NIGERIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Proceedings of 2016 Conference of

Nigerian Library Association

Kaduna State Chapter

Theme:

Library Thing: Issues at Stake



Held at

Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (NITR)

Ungwan Rimi, Kaduna.

On 7th April, 2016





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ACHIEVING ACCESS TO INFORMATION RESOURCES THROUGH THE USE OF SIGNAGE SYSTEMS IN LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The article argues for the potential, appropriateness and conspicuous representation of messages by signage within the library space. The placement is not restricted to shelves for print and directions for electronic resources acquired for patrons use. It has been discovered that challenges abound but the essence is to encourage libraries to sustain and maintain signage's and when old, turn or mutilated be replaced immediately because of the significant roles it play for facilitation, directing, pointing and positioning of acquired information resources. It is worthy to suggest that library management should make funds available to the technical unit responsible for making befitting signs and creative expressions of obtainable services and resources.

Introduction

Library will forever rely on signs to direct, point and be used to position all its acquire information resources. These pertinent roles of signage influence arrangement, organization, storage and retrieval of information resources that fill the library spaces. Libraries must bear in mind that signage systems complement the activities of the technical divisions' operations, therefore requires commitment and creativity.

Library technical operations takes place in a designated area called the technical unit, it is responsible for the acquisition and later the cataloguing and classification of acquired information resources; it is also assigned care of these resources in areas of weeding, binding and archiving. The unit ensures that the resources processed are later transferred to specific designated library space for consultation. These implies that the unit is sensitive and responsive to staff and clients because of the role they play in servicing the information needs of patrons through the implementation of the

library information resources development policy (platform that gives the library a better sense of direction).

However, no matter how laudable a technical unit is, its functionality and appraisal rely on library stakeholders capability to access and use resources, ability to conduct self around the library space with little or no supervision, having understanding that stakeholders are not librarians and will objectively point out the comfort or challenges they confront. The capacity of self-expression by signage provide leverages to access and use of what the technical units have processed and dispatch to the library patrons space. This implies that for meaningful directions, locations, positioning and description of a resource, it is proper it is done in the technical operation unit which is the first point of contact and the unit which can categorically assign the correct messages, in addition; take good care of the signage systems of the library

According to Kusumarin, de Yong and Thamrin (2012), signage system is an important part of the completeness of information and can guide to the needs in space-building, especially in public space-buildings. These visual instructions are generally in the form of typographical elements which are signs consisting of pictures, maps, arrows, codes, colours, pictograms and others. Following the signage system is generally termed as way-finding, way-signing or sign-posting.

Signage in public space-buildings provides information as well as directions to a particular location. However, simply positioned signs are designed in accordance with the characteristic of unity with the space-building characteristic, for instance, for libraries signs defined the spaces by their types, characteristic, resources and the clients they serve. It is not different from the universal applied design because its signs as well indirectly ease all users of the facility without exception. Thus, utility is enhanced as all the users of the library can become efficient and consequently an ambassador of the library.

Essence of Signage in Library

Signages in libraries are necessary because it facilitate every user with the capability to perform his activities independently, easily and optimally. This is evident in libraries as signs always draw attention and patrons seen to be able to solve the location problems when in the library. Characteristically, Story (1998) posited that signage can be related to human physical conditions in the use of a design product, and have become standard principles in universal design approach. Signage essentially apart from being universal in it composition and design should be:

a. Equitably Use: The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
b. Flexibility in Use: The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

c. Simple and Intuitive Use: Use of the design is easy to understand regardless of the users' experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
d. Perceptible Information: The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient condition or the user 's sensory abilities
e. Tolerance for Error: The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
f. Low Physical Effort: The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
g. Size and Space for Approach and Use: Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of user body size, posture or mobility.

Therefore, signage enables people to clearly understand the layout and function of a space-building or environment and to find their way around independently. Signage and information should be usable and informative to everyone and include information in visual, tactile, and audible formats. It should be simple and easy for everybody to understand.

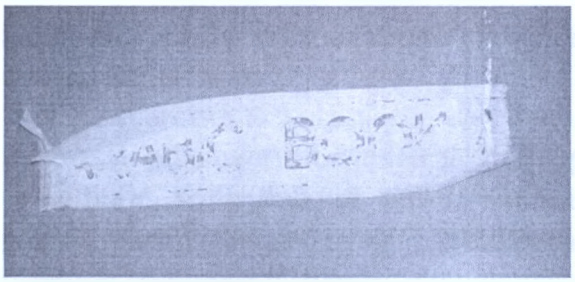
Problem Statement

Although sign guide the ways to finding and self-orientating in complex buildings like the libraries with so much shelves, gadgets and information resources. Research on the role of signage in libraries has become imperative because it influences mobility, access and retrieval of information resources by both staff and patrons on the other hand has been discovered to be the single entity of library operation that is most neglected during the design process. Peculiarly, signage has been able to address the need of people with special needs like shyness, complexes, disability, etc, then why has it been treated indifferently in the library cycle?

The signage system as one of the main elements in public facilities is also an elements that must be studied and applied taking cognizance of submissions made of the composition of universal design approach (www.universaldesign.ie/buildingforeveryone). Has the considerations made of the library things and issues at stake include signage systems as requisite to attracting patrons? What content of messages in the library respect patrons? This is a problem that libraries neglect but this paper is poised to investigate the state of selected libraries in a library complex. The essence is also to rekindle discourse among professionals to proffer ways of improving signs in the library through shared experiences, problems with application of the signage systems and ultimately produce alternative solutions to those problems as it affect the library environment and the

uniformity of purpose using the universal design movements to vanguard the use of signage systems. What benefits can the library achieve with signage system within library space? What types of signage is appropriate within the library space? These are the problems that must be resolved.

However, inconsistency of messages and contents can thwart patrons' efforts, compromising their time, delay identification of resources, contact and depriving the retrieval of information resources. Staff are not also spared whenever the library signage is in poor state, it affect staff capability to easily locate a resource, frustrating the followership of a patron and in some instances, staff are tagged incompetent and misguiding because of these deficiencies.





Common state of signage systems in libraries as a result of age, mutilation, tear or defacing

Objective

The objective of this paper is to determine the types of signage in libraries, encourage librarians on ways to explore it and benefits the library service systems.

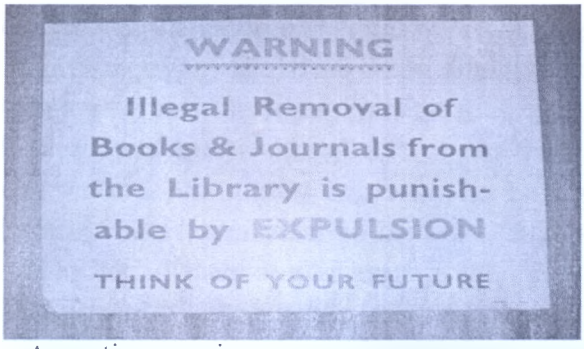
Types of signage and roles in libraries

- Cautionary: Warn against unethical acts and the resulting penalties.
- Compositional : Categorical of what resources or services that are obtainable
- Descriptive: What is obtainable
- Directional: Where to go
- Identification: What to look out for when within the library space
- Locational: Movements charts and/or maps
- Operational : Name of unit, division or offices where enquiries can be tabled
- Positional: Where resources are accessible and retrievable

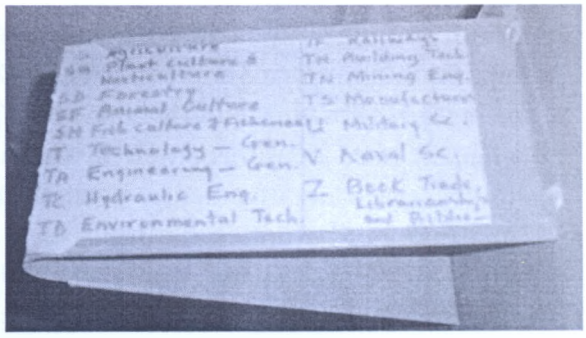
What Types of Messages Should Signage in Library Space Compose of?

- All signage should be clear, consistent, and easy to understand messages.
- Provide concrete information.
- Letter size selected should be suitable and viewable from distance.

- Capable of aiding to overall orientation of the library (could be in the forms of maps, diagrams and directory signs).
- Provide directional guidance to the library resources arrangement and locations in library
- Signs should include arrows.



A cautionary sign



An indicate/Positioning sign

Methodology

The research utilized survey of selected libraries within the Ahmadu Bello University Library complex to observe, investigate types of signage systems that prevails these library spaces and obtain evidences (photographs)in order to compare with the universal design thinking which elaborates on the imperatives of signs in public places. Literatures were consulted to broaden understanding, the consistency, maintenance and sustenance of signage systems in libraries.

Findings and Discussions

Visits to academic, public and special libraries reveal relative application and use of signage systems. However, many have signs that are defaced, old or depleted and in some cases need immediate replacements. This automatically affects the essence of using signage systems in the library buildings and against the universal design thinking which advocated a self-exclaiming space. Further investigations show that the assigning of responsibilities on the design, maintenance and sustenance of library signs is not consistent across the libraries visited. This calls for a review of personnel or committees assigned the responsibilities of the signage systems in the libraries. The challenge observed has been reported elsewhere by Lockwood (2010) who proposed periodic assessment of patrons by surveying opinions on the state of the library signage system, messages, alternatives and expected outcomes. Therefore, staff tasked with educating, enlightening, sensitizing and renewing the signage should enjoy the shredding of responsibilities during the period of updating the signage system.

Libraries expansion is observed to be a dominant factor responsible for poor signage system; composition, change of locations and coverage of resources are sometimes not reflected. A report by both Velazquez, Black and Ahmadi (2015), and the Dietitians of Canada (2010) revealed that the library is not the only affected environment, for instance students in Vancouver schools are exposed to signage directly conflicting with messaging promoted by programs designed to promote healthy eating. Gaps caused by expansion (shelf by shelf, resources subject areas or repositioning information resources and services from an earlier library space) should be bridge following item by item description in order that target patrons do not suffer when in need of information in the library space. The familiarity of staff with the library space arrangements, positioning and effectiveness within the library space area may not be noticeable until such a staff is moved or transferred elsewhere, the negative effect is made worst when the signage system is not inscribe properly to direct; a fundament avenue that include and avails patrons the opportunity to effectively and efficiently explore the library services and resource delivery systems.

No matter how good a cataloguer, classifier, subject specialist is, or the acquisition arm of a library, it will remain ineffective if the resource does not get to the target patrons attention. The platform readily available is the appropriate use of befitting signs with sufficient messages to indicate the type of resource, subject area and location in the library space to find such resources. To go beyond the technical unit, signs also provide patrons the capability to self-detect the functionality of an effective and efficient technical unit as they explore the correlates that pool resources together especially those depict by the library signage system.

Conclusion

It is clear that library space needs signage systems to facilitate it to achieve the service delivery mandate of the library. Therefore, signage systems within the library space should be accorded high priority activity and not compromise because it plays numerous roles of directing, positioning and revealing the locations of service to clients and encourage these clients to self-actualization as they develop confidence, deliberate consciousness, are guided and cautioned while using, behaving and utilizing the library space.

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