OPAC User Interface evaluation in University Libraries in Sri Lanka

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The interface of a web-application facilitates the interaction between the user and the system. Thus, the user interface must enable two-way communication by providing feedback to the user, as well as functions for entering data needed by the system. This research paper discusses the features and issues in the OPAC interfaces in University libraries in Sri Lanka. The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is the latest and the most sophisticated catalogue format. OPAC provides an access to all types of materials in libraries such as books, periodical titles, theses, and audio-visual items more easily than traditional card catalogue. In any OPAC, interface plays a very important role. It is through the user-friendliness and perhaps the attractiveness of the interface that a catalogue becomes a familiar information retrieval tool in a library.

Main objective of the research is to identify the features and main barriers of the OPAC interfaces in university libraries in Sri Lanka and make new proposals to overcome the identified issues regarding OPAC interfaces.

The research method adopted was the keen observation of OPAC interfaces in Sri Lanka and other

ountries in the world and made interviews with OPAC selected undergraduates and academic staff members of six universities in Sri Lanka. Purposive sampling method was used to select the six universities namely, university of Peradeniya, Colombo, Jayewardenepura, Moratuwa, Ruhuna Open University of Sri Lanka.

It has been found that most of the users are not satisfied with its OPAC interfaces, because its outlook appearance, background colors, font size and colors. The interfaces of the OPAC are yet to be improved up to international standards. Many of the interfaces do not give proper location to the OPAC icon in the university home page. As a result of that the users are not aware about functions and necessity of an OPAC. Furthermore primary data revealed that no help massages to aware about how to use OPAC and no pop-up massages to identify the errors they have made in OPAC searching. To overcome above issues technical advancement of the system is vital. The uniformity between all university libraries for the purpose of implementing OPAC interface is essential.

Key words: OPAC, Interface, Library automation