

THE AFFORDABILITY OF SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS IN KENYA: CONSUMER EXPERIENCES IN THE TRANSFORMATION TO A LIBERALISING ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

The growth of educational publishing in Kenya depends heavily on the disposable income of its customers. This article looks at the incomes of both actual and potential customers and how they prioritise their spending. The findings are based on research carried out in Kenya by the author. In selecting the areas to conduct the research, socio-economic factors, geographical conditions and level of development were considered. It was found that most textbook purchasers think that textbooks are very expensive in comparison with their own incomes. This has therefore led them to prioritise basic essential needs before thinking of purchasing textbooks.

Keywords: educational books, educational publishing, market liberalization, textbooks, consumer incomes, curriculum, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Kenya is located in East Africa and lies between a longitude of 34° East and 42° East and a latitude of 4° North and 4° South. It covers an area approximately 582,646 square kilometres and is bordered by Ethiopia and Sudan to the North, Somalia and the Indian Ocean to the East, Uganda to the West and Tanzania to the South.

Kenya gained her independence in 1963 after a protracted struggle with the British Colonial Administration. Since then, three elected presidents have ruled the country. The country has enjoyed political stability since independence.

Kenya's population is estimated to be over 30 million, and the majority are below the age of 15 years. The country is one of the low-income nations of the world with annual per capita income below US\$300. The country is also highly indebted by both foreign and domestic debt.

The centerpiece of the publishing industry in Kenya has always been the publication of educational books and/or textbooks. However, not all educational books qualify by definition as textbooks, for textbooks are usually the standard books in any branch of study that presents ideas and facts in a sequential manner. The industry has undergone various stages of growth since its establishment by missionaries in the 1890s. The methods that were adopted in

the distribution of these books have varied from the time the industry was established.

The liberalization of the economy in Kenya since the mid-1980s has influenced the operations in the educational publishing sector as it did in other sectors of the economy. The structural adjustment programmes (fronted by the IMF/World Bank) that resulted in a reduction in government spending in the education sector had a direct impact on publishing. One of the government actions was to abolish free textbooks for schools. The liberalization of the economy also had an upward impact on the prices of most commodities, including paper prices, which led to a rise in textbook prices.

The distribution of textbooks to the various parts of the country is also considered here. Since there are textbook users who live in both rural and urban areas, the accessibility of educational books may not be the same in a more liberalized market. Before market liberalization, the government used to distribute textbooks to all parts of the country through a centralized system. It is, therefore, important to investigate how the textbook users who live in various parts of the country get access to books. On the same note, it is also important to investigate how publishers are attempting to meet the needs of textbook users.

As education is considered paramount in the development of every country, and as textbooks are the main sources of information in schools, it is important that schools get access easily to these vital materials. The processes and procedures followed in curriculum and syllabus development are very important to publishers as these activities directly affect their operations both in the actual book production and in distribution.

1. EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Since independence in 1963 a number of commissions have been set up to review Kenya's education system. The first Commission after independence was in 1964 (chaired by Professor Ominde) and aimed to review the whole education system. Ndegwa (1971), Gachathi (1976), Mackay (1981), Kariithi (1983) were chairs and another commission was the Presidential Working Party on Education and Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond in 1988. These commissions have influenced the education policies and practices in Kenya.

The various school systems (as management systems) that have been adopted in Kenya have had a collective and individual influence on how textbooks are procured for and distributed to schools. The systems also dictated the kind of curriculum studied in schools. The various Commissions mentioned above were used in determining industry as the systems of education at a given time; they thus affected the publishing industry as the source of educational materials.

The first Commission chaired by Professor Ominde in 1964 immediately after independence proposed various changes in the education system. The

recommendations included bringing to an end the segregation of schools by race, and the unification of the curriculum in all schools. However, it did not make any recommendations to do with the publishing and acquisition of educational materials. In the report an assessment was made of the fact that education is an economically expensive undertaking and may be beyond the reach of ordinary Kenyans. The Commission considered the cost of items needed by pupils ranging from food (lunch), uniforms and books to writing materials and school fees.

The Gachathi report of 1976 made a number of recommendations and touched on the publishing industry. It also appreciated the fact that educational books have a long production cycle from the time of commissioning to the actual publication. Therefore, there was a need to give ample time to the process. They were also aware that at the time the publishing industry was dominated by foreign publishers who could not adequately meet the needs of Kenyans by publishing books with a cultural fit to the needs of the Kenyan education system and its schools. The report expressed the opinion that the situation would require a remedy.

The Gachathi report (1976) led to the recommendation that school textbooks be published and printed centrally by the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (JKF). The JKF had been established in 1965 with a number of functions, one of which was to publish schoolbooks. The aim of the JKF during its establishment was a charitable organization using its profits for the education of bright students from poor backgrounds. The curriculum center – the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) – commissioned these textbooks. This was the start of giving the JKF a monopoly in publishing KIE manuscripts. The KIE has been established in 1966 to develop syllabuses and other educational materials, which were to be given to publishers for publication. The report recommended that, for the JKF to make more profit, it needed to be given a commercial function; this took the form of a monopolistic role in publishing educational materials from KIE. Later, in 1980, the Kenya Literature Bureau (KLB) was established through an Act of Parliament. Since it was government-owned publishing house, it was also to obtain educational manuscripts from the curriculum center.

The Mackay Commission (1981) which led to the establishment of the second university in Kenya at Eldoret (Moi University) made no mention of how to provide books to schools – a notable omission. Though the Commission came out with recommendations to overhaul the entire education system with a new curriculum, there was no mention of how the books for new subjects would be procured and distributed. The recommendation was to change the education system from 7-4-2-3 (seven years in primary, four years in secondary, two in high school, and at least there in a university) to 8-4-4 (eight years in primary, four in secondary and at least four in university). The examinable subjects at primary level were to be increased from three (Mathematics, English and General Paper) to eleven (Agriculture, Art and Business Education, English, Geography-History-Civics, Home Sciences, Kiswahili, Mathematics, Music, Religious Education [*Christian or Islamic*] and Science). Another notable

change was a shift to a greater emphasis on science and practically-oriented subjects. In turn, this dictated a need for new sets of textbooks to be used in schools. Clearly, conditions were developing for the potential expansion of the educational publishing industry. Despite all these reforms, there was no mention of how the publishing industry was to produce and distribute textbooks to school.

The current education system, 8-4-4 as it is popularly known, came into effect when the first batch of students entered standard eight at the primary level in 1985. The need for textbooks was intense and most publishers were caught in the middle of the changeover. There was no clear policy on this issue and what followed was a mushrooming of publishers trying to cash in on the new system of education. Some enterprising Kenyans started their own publishing houses and printed textbooks; most of these were old books fitted with new covers. Some booksellers also joined the lucrative market and started publishing textbooks. In retrospect, the mid-1980s were an exceptional time for educational publishing. There was a rapid growth in the number of titles, but this led to a failed development.

The government or any other school-sponsoring body in Kenya managed the acquisition of textbooks and other educational materials. These bodies included church organizations, District Education Boards (DEB), and Community (Harambee) schools. They had the responsibility for purchasing books for schools under their care.

In 1972 the government established the Kenya School Equipment Scheme (KSES) which was charged with the procurement and distribution of textbooks. This was a direct government involvement in the purchase of textbooks being increasingly produced by the private sector. Tenders were invited from the various publishing firms whose books were in the list of recommended school textbooks. The titles on the recommended list were mainly developed by KIE and published by JKF (Chakava 1996). In 1988, the government stopped the procurement of textbooks and moved to a procedure whereby parents bought books for their children. In other circumstances, the community, through fund-raising, bought books for the schools. This was a move adopted by the government in the process of increasing market liberalization.

2. METHODOLOGY

An investigation of textbook consumer pattern formed part of a wider study carried out in the period 1997-2000 to look at the growth and changing status of educational publishing industry (Rotich 2000a) and revised in the year 2003.

Ideally, this research was to cover the entire country since the study is about educational publishing in Kenya as a whole. There are eight provinces in Kenya including the Nairobi area. These provinces are divided into district administrative units. Each of the districts is further subdivided into small

administrative units known as divisions. Unlike other provinces, Nairobi area is divided into divisions and not districts.

However, due to financial, personnel and time constraints, it was decided that a number of broadly representative areas be sampled for the purpose of this study. Three areas were selected as representative of the country (see Table 1). In selecting these areas, the socio-economic factors, geographical conditions and level of development were considered. This was to ensure coverage of a good cross-section of the Kenyan population. On the basis of the above, the areas selected for the purpose of this research were Uasin Gishu District in Rift Valley Province, Machakos District in Eastern Province, and Nairobi City.

Table 1. Areas selected for the research.

District	Characteristics
Nairobi	Urban Tertiary sector type of economy
Uasin Gishu	Urban with a vast majority rural hinterland Tertiary sector and Agricultural economy both large and small scale farming
Machakos	Rural mostly arid and semi-arid land Subsistence farming mostly livestock rearing

Uasin Gishu District is a medium-developed district with a blend of rural and semi-urban characteristics with higher agricultural potential. Machakos District is one of the districts situated at lower altitudes: it has the characteristics of a rural population and is in the arid and semi-arid lands of Kenya. As the largest metropolitan area in the country, Nairobi was to represent the urban population. With these three areas and the different characteristics then encompassed, it was deemed that the information collected would be representative of the entire country.

When these areas had been identified, a formula for sampling those to be interviewed was developed. The first task was to select the schools in which teachers and parents would be sampled from. As in any other district in Kenya, these districts were divided into provincial administrative divisions.

In order to implement this investigation appropriately and in depth, a number of methods were considered. It could have been carried out through case study, interviewing, observation, personal experience, historical data, visual text or experimentation. It was decided that to answer the question set out in this research it would be appropriate for interviews, case study of textbooks, archival documents and available literature to be used.

Interview is a process initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information for description, prediction or explanation (Robson 1993: 229). Interviews are one of the tools used in collecting data for qualitative research. They can be carried out in a number of forms: individual face-to-face, group face-to-face and telephone surveys. Some researchers can do their interviews informally or formally with structured, semi-

structured or unstructured questions. During informal interviews, the researcher will have to engage the respondent in a conversation, and the respondent(s) may not be aware that he/she is being interviewed. Anderson (1998) has stated that the interview is a highly purposeful task which goes beyond mere conversation and should therefore be focused (Anderson 1998: 190). For this investigation, during the preliminary stage, informal interviews were held with respondents and notes were written down during the preliminary stage, informal interviews were held with respondents and notes were written down during and after the interviews.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Since independence, the number of all types of schools in the country has increased from less than 7,000 schools in 1963 to over 20,000 schools in 1996 (see Table 2). At independence in 1963, there were 6,053 primary schools and 150 secondary schools (Eshiwani 1990: 2). This growth shows that the potential market for educational books has increased. However, it is not automatic that all those enrolled in these schools would be the actual customers who will purchase textbooks, but nevertheless they will use them in the course of their learning. The increase in the number of schools indicates that there has been an increase in the number of those who have joined schools, and thus likely to increase demand for educational learning materials (textbooks).

Apart from the increase in the number of schools, it is also possible to plot a pattern of increase in the enrolment. At independence in 1963 the number of pupils in primary schools were 891,058, and 28,764 were in secondary schools (see Table 2). This had risen to 2.116 million children in primary schools and 37,000 in secondary schools by 1974. By 1996 there were over 6 million children in both primary and secondary schools in Kenya which over 5.5 million were in primary (6-13 year olds in the 8-4-4 education system) and another 0.6 million were in secondary schools. It can be noted that primary education in Kenya is compulsory from 6-13 years by statute, and its is nominally free. However, in reality there are various parental charges whose effect may be to exclude some from compulsory attendance. Among these parental charges are an activity fee, development, lunch and transport; however, these charges vary from school to school and region to region. Since the beginning of 2003, the Kenyan government started to enforce this policy of free and compulsory primary education by abolishing all the parental charges. However, due to logistical problems, a majority of schools still lacked essential textbooks and writing (stationary) materials in the first term of 2003 (January-March 2003) and continued for the better part of the second term (May and June 2003).

Table 2. Number of schools and enrolments in Kenya 1987–2001.

Year	Number of Schools		Pupils Enrolled in Schools	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
1987	13,849	2,592	5,031,340	522,261
1988	14,288	2,717	5,123,581	540,192
1989	14,691	2,654	5,389,148	640,735
1990	14,864	2,678	5,392,319	618,461
1991	15,196	2,647	5,455,996	614,161
1992	15,465	2,632	5,563,987	629,062
1993	15,804	2,639	5,428,396	531,342
1994	15,906	2,834	5,557,008	619,839
1995	16,115	2,878	5,544,998	632,388
1996	16,522	3,004	5,597,700	658,253
1997	17,080	3,028	5,764,855	687,473
1998	17,623	3,081	5,919,721	700,538
1999	17,623	3,197	5,867,608	661,824
2000	18,617	3,207	5,882,625	660,915
2001	18,901	3,621	6,314,600	818,247

Sources: Development Plan 1997 – 2001; Economic Survey 1996, 1998, 2002; Statistical Abstract 1995, 1998, 2001.

Although there has been an increase in the number of children in schools since independence, there was a drop between 1990 and 1993. In the 1990s, the cause of the decrease could be attributed to the change in the education system from 7-4-2-3 to 8-4-4, leading to the abolition of the A-Level classes in secondary schools. The effect on the educational publishing sector was a decrease in the number of subjects covered in schools due to a loss of some classes and therefore a loss of market for the textbook titles that were already in the market. In 1993 there was an overall decrease in the number of children at both primary and secondary school levels. This could have been the knock-on effects of the downturn in events of 1990 to 1992 in the economy. The change in real GDP declined from 4.2 per cent in 1990 to -0.8 per cent in 1992, with a slight increase to 0.4 per cent in 1993 (UBS 1997). This therefore affected the purchasing power of consumers, i.e., the market for the educational publishing industry. Since the government had already introduced the cost-sharing scheme in schools, parents could only send children to school if they had the ability and money to meet the associated costs (purchasing of textbooks, writing materials, uniforms and other miscellaneous costs).

The increase in population and school enrolment should present a favourable environment for the growth in educational publishing. In pre-independent Kenya and the first decade of independent Kenya, the multinational publishers formed a majority of players and dominated the educational publishing field in the country. Each succeeding decade has in general appeared to support conditions for a growing educational publishing industry. However, for the conditions to be effective and influence the growth of the industry, there is a need for other factors to be favourable and in harmony.

The annual input of titles into the market is a useful indicator of market growth; so, too, is the number of copies actually sold. The latter statistics will indicate the presence of disposable income, the desirability of the goods sold, and also increases in the capability of the publishing houses to finance new titles. As for the foreign publishers, which are mostly British (e.g. Heinemann, Longman, Macmillan and OUP), their titles sold in Kenya as textbooks, and their expansion were based on the number of copies sold in order to finance their operations.

4. CONSUMER EXPERIENCES

As already indicated, the research was conducted in three areas in Kenya representing urban, semi-urban and rural populations. The respondents consisted of teachers and parents of the schools visited in Nairobi (urban), Eldoret (semi-urban) and Machakos (rural). Apart from income levels affecting the purchasing power of the population, other environmental factors also play a major role. The incomes of the respondents are also affected by their own access to education and employment opportunities. The decision about the selection of the areas for study was also an appreciation of the importance of textbooks for their children, whether in school or at home, by the respondents in the different districts. The urban and rural populations view the role of textbooks in the education of the child differently, and even more so the provision. The rural population's preferences are for the government to provide textbooks in schools because they are less likely to have the money to purchase them.

There have been various factors that have affected the wages of the ordinary Kenyans. The real wages of the population decreased by 12 per cent in the 1991/92 period due to high inflation (CBS 1993b: 5). This decrease was partially caused by the suspension of financial aid to the Kenyan government by the IMF and World Bank. The Kenyan currency was devalued and depreciated within that period in the foreign exchange market. Since the price of local paper is pegged at international paper prices that are normally priced in US dollars, its price therefore rose according to the exchange rate, leading to textbook price increases. For the consumer to purchase the books, they should have had incomes that would have enabled them to pay the higher price levels of the books.

Our study found that people living in the rural and semi-urban areas have average earnings that are lower than those who live in urban areas. More than half of the 89 people who were interviewed in Machakos (a rural and ASAL district) and who disclosed their average monthly incomes earn less than Kshs. 8,000.00. This indicates that the majority of people living in this area earn below the government's official poverty threshold income level (Kshs.7,999.00 per month). Those who earn an average monthly income of below Kshs.8,000.00 were 66 in Machakos, 26 in Uasin Gishu and 14 in Nairobi areas. Of the 106

respondents in the three areas earning an average income below Kshs.8,000.00, 92 of them live in the rural and semi-urban areas. This is clearly demonstrated by government statistics showing that a majority of the poor population live in rural areas (67.9 per cent) while 8.7 per cent live in urban areas (CBS 1998a: 3). Those who earn above the government's non-poor threshold of Kshs.8,000.00 per month were 23 people (23 per cent) in Machakos, 62 (69.9 per cent) in Uasin Gishu and 56 (80 per cent) people in Nairobi. This confirms the government statistic concerning the income difference between rural and urban populations, which affects their purchasing power.

The incomes of the respondents are considered to determine how they use their earnings and what effect this has on consumption. Wherever they spend their money, they have to weigh and consider the opportunity costs of what they buy. This affects not only their purchase of textbooks but also other things like reading daily newspapers and possession of media tools like radios and television sets. However, in Kenya, reading a newspaper daily does not imply that one has to buy it, and it was found during the investigation that up to ten people share a copy of a daily newspaper. Further to that, it was found out that some people go to newspaper vendors and stand to read – but not to buy – the newspapers. Those who read newspapers daily or frequently are more informed and are likely to know more about current events than those who occasionally or do not read them at all.

Those with higher incomes are likely to purchase textbooks more frequently than those with lower incomes. It was found that most respondents were of the opinion that they could not afford textbooks because they were expensive. They were of the opinion that primary school textbooks would cost an average of Kshs.100.00 and secondary school textbooks an average of Kshs.200.00. As one of the parents interviewed said: “School textbooks have become very expensive and my only request to publishers is to make the prices of these books affordable by reducing them.”

Although the average annual income of the population has been increasing, the average increase in textbook prices has been higher. The average earning per person increased from K£1,837.4 (K£ is a budgetary unit of measure equivalent to Kshs.20.00) per annum (Kshs.3,063 per month) in 1991 to K£2,059.7 per annum (Kshs.3,433 per month) in 1992 (CBS 1993a: 4). By 1996, the average annual income was K£4,150.1 (Kshs.6,916.8 per month) which increased by 20.6 per cent to K£5,004.6 (Kshs.8,341 per month) in 1997 (CBS 1998b: 6). The average income difference between 1991 and 1997 was K£3,167.2 (Kshs.5,278 per month); this is equivalent to an increase of 172 per cent in the six years. Between 1998 and 2001, the average annual income level increased from K£6,578.5 (Kshs.10,964.10 per month) to K£9,940.10 (Kshs.16,566.80 per month) (CBS 2002: 61). The increase represents an increase of 33.8 per cent, however, taking into consideration the inflation factors, the actual rise was below 10 per cent. This does not match the level of increase in the prices of textbooks. During the investigation, seven textbooks were sampled and it was found that their average price rise over six years was more than 230 per cent.

One of the studied textbooks had its price increased by over 700 per cent between 1990 and 1999 (see Table 3). Between 1999 and 2002, some textbook prices increased by over 39 per cent. As compared to the increase in the average annual income increase, this shows that the prices of textbooks and, by extension, other essential commodities were outstripping the incomes of the population. It is therefore legitimate for consumers to complain about the high prices of textbooks.

Table 3. Prices of sampled textbooks in Kenya 1991, 1999 and 2002.

Textbook Title	Publisher	Price (Kshs)		
		1991	1999	2002
Primary Mathematics Pupil's Book 4	JKF	23.00	186.00	220.00
Primary Art and Craft Standard Six	Macmillan (Kenya)	80.00	325	325.00
Masomo ya Msingi Kitabu cha 7	EAEP	90.00	260.00	275.00
Secondary Home Science Form 1 Pupils' Book	KLB	80.00	120.00	120.00
Certificate Geography Form 2*	OUP	250.00*	398.00	418.00
Secondary Commerce Students' Book 3	JKF	49.00	178.00	248.00
God Meets Us: CRE Form 4	EAEP	120.00	310.00	385.00

*Title was first published in 1993, price shown is for 1993

Source: Publishers' Catalogues.

The number of textbooks that people surveyed have in their homes had a positive correlation with the average monthly income. Those who had average monthly earnings of less than Kshs.8,000.00 had fewer books in their homes than those with higher earnings. It is assumed that those with lower incomes struggle to meet their basic needs (food, clothing and shelter) before thinking of purchasing textbooks.

The study established that people with lower incomes do purchase textbooks that, according to their judgment, are very necessary for the education of their children. It was found out that parents who are not teachers and with lower incomes always purchase books after their children have requested and convinced them that those particular titles will increase the chances of the child to do well at school. It was also established that those parents have to seek opinions about the books from someone who is a teacher or any other person whom they perceive to be informed about education matters. This shows that some parents are keen to know whether the books they are buying are actually necessary and contribute to the improved educational performance of their children in school. Most people therefore share information about the relevance and availability of textbooks that they are told to purchase by their children or schoolteachers.

5. CONCLUSION

The educational publishing industry in Kenya has faced numerous problems that have affected its growth. The problems stem from government policies and of late the globalisation of the economy through the introduction of wider market liberalization, SAPs from the World Bank and the requirements of the IMF. The imposition of economic policies by the IMF and World Bank on the government of Kenya has fuelled problems, which were already facing the publishing and educational sector in Kenya.

The movement towards liberalization of the economy led to the devaluation of the Kenyan currency and rising inflation affected the educational publishing sector. The cost-sharing schemes, which were introduced by the government in the education and health sectors made matters worse as the majority of the population in Kenya live on a hand-to-mouth basis. The population has, therefore, had to prioritise concerning what to purchase, and, almost without exception, their priorities are the basic necessities of life (food, shelter and clothing).

However, it is envisaged that the problems brought on by market liberalization will not be too long-lasting. On an optimistic note, the tenets of wider market liberalization are supposed to make organizations more efficient by encouraging competition. In the textbook market, efficiency is what is paramount and competition among the players would determine a base for future efficient players in the market. Where there is competition, the customers in most cases are almost guaranteed of quality products, as opposed to what could often occur under a monopolistic environment.

In the Kenyan situation, textbook market liberalization will enable the KIE to concentrate more on the vetting and evaluation of textbooks since they will no longer be involved in textbook writing. Both private and state-owned publishers involved in textbook publishing will be competing against each other on equal terms.

It should also be noted that implementation of government and other donor agencies policies without due consideration of the effects could be counter-productive. The introduction of market liberalization in Kenya did negatively alter the purchasing power of the population, which should be a lesson to be learned by other African countries. It is therefore important for policy-makers both in individual governments and in international organizations (IMF/World Bank) to carry out risk analysis before the implementation of certain policies.

Since the educational publishing market is directly linked to the educational institutions as its market, government policies on education also affect the growth of the publishing industry. The changes that have taken place in the education institutions in Kenya, such as levels of enrolment, the number of subjects taught, the curriculum and the emphasis on examinations, have all had their effects on the publishing industry. The changes made in Kenya to the education system in 1984/85 did have an effect, as the number of newly-

published titles increased. The low enrolment in schools in the 1990s naturally produced a setback in the potential market of the educational publishing industry. These macro-economic factors have been shown to be significant. In future, policy must support activities to eliminate their negative effects.

This study has also shown that the rate at which textbook prices increase is higher than the increase in income levels. This indicates that there will always be a shortage of textbooks in schools and in the homes of consumers as they will always choose their own priorities. Textbooks will always be the last of the priorities of most Kenyans, as they will search for the essential commodities of life first. Although the government is planning to purchase textbooks for primary schools, the problem will still persist as the books bought for use in schools will be only the recommended textbooks, while parents will still be buying supplementary textbooks.

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The Affordability of School Textbooks in Kenya

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