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Printing Press Operator and Publisher: The Misconception of Graphic Design Students in Technical Universities in Ghana

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Abstract:

The study concerned itself with the exploration of the misconception held by Graphic Design students in Technical Universities, with particular emphasis on Takoradi Technical University (TTU) and, to some extent, by some Graphic Arts/Printing Press Practitioners in Ghana that a printing press operator (a printer) and a publisher are the same in meaning and work or can be used interchangeably to connote same. The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify who a printing press operator and a publisher is;
- Find out the differences between a printing press operator and that of a publisher,
- Draw the workflow chart of a printing press operator and a publisher, and
- Draw conclusions based on the prospects of changing the misconception narrative among Graphic Design students in Technical Universities and some Graphic Arts/Printing Press Practitioners in Ghana

The study was carried out at the Department of Graphic Design Technology, Faculty of Applied Arts and Technology (FAAT), TTU, in Ghana. An expert purposive sampling technique was adopted. The research design employed was a qualitative research approach since the nature of the study required heavy reliance upon extensive observation, document reviews, verbal data from Graphic Arts/Printing Press Practitioners, course lecturers, experts well-versed in the printing press and publishing activities, and Graphic Design students that resulted in non-numerical data. Data for the study were gathered from two main sources:

- Primary – through interaction and observation sources, and
- Secondary – through literary sources

Content analysis and descriptive analyses were employed to present and analyze the data. The study recommended that adequate information in relation to who a printing press operator and a publisher are and what their individual workflow and activities are should be inculcated in the Graphic Design programme being run and pursued at the Technical Universities to eradicate that deep-seated misconception held by Graphic Design students.

Keywords: *Printing press operator, publisher, misconception, graphic design students, technical universities, graphic arts/printing press practitioners*

1. Introduction

With the advent of the 21st century, there were many theories and speculations that the works of the formal printing press operator and the publisher have come to an end due to the emergence of electronic media. Notwithstanding these theories and speculations, printed and published products from both the graphic arts/printing and the publishing industries are still present and have crucial effects on all spheres of our lives. In addition, the market for printed and published products in this 21st century keeps on offering more variety of printed and published products for both print buyers and published materials customers than ever before (Amissah, 2014). In spite of this, it should be noted that the growth of both the printing press and publishing industries is influenced essentially by macro-economic factors such as economic development and customer demand. In the United States of America (USA) where, for example, the graphic arts/printing industry (i.e., printing press), according to statistics, is the sixth largest industrial sector due to the country's economic development and customers' demand for printed products (Dennis & Jenkins, 1991).

In Technical Universities, printing technology course lecturers are mostly bombarded with questions regarding a printing press operator and a publisher by the Graphic Design students, particularly at the Department of Graphic Design Technology, FAAT, TTU. The question most Graphic Design students ask is: is the printing press operator the same as a publisher in meaning and work schedule? They ask this question based on their understanding and disposition that the

two (2) terms are the same, but, arguably, there is no final answer to the question asked by the Graphic Design students as any answer given would be influenced by how one delineates a printing press operator and a publisher in the context of Graphic Design programme they are pursuing. This is so because, in a broader-spectrum, a printing press operator is a person who produces copies of a document with the use of a printing machine, while a publisher is a person who organises, oversees, and finances the production of a document. Nonetheless, there are some occasions where the two (2) terms could be used interchangeably, for example, if a person self-publishes a book, then the person would be both the printer and the publisher (www.tagari.com).

2. Discussions

There are some critical contributing factors to the misconception held by Graphic Design students in Technical Universities, particularly of the Department of Graphic Design Technology, FAAT, TTU in Ghana, that made, and still make them classify a printing press operator and a publisher as same in terms of work activities and workflow in the employment space.

Firstly, Graphic Design students know that in some parts of the world, major publishers sometimes own their own printing presses, which they use to turn acquired manuscripts into printed books for customers (Datus, Jr, 1989).

Secondly, based on the Printing Technology courses embedded in the Graphic Design programmes from the Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelor of Technology (B-Tech), Master of Technology (M-Tech) in Graphic Design and M-Tech in Printing, the Graphic Design students have the mindset that since all graphic works are printed, they misconstrued the two (2) to be same TTU Diary, 2020).

Thirdly, unlike the Traditional Universities, for instance, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi in Ghana, where the College of Art and Built Environment Bachelor of Art (BA) Communication Design (Graphic Design) and BA Publishing Studies programmes are run and pursued separately with different course outlines and outcomes. Only the Graphic Design programme is pursued in the Technical Universities (KNUST Cut-Off Points, 2022/2023), and hence, creating the misconception.

With the above critical contributing factors to the misconception held by Graphic Design students expounded above, the authors would now turn to delineate their study area as follows:

2.1. Identify Who a Printing Press Operator and a Publisher Is

The term printer in this study was used to refer to a person with a specialised expertise in handling printing presses to print products for a print buyer for the purpose of communication, but not the film or plate of a single colour produced for four colour process printing (Campbell, 2005). Examples of some printing presses are: letterpress, lithography, gravure, screen printing, collotype, flexography, and die-stamping. However, other methods of applying images are now being used, including inkjet printing and heat transfer printing (Campbell, 2005; Kipphan, 2001; Dennis & Jenkins, 1991). In addition, some of the responsibilities that a printing press operator repeatedly executes before and during print run consist of evaluating print orders of a print buyer, deciding on materials, such as type of paper(s) and inks to use, and injecting these materials into the printing presses, performing quality control and maintaining the quality of the printing presses (www.zippia.com).

All these activities of the printing press operator happen in graphic arts/printing industry. Graphic Arts/printing industry are technical areas of producing printed products, and it covers the six basic phases that printed products normally pass through, even though modern advancement in technology has facilitated some of the phases to merge. These six phases are:

- Design and layout,
- Copy preparation,
- Photo-conversion,
- Image carriers,
- Image transfer and,
- Binding and finishing

Notwithstanding modern technological advancement, the above six phases remain an excellent model for comprehending how most printed products are produced (Dennis & Jenkins, 1991).

The term publisher, on the other hand, was used to refer to a person or risk taker who is in charge of everything in book production - editing, design, legal, marketing, distribution, finances, and public relations. A publisher is the grand strategist and organiser of the whole undertaking of book production and the fourth partner in the World of Books. The other three (3) partners are:

- The author who writes the manuscript,
- The printing press operator who turns the manuscript into an edition of books, and
- The bookseller who sells the books that have been produced

Thus, a publisher could be equated to a director general of the whole enterprise of book publishing (Datus, Jr, 1989). Simply put, a publisher is a person whose business is the publishing of books, periodicals, engraving, and computer software (www.collinsdictionary.com).

2.2. The Differences between a Printing Press Operator and a Publisher

It is normal to have some misconceptions about the roles of a printing press operator and a publisher in relation to who does what? Practically speaking, a printing press operator and a publisher serve different functions (tbm, 2010). Some of the significant differences between the two (2) are as follows:

No.	Printing Press Operator	Publisher
1	A printing press operator uses a printing machine to print real books and bind and trim them to the required sizes.	A publisher does not use a printing machine to print, bind and trim printed books to the required sizes.
2	A printing press operator gets paid not from sales of the printed books, but from the printing, binding, and trimming of the books printed.	Unlike the printer, a publisher gets his/her cut in monetary terms from the number of printed books sold.
3	A printing press operator does not distribute or have a warehouse to store printed books.	A publisher does distribute and has a warehouse to store books printed for later distribution.
4	A printing press operator does not have any working relationships with printed book distributors and warehouse owners where the printed books are stored.	A publisher has a working relationship with printed book distributors and warehouse owners due to the fact that each of the two (2) is paid for the services they render by the publisher.
5	A printing press operator does not in any way take responsibility for the content in the printed books; their only responsibility is to print the required number of books ordered.	A publisher takes responsibility for the content in the printed books. Based on this, the publisher ensures that reviewing, copyediting, designing, and preparing the author's manuscript are done appropriately before printing starts.
6	A printing press operator does not hire any person before and during the printing phase, thus, does not pay for any hiring services rendered.	Unlike the printer, the publisher has to hire persons to complement their work, for instance, a copy-editor to ensure that the text grammatically follows the laid down style adopted by the publisher or the publishing house.
7	A printing press operator is always all set to print books demanded by a print buyer.	A publisher could take a minimum of three (3) months to one (1) year maximum to print a book because he/she has to work or rework the acquired manuscript before printing.

Table 1: Indicating the Differences between a Printing Press Operator and a Publisher

2.3. Workflow Chart of a Printing Press Operator and a Publisher

2.3.1. A Printing Press Operator

Printing, according to Kipphan (2001), is described as the process of transferring processed ink(s) (such as cyan, yellow, magenta, and black) into a paper or another substrate through a printing plate containing texts, images, and graphics in a printing press. To buttress this point further, Dennis & Jenkins (1991) state that the actual printing is done in the fifth phase of the six production phases, of which Graphic Arts products usually go through with machines holding image carriers transfer images to many kinds of materials. The skilled person who operates the printing press and additional image transfer equipment is the printing press operator.

In a publishing house, a printing press operator is the producer; he/she takes delivery of the manuscript from the publisher, composes, prints, and binds an edition, and sends the produced book back to the publisher. He went on further to say that the printer plays no role in deciding what to print but simply does the work requested by the publisher and gets paid for it. In addition, he/she is not a risk taker on any specific book project (Datus, Jr, 1989). Below is the workflow chart of a printing press operator.

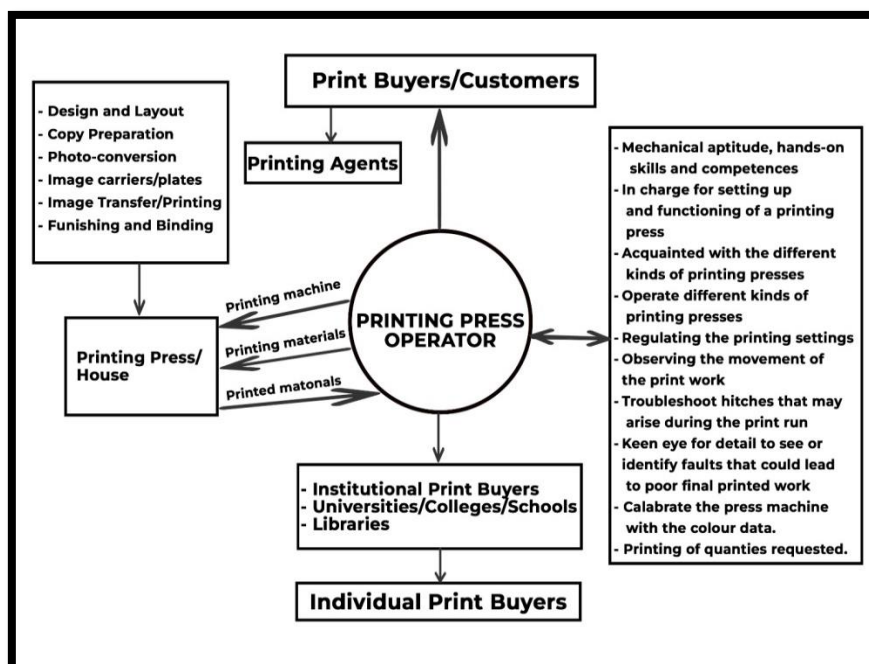


Figure 1: Workflow Chart of a Printing Press Operator

As the workflow chart above shows, a printing press operator plays a crucial part in the general production of the printing processes by making sure that the print work runs smoothly and that the final printed product meets the standards set by the print buyer or customer (www.diplointernational.com).

2.3.2. A Publisher

Conventionally, the word 'publisher' denotes the creation and distribution of published works such as books, newspapers, and magazines. However, with the introduction of digital information systems, the range has extended to include digital publishing, including e-books, digital magazines, websites, social media, and video game publishing (Friedlander, 2015). According to Brooke (2019), a publisher can be referred to as a publishing company or organisation or to an individual who leads a publishing company, periodicals, or newspapers. However, according to Datus, Jr. (1989), a publisher, besides being the fourth partner in book publishing, is the director general of the whole enterprise of book publishing or the one who pushes the button setting the entire machinery of the book publishing process in motion (Datus, Jr., 1989). Below is the workflow chart of a publisher.

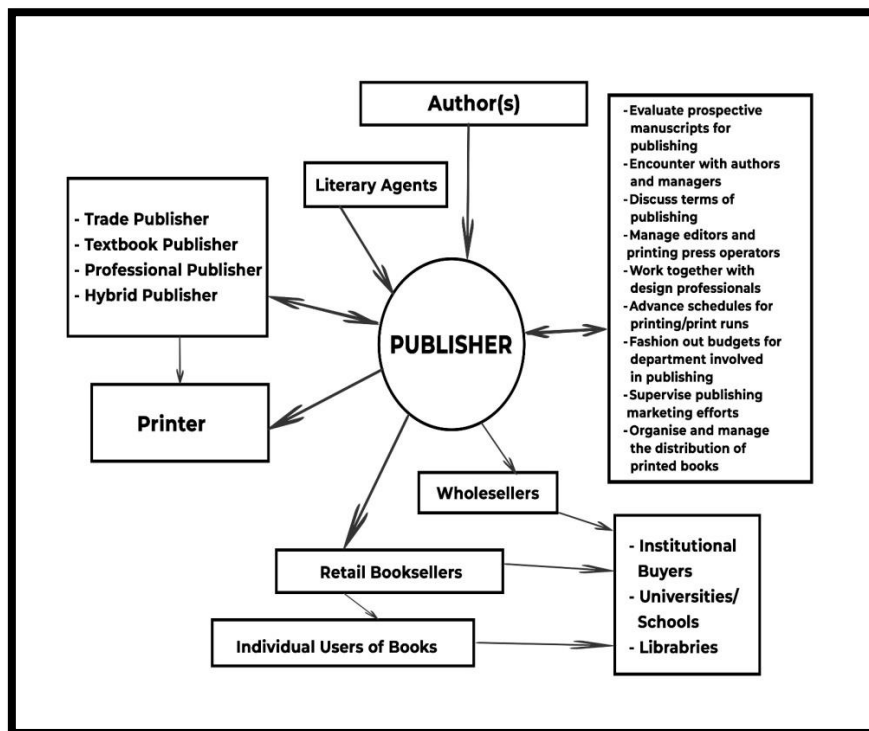


Figure 2: Workflow Chart of a Publisher

As the workflow chart above shows, a publisher is the one who sets the editorial and commercial direction for companies that publish books, newspapers, magazines, and digital content and makes decisions about the markets his/her publishing company would serve and the type of content he/she will offer the customers. In addition, he/she works with teams of editors, designers, writers, and freelance contributors who create the content and manage its production (www.work.chon.com).

Secondly, it is the publisher who takes delivery of the manuscripts from an author, enlists capital, engages the services of designers, translators, and other editorial specialists, commissions and supervises the work of printing press operators, and then directs the distribution to the potential market of the books thus published (Datus, Jr., 1989).

3. Conclusions

It is clear from the above discussions that factors such as the running of the Printing Technology courses embedded in the Graphic Design programmes from HND, B-Tech, M-Tech in Graphic Design, and M-Tech in Printing have contributed to the misconception held by the Graphic Design students that a printing press operator and a publisher are the same in terms of work activities and workflow. The Graphic Design students at the Department of Graphic Design Technology, FAAT, TTU have this mindset, precisely, a deep-seated misconception of the two because, in their studies, they know all Graphic Design works end up being printed or published.

These factors make the authors conclude from a practical point of view that a printing press operator and a publisher serve different functions in relation to the differences in terms of definition, work activities, and workflow of each one as indicated in table 1 above – where the differences between a printing press operator and a publisher are indicated. In addition, in figure 1 above, the workflow chart shows that a printing press operator plays a crucial part in the general production of the printing processes by making sure that the print work runs smoothly and that the final printed product meets the standards set by the print buyer or customer. While on the other hand, figure 2 above clearly indicates that it is the publisher who takes delivery of the manuscripts from an author, enlists capital, engages the services of designers, translators, and other editorial specialists, commissions and supervises the work of the printing press operator,

and then directs the distribution to the potential market of the books thus published. In view of this, the authors finally conclude that based on the differences in terms of definition, work activities, and workflow of a printing press operator and a publisher, the Department of Graphic Design Technology, FAAT, TTU owes the students a duty to help them to critically see and appreciate the differences through teaching and learning of the students based on the Graphic Design curriculum.

4. Recommendations of the Study

Based on the discussions on the study, the authors wish to make the following recommendations:

- The Department of Graphic Design Technology, FAAT, TTU must be proactive to explain the differences between a printing press operator which falls within its printing technology course, and a publisher which falls outside its scope in order to erase the deep-seated misconception of Graphic Design students.
- During a foundation class, the Department of Graphic Design Technology must give tutorials on the differences in terms of definitions, work activities, and workflows of a printing press operator and a publisher for the students to have a clear mind of what each stands for and do.
- Other researchers must research other similar or related programmes/courses students are pursuing in the various Technical and Traditional Universities in Ghana to help students erase similar deep-seated misconceptions about some programmes/courses.

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