ShahidiHub International Journal of Education, Humanities & Social Sciences- ISSN (Online): 2958-8154– Vol. 1, No. 1 (2023), 22–37

Higher Education Financing: Application of Efficiency and Equity in the Kenyan Education Context

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Abstract

Education is critical for human development and thus requires financing in various forms. There is an upsurge of enrolment in various levels of education globally, as education is regarded as the key to national development. Governments have invested much in education to improve their citizens' living standards. Kenya also spends a significant amount of its budget on education. However, many students still face financial difficulties. In this study, efficiency refers to avoiding the waste of education resources. Wastage occurs when student enrolment and participation rates in schooling are below one hundred per cent. Equity refers to providing more resources to those who need them most, meaning that students from poor backgrounds have adequate funds to complete schooling. In other words, the state education funds are distributed according to student needs. The absence or inadequacy of finances has brought different problems for both secondary and university students, including stress in secondary schools, student suicides, depression and violence. The study revealed that bursary funds allocation had been muddled with inequity and inefficiency. For instance, in one of the counties surveyed, there was inadequate data on the beneficiaries of bursary funds and the criteria used. The research calls for efficient and equitable financing of education at all levels.

Keywords: Efficiency, Equity, Bursary Fund, Scholarships, Student Loans, Kenya, Education Financing

Introduction

Globally, governments invest finances in education to improve their citizens' living standards. Education Financing involves acquiring financial resources for education and training (Guthrie & Schuermann, 2017). Resources for education are obtained through internal and external sources. The internal sources for schools involve collecting fees and other service charges from parents. External sources include funds from donors (philanthropists) and loans from financial institutions by students or parents. Also, governments may provide grants, scholarships and loans to students for educational purposes (HELB, 2011).

In many education systems globally, education is mainly public-funded because it is considered a public good. It increases the chances of building a democratic society. It reduces crime in society, increases tax collection, and reduces poverty (Jackson & Persico, 2016). Dewey argues that the interests of parents should play a pivotal role in determining student interests in the choice of schooling (Dewey, 1900). Different countries have various methods of funding education, primarily through government budgets, foreign donors, foundations, well-wishers, individual students and parents. The state also provides loans, scholarships, and bursaries. The funding model is determined by a country's political ideology and national goals—the following section surveys how education is financed in various countries.

Education Financing Globally

United States of America

In the United States of America, the federal government provides about 55 per cent of education funds to students in colleges (McFarland et al., 2018). It gives the remainder through student loans, bursaries and scholarships, private individuals, parents, and well-wishers. Sometimes, tax vouchers are awarded to students from poor backgrounds (Biddle & Berlin, 2002).

Funding for students varies from one state to another; wealthy states have adequate funds for their students compared to poor states. The graduation rates of students in poor states, mainly inhabited by blacks (Sass et al., 2010), are lower (68%) as compared to students in wealthy states (92 %). In college attendance, students in poor states score poorly (28%) compared to those from rich states (52%). It is observed that poor college attendance and student graduation rates are related to the state's economy and the ability of colleges in such states to motivate teachers. Highly motivated teachers are found in wealthy states (Greenwald, Larry & Laine,1996). Public school students in secondary, primary and preschool education are provided with free education.

In comparative terms, the United States of America spends US$ 12,800 per student on elementary and secondary education) a figure lower than that of Austria, Norway, and Luxemburg, according to the Organization of European Countries for Development (OECD). The information in Table 1 shows the comparative expenditure for some OECD countries and the United States.

Table 1: Western Europe Education Expenditure, 2019

Country	**US$**
USA	12,800
Austria	13,931
Norway	14,353
Luxemburg	20,900

Source: OECD, 2019

Data in Table 1 shows that the United States of America spends the least per student (US$ 12,800) compared to Luxemburg (US$20,900). The difference could be due to a country's politics and population dynamics.

Asia

Primary education in China is free. The Chinese government also funds various categories of college education. The state offers bright students full scholarships. These students may be exempted from paying student loans if they graduate and (1) work in rural areas, (2) work in the minority inhabited areas in China, (3) have graduated in areas such as teaching, mining, water conservation and petroleum extraction industries, and (4) opt to work in under-developed countries the Chinese authorities assign them.

In addition, student loans are offered to students from poor backgrounds. The loans advanced to students from poor socio-economic backgrounds may be exempted from repayment or reduced loan payments. They also receive stipends from the state or are provided with part-time jobs in work-study college programmes. The last category of funding is for those college students sponsored by local communities and are expected to return and work in those communities after graduation (Ngok & Lee, 2012).

China has effected economic modernisation through revolutionary education system reforms such as commercialisation, categorisation, subsidisation, capitalisation, localisation and industrialisation. In the 1980s, China primarily emphasised science and technology in education. Humanities were relegated to a secondary category. Cooperation between industry and universities in scientific and technical knowledge was encouraged. Thus, the sci-tech research resulted in high-tech products and enhanced innovations for commercialisation. China is considered the 21st-century world's factory with an economy close to the United States. The importance of science and technology education in China is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: World Research Outputs

Region	**Scientific Publications**	**Patent Filed by Residents**
East Asia & Pacific	24.7%	46.3%
Europe & Central Asia	39.06%	23.1%
Latin America & the Caribbean	16.4%	28.2%
Middle East & North Africa	4.35%	0.65%
South Asia	11.8%	1.5%
Sub-Sahara Africa	3.6%	0.07%

Source: World Bank, 2009

Table 2 shows that China, the biggest economy in East Asia, emphasises technical knowledge and innovations. China and other East Asia and Pacific countries account for almost 50 % of the world's patents filed by their citizens. It has established forty-three national university sci-tech parks. The efficiency of its education system contributed to making China one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world.

India

In India, the public authorities fund most of the educational requirements (Tilak,1993). The rest of the funding is provided by parents, student loans from the government budget, and funds donated by non-governmental organisations. Parents/students cover the education costs in private colleges. However, issues of efficiency and equity remain of concern.

Europe

In Britain, the government mainly funds students enrolled in public schools in primary education. Students in private institutions pay the cost of schooling at both basic and higher education. The British education system is undergoing the process of making it more efficient (Shuttle, 2018).

In Germany, the federal government provides money to the universities. A committee of university chancellors consisting of the Ministry of Education and Research, individual state representatives and chairpersons of the Higher Education Commission determines university funds (Hurtwing, 2006). Then, the committee distributes funds for states. Afterwards, state governments advance funds to their respective universities. The funding of individual universities is done after they have submitted their annual report to the parliament of individual states as required by the law. The money received by the universities is for paying teaching staff, research work, and infrastructure development. Special funds are set aside for Berlin University by the federal government to make it a world-class research university.

College students in Germany are funded in five ways. First, students needing college funds can apply for state student loans, in which about 50 per cent of the student loan is a scholarship. The other 50 per cent is paid by the student without interest. Second, a 20 per cent interest-free loan can be waived off if the student graduated as per the stipulated time or among the top 10% of the graduating class. Third, students from wealthy backgrounds may not apply for state student loans to meet the total university cost. Fourth, students from poor backgrounds may receive financial help from non-governmental organisations such as Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Friedrich Stiftung Foundation. Students from poor socio-economic backgrounds may also apply for financial support from religious organisations and political parties (Teichler, 2016). Lastly, some students may wish to agree with their respective universities where they study first and pay later after graduation.

The federal government provides most of the funding for primary education in Germany, while parents, business organisations and individual communities supplement the rest. Like the British government, Germany has instituted measures to improve efficiency and equity (Ziegele, 2005).

In France, education is financed through the Ministry of National Education and Technology. According to Paris (2010), education consumes about 57% of the total national income and about 7.2% of the French Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Education financing in France is generally in two categories. The students who have been enrolled in public universities are granted full scholarships. The rest of the students enrol in private universities, which the Ministry of Education categorises for funding. Students apply for state grants, and students who attained top grades at Lycee and Baccareaut schools or are among the top 20 students for the last two or three years with a bachelor's degree receive a grant of US$1,855. Young students, financially independent of their parents, receive a grant from US$4,122 to US$ 5,152. Students studying in foreign countries receive an "international mobility assistance" of US $3,709, while students aged 28 years studying in France whose parents are abroad receive a grant ranging from US$ 1,700 to US$ 4,879 as "emergency assistance." If the student's parents earn a yearly income of US $ 34,158 or more, they are granted the minimum amount of US $1,030 annually. Students from poor backgrounds whose parents make an annual income of less than US $ 2,154 receive US $6,801. The total cost of private college education in France is US $15,456 annually.

The cost of a college education depends on the course one has enrolled in. The humanities and social sciences cost US $ 6,182, while those enrolled in engineering are as high as US $12,565 annually. Chevalier (2014) states that the cost of learning is as follows: the primary level is US $ 3,879; the secondary level (US $8,552) in higher education is US $10,824.

The French education financing is equitable as the students from low socio-economic backgrounds at private universities pay much less than those from wealthy families. All students can access education finance as full scholarships in public universities, while grants and state student loans cover private colleges' costs. Students from low socio-economic family backgrounds borrow fewer loans than those from affluent socio-economic status. The college grants are mean tested. The French government provides financial aid to students at all college education levels. All the students have a chance to apply for state student loans. Some student aid is from families and business organisations. French education financing is relatively equitable and efficient, though it can pose management and leadership challenges if applied to other contexts.

Education Financing in Africa

The youth in Africa need technical and vocational training in addition to higher education to be self-reliant and for Africa's national development (Africa Economic Outlook, 2013). These actions would save the youth from poverty, unemployment and hopelessness. For this to be fulfilled, the public sector must work with the private sector to create job-related skills

(Mwirichia, 2018). The youth need adequate funds for education and training. These government funds can be in the form of scholarships, bursaries and loans. Parents can provide fees and other money needed for education and training. The church, savings and credit societies, commercial banks and well-wishers support youth education and training.

According to the World Bank (2010), there are continental sources of funds for students needing education. These foundations are the Association for Africa Development of Education (AADE), Leap for Education in Africa (LEAP) and Partnerships for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA). Apart from the internal sources of education funds in Africa, there are external sources. Countries such as France, Britain, China, Germany and the United States of America, among other countries, provide scholarships and grants to students in individual African countries. Private sources from abroad, like Ford, Carnegie, Rockefeller, MacArthur, Hewett, Mellon and Kresge Foundations, also sponsor students in Africa. These private foreign sources or foundations that provide funds are.

Specific African countries have their sources of money for education and training. In Southern Africa, Zimbabwe had a financing scheme called the Cadesrip Scheme in which needy students are provided with funds but have to work for the government for several years after graduation. A country like Madagascar emphasises the course registered in the university or college for funding. The control is through college entrants. According to the Ministry of Education and Research (2008), the government provided scholarships to students pursuing mathematics, technological subjects, and literacy. Enrollment in “relevant courses” is also an essential funding criterion in certain other countries, such as Botswana. In Botswana, the government provides scholarships for students enrolled in higher education courses relevant to Botswana’s economy.

In South Africa, areas of training and education for funding at higher education are determined by the South Africa Universities Vice-Chancellors’ Association (SAUVCA) and the Committee of Technikos Principals, which has headquarters in Pretoria. The Ministry of Education also collaborates with other sectors, like the Ministry of Health, to determine common training areas for funding relevant to the economy of South Africa. Students can register for these courses and apply for state loans funded through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme. The final decision on which student to receive the funds is made through mean testing. The family’s socio-economic status is a significant factor for students to be awarded funds (Tekleselassie & Johnstone, 2004). In the 1999-2000 financial years, South Africa spent about 6.5 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education financing.

In the East Africa region, the Uganda government sponsors students in higher education based on the courses relevant to the national economy. Many funds are channelled to students enrolled in science and technology (Zaafare, 2008; Otieno, 2008; Musisi & Mayenga, 2008).

Kenya

The Kenya government funds students in education through the Ministry of Education. In primary schools, to cater for student education needs, the government provides money for infrastructure development proportional to the number of students in each school. The money is sent through the National Education Management Information System (NEMIS), in which each school has a unique identifier number for funding from the Ministry of Education. Parents, church organisations and well-wishers meet remaining education needs.

At the secondary level, the government funds students through NEMIS. An Extra County Secondary School level in Tharaka-Nithi County showed the types of funds advanced by the government to the school (Table 3).

Table 3: 2019 and 2020 Annual Secondary School Budget

	2019 Income	**2020 Income**	**2019 Expenditure**	**2020 Expenditure**
Parents	70.9%	66.3%	69.5%	66.3%
Government	29.1%	33.7%	30.5%	33.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Derived from Extra County Secondary School Accounts for 2019 and 2020, Kenya.

Information in Table 3 shows that parents contributed most to budget income (70.9%) in 2019 and (66.3%) in 2020, against the Government of Kenya's (29.1%) and (33.7%) in respective years. According to the cost-sharing strategy of the Kenya Government (Njeru & Orodho, 2013), the government subsidises education at all levels.

Under this cost-sharing system, the government allocates about US$ 157 annually to every student in secondary school. In primary school, the institution receives approximately US $ 16 per student. Various local stakeholders have argued that the allocations are just a drop in the sea. In secondary, parents pay an average of US $ 383 annually, primarily for National and Extra County Schools. The figures have remained unchanged since 2014, yet the cost-of-living index has skyrocketed. At all levels, the financial support by the government is not adequate. In most cases, it is not provided on time, thus leaving the school, university, college and primary school authorities no option but to borrow from commercial banks. The inadequacy in education funding at all levels of education has led to dilapidated physical infrastructure and compromised quality of education (Wambuti, 2020).

The funds for secondary schools are inadequate to cover all the education costs (Otieno, 2020). Parents and other organisations supplement the government funding. Several organisations from the government and non-government sectors fund the students. These groups provide bursaries and scholarships to the students. The constituency committee distributes the National Government National Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF) under the respective Member of Parliament (MP) patronage. The County government has a bursary kitty for needy students, which is under the control of the County Governor. At the Ward level, the Member of County Assembly (MCA) disperses bursaries to students in secondary schools. At another political level, the County Women's Representative under the National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF) also distributes bursaries and scholarships to students.

In all these cases where politicians distribute the bursary funds, there is a concern about fairness in the process. Mostly, politicians would give funds to their relatives and reward their political allies. In addition, the misappropriation of bursary funds, tribalism in dispersing funds and provision of too little to cover the needed funds for students at the secondary- level are some of the problems experienced (Mwirichia, 2007).

Business groups such as Barclays Bank scholarships, Kenya Tea Development Authority (KTDA), and Equity group (Wings to Fly program) are other groups that provide education funds. Examples of groups that fund students at the secondary level are Plan International, church organisations and well-wishers.

At the university level, the Ministry of Education funds university and college students through the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB). Students on regular programs taking full-semester load are provided loans at 4 per cent while income-earning students borrow at 12 per cent interest. The students are expected to pay the loan after graduation. The HELB provides money for students in public and private universities (Jackson, 2012). It also funds students in technical and vocational colleges such as polytechnics and medical colleges.

In the past, the HELB has been accused of delaying the disbursement of student loans and providing inadequate funds to cover education costs, such that students have to borrow costly loans from shylocks and mobile app lenders. This has led to students experiencing stress, depression, and committing suicide. Others have either dropped out of college or suffered delays in graduation.

Moreover, most students find it challenging to pay the loans after graduation because they take longer to get employed or even remain unemployed. The youth unemployment in Kenya is partly blamed on the mismatch between courses offered at the university and job market demand. The country's economic growth does not match the growing number of graduates from universities and colleges (Mwirichia,2018).

Apart from internal sources, students may be funded by external sources. Sometimes, Kenyan students are given limited scholarships to study in countries like Britain, Germany, France, Russia, China, Pakistan, and India. Gichui (2015) noted that foreign governments have organisations in Kenya that fund students, like the Global Education Fund (GEF) and Britain's Department for International Development (DfID). Also, the World Bank partners with Equity Bank of Kenya, the Ministry of Education, Master Card Foundation and the German State Bank (Kfw) in the 'Wings to Fly' scheme to sponsor needy students in secondary and tertiary education levels (Kivuva, 2020).

Thus, there are multiple sources of education funds in Kenya, yet issues of students not being enrolled in secondary schools are common. In addition, many students drop out of college or cannot enrol in colleges because of a lack of education funds. Partly, this is because various sources are uncoordinated, and thus, there is a need for a unified management of funds disbursement.

The new government financing model established in the 2023/24 Financial Year mitigates the lack of equity in the past education financing model. In the new funding model, the government classified students into four categories for funding purposes and to address the issue of equity in financing education: the vulnerable, extremely needy, needy, and less needy. In this model, the vulnerable and the extremely needy receive 100% tuition funding from the government through scholarships. The needy and less needy receive 93% of government tuition funding (as scholarships and loans), and the remaining 7% is to be raised by the parents or guardians. In essence, students from well-to-do backgrounds would get more loans than scholarships.

Theoretical Framework

The allocation of funds to students can be explained and understood through the equity theory. The theory of equity was founded by Rawls in 1971. It argues that most resources should be distributed to those who need them most. For instance, in education funding, students from low socio-economic backgrounds should receive more funding than those from wealthy backgrounds. This equity theory was expounded by Mackmohon (1987) by explaining that resources have to be distributed fairly among the members of the society. Thus, students from wealthy families should pay more for education than those from low socio-economic families. The distribution of resources must factor in efficiency. Also, education funds must be distributed in an optimal way in which they adequately cover education costs. The issue of progression from one level to another and students dropping out of school must be addressed through the education financing models. These issues affect the participation rates of students in education.

Conclusion

There should be prudent management of financial resources for education to benefit the learners. Wastage occurs due to the misappropriation of funds by education officers and inadequate funds to cover the total schooling costs. Equity refers to providing more resources to those who need them most. Thus, students from poor backgrounds should be provided with adequate funds to complete schooling. As earlier pointed out, there are equity challenges even in developed nations; some wealthy states in the US have more funds for schooling than poor states inhabited by blacks. The political philosophy of democracy gives the freedom of choice to schooling in which parents and students can receive education funds from various sources. Student participation rates differ according to students’ race, which is evidence of efficiency challenges in the education-financing model. The UK faces the same challenge of inequitable education financing because high-achieving and established schools are associated with well-to-do backgrounds. Britain's financing model is based on a political model of free choice. In Germany, all students are eligible for state student loans. Thus, all students have access to education. The French education system is efficient and equitable as all students have access to education, and funding covers adequate education costs. China has state student loans which can be cancelled under certain conditions. There are also scholarships for the best students. Poor students get help from the state and colleges. The system is equitable and efficient. However, Africa faces an inequitable and inefficient financing model since the youth in Africa have low literacy rates.

Kenya faces challenges in state disbursing student loans, which are often uncoordinated. There are too many uncoordinated sources of bursaries and scholarships. Moreover, students face delays in the disbursement of funds from the funding body (HELB). Sometimes, bursaries and scholarships are awarded to underserving cases; sometimes, too little or no money is offered to students from vulnerable or low-income families. Before the 2023 model that is still at the onset stage, the past model awarded inadequate student loans. Other challenges include a lack of transparency in decision-making, excessive expenditures on students studying abroad/overseas, political interference, poor monitoring of expenditures by government agencies on bursaries and scholarships, corruption, bribery, nepotism and impunity.

Education financing in Kenya lacks strategic planning because scholarships and bursaries are not closely aligned with the national goals. Concerning student loan repayments, students face a plateauing economy that provides very few jobs for college and university graduates. These problems show inefficient models of funds allocation.

Like other African countries, Kenya faces inefficient and inequitable education financing models. Therefore, a new model should include attributes that satisfy the criteria of adequacy, efficiency, and equitability. African countries can benchmark Western countries with models that foster adequacy, efficiency and equitability.

Recommendations

At the secondary school level, the state should arrange to provide student loans to all students to cover all the education costs. This is because the current financing model is inefficient and inequitable. The state support to secondary students will improve equity and efficiency by ending corruption, nepotism, tribalism, impunity, political interference and misappropriation of bursary funds by the awarding authorities. Student loans, bursaries/scholarships awarding and capitalisation for schools should be given through NEMIS. Poor students can have their student fees reduced, exempted from paying or awarded some bursaries and scholarships to cover what they cannot pay. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology must provide proper and clear guidelines and criteria about the amount allocated per student. It should also consolidate all bursary schemes offered by the public sector into schemes at the Ministry of Education under HELB or other government organs.

Students in technical and vocational colleges should be able to borrow money from HELB consisting of 50 per cent in free scholarships and the rest categorised as an interest-free loan payable over five years. This gives them room to repay student loans whether they get engaged in formal or informal sectors of the economy. It will encourage students to train in areas needed by the economy. University students studying science and technology-related courses should be offered state student loans with low-interest rates. The funding model in Kenya should also be aligned with the Kenya Vision 2030 goals; it should look at priority areas of funding to drive the economy. In disciplines with an overproduction of graduates, the government can scale down support in such areas. Further, university graduates working in difficult or hardship areas of Kenya can be considered for tax breaks from the government to help them meet their student loan obligations for a certain number of years. These suggestions of the government financing model of university and college education will increase participation rates of students, reduce unemployment and underemployment of college graduates and raise innovations and economic growth.

This paper calls for education finance in Kenya to be controlled and administered by one state organisation with branches at the County and Ward levels. The management of the education fund should be such that no student is denied access to education funds adequate to cover all their education cost requirements. In this way, education financing in Kenya may be judged as satisfying the criteria of equity and efficiency to the best of the national interest.

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