



## **Decline of Reading Culture among Students in Higher Education Institutions: A Survey of Juja and Thika Towns, Kenya**

Gitonga Kimani<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kenyatta University, Kenya  
Email: kimanipter@ku.ac.ke

DOI: 10.53103/cjlls.v5i4.224

### **Abstract**

Primary school education is intended to inculcate in the learner basic literacy skills of reading, writing and simple arithmetic. The next level which is secondary education is aimed at identifying the career path the learner should pursue based on his/her ability and endowment. This ability is what informs the course the learner will pursue at the tertiary level of education. Higher education as contextualized in this paper is synonymous with tertiary education and refers to learning undertaken after secondary school be it in a college, TVET institution or university. The Study adopted the descriptive survey design. The location of the Study was Juja and Thika towns and their environs in Kenya for having a higher concentration of colleges and universities in Kenya when compared with other regions in the country. Triangulation of sampling techniques was used. The Study found out that less than 50% of students did not visit a library outside their institution to study or buy a personal book for the course they were undertaking. Further, over 50% of the students accessed the internet for non-academic content and went to the library only to study for examinations and not gain wide knowledge. The Study established causes for the decline of the reading culture that included poor foundation in high school and misuse of A.I. Finally, the Study recommended measures to redress the poor reading culture e.g policy changes on evaluation and regulating the use of A.I.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Artificial Intelligence (A.I), Formative Evaluation, Summative Evaluation

### **Background to the Study**

In 2017, Kenya adopted the competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) (Amutabi, 2021) to replace the close to 40 years old 8-4-4 system following the Douglas Odhiambo Report of 2012. The CBC entails 2 years of pre-school, 6 years of primary school, 6 years of secondary school (3 years in Junior Secondary; 3 years in Senior School) and 3 years in the University. Elementary/Basic education will go up to grade 9 (Junior Secondary School-JSS). That is why President Uhuru Kenyatta declared a 100% transition from

primary to secondary school in January 2020 (KIPPRA, 2020) to enable all learners attain basic education up to this level.

At JSS level, the learners will be helped to identify the career pathway to guide them on choice of subjects as they join Senior School. Three career pathways have been identified out of which the learner will choose one. These are STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), Social Sciences and Arts and Sports pathway (KICD, 2018).

Learners in the first two pathways will join college and universities while those in the third pathway will join special Sports and Arts Academies. Since it is at the tertiary level of education that one is expected to be an expert in a certain field, a lot of vast reading is expected. One of the regrets bequeathed the country by the outgoing 8-4-4 system was making learning too much examination oriented at the expense of adequate acquisition of knowledge (KICD, 2019). The clamor for grades prompted many publishers to produce books that resemble marking schemes with predicted Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) questions and answers. Form four candidates only needed to cram/memorize those answers and get their A's (Milligan, 2017).

On arrival at the college and universities, the students found the courses they were admitted to a tall order with some being discontinued from studying. Others opted to change courses while some sunk into depression leading to drug abuse, alcoholism and suicide (Mutwiri et al, 2023).

Failure to cultivate a reading culture in high school haunted them in the college and universities where they expected summarized notes and handouts that were not forthcoming.

### **Statement of the Problem**

From the foregoing literature, there is a decline in the reading culture among students in HEIs which if not addressed could result in low quality of graduates with limited and skewed knowledge which could be detrimental to service delivery once these graduates join the job market.

### **Objectives**

This paper sought to realize the following objectives:

- i. Identify the indicators for decline of reading culture among college and university students.
- ii. Establish the reasons for decline of reading culture among college and university students.
- iii. Suggest measures that could improve the reading culture among college and

university students.

### **Methodology**

The method used was descriptive survey. A survey is used to investigate populations by selecting samples to analyses and discover occurrences.

The target population was students in colleges and universities in Juja and Thika towns in Kenya estimated at 150,000.

Triangulation of sampling techniques was utilized (Patton 1999). Both stratified and convenience sampling techniques were used. In stratified sampling, questions were issued to each college and university. Convenience sampling augmented on data acquired through stratified sampling especially due to low return of questionnaires from some of the institutions. Purposeful sampling was also done on tutors/lecturers and bookshop owners who provided vital information.

### **Locale**

Juja and Thika towns in Kenya were chosen for this Study for having a huge concentration of HEIs. For the sake of this research, Juja area was extended up to Kahawa along the Thika-Nairobi Highway to cover more HEIs. The two towns have a total number of 4 universities, 39 colleges, 20 bookshops and 2 libraries. The estimated student population is 150,000.

### **Discussion**

Jereb et al. (2023) argued that there is usually a decline in motivation to study which is connected to lowering learning goals and students finding it harder to focus on learning. They carried out the study in Athens during the Covid-19 Pandemic but low motivation to study could still be caused by other factors.

Farooq et al. (2020) identified difficulties in students study habits in Pakistan that included lack of institutional support and difficulties with internet accessibility. This means that the study environment matters when it comes to creating the needed atmosphere to enable good study habits.

Miller (2020) added that another component needed for successful studies is taking responsibility for studying on the part of the student. This means taking responsibility for homework, academic choices, seeking support if needed, attitude (believing in oneself and willingness to learn), interactions with others, confidence and growth. Interactions with others refer to group work and group discussions while growth means aspiring for continuous improvement.

A study carried out in Nigeria (Henry 2004) in Aina et al. (2012) reveals that 40% of adult Nigerians never always read a non-fiction book from cover to cover after leaving school and that an average Nigerian reads less than one book per year. This translates to a poor reading culture in the society which could only have started in school. The people end up missing out on vital and pertinent information and knowledge because the vast majority of the world's information is not yet fully digitalized but still in print form.

Chris, L.A (2015) carried out a study on the influence of social media on the study habits of undergraduate students in Kenyan Universities. The study acknowledged that social media could positively be used to enhance good study habits but at the same time identified bad study habits that are associated with social media. These include studying in unsuitable settings, studying while listening to music or watching movies and television as well as accessing toxic and harmful digital content.

While carrying out a study on the study habits of undergraduate students of University of East Africa, Baraton: Odhiambo (2024) identified good study habits by well performing students. Such students always completed their assignments and tests in time, did proper preparation for exams, actively participated in class, sought feed-back from instructors and had a specific academic goal.

The current study looked at a different locale and seeks to look beyond the study environment and student dynamics. It has put into consideration both internal and external factors ranging from what transpires in the institutions to the environment outside the HEIs where supportive facilities and services like bookshops, libraries and internet are supposed to come in handy.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

The Study identified the following indicators for decline of reading culture among College and University students in the study region.

- Most students went to the library to study fewer times on average.
- Only 35% have ever visited another library apart from that of their institution.
- Only 38% have never bought a personal book on the course they were studying.
- 62% used the internet to catch up with what was trending regionally and globally (e.g in politics and entertainment industry) other than to access content of the course they were studying.
- 73% went to the library to study for assignments and examinations not for content enhancement or knowledge acquisition in their area of specialization.
- The number of libraries outside the HEIs (2) and bookshops (20) against a population of 150, 000 students indicate poor reading culture.

The Study established the reasons for the decline of reading culture among college and university students in the study locale:

- The reading culture was not inculcated in high schools.
- Students were over relying on lecturers'/tutors' hand-outs/notes.
- Some students had learnt that what the lecturers/tutors over- emphasize in their teaching is what will be tested and so there was no need for in-depth reading.
- Most students had learnt to use artificial intelligence (A.I) for quick answers for their assignments so found no need to read widely.
- There were no mechanisms in the HEIs that required wide reading.
- Students knew internet has much information but most felt internet charges were high and in most institutions, internet connectivity was weak and not free.

Measures that could help improve the reading culture among college and university students were identified:

- Lecturers/tutors to refrain from giving students too much of hand-outs/notes.
- Lecturers/tutors not teach the examinations or be easily predictable on what they will likely test in the examinations.
- Institutions to give many continuous assessment tests (formative evaluation) based on small topics that demand regular reading as opposed to one singular end of semester examination (summative evaluation).
- Even in the summative evaluation lecturers/tutors to ask questions that require wide reading to answer and not from some particular popular predictable topics.
- Create adequate conducive reading spaces both in the library and the outside compound in the HEIs.
- Ensure there is students input even when Artificial Intelligence (A.I) has been used to do take away assignments.
- Ensure there is good and free of charge internet connectivity in the HEIs to enable students to freely undertake online studies and research.

### References

- Amutabi, M. (2021). *Journal of Popular Music Education* 3(10) :45-66 March 2021.
- Chris, L.A. (2015). Influence of Social Media on Study Habits of Undergraduate Students in Kenyan Universities: *International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity & Social Sciences* to (4) 42-55.
- Farooq, R., & Mansoor (2020). Challenge of Online Medical Education in Pakistan During Covid-19 Pandemic: *Journal of the College of Physicians & Surgeons in Pakistan* 30 (1) 67-69.
- Jereb, E., Jerebic, J., & Urh, M. (2013). Study Habits in Higher Education Before and after the Outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic: *Athens Journal of Education*, 10(1),67-84.
- KICD (2018). *Report on Competence Based Curriculum Activities 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2018*.

- KICD (2019). *Curriculum Reforms in Kenya*.
- Kinoti, M., & Mwita, J. (2021) The Effects of Students' Study Habits in Kenyan Universities: *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* 9(8)
- KIPPRA (2020). *Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis*. 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020
- Miller (2020). Accepting Responsibility for Your Learning. Retrieved From <https://www.smarttutorreferrals.com/articles/being-great-student/responsibility> (Accessed Dec 10 2021)
- Milligan, L. O. (2017). Education Quality and the Kenyan 8-4-4 Curriculum; Secondary School Learners' Experiences: *Research in Comparative & International Education* 12 (2):198-212.
- Mutwiri, M., Wambugu, A., Kinuthua, J., & Gachenia, L. (2023). Suicide in Kenyan Universities: *European Scientific Journal*, 18, 73-98.
- Odhiambo, M. (2024). *Effects of Study Habits on Undergraduate Students' Academic Performance at University of Eastern Africa, Baraton*.
- Pittan, O.O. (2013). Poor Study Habits as an Educational Problem Among University Undergraduates in the Contemporary Times & Effective Management Strategy: *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Invention* Vol. 2 Issue 11 Nov 2013