Indexing and publishers in Nigeria: a plea

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Briefly reviews the state of book indexing by publishers in Nigeria. Sample indexes are criticized and suggestions for improvement made.

Introduction

Publishing is still underdeveloped in Nigeria compared with developed countries. This could be due to the low level of printing technology, the high illiteracy rate, or the low demand made by the general public. The high development of the education sector has stimulated the publishing industry. A few indigenous publishers have emerged. These include the Onibonje Publishers, Nwamife Publishers, New Africa Publishers, University of Ibadan Press, University of Ife Press, University of Nigeria Press, and Ahmadu Bello University Press, to name a few. Other reputable publishers such as Macmillan, Longmans, African University Press, etc., have subsidiaries in Nigeria.

Critical examination of books from these publishers shows that some do not include indexes, and those indexes that are included are of poor quality. This corroborates Collison's recent remarks that we must recognize that to the public at large, to the publishers, and, shamefully, even to many authors, indexes are of little consequence. This is indeed a great shame, especially to reputable publishers who are expected to set the pace. In developing countries, and Nigeria especially, where reading is not well developed, an index serves as a particularly useful aid. As newcomers, Nigerian publishers should aim to achieve the best in publishing by giving indexes priority in their publishing efforts. This is, however, not the case, as most of them publish without indexes.

Oyesola's plea for the Nigerian Library Association to encourage the provision of indexes in acceptable forms is welcome. The most immediate concern would be for interested librarians who have long been engaged in some form of documentation and information work that involves indexing to form a society of indexers, affiliated to the UK Society of Indexers. We do already have some librarians who are members of this society.

Sample indexes: a critique

More than 100 books from various Nigerian publishers were examined to validate my findings, with the hope of correcting this anomaly. Extracts from these books follow:


Index

Adefope, H. E. O., 195, 196.
Adegbesan, J. O., 173.
Addis Ababa, 43, 45, 122, 123, 136, 137.
Cost of living allowance, 2.
Dacko, D., 207.


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Accounts
fair picture, must present, 244–245.
see also balance sheet; profit and loss.

Articles of Association

call on shares, 119–120
contract authorised by, 62, 65, 69
interest, disclosure of, 76, 97
liability for secret profits, 182.


—No index in either of these important books.

Some of the books surveyed, highly useful and from established, reputable publishers, lack indexes. Generally, most of the indexes that are provided are scanty, less than 5% of the text. Some have author, subject and geographical indexes jumbled together. Most of the subheadings do not clearly define an aspect of the main topic. Indexing consistency and thoroughness is lacking. The layout of most of the indexes is unclear and misleading to the user. The state of indexing must be
reviewed by publishers in Nigeria in order to enhance the quality of their books.

**Suggestions for improvement**

Production of bad indexes may not be the fault of publishers alone. Other factors, such as lack of indexing standards from the Nigerian Library Association and of demand for quality book production by the Nigerian users, as well as the unavailability of trained indexers, play a part. To ameliorate this situation, the following suggestions are offered:

* Indexing courses should be given a prime place in library school curricula in Nigeria, as are cataloguing and classification.

* The Nigerian Library Association should set indexing standards for publishers in Nigeria.

* Publishers in Nigeria should engage the services of librarians with expertise in indexing principles to prepare indexes for them.

**Conclusion**

Nigerian readers deserve the best in book production to enhance the utility value of these books. Publishers in Nigeria are admonished to pay some attention to the quality of their indexes and their reputation rather than maximizing profit.

**References**


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**Standards for information handling**

The information that we handle may be defined as intellectual communication between people, orally or graphically presented. Since the purpose of communication is to be understood, information must be ordered and presented in an assimilable manner. Specialized information must conform to the accepted organization of its particular matter and make use of accepted terminology. (Categorization and terminology themselves are naturally subject to continual change as the study of the speciality develops.) The information must also be set out in conformity with the rules for writing or speaking in a particular language and for writing to a particular readership.

A physical medium is necessary to preserve and disseminate the information: paper or tape, for example, to keep it in the form determined; books, journals, online systems, microforms to reproduce and distribute it.

Because there is so much information generated it cannot be left to find its own way into the hands of the people who need it. A whole apparatus of reviewing, cataloguing, abstracting and indexing services is needed to assess, analyse, list and pinpoint the recorded information in its various formats. In addition, a sufficient number of commercial and non-commercial agencies must be established to collect and make available on demand material published in any format, offering it to the user either in the physical form in which it was originally produced or in some other form.

In today’s world the exchange of information is no longer confined to specific regions or cultures—all places, languages, and social structures are potential suppliers, mediators and users of information. It is therefore imperative that some degree of conformity exists in all the practices of generating, disseminating, and acquiring information.

Unesco’s concern that standards at present available in this field are not widely accepted internationally and that standardization in many parts of it are lacking is shown by the publication of the *UNISIST guide to standards for information handling* (Paris, Unesco, 1980. Available free of charge from the Section for the Promotion of Methods, Norms and Standards of the Division of the General Information Programme of Unesco, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris.) The guide has been prepared by the UNISIST Working Group on Bibliographic Data Interchange, with the help of outside experts, and compiled by Erik Vajda. It is a bibliography of official standards, guides, directives and other normative materials, listed under the following headings: Intellectual preparation of documents and subject analysis (including abstracting, classification systems and thesauri); Production of documents (including the physical medium, printing and magnetic recording); Reproduction of documents; Representation of information (including written text, symbols, illustrative matter); Editing of documents; Preparation of bibliographic records; Interchange of machine-readable bibliographic data; Management of document collections; Numerical data.

Each section is introduced by a general definition of