CONTENT QUALITY AND QUALITY OF FORM AS PREDICTORS OF BOOK SALES PERFORMANCE OF EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHERS IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The publishing industry plays a crucial role in knowledge dissemination and educational development, yet many publishers struggle with sub-optimal sales performance. This study examines the impact of content quality (which refers to the intellectual and academic value of a book) and quality of form (which encompasses the book's physical and visual appeal) on the sales performance of educational publishers in Southwestern Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was employed, drawing on data from publishing firm managers, sales representatives, and school administrators who are key decision-makers in textbook adoption. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to analyze the relationship between these variables. The results indicate that both content quality and quality of form significantly influence book sales performance ($p < 0.05$), but quality of form exhibits a stronger significant relationship with sales performance ($t = 3.89$, $p < 0.05$). In other words, attributes such as book layout, paper quality, binding, and aesthetics were found to be critical determinants of consumer preferences and adoption decisions. The study recommends the need for publishers to improve both content depth and physical presentation of their books to remain competitive. The findings further suggest that while content quality ensures curriculum alignment and pedagogical relevance, quality of form drives consumer appeal and marketability. Consequently, strategic investment in production quality, regular content revisions, and improved material standards are recommended to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of educational publishers.

Keywords: Content Quality, Quality of Form, Book Sales Performance, Educational Publishing,

INTRODUCTION

The publishing industry is an essential pillar of education, knowledge dissemination, and cultural preservation. In the context of Nigeria, educational publishers play a vital role in meeting the learning needs of the growing population (Sosale, 1999). Their products, primarily textbooks and educational materials are indispensable to the academic success of students and the teaching efficiency of educators (Jacob, John and Gwany, 2020; Ajoke, 2017). However, achieving sales performance in the competitive publishing industry remains a persistent challenge. Book sales performance, which indicates the volume and financial value of books sold over a specific period, is crucial for the sustainability of publishers. Factors influencing book sales performance include the quality of content and the quality of form, which together determine a book's appeal and usability (Akangbe, 2021; Suchanek & Kralova, 2015).

Content quality refers to the intellectual value of a book (Akangbe, 2021). It encompasses the relevance, depth, and alignment of the content with the curriculum and the needs of its target audience. According to Harris et al. (2014), books with high-quality content often gain wider acceptance among educators and students because they meet academic and pedagogical standards. On the other hand, Akangbe (2021) further described quality of form as the physical and visual attributes of a book, including typography, layout, paper quality, cover design, and binding. These aspects significantly influence the attractiveness and durability of the book, thus affecting its marketability and sales performance (Akangbe, 2022; Matthews and Moody, 2007).

The relationship between content quality, quality of form, and sales performance has gained increasing attention in recent years (Ayanso et al., 2011; Djakasaputra et al., 2021; Nwoko and Obi, 2024). Globally, the publishing industry has recognized the need to invest in high-quality production to meet the expectations of an increasingly discerning audience (Apeh and Didiugwu, 2016). In Nigeria, however, many publishers face constraints such as inadequate funding, outdated production technologies, and insufficient quality control mechanisms. These challenges often lead to substandard books that fail to compete effectively in the market, resulting in poor sales performance and financial instability for publishers (Oyeyinka et al., 2016; Juliana, 2011).

According to Thompson (2005), the ability of educational publishers to achieve favourable sales performance is critical for their financial health and contribution to educational development. However, in Southwestern Nigeria, many educational publishers struggle to meet sales targets despite the growing demand for textbooks. Preliminary investigation by Thornton (2004) reveals that the problem of poor book sales performance is not solely due to external factors, such as competition or economic conditions, but also internal issues related to production quality. Specifically, low content quality and poor-quality form have been identified as significant barriers to achieving optimal sales performance (Akangbe, 2021).

Educational books are expected to meet stringent quality standards to gain acceptance among educators, school administrators, and students (Stabback, 2016). However, many publishers fail to invest adequately in content development and form design. For instance, poorly edited texts, misaligned content with curriculum requirements, unattractive cover designs, and fragile binding often result in customer dissatisfaction and reduced patronage. Furthermore, publishers face difficulties in maintaining consistency in quality across their product lines, which undermines their credibility and market position (Jenkins, 2018; Adamu, 2020).

Research on book sales performance has largely centred on external factors, such as marketing strategies, distribution channels, and consumer behaviour. Kotler et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of effective marketing in enhancing product visibility and consumer engagement. Similarly, studies on distribution networks highlight the role of accessibility and convenience in driving book sales (Richardson and Evans, 2017; Jagdale et al., 2024). However, these studies often overlook the fundamental attributes of books, such as content quality and form quality, which are equally crucial in influencing sales performance.

In the context of production quality, Suchanek, Richter, and Kralova (2014) found that customer satisfaction is directly linked to product quality, which in turn affects sales performance. Their study, conducted in the food industry, provides insights that are transferable to the publishing sector, where product quality significantly determines consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Akangbe (2021) specifically highlighted the challenges faced by Nigerian publishers in maintaining high production quality, citing limited resources and inadequate quality control measures as major constraints.

Similarly, studies have shown that content quality, when aligned with curriculum standards, enhances the relevance of educational books and their acceptance by educators and students (Jenkins, 2018). This alignment ensures that books meet pedagogical requirements, thereby increasing their adoption in schools and contributing to higher sales performance. Furthermore, quality of form has been linked to consumer perception, with visually appealing and durable books being more likely to attract and retain customers (Kirilova and Chan, 2018; Seaman, 2019).

In Nigeria, few studies have directly examined the relationships between content quality, form quality, and sales performance. Adamu (2020) explored the impact of production processes on the market success of educational books but did not differentiate between the roles of content and form. Similarly, Sullivan et al. (2012) identified production quality as a determinant of sales performance but did not delve into its specific components. These gaps spot the need for a comprehensive study that integrates both dimensions of production quality to provide actionable insights for the publishing industry.

Although existing studies provide valuable insights into the factors affecting sales performance, several gaps remain. Most research has focused on external determinants, such as marketing strategies and corporate reputation, with limited attention to intrinsic factors like production quality (Taghian, 2010; Araujo et al., 2023). Also, studies examining production quality often treat it as a single construct, without differentiating between content quality and quality of form. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical research within the Nigerian context, particularly in Southwestern Nigeria, where the challenges and dynamics of the publishing industry differ significantly from those in developed markets. These gaps in the literature limits the understanding of how publishers in Southwestern Nigeria can strategically invest in production quality to enhance their market performance.

This study aims to investigate the extent to which content quality and quality of form predict the sales performance of educational publishers in Southwestern Nigeria. The study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relative contributions of these two dimensions of production quality to sales outcomes. The findings are expected to offer actionable insights for publishers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to enhance the quality and marketability of educational books in the region. In addition, the study will also contribute to the broader

discourse on the role of production quality in the publishing industry which will address the critical gaps in the literature and providing a foundation for future research.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study established the relationship among variables under study without manipulating the data; hence, the descriptive survey research design of the correlational type was considered suitable as a result of a large population that are geographically dispersed.

Population of the study

The study has three sets of population which include management staff of the publishing firms who specialise in publishing educational books for pre-primary, primary, and post-primary levels of education in Southwestern Nigeria; sales representatives of educational publishing firms; and school administrators of private nursery/primary and secondary schools who make decisions on textbooks adoption and use in schools. Southwestern Nigeria consists of six states: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo.

Sampling techniques

Based on the data published by the Nigerian Publishers Association in 2022, 54 registered publishing firms specialised in publishing educational books in the six states in Southwestern Nigeria. Lagos and Oyo states have been purposively selected for the study because of the concentration of publishing firms in the two states, as 36 of the 54 publishing firms in southwestern Nigeria, which constituted 67% of the total population, were located in the two states. The total enumeration of all the Sales/Marketing Managers was made from the 36 selected publishing firms. The total number of sales representatives in all the 36 publishing firms in Oyo and Lagos states was 713. As the population of sales representatives was large, a sample size of 50% was taken using an accidental sampling technique. Therefore, 361 sales representatives were sampled, as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, Out of the 3,588 nursery and primary schools and 1,892 secondary schools across 20 local government areas in Lagos State; and the 2,452 nursery/primary schools and 892 secondary schools across the 33 local government areas in Oyo

State, an equal representation sampling technique was employed to select one school administrator each from nursery/primary and secondary schools in each of the 20 and 33 local government areas in Lagos and Oyo states respectively making 106 school administrator. The selection of these schools was based on prior investigation of their viability, explicitly considering the volume of books purchased in relation to the numerical strength of the student population across the local government areas.

Table 1: Sample Size of Sales Representatives in all the Publishing Firms for the Study

S/N	Publishing Firm	Location	No. of Sales Representatives	A sample size of 50%
Publishing Firms in Oyo State				
1.	African University Press Limited	Oluyole, Ibadan	12	6
2.	Associated Book Makers Ltd.	Ring Road, Ibadan	3	2
3.	Bookcraft Limited	New Bodija, Ibadan	9	5
4.	Bounty Press Limited	Orita Challenge, Ibadan	16	8
5.	Cosmopolitan Book Service	Dugbe, Ibadan	18	9
6.	Evans Brothers Publishers Ltd.	Jericho, Ibadan	84	42
7.	Extension Publications Limited	Molete, Ibadan	59	29
8.	Gbabeks Publishers Limited	Ring Road, Ibadan	5	3
9.	Holland Publishers	Sango/Eleyele Rd, Ibadan	2	1
10.	Ibadan University Press Pub. House	Uni. Of Ibadan, Ibadan	2	1
11.	Joycefitround (JFR.) Publishers	Ring Road, Ibadan	7	4
12.	Kings Publishers	Old Ife Road, Ibadan	6	3
13.	Lamlad Publications Limited	Old Ife Road, Ibadan	7	4
14.	Lasswell Enterprises	Imalefalafia, Ibadan	2	1
15.	Learning Solutions	Bodija Ibadan	15	8

16.	Spectrum Books Limited	Ring Road, Ibadan	32	16
17.	Stirling-Horden Publishers Nig. Ltd.	Oyo Road, Ibadan	5	3
18.	Straight-Gate Publishers Limited	Water Area, U. I. Ibadan	19	10
19.	University Press Plc.	Jericho, Ibadan	102	51
20.	Lolyem Communications	Oke-Bola, Ibadan	1	1
21.	Safari Books Limited	Onireke, Ibadan	7	4
22.	Scholarship Books Limited	U.I. 2nd Gate, Ibadan	5	3
23.	Shower Kiddies Publishers	Ikeja, Lagos State	12	6
24.	Penthouse Publications (Nig) Ltd.	Old Bodija, Ibadan	5	3
25.	Quantum Publishing Limited	Idi-Isin, Ibadan	5	3
Sub-total			**440**	**223**
Publishing Firms in Lagos State				
26.	Quramo Publishing Limited	Vic. Island, Lagos State	5	3
27	Tonad Publishers Limited	Ikeja, Lagos State	10	5
28	Peaceville Publishers	Epe, Lagos State	10	5
29	Macmillan Nig. Publishers Limited	Ilupeju, Lagos State	15	8
30	Metropolitan Publishers Limited	Palmgrove, Lagos State	33	16
31	Model Educational Book Pub. Ltd.	Shomolu, Lagos State	10	5
32	Learn Africa Plc.	Ikeja, Lagos State	97	49
33	CSS Bookshop Limited	Broad Str., Lagos State	5	3
34	Afem Publishers Limited	Oworonsoki, Lagos State	10	5
35	Atlantic Publishers Limited	Palmgrove, Lagos State	10	5

36	West African Book Publishers Ltd.	Ilupeju, Lagos State	68	34
Sub-total			**273**	**138**
Total			**713**	**361**

Research Instruments

The instruments used for the study were two different questionnaires and two separate interview schedules. The first questionnaire was used to collect data from sales representatives of the sampled publishing firms, while the second was used to elicit information from the heads or administrators of private nursery/primary and secondary schools. Two interview guides were also used for data collection. The first guide was for interviewing the heads or administrators of private nursery/primary and secondary schools on the production quality of the educational books by publishers. This guide was to complement the questionnaire. The second interview guide was for the management officers of book publishing firms, be it the managing director/chief executive officer, sales/marketing manager, finance director/financial controller, or publishing director of the selected publishing firms.

Data collection procedure

The copies of the questionnaire were administered to the sales representatives of the sampled publishing firms in their offices, while the ones for the heads or administrators of private nursery/primary and secondary schools were administered in their offices in their respective schools. The key informant interview for heads or administrators of private nursery/primary and secondary schools were also conducted in the respondents' offices, while that of the management staff of the publishing firms took place in their respective companies' premises. Notably, both interviews were recorded for reference with the permission of the interviewees.

Methods of data analysis

Data was collated and analysed using the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS). Statistical tools such as frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was used to test the null hypotheses. The null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of

significance. Tables and charts were drawn to present the results. Data from the interview were also analysed by interpreting and describing the data collected through responses to the interview guides. This was reconciled with the results from the quantitative analyses of responses to the questionnaire to conclude the study's outcome.

Ethical consideration

The data collection process for the study adhered to the principles of informed consent, organisational permission, and respondent anonymity. To ensure the respondents' participation, permission was sought through an informed consent form explaining the study's purpose and benefits. This allowed the respondents to make an informed decision about their involvement. Furthermore, respondents had the opportunity to clarify any questions they had about the questionnaire. Data was collected without revealing the respondents' identities to protect their privacy. The participation of the respondents was absolutely voluntary.

RESULTS

Level of Sales performance of educational publishers in southwestern Nigeria

Figure 4.2 shows the number of sampled sales representatives from each educational publisher.

Table 4.2: Level of sales performance of educational publishers in southwestern Nigeria

S/N	Sales Performance	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	$\bar{X}$	Std
1.	In the past five years, I achieved my annual sales target set by my organisation.	57 (26.1)	73 (33.3)	78 (35.6)	11 (5.1)	2.81	0.88
2.	My publishing firm rated my sales performance in the past five years as satisfactory.	76 (34.7)	108 (49.3)	29 (13.2)	6 (2.8)	3.15	0.76
3.	My publishing firm is making a profit as projected within the last three years.	73 (33.2)	118 (54.0)	21 (9.6)	7 (3.2)	3.17	0.73
4.	My publishing firm has yet to make a profit as projected within the last three years.	31 (14.2)	92 (42.0)	63 (28.9)	33 (28.9)	2.55	0.61

5.	In my opinion, the sales team is responsible for the company's poor sales performance.	39 (18.0)	41 (18.8)	84 (38.3)	55 (24.9)	2.29	1.03
6.	My company's sales growth in the last five years has been steady and satisfactory.	50 (22.9)	112 (51.3)	48 (21.7)	9 (4.1)	2.92	0.78
7.	I think the performance of my company's sales team enhanced our company's sales growth.	77 (35.1)	106 (48.6)	25 (11.5)	11 (4.8)	3.14	0.80
8.	I think the performance of my company's sales team hindered our company's sales growth.	34 (15.6)	51 (23.3)	95 (43.5)	39 (17.6)	2.37	0.95
9.	I have been meeting my sales target in the past five years due to my professional commitment and marketing strategies.	41 (18.7)	103 (47.0)	63 (28.8)	12 (5.5)	2.78	0.81
10.	I have not been meeting my sales target in the past five years due to my company's management policy.	41 (18.7)	52 (23.7)	95 (43.4)	31 (14.2)	2.47	0.96
11.	In the past five years, my annual turnover has been very high.	48 (21.7)	69 (31.7)	86 (39.2)	16 (7.4)	2.67	0.89
12.	My annual turnover has not been high enough in the past five years.	38 (17.4)	81 (37.1)	79 (36.1)	21 (9.4)	2.62	0.87
13.	My professional commitment and marketing strategy have not been able to help me grow my firm in the past five years.	49 (22.6)	101 (46.2)	45 (20.4)	24 (10.8)	2.81	0.91
14.	The amount of money spent by our company on sales and marketing staff is high compared to our returns.	21 (9.6)	41 (18.7)	98 (44.7)	59 (27.0)	2.11	0.92
	Weighted Mean=2.74						

Table 2 presents the level of sales performance of educational publishers in southwestern Nigeria. Most sales representatives claimed they had met their organisations' annual sales target in the last five years ($\overline{x}$ = 2.81). Many sales representatives considered their sales performance satisfactory ($\overline{x}$ = 3.15), and the majority agreed that their publishing firms were making a profit as projected within the last three years ($\overline{x}$ = 3.17). Conversely, though some sales representatives believed their publishing firms were not making a profit as projected within the last three years,

the sales representatives disagreed that they were responsible for such poor sales performance ($\overline{x}$ = 2.29). Many rated their company's growth in the last five years as steady and satisfactory ($\overline{x}$ = 2.92); this company's sales growth performance was considered enhanced by the company's sales team ($\overline{x}$ = 3.14) while disagreeing that the performance of their company's sales team hindered their company's sales growth ($\overline{x}$ = 2.37).

As regards marketing strategy and professional competence, most of the respondents agreed that their marketing strategy and professional competence accounted for their meeting their sales target in the past five years, thus recording credible sales performance ($\overline{x}$ = 2.78), while many disagreed that sales targets were not met because of the company's policy ($\overline{x}$ = 2.47). A little above average considered the annual turnover of their company high ($\overline{x}$ = 2.67), and they also believed the current profit margin could be improved because, in the past five years, the annual turnover has not been high enough ($\overline{x}$ = 2.62). In the same vein, the majority of the respondents agreed that their professional commitment and marketing strategy has not been able to help grow their firm in the past five years ($\overline{x}$ = 2.81), while sales representatives considered the amount of money spent by their company on sales and marketing staff high compared to the returns on their investments. In other words, in the opinion of respondents in this category, the expenditure was higher than the income ($\overline{x}$ = 2.11). Overall, sales representatives' sales performance was above average ($\overline{x}$ = 2.74).

Qualitative data collected from marketing managers of educational publishing firms through structured interviews rated the sales performance of many sales representatives above average in meeting net sales targets. For example, managers observed that the sales representatives' performance varied and was unequal. They explained that while some met their targets 100%, some recorded varying success percentages, which could be 90%, 80%, 70%, or even below 40%. Generally, these sales performance trends painted an unsteady picture of publishing firms' sales performance.

> *Ehnn, well, let me just say between 50 – 60% because you may have some (sales representatives) achieving 95%, some 90%, whereas you have some achieving as low as 30%. So, on the average, let us say between 50 and 60%.*
>
> **(KII/Sales Manager/Lagos State/May, 2023)**

The qualitative data also revealed some factors that may affect the sales performance in some cases. One of them is the non-complimentary attitude of pupils and students in not buying all recommended titles also affected book sales performance. The Manager at another Publishing firm submitted that the common practice was that students would just buy the core subject books. As he put it:

> *Most students have dropped other titles and concentrated on core titles like English, Mathematics, and maybe Verbal and Quantitative Reasoning for nursery and primary schools. Then, for Junior Secondary School, students buy only the sciences, English, and Mathematics. The same applies to the senior secondary school series.*
>
> **(KII/Sales Manager/Oyo State/May, 2023)**

According to some sales managers,

> *some sales targets set by the management of publishing firms could be outrageous and overambitious. In such instances of unrealistic targets, failure to meet the target is imminent. Logistics is another problem identified*
>
> **(KII/Sales Managers/Lagos/Oyo State/May, 2023)**.

To buttress this further, a Sales Manager maintained that logistic issues could facilitate sales retardation as the smooth operations of sales representatives are hampered. As he put it:

> *The second is that sometimes there are logistics problems, such as long distances to cover in relation to time. Mobility is also a major problem. This is because many sales representatives have no operational vehicles. Many lack cars for transportation to sales locations. Also, because of the dire state of our roads, the cars of those who are mobile are in bad condition.*
>
> **(KII/Sales Managers/ Oyo State/May, 2023)**.

On the general performance of the sales team, some publishing companies declared it was good; others claimed it was just reasonably satisfactory. To Company A, General Manager, Field Operations, West stated that:

On average, it is not too good, and it is not too bad because, you know, the company will not stay afloat if the sales team's performance is so poor. Since the company is still afloat, I can say it is not bad.

Quantitative and qualitative performance requirements must be met for a successful sales performance to occur. Sales volume, average sales call, new customers acquired, gross profit by product, customer and order size, the ratio of selling cost to sales, and sales order (daily number of orders, order to sales call ratio, and products returned) were identified as the crucial factors for sales optimum performance in terms of quantitative performance.

Production Quality of Content of Books by Educational Publishers in Southwestern Nigeria

Table 3 presents the criteria for measuring book production quality of content of educational publishers in southwestern Nigeria.

Table 3: Book Production Quality of Content of Educational Publishers in Southwestern Nigeria

S/N	*Quality of Contents*	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	$\bar{X}$	Std
1	The depth of treatment of topics by publishers influencing the decision of my school to purchase their books.	171 (78.1)	37 (16.9)	6 (2.8)	5 (2.3)	3.71	0.89
2.	Inadequate exercises in books make us reject books no matter the professional efforts made to convince us.	102 (46.6)	89 (40.6)	17 (7.8)	11 (5.0)	3.29	0.95
3.	Inadequate sets of evaluation exercises in books affect my decision to drop the books from our list.	83 (38.0)	96 (43.7)	32 (14.6)	8 (3.7)	3.16	0.86
4.	Inappropriate language to the target audience used in books can lead to our rejection of books.	122 (55.8)	80 (36.4)	9 (4.1)	8 (3.7)	3.44	0.79
5.	If a book is irrelevant to the curriculum, my school will reject such a book.	137 (62.5)	54 (24.7)	8 (3.7)	20 (9.1)	3.40	0.67

6.	If the contents of a book are not rich enough, my school can adopt it because of the relationship with the publisher.	125 (57.1)	51 (23.3)	25 (11.4)	19 (8.2)	3.28	0.89
7.	The integrity of authors can help to adopt their books.	49 (22.3)	79 (36.0)	50 (23.0)	41 (18.7)	2.62	0.73
8.	Books that are not constantly revised are always dropped from our list.	122 (55.7)	66 (30.3)	14 (6.3)	17 (7.7)	3.34	0.62
Weighted Mean= 3.28							

The response of school proprietors in Table 3 indicates in terms of the quality of the content of books that the depth of treatment of topics in a company's books can influence the decision of schools to purchase the books ($\overline{x}$ = 3.71); inadequate exercises in books can make customers reject such books no matter the professional efforts made by the sales representatives to convince the buyers ($\overline{x}$ = 3.29); and inadequate sets of evaluation exercises in books can prompt customers to drop such books from their list ($\overline{x}$ = 3.16). In the same vein, inappropriate language to the target audience ($\overline{x}$ = 3.44), irrelevance of a book to the curriculum ($\overline{x}$ = 3.40), and substandard contents of a book ($\overline{x}$ = 3.28) can all negatively impact the performance of books in the market. Failure to revise books as and when due can cause schools to drop them for other publishers' books ($\overline{x}$ = 3.34), and integrity of authors on books' sales prospect ($\overline{x}$ = 2.62) is the last indicator and the least rated. Overall, the weighted mean average of the book quality is 3.28, higher than the benchmark of 2.5.

Notably, the qualitative data aligned with the quantitative data in all the quality of content indicators. However, only one school administrator submitted that she could buy a book with very few evaluations, quizzes, and exercises as long as the teacher can augment it with their exercise. As she put it:

> *Aahh, you know we have different kinds of authors. Some people are very good at that, but the methods of evaluation of individuals are different. It differs from place to place. So it depends on the class teacher, who will know whether the book is relevant. But as for me, a good teacher should be able to evaluate each pupil on his or her own, not depending on the book.*

(KII/School Administrator/Oyo State/May, 2023)

Production Quality of Form of Books by Educational Publishers in Southwestern Nigeria

Table 4 presents the criteria for measuring book production quality of form of educational publishers in southwestern Nigeria.

Table 4: Book Production Quality of Form of Educational Publishers in Southwestern Nigeria

Quality of Form	**SA (%)**	**A (%)**	**D (%)**	**SD (%)**	**$\bar{X}$**	**Std**
We reject a book if the size, in terms of dimension and pagination, is inappropriate for the reader.	88 (40.2)	86 (39.4)	39 (17.6)	6 (2.8)	3.17	0.82
If the layout and design of a book are not good enough, we can still buy them.	45 (20.4)	21 (9.6)	71 (34.2)	82 (37.4)	2.86	1.13
If the quality of paper used to print a book is not the durable type, my school can still buy them, as long as the price is low.	19 (8.6)	36 (16.4)	86 (39.3)	78 (35.7)	3.02	0.93
The quality of illustrations influences my school's decision to buy the book.	79 (36.1)	99 (45.4)	27 (12.1)	14 (6.4)	3.11	0.85
Poor finishing aesthetics such as collation, binding, trimming, and packaging affect the purchase of books.	35 (15.8)	6 (2.8)	101 (46.1)	77 (35.3)	3.01	1.01
If the price of a book is not appropriate with the quality of the book, this can influence schools' decision to purchase it.	25 (11.3)	48 (21.8)	86 (39.4)	60 (27.5)	2.83	0.95
Overall, I feel that the quality of our preferred books is excellent.	117 (53.5)	85 (38.7)	14 (6.4)	3 (1.4)	3.44	0.68
Weighted Mean = 3.06						

Concerning quality of form as presented in Table 4, the respondents agreed that the appropriateness of book size in terms of dimension and pagination ($\bar{x}$ = 3.17), efficient layout

and design ($\overline{x}$ = 2.86), quality of paper ($\overline{x}$ = 3.02), quality of illustration ($\overline{x}$ = 3.11), and quality of finishing aesthetics which includes collation, binding, trimming, and packaging ($\overline{x}$ = 3.01) are all indicators of quality of form. The correct layout and design ($\overline{x}$ = 2.86) and the appropriateness of the book price ($\overline{x}$ = 2.83) were also included. School administrators rated the quality of content ($\overline{x}$ = 3.28) of their dominant publishers' books equally as the quality of form ($\overline{x}$ = 3.06). Overall, book production quality is high.

The qualitative result regarding the quality of form is the same as the quantitative, although some administrators differed on layout and design.

> *Layout is not the problem. The design, we don't dwell much on design, we, rather, emphasise the content. Our primary concern is the information contained in the book. So, we are not always looking into the design so much.*
>
> **(KII/School Administrator/Lagos State/May, 2023)**

From the respondent's submission above, it is evident that the school administrator will prefer a book with good content and poor layout to one with good layout and poor content that lacks depth and coverage. This, however, was a minority view as the majority of the school proprietors recommended that the quality of form of books should be improved. The following views corroborate this majority position:

> *Most of the books are good, and most of the publishers are equally good, but I want the remaining publishers to work on the collation, binding, trimming and packaging of their books.*
>
> **(KII/School Administrator/Oyo State/May, 2023)**
>
> *Well, to some extent, we still have a very simple majority of them who have good quality, and I will still encourage them to continue to pay attention to quality. But for as many who have been producing books that have low quality, they should improve. You know, most of the books you are producing are being used by children and of course, how they will handle it differs. So, if the quality is not there, definitely the book may not have a long shelf life. So, as a result of this, I would like to urge the publishers who are still using low-quality materials,*

materials that are not good, and materials that are of low value to please upgrade themselves for the sake of students and the teachers who will be using the books. That will even help them if they do so. People will patronise them as expected, and their company will make more sales.

(KII/School Administrator/Lagos State/May, 2023)

The responses of the heads/administrators of the various nursery/primary and secondary schools revealed that they cared about the quality of the contents of the books they used for teaching and learning, as well as the aesthetics of these books. The depth of treatment of each book is of paramount concern to them as they all confessed that lack of depth of treatment of topics in a book could influence their decision not to recommend the book for use in their schools. The same goes for exercises or practice questions. Many heads and administrators of schools contended that an insufficient number of exercises or inadequate sets of evaluation quizzes or test suggestions could make them reject a book. Here are some of the direct responses of heads/administrators on the depth of treatment of a book.

Yes, when the book lacks a topic that we are supposed to cover as a school from the curriculum, there is no need to adopt such a book.

A respondent

Yes, now! A book's failure to treat the topics very well will certainly influence my decision not to recommend it for use in the school. .... Also, if the textbook does not have enough exercises for the children to work on, we won't use the book. The same goes for quizzes and exercises. If these are inadequate, I'll decide to drop the book.

A respondent

Well, if it is not revised ... You know, even life is not static. The publisher should be able to put in new things, new changes, you understand? We cannot continue to use a book that is not revised, so we may decide to drop it; if we see another textbook that is adding new facts, good assignments, and giving colourful pictures, we will drop the unrevised one and take to the revised one.

A respondent

Also, on the quality of form, features like book size, layout and design, quality of illustrations, and finishing aesthetics such as collation, binding, trimming, and packaging were some of the parameters considered. On the use of illustrations, an interviewee responded thus:

> Yes, the quality of illustration is part of what they use. When we talk about a subject like technical drawing, there are many diagrams. Also, Biology, and so on. If the illustrations that they have there are not okay, then they will be rejected.
>
> **A respondent**

For finishing aesthetics, most respondents felt that a book with poor aesthetics would be defective and devoid of attraction; therefore, they would rather reject it.

> No, I can't. It even happened to me with one of my children. We bought some particular books. Instead of arranging the books very well, the books were falling off. So, we needed to go back to the headmaster, who complained to the publisher that we didn't want such a book for our students.
>
> **A respondent**

The selling price of books was also considered as an indicator of quality. It is logical that the price of a book should be commensurate to its worth. If this is not so, then the book is not of quality. This was also the general view of all the heads and administrators of schools. When asked, "If you feel the price of a book is not appropriate with its quality, can this influence your decision to purchase that book?" the response was unanimously negative. A school head answered that:

> We cannot use any book that is not worth its price. People will not buy it, so we shouldn't do such a thing. Period! The price of the book should be appropriate for the quality because parents seriously cross-check textbooks with the price given to them.
>
> **A respondent**

Finally, the respondents were asked to make a general assessment of the quality of books published by Nigerian publishers, and they had varied opinions. However, the following responses showed that most heads and administrators scored the Nigerian publishers high.

> Some publishers maintain standards, while many others need to up their game. Based on the price, some publishing companies have enough money to do the business, while others lack the requisite financial muscle.
>
> **A respondent**

Relative Contribution of Book Quality Form and Content Quality to Sales Performance

Table 5 shows the analysis of the relative contributions of book quality form and content quality to sales performance. Also, the relationship between book sales performance and book quality form and content quality is shown in Table 6.

Table 5: Relative Contribution of Book Quality Form and Content Quality to Sales Performance

	Unstandardised B	**Std Error**	**Standardised Coefficients Beta**	**T**	**Sig**
Constant	42.357	4.616		9.175	.000
Content Quality	-.168	.135	-.084	-1.247	.214
Quality Form	.681	.175	.261	3.892	.000

Table 5 shows that only book quality form had a significant relative contribution to sales performance. (β=0.26; t=3.89; $p<0.05$). On the other hand, content quality relative contribution to book sales performance is not significant (β=-0.08; t=-1.247; $p>0.05$). This means that book quality form is the active component of book quality in the model, and therefore influences book sales performance.

Table 6: Relationship between book quality form, content quality and sales performance

Variables				
Sales Performance	1			
Book Quality	0.260**	1		
Quality of Content	-0.066		1	
Quality of Form	0.252**		0.119	1

Table 4.7 reveals the relationship between independent variables and book sales performance by publishers in southwestern Nigeria. The result in Table 4.7 indicates a significant positive weak relationship between production quality ($r = 0.260$; $p < 0.05$) and sales performance. This result reveals a significant relationship between publishers' production quality and book sales performance in southwestern Nigeria. This implies that content quality and form positively correlate with sales performance and thus have a significant relationship. This implies that increasing the production quality will increase sales performance. Therefore, the null hypothesis Ho1 is rejected, meaning a significant relationship exists between sales performance and production quality. Book quality form is the only production quality sub variables that had a significant positive relationship with sales performance ($r = 0.25$; $p < 0.05$) while quality of content had no significant relationship.

Table 7: Multiple Regression of sale performance using content quality and quality form as predictors

Model	**Sum of Squares**	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig**
Regression	886.698	2	443.349	7.886	0.000
Residual	11750.409	209	56.222		
Total	12637.107	211			

$R = 0.27$; $R^2 = 0.07$; $AdjR^2 = 0.061$; Std Error = 7.49

Table 4.8b indicates that quality form and content quality significantly contributed to sales performance $F_{(3,209)} = 7.89$; $p < 0.05$; $adjR^2 = 0.06$). Book quality form and book content quality made a significant joint contribution to sales performance. This implies that production quality accounts for 6.1% of the total variance of sales performance is accounted for production quality variables.

Discussion of the Findings

Level of Sales Performance of Educational Publishers in Southwestern Nigeria

Findings from the study show that in the last five years, most sales representatives in southwestern Nigeria have reported meeting their annual sales targets in the educational publishing sector, signalling a robust performance in book sales. This trend shows the effectiveness of sales strategies employed by publishers and the diligence of sales teams in navigating the local market dynamics. The consistent attainment of sales targets suggests a strong demand for educational materials and alignment with the region's curriculum requirements, indicating publishers' ability to cater to the evolving needs of schools and learners. This finding corroborates the study of Fader, Hardie and Lee (2005) that the ability of sales representatives to consistently meet targets not only reflects their proficiency in selling techniques but also implies a deep understanding of customer preferences and effective engagement with key stakeholders such as schools, educational boards, and bookstores.

Notably, a significant proportion of sales representatives did not attribute poor sales performance to themselves. This perspective suggests that while acknowledging challenges, sales representatives may perceive external factors to have a more substantial influence on sales outcomes. Such factors could include market dynamics, economic conditions, competition, and educational policies or curriculum changes. This finding shows the complexity of sales performance within the educational publishing industry, where multiple variables interact to influence outcomes. It resonates with the findings of Spiro, Stanton, and Rickard (2002),

highlighting the multifaceted nature of sales success, which involves not only the efforts of sales representatives but also broader environmental factors.

Within the surveyed sales representatives in Southwestern Nigeria's educational publishing sector, there was a notable disagreement regarding their contribution to their company's growth. This perspective suggests that while recognising the overall growth of their organisations, many sales representatives may not attribute this growth solely to their efforts. Instead, they may acknowledge the collective contributions of various stakeholders, including marketing teams, management, product development, and external market factors. This finding resonates with that of Kamrul and Mohammed (2017), who state that the growth of the book industry has a direct impact not only on a salesperson's performance but also on the organisational commitment and activities of various stakeholders.

A significant consensus emerged among the respondents regarding the pivotal role of marketing strategy and professional competency in driving sales performance. This collective agreement highlights the recognition among sales representatives of the critical importance of strategic marketing initiatives and their expertise in achieving sales targets. Effective marketing strategies tailored to the unique needs and preferences of educational institutions and learners play a crucial role in generating demand and facilitating sales conversions. This finding aligns with that of Johnston and Marshall (2021), highlighting the central role of marketing excellence and sales expertise in driving competitive advantage and sustainable growth within the publishing industry.

The literature supports the notion that sales targets are not primarily missed due to company policies, and this also emphasises the multifaceted nature of sales performance determinants. Anderson and Oliver (1987) suggest that while company policies and organisational structure may influence sales outcomes, individual salesperson characteristics and customer interactions play significant roles in shaping sales performance. Similarly, Johnston and Marshall (2021) argue that while organisational factors such as incentive structures and sales processes can impact sales effectiveness, personal selling skills and customer relationship management remain critical drivers of performance.

In addition, the assertion that sales representatives' performance is above average aligns with research by Spiro *et al.* (2008), which highlighted the role of sales training and development

programmes in enhancing sales effectiveness and driving superior performance. Therefore, the overall above-average sales performance reported by sales representatives emphasizes the effectiveness of sales training, management support, and market conditions in facilitating sales success within the educational publishing sector.

Level of Book Production Content Quality of Educational Publishers in Southwestern Nigeria

In terms of quality of content, the recognition of this study's depth as a critical factor in schools' purchasing decisions shows the need for educational publishers to prioritise content rigour and alignment with curriculum requirements. Respondents' acknowledgement that the depth of treatment of topics in company books can influence schools' purchasing decisions aligns with the research by Heller and Greenleaf (2007), which highlights the impact of content comprehensiveness and instructional quality on student learning outcomes.

Recognising the negative impact of inadequate exercises on book acceptance shows the need for publishers to prioritise the development of high-quality, pedagogically sound instructional materials. The perception among respondents that inadequate exercises in company books can lead to customer rejection underscores the importance of instructional design and content quality. This finding aligns with the research by Morrison, Ross, Kemp, and Kalman (2019), emphasising the role of interactive and engaging exercises in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. Similarly, studies by Guthrie and Humenick (2004) emphasise the significance of challenging and relevant tasks in fostering deep comprehension and critical thinking skills.

Moreover, research by Glatthorn, Boschee, and Whitehead (2018) emphasises the importance of curriculum coherence and alignment with standards in educational materials adoption. Furthermore, the reaction by respondents that personal relationships with schools can influence book adoption highlights the importance of interpersonal connections and customer engagement. This finding aligns with studies by Guenzi and Ottavia (2004) highlighting the significance of salesperson expertise and relationship building in influencing customer decisions.

Level of Book Production Quality Form of Educational Publishers in Southwestern Nigeria

Regarding the quality of form, the respondents claimed that schools might reject a book if its size, dimension, and pagination are inappropriate for the reader, highlighting the importance of physical characteristics in book selection. This finding aligns with studies by Bringhurst (2002) highlighting the impact of typographic principles and page layout on readability and user experience. Also, the belief among respondents that they can still sell books even if the layout and design are not of high quality suggests a potential gap in understanding the importance of visual appeal in book marketing. However, literature on book design and consumer behaviour emphasises the significant role of layout and design in attracting readers and influencing purchasing decisions. Research by Reighn-Garron (2011) emphasises the importance of visual communication and design aesthetics in engaging readers and enhancing content comprehension.

The belief among respondents that poor finishing aesthetics such as collation, binding, trimming, and packaging do not affect sales suggests a potential oversight in understanding the impact of presentation on perceived quality. However, Toufani, Stanton, and Chikweche's (2017) research on the importance of aesthetics on customers' intentions to purchase smartphones emphasises the significance of finishing aesthetics in conveying professionalism and enhancing product appeal. Moreover, the claim by respondents that the price of a book relative to its quality can influence schools' purchasing decisions aligns with the literature on consumer behaviour and price perception. Research by Maulida, Sudarman, and Sutrisno (2022) highlights the influence of price and service quality on the decision to purchase reference books among students. The importance of price-quality alignment emphasizes the need for publishers to price their products competitively while maintaining quality standards in book production.

Relationship between Production Quality and Book Sales Performance

The findings from this study revealed a positive correlation between book production quality (content quality and quality of form) and sales performance, thus indicating that higher book production quality tends to result in improved sales performance. Akangbe (2021) emphasised the significance of quality book production for patronage and sales in the book industry, highlighting the influence of print quality on attracting prospective buyers. His study further

revealed that the level of quality book design in the publishing firms in South-West Nigeria was high and the level of quality book production was also high. These high qualities of book design and production influenced sales performance in the publishing firms. This thus revealed that quality book production could positively impact publishing firms' sales performance.

Production quality is quite critical to satisfying customers and retaining their loyalty for optimum sales performance. In the book publishing sector, the quality of books is highly emphasised as a necessity for survival in the highly competitive market, quality products make an important contribution to long-term revenue and profitability (Akangbe, 2021). This position aligns with Hajjat and Hajjat (2014) who noted that quality and Total Quality Management (TQM) were the only factors that guaranteed customer satisfaction and loyalty, the strongest shield against fierce international competition, and the best course for sustained competitive advantage. The result of the study showed that the five hypotheses tested were true, and the test statistics were all significant. The findings, therefore, suggest that the company's external and internal performance can be improved by examining and emphasising certain elements of product quality.

According to Buciuniene and Skudiene (2009), by prioritising quality in book production and addressing challenges within the production process, publishers can enhance their sales performance and contribute to the growth of the industry. Also, Anwar and Shukur (2015), in their study maintained that the quality of service has implications for students' satisfaction. This is tantamount to production quality impacting sales performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the study reveal that both content quality and quality of form significantly influence the sales performance of educational publishers in Southwestern Nigeria. Content quality, which includes depth and relevance of the book content, alignment with curriculum requirements, and the inclusion of adequate exercises, plays a pivotal role in ensuring customer satisfaction and adoption by schools. However, the findings also highlight that quality of form, which includes aspects such as layout, paper quality, illustrations, and finishing aesthetics, is a critical determinant of book sales performance. Books with high-quality form are more likely to attract and retain customers, as they meet both functional and aesthetic expectations. Although,

general high quality was observed among Nigerian publishers, the study identifies gaps in production processes with respect to consistency and innovation. Challenges such as inadequate revisions, substandard materials, and misaligned pricing models continue to hinder optimal sales performance. Furthermore, findings from the study shows that improving quality of form has a stronger direct impact on sales performance compared to content quality, and this suggests that aesthetic and physical attributes are significant drivers of consumer purchasing decisions.

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Publishers should prioritize the improvement of physical attributes of books like the layout, binding and paper quality.
2. Books must strictly adhere to curriculum requirements in order to remain relevant and useful for educational purposes. Periodic reviews and updates to content should be implemented to reflect changes in the educational system.
3. Also, publishers should ensure that books contain adequate and challenging exercises, quizzes, and evaluation tools in order to enhance students' engagement and the educators' satisfaction.
4. Publishers should regularly engage with school administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders can provide valuable insights into consumer preferences and expectations, as this will guide the development of future products.

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