

Career Prospect in Book Publishing for Graduates in English

Outline of a Talk given by Agbo Areo

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Introduction

- *Before Printing Started*
 - writing in various forms having started several centuries in ancient times, BC/BCE, i.e. Before Christ/Before Christian Era
 - the Persians and Assyrians had the *cuneiform* system
 - the ancient Egyptians wrote in *hieroglyphics* (picture writing)
 - the Hebrews, the Greeks and the use of the Scribes to reproduce (re-write) single, individual copies.
- *Invention of Printing*
 - the German, John Gutenberg (1398 – 1468), a blacksmith, goldsmith invented/introduced printing to Europe in 1439, through the invention of his ‘mechanical movable type’, the ‘letterpress’ printing system, capable of mechanically reproducing several copies of a book as opposed to reproduction by re-writing by hand (by ‘scribes’) additional individual copies.
 - **the Bible** as the first book published by Gutenberg, known as **Gutenberg Bible**, in about **1455**.
 - **the Psalter**, i.e. a collection of sacred hymns together with their musical notes, was also published by Gutenberg **in 1457**.
 - Italy, France, Switzerland later knew about Gutenberg’s invention and replicated it in their countries.
 - **William Caxton**, referred to as the father of English printing, started his press in England in **1475**, after returning from Germany where he had learnt the craft and trade.
 - Caxton got translated from Latin several handwritten works and published over 100 books, by the end of 1477.

Notable Precursors of British Book Publishing

- **The Oxford University Press** (OUP) founded in 1478 as an integral part of the University of Oxford, a university founded in the Middle Ages.
- **The Cambridge University Press**, founded in 1521 as an integral part of the University founded in the thirteenth century.
- Some other families in printing and stationery business established book publishing business in England, mainland Europe, and subsequently in the ‘New World’, i.e. America.

Nigeria

- Literacy starting in Nigeria in the mid 1850s after the Abolition of Slavery, and the late 1850s marked the beginning of formal school education in Nigeria.

- Nigeria initially as sales outpost of books published in Gt. Britain.
- the 1940s, 1950s and the 1960s — still sales outpost but the OUP established in Nigeria (1948), followed by others – Longman, Thomas Nelson, Evans Brothers, Macmillan, Heinemann in the 1950s and 1960s.
- the 1970s and establishment of indigenous publishers: Onibonoje, the Fourth Dimension, Literamed, etc. etc.

The 1970s Explosion/Boom in Nigerian Book Publishing

- Establishment of full Publishing Departments in Nigeria by the multinational book publishing companies.
- appointing and training of Nigerian publishing staff both locally and abroad.

The Graduate in English as Book Editor

- Virtually all the editors first appointed by the multinational book publishing companies in Nigeria in the 1970s as university graduates in English, called Humanities Editor.

Qualities of the Book Editor

- Real competence and confidence in the use of English language (or plus any other language the editor hopes to handle, e.g. Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, Efik, etc., or French)
- a pleasant personality
- one who keeps abreast of latest developments in the educational, economic and social/sociological issues in the country, and in relation to the outside world
- one who has an eye for details, given to constructive criticism, who combines the qualities of a good talker/speaker and good listener.

Editorial Functions

- Editing: first, checking for accuracy of content, arrangement, language use/competence, illustrations in manuscripts
- arranging, where necessary, for external assessment of manuscripts
- working in close co-operation with other publishing/production staff — typesetter, book designer, artist/illustrator, and sometimes printers
- may sometimes be required to do some re-writing
- assisting the sales personnel by giving necessary information on sales points on books handled by her as the book editor
- visit bookshops, book fairs to be familiar with what other competitors are doing
- scouting for publishable manuscripts, i.e. manuscripts acquisition

E-books (Electronic Publishing)

- electronic books (electronic publishing) as an integral part of global electronic commerce (e-commerce)
- ***Forerunners of electronic books***
 - the *audio books* since the 1950s: books, especially plays, recorded in the old vinyl long-play (LP) records, the subsequent audio and video cassettes, and eventually the Compact Discs (CD); examples, the BBC series

- electronic business, including books, ‘... is created electronically, delivered electronically, with support payments and updates all handled on the Internet,’ as explained by David Howell (1999) (*Successful E-commerce in A Week*)
- electronic books are prepared in the normal, usual stages a book passes through: editing, typesetting, proof-reading, page and cover designing, text illustrations if needed
- the complete book is subsequently stored in a CD or uploaded in PDF format, and transmitted to the buyer through the Internet
- an author’s or publisher’s website is absolutely necessary, and reliable means of payment are imperative: payments through any of (i) Credit or Debit Cards, (ii) Digital Cash, (iii) Micropayments, (iv) Smart Cards
- Downloading after payment could be through:
 - a personal computer
 - PDA (Personal Digital Assistant)
 - specially designed e-book
- Some electronic publishers are in arrangement with some reputable courier service companies to deliver in CD or any other suitable electronic form, orders to their subscribers in various countries of the world.

Book Writing

- Two broad categories of books: (i) educational books, (ii) general books
- **Educational books:** these comprise mainly:
 - school books at various educational levels
 - professional books, for trades/crafts and other professions, e.g. carpentry, bricklaying, surveying, electrical works,
 - and higher professions as in technology, engineering, medicine, pharmacy, etc.
- **General Books:** these, with sub-categories, comprise:
 - fiction: novels, plays (drama), poetry
 - biography/memoir, travelogue
 - children’s books
 - leisure: e.g. gardening, photography, etc.
 - alternative health
 - annotated bibliography
 - self-help and motivational books, religion
 - calendars and gazettes
 - encyclopedias

The Writer

- For any or all kinds of books, a background of appropriate vast reading, and relevant experience imperative
- Undoubted competence/confidence in the use of language
- For educational and professional books, very close knowledge of relevant curriculum/syllabuses and course contents
- Familiarity with the relevant test/examination syllabus
- Diligent search for the appropriate publisher of the work produced
- Patience and good luck (to secure the appropriate publisher).

Career Opportunities

- Full time editor
- Freelance editor
- Full time writer
- Book packaging
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