

# Government Financing of Public Secondary Schools in Kenya: Perceptions about Unit Cost of Education (UCE) to Students' Performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Must the Government Strain?

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**Abstract-** Attainment of education related millennium development goals in Kenya is largely hinged on availability and appropriate use of unit cost to acquire supportive inputs to the education process. The introduction of capitation in secondary schools was aimed at providing the economically disadvantaged with an opportunity to benefit from government sponsored education provision. However, there are indications that providing this education is now beyond the scope of Kenya's ordinary education budget, owing to 95% transition in the year 2019. Challenges arising from the pressure placed upon available unit cost in national schools have been steadily growing. In spite of the new measures that government is undertaking to strike a balance between unit cost and quality learning in recent years, it is worth examining government financing of public national secondary schools in Kenya: perceptions about UCE to students' performance in KCSE in public National schools. Must the Government Strain? The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Objective of the study was to determine effect of UCE to students' performance in KCSE in public National schools in Kenya. The target population was principals, school bursars/accounts clerk in national schools and Sub-county Director of Education in Kenya. Convenience sampling procedures was used to sample 5 National schools where 5 principals, 5 bursars and 5 Sub -County Directors of Education who were used as respondents in the study. Data was collected using questionnaires that comprised of closed and open ended test items. Interview schedules were used to get information from Sub-county Director of Education. Data analysis was done using thematic approach and descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics used frequency counts, means and percentages. The study concluded there is inadequate financing which in turn affect students' performance in KCSE in secondary schools. The study recommends that the current fees in national schools put at Khs 81,673 up from Ksh 75,798 an increase of Kshs 5,875 while the government to provide for infrastructure vote head of Kshs4, 000 without reduction of other vote heads to put capitation at Kshs 26,244.

**Index Terms-** Government Financing, Quality Learning, Public Secondary Schools, Capitation, Unit cost, Ministry of Education

## I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Quality learning entails learners who are well-nourished, ready to participate and learn, healthy, and supported in learning by their families and communities. The content also should be reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace. This will reduce disparities and outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes that are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society (UNICEF, 2000).

UNESCO (2012) indicate that the big challenge for secondary education in Latin American and East Asian countries in the context of increased primary school enrollment rates, which puts pressure on increased resources as demand for secondary education increases. The major challenges that these countries are encountering are inadequate resource allocations, constraints of expansion and increasing the quality of secondary education.

World Bank (2005) describes secondary education as the crucial link between primary schooling, tertiary education, and the labour market. Nearly all countries in Sub Saharan Africa have implemented policies to ensure free universal primary education particularly through waiver of direct costs to households. This has resulted in an increase in enrollment and completion rates and has brought increased demand for access to secondary education. With the increased enrollment in secondary schools, African countries must deal with issues of funding, quality learning and relevance of teaching and learning.

Kenya's Vision 2030 is the country's new development blue print; it aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrialized country by the year 2030. The Vision is based on three —pillars: the economic, the social and the political. The policies of the first and second pillars are equally anchored on an all-round adoption of education as an implementation tool. One of the key areas in realizing vision 2030 is quality education and training. Improved secondary education is fundamental to the creation of effective human capital in any country. The launch of Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) in 2008 was initiated in order to promote pupil transition from primary to secondary schools, and retention and completion in secondary schools without discrimination. The

Government intended to remove major obstacles that have stood in the way of children who need to join and complete secondary education (Republic of Kenya, (2005). The government of Kenya, through Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005, made a commitment to increase transition from primary to secondary school from 49 to 70% by the year 2010. This would be made possible by the government supplementing parents' efforts in meeting education costs at secondary level. The government supported the poor and needy students through bursaries. Further, tuition free secondary education policy was implemented in 2008 with the government's commitment to pay tuition fees for all students enrolled at secondary level. With the government efforts, transition rate to secondary level of education has since increased from 59.6% in 2007 to 90% in 2019.

Implementation of Subsidized Secondary Education (SSE) in Kenya was a major step in expanding access to education to majority of students from poor background. This was further reinforced by the international agreement on Education for All. The government provided subsidies towards funding SSE, however there were other costs that were not catered for by SSE but were to be catered for by the parents. Concerns have however been raised over effective implementation of this programme, and the impact of SSE on quality learning in national secondary schools following structural factors including inadequate and delayed disbursement of subsidies to school, shortage of human resources, limited physical and instructional resources. This research utilizes primary and secondary data to critically examine government financing of public national secondary schools in Kenya: perceptions about unit cost of education on KCSE performance. Must the Government Strain?

### **Statement of the problem**

Fuelled by an historic convergence of globalization, knowledge-driven economies, human rights-based development and demographic trends, it has become clear that educational attainment is not only vital to the economic well-being of individuals but also for that of nations. In order to achieve the national goals of education, it is necessary to increase access to education, improve quality of learning. The first step toward a quality learning system is to ensure adequate resources, allocated in a healthy balance across core system parameters. Without this, few other policy objectives and programs can be implemented or sustained. Estimation of the unit cost of basic education makes an important contribution towards marshalling adequate resources and ensuring the sustenance of quality learning system. Secondary schools have been categorized into National schools, Extra County schools, County schools and Sub-County schools. National schools have been further grouped into various clusters depending on enrolment, location, length of stay and infrastructure. The various categories of schools have unique needs depending on enrolment, location, and its establishment with the high students' enrolment, high teacher: student ratio and overstretched facilities specifically in national schools amid standard fee guidelines by Ministry of Education. This contradicts Government policy on quality learning provision that has shown an increasing interest of attaining 100% access to secondary education, but many challenges remain. Quality learning provision in secondary schools could be compromised and even derail the free day secondary program due to inadequate financial resources and

delayed disbursement of subsidies to schools. This study seeks to explore Government UCE to students' performance in KCSE in public National schools in Kenya: stakeholders' perceptions about capitation for quality learning.

### **Research Objectives**

The study was guided by the following objective:  
Effect of Unit Cost of Education to students' performance in KCSE in public National schools in Kenya.

### **Research Questions**

In order to achieve the above objective, the following question will be addressed:

What is effect of the UCE to students' performance in public national secondary schools in Kenya?

### **Research Design**

The study used a descriptive design that attempts to describe what was or what is in a social system. Its purpose is to use qualitative results to assist in explaining and interpreting the findings.

### **Sample Size**

The study adopted convenience sampling technique. This is also known as availability sampling. It is a type of sampling where the first available primary data source will be used for the research without additional requirements. It involves getting participants wherever you can find them and typically wherever is convenient. In this way the desired sample in the study was satisfactory to the desired needs. The sample constituted of 5 sampled public National secondary schools.

### **Sampling Procedure**

Convenience sampling procedures was used to sample 5 National schools where 5 principals, 5 bursars and 5 Sub -County Directors of Education who were used as respondents in the study.

### **Research Instruments**

The research used questionnaire for principals, and accounts clerks/ bursars to collect secondary data for the study and interview schedule for Sub- county director to collect information that cannot be accessed from respondents.

### **Validity of the Instruments**

To ensure validity of the questionnaire, assistance was sought from the expert judgment of researcher's supervisors. They were also arranged from simple to complex for easy understanding. The researcher also took representative questions from each of the sections of the unit and then evaluated them against the desired outcomes. In addition, a detailed verbal descriptions and clear instructions were provided during the group administration, which the researcher personally conducted.

### **Reliability of Instruments**

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the split half method was used. This was done by assigning the odd numbered items to one half and the even numbered items to the other of the test.

**Data Analysis**

This research yielded data that required qualitative and quantitative analyses. Quantitative analysis entailed analyzing numbers about a situation by choosing specific aspects of that situation. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the quantitative data obtained using frequency counts, percentages and means. The results of data analysis were presented using frequency distribution tables. Data from interviews was analyzed using the thematic frame work and the research followed the principles of thematic analysis. The qualitative data obtained in this study was analyzed by using excerpts responses.

**II. FINDINGS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION**

**Findings on Relationship between Unit Cost of Education (UCE) to Students' Performance in Public National Secondary Schools in Kenya**

The adequate provision of facilities for better performance has a strong relationship with Unit Cost of Education because such facilities cannot be provided or planned for without establishing the unit cost of sustaining a student until completion of the course.

**Table 4.4: National schools' KCSE Mean Standard Score – MSS, (2014-2018)**

School	MSS-2014	MSS-2015	MSS-2016	MSS-2017	MSS-2018
A	9.28	9.74	7.33	5.61	5.84
B	-	-	9.89	7.69	6.87
C	7.89	7.33	6.16	5.61	5.63
D	10.56	10.64	9.23	8.73	8.55
F	9.93	9.65	9.23	8.12	7.98

Source: Survey data (2019)

Table 4.4 shows national schools' KCSE Mean Standard Score (MSS) for the years between 2014 -2018. National schools of all clusters admit highly scored pupils at an average of 350 out 500 marks in K.C.P.E. This is an average minimum score of 10.00 (B+) which should be maintained at K.C.S.E score. It's a pity that the general performance trend from table 4.2 above specifically in the years 2017 and 2018 show less MSS than their entry behavior. There were wide variations in KCSE performance among national schools since some schools attained a mean score of 8.55 (B) while others attained a low score of 5.63 (C) in 2018. Worst still a principal of one school was unable to produce records of their KCSE mean score for two consecutive years.

MoEST (2012) points out that to attain better performance it requires adequate human and physical resources as well as sound school management. One of the principals asserted that:

“Physical resources such as classrooms, laboratories and playground go a long way to facilitate teaching-learning and are one of the prerequisites for achievement of better grades in KCSE examinations. To obtain these resources; finances are required such as government grants, school fees, donations and contributions from the community to meet these costs incurred by school to sustain teaching/learning.”

*“A severe shortage of teachers has hit national schools countrywide, threatening the quality of learning and compromising confidence in public education. Coupled with congestion in classes, dormitories, dining halls and even toilets as a result of the government's 100 per cent transition drive from primary to secondary, principals are struggling to maintain order and security while keeping operations going”EO5.*

Shortfall continues to rise as government insists on 100 per cent transition from primary schools. Government hopes to achieve 100 per cent transition, and official figures indicate it had reached 95 per cent, which means more than one million more learners have joined form one in the year 2019. The commission is aware of the strain this is causing teachers and is asking for patience and creativity in handling the situation as the government works out strategies and interventions including employing interns to ensure no child is left without a teacher.

*“While the average student to teacher ratio is 1:45, my school is operating with a rate of 1:60 or more, leading to a stressed-out learning environment with minimal teacher to student individual contact. Though the TSC has been hiring about 10,000 each year, it has been unable to match the attrition rate as teachers retire, leave for greener pastures, are dismissed due to indiscipline and other reasons, or die” P4.*

On the whole, inadequate preparation of candidates is perhaps the main cause of poor performance in examinations in Kenya. This arises out of inadequate provision of teaching and learning materials especially teacher as resource, laboratory facilities. Poor performance especially in sciences could have resulted from theoretical teaching. One of the Principals was asked to comment on the relationship between unit cost and students' academic performance noted:

*“Unit cost influences the condition (quality) and adequacy (quantity) of physical facilities in schools such that if it is high in relation to the fees collected the schools can buy or maintain the facilities. Adequate facilities and in good condition is a prerequisite for better performance in KCSE. With 100 % transition hence increased enrolment, little time seems to be spent on practical lessons because of overstretched facilities and this affects the overall performance in the final examination.”(P5)*

The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations are administered nationally to test a wide range of subjects as stipulated in the secondary school curriculum. Thus academic performance is highly emphasized in Kenya as it is used for certification and selection to tertiary institutions and even employment. One of the education officers made this observation when asked about inadequate facilities in relation to KCSE score in national schools:

*“KCSE mean scores in national schools indicate that those schools with inadequate facilities performed lower than those with adequate facilities. Hence, there is a positive relationship between KCSE mean scores and the availability of physical facilities in school.”EO4*

It is noted that the well to-do parents in Kenya strive to secure form one places for their children in the a few but well established national schools leaving the so unpopular dilapidated day schools which perform poorly to Kenyans. In addition, the cost of schooling varies with the location of the school although; on average high quality institutions are more expensive than other

government schools. These revelations, however, do not give the real UCE of national secondary schools. An education officer asserted that:

*“There is need to come up with the unit cost of national secondary schools. This will assist in designing more appropriate policies on cost and financing of education and training. To come up with actual UCE requires that the components of the costs be properly articulated and estimated.”*EO2

Unit Cost of Education in Kenya has not been established because expenditure per student in national schools has not been

determined to enable one to properly calculate UCE. However, comparing data on spending per student can provide a starting point for evaluating the UCE of secondary education. The total amount of costs national schools incur to run and facilities available are met by or match their venues payable to the school more so from parents and the government. This implies that the revenues payable may be higher or lower than the UCE implying that schools may either have excess or inadequate resources to run schools.

**Table: Government Regulated Fee Charges in National Secondary Schools and the Actual UCE**

NO	VOTE HEADS	PARENT FEE CHARGES K shs	GOVERNMENT CAPITATION K shs	TOTAL FEEES K shs	ACTUAL COST PER SCHOOL K shs					Average actual cost K shs
					A	B	C	D	E	
1	BES	30,385	4,792	35,177	37,560	38,677	37,935	38,656	38,735	38,313
2	Personal Emolum.	8,450	5,755	14,205	15,585	15,465	15,689	15,975	15,695	15,002
3	RMI	2,000	2886	4,886	5,262	5,486	5,235	5,535	5,345	5,863
4	EW&C	5,370	2151	7,521	7,925	7,835	7,872	7,645	7,668	7,789
5	LT&T	2,885	1833	4,718	4,870	4,785	4,875	4,975	4,976	4,896
6	Activity	798	1,256	2,000	2,245	2,135	2,154	2,355	2,465	2,270
7	Admin, cost	3,666	1572	5,238	5,435	5,345	5,543	5,465	5,495	5,457
	Medical	-	1,999	1,999	2,054	2,115	2,050	2,045	2,150	2,083
	GRAND TOTAL	53,554	22,244	75,798	80,936	81,843	79,553	82,651	82,529	81,673

Source: Survey Data (2019)

Key – A, B, C, D and E – Sampled National Schools

Table 4.5 shows government regulated fee charges in national secondary schools and the actual UCE as indicated by the five sampled schools as noted by the principals and bursars in their respective schools. This survey has indicated that the cost of national schools’ education per student per year is low. It was indicated in table 4.5 that the average cost per student national schools fees should be raised to K Shs 81,673. An interview conducted in the study by sub-county director of education and in table 4.5 revealed that BES and personal emoluments vote heads are among the unit components that should be increased in public schools. The unit cost was arrived at by dividing the total cost of each school by the number of students in that school. This study agrees with a study by KIPPRA (2006) which found out that Unit cost analysis is important in establishing what actually constitutes any form of investment. Education as an investment good comprises of certain costs that go into teaching and learning. One of the sub-county directors of education when asked on the view of the ministry policy on allocation of capitation into various vote heads indicated that:

*“Schools should be allocated capitation based on their unique characteristics (BOMS), one size fits all approach is not tenable on the ground. Further, each national school is unique. Allocation should be based on individual national school needs. This has impacted academic performance”* (EO2)

Public boarding secondary schools of National, Extra-county, County and Sub-County schools receive capitation equivalent to the public day school counterparts. The Students in National schools pay Kshs 53,554 per year. Students in boarding schools and extra county schools in other regions pay Sh. 75,798. All students in public schools were funded to the tune of Sh22, 244 per annum with parents and guardians of students in boarding schools only cover uniform costs, boarding costs and infrastructural projects approved by County Education Board. A principal interviewed on effect of UCE on students' academic performance noted:

*“Establishing the UCE has been necessitated by the fact that it is determined by the amount of fees payable which in turn influences the financial ability of schools to provide teaching-learning facilities, other educational inputs and conducive school environment which affect students' academic performance. The concern for establishing the UCE in the secondary education sub-sector and its relationship to academic performance has come at a time when the costs of education are rising amid high poverty levels in Kenya to meet the costs of education. School's stable financial base as a catalyst for activities that enhance improved academic performance in schools”*P5.

The MoE has issued standard fees guidelines with a view to rationalizing the fees charged by various categories of secondary schools. However, these fees guidelines do not take into account

100% transition from primary to secondary that has resulted to overstretched facilities. Further, it has been observed that these fees guidelines do not take into account the regional disparities in resource facilities endowment and the peculiar needs of national schools. This has led to schools accumulating large deficits which most BOMs are unable to clear, thus negatively affecting the academic performance in these institutions.

One of the principals asserted that:

*“Budget deficits are always carried forward to the following year in terms of debts which accumulate yearly. It is my wish that the government allows parents to come together and agree on how to fill the deficit in funding, government capitation in national schools should also be given more compared to current rate and should be consultative with stakeholders on its allocation”. Infrastructure should be given special attention” (P5).*

The major challenges facing universal education initiative were increased student numbers and delay in disbursement of funds by the government. Free secondary education increased enrolment which has caused overstretching of the available infrastructure. The government has not adequately budgeted for the extra students who enroll which have affected the proper implementation of the program. The Ministry re-adjusted FDSE vote heads to address infrastructure improvement needs. Principals were informed to adjust their budgets accordingly to provide for infrastructure improvement on this specific vote head. The re-adjustment was not adequate for infrastructure improvement as other vote heads were negatively affected. If the amounts allocated for a vote head prove inadequate, then it implies that the amount of expenditure anticipated is less than the actual cost of maintaining a student in school, which in turn affects the provision of the required teaching-learning facilities for better academic performance.

### III. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary of the Findings

In this section a summary of research findings of this research study was presented along research objective.

The findings of the study indicated that the cost of national schools' education per student per year is low and has a negative impact on academic performance. The average cost per student national schools fees should be raised to K shs81,673. It further, revealed that BES and personal emoluments vote heads are among the unit components that should be increased in public schools to improve academic performance.

#### Conclusion

The study further concludes that government capitation left out some key areas that make learning to improve academic performance in schools. Such areas include infrastructure development and provision of meals. However, the feeling that the government provides free education has led to unwillingness by many parents to make any payments to the schools. There is need to increase the issue of infrastructure funding as the rising numbers seem to out match existing facilities. Overcrowding, if not well managed, greatly compromise academic performance.

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:-

Schools infrastructural development is critical in creating conducive environment for both teachers and learners to engage in their respective teaching/learning activities. It is clear from the fore going that government disbursement of funds by the government to schools should be timely and adequate and should be in harmony with the calendar of schools' activities, in order to avoid schools experiencing lack of purchasing power within certain periods in the year and hence reduce the increase of prices by suppliers due to the delayed payments. However, government capitation provide Kshs 4000 to support infrastructure vote head in schools. Additionally, schools seek approval from parents through their representatives (Parents Association Committees) before approaching County Education Board to ratify charging infrastructure levy of which they get resistance from parents.

The study revealed that development of schools infrastructure remains a big challenge in schools, it requires extra funding and most affected area is sanitation. It was also highlighted that government is taking almost half of Ksh 22,244 capitation allocated to each student, yet debts are piling in schools and infrastructure development has collapsed. It was noted that BES and personal emoluments vote heads are among the unit components that should be increased in public schools. The study recommends that fees be increased since the current fee charged in schools is highly inadequate as schools are operating on a shoestring budget under overstretched facilities. The study recommends to the government to consider fee increment proposal. The study recommends that the current fees in national schools put at Kshs 81,673 up from Ksh 75,798 an increase of Kshs 5,875 while the government to provide for infrastructure vote head of Kshs4,000 without reduction of other vote heads to put capitation at Kshs 26,244

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