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**Availability of Informational Guide and Students' Utilisation of Information Services in  
University Libraries in the United Kingdom**

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**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study was to examine library signage and students' utilisation of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom. This study adopted survey research design. The study was conducted in university libraries in the United Kingdom. The population of the study was 4220 registered undergraduate students in faculty of education. The simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 2 Universities in the United Kingdom, alongside 4220 registered undergraduate students which constituted the sample size for the study. The researcher developed instrument entitled "Library Signage and Students Utilization of Information Services Questionnaire" (LSSUISQ), used in collecting data for the study. The instrument was given to three research experts for face validation. Two assessors were from the Department of Education Foundations, Guidance and Counselling and one from Library Science Unit of the Department of Educational Technology and Library Science. A trial testing of the instrument was carried out using 30 registered students who did not take part in the actual study. Thereafter, the internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method. The reliability coefficient index of .86 was obtained. The Regression Coefficient Analysis was used to answer research questions of Simple Linear Regression Analysis, while the F-value of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to test null hypotheses at .05 alpha level. The study concluded that information guide foster independent and critical thinking, it solves way-finding problem in unfamiliar environment, it helps library user to use the appropriate data, tools and facilities of the library. It was therefore recommended amongst others that management of universities should ensure that library signage constitutes orientation content for freshmen; this will aid the young students to be acquainted with information, directional, instructional and regulatory signs in academic libraries.*

**KEYWORDS: Library Signage, Instructional guide, Students' Utilisation, Information Services, University Libraries, Way-finding**

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**Introduction**

A successful signage system is intuitive and self-navigable, and it protects the overall visual integrity of the site. Library signage is an indispensable tool in enhancing utilisation of information service in the library. Like other media employed to educate the library user, they derive their importance and usefulness from the needs that users experienced as they search for information.

Information signage is one of the important signs in the library. This is in line with Dalton (2014) who stresses that informational signage is also one of the keys to information services utilization in university libraries. Signs give information and in way-finding signage, different types of signs are necessary to deliver information. Knowing what those signs are is an integral part to creating a useful system of way-finding signage. When designing the system, the simpler the way-finding signage system, the better it is to the visitors using it to get around. The idea behind designing signs is to convey as much information as possible. Dwight (2008) postulates that information signs helps to answer certain question such as, what are the hours of operation. Kyung (2000) believes that information signage contains necessary information for library users to use appropriate data, tools and facilities of a library. The signage includes administrators' intentions, general information, restrictions, opening hours, titles of facilities and exhibitions, handing descriptions and operational manuals.

Utilization is the process of making practical and proper use of the information resources that are available in the library. In view of the utilization of information resources in university libraries, Parvathamma and Reddy (2009) advocate that academic library need to take proactive approach in motivating users to use their resources, provide access to the internet and offer community-based services including literacy programs. Perhaps this is possible if our local university libraries apply appropriate signage or adopt signage system to provide the necessary guide or information required to aid utilization of library information by students and other library users. This can be achieved through systematic evaluation of the library's services. There is need to provide proper library orientation to users because without the knowledge of the use of the library's signage, one cannot retrieve materials easily from the library. Properly placed signage in library should aim at developing the bibliographic skills of library users, especially students, so that they can make the most effective use of the library and information resources. Taking a cue from the foregoing, this study takes a look at library signage and students' utilization of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As research on user way-finding in all library types is beginning to emerge, university library manuals seem to pay little or no attention to library signage and support that students need to increase usability of their services. It seems in university libraries; signage content conveys little or no spatial information to students. As library collections expand, materials are moved and re-shelved to make room for new items with little consideration to student's way finding needs. Recent observations have shown that most librarians and libraries are not aware of students' frustration in terms of haphazard arrangement of materials and confusing library signage. Some librarians interviewed admitted to the inadequacy of signage in libraries, while others are of the opinion that these signs are usually put in place but not adhered to by users. It is therefore based on this contradiction that the researcher attempted to examine library signage and students' utilisation of information service in university libraries in the United Kingdom.

### **Purpose of the study**

The main objective of this study was to examine library signage and students' utilisation of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom. Specifically, the study sought:

1. To determine the extent to which informational guide predict students' utilisation of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom.

### **Research Question**

1. What is the extent to which informational guide predict students' utilisation of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom?

### **Research Hypothesis**

H<sub>0</sub><sub>1</sub>: There is no significant extent to which informational guide predicts students' utilisation of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Concept of Library Signage**

Stempler and Polger (2013) opine that signage is an important way-finding aid strategy for all libraries, but is all the more important in the academic library which needs to support students who are still learning about the organizational scheme of the library and developing spatial thinking skills (Read, 2010). In order to successfully navigate space while seeking information, students need to develop their spatial thinking and understand spatial signs, or the ability to visualize and interpret location, distance, direction, relationships, movement, and change through space. Finding one's way is a requirement of daily life and purposeful navigation between places is perhaps the most prominent real-world application of spatial cognition (Wiener, Büchner and Hölscher, 2009). Way-finding is not only getting to a location successfully, but also developing an awareness of the environment that contributes to more efficient planning and execution. Signage has the potential of improving a person's spatial skills or spatial literacy and the design of signage systems and aids, when associated with completing a task or solving a problem, can create this spatial awareness.

Without spatial sign and knowledge, people may get lost or feel disoriented, frustrating experiences for people who are trying to reach a specific destination (Cubukcu and Nasar, 2005). In the case of students seeking information in academic libraries this can result in helplessness, confusion, disorientation, and frustration, all of which can lead to students simply giving up on their information seeking tasks (Eaton, 2011). Eaton maintains that user search strategies that utilized way-finding aids, such as well-placed signage, limited the amount of information users needed to process and therefore helped to reduce confusion and route uncertainty. Cornell, Heath, and Alberts (2014) postulates that signage is related to the idea of cognitive mapping, a process of creating a mental map that every human being uses to find his or her way in any environment. Signage as an important element of the library environment, contributes to these cognitive maps.

Larken-Lieffers (2001) found that inappropriate language in signage inhibited children's (and parents') use of juvenile nonfiction. In this case, inappropriate language means language that was not specific enough, with signs saying "nonfiction" but not "juvenile." Larkin-Lieffers specifically recommends the use of signage to draw patrons' attention to specific materials. This might include directional signage that indicates physical directionality, rather than rules (regulatory signage) or other information (informational signage). Stempler and Polger (2013) identify the navigational value of signage and divide the signs in their audit of an academic library's signage into the three main categories; directional, policy, and informational.

## **Concept of Utilization of Information Services**

Popoola and Haliso (2009) aver that library services are the activities that libraries and their personnel render to meet the information needs of their users. Such services are core and traditional library services. Morgan (2005) advises that it is vital that the views of the service users are sought to help inform the debate about the library's performance. Satisfactory service cannot be provided unless the views of users are considered. Also, Morris and Barron (2008) assert that users' views about the services they use should be sought regularly and systematically to inform decision makers about what services should be provided. Emojoroh (2005) conducted a study on the roles and effectiveness of academic library in nation – building in the United Kingdom and found that the United Kingdom academic libraries are performing poorly in most aspects due to appalling resources. Library must not only provide the resources but also ensure effective use of the resources by its users (Adeleke, 2005). Okiy (2003) corroborates this and posits that for the library to perform its role adequately, its resources must be effectively utilized. Thus, library signage is indispensable to ensure effective access to relevant information resources in academic library.

The Librarian has to know whether the students utilize the right materials at the right time. This can be achieved through systematic evaluation of the library's services; the need to provide proper library orientation to users because without the knowledge of the use of the library's signage, catalogue and the entire library, one cannot retrieve materials easily from the library. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) believe that instructional signage in library aims at developing the bibliographic skills of library users, especially students, so that they can make the most effective use of the library and information resources. In a study conducted by Igun and Adogbeji (2007) among the postgraduate students, majority of the students claimed that their main purpose of using the library is to update their knowledge and skills. It is therefore essential to know the needs and desire of the users in order to satisfy them. However, literature has revealed that information availability does not mean accessibility and utilization; therefore, university libraries have to market their resources and services to attract users.

## **Informational Signage and Students' Utilization of Information services**

Academic libraries are left with no options or choice than to provide access to relevant information resources by applying this to enable quick access, integrate and repackage information for the end user that will capacitate and enrich higher educational institutions means of conducting research. Basically, library resources are materials that users consult in making decisions and also for problem-solving. Libraries have always played a significant role, enabling people to engage with all kinds of information and available knowledge resources (Curran et al, 2006). However, information availability does not mean accessibility and utilization; therefore, university libraries have to provide informational signage to aid utilization of the available library information.

Perhaps, informational signage in academic libraries enhances accessibility and utilization of library resources because it provides necessary information for library users to use appropriate data. Ugah (2007) opines that the more accessible information resources are, the more likely they would be used and the readers tend to use resources that require the minimum effort to access. Informational signage saves students' time and reduces the level of stress and challenge to locate the material of interest. Even though the world is experiencing the concept of information "explosion" or "overload", the third world countries of which UK is a part can be said to be experiencing information poverty. This is, according to Ochogwu

(2007) due to the failure of our library professionals to provide complete access to those information resources due to lack of informational signs related to indexing, abstracting and bibliographic.

Dalton (2014) stresses that informational signage is one of the keys to information services utilization in academic libraries. Johnston and Mandel (2014) opine that informational signs comprise all other signs, including advertisements, art, etc. The basic guiding principles behind the design and placement of those signs should be the same. Signs deliver information, and in way-finding signage, different types of signs are necessary to deliver information. Knowing what those types of signs are is an integral part to creating a useful system of way-finding signage. When designing the system, the simpler the way-finding signage system is made, the better for all involved; from the designers of the way-finding signage system, to the visitors using it to get around. The idea behind designing signs is to convey as much information as necessary in as little space possible. The role of the librarian is to connect people to information, and according to Schmidt and Etches (2014), signs can be seen as tools to achieve this, and hence their design falls well within the scope of library work.

### **Empirical Framework**

Carr (2006) conducted a study on an experiment with Art Library Users, Signs, and Way-finding in Sloane Art Library. The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of stack end signage on user way-finding success in searches in academic libraries. An action research design was used for the study. A total of nineteen subject participated in this study. A three-week study was conducted to survey the effects of three different iterations of signage on the success of subjects performing test searches in the Sloane Art Library. The data collected were evaluated qualitatively. The result revealed that the Library of Congress call numbers were the most critical item included on the signage for a known-item search, while the subject headings and material listings were especially useful for browsing in the stacks. The study also revealed that there were no stack signs for the shelves at the beginning and end of the range of call numbers and books were housed on shelves that were flushed with the walls and signs were placed very high above the shelves. It was recommended that the signage should be designed to address the arrangement of materials on the shelf units and make this left to right configuration of materials obvious to patrons.

Similarly, Beecher (2004) conducted a study on way-finding tools in public library buildings: a multiple case study. The purpose of the study was to determine the way-finding tools in public library buildings in three large cities in the United States. The research was exploratory in nature. The population of the study was 60 participants made up of 20 volunteers from each of the three libraries. The data for the study was gained from the self-reported comments of volunteers. The data collected were evaluated qualitatively. The result revealed that the way-finding tools include; maps, signs, and directories and the degree to which each of the tools was used depended, in part, on the availability of the tools at the individual library. The result also revealed that many of the way-finding tools currently available in libraries do not facilitate item retrieval. Inconsistencies, ambiguities, disparities, obstructions and operational deficiencies all contributed to end-user frustration and retrieval failure. The study suggests that failing to address these issues may prompt library patron's end users who are increasingly interested in finding information with minimal expenditures of time and effort may turn to other information-retrieval strategies and abandon a system that they find confusing and frustrating. The way-finding literature stresses usage of

directional signs (Arthur and Passini, 2012), but only 2.3% of all signs in the academic libraries studied were directional while 14.7% were regulatory and 83.0% were informational. This ratio of directional to other signs is even starker than the ratios found by Stempler and Polger (2013) and Mandel (2012) who found 12% directional, 44% regulatory, and 44% informational and 12.7% directional, 11.7% regulatory, and 75.6% informational, respectively. It seems that even though students require additional help to get information or library services, academic libraries are utilizing even fewer directional signs than public libraries, and directional signs had more issues of clarity than other signs. Li and Klippel (2012) postulate that improving access to learning resources through provision of directional text-based and graphics-based signage is valuable because directional signs assist in orientation and navigation contributing additional information to the mental image of the environment and therefore contributing to the cognitive map and when students are not given adequate directional cues, including both having sufficient directional signs and ensuring those signs are clear, their disorientation will hinder both way-finding performance and spatial knowledge acquisition.

## Method

This study adopted survey research design. Analytical survey is used when collecting first-hand information from people in their natural settings for the purpose of getting detailed descriptions. The study was conducted in University libraries in the United Kingdom. The population of the study was 4220 registered undergraduate students in faculty of education. The simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 2 Universities in the United Kingdom, alongside 4220 registered undergraduate students which constituted the sample size for the study. The researcher developed instrument entitled “Library Signage and Students Utilization of Information Services Questionnaire” (LSSUISQ), used in collecting data for the study. The instrument was given to three research experts for face validation. Two assessors were from the Department of Education Foundations, Guidance and Counselling and one from Library Science Unit of the Department of Educational Technology and Library Science. A trial testing of the instrument was carried out using 30 registered students who did not take part in the actual study. Thereafter, the internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach’s Alpha method. The reliability coefficient index of .86 was obtained. The Regression Coefficient Analysis was used to answer research questions of Simple Linear Regression Analysis, while the F-value of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to test null hypotheses at .05 alpha level.

## Result and Discussion

**Research Question One:** What is the extent to which information guide predict students utilization of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom?

**Table 1: Simple linear regression analysis for the extent to which information guide predicts student’s utilization of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom**

Variable	R	R Square	Extent of prediction	Remark
Information Guide	.337	.114	11.4%	Low Extent
Students Utilization of Information services				

The entries in Table 1 indicates the R for the strength of the relationship and R<sup>2</sup> for the determination of the extent to which information guide predict or determine students' utilization and information service in university libraries in the United Kingdom. The R-Value of .337 indicates a low extent of relationship between the two variables. The calculated R<sup>2</sup> of .0114 which is the coefficient of determinant indicates that only 11.4% of students' utilization of information service is predicted by information guide. This implies that information guide to a low extent predicts students utilization and information service in university libraries in the United Kingdom.

### Test of Null hypotheses

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant extent to which informational guide predicts students' utilisation of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom?

**Table 2: Simple linear regression analysis for the prediction between information guide and students utilization of information service in university libraries in the United Kingdom**

Variables	Source Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-Cal	F-Crit	Decision @ p< .05
Information Guide	Regression	75.689	1	75.689	50.837	3.89	*
	Regression	79.146	396	21.159			
Students Utilization Information Service	Total	54.834	397				

**\*Significant at p< .05**

The outcome in Table 2 shows that the calculated F-value of 50.837 is greater than the critical-F value of 3.89 at .05 level of significant with 1 and 397 degrees of freedom. The result is significant; therefore, the null hypothesis which states that the extent to which information guide predicts student's utilization of information service in university libraries in the United Kingdom is not significant is rejected. The result reveals that information guides significantly predict students' utilization of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom.

### Discussion of Findings

#### Information Guide and Students' Utilization of Information Services

The result of findings in Table 1 showed that all the identified items on information guide predict students' utilization of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom. The reason for the result is obvious, informational signage gives information. It provides knowledge of how what one requires could be seen. Informational signage in academic libraries serves as a guide to direct students to where they should locate any information resources needed. This finding is in line with Admin (2016) who maintains that informational signage gives information. It provides knowledge of how what one requires could be seen. Informational signage in academic libraries serves as a guide to direct students to where they should locate any material needed.

Similarly, the result of the data presented in Table 2 showed the extent to which information guide predict students' utilization of information services in university libraries in the United

Kingdom is significant. This is because information guide provides all basic information to students in the library. It is a tool to discern various books, service points and facilities. Perhaps, informational signage in academic libraries enhances accessibility and effective utilization of library resources, because it provides necessary information for both female and male students to use appropriate data. This is in line with Dwight (2008) who postulated 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.

### **Conclusion**

Information guide foster independent and critical thinking. It solves way-finding problem in unfamiliar environment, it helps library user to use the appropriate data, tools and facilities of the library, bringing about coordination in academic libraries and aid students in way-finding and effective retrieval of the needed information. Hence, library signage has great influence on students' utilization of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom.

### **Recommendations**

1. 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.
2. Management of universities should ensure that library signage constitutes orientation content for freshmen. This will aid the young students to be acquainted with information, directional, instructional and regulatory signs in academic libraries.



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