

# REBUILDING SUSTAINABLE FOUNDATIONS OF READING AS THE ONLY HOPE FOR A LITERATE TOMORROW: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF READING CULTURE AMONG STUDENTS IN RARIEDA SUB-COUNTY

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## Abstract

Reading is one of the most important endeavors in human life. This study at its core sought to examine the delicate relationship between a firm and established reading culture and academic performance in English with the objective of finding out how schools in Rarieda Sub-County, Siaya County have endeavored to put up a wide range of materials and policies that inspire reading culture. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The sample of the study constituted 240 secondary school students randomly selected from 15 schools across the sub-county. The study employed questionnaire to gather the data. It was found that students recognized the value of reading. It is recommended that school administrators need to improve library facilities and services.

**Keywords:** Secondary school, reading, reading culture, literacy

## Introduction and Literature Review

It is quite obvious that in order to realize a reasonable academic attainment, reading is inevitable. Nevertheless, to read and attain excellent academic score is one thing and making it (reading) a habit is another. While a number of scholars including Ogbodo (2002), Laitsch, 2005, Bhan and Gupta (2010), and Singh (2011) have taken interest in affirming the correlation between reading habit and academic excellence, this study takes a less trodden path of seeking to find the relationship between a strong culture of reading and academic attainment in English.

Reading without doubt is an extremely important skill in academics. It is the center of all learning. In fact, reading and learning are inseparable. Ruterana (2012) while referring to Minister Habineza's keynote address points out that reading culture is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning and becoming an adaptable and skilled reading increases one's chances of success at school and beyond. He beautifully encapsulates this argument by stating that reading is not just for school, it is for life. No wonder, Nwokocha (2014) adds his voice to categorically posit that every child must fully become competent in reading if they dream of realizing any success in school and out of school in discharging various responsibilities as citizens of a

democratic society. It is a means of attaining educational and professional excellence (Jacobs, 2010).

Reading is important in coping with the new knowledge in the changing world. It enables an individual to keep abreast with the fast moving world. Chettri and Rout (2013) sees reading as an important practice that can assist an individual to not only gain creativeness and develop critical thinking capacities but also as a means to personal and mental development and an access to social, economic and civic life. It paves a broad path to self-discovery as it gives one an insight to understand one's own experience.

Furthermore, Ruterana (2012) deduces that making a nation a reading one equips it with the most reliable tool for enhancing literacy levels and the advantages thereof. This is the reason the importance of literacy has received much attention the world over. This has been demonstrated by annual celebration of World literacy day commemorated on September, 8 of every year as a reminder to emphasize to individuals, societies and the international community on the importance of literacy and the need to overcome issues about learning. This day was first declared on October 26, 1966 by UNESCO at the 14th session of UNESCO'S General conference.

Annan (1997) stated that, "Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in mod-



ern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories.”

Despite all this significance,

“Several sociological studies on reading habits state that school pupils and students no longer read for leisure, or even to satisfy individual curiosities. They are occupied with obligatory school readings. The reading of literature and fiction in general tends to be a way, not only to help developing a personal and social identity, but also to create more profound and grounded literacy capacities, namely the information literacy abilities that are so needed to go through life in today’s world.” (Martins & Marques, 2010, p.3).

One of the factors that has been attributed to this is poverty (Ojwang’ as cited by Onyango, Indoshi, & Ayere, 2015) but much more importantly, teachers abdicating their role in nurturing healthy reading culture. He continues that the exams are based more on syllabus than on life skills and so students are more interested in academic learning and will not be bothered to learn what is outside their course. This has resulted to breeding individuals who are functionally illiterate even at degree level. They don’t use libraries to enhance their knowledge outside their coursework. This is a time bomb since poor reading culture has a far reaching consequence (Fabunmi & Foloruns, 2010). He adds that the performance of students nowadays is attributed to their poor background in the reading culture which is normally a carryover from their primary school through the secondary and up to the University level.

Reading is not an innate ability like talking but a latent capacity that should be diligently nurtured from the earliest possible opportunities through proven strategies and methodologies. The process of developing a culture of reading is gradual but consistent and not sudden and impulsive. Ruterana (2012) while quoting Bamberger 1975 elaborates that the development of a life-long reading interest and reading habit is a constant process rooted in the home and improves systematically in the school and is further carried on in later life through the influence of the general cultural atmosphere and the conscious effort of the public education and public libraries.

At the base of a stable reading culture lies the parent whose contribution to the literacy development of the child is instrumental towards cultivating incessant reading habit. It is said that parents who read to

their children nurture more than literary skills. Gitachu (2007) records that adults who offer to read to young children, normally help them to develop as independent readers by engaging them in conversation about what they had read. Parents can buy the children graded books through the advice of educators which they can read to them or simply buy story books to their children and the impact would be tremendous.

Buhere (cited in Nalusiba, 2010) while quoting Professor Lyon’s statement made before the Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives on July 10, 1997 notes that children’s ability to understand what they are reading is inextricably linked to their background knowledge. Very young children, who are provided opportunities to learn, think, and talk about new areas of knowledge will gain much from the process of reading. Owusu-Acheaw (2014) interposes that reading is an intellectual activity which is possible only if a man forms the habit of reading and practises them from childhood. The amount of reading that children do for enjoyment and for school was found to be a major contributor to their reading achievement. For a reading culture to be possible reading must be part of all aspects of life and not only certain parts such as school or work (Magara & Batambuze, cited in Nalusiba, 2010).

Reading skills which is inherent in our basic education curriculum emphasizes introduction to alphabets then word recognition and its meaning. After which, the learner is to be exposed to a wide array of written texts having age appropriate vocabulary, appropriate treatment of themes and length of written texts such that from the earliest grades, learners are provided with opportunities to read, discuss and write on issues, themes they have read about (Buhere cited in Nalusiba, 2016). At this level the syllabus provides for library lessons that ought to fortify the reading interest already kindled at the early stages. During such lessons the students get time to read at leisure the books they own or the ones they have borrowed from the library. The books in question should be interesting and provocative texts purposefully, always guided by good questions that stimulate discussion, debate and effective writing.

Before, as a reaction to the Sessional Paper No 10 1965, The Kenya National Library Services Board Act was established to develop programmes that would ensure challenges related to illiteracy were addressed. This saw libraries constructed across

the country to provide an easier access to knowledge. Since then, as explained by Ibrahim Oruko, the director of the Kenya National Library Services in an interview, the role of the libraries have solely involves contributing to independent learning, occupational literacy, adult literacy, recovery programmes while at the same time supplementing on formal education as we develop a sustainable reading culture.

The school can therefore explore a well programmed library system as a means of setting a well-founded school reading culture through firstly providing access to books. Access to books encourages reading asserts Nalusiba (2010). Onyango, Indoshi, and Ayere (2015) interposes that culture of reading is inextricably intertwined with the availability of books. He continues that exposure to a wide range of books, magazines and other print materials, at various levels of difficulty, is likely to encourage development of a culture of reading.

...book fairs, exhibitions and book talks expose pupils and teachers to a variety of information materials. These can be carried out in the school environment whereby teachers and pupils introduce each other to favourite books. This could be done by reading aloud what is on the back cover (blurb), the first paragraph of the first chapter or any favourite part of the story and telling others why the book was enjoyable and later on encouraging swapping of books to boost pupils' morale to read. (Nalusiba, 2010, p. 16)

Secondly, the schools can work on allocation of adequate time for reading. This is possible through teaching reading as subject content regularly and consistently. Nnam as pointed out by Nalusiba (2010) emphasized that schools should put in place policies, routines and curricula that require pupils to visit the library at least once a week which is also a requirement of the Ministry of Education in Kenya that has been overlooked by most language teachers. Teachers can also engage students in research activities that extend to the libraries where students can pre-read of what is yet to be covered or give additional information on what has been learnt. Nalusiba (2010) says planned reading sessions enable learners to utilize the time they got to visit the libraries and get exposed to a wide variety of reading materials, which would encourage them to engage in reading.

Lastly, motivation of students through rewarding the best readers frequently has also proved to be

an effective way of establishing a culture of reading. Nalusiba (2010) affirms that some of the ways in which teachers rewarded their pupils were through showing off the pupils' books to their fellow pupils, asking pupils to read in front of the class and putting stars in the pupil's exercise books. Such rewards encouraged pupils to indulge more in reading since they anticipated being rewarded.

### Statement of the Problem

English language in the status national language is not only a medium of instruction in the Kenyan curriculum but also one of the compulsory subjects which is examined at the end of eight-year and four-year cycles of learning in primary and secondary schools respectively. However, it is interesting that many students even after undertaking the course in English from standard one up to form four are still not able to express themselves well in both written and spoken English. This not only disadvantages but also hampers the learner's progress in subsequent learning adventure.

According to Dr. Francis Owakah, University of Nairobi lecturer of Philosophy and Religious Studies (as cited by Kaberia, 2012), Kenya lacks a strong and consistent reading culture and most Kenyan schools only teach students to pass exams. He decries the laxity of Kenyan teachers in nurturing a healthy reading culture. He continues that the examinations are based more on syllabus than on life skills. It is on this background that this investigation was set to investigate the correlation between reading culture and the academic performance in English as well as how schools have endeavored to promote the culture of reading in secondary schools in Rarieda Sub-county, Siaya County, Kenya.

### Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the perception of students on the importance of reading?
2. What is the reading culture of students?
3. To what extent do schools provide motivation for reading?
4. What is the students' attitude toward reading?

## Significance of the Study

This research will be very significant to the secondary school administrators who will assist the students to develop a strong reading culture that will spur learning. Furthermore, the study will be a source of literature to be reviewed by those intending to do further research on the problem especially those sourcing for the modern solution to poor reading culture that will rebuild the crumbling academic wall for the modern student. The study will be consulted by other people carrying out research about reading in order to acquire facts about the reading practices.

## Methodology

This study utilized descriptive research methods to determine the reading culture of the respondents. The sample of the study constituted 240 secondary school students randomly selected from 15 schools across the sub-county. The study employed questionnaire to gather the data. Data gathering instrument went through the process of content validation by faculty of Department of Education at UEAB. Reliability coefficients for selected subscales were done and the resulting alpha coefficient of 0.82 was obtained and therefore questionnaire was deemed reliable.

## Findings

Table 1

### *Importance of Reading*

<b>Reasons for Reading</b>	<b>Rank</b>
I learned a lot	# 1
It helps me get ahead in my studies.	# 2
It teaches me how to better express myself.	# 3
I learn new words.	# 4
It helps me imagine things and situations.	# 5
I enjoy it.	# 6
It keeps me from getting bored.	#7
It makes me feel good.	# 8
I am forced to.	#9

Table 1 shows that the students find reading important because they learn a lot from it (reading), it helps them to get ahead in their studies, it teaches them how to express themselves better, they learn new words, it helps them imagine things and situations, they just enjoy reading, it keeps them from getting bored, it makes them feel good and because they are forced to

read in that order. It therefore follows that majority of these students have attached a significant value to reading which is an indication that they could have had a stable foundation in reading at the early stages of their lives as well as a good culture set by the schools in Rarieda Sub-County.

Table 2

*Frequency of Reading Books*

<b>How often?</b>	<b>Frequency and Percentage</b>
1. Never	0
2. Once a month	2 students or .7%
3. Twice a week	37 students or 13.4%
4. Everyday	205 students or 88.4%

The information in table 2 testifies that majority of the students represented statistically by 88.4% who read everyday. This is sure pointer to an established habit of reading among the students irrespective of the tight school schedule that normally tend to give students quite a minimal for personal reading time. The data presented in table 3 indicate that books related to the classroom work receive a considerable greater amount of time and attention compared to the other books. This is logical since the students are basically

in school to study a prescribed course of study and be tested for their mastery after a specific period of time. however, finding time to read other materials is a suggestion not only that the school has availed the reading materials to the students which exposes them to a wide variety of materials but also that the very students have matured enough to choose a variety of materials to read on their own.

Table 3

*Mean Number of Hours per Week Spent in Reading the Indicate Type of Materials*

<b>Types of Reading Materials</b>	<b>Number of Hours per Week</b>
Books for class	3.79 hours
Books not are not for class	2.04 hours
Newspapers	1.32 hours
Magazines	1.24 hours
Comic Books	1.49 hours

The information presented in Table 4 reveals that the students find a substantial amount of time to read even more on a busy school day and still choose

to read more on weekends as well which could be pointing out to a grown interest in reading among the students.



Table 4

*Frequency of Reading During Specific Time Periods*

<b>Time/Occasion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
On school days	A lot
On weekends	A lot
During vacation	Very little

Table 5 provides an evidence that teachers play a significant role in the development of a culture of reading through recommending going to the library to students quite often, encouraging sharing of the books among students and frequently commenting on class

readings. However, the results further show that organization of debates based on issues brought out in books and class presentations have not been explored by teachers often.

Table 5

*Role of Teachers in Encouraging Reading Culture*

<b>Role of Teachers</b>	<b>Mean/Frequency</b>
Recommend going to the library	M = 3.59 (often)
Encouraging sharing of books	M = 3.97 (often)
Comments on class readings	M = 4.01 (often)
Organizing debate issues found in books	M = 3.05 (sometimes)
Encourage giving presentations on topics	M = 3.45 (sometimes)

The results in table 6 show that a sizable number of students (46.7%) of the students visit their libraries at least once or twice a week compared to the 5.1% who never visit the libraries at all. This attests to an already

kindled culture of reading with the books available and accessible to the students.

Table 6

*Frequency of Library Visit*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Number of Students (%)</b>
Never	14 (5.1%)
Once or twice a month	8 (2.9%)
Once or twice a week	129 (46.7%)
Almost everyday	54 (19.6%)
Everyday	26 (9.4%)

Table 7 illustrates that the libraries in the schools in Rarieda Sub-County are fairly equipped with relevant materials for student's learning so that

they are able to find those that they need for their reading.

Table 7

*Do you find what you need when using your school library?*

Mean	Interpretation
3.77	Often

The statistics in table 8, even though majority of the libraries are not user-friendly, there are a few that are well equipped and are comfortable. Actually, from the observation made during the research, a number of

schools have bookstores that are labelled "library" but there are also those schools that have the actual buildings fashioned to serve as libraries with studying tables and a well-coordinated system.

Table 8

*How would you describe your experience when using your school library?*

Description of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Well-equipped	10	3.6%
Not well-equipped	4	1.4%
Not user friendly	100	36.2%
Uncomfortable	40	14.5%
Very comfortable	84	30.4%

Table 9 provides data that shows majority of the students like reading and would like to read more. Other responses with higher means include the students reading a lot (M=3.22), teachers encouraging

the students to use the library (M=3.38), the student's knowledge of what is in the school libraries (M=3.07) and availability of help when using the library (M=3.17).

Table 9

*Attitudes towards Reading*

Attitudes/Perceptions	Mean	Interpretation
I like to read.	3.59	Strongly agree
I read a lot.	3.22	Agree
My teachers encourage me to use the library.	3.38	Agree
I would like to read more.	3.68	Strongly agree
I am aware of what is in the library.	3.07	Agree
I find the books I am looking for in the library.	2.85	Agree
Help is available to me when I am using the library.	3.17	Agree
I am satisfied with the library.	2.64	Agree



The data in Table 10 indicate that the schools have significantly contributed to the strengthening of the culture of reading. A bigger number of schools

(35.9%) reward the best readers, (14.5%) acknowledge the best readers and (7.2%) organize reading competition activities.

Table 10

*How does your school provide motivation for reading?*

Motivational Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
No motivation at all	74	26.8%
Acknowledging best readers	40	14.5%
Rewarding best readers	99	35.9%
Organizing reading competition	20	7.2%

**Conclusions**

From the above findings, it is clear that:

1. Students recognized the value of reading that is they learn a lot.
2. Most of the students read every day, especially books for their classes.
3. Most students read during school days and weekends but not often during vacations.
4. Teachers play an important role in developing reading culture among students.
5. Students use their school libraries once or twice a week.
6. Most of their libraries are not user friendly.
7. Students have a good attitude towards developing reading culture.
8. Schools are giving rewards and acknowledge best readers

**Recommendations**

The researchers therefore came up with the following recommendations to aid the institutions in reinforcing the pillars of reading culture:

- School administrators need to maintain and improve the reading culture among their students.
- Teachers should be role models of good reading habits and they need to give more activities such as reading assignments to students who are encouraged to read more.
- Administrators need to improve the library facilities especially service from the personnel

in charge.

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