**In Search of the Spirit of Education: a Paradigm Shift from Reading to Pass Exams to Becoming an Avid Reader.**

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# Abstract: This paper is my testimony. I speak of a journey which has paid off, a journey which is still continuing and a journey from a world of memorizing to pass exams to becoming an avid reader. It is a paper which is from a different worldview, from the lenses of a student. The theory of the “idle student” is one I have in mind. Our university students, who are the future of our republic, have been left in the hands of fate. This paper aims to explore this theory and its effect in regards to educated unemployment. It will answer the questions: Who is an idle student? What is the theory of an idle student? What can be done? The paper will then further expound on the effects of memorisation on students and give recommendations on how to remedy the same and will also share with the audience what Kabarak Law School has implemented in order to achieve a reading culture among students of law, its successes and failures. The journey is on going, a shift in culture takes time but it is achievable. Memorizing to pass exams is the ghost that haunts the corridors of our universities. Key words: Paradigm shift, reading culture, memorizing and idle students.

# Introduction

While searching for the “Spirit of Education” this article was conceived in my mind. Graduating out of Law School with a First Class Honours was my dream and in the first year of my campus life this I worked very hard to achieve and I did achieve. One or many may already congratulate me, however, this is not how I saw it, during my long holiday I asked myself this; now that you are a first class student how learned are you? The answer to this marked the beginning of a journey related to in this article.

In a developing country that is in need of competent leaders, hardworking and honest citizens, employment opportunities for its people amongst others. One may ask who and who especially is the future of this country? The younger generation might be the correct answer.

Where is this younger generation? Is an equally important question that demands an answer, well? The right answer might be that they are in school; of Kenya’s population an estimate of 29% are between the ages of 18 to 34 (Ndungu, 2020). This article is particularly concerned with the category that is in institutions of higher learning and especially universities and colleges (these terms will be used interchangeably).

It is the spirit of this paper that every college student should take the future of this country into their own hands. Mwalimu Julius Nyerere could not have put it any better when he said of students “…if any young men or women who are given education by the people of this republic adopt attitudes of superiority or fail to use their knowledge to help the development of this country then they are betraying our union” (Legum & Mmari, 1995, pg. 5). It therefore goes without saying that this paper takes a philosophical approach while targeting university students as its main audience and this is without prejudice.

Consequently, it will proceed to deliver thought provoking arguments in an interesting manner while anchoring its roots on the aims or what should be the aims of education, and at the same time it will answer these questions before proceeding to render its conclusion;

* + What is the importance of Education?
  + What is wrong with our universities?
  + Why we need a paradigm shift?

**Importance of Education**

“To live is a trade which I wish to teach him. On leaving my hands, he will not, I grant, be a magistrate, a soldier, or a priest. First of all he will be a man” Rousseau’s philosophy (as cited by Mithal, 1978 p.152).

Education is a term that has been defined by many, above shows Rousseau’s perception of what education should achieve, “creating a man.” True education has been said to have three characteristics that which distinguishes it from rote learning, purely mechanical training, indoctrination or brainwashing. It is said of it to be, one, which deals with knowledge that is recognisably worthwhile and capable of achieving a voluntary and committed response from the learner. Two, that which leads to quality of understanding that gives rise to new mental perspectives in the learner. Three, true education is that which uses methods that encourage the exercise of judgement by the learner and the use of his or her critical faculties (Farrant, 1980 p.19).

The above is not all that there is of what education is, the term can be given different meanings due to various reasons including complexities in human personality and human environment, different philosophies of life and educational theories and practices (Mithal, 1978 p.3).

Correspondingly, our Country has seen this through its history, before our fore fathers were colonised they had their own way of educating their young generation, to them education meant perhaps a way of preserving cultural practises. A different epoch was marked when the white man came and for them to gain independence they had to learn the White man’s language and ways thus one may say Education at this time meant freedom. Yet, a different era was marked and this was after independence where one may say education meant a ticket to getting a white collar job and thus a key to “a good life.”

Times have changed since then, to be borne in mind and this is very important is the fact that in the year 1969 there were over 10 million inhabitants in Kenya(Marsh & Kingsnorth, 1972, pp. 6-7), today we speak of up to 47 million inhabitants (Ndungu, 2020).

Following the above, one of the implications of the rapid population growth is what has been termed as educated unemployment, which in its simplicity refers to people who have gone through the formal school system and are actively looking for jobs which they cannot find at the prevailing wages (Chiuri &Kiumi, 2005, pg.192).

It gets more interesting if one is to deeply interrogate the problem with educated unemployment, this is not an exhaustive list. It would mean that we have a group of active young men and women who entirely depend on their parents this in turn means they will lower the potential of saving at household level and thus reducing the standards of living. It also, results to the shift of skilled human resources from the rural areas to the urban centres this then creates socio economic imbalances between these areas of course with rural areas being at a loss. It does not stop here, most young men and women then seek greener pastures outside the country and lastly it has been said to generate crime and mental disturbances among the affected youth. This then means that our nation in turn becomes a victim of its own educational system (Chiuri &Kiumi, 2005, pp.192-193).

It then begs the question: is education worth it if the above is to be considered but more importantly, is the aim of education to secure employment in this era? In Kenya unemployment rate among youth’s stands at 64% and this is of great concern. With hordes of students graduating every year it is an automatic result that the numbers outweigh job opportunities present (Wandimi, n.d) The problem still remains unemployment in a country which pumps billions of shillings (as of 2019/2020 budget 473 billion) to the education sector. One may ask, is it not better to shift our focus to perhaps choosing not to study and venture into informal sectors such as agriculture? Or investing the money on entrepreneurship?

It is in the backdrop of the above that this paper sought to look at the importance of education and especially to an individual. Is everything lost now that the light of being employed grows dimer as thousands of graduates flood the job market each year, what does this mean to a student siting in a classroom? It is here that the paper takes a philosophical approach.

**The Problem with our Universities**

***The Theory of an idle student***

This is a theory of my own making one that was born out of observation. Many will agree with me that it is perhaps two weeks before exams that most students change their way of doing things it ranges from walking very fast to overcrowding the libraries (which is rarely trodden at the beginning of the semester) later to be immediately abandoned after exams. This is not of course a new observation in fact one may say it is a norm.

It is the above that I have referred to as the theory of an idle student, one who studies because exams are near. One may blame the 8-4-4 system which is currently undergoing reforms through the nascent Competent Based Curriculum, but is it entirely our system? Do we then fold our hands and say it is the system?

I then come back to why I thought the First Class I scored was not something to be proud of. True it was achieved through hard work and self-sacrifice, but there was something missing, a greater aim. The goal was the same reading to pass exams and nothing more. This paper alleges that there is a problem, a far greater one and that is the presence of idleness in our universities which has rooted itself on the grounds of “reading to pass exams” where passing can easily be achieved in the two weeks. Interestingly in Kenya today scoring a first class is not a ticket to securing a job it has in fact been termed as “perfecting the theory.” (Kamande, 2019).

So far, one may imply that my assertion is that the end goal should neither be securing the highest grades nor securing a job. To me good grades are worthless if they are achieved with the only aim of passing exams. There should be something greater of which I relate to below.

While starting us off I quoted Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and his philosophy at that time was that the youths had to give back to society lest they be traitors. To be remembered, however, is that this was in the 80s and 90s when harambees (fundraising) was done to further educate young men and women who were then prized and expected to give back to society (Wandimi, n.d). The same cannot be said of the youths today what one may imply from the preceding assertions is that they are in fact a burden to society. Who is betraying the union now? One may ask Mwalimu. The answer to me should still be partly we the students who have been educated by Kenyans (through the tax payers’ money) if we only study to pass exams.

So what is this “something more?” I have keenly observed during my short time in campus that there is no culture of reading in our university. To me and what interests me most is my belief that giving back to society should be anchored on patriotism that is the need to better our Country. This can only happen when we hold dear as we do our dreams the future of our country, by wishing for a corruption free country one should not be corrupt and by wishing for hardworking, competent, honest, conscientious…leaders one should be of these characters, and by wishing for more job opportunities one should be creative in their studies, “thinking outside the box.” This way we can contribute to “healing” our country in our little ways.

Accordingly, our universities are the best places that one can get such virtues so much because they are diverse and there is freedom away from the family set up thus demanding a certain kind of maturity. Should we as university students adopt such characters then our institutions will reflect the future of our Nation. It starts, I say with such little things as reading because we owe a duty to our Nation and the generation that follows.

The other side to this theory is the element of memorizing to pass exams. This is what happens when one reads two weeks before exams. Well I know of someone who read the whole unit a night before exams and performed very well, is there anything wrong with this? Is it not the joy of the school to see its students pass? Or are the schools and students focusing on entirely a different thing? This brings me to the third topic I am to address.

**The need for a paradigm shift**

***Goodbye Yellow Brick Road?***

Farrant (1980) suggests that:

Education is society’s cultural reproductive system. By education, society reproduces itself, passing on its main characteristics to the next generation. Just as with genetics, however, the process is complicated, being influenced by philosophical, political, economic and social forces acting on the mechanism. The result is that each generation is different from that which it sprang yet preserves a family likeness that, in short term, is unmistakeable. In this sense, it is education that keeps society alive. (p.19)

In saying that each generation is different from which it sprang from yet maintains a degree of likeness may mean a lot to a country such as ours which has lost billions of shillings through corruption, which has lost children, women and men through tribal clashes, whose citizens live in poverty among many other misfortunes that one may gather. This should not be read to mean that such vices are generational problems but to mean they can be passed to the next and future generations. In a sense it would mean that these characteristics are amongst us already, in fact a research done revealed that there is high tolerance for corruption among youths (The Aga Khan University, 2016).

The term avid reader as used means an enthusiast (Cambridge dictionaries online, 2020) of reading put otherwise one who loves to read. One may wish to take for granted this phrase *“Haukuja shule kukula na kulala”* (you did not come to school to eat and sleep), this in itself implies to the existence of a duty to study in school.

The habit of reading is good in itself since one is able to have a wider understanding of the subject at hand. While talking about an idle student one will remember that the only motivation there is, is to pass exams. This then translates to what happens after school closes, one may want to ask how many of us students apply what we are taught in school to come up with real life solutions? Or do we even try to read more on what was taught? Or we perhaps translate it to “leave to school what belongs to school.”

The question I am supposed to answer here and it is not lost on me is why there is need to shift from memorizing to pass exams to becoming an avid reader. As a law student reading and reading widely is inevitable thus there is need for one to develop a reading culture. It has become of concern that law students are in fact victims of this culture of memorizing to pass exams. It has been said of legal education to require law students to cram and regurgitate in the end term examinations and they then carry this habit to practise and finally unto the bar and thus leading to miscarriage of justice as in the case of Anarita Njiru Karimi (Ogutu 2020). In essence here the culture of reading is used as a tool of becoming an efficient lawyer.

Through the Avid readers forum Kabarak Law School with the view of inculcating in its students a culture of reading was formed. The session runs once in a week with each week having a short article to read and then a lead speaker is appointed to lead the discussion. It is a voluntary exercise and very few students attend. The problem cannot be blamed on the organizers but largely on students who are expected to take up the opportunity.

“Goodbye yellow brick road” is a song sang in the 70s by Elton John (John, 1973, track 4) yellow brick road was an image taken from a movie, Wizard of Oz in it a character by the name Dorothy and her friends followed the yellow brick road while searching for the magical Wizard of Oz, only to find out that he was a fraud and what they were looking for they had it all along. In this context it is meant to challenge the crowd mentality that campus is largely meant to be a place of having fun and suggests that it is also a place of healing our country of the vices mentioned by adopting characters that would be to the effect of creating a better nation.

**Recommendations**

It is imperative for each and every university student to take into their hands the future of this country and realise that we are part of the solution to our nation’s problem therefore taking without being forced in an imperfect system attitudes and characters that will heal our nation. Should we then cheat in exams, resent students from other tribes, be lazy, be not creative and innovative or memorize to pass exams then we will be betraying this “union.”

Is it not now that we say our leaders are corrupt, that they are ignorant to the plight of their electorates, that they do not have ideas that will better our nation, that they have failed to create employment for young men and women of this Country, that they this and that. Now we are criticizing, lamenting or perhaps it is time to weep about the state of our Country Kenya. But then, I ask, what is the state of our characters? Are we ready to make sacrifices? Can we dedicate our lives to serve others? Can we have dreams about the future of our country?

Well, should one have expected a “revolutionary suggestion” this is it, a change in character!

**Conclusion**

This paper sought out to speak of a journey which has been related to by answering three questions. In this one may have deciphered the objective of the paper to convey a message to university students that there is need for a much greater aim and the methodology used to be observation.

Let us, then be up and doing,

With a heart for any fate

Still achieving, still pursing,

Learn to labour and to wait

H.W Longfellow (A Psalm of Life)

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