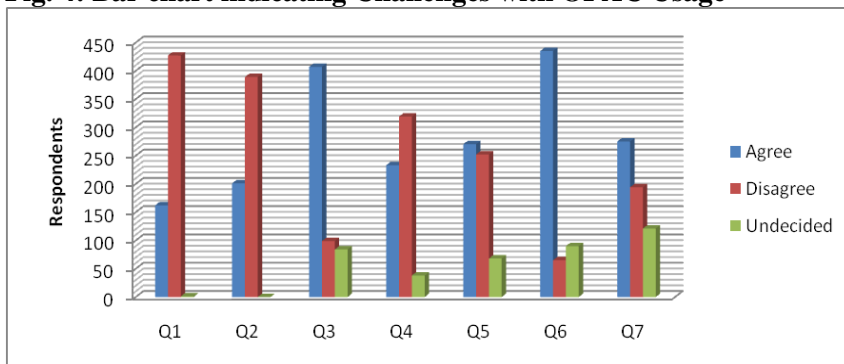
		Undecided	Unsatisfied	Satisfied	Total
Q1	How fulfilled are you after using OPAC?	160	101	329	590
		27.11%	17.11%	55.76%	100.0%
Q2	Are you satisfied with the alternative titles received if the search titles are not available?	44	231	315	590
		7.45%	39.15%	53.38%	100.0%
		<b>Often</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Total</b>
Q3	Are the materials needed available in the library?	357	135	98	590
		60.50%	22.88%	16.61%	100.0%
Q4	Do you think OPAC has put an end to the fruitless search of books in the FU library?	423	137	30	590
		71.69%	23.22%	5.08%	100.0%

This table shows that 390 (55.76%) were satisfied with their usage of the library OPAC, leaving a minority of 101 (17.11%) unsatisfied while the rest are undecided. Similarly, 315 (53.38%) student-clients were satisfied with the alternative titles received in the absence of availability of searched titles, while 231 (39.15%) were not satisfied. Two principal elements of satisfaction were

tested in the table namely; availability of needed materials and putting an end to a fruitless search for books in FUL. The majority (357 and 423 respectively) said this was often the case. Those who said this were occasionally represented by 135 and 137 respondents. Fewer respondents (98 and 30) believed this was never the case.

**SECTION E: Challenges of Using OPAC**

**Fig. 4: Bar chart indicating Challenges with OPAC Usage**



The majority of the student-clients agreed that protection of the platform through users' password (Q3), lack of orientation from the library staff (Q5), inability to memorize the URL to the OPAC (Q6) as well as an epileptic power supply (Q7) represented by 407 (68.98%), 270 (45.76%), 435 (73.72%) and 275 (46.61%) respondents respectively were the critical challenges facing the usage of the interface at FUL. Users' unfriendliness of the interface (Q1), unawareness of the existence of the OPAC (Q2), and inability to get needed books though the OPAC (Q4) were not considered challenges by the majority of the respondents based on their responses; 427 (72.37%), 389 (65.93%) and 319 (54.06%) in that order (not clear). It should be noted, however, that while there is an obvious wide gap between the figures of those who agreed and those who disagreed on Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q6 and Q7, the gap between the contending respondents is close concerning Q5.

**SECTION F: Users' Experience between Card Catalogue and the OPAC**

Respondents were allowed to freely relate their experience and express their perceptions with regards to their time with the two platforms; the former card catalogue and the present OPAC. The responses are below:

1. Several clients can use OPAC at the same time, unlike the card catalogue.
2. OPAC, unlike the card catalogue, can be remotely accessed.

3. With OPAC, a client knows if the desired book has been borrowed and can place a hold on such material.
4. Clients can participate in the acquisition process using the OPAC platform.
5. OPAC usage saves clients' time better than a card catalogue.
6. Card catalogue, unlike the OPAC, can be accessed in the absence of electricity.

## Discussion

The finding of this work has shown 400 level and 100 level students as the largest patrons of FUL giving a partial agreement with the position of Ogbole and Atinmo (2017) and Emiri (2015) that returning students were common users of OPAC. A further study may clarify this variation. Even though the general understanding of the essence of OPAC was low, the students were fully aware of its availability in FUL contrary to the findings of Rout and Panigrahi (2018), Chewe and Chitumbo (2018), Ozonuwe, Lateef and Nwaogu (2018), Mohammed and Temboge (2019) and Eserada and Okolo (2019). Nevertheless, the students only knew that it could be deployed as tools for identifying information materials in the library. Besides the above highlighted general-purpose, other inherent benefits such as remote usage of OPAC outside the library, navigating FUL electronic resources via the OPAC, and accessing the interface through personal electronic devices like phones and laptops were identified by the study as a step beyond the card catalogue. The interface, unfortunately, was not frequently made use of since its usage was restricted to monthly and weekly exercise by the larger populace of students. The purpose of usage mainly revolved around the traditional known essence; searching for books and journals, knowing relevant titles on a given subject and their locations as well as getting access to past questions. The innovatory essence ranging from assisting in the collection development process by way of suggesting relevant titles for acquisition to gaining access to course reserves were not their premonitions. This might be connected with the absence of course reserves on the platform itself. Also, the students were satisfied with the new technology – just like other findings; Ashokan and Dhanavandan (2015) and Thanuskodi (2012) - since it met their needs; putting an end to a fruitless search for information materials on the shelves and providing alternative titles in the absence of the desired ones.

A few challenges were inhibiting the smooth enjoyment of services provided by the OPAC. These include the use of password (this could be understood especially for students who have different passwords for similar platforms they were engaged in), inability to memorize the URL (presently, the OPAC uses figures instead of a unique mnemonics), inadequate orientation from the staff of FUL (Adigun *et al.*, 2011) and the incessant power outage. The challenge posed by memorization of URL further affirmed the conclusion of Mohammed and Saka (2016) on OPAC usage at the University of Jos,

University of Ilorin, and African University of Science and Technology, Abuja. The study identified wider access and ease of use as features of OPAC in line with the argument of Kao (2001), and Onuoha, Umahi and Bamidele (2013).

## Conclusion

The study presents an all-inclusive evaluation of the deployment of OPAC at FUL vis a vis its usage, especially by undergraduate students at Fountain University. It is apparent that beyond awareness of the existence of the facility at FUL, there is a short gap in the depth of the awareness. This poses a challenge to the FUL staff to widen their scope of orientation lessons to include all the intricacies (its features, coverage, fringe benefits, and technicality of its application). Continuous practical demonstration of OPAC manipulation should be integrated into the course content of user education. Password provision only guarantees the facility from abuse by non-FUL clients; a necessity that can be summoned when clients use familiar and easy to remember usernames and passwords. The non-availability of course reserves on the OPAC lays credence to non-usage of the module that facilitates its availability on the facility by the faculty. This may equally require education and persuasion on the side of the academic librarians of FUL. Additionally, a combination of adequate information on the propriety of deployment of personal devices most importantly, the mobile phones, and leverage on the cloud system remains a sure leeway from the persistent power outage the country currently grapples with.

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