

Part-Time Students in Kenyan Public Universities: Challenges Encountered in Social Engagement Practices

Joan Jelimo*, Felicity W. Githinji, Kefa Lidundu Simwa

School of Education, Moi University, P.O Box 3900, Eldoret, Kenya

***Corresponding author**

Joan Jelimo

Article History

Received: 03.10.2018

Accepted: 15.10.2018

Published: 30.10.2018

DOI:

10.21276/sjhss.2018.3.10.1



Abstract: Part-time students are distracted by too many competing demands on their time because of work or family commitments. As a result they are not as involved as other students. This is problematic because what students gain from their college experience depends a lot on how much time and effort students put into their educationally purposeful activities. This study sought to find out challenges encountered by part-time students in selected public universities in Kenya. The study was based on student engagement theory. Data was collected from part-time students, games tutors, deans of students, officials of clubs and societies. Simple random sampling was used to select students while purposeful sampling was used to select games tutors, deans of students and officials of clubs and societies. Data was collected using questionnaires, focus group discussions and interview schedules. The analysis of the qualitative data followed the path of aggregating the words or images into categories of information and presented the diversity of ideas gathered during data collection. The study established that majority of the part-time students lacked time to participate in social activities in the universities. They spent most of their time travelling or looking for means of transport. The study further established that part-time students lacked information on the social activities in the university that they could participate in. It is hoped that the findings of the study will be useful to university management in understanding the part-time students' social needs and satisfaction predictors so as to keep part-time students more engaged with their academic work and perform well in their examinations.

Keywords: Social engagement, part-time students, challenges, practices.

INTRODUCTION

According to Laura and Jennifer [1], approximately 86 percent of college and university students are defined as part-time students, that is, students not living in university-owned housing. The part-time student population is a diverse group, which encompasses full-time students who live with their parents, part-time students who live in off-campus apartments, those who live with peers or with their children at home and full-time workers. Part-time students range in age from the traditional college student (eighteen to twenty-four years old) to the older adult. They attend every type of higher education institution, including two-year and four-year public universities or private colleges. Typically part-time students walk, ride bikes, take public transportation, or drive to campus to go to classes. They often attend classes and then go home or to work, rarely spending additional time outside of the classroom on campus.

Because of the short amount of time spent on campus each day, part-time students have a limited knowledge of the university itself, including the location of buildings, functions of university departments, campus policies and procedures, and

current events. Residential students become familiar with the university by spending a substantial amount of time on campus, taking part in student forums and discussing current campus events in the residence hall or in small groups [2]. Therefore, residential students often have a better understanding of the status of the university, because part-time students must wait to receive pertinent information through mailings or newspaper articles. In addition, greater proximity gives residential students more frequent occasions to establish personal relationships with faculty and staff, who serve as resources and mentors. These mentors may provide assistance and information regarding new policies and procedures.

According to Koirala, Davis, and Cid [3], the primary reasons that “students left the university were: Financial difficulties, lack of family support, lack of engagement and motivation, lack of confidence (self-efficacy), lack of academic preparation, lack of proper advisement...These students come to college and are seen as the family member with the most flexible schedule, they are family problem solvers and resources for the family. They get drawn into family needs and that becomes their priority instead of academics.” They

have difficulty setting boundaries and telling their families they are busy and can't leave campus. They will first deal with family issues; the academics become secondary. The families don't understand the student is working, not hanging out and having fun with friends.

Part-time students are more likely than residential students to be in the first generation in their families to attend college, to be older than traditional college-aged students, to work more hours, and to attend college part-time [4]. Students who commute often have multiple life roles, and that the non-academic demands of their lives impact their experiences as college students differently than for residential students. Furthermore, part-time students tend to minimize the amount of time they spend on campus, and are thus less involved in college-related activities [4]. When they are on campus, many part-time students spend much of their time negotiating obstacles, including finding places to create academic and non-academic space.

Some of the aspects of college student living environments may act as stress factors in students' lives. Hassainain [5] revealed that students were not satisfied with their college accommodation. Amole [6] found out that the residence had inadequate modern facilities in the hostels. Students who live on campus generally participate in more activities, take advantage of campus resources, and are more involved in leadership experiences. Many times the interaction that students have within the residence hall frames their campus experience. In addition to the residence hall experience; students who live on-campus are also actively involved in campus-wide organizations and activities. They tend to have a better understanding of self, experience positive changes in values, have higher self-esteem, and are more satisfied with their collegiate experience unlike the off-campus students [4].

The demand for university education in Kenya has significantly increased. When public universities get into haphazard expansion, through market penetration tactics, the twin questions of what markets they are competing for and the basic essence of a university become imperative. Facilities, spaces and teachers, to match the implementation requirements of these policy guidelines, rivet the quality equation clearly in regulations. The high influx of students in Kenya, both government and self-sponsored, greatly supersedes the ability of these institutions to offer accommodation to all students [7].

In reality, the educational goals of commuter students are very similar to those of residential students. They seek to be involved in the campus community and in their learning; however, their lives consist of balancing many competing commitments, including family, work, and other responsibilities [2]. Part-time students are more likely to work, to work more hours,

and to work off campus than resident students. As a result, they may appear to be less committed to and engaged in their education. Despite their commitment, many commuter students simply cannot always make college life on campus their primary focus. It was against this background that the study sought to establish the challenges encountered in social engagement practices of part-time students in public universities in Kenya.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To investigate challenges encountered in social engagement practices of Part-Time Students in Public Universities in Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This study was carried out in Moi University (Eldoret West Campus), Kisii University (Eldoret Campus) and University of Eldoret (Town campus). This study was guided by student engagement theory [8]. The theory underscores the role of environment in the learning of students. According to Reeve and Assor [9], classroom environment influences students' way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. This study used qualitative research approach. The target population for the study consists of students, games tutors, deans of students and officials of clubs and societies. Data was collected from students, deans of students, games tutors and officials of clubs and societies. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions. The analysis of the qualitative data followed the path of aggregating the words or images into categories of information and presented the diversity of ideas gathered during data collection.

Ethical considerations

To ensure that the study complies with the ethical issues pertaining research undertaking, a permission to conduct the research was sought from the respective authorities. A full disclosure of all the activities concerning the study was explained to the authorities and this involved the study intention which was only for learning purposes. A high level of confidentiality and privacy was observed and the findings of the study were only submitted to the university. A letter of introduction was obtained from the University to serve as evidence of the purpose of the study. In respect for the informants and in order to protect them from abuse resulting from the data they give for the research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to investigate challenges encountered in social engagement practices of Part-Time Students in Public Universities in Kenya. The study findings were as shown.

Age of the part-time Students

The part time students were also asked to state their age. The responses are shown in fig.

Figure-1 shows that 137(70.6 %) of the part time students were aged between 20-29 years whereas 33(17 %) were aged 30-39 years. Another 23(11.9%)

were aged over 40 years. Only one (0.5%) was below 20 years. This implies that most of the part-time students are non-traditional students.

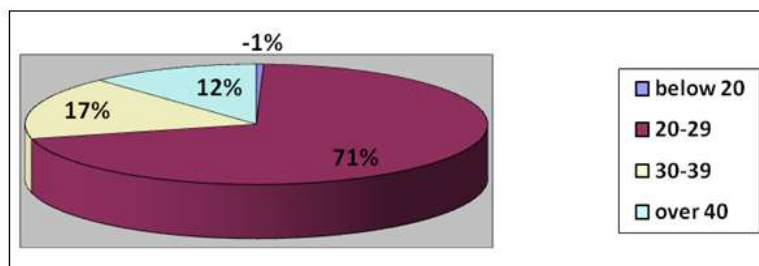


Fig-1: Ages of the part-time Students

Current living arrangement

According to Jacoby and Garland [10], it is important to consider the area of residence of students in any learning institution. Further, knowledge about differences that exist within diverse student population

is useful in assisting students to engage in social activities of universities. This study sought to determine the living arrangement of the part-time students who participated in this study. The results are shown in Fig-2.

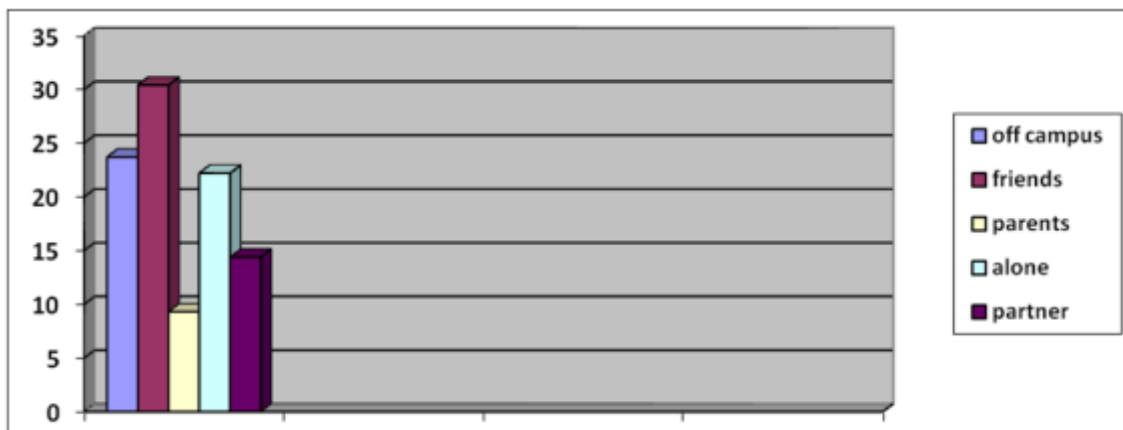


Fig-2: Living Arrangement

The study established that majority 59(30.4%) students were living with friends or in a shared house whereas 46(23.7%) were under off-campus students accommodation. There were 43(22.2%) part-time students who were living alone. Another 28(14.4%) were living with partner or children. Only 18(9.3%) were living with parents or guardians. According to Bozick [11] and Guha and Leonard [12] students who lived with their parents were less likely to persist past the first year of college compared to on-campus students. Students who live with their parents cannot avail themselves of whatever benefits may be derived from living on campus as a freshman [13]. Besides, research in this area generally supports the notion that students living in campus organized housing tend to be more socially adjusted and tend to participate more often in extra-curricular and campus activities than students living off- campus [14]. In the study done by Rinn [14], he established that the diversity of students living on-campus was directly associated with significantly higher levels of open-nest diversity than

living off- campus. Another study by De Beer *et al.*, [15] highlighted considerations around the nature of the home environment and how conducive that environment might be (or might not be) to supporting study. They suggested that living at home and lengthy commuting time contributed to a lack of sense of belonging.

Challenges Encountered in Social Engagement Practices of Part-Time Students

The study also sought to determine the challenges encountered by part-time students, deans of students, games tutors and officials of clubs and societies in social engagement practices of part-time students in public universities in Kenya. This information was sought using an open-end item that was responded to by the part-time students, deans of students, games tutors and officials of clubs and societies in the universities where the study was done. The part-time students, deans of students and games tutors were in agreement that the part-time students

lacked time to participate in the social activities in the universities where the study was done. They spent most of their time travelling or looking for means of transport. This is supported by Wilmes and Quade [16] who established that the most obvious concerns shared by part-time students are those related to transportation: parking, traffic, fixed transportation schedules, inclement weather, vehicle maintenance, transportation costs, and locating alternative means of transportation when their primary means fails. No matter the mode, commuting to and from campus places demands on students' time and energy. As a result, they frequently concentrate on their classes into blocks, take some classes online, and have little free time to spend on campus. The convenience of classes, services, and programs is of paramount importance. Part-time students were only concerned with academic work. They just reported for classes and left for their homes almost immediately. This was because most of them might have been engaged with other economic activities outside the universities. One of the deans of students said:

"Part-time students did not have time and in most cases were not available to take part in social activities in the university due to their busy schedules. Even for lectures they attended and left immediately".

According to Clark [17] and Newbold *et al.*, [4] part-time students who commuted often had multiple life roles, and that the non-academic demands of their lives impacted their experiences as college students differently than residential students. Furthermore, part-time students tended to minimize the amount of time they spent on campus, and were thus less involved in college-related activities [4]. When they are on campus, many part-time students spent much of their time negotiating obstacles, including finding places to create academic and non-academic space.

The other challenge identified during the interview with the deans of students and games tutors were the difficulties experienced in dealing with mature students. Most of the part-time students are either parents or did their last examination many years ago. It is therefore difficult to either force them or persuade them to engage in social activities in the university as they considered those activities to be uneconomical. They preferred engaging in activities that could enable them to generate more funds. This is in agreement with a study that was done by Wilmes and Quade [16] who asserted that for most part-time students, being a student is only one of several important and time-consuming roles. Most part-time students work to defray the costs associated with higher education. Many work the equivalent of full time and at more than one job. In addition, many have responsibilities for managing households including children, siblings and relatives.

Part-time students' time is a critical and finite resource that directly impacts their ability to engage in academic and out-of-class activities. By necessity, they select their campus involvements carefully. The relative value of a campus activity when compared with other priorities is a major factor in their decision to participate.

The study further established that the part-time students lacked information on the social activities in the university that they could participate in. This means that they lacked knowledge on the activities they could engage in and when the events are taking place. This implies that there was poor communication concerning the availability of the social activities in the universities where the study was done. A study done by Amole [6] in Nigeria found out that the students who lived on campus generally participated in more activities, took advantage of campus resources, and were more involved in leadership experiences. Many times the interaction that students have within the residence hall frames their campus experience. In addition to the residence hall experience; students who live on-campus were also actively involved in campus-wide organizations and activities. They tended to have a better understanding of self, experience positive changes in values, have higher self-esteem, and were more satisfied with their collegiate experience unlike the off-campus students [4]. The opportunities they got were never enjoyed by the part-time students who do not reside in campus. This becomes a challenge as the part-time students are left out in most of the social activities that are conducted within the university.

During focus group discussions, the part-time students stated that they did not engage in social activities because there was lack of variety of activities to accommodate all the interests of the students. One of the part-time students said:

The university offers activities like athletics, volleyball, football, rugby and hockey. There is need for indoor games. Some of us are too old to participate in football and athletics. We need other games like scrabble, badminton, table tennis and even functional clubs and societies.

This implies that only field activities were available for the part-time students or generally for students. This was mentioned by the deans of students who also stated that the part-time students felt shy to participate in outdoor activities and therefore, recommended that the university should come up with more indoor activities to enable all students participate in the social activities of the university. The respondents were also in agreement that most of the universities did not have adequate facilities to enable students to engage in social activities. Part-time students often lacked the supportive campus environment that had been identified

by the National Survey of Student Engagement as one of the benchmarks of effective educational practice [8]. Students who commute often lack a sense of belonging to, or of feeling wanted by, the institution. Some institutions fail to provide even the most basic facilities, such as lockers and lounges, which allow students to feel physically connected to campus. In many cases, there are inadequate opportunities for part-time students to develop relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. Individuals rarely feel connected to a place where they have no significant relationships. Students who do not have a sense of belonging may complain that their college experience is like “stopping at the mall” to get what they need on the way to somewhere else [16, 2]. This limits students’ participation since when students want to go for competitions or tournaments, not all can get the opportunity to participate. When there are no funds or limited funds, it implies that the university can afford to sponsor few students. This was stated as one of the challenges the part-time students were facing as they tried to participate in the social activities.

According to De Certeau [18], many students do not prioritise their need for counselling and do not have the 'map knowledge' which is a detailed understanding of what is required to maximise their behaviour in social spaces, such as the university. The institution, in turn, did not provide students with a deep understanding of how to use the counselling services effectively for their development. De Certeau [18] further established that students do not participate in social support structures such as choir, sport, and religious, social and political organisations. Staying away from university influenced their access to and participation in many of these social activities that take place outside the formal structure of their programmes. Many of them commented on the time and money spent on travelling to campus and back.

Other participants expressed their concern for safety when travelling home late in the afternoon or evenings. Many recounted on their home environment as a barrier to their social engagement, indicating the following: they felt unsafe walking home with laptops, cell phones and books; the high crime rate; and risky surroundings such as thugs, loud music and informal pubs near their homes, which limited their use of social institutional support structures. Zipin [19] describes this environment as 'dark life world assets', in which poor students are faced with and are forced to find a way to navigate through in order to achieve their aspirations for higher education. Living in the townships and travelling long distances to the university is another pre-university non-academic factor that institutions must take into consideration when providing support to students from diverse backgrounds, more specifically to students coming from challenging socio-economic circumstances.

CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to find out challenges encountered by part-time students, deans of schools, games tutors and officials of clubs and societies in social engagement practices of part-time students in public universities in Kenya. The findings revealed that part-time students, deans of students and games tutors were in agreement that the part-time students lacked time to participate in the social activities in the universities where the study was done. They spent most of their time travelling or looking for means of transport. Part-time students were only concerned with academic work. It was also difficult to deal with mature students. The study further established that the part-time students lacked information on the social activities in the university that they could participate in. The part-time students did not engage in social activities because there was lack of variety of activities to accommodate all the interests of the students. The respondents were also in agreement that most of the universities did not have adequate facilities to enable students to engage in social activities.

Policy implication

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the study recommends that the universities and other stakeholders should provide resources to support the activities of different clubs and societies. This would enable the clubs and societies to be functional so that the part-time students can socially get engaged in the social activities in the university.

REFERENCES

1. Goldmuntz, E., Clark, B. J., Mitchell, L. E., Jawad, A. F., Cuneo, B. F., Reed, L., ... & Emanuel, B. S. (1998). Frequency of 22q11 deletions in patients with conotruncal defects. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 32(2), 492-498.
2. Jacoby, R. F., Seibert, K., Cole, C. E., Kelloff, G., & Lubet, R. A. (2000). The cyclooxygenase-2 inhibitor celecoxib is a potent preventive and therapeutic agent in the min mouse model of adenomatous polyposis. *Cancer research*, 60(18), 5040-5044.
3. Koirala, H. P., Davis, M. J., & Cid, C. R. (2010). Retention of most-at-risk entering students at a four year college.
4. Forbus, P., Newbold, J., & Mehta, S. (2011). University commuter students: Time management, stress factors and coping strategies. *Advances in Business Research*, 1(1), 142-151.
5. Hassanain, M. A. (2008). On the performance evaluation of sustainable student housing facilities. *Journal of Facilities Management*, 6(3), 212-225.
6. Amole, D. (2009). Residential satisfaction in students' housing. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 29(1), 76-85.

7. Wamugunda, T. N. (2013). *Enhancing inclusive education to address Enrollment challenges of learners with special Needs in public primary schools in Ruiru district, Kiambu county, Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, Mount Kenya University).
8. Kuh, G. D., Gonyea, R. M., & Palmer, M. (2001). The disengaged commuter student: Fact or fiction. *Commuter Perspectives*, 27(1), 2-5.
9. Reeve, J., & Assor, A. (2011). Do social institutions necessarily suppress individuals' need for autonomy? The possibility of schools as autonomy-promoting contexts across the globe. In *Human Autonomy in Cross-Cultural Context* (pp. 111-132). Springer, Dordrecht.
10. Jacoby, B., & Garland, J. (2004). Strategies for enhancing commuter student success. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 6(1), 61-79.
11. Bozick, R., & Ingels, S. J. (2008). Mathematics Coursetaking and Achievement at the End of High School: Evidence from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002). Statistical Analysis Report. NCES 2008-319. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
12. Leonard, J., & Guha, S. (2001). Education at the crossroads: Online teaching and students' perspectives on distance learning. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 34(1), 51-58.
13. Duviols, P. (2008). *La lutte contre les religions autochtones dans le Pérou colonial: L'extirpation de l'idolâtrie entre 1532 et 1660*. Presses Univ. du Mirail.
14. Rinn, A. N., & Plucker, J. A. (2004). We recruit them, but then what? The educational and psychological experiences of academically talented undergraduates. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 48(1), 54-67.
15. De Beer, A. S., & Merrill, J. C. (Eds.). (2009). *Global journalism: Topical issues and media systems*. Boston: Pearson.
16. Wilmes, M. B., & Quade, S. L. (1986). Perspectives on programming for commuters: Examples of good practice. *NASPA Journal*, 24(1), 25-35.
17. Park, J. B., & Clark, D. S. (2006). Deactivation mechanisms of chloroperoxidase during biotransformations. *Biotechnology and bioengineering*, 93(6), 1190-1195.
18. De Certeau, M. (1984). The scriptural economy. *The practice of everyday life*, (Part IV).
19. Zipin, L. (2009). Dark funds of knowledge, deep funds of pedagogy: Exploring boundaries between lifeworlds and schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 30(3), 317-331.