

## **Contemporary Curricular Activities and Societal Norms among Secondary School Learners in Meru County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary school system is expected to inculcate desirable societal norms in the learners. However, manifestation of unacceptable norms such as immorality, destruction of property, riots, strikes, drug abuse and disrespect for authority have been on the increase despite numerous interventions put in place by the government and individual educational institutions to avert such incidences. This study sought to examine the influence contemporary curricular activities on societal norms among secondary school learners in Meru County, Kenya. Exploratory descriptive research approach was used in the study. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data. The descriptive statistics used to analyze the data included mean, standard deviation and coefficient of variation. Inferential statistics used for data analysis was Linear Regression Analysis. The study found out that contemporary curricular activities have statistically significant influence on societal norms among secondary school learners. The findings of this study will provide useful knowledge regarding contemporary curricular and societal norms and thereby provide a basis for further studies.

**Keywords:** Influence, Curricular activities, Contemporary, Societal norms

## **1. Introduction**

Curricular activities in a school system provide important avenues through which society's desired norms and values can be imprinted in the minds of the learners. According to a study by Chiriswa and Thinguri (2015) on the contribution of secondary school curriculum to peace in Kenya, character development in education requires inculcation of norms and values like purity, faithfulness, perseverance, obedience, sincerity and other socially acceptable humanistic tendencies which are part of Kenyan ideal societal norms as advocated in the goals of education. According to Mehan (2012) school systems that promote collaborative culture through elaborate communication channels inside and outside the classroom, effectively achieve the objective of instilling desired good habits in their learners. According to Hechter and Karl-Dieter (2005) a school system should deliberately create a conducive curricular environment to achieve the institution's stated objectives. Classroom norms in a school should mirror desirable societal norms that are practical to all learners in and out of classroom. For effective transmission of desired values, learners ought to see and experience their involvement in establishing their school culture through curricular activities. According to Bicchieri (2006) when students' input is considered in structuring school norms that are supposed to be a miniature reflection of the larger societal norms, students realize and appreciate how they are genuinely incorporated in governing themselves and shaping their character through deliberately designed curricular activities.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

It is the duty of school system in Kenya to consciously socialize learners into their society. Through schooling process, young people are expected to learn and appreciate their society's cherished norms and values in order to grow to be responsible and productive members of their society. Despite strategies put in place in school system in Kenya to effectively socialize young learners into their society, cases of undesired behaviors have persistently manifested themselves amongst both learners and graduates of school system. This study thus sought to establish the influence of contemporary curricular activities on societal norms among secondary school learners in Meru County, Kenya.

### **1.2 Objective of the Study**

The study sought to establish the influence of contemporary curricular activities on societal norms among secondary school learners in Meru County, Kenya.

### 1.3 Hypothesis

The study was guided by the hypothesis that there is no statistically significant influence of contemporary curricular activities on societal norms among secondary school learners in Meru County, Kenya.

## 2. Research Methodology

Descriptive research design and correlational design were used in the current study. The two designs helped the researcher to conclusively understand the characteristics of the issue in study and compare the relationships.

## 3. Results and Discussions

The objective of this study was to establish the influence of contemporary curricular activities on societal norms. The researcher sought information regarding curricular activities. Table 1 and Table 2 present descriptive statistics for each of the research variables measured by a Likert-type scale to evaluate the respondents' agreement on curricular activities and societal norms.

### 3.1 Contemporary Curricular Activities and Societal Norms

The researcher sought information regarding contemporary curricular activities. The respondents indicated their agreement with statements on indicators of curricular activities. The results in frequencies and percentages are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequencies of Contemporary Curricular Activities

Contemporary Curricular Activities	SD	D	U	A	SA
Guidance and counseling is provided in the school.	33 (8.8%)	21 (5.6%)	20 (5.3%)	180 (47.7%)	123 (32.6%)
Passing examinations is overemphasized in the school.	9 (2.4%)	29 (7.7%)	58 (15.4)	123 (32.6%)	158 (41.9)
Students give attention to non-examinable subjects.	82 (21.8%)	88 (23.3%)	92 (24.4%)	88 (23.3%)	27 (7.2%)
Life skills lessons are taught as per the time-table.	106 (28.1%)	77 (20.4%)	74 (19.6%)	78 (20.7%)	42 (11.1%)
Co-curricular activities in the school are used as forums for team building.	12 (3.2%)	68 (18%)	126 (33%)	110 (29.2%)	61 (16.2%)
Co-curricular activities in the school focus on students' cohesion.	13 (3.4%)	57 (15.1%)	126 (33.4%)	131 (34.7%)	50 (13%)
Co-curricular activities in the school are used develop leadership	21 (5.6%)	72 (19.1%)	129 (34.2%)	119 (31.6%)	35 (9.3%)

skills among learners.						
Involvement in co-curricular activities is used to motivate students.	12 (3.2%)	58 (15.4%)	107 (28.4%)	129 (34.2%)	71 (18.8%)	
There are active religious movements in the school.	10 (2.7%)	47 (12.5%)	102 (27.1%)	132 (35%)	86 (22.8%)	
Clubs' activities in the school are used as forums for developing self-discipline among learners.	14 (3.7%)	55 (14.6%)	104 (27.6%)	155 (41.1%)	49 (13%)	
Parents' academic visits are used to discuss students' welfare.	22 (5.8%)	50 (13.3%)	70 (18.6%)	156 (41.4%)	79 (21%)	
Religious activities focus on respect and appreciation of human life and dignity.	10 (2.7%)	36 (9.5%)	86 (22.8%)	152 (40.3%)	93 (24.7%)	

*SD = Strongly disagree, D = Disagree, U = Undecided, A = Agree, SA = Strongly agree*

The research findings in Table 1 show that passing of exams being overemphasized in the school had the highest percentage (41.9%) of respondents who strongly agreed with the statement while life skills lessons being taught as per the time table had highest percentage (28.1%) of respondents who strongly disagreed. These research results indicate that the highest percentage of respondents agreed with the statement that there is overemphasis on passing exams in secondary schools. This implies that societal norms could be neglected and that societal norms that are inculcated through non-examinable subjects are not given attention.

These results are in harmony with Shirivastava (2017) who said that norms and values continue to be neglected in most school systems as teachers lay more emphasis on importance of getting high grades in examinations. The research findings in Table 1 further indicate that majority of the respondents strongly disagreed that life skills' lessons are taught as scheduled in the time table. This implies that life skills lessons are not taught the way they are scheduled to be taught as per the time table. It also implies that lessons allocated for life skills could be used to learn other subjects. The results therefore imply that the importance and value of subjects that are not examined is not impressed on the learners in secondary schools.

The results shown in Table 1 also reveal that the majority of respondents indicated that guidance and counseling was done in their schools. This implies that secondary schools understand the value of guidance and counseling as a way of inculcating desirable societal

norms among learners. These findings agree with a study by Otewa (2016) on using hidden curriculum principles in teaching character education in Kenya which established that education in Kenya values character as evidenced by inclusion of religious studies and life skills in school curriculum. The research results in Table 1 further indicate that the highest percentage (47.7%) of respondents agreed that guidance and counseling is offered in the school while students giving attention to non-examinable subjects had the highest frequency (23.3%) of students that disagreed with the statements. The results further indicate that majority of the respondents were undecided on the statements that co-curricular activities in the school are used as forums for team building and co-curricular activities in the school are used to develop leadership skills among learners. This implies that the respondents did not see those indicators expressly in their schools. Consequently this implies that co-curricular activities in the schools could be focusing only on winning the competitions and not instilling desirable values and norms among learners.

The results presented in frequencies and percentages were further analyzed. The means and standard deviations of the responses were computed and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Means of Contemporary Curricular Activities

Contemporary curricular Activities	N	Mean	S D	CV
Guidance and counseling is provided in the school.	377	3.90	1.176	30.165
Passing examinations is overemphasized in our school.	377	4.04	1.047	25.924
Students give attention to non-examinable subjects.	377	2.71	1.242	45.856
Life skills lessons are taught as per the time-table.	377	2.66	1.369	51.389
Co-curricular activities in the school are used as forums for team building.	377	3.37	1.054	31.275
Co-curricular activities in the school focus on students' cohesion.	377	3.39	1.008	29.706
Co-curricular activities in the school are used to develop leadership skills among learners.	376	3.20	1.033	32.282
Involvement in co-curricular activities is used to motivate students.	377	3.50	1.062	30.338
There are active religious movements in our school.	377	3.63	1.049	28.918
Clubs activities in the school are used as forums for developing self-discipline among learners.	377	3.45	1.012	29.335
Parents' academic visits are used to discuss students' welfare.	377	3.58	1.132	31.582
Religious activities focus on respect and appreciation of human life and dignity.	377	3.75	1.017	27.140
Overall Mean Score	377	3.43	1.100	32.826

The research findings in Table 2 show that over-emphasis on passing examinations in schools had the highest mean score of 4.04. This implies that majority of the respondents agreed that passing of exams was over-emphasized in the school system. It also implies that societal norms could be neglected in secondary schools. The results agree with Johnson (2015) on character education, our shared responsibility in USA who argued that education practice has over the years been emphasizing more on cognitive excellence of the learners in many countries at the expense of character formation which has consequently led to erosion of desirable societal norms among the learners.

The results in Table 2 also indicate that Guidance and counselling in schools, co-curricular activities and team building, co-curricular activities and students' cohesion, co-curricular activities and students' leadership, involvement in co-curricular activities, active religious movements in schools, clubs' activities, parents' academic visits as well as religious activities, all had a mean scores ranging from 3.20 to 3.90. This implies that on average, the responses ranged between having no opinion and agreeing. Whereas majority of the respondents agreed with guidance and counseling being offered in their schools and religious activities focusing on respect and appreciation of human life and dignity, majority were neutral on co-curricular activities in the school as forums for developing leadership skills among learners. This implies that while guidance and counseling is seen to be practiced to the satisfaction of the respondents, curricular activities could be missing out on intended purpose such as promoting team work and developing leadership skills among the learners. The results are not in harmony with the studies by Blomfield and Barber (2009) on performing on the stage, the stage or both in Australia who established that co-curricular activities have many benefits on students which include boosting their self-esteem, improved youth behavior, improved social skills and improved social networks.

The results in Table 2 further show that life skills as a subject being taught as per the time table, had the least mean score of 2.66. the results in Table 2 thus show that only two measures, that is, students giving attention to non-examinable subjects and life skills lesson being taught as per the time table had mean scores of less than 3.0, with 2.71 and 2.66 respectively. Therefore for all the measures used in the study, the agreements were moderate with an overall mean score of 3.43. This implies that on average, the responses on the

parameters of the study were between neutral and agreeing. This means that the responses were not extreme.

### 3.2 Correlation of Contemporary Curricular Activities and Societal Norms

The current study sought to examine the influence of contemporary curricular activities on societal norms among secondary school learners in Meru County, Kenya. A correlation analysis was conducted in order to assess the relationships between contemporary curricular activities and societal norms. The correlation results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Contemporary Curricular Activities and Societal Norms

		Societal Norms	Contemporary Curricular Activities
Societal Norms	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	377	
Contemporary Curricular Activities	Pearson Correlation	.401**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	377	377

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results presented in Table 3 show contemporary curricular activities have a positive fair correlation with societal norms ( $r = 0.401$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). This correlation suggests that societal norms may be inculcated through contemporary curricular activities although there are other factors which influence inculcation of societal norms.

### 3.3 Regression of Contemporary Curricular Activities and Societal Norms

The objective of the current study was to establish the influence of contemporary curricular activities on societal norms among secondary school learners. To assess the relationship between contemporary curricular activities and societal norms, the following hypothesis was tested:

*H<sub>01</sub>: There is no statistically significant influence of contemporary curricular activities on societal norms among secondary school learners in Meru County, Kenya.*

In order to test this hypothesis, a linear regression analysis was conducted at 95% confidence level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The contemporary curricular activities were regressed against societal norms

in order to establish the goodness of fit, the overall significance of the Model and the individual significance of the Model. The results are shown in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6.

The researcher regressed the contemporary curricular activities against societal norms to establish the percentage of variation that was explained by independent variable in the Model. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: The Goodness of Fit of Model

Model	R	R Square	ARS	SEE
Contemporary Curricular Activities	.401	0.160	0.158	0.54351

The results in Table 4 show that contemporary curricular activities had influence on societal norms. The coefficient of determination is 0.16. This suggests that 16% of variation in societal norms is explained by contemporary curricular activities. The researcher then did an analysis of variance to assess the robustness and overall significance of the model. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: The Overall Significance of the Model

Model		SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Contemporary Curricular Activities	Regression	21.171	1	21.171	71.671	.000
	Residual	110.775	375	0.295		
	Total	131.946	376			

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that contemporary curricular activities significantly influence societal norms with F statistics = 71.671 and a p-value  $0.000 < 0.05$ . This implies that the regression Model is statistically significant at 5% level of significance. The researcher further sought to establish the significance of individual variables in the Model. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: The Individual Significance of the Model

Model		Unstandardize		Standardized		T	Sig.
		B	SE	Beta			
Contemporary Curricular Activities	(Constant)	2.444	0.171			14.311	0.000
	Contemporary Curricular Activities	0.416	0.049	0.401		8.466	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Societal Norms

The results in Table 6 show that contemporary curricular activities were considered to be statistically significantly significant with t-value of 8.466 and p-value  $0.000 < 0.05$ . This implies that one unit change in contemporary curricular activities corresponds to an increase in societal norms by a factor of 0.416. The predictive Model for societal norms in respect to contemporary curricular activities can be stated as follows:

$$Y = 2.444 + 0.416X_{II}$$

Where  $Y$  = Societal norms

$X_{II}$  = contemporary curricular activities

2.444 is the constant

0.416 is the regression coefficient which shows the expected increase in societal norms when there is a unit increase in contemporary curricular activities.

The study conclusively revealed that contemporary curricular activities influence societal norms at 5% level of significance. The null Hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between contemporary curricular activities and societal norms is therefore rejected in the current study.

The findings of the current study agree with the assertion of previous studies by Sulayman (2014) on value based curriculum Model which reveal that a country's education system can embrace curriculum activities that can involve connections across all disciplines. The result of this study further agrees with similar studies by Skorupski (2010) which found that participation in sports has a significant positive impact on the social life of students because they help to establish social interactions between students from different schools.

The findings of the current study are also echoed by similar studies by Mahoney and Stattin (2000) which established that school curricular groups such as clubs and religious movements promote collaboration, communication, social skills and interaction. The findings of the current study however disagree with a similar study by Metzger (2009) who established that participation especially in co-curricular activities has the potential negative impact on students' discipline and therefore may not enhance societal norms. Metzger (2009) established that co-curricular activities can consume too much of students' time thus making them to lose focus.

#### 4. Conclusions

Based on the objective of the current study, the researcher concludes that contemporary curricular activities influence societal norms. More emphasis however is put on academic subjects such as sciences, mathematics and languages at the expense of non-academic activities which should be used as the main avenues of inculcating societal norms among learners.

#### 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that there is need to promote contemporary curricular activities such games, religious activities, music, debates and life skills that serve as avenues to enhance societal norms among secondary school students.

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