2014 Digital Essay Competition Report
For: Ministry of Education, Science & Technology

12th February 2015
I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

eKitabu is Kenya’s leading distributor of ebooks with over 350,000 titles from local and international publishers including KICD-approved educational content for the Kenyan 8-4-4 curriculum. In 2014 in accord with eKitabu’s mission to achieve transformative educational outcomes through the use of digital content, eKitabu invited over 8,000 public and private schools across Kenya to submit essays online at http://essay.ekitabu.com for the 2nd annual eKitabu Digital Essay Competition. The Competition ran from April to August for two categories of students: Upper Primary (Class 5 - 8) and all Secondary School pupils. The title of the essay was: Technology in My Education: Dream or Reality? The 2014 Competition registered 2,257 students from 271 schools from across ALL 47 counties of Kenya. The purpose of this document is to summarize the results, process and lessons learned.

eKitabu thanks the Ministry of Education, Science & Technology for its support in 2014, and looks forward to more collaboration in 2015 for, as Cabinet Secretary Jacob Kaimenyi says, “a greater Kenya.”

II. DEC 2013/2014 GOALS

In 2013 our goals were:
1. About making a start
2. Finding stakeholders we could work with to support the program for us to achieve our main objectives.
3. Setting priorities
4. Piloting an approach

In 2014 our main goal was about reach:
1. To reach the highest number of schools possible
2. The Competition to have a National face: reach all 47 counties of Kenya.
DEC PARTICIPATION 2014: A MAP REPRESENTATION

- Registrations from all 47 counties
- Over 1,000 from Nairobi
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN LIBRARIES AND DEC PARTICIPATION
KNLS LIBRARIES WITH DEC SCHOOLS (2013/2014)

Most public secondary schools in Kenya have libraries, we estimate approximately 80%. In order to see the relationship between DEC participation and access to libraries, we plotted the two on the single map below. We need more data to draw any definitive conclusions; however, DEC entries do appear to cluster where libraries are present in Kenya.

MAP LEGEND
Also from the data collected through DEC online registration, 80% of the students who gave us their details indicated that their schools have computer labs; 98% of these are secondary schools. Also from these data 99% of the schools indicated that they need teacher training on digital content development.

**DEC 2014 SPONSORS AND PARTNERS**

2014 Partners included leading Kenyan educational publishers, the Kenya Publishers Association (KPA), the Kenya Primary School Heads Association (KEPSHA), the Kenya Private School Association (KPSA), Hewlett-Packard (HP), Elimu, Intel, Mustek, MTN Kenya and Samsung. The Competition was approved by:

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**
Ref: QAS/VETT/621/(4)

**2014 LESSONS LEARNT**

1. Focus on maximizing the number of schools to maximize county reach and student participation.
2. Schools who returned in 2014 show special enthusiasm for DEC.
3. The DEC is a cycle that spans the whole year when you take planning time into account.
4. 2015 end-to-end planning means DEC Launch and Prize Giving events on the two ends, county events in between.
5. Go to counties: to increase reach, involve participating schools with well planned county events.
6. Use agents to reach remote areas such as Kilifi, Lamu, Kwale, Mandera, Turkana, Wajir, Isiolo.
7. Getting registrations is not the same as getting student essays: in 2015 get essays from all 47 counties.
8. Reward teachers with certificates and prizes, even something small.
10. ICT champions: some registered with us on the website, but few; do something special for them, maybe for teachers in general, maybe teachers can post their own guidance on web page for how to write a good entry.
11. More engagement with the County Directors of Education and District Education Officers is necessary for widest reach.
12. Be prepared for submission of essays in various formats including paper.

III. OBSERVATIONS & ANALYSIS

The eKitabu team and other stakeholders collaborated closely throughout to develop and deliver a program that had integrity. The 2014 Competition process flow was sound, well-planned in advance and in general well executed. Changes along the way were mainly changes in dates, for example, we extended the closing deadline by three weeks to allow more submissions.

The sections below depict and describe in detail the stages of the 2014 Competition process.
STAGE I. DISCOVERY/AWARENESS

eKitabu created awareness of the Competition through:

a. School Website Banners

Three hundred and fifteen schools got banners on their websites with information about the Competition:

- 133 Primary schools
- 182 Secondary schools

b. Bulk SMS To Schools

eKitabu’s presence at 2014 national events, conferences and expositions such as KSSHA, KEPSHA and Book Fairs helped grow its list of school contacts, especially with school head teachers and teachers who visited our stands. They provided us with school phone numbers or phone numbers for the head teachers. We also contacted the 2013 DEC schools through the contact information we had.

With these contacts we reached schools with information about the Competition using bulk SMS delivered by Elimu. The information we delivered was, in chronological order:

- Launch of the Competition
- Registration instructions
- Number of days to go
- Deadlines for essay submission
- Essay prizes
- Final results
c. Posters & Letters To Schools
Since the 2013 Digital Essay Competition, we have tried as much as possible to ensure the program has a national scope. We used a more targeted approach in 2015, sending posters to areas we had not reached in 2013 though local agents active in those areas. We also sent letters and posters to all County Directors of Education in these regions and accompanied them with posters to be pinned on notice boards and distributed to schools. We also sent posters to 1,200 Nairobi schools through the City Education Director’s office.

d. Calls to County Education Headquarters
We made calls to the County Education Directors’ offices requesting them to pass information about DEC to the schools in their counties. These offices were also helpful in enabling us to contact the award winning schools and students at later stages of the Competition.

e. Emails and Calls to Schools and Schools’ ICT Champions.
With the support of the Ministry we worked with the network of schools’ ICT champions who helped push DEC in their schools and regions. The campaign to reach the ICT Champions was done through both calls and emails. We also sent emails to 2013 DEC schools to make sure they participated in 2014.

STAGE II. PARTICIPATION

Entrants were encouraged to use the online essay submission platform at http://essay.eKitabu.com. We kept the online registration and submission process simple to minimize barriers to online submission.

a. Registration
Students registered to participate in the Competition by creating an account with their personal and school details. The system issued unique user IDs to all users on completion of the registration process.
b. Essay Submission

On completion of the online registration entrants could type in or paste in their essays. The platform allowed entrants to update or make changes on their essays at any time until they were satisfied with the final version, so long as they made changes prior to the final essay submission deadline.

The platform also allowed students to upload word documents, scanned copies of handwritten essays, or art. This was new functionality we introduced in 2014.

Some schools called to request other means by which their students could submit essays as they faced ICT equipment constraints. Not all schools had access to Internet nor enough computers for students type their entries. In light of these facts we accepted all submissions whether electronic or on paper.

STAGE III. JUDGING

Two rounds of judging were necessary:

a) First Round Judging

Before the essay submission deadline eKitabu recruited a panel of teachers recommended by The Nation newspaper. These were teachers with high levels of experience in essay marking, most of them national examiners in primary school or secondary school categories. In advance of the Competition, the judges sat together as a team to define marking criteria (see below).

The first round judging grouped the essays into two categories: Upper Primary (Class 5 - 8) and Secondary (Form 1 - 4). The essays were then read and marked. The essays that received the highest marks, at least ten from each category (Finalist Essays), were selected to proceed to the second round judging.
b) **Second Round Judging**

The judges in this stage were a group of eminent persons: CEOs of Kenyan publishing firms; School Directors/Heads; and University Professors. The second round judging took place at the University of Nairobi. Judges read the Finalist essays and scored them to select the Winners in each of the categories.

**FIRST ROUND JUDGES’ PROFILE**

**Judging Coordinators**

1. Hezekiel Gikambi Peter
2. Stephen Mwangi Macharia

**Hezekiel Gikambi** holds a Bachelor of Education (Arts) Honours degree (Kiswahili & History and Government) holder from the University Of Nairobi and a Post Graduate International Diploma in Sales Management and Marketing from Cambridge International College (UK), a professional development course in Research Methods & Project Cycle Management with Eastern Institute for Research and Training, a Certificate in Digital Media Management from Rhodes University in South Africa, a Post graduate Diploma course in Journalism and Mass Communication at Kenyatta University. He is currently pursuing a MA-Swahili Studies course at the University of Nairobi. He is the Project Manager of Swahilihub, a digital project of Taifa Leo and Mwananchi publications (Tanzania) of Nation Media Group, which produces a world class daily news Swahili site. He has been the Education Features Editor and former pioneer columnist and editor of the weekly Mbwembwe-Jarida kabambe la wasomi chipukizi, a two page student/school buzz magazine on Taifa Leo every Wednesday. He has taught Kiswahili and History and Government at high school level and in colleges for over 15 years most of which he examined.

**Stephen Macharia** holds a Master of Arts degree in Linguistics and a Bachelor of Education in Linguistics and Literature from the University of Nairobi. He has taught and examined students at high school level for 5 years. He currently teaches Communication Skills at Strathmore University as well as consulting at the Strathmore Writing Centre.

**High School Examiners**

**Henry Ngure** holds a Bachelor of Education degree from Moi University. He is currently a teacher of Kiswahili and Geography at Kenton High School in Nyandarua County. He is also a marker of national examinations.
Geoffrey Tinega graduated in 2009 with a B.Ed (Arts), 1st class honours from the University of Nairobi. He is currently pursuing an MA in Communication Studies from the University of Nairobi where he assists lecturers from the Linguistics and Communication departments in marking students' examinations. His subjects are English/Literature he currently teaches at Rasul Al Akram Academy in Karen, Nairobi.

Primary School Examiners

Violet Nkatha is a teacher at Milimani Primary School. She has been teaching for the last fifteen years. She graduated from Kamwenja Teachers College and later the University of Nairobi having attained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English and Literature. She has taught English and Literature at the International Teachers Training College where she did her attachment. She has also been teaching English at Milimani Primary where she prepares candidate classes in English language as a subject.

James Mbaria Njire holds P1 Teaching Certificate from Kilimambogo Teachers College. He has 15 years of teaching experience. He is currently a teacher at Forest One Primary School in Nyandarua County. He is also an examiner of English Compositions with KNEC.

JUDGING CRITERIA (ACTUAL FINAL CRITERIA)
Each essay must reflect the contestant's own research, writing and original thinking. Any essay that the judges may deem to have been written by someone else will be disqualified.

a. Factors to weigh in assessing overall quality of essays
The final winners should reflect regional, gender and social balance, but not to the exclusion of overall essay quality according to the scoring criteria below which should be the major determining factors in deciding winners. Received essays will be categorized in two groups: Upper Primary School and Secondary School essays.
The following characteristics will be noted as factors to consider in judging each essay:

a. Private/public schools  
b. Urban/rural schools  
c. Gender of the writer: male/female  
d. Grade level

The essays will be judged using five criteria as indicated on the scoring sheet below. Rate each of the five tested skills on a scale of 1-20, with 20 as the highest score. Add the five categories to reach the candidate’s final percentage score.

Essay Number ____________

I. **Comprehension (1-20 points) __________**
How well does the essay reflect a thorough comprehension of the issues indicated by the essay question? Essays may be approached in unusual ways (questions can be answered as essays, stories, dialogue). They should still respond to the essay question.

II. **Organization (1-20 points) __________**
Does the argument follow a logical and easily understood progression? Does corroborating evidence support the essay’s main points?

III. **Conclusions (1-20 points) __________**
Do the conclusions follow logically from the argument? How compelling are the conclusions?

IV. **Creativity (1-20 points) __________**
Portrayal of an innovative and creative angle on the issue.

V. **Writing (1-20 points) __________**
Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Concise language.
Final Score ______

Marking schemes: criteria related to grade bands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80 – 100</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 – 79</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 – 69</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 59</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 50</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The individual judges will present the essays they categorized in grade A to the lead judge who will allocate them to different judges to do the grading again and identify the best among them. The panel of judges will then agree on 10 to pick based on the above categories.

b. DEC 2015 results

For both Secondary and Primary school categories at least the best 10 contestants will be selected and their names and essays presented to the CEO of eKitabu.

FINAL RESULTS

2,237 students registered for the Competition and we received 2,062 Essays (up 287% compared to 2013 DEC)

The essays came from:

271 Schools (up 319% compared to 2013 DEC)

- 95 Primary (up 306% compared to 2013 DEC)
- 175 Secondary and 1 Tertiary Institution (up 324% compared to 2013 DEC)

ALL 47 counties registered (up from 27 in 2013 DEC)
The charts that follow summarize the 2014 results.

1. DEC 2014 vs. DEC 2013 Participation

Observations:
- DEC 2014 registered 186 more schools than DEC 2013, an increase of 319%.
- In 2014 more secondary schools participated than primary schools.
2. Essays by Category: Upper Primary vs. Secondary

Observation:
- In DEC 2014 Primary schools, though lesser in number than Secondary schools, registered the higher number of entries.
3. Online vs. Paper Entries

Observation:
- 99% of Secondary school entries were online submissions compared to 25% for primary schools. This gives a picture of the presence of Internet and ICT infrastructure at the different levels of education.
4. Finalists

After the first judging we had 29 candidates (Finalists) whose essays proceeded to the second round judging. These Finalists produced quality essays and were all recognized by eKitabu for outstanding efforts.

By gender the Finalists were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIMARY SCHOOL FINALIST BY GENDER</th>
<th>SECONDARY SCHOOL FINALIST BY GENDER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEMALE</strong> 42%</td>
<td><strong>MALE 53%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MALE 58%</strong></td>
<td><strong>MALE 47%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STAGE IV. AWARDS
All Finalists produced outstanding essays per the judging criteria. All received awards and Finalist certificates during the Nairobi International Book fair held on 24th September 2014.

The prizewinners received:
1. For 1st prize winners in both Primary and Secondary categories, scholarship money of Kenya shillings 40,000 and Kenya shillings 10,000 for uniform.
2. For 2nd prize winners in both Primary and Secondary categories, scholarship money of Kenya Shillings 20,000 and uniform money of Kenya shillings 5,000.
3. For 3rd prize winners in both Primary and Secondary categories, uniform money of Kenya shillings 10,000.
4. Mecer Classmate laptops for the top 5 students, Primary school category and Meccer Tablets for the top 5 students, Secondary school category.
5. A Mecer tablet for the top student, Kiswahili category.
6. Art kits for the top student, Art category for both Primary and Secondary.
In summary, the Digital Essay Competition in 2014 may be represented as follows:

**BENEFITS OF THE DIGITAL ESSAY COMPETITION**
1. Encourages students to develop and use digital technologies.
2. Enhances creativity and critical thinking amongst students.
3. Gives the students an opportunity to reflect on how best they can use technology to enhance their education.
DEC 2014: VOICES AND IMAGES

Without the galaxy
The world is dark and dull
Technology in education;
The star designing Kenyan stars
The sun inspiring the son’s visions
The moon radiating the daughter’s ways
To revolutionize education, lean on technology.

“Don’t give me milk… give me flash discs.”

“Passions are launched daily. Technology refines gifts… technology connects learners to experts.”

“Technology has donated the wings for our flight. Fly Kenya. Go my country.”

“Technology has overturned the tables in my learning… my worldview has been expanded.”

“Technology is the native language of today’s education.”

“What now seems an elusive dream would be discovered as a great blessing to humanity. I end with a question that all perceptive minds should be asking: what are we waiting for?”
My essay on technology won me a laptop

BY VINCENT ACHUKA
vachukavcent@gmail.com

A Standard One pupil eagerly awaited the government to honour its promise to issue them with laptops. Rhoda Agula is among the few lucky pupils who have already received theirs. This is after the 14-year-old student from Kwa Njenga Primary School in Nairobi emerged the winner in the recently concluded 2014 Digital Essay Competition.

The competition, which ran under the theme ‘Tunzaenda Digital’, targeted primary schools from all the 47 counties where they were required to write an essay on how the use of technology would impact their education.

According to the Ministry of Education and digital content publishing company E-Kitabu, who jointly sponsored the programme, the competition was meant to challenge schools on their readiness to go digital. Additionally, they wanted the pupils to communicate their ideas and wishes for the One Laptop per Child programme that the government intends to launch.

Speaking to the “young nation” a week ago when she was declared the winner during the Nairobi International Trade Fair, Rhoda said she least expected it. “I am overwhelmed with this award,” she said. “I have never won anything in my life and to win a laptop as the very first prize is overwhelming.”

The judges said her essay showed an in-depth understanding of what technology entails and a deep yearning for the government laptop project to roll out. It contains the reasons why she would like to own a laptop and how it would help her in her studies. She also wrote how she would use the laptop.

One computer

Interestingly, the closest she has come to computers is seeing one at the office of her headmistress or on the display windows of computer shops in town. Her family is one of the beneficiaries of the programme.

Rhoda’s siblings live in a two-bedroom house in the middle of Kwa Njenga slums in Nairobi and they don’t own a computer. Additionally, she said, her school has no computers.

One computer

One computer

Rhoda Agula, a pupil at Kwa Njenga Primary School who was the winner of a national competition organized by ministry of Education. She shows off the laptop she won for her essay on technology.

“People started using technology by converting natural things into simple tools like stones, weapons and the discovery of fire which changed the whole world,” she wrote.

However, her essay dwelt a lot on the possibilities that the introduction of computers to aid in learning would have to pupils in public schools who cannot even afford enough textbooks forcing them to rely on those provided by schools.

She wrote on how it would make it possible for pupils to access books and how the cost of operations for schools will be reduced. She also included a diagram showing how the content of several books could be stored on a single flash drive.

This, she said, was from her own experience as a girl living in a slum. “In our class, the teacher gives us one textbook per every six pupils and sometimes we get into arguments on who will go home with the textbook. If homework has been given and you need the book you are forced to go to your class mate house at night and walking through the slums alone in the dark is not a good thing as you may meet bad people out to rape you,” she explained.

Her class teacher Ms Mukai said as a consequence the performance of pupils in the school is below average and pupils hardly do their homework due to lack of books.

“In a class of 30 pupils, you get that it is only one who owns a textbook and the rest rely on the school to provide learning materials. This affects the performance,” she said.

However, because of her creativity, Rhoda will not have to walk through the dark slums of Kwa Njenga at night to borrow textbooks as the laptop she won has been installed with the official school curriculum from the government and approved textbooks for her to use.
Mr. John Temba, Head of ICT for Ministry of Education Science & Technology making his remarks at the DEC 2014 Prize Giving ceremony.
Second place winner Secondary Category Susan Wariara of Starehe Girls Centre and School receiving her award.
First place winner Primary School Category Venessa Ndirangu receiving her award from MTN Kenya Managing Director Tom Omariba.
IV. PLANS FOR 2015 eKitabu DIGITAL ESSAY COMPETITION

The 2015 Digital Essay Competition will be held from April 2015. The submission period will be open from 13th April 2015 and will close on 22nd July 2015. Winners will announced at the Prize Giving ceremony on 23th September 2015.

Students will register and submit their essays through http://essay.ekitabu.com/

The Digital Essay Competition gives students in Kenya the chance to contribute their voices and visions to the integration of ICT in learning and teaching. It helps them develop critical thinking and innovative minds. DEC also provides a vehicle for research into ICT integration for learning and teaching in Kenya.

As a matter of major research priorities for 2015 eKitabu will:
- Continue to assess the impact of DEC on schools and students;
- Explore the relationship between libraries and DEC participation and performance; and
- Develop a clearer picture of ICT integration in participating schools.

eKitabu thanks the Ministry of Education, Science & Technology for its support in 2014, and looks forward to more collaboration in 2015 for, as Cabinet Secretary Jacob Kaimenyi says, “a greater Kenya.”
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