

A Qualitative Case Study On Students' Awareness And Understanding of Library Signage at Federal College of Education, Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria

By

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Abstract

This study explored the knowledge of Library signages by the students of Federal College of Education, Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative case study research design and out of the projected 25 participants of the study, 10 interviews were used for the analysis of the study as saturation was achieved after the 10th interview. The study revealed that the knowledge of students on the available library signages in Federal College of Education Zaria library includes i) Wayfinding tools ii) Signs on the door and iii) No knowledge. The study concluded that the knowledge of library signages is an important issue that influences library patronage in the Federal College of Education, Zaria. The study recommended that the library should develop and implement signage orientation sessions or workshops for students to familiarize them with the various types of library signages and their meanings.

Keywords: Library, Library Patronage, Library Anxiety, Library Signages, Wayfinding.

Introduction

Library patronage is experiencing a significant decline worldwide (Odu, 2017; Potnis, Deosthali, Zhu, & McCusker, 2018; Saibakumo, Orewa, & Nwose, 2019), with one of the primary factors being library anxiety (McPherson, 2015). This condition involves feelings of fear, discomfort, and helplessness that individuals encounter when attempting to access library resources and services. Library anxiety can severely hinder users' effective engagement with libraries, leading to avoidance of library spaces altogether. Studies (Mellon, 1986; Abusin, Zainab & Abdulkarim, 2011) have consistently linked library anxiety to negative emotions, such as fear, helplessness, and inferiority, which contribute to an overall unpleasant experience for users.

Library anxiety manifests as a sense of being overwhelmed or unwilling to utilize library services. This anxiety disrupts the information-seeking process and is often associated with users' challenges in locating resources and apprehensions about asking for help from library staff. Most user inquiries revolve around navigation, directional guidance, and way finding within the library (Bishop & Bartlett, 2013). To address these concerns, libraries have implemented various strategies, such as improved signage, to assist users in navigating the library environment more confidently and independently.

Library signage plays a crucial role in guiding users, alleviating anxiety, reducing negative experiences, and enhancing the overall user-friendliness of the environment (Mandel & Johnston, 2019). It assists users in navigating the library, locating information resources, and using retrieval

tools like card catalogues and online public access catalogues. Additionally, signage provides essential information, such as emergency instructions, point-of-use guidance, and details about library policies, resources, services, and events. As a key component of way finding, signage helps users orient themselves and navigate the library space (Mandel, 2017). Way finding refers to how users find their way within the library, facilitated by spatial information provided through signage. Despite the presence of signage to support navigation and ease library use, academic libraries, particularly in developing countries, continue to face the challenge of declining patronage (Nse & Okorafor, 2011; Saibakumo, Orewa, & Nwose, 2019).

Statement of the problem

Library anxiety is basically the fear and apprehension attached to not finding what a library user is looking for. Studies of (Bishop & Bartlett, 2013; Mandel, 2013) have shown that majority of the questions library users ask are way-finding and navigational in nature. Human in nature have traditionally preferred the use of spatial information in form of signs and maps to find their way (Mandel, 2013). In the library setting, these way-finding tools are library signages. They instruct, inform, and direct users on library policies, emergencies, and the location of information resources and services. Despite the availability of these way-finding tools in Academic libraries however, library patronage is reducing at an alarming rate especially in the Federal College of Education, Zaria Library.

In order to improve patronage of the library by students of Federal College of Education, Zaria, there is the critical need to explore the knowledge of these students on Library signages and their understanding of the information the signages convey. This is critical because library signages help alleviate the wayfinding and navigational issues that otherwise heighten library anxiety and consequently reduces library patronage. They make the library use experience a pleasurable one and the library becomes user friendly. More so, the ability for students to find their way in FCE, Zaria library has an impact on their ability to successfully use library facilities to fulfil their own information needs.

Objective of the study

To find out the knowledge of students on the available library signages in the Federal College of Education, Zaria Library.

Research Questions

What is the knowledge of students on the available library signages in the Federal College of Education, Zaria Library?

Literature Review

Library signage is one of the most important elements involved in promoting user satisfaction in any building open to the public. Library Signage is a collective term for all the static visual symbols and devices used in a library to direct patrons to specific resources, services, and facilities and to inform them of library hours, policies, programs, and events, including their size, design, and placement.

Rakshikar and Powdwal (2020) provided narratives of variety of tasks completed by participants with average task completion time (ATCT) and explored users' facial expressions and behavior and conducted cause analysis. Findings revealed that majority of participants in university libraries felt that way finding is complex and not self-oriented even after attending library orientation, due

to the complexity of library buildings and lack of appropriate signage. The analysis of ATCT highlighted that maximum users of the university libraries in Mumbai require inordinate time to find their way and locate the required information source. Many participants experienced confusion, disorientation, indecisiveness and anxiousness while navigating and searching for information sources in libraries. It further revealed that major reasons behind prolonged time required in task completion were user specific such as user unawareness about library physical settings, classification schemes, floor-wise splits in stacking arrangement, availability of facilities, etc.

Su, Lu, Sun and Liu (2021) explored the relationship between university library signage system design and patrons' way finding behavior features. This study also investigated the effects of library users' spatial anxiety and environmental familiarity on their fixation on the area of interest of the way finding signage system using the differential test and regression. An eye movement tracking method was introduced to record eye movement data during the way finding process of participants in the library interior, targeting the cognition and psychology of library users in the way finding signage system. The visual guiding usability of landmarks, informational signages and directional signages were quantitatively tested, and the fixation on the signage system between orientation strategy users and route strategy users was compared. Findings indicated that informational signage had the best visual navigating competence. The difference of fixation duration and searching duration between patrons used various way finding strategies was significant. The informational signage was most attended by the route strategy users, and the orientation strategy users rarely focused on the directional signage. And participants with high anxiety tended to ignore the visually auxiliary function of the landmarks but paid attention to the directional signage. The participants with low anxiety could capture the landmarks that could not be easily found by the route strategy users. And participants less familiar with the environment were more sensitive to the landmarks.

Emmanuel (2020) examined library signage and students' utilization 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 study found that information guide predict students' utilization of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom. The study also found that the extent to which information guide predict students' utilization of information services in university libraries in the United Kingdom is significant.

Onwuchekwa (2020) addressed the different roles of signages and buttress the fact that Digital signage can play a major role in this communication process in addition to demonstrating a "green" environment for library patrons. Graphic Information can be displayed to the public in meeting rooms, at the front desk, in vestibules or cafeterias/cafes. The messaging can range from programs being held at the library to public service announcements to emergency messaging and so much more. There is no limit to the information that a library signage can convey to its users.

Fauchelle (2017) examined the different aspects of language that are present in the signage, handouts and websites of public libraries. It discusses the extent to which this language reflects the varying demographics of library clients. The study adopted a qualitative methodology which took a document analysis approach and utilized an inductive-coding technique to analyse data collected from four lower North Island libraries in New Zealand. Five language aspects were identified from the collected data: monolingual, bilingual and multilingual language; language

context; welcoming and prohibitive language; language consistency; and jargon. The nature and incidence of these aspects were evaluated for each of the four libraries. In some cases, the libraries achieve an accurate reflection of client demographics through their language. However, each library could make some changes to their use of language to better accommodate their distinct communities.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the Interpretive Research Paradigm and a qualitative case study research design. The study chooses 25 participants of the study, 10 interviews were used for the analysis of the study as saturation was achieved after the 10th interview. This research paradigm was adopted because the study centers on how library users make sense of their subjective reality about library signages and the subjective meanings that they attach to the use of library signages in the library. A criterion-based purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study and the following criteria was used to select participants for this study: the following are the inclusion criteria for Participants of this study:

- i. Must be a registered user of the library
- ii Must have spent a session as a student of the College
- iii. Must have used the library even on just one occasion
- iv. Be willing to share information with the researcher

Result

This objective of the study explored the knowledge of students on the available library signages in Federal College of Education, Zaria library. Three categories emerged from the narratives of participants of this study namely: i) Wayfinding tools ii) Signs on the door and iii) No knowledge.

Table 1: Knowledge of students on the available Library signages in Federal College of Education, Zaria Library

Research Questions	Categories	Subcategories
What is the knowledge of students on the available library signages in the Federal College of Education, Zaria Library?	1. Wayfinding tools	1.1 They guide us on how to use the library
		1.2 Used to locate and find books
		1.3 Direct you
	2. Signs on the doors	2.1 The signs are the ones on the doors
		3.1 I don't know anything about the signages
	3. No Knowledge	

Way finding Tools

This category emerged from narratives of participants related to the knowledge of students on the available library signages in Federal College of Education Zaria library. It is made up of three subcategories that manifested from narratives of participants, namely: i) They guide us on how to use the library ii) Used to locate and find books and iii) directs you. These subcategories are explained below:

They guide us on how to use the library: This subcategory emerged from narratives related to the knowledge of students on the available library signages in Federal College of Education Zaria Library. A participant showcased his knowledge of signages by describing them as a guide on how to use the library.

“They guide us on how to use the library...” Participant 1.

Used to locate and find books: This subcategory also emerged from narratives related to the knowledge of students on the available library signages in Federal College of Education Zaria Library. Participants knowledge of library signages also revolves around signages being used to locate and find books.

“...used to locate to find my books...” Participant 4.

Similarly, Participant 5 recounted that *“They help me to locate the section where I can find the books for my department”*.

Directs you: This subcategory also depicts the knowledge of participants on the available library signages in Federal College of Education Zaria Library. Participants reported that signages directs users of the library to the different sections of the library. Participant 4 narrated that *“...directs you and shows you that this section contains books”*. Similarly, Participants 9 and 10 expressed their knowledge of signages as:

“Signs in the library are the ones of the doors that direct”. Participant 9.

“Signs direct me to section where books of my department are located”. Participant 10.

Signs on the door

This category sums up narrative related to knowledge of students on the available library signages in the Federal College of Education, Zaria library as signs on the door. It is made up of one subcategory namely: The signs are the ones on the door. This subcategory is explained below.

The signs are the ones on the door: This subcategory emerged as a knowledge of students on the available signages in the Federal College of Education Zaria library. Participants of this study see signages as the signs on the doors that direct users to the different sections of the library.

“The signs are the ones on the doors to the different sections of the library” Participant 6.

“The signs I know are the tags on every door in the library” Participant 8.

No Knowledge

This category also emerged from narratives of participants related to knowledge of students on the available signages in the Federal College of Education Zaria library. It is made up of one subcategory. The subcategory shows some students do not have the knowledge of signages as they do not see the need for them as they bring their reading materials to the library. Participant 2 narrated that *“I don’t know anything about the signages. I come to the library with my own materials”*.

Discussion

The knowledge of students on the available library signages in Federal College of Education Zaria library includes i) Way finding tools ii) Signs on the door and iii) No knowledge.

In this study setting, participants see signages as signs that direct them to sections of the library where information resources for their departments are located. Some of the participants see signages as the signs on the doors in the library that shows the section on the library. While a participant said she has no knowledge of signages as she comes to the library with her own reading materials. Way finding tools include maps, signs, guides and pamphlets that are used to locate

information resources and services in a library. These tools have now become the focus of the next generation of information systems that offer self-services in the library. They are designed in such a way that a library user can navigate information resources and services without any help from librarians. Library signages have been captured in Library and Information science literature as way finding tools (Mandel & Johnston, 2019; Mandel, 2020; Rakshikar & Powdwal, 2021; Su, Lu, Sun & Liu, 2022). The studies however made the point that these signages should be in the forms of maps, signs, guides and pamphlets. These tools should form a way finding information system for the library. In this study setting however participants just see signages as signs on top of the doors in the library.

Way finding is a challenging task in libraries as users navigate the complex environment of the library in search of information resources and services, particularly when combined with a person's unfamiliarity with the specific environment (Rakshikar & Powdwal, 2021). It involves the navigation and the final location of information resources and services by library users. Way finding in libraries requires the user to rely on information from their surroundings to acquire the knowledge necessary to locate their destination (Iftikhar, Asghar & Luximon, 2021). This knowledge concerning how to navigate the library and destination can be obtained from signages if students have the knowledge of the content of these signages. Library signage informs library users and influences their behaviour. A library user that finds the library user friendly in terms of the ease of locating information resources and services cultivates the habit of using the library to satisfy his/her information needs and this consequently alleviates the fear of using the library. Library signages as way finding tools ultimately direct library users to information resources and services. Mandel and Johnston (2019) opined that it is therefore critical for libraries to do everything they can to provide an effective way finding information system since "poor judgment of way finding in the setting affects the way the organization itself is perceived".

Conclusion

This qualitative study shed light on the knowledge of students regarding library signages at Federal College of Education Zaria library. It could be concluded that the knowledge of library signages is an important issue that influences library patronage. Navigational and way finding challenges are also some of the sources of library anxiety among students of Federal College of Education, Zaria.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study on students' knowledge of library signages at Federal College of Education Zaria library, the following recommendation is proffered:

1. The library should develop and implement signage orientation sessions or workshops for students to familiarize them with the various types of library signages and their meanings. This will empower students to navigate the library effectively.

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