# Library Signage and Students' Utilisation of Information Services in University Libraries in the United Kingdom

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

*Signs play a role as directional or indicating information when following conditions are met: Signage provides basic information to library users, signage is a tool to discern various books, service points and facilities, delivering messages in signs should be simple and straight forward, signs shall be designed in consistent and symbolic ways, while express the intentions of the library, signs shall be changeable to the extension or modification of library building, library signage shall be harmonized with building structures and decorations, signage location, height, color, the contrast of colors and the use of Braille shall strictly observe the disability related laws. when signage systems are designed, the following functions and forms of signage should be considered, spatial cognition signage helps library users recognise their current locations and their destinations, such as reference room, children's reading room or bookshelf (e.g. building floor plan), directional signage leads library users to particular service or destinations (e.g. arrows to certain point), identification signage indicates the identification of specific area (e.g. locations or service point like common room, lecture hall, information desk, donor recognition, and bookshelves of adult fictions or periodicals), operational signage shows facility instructions (e.g. copy machine instructions), regulation signage indicates restrictions, warnings, or necessary procedure to conduct certain action (e.g. non-smoking, no food or beverage are allowed sign), announcement signage contains necessary information for library users (e.g. program time table, opening of special program, services provided by the library and equipment failure). Basic library signage should be provided in academic libraries to aid navigation and way-finding. Providing text-based and graphics-based signage can assist students with differing needs in accessing information. Improving access to learning resources through the use of signs is an important general strategy for all libraries, but is most important at the academic library where students are still learning about the organizational scheme of the library.*

**KEYWORDS**:  **Library Signage, Students' Utilisation, Information Services, University Libraries**

## Introduction

Library signage can be sorted into two ways, considering their shapes and usage. In terms of it's of shape, there are linear and side models of signage. The linear models are based on non-selective pathways, and focus more on the process of access rather than the destination (e.g. traffic lights). The side models of signage are pathway selective, focusing mainly on destination itself (e.g. directional signs in department stores). Polger and Stempler

(2014) are of the opinion that library signs are "living documents", and must adapt and change as the library does. Librarians undertake responsibilities around designing signage, brochures, informational handout, web pages, and promotional and instructional documents every day as part of their jobs. Hence, "librarian is in the business of graphic design, even if they have not been formally trained in design" (Wakimoto, 2015). Signage uses marks, lights, and symbols to express or deliver a message. The range of signage is very broad, including library building itself, trees around the main entrance, and landmarks on the top of the building (Korea Library Association, 2009).The use of the library includes how to locate information including the techniques of using the catalogue, the classification system in use, getting assistance from the library staff and having knowledge of library approach to reference services, borrowing pattern knowledge of opening and closing time in the library and others (Abagai, 2008). In other words, availability of library information resources, the knowledge of their existence and acquisition of some basic skills on how to locate such materials and information depend on the effectiveness of library signage.

**Literature Review**

**Orr's Theory of Library Evaluation, Richard Orr (1973).**

Orr's theory of library evaluation, otherwise known as "Orr's Schema" was propounded by Richard Orr in 1973 and is often used for the evaluation of services in libraries. The basic assumption of the theory is that library resources utilization is paternalistic in the sense that they are ordinarily provided for others. Orr assumes that if utilization is increasing, then the beneficial effects are increasing. Richard Orr created an evaluation theory. The theory has six component which are; resources, capability, utilization, beneficial effects, quality and demand. Resources, capacity, and utilization measures are all inward looking (that is, they reflect activities within the library) while beneficial effect measures focus on the impact or benefits of the library service in the life of the students. With time, the benefits derived by the individual may accrue to a larger organizational or community setting. Historically, university libraries have relied upon resources measures (for example, the ARL Index) and size of collections to demonstrate quality. At the same time, libraries have relied on capacity measures (typically annual circulation) by equating use with value. If libraries wish to demonstrate the value of their services, their collections, and of the library itself, they need to focus much attention on the resources, the quality of the resource, as it will increase their demand and the beneficial effect their resource and services.
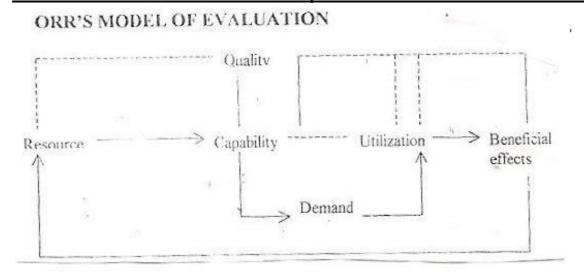
*Figure 1*: **Orr's Evaluation Model (Orr, 1973)**

The figure 1 above represents the adaptation of this theory in this study of library signage and students Utilization of Information services in universities. The relevance of the model to this study is that the model shows library resource, capacity, utilization and, and beneficial effects. Resource, process, and output measures are all inward looking (that is, they reflect services including signage within the library) while outcome measures focus on the impact or benefits of the library service in the life of the students. It shows how library services through effective signage influence, promote, and enhance utilization of library resources by students, which in turn promote the quality of academic libraries. The theory also shows that without improve library services through proper signage to direct users of what is housed by the library, the utilization and beneficial effects cannot be achieved by library users (students).

**Concept of Library Signage**

Library signage can also be divided by their installing methods; adhesions on the wall, hook types, stand types, hangings from ceiling, and by their materials; metal, acrylic and etc. Effective signage contributes to user's friendly environment, and can help users move throughout the buildings more efficiently and accurately and may reduce questions at service points (Bosman and Rusinek, 2007). It has been found that library users may experience a fear of appearing stupid and revealing ignorance by asking questions (Coker, 2013), which can be a psychological barrier to requesting assistance. More recently, library anxiety has been found to have a paralyzing effect, which can prevent users from approaching a research assignment rationally and effectively and can influence student's ability to complete assignment (McPherson, 2015). The above premises signify the influence of library signage on student's Utilization of Information services. Stone, (2001) noted that the effectiveness of a library does not depend on only its collection/resources and other facilities per se, but also on the success of its exploitation and use. Students cannot exploit or make effective use of these resources if they do not know where these resources are located.

Signage also acts as an affordance to the resources in a library. Affordance are features in the environment that "indicate the potential for a behaviour, but not the actual occurrence of that behaviour" (Maier, Fadel and Battisto, 2009). Library signage is there to help users to use the library, which could be anything from assisting a user in navigating the collection, to explaining how to use a self-check loans machine. Aside from preventing mass confusion and

chaos, implementing a new system for library signage is an opportunity to reinforce a brand (Dwight, 2008). Through design consistency, important colors, mascots, emblems, and more can be displayed. Moreover, Styles-Lopez (2003) says that one way to make a good first impression is to ensure people know their way around the area. Library signs are wayfinding aids or markers that support navigation and are integral to the wayfinding process in academic libraries (Arthur and Passini, 2012).

Read (2003) postulates that providing text-based and graphics-based signage can assist students with differing needs in accessing information. Improving access to learning resources through the use of signs is an important general strategy for all libraries, but is all the more important at the academic library where students are still learning about the organizational scheme of the library. With younger students who are just beginning to be exposed to library organization systems and are not yet fluent readers, it is  particularly helpful that shelf signs include not only text, but also graphics and pictures that represent subjects. The use of color and graphics in signage to aid wayfinding is a particularly important design element that can be utilized used to improve children's wayfinding and spatial orientation abilities in their environment. Graphics are a form of engineered wayfinding tools; the most common are signage and maps. They are used to communicate general information, to give information about the setting or area, to establish orientation and current location, to indicate directions to destinations, or to identify destinations. There are a number of authors like (Brown, 2002; Li and Klippel, 2012; Mandel, 2013) who have proposed that the solution to wayfinding problems in libraries is the installation of "proper" signage to address the style, placement, color, and size of signs.

## Concept of Utilization of Information Services

One way to stimulate the effective use of books and other services of academic libraries is to teach library users how to obtain information from available sources or services through appropriate signs and this is usually done through user education. Busayo (2003) explain that user education is intended to acquaint users with the basic library skills, including signage necessary to enable them use effectively with minimum problems the library materials which are most suitable to them for the purpose of learning, research and recreation. Furthermore, an information literate person is able to recognize when information is needed and has the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information. Brophy (2007) agrees that use of public library depends on the services provided or made available in the library. If the services are not adequate for the needs of public library users, it is not likely that the library will be heavily used. Bassey (2006) ascertain that for a library to be functional, the services it provides should correspond as closely as possible with the needs of its users. Creating library signage and access points to library resources by the library encourages the users to visit and use the library more often.

Abagai (2008) opines that the use of library by users and indeed their satisfaction with library services depends on availability of suitable learning materials, accommodation and competent staff in the library. However, no matter how good the library resources and accommodation, if there is no effective signage to guide the users in utilizing the resources, the library only remains a mirage. Hence, the main objective of any library signage is to guide students in identifying and utilizing the material or service of their interest with ease, by providing direction, instruction and information to students. This objective which is achieved through systematic acquisition and organization of all forms of library signage

pertinent to the goals of the students and making students acquaint themselves with such signs for utilization of library information.

**Types of signage in relation to Students' Utilization of Information Services**

**Multi-Colour Guide and Students' Utilization of Information Services**

Much of previous studies used red for warm colour followed with blue for cool colour on its context. Therefore, colour effects of red and blue are abundantly supplied compared to other hues (Fehrman and Fehrman, 2004). Besides that, it is discovered that only one research has included subject's colour preference together with determined colour in the experimentation. With consideration of subject's colour preference, it may give significant pattern as people respond to colours differently based on culture. Moreover, it is found that colour has positive effect if the luminosity level fit the individual preference, which should be further research. Looking at other research findings, it is discovered that research studies highlighted the salient effects of white colour to human well-being and performance. Every individual has different level of sensitivity towards environment. The ability of screening irrelevant stimuli makes high screener less arousing or less affected by the environment than the low screener.

This white effect is found worsening among low screeners which caused to more error made in their performance and dysphasia or depression state than the moderate or high screeners. Besides that, it is said most public building is in white colour which is also referred as natural colour. In regards to this, many people thought white has professional quality and widely accepted but unaware of its distinct effects on people (Kwallek, Lewis, Lin-Hsiao and Woodson, 2006; Stone, 2001).

**Directional Signage and Students' Utilization of Information Services**

For many years academic libraries have taken for granted that their client (students) know where everything is located in the facility (Hahn and Zitron, 2011). Now with increased students turnover and visits from lecturers and other new comers, libraries want their facilities to look like airports. Their goals are to allow someone who has never entered their facility to be able to navigate to any department or section and retrieve information without asking a single question (visual work place). These processes can only be achieved by placing a clear and concise directional guide in the library. Directional guide is a signage that provides information to help library users find their way around the library. These include holidays, closing signs, rest room, copier signs and many others signage at the library.

Palmer (2008) posits that when one is designing directional guide one should be consistent with nomenclature like, names for department, destinations. Collections should always be consistent on signage and graphic elements both within a building system. For instance, consistently using "student" rather than "young adult" in some places and "student" in others. Clear logical hierarchies must exist to help users remember and use nomenclature. The classification system should be explained in some form near the entrance to any area, making the students self-sufficient learner.

**Instructional Signage and Students' Utilization of Information Services**

Ahn (2011) maintains that the roles of signage are divided into two, first as a visually delivery of necessary information and second as a composition of exterior and interior designs to give instruction to library users. The instructional role maximizes the harmony of

spaces by displaying signs on walls, stairs, hallways, and floors of libraries. The library signs, therefore, not only provides instruction for easier ways of access for visitors, but also visually express the nature of organizations and the function of areas, and worked as an image marketing strategy of library.

Becker (2013) opines that some university libraries offer specialized instructional signage. Instructional signs help library user to achieve specific research goals. Instructional signage in academic libraries can also benefit from the utilization of video games and gaming designed for information literacy. When incorporating instructional signage from gaming into information literacy instruction, instructional signs can teach students how to succeed through long, complex, and difficult tasks while still keeping the learning experience engaging. Library instructional signage is evolving to adapt to the changing concepts of information use and understanding. Model academic library should respond to the changing information environment, in order to be meaningful and effective, (Kenney, 2006). A model library utilizes complementary signs to deliver memorable, interactive instruction. These instructional signs are necessary to engage the attention of contemporary patrons immersed in a media environment.

## Regulatory Signage and Students' Utilization of Information Services

With the increasing number of students gaining admission into higher institutions, libraries are likely to face a number of problems, one of which is the increasing number of non-compliance attitude occurring in the library. This implies that most libraries in the developing countries are behind in the modern trend of library operation, utilization, security, and continuous restructuring of library space. One issue that needs to be addressed is compliance to library rules and regulation by the students in academic libraries is collection security. Hence, library regulatory signage is indispensable in academic library and is required to provide regulatory signs to guide against student misconduct and ensure collection security.

In an earlier research, Ewing (2004) identifies other non-compliance behaviors to include breaches such as non-return of items by borrowers, theft of library equipment, personal theft (from staff and users), verbal and physical abuse against staff and users, vandalism against library buildings and equipment, and stock destruction, all of which can directly or indirectly affect library services. Bello (2003) conducted a study on theft and mutilation in technological university libraries, revealing that there is a lack of security in university libraries. Users resorted to delinquent/deviant behavior because demand outstripped the supply of library material. These results in competition for resources, which invariably tempts users to steal, mutilate, or engage in illegal borrowing. This implies that regulatory signs are required in academic libraries to compliment security, in order to reduce unwanted behaviour in library environment.

## Informational Signage and Students' Utilization of Information services

Dwight (2008) postulates that informational signs help to answer certain questions such as what are the hours of operation, is public Wi-Fi available? All this and more can be supplied to visitors through informational signs. While informational signs can be found at locations marked by identification signs, they can also provide information about other things along the route. For instance, if an area is under construction, it'd be nice to give a little head's up to anyone in sandals that the road might get a little rocky. If a way is temporarily closed, that's also good to know ahead of time.

Ahn (2011) maintains that informational role of library signs permits or restrict certain behaviors of users help them find their destinations. An information sign is a very legibly printed and very noticeable placard that informs people of the purpose of an object, or gives them instruction on the use of something. An example is a traffic sign such as a stop sign. Information signs have been growing in visibility due to the explosion of sign technologies. For hundreds, if not thousands, of years signs were crafted out of wood. Words and images were then hand-painted on the sign. The other traditional way of creating signs dealt with individual constructed letters carved from wood, moulded or wrought from metal, which were then individually placed in the appropriate sequence. While both of these methods are still employed, technology has moved in around them.

**Conclusion**

Basic library signage should be provided in academic libraries to aid navigation and way-finding. Providing text-based and graphics-based signage can assist students with differing needs in accessing information. Improving access to learning resources through the use of signs is an important general strategy for all libraries, but is most important at the academic library where students are still learning about the organizational scheme of the library. The findings of the study also have implication on the curriculum and/or course content of faculty of education in general and library and information science in particular in tertiary institutions. It is imperative that library signage should form part of contents to be taught to all the students offering library science, while it should be taught as a course to those in library and information science.

**Recommendations**

1. The designers of library signage should ensure that the colour combination of signs do not result to colour blindness. Colour combination should be attractive to aid way finding and special navigation. This will enhance visual stimulus and aid students' utilisation of library and information services.

2. Librarians should ensure that signs should contain clear and precise information and instructional signs should conform to the arrangement of materials on the shelf units to avoid confusion and frustration in accessing information and other library services.

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