

# Publishing of Technical Education Books in Nigeria: Constraints and Suggestions for Improvement

By

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## Abstract

The current emphasis in vocational and technical education requires appropriate instructional materials for teaching the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for industrial and economic development.

The paper presents essential ingredients for producing high quality books in technical education. Peculiar problems associated with publishing technical education books were highlighted. Based on these, some suggestions were made towards overcoming the identified problems.

## Introduction

Publishing plays an important function in any society. It facilitates the dissemination and diffusion of knowledge which is our nation's **greatest asset**. It can be regarded as the conveyor of knowledge from the author to the readers. The book industry packages knowledge and the publishing of books is making the knowledge known to the readers. Iwerebon (1991) stated that books are sources of knowledge and any country that starves this source should be prepared to live with ignorance. This implies that there is no education without books.

Provision of technical knowledge and vocational skills that are necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development is one of the aims of technical education in Nigeria. (National Policy on Education, 1981).

Technical education books must be available in order to achieve the goals of the National Policy on technical education. One of the ways to achieve this is to develop appropriate instructional materials that will aid the teaching and learning of technical subjects. Educationists have the responsibility of providing adequate books using local resources. As of now, there are locally published books on Introductory technology while *there are not enough technical books for senior secondary and tertiary levels*. Much of what is in the market are foreign publications which are costly and in most cases use illustrations that are rather foreign to our environment. *There is the need to provide the right books to the right people*. This will assist in improving the *standard of education* at all levels of our educational system.

It has been observed that Nigeria is suffering from acute shortage of *books of all forms* (Okojie and Azubuiké, 1988; Okoro, 1990). With this awareness, there is the need to evolve strategies for producing books in technical education. The purpose of this paper are to:-

1. highlight the need for publishing technical education books in Nigeria;
2. outline the problems of publishing technical education books; and
3. suggest ways for making the problems surmountable.

## The need for publishing Technical Education Books in Nigeria

The current system of education (put into operation in September, 1982) attaches equal importance to academic as well as vocational courses. The former grammar

school system encouraged the publication of liberal arts education books. With the current emphasis in vocational and technical education, more textbooks written by local authors in the technical and engineering fields is in great demand. Publishing more textbooks in technical education is likely to improve the degree of technological literacy of the citizens. Currently, foreign books dominate the publishing industry in Nigeria. Nkwocha (1972) asserted that most of the foreign books do not meet our requirements because they do not consider the culture of the people or consumers of the ideas. This point is made clearer when one considers their writing style, examples, illustrations and explanation of concepts. Textbooks that use local examples and illustrations are better understood by students than imported ones with foreign examples.

The time has come for publishing companies in Nigeria to open their doors for educators and technical writers because of the prospect of selling technical books. Many publishers have not been able to produce the wide range of textbooks required for the 6-3-3-4 system. At present, some publishers prefer Junior Secondary School (JSS) textbooks to specialised books in occupational areas such as Auto mechanics, Applied Electricity, Basic Electronics, Metal Work, Woodwork and Technical Drawing. This is because of the present low enrolment of students in the WAEC Senior Secondary School examinations. They feel that technical manuscripts in these areas will not be commercially profitable. It is good to know that the present situation is temporal and the number will increase geometrically as more people become aware of their utilitarian values. Time has come for publishers to patronise local authors or lose very good and scholarly manuscripts to foreign publishers.

Nigerian authors have their part to play in making technical education books available. They need to patronise local publishers and abide by the writing guidelines for technical books. High quality books is important to all that are involved in the book industry. Publishers of quality books will likely have more readers while authors will be proud to have their books published by reputable publishers (Mitchell, 1972).

Most publishers would expect manuscripts to contain author's innovations and perceptions. Besides the content must reflect class tested explanations and examples. (Beakley, 1988). This makes every author's book to be unique. Generally publishers would expect writers of student texts to use illustrations sensibly and let each statement communicate relevant ideas in the context of the topic under consideration. The text titles are often selected to have marketing impact. Book importation is on the decline and quality books will bring national recognition and professional acclaim to local authors.

### **Problems of publishing Technical Education Books**

One of the current threat to publishing technical education books is the low level of readership. Zell (1980) observed that the bulk of local publishing output is aimed at the school book market. Most people read to pass examination and low enrolment in the examinations imply low sales. A book will only be published if publishers can predict that it will be commercially successful. This led some publishers to define a good book as "one that sells well". Consequently, most Nigerian publishers focus on prescribed textbooks for educational institutions since the bulk of the book market is with the school system.

For the past five years, there has been low entries in WAEC Technical examinations. (West African Examinations Council, WAEC entries: 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990). As of now, students who enrol for WAEC Senior Secondary School (SSS).

technical examinations are not sufficiently large to enable the publishers to publish reasonably priced texts for them. Publishers consider book publishing in terms of cost of production and market/sales (Mitchell, 1972; Zell, 1980; Iwerebon, 1991).

There is the problem of getting technical educators to write good educational materials. Iwerebon (1991) opined that Nigerian authors are not professional writers. They are teachers, professors, lecturers, etc., who have other pressing engagements besides teaching and writing. Kadiri (1987) also observed that those who can write at the tertiary level direct their effort towards production of journal articles to earn promotions, in the face of "publish or perish" conditions attached to promotion exercises in most Nigerian universities. Beakley (1988) argued that what discourages academics in writing textbooks is the high esteem given to research papers than textbooks.

Most of the needed raw materials for book production are not available locally. There is shortage of printing materials such as paper, ink, films, plates and chemicals (Iwerebon, 1991). These materials have to be imported and that increases the cost of book production. Although there are paper mills at Jebba in Kwara State, Iwopin in Ogun State and Oku-Iboku in Akwa Ibom State, they need to be expanded to produce enough paper and improved upon to produce the type required for book production. The three paper mills were set up to promote self-sufficiency in the paper industry. The Iwopin Mill produces writing papers, the Jebba Mill produces industrial grade papers while the Oku-Iboku Mill produces newsprint for the newspapers industry (Central Bank of Nigeria, 1986).

There is frequent shortage of spare parts, machinery and printing equipment. The publishing effort of local publishers is not yielding much fruit because of the rudimentary process in colour separation, graphics, typesetting, bindery, book design and illustration. (The Guardian, 1991). Their printing capability is inadequate. This is because manually operated machines are still being used. Publishing has become a highly technological process. The current thing is the use of computer-aided publishing (CAP) systems which has the ability to automate publishers' work and reduce the time and cost of publishing a wide range of materials (Abbott, 1986). Our local publishers will particularly benefit from electronic publishing system since it is cheaper in terms of cost and saves time than the present method of production.

Another problem is that of piracy which is a theft of copyright. Book industry has been hit by the pirates and the effect is more on the author who is robbed of a portion of his/her royalty. The 1988 copyright law (an update of copyright Act of 1970) provides punishment to offenders. The copyright holder has the right to sue the infringer and claim damages. However, some writers (Bankole, 1988; Bolodeoku, 1988; Ojo-Igbinoba, 1991) doubt whether the Nigerian Copyright Council (NCC) will be effective because the present penalty imposed on infringement of copyright work is inadequate. It is interesting to note that piracy often affect books that are needed in the market. Bankole (1988) remarked that piracy of books in Nigeria will reduce if publishers serve the market when books are needed by the public.

#### **Suggestions for Improving the Current Situation**

Under the present constraints, the following suggestions are recommended to improve the production and circulation of technical education reading materials. Most of the recommendations can be applied to other instructional materials.

Training programme should be mounted for authors, editors and publishers that would make them do their work better. In this case, co-operation is essential since

each group has a part to play in book production. Authors should know what the publishers need and make contributions that can improve the text's marketing potential. Authors' suggestions can be on page layout, cover design, photographs and provision of drawings that can illustrate their textbooks. Training programmes should be organised for writers at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels which will highlight essential requirements for producing manuscripts of international standard. In addition, there could be sub-grouping of writers according to occupational areas or disciplines. Bolodeoku (1988) asserted that authors' education will make writers to understand their rights and responsibilities.

If publishers must produce more books, enough papers must be available. As a result, more paper mills should be established to meet the needs of publishers. The paper mills at Iwopin and Jebba should be expanded in order to be self-sufficient in writing and industrial grade papers. At the interim, the Government should abolish the 40 % duty on paper importation in order to reduce the cost of production. Besides, the second phase of the petro-chemical project should be completed on schedule in order to get a regular supply of chemical raw materials for the book industry.

There should be Government policy on book. Okojie and Azubuike (1988) suggested that such policy should provide for authors' welfare, book quality in terms of content and format, book supply and distribution. The National Policy on Education (1981) recognises that most of our textbooks at present are unsuitable and inadequate. This led to the establishment of a National Book Development Council (NBDC) whose functions include promoting the development, production and distribution of books for all levels and the encouragement of indigenous authors (NPE, 1981). It is expected that a good atmosphere should be created for effective performance and development of the book industry in Nigeria. Wali (1988) suggested that the NBDC should be separated from the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and made to concentrate on its main functions. The worry is that the NERDC cannot combine the extra business of publishing with its several other roles.

The copyright law must be strictly enforced to make it effective. The Twenty-five members of the Nigerian copyright council should discharge their duty without fear or favour to maintain the confidence people repose in them. The 1988 copyright law provides penalties for criminal infringement when the law is contravened willfully or intentionally for commercial advantage or private financial gain, (Ojo-Igbinoba, 1991).

### **Conclusion**

Books are vital to the development of any society. Publishing of technical education books using local authors will benefit students, authors and publishers. Those in the book industry should look beyond the present constraints and work towards the production of quality books for the public. The government has a great part to play in reducing the cost of production. Their laws could be made to favour the importation of needed publishing materials and discourage piracy. It is essential to use the abundant intellectual resources within the country towards profitable gain.

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