

Library Automation and User Friendliness of Digital Library Services: A Study**Dr. S. Mahalakshmi**

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Abstract

Library automation plays an important role in improving the efficiency, accessibility, and quality of library services in higher educational institutions. The introduction of automated library systems, Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs), and digital library software has transformed the way users search for, retrieve, and access information. The present study examines the status of library automation, the availability of OPAC facilities, the presence of digital library software, and users' perceptions of the user-friendliness of these systems. The analysis is based on primary data collected from respondents. The findings reveal that most respondents reported that their libraries were automated and that OPAC facilities and digital library software were available in their respective libraries. The responses also indicate favourable perceptions regarding the user-friendliness of OPAC and digital library software. However, the findings suggest a difference between the availability of digital facilities and the overall status of library automation. The study highlights the need to strengthen automation infrastructure, improve user awareness, and provide appropriate training to ensure the effective utilisation of library technologies in higher educational institutions.

Keywords: Library automation, OPAC, digital library software, user-friendliness, academic libraries, information services, library technology.

Introduction

Libraries have undergone considerable changes with the development of information and communication technologies. Traditionally, library activities such as cataloguing, circulation, acquisition, and the maintenance of records were carried out manually. Although these methods served their purpose, they often required considerable time and effort from library staff and users. The increasing volume of information and the growing expectations of students, teachers, and research scholars have created a need for more efficient and accessible library services. Library automation has emerged as an important solution to these challenges. It involves the use of computer-based systems to manage routine library activities and improve the delivery of information services. Automated systems can support book acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, membership management, serial control, and the generation of administrative reports. By reducing repetitive manual work, automation enables library professionals to devote more attention to user support and information services.

The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is another important component of modern library services. It enables users to search for books and other library materials through an electronic interface. Depending on the system, users may search by author, title, subject, keywords, or other bibliographic details. An effective OPAC helps users identify available resources and reduces the difficulties associated with searching printed catalogues. Digital library software further extends the range of library services by supporting the organisation, storage, retrieval, and access of electronic documents. Such software may provide access to institutional publications, dissertations, research papers, reports, and other digital materials, subject to copyright

and access restrictions. However, the availability of library technology does not necessarily mean that every user can use it effectively. The usefulness of an automated system depends on its reliability, accessibility, ease of navigation, and the level of awareness among users. Therefore, examining the status of library automation alongside users' perceptions of its usability is important for understanding the effectiveness of technology-based library services.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the status of library automation among the libraries represented by the respondents.
2. To assess the reported availability of OPAC facilities.
3. To identify the reported availability of digital library software.
4. To examine respondents' perceptions of the user-friendliness of library automation systems.
5. To assess the perceived user-friendliness of OPAC and digital library software.
6. To suggest measures for improving library automation and the effective use of digital library services.

Methodology

The present study was conducted to examine the status of library automation and the user-friendliness of digital library services at the University of Madras. The study is based on primary data collected from 991 respondents associated with the university. The data focus on the availability of library automation facilities, the user-friendliness of automated library systems, the availability and usability of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) facilities, and the presence and usability of digital library software. The collected data were analysed using frequency counts and percentage analysis to understand the respondents' views and experiences regarding digital library services. The findings are presented descriptively to explain the availability of technological facilities, assess users' perceptions of their usability, and identify areas where library services could be improved. The study is confined to the information available in the collected data and focuses on library automation and digital service usability at the University of Madras. Further details regarding the sampling technique, institutional coverage, respondent categories, and questionnaire validation may be incorporated into the final manuscript, wherever applicable, to provide a more comprehensive account of the research process.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1. Status of library automation

S. No.	Particulars	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Library automated — Yes	875	88.3
2	Library automated — No	116	11.7
	Total	991	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table 1 indicates that 88.3% of respondents reported that their libraries were automated, whereas 11.7% reported that they were not. Although automation was widely reported, the remaining proportion indicates a

need to examine the availability of automation facilities and the barriers faced by libraries that have not adopted them.

Table 2. User-friendliness of library automation

S. No.	Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	878	88.6
2	No	113	11.4
	Total	991	100.0

Source: Primary data

A total of 878 respondents (88.6%) considered library automation user-friendly, while 113 (11.4%) did not. The findings suggest that most respondents viewed the systems favourably, but some users may need better orientation, technical support, or improvements in system navigation.

Table 3. Availability of OPAC facilities

S. No.	Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	981	99.0
2	No	10	1.0
	Total	991	100.0

Source: Primary data

OPAC availability was reported by 99.0% of respondents. This suggests that electronic catalogue facilities were widely available among the libraries represented in the study. Nevertheless, availability should be distinguished from actual usage and the effectiveness of search functions.

Table 4. User-friendliness of OPAC

S. No.	Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	990	99.9
2	No	1	0.1
	Total	991	100.0

Source: Primary data.

Almost all respondents (99.9%) indicated that OPAC was user-friendly. This is a highly positive reported assessment. Further research could examine search accuracy, interface accessibility, response time, and the ease of locating specific materials.

Table 5. Availability of digital library software

S. No.	Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	990	99.9

2	No	1	0.1
	Total	991	100.0

Source: Primary data.

Digital library software was reported as available by 99.9% of respondents. This indicates widespread reported availability, but does not independently establish the size of digital collections, the frequency of usage, or the accessibility of subscribed resources.

Table 6. User-friendliness of digital library software

S. No.	Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	991	100.0
2	No	0	0.0
	Total	991	100.0

Source: Primary data.

All 991 respondents reported that digital library software was user-friendly. This represents a completely positive response in the supplied data. It should be interpreted as a finding from the survey, rather than proof that the software has no usability limitations.

Resulta

The major findings of the study are summarised below:

1. A total of 88.3% of respondents reported that their libraries were automated, while 11.7% reported that they were not automated.
2. A favourable response regarding the user-friendliness of library automation was recorded among 88.6% of respondents.
3. OPAC facilities were reported as available by 99.0% of respondents.
4. Almost all respondents (99.9%) reported that OPAC facilities were user-friendly.
5. The presence of digital library software was reported by 99.9% of respondents.
6. All respondents (100.0%) reported that the digital library software was user-friendly.
7. The findings indicate that the reported availability and usability of OPAC and digital library software were higher than the reported coverage of library automation.
8. The negative responses concerning library automation indicate a need to investigate infrastructure gaps, system usability, and user support.

Conclusion

1. The study examined the status of library automation, OPAC facilities, and digital library software based on responses from 991 respondents. The findings indicate that library automation was reported by 88.3% of respondents, while the availability of OPAC facilities and digital library software was reported

by 99.0% and 99.9%, respectively. The responses concerning the user-friendliness of OPAC and digital library software were also highly positive.

2. These findings suggest that digital library facilities have an important place in the information services represented in the study. At the same time, the proportion of respondents reporting that their libraries were not automated indicates that further development may be required to ensure more consistent access to automated services.
3. Library administrators should therefore focus on appropriate automation systems, staff and user training, accurate catalogue maintenance, reliable digital infrastructure, and regular assessment of service quality. Awareness programmes can help users make better use of the facilities available to them. Future studies could examine the relationship between technology availability, actual usage, user satisfaction, and research support.
4. Overall, effective library automation should not be measured only by the presence of software or equipment. Its real value lies in how well it helps users discover, access, and use information to support their educational and research activities.

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