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


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
the subject. Coverage by standards is noted, and sometimes a comment is offered, as when the importance of standardizing the form of headings in catalogues is stressed, or the value for exchange purposes of authority files. The compiler points to the work being done by IFLA in that area. He points also to subjects which, although of international importance, lack official standards, such as Cataloguing-in-publication (CIP)—a lacuna likely to be filled as a result of the International CIP Conference in Ottawa in 1982.

On indexing it is noted that 'standardization of indexing principles is one of the ongoing projects within ISO/TC 46/SC5 [a technical committee of the International Organization for Standardization] and that no standardization work has yet been undertaken in the field of computer-aided automatic indexing'.

Among sources of 'further useful information on documentary languages' we note monographs by members of the Society of Indexers, M. C. Anderson, K. G. B. Bakewell and R. L. Collison. The Bibliography, pp. 205-71, puts into alphabetical order, by issuing body, publications mentioned in the text. A detailed subject index refers to the numbered section of the text which includes the topic.

This preliminary edition lacks Part 1—Users and their fields of work—which is to be published later. It was a good decision not to delay publication of Part 2, the more substantial part, as the descriptive bibliography is of immediate usefulness and stands alone as a very valuable compilation.

Widespread British interest in standards for information handling is shown by the creation of the National Forum on Bibliographic Standards. First convened by the Library Association in 1981, the Forum consists of representatives of associations concerned with the existence and use of such standards. Associations of libraries, library cooperatives, the British Library, schools of library and information studies, are not, of course, the only bodies represented. Publishers, booksellers, data base producers and computer services are also represented, as well as societies like our own which are interested in many aspects of information handling. The British Standards Institution is represented by its Principal Technical Officer in charge of Documentation Standards. Membership of the Forum by the Office of Arts and Libraries and the British Council indicates official interest.

The Forum meets twice a year to hear and discuss reports on standardizing work already accomplished or still in progress. Reports may be made by members of standardizing committees who are not themselves members of the Forum but who have been asked to come and bring the meeting up to date with their committee's activities. Recent topics have included input standards for data bases, the form and content of union catalogues, the expansion of the British CIP programme, and the government's proposals on copyright legislation. Members of the Forum comment on the papers presented and offer suggestions for emendation and for making good an agreed lack.

Although the National Forum on Bibliographic Standards has no official status, and is solely a discussion and advisory body, it represents important users and creators of standards and its voice is not ineffectual. The fact that so many interests are represented gives it additional importance in that a standard conceived for one set of users can be broadened to serve other interests also; furthermore, conflicting provisions in different standards can be noted and, it is hoped, reconciled.

Because, as the Unesco guide demonstrates, national standards are no longer sufficient, the Forum extends its concern to international standardization. Its last meeting, for example, heard reports on the new UNIMARC manual and on the Universal Availability of Publications.

Mary Piggott

Every author his own indexer?

'If it needs an index, which is usually drawn up separately at the page proof stage, ensure that the task is not given to someone else to do. That is, unless you positively hate indexing. Because if you don't do it yourself you will find that, in line with your agreement, the indexer will be paid out of your royalties! So make it clear to your publishers that you will prepare your own index.'

—questionable advice offered by Ronald C. Denney in 'Traumas of technical writing' (Chemistry in Britain, April 1983, p. 299). The Registrar of the Society of Indexers sent the following letter to the journal's editor:

'I am not surprised that Ronald C. Denney titled his article 'Traumas of technical writing'. In advising the author, 'ensure that the task is not given to someone else to do. That is, unless you positively hate indexing', he gives only a financial caution having warned that no money is to be made out of writing books. Why should an author pay an indexer, why not the publisher?

Does Mr Denney think the compilation of an index such a simple task that it is not worth paying for? Or does he so undervalue them that he thinks that any list of words in columns will serve?

Indexing is a craft which has to be learnt, it is time-consuming, and should be paid for by the publisher, not by the poor exploited author. It is not surprising, with such advice, and the prevalent attitude of publishers, that an estimated 80% of published indexes are worthless.

Elizabeth Wallis