Use of Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC), in Sri Lankan national university libraries

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The OPAC is an integrated part of total library system including acquisition , cataloguing, circulation and other auxiliary services.OPAC is a computerized online catalog which provides bibliographical information of the materials held in a library. The user can easily access through computers within the library, or out of the library anywere he or she likes. OPAC can provide facilities such as high quality bibliographic data, greater number of access points, interactive searching, online training, backup facilities, rapid database management system, authority control files etc. However most Sri Lankan libraries do not use this facility which is the problem this study.

OPAC terminals began to replace card catalogs in many libraries in the 1980s. Since mid-1990s, these systems have increasingly migrated to Web-based interfaces and OPAC is becoming a more popular information retrieval tool currently.Sri Lankan university library system entered automation scenario in 1986. UGC provided one microcomputer to university libraries for their automation activities. CDS/ ISIS was used for create their bibliographical databases. Apart from CDS/ISIS, the university libraries gradually turned to other library software packages such as Purna, Libsys, Libsuite, Alice for windows and locally developed software using Koha ,named ISURu (*Integrated Software of University of Ruhuna*) to automate their library functions.

Main objectives of this research were identification of user bibliographical information needs, identification of problems related to the library automation software, identification of problems of user and those of the library staff adopting OPAC system.

Primary data was collected using questionnaires and personal interviews. The purposive sampling method was used to select the six university libraries, out of 15 university libraries in Sri Lanka.

Data collected in this research identified 13 issues related to OPAC. Inadequate computer literacy and non-familiarity with OPAC are the major causes of the issues. Inadequate knowledge regarding bibliographical data, search strategies, deficiencies with regard to terminals, problem related to library automation software was the other causes of the issue.

To overcome these problems both staff and the users need to have a high level of computer literacy. They also must have a sufficient knowledge on the nature of the component of bibliographical databases. Selecting the suitable library automation software and promoting uniformity between university library automation activities are the other reform necessary in this connection.

Key words: OPAC, Sri Lanka, Cataloguing, University lbraries, Bibliographical databases

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