Effectiveness of Constituency Bursary Funds in Enhancing Retention of Students in Secondary Schools in Manyatta Constituency, Embu County

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ABSTRACT

The constituency bursary fund (CBF) was established in 1993/4 financial year with an objective of helping the vulnerable families to finance secondary education hence reducing inequalities. This study set to investigate the efficiency of the Constituency Bursary Fund in enhancing retention of needy students in secondary schools in Manyatta Constituency of Embu County. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised of all the 46 secondary schools in Kibra Sub-County. Cluster random sampling procedure was used to select ten public secondary schools from a total of 17 schools while 10 school principals, 2 members of the CBF, 100 students, ten from each school, County Education Officer, and two area chiefs were purposively sampled. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used for data collection. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution were employed to analyse the quantitative data. Qualitative data was placed under themes consistent with the research objective and conclusions made based on trends and patterns of responses. The study established that not all deserving cases benefited from the funds and that bursary schemes slightly improved secondary school retention rates, which means that there may be other factors affecting retention other than availability of funds. The study also found that the most common challenges faced in the distribution of bursary funds were lack of transparency and lack of clear procedures in identifying the needy children. The study recommended that there should be fair distribution of funds as girls tend to have more needs than boys, and procedures for distribution of bursaries should be clearly stipulated.

Keywords: Constituency Bursary Fund, Manyatta student retention, bursaries and retention, Manyatta bursary schemes, secondary school retention, Manyatta CBF, CBF and retention, enhancing student retention, financing and retention
INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that investment in education is a necessary condition for development to be realized. Social and economic development benefits are a result either directly or indirectly from mass participation in a school education system. There is extensive and highly nuanced literature demonstrating linkage between investments in education and training and desirable development outcomes (Lewin, 1994).

Evidence on the effects of education on development has widely been reviewed in various studies (Psacharopoulos, 2001; World Bank, 1995; Lewin, 1994). The findings of these reviews generally support the positive impact of educational investment on development. As primary schooling becomes more universal, focus is shifting to the exploration of the benefits of secondary schooling. Lewin (1994), in his analysis of financing secondary education states that in many developing countries, the problem of financing secondary schools is acute. Participation rates remain low and are not growing in most of the countries. Where they are smallest, costs at secondary level are often high and are unsustainable if participation is to be increased.

Employment based on new production methods, the improvement of mature technologies and the widespread diffusion of information and communication technologies increasingly demands workers with more than basic education (Lewin, 1994).

The first case in example is Singapore where there is the famous Edusave Merit bursary (Wambua, Saina and Simiyu, 2017). The government through the Ministry of education in Singapore has put in place this bursary scheme for students with a household income that is less than $4000 a month further providing $300 for secondary 1 to 5. To qualify for the bursary, students must be enrolled in secondary school with a performance that is 25% in a stream (MoE, 2012). The strategy has worked since it has been able to retain students who would have opted to drop out due to lack of fees. Evidence of the impact of investment in education is also in the UK. The UK government’s key priority is to eliminate the gap in education attainment between the poor and the rich (Wambua et. al, 2017). Further the government aims to ensure that all young people participate and benefit from education and training. This has been achievable through a scheme known as YPLA (Young People Learning Agency) Bursary Scheme (YPLA, 2012). In essence, the Government provides aid to tackle the underprivileged both through the YPLA’s funding formula and through support to help young people meet the costs of participating in education and training post 16-19 education (YPLA, 2012). As a result, this has retained students in schools.

Currently in the USA, 35 states have a provision in their formula that provides additional funding to districts serving more low-income students. In theory, these provisions should make school funding more progressive by spending more money on students from low-income families. But this depends on how successful the particular states are at counteracting local funding, which tends to be regressive (Matthew, 2017)
In South Africa, an exploratory study into the current South African undergraduate student funding model employed by one university for the purposes of improving efficiency and effectiveness established that most of the students who drop out of higher education institutions in South Africa do so for financial reasons (Styan, 2014). So, it is argued that students are being excluded from higher education due to insufficient funds (Sharon, 2018). Studies from a continental perspective in Zambia and Malawi indicate that close to 70% of secondary school students in these countries are entitled to bursary schemes (Wambua et. al, 2017). These schemes are meant to cover 75% of tuition fees for most beneficiaries and up to 100% for vulnerable groups. According to Sutherland (2008), bursary schemes are also favored to improve retention of girls in schools. Although bursary schemes are intended to progress student retention in public secondary schools, some students end up dropping out due to extreme poverty. Therefore, poverty is an area these schemes need to address. Wambua et. al (2017) reiterate that paying fees may not be the only form of funding rather, there may be need to provide school uniform and other personal effects.

In Kenya, the secondary education sub-sector faces a number of challenges which hinder growth. First, there is the problem of high cost of education, which is five times that of primary education. Second, the high poverty levels in the country limit access and retention. Transition rates from primary to secondary schools nationally stood at 47% in 2005 (Republic of Kenya, 2005). The objective of the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP) (Republic of Kenya, 2005a) was to achieve a transition rate of 70 percent by 2008. According to the Ministry of Education (2009), this objective was surpassed with the current transition rate being slightly above 71%. Thirty percent of the students who enroll for secondary education drop out before they complete the secondary cycle (Republic of Kenya, 2005). Third, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) is very low with a national average of only 29.8% in the year 2004. This rose to 36.7% in year 2007. This is due to the fact that many parents cannot afford to pay for secondary education whose costs are comparatively higher than those of primary education.

The Government has put in place strategies to enhance retention and reduce costs of education for poor parents at secondary and university levels. These strategies are ring fenced during the budgetary allocation process as the core poverty intervention programmes. The secondary schools Constituency Bursary is one such strategy meant to enhance needy students’ retention in secondary education. The system should therefore be made efficient to ensure that needy cases are identified and supported financially in order to boost their retention in secondary education.

The constituency bursary fund (CBF), which was formally referred to as Secondary School Education Bursary Fund (SEBF), was established in 1993/4 financial year. The objective of the fund was to reduce the financial burden of poor families in financing secondary education. CBF aims to cushion the country’s poor and vulnerable groups against the high and increasing cost of secondary education, therefore reducing inequalities. It also aims to increase enrollment in (and completion of) secondary school. In summary, the objectives of the bursary scheme in Kenya are: to increase access to secondary schools for poor households; ensure retention of those who
enter secondary schools; to enhance completion by those who enter secondary schools and to reduce disparities and inequalities in the provision of secondary school education.

The bursary fund is not based on a fixed share of the national budget. Allocations vary depending on the Ministry of Education’s annual provisions, the number of students enrolled in secondary schools within each constituency, national secondary school enrollments and poverty indices. Since 2003/2004, the bursary fund has been coordinated by Constituency Bursary Committees, which screen potential beneficiaries, coordinate and disburse the funds, and prepare reports to the Ministry of Education. The government has continued to increase bursary allocations for secondary schools over the period. Bursary allocations rose from KES 20 million in the period 1996-97 to KES 800 million for the period 2008-09.

A study on the Secondary School Bursary Scheme by Orodho and Njeru (2003) identified major weaknesses of the secondary school bursary scheme as lack of transparency, inadequacy of funds, fluctuations of the amount allocated, disbursement delays, lack of uniform criteria for identification of the poor students and inadequate equity consideration. From the financial year 2003/2004 however, the bursary funds disbursements methods were changed and funds are now disbursed directly to the 210 constituencies at District Level. Each Constituency gets an initial KES one million and the remaining amount is disbursed on the basis of constituency students’ enrollment and District Poverty Index. The funds are then disbursed to the selected students in secondary schools (Nyawira, 2015). Though there is great concern on low retention from the stakeholders, there is limited evidence that systematic studies have been carried out to establish the effectiveness of Constituency Bursary Funds in enhancing needy students’ retention in secondary schools education. This study hence sought to identify the effectiveness of constituency bursary funds in enhancing retention of students in secondary schools in Manyatta constituency, Embu County.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a descriptive survey research design across a target population comprising of all the 46 secondary schools in Kibra Sub-County. Of the 46 secondary schools, 7 are public while 39 are private secondary schools. All the secondary school principals, form three and four class-teachers, matrons and students including the quality assurance and standards officer are in Kibra Sub-County.

The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling procedures. 7 public secondary schools were selected by use of purposive sampling and 10 private secondary schools were selected using cluster random sampling to ensure that all school categories were selected and fairly represented. The total number of schools therefore was 17 which formed 37% of the total 46 secondary schools which is higher than the minimum 10% recommended as a representative sample size by Creswell (2014). Head teachers, Form three and four class teachers and matrons were selected by convenience sampling. Quality assurance and standards officers were selected by Expert Sampling. In selecting the students, purposive sampling was used to
select form three and four students. In selecting the sample size for the students from the 17 secondary schools selected above, the study adopted the formula developed by Fisher, Laing, Stoeckel and Townsend (1991) as follows:

\[ n = \frac{z^2pq}{d^2} \]

Where:

- \( n \) = the desired sample size
- \( z \) = the standard normal deviation, set at 1.96 which corresponds to 95% confidence
- \( d \) = Acceptance range of error set at 0.05
- \( p \) = participating rate in the Kibra Sub- county secondary schools was 30%
- \( q \) = Non-participating rate Kibra Sub- county secondary schools was 70%

When Population >10,000 pupils,

\[ n = \frac{(1.96^2 \times 0.3 \times 0.7)}{0.05^2} = 323 \]

respondents were selected using proportionate random sampling across all schools selected to participate, since the target population is >10,000 i.e. 69,934 (MoE, 2014). Simple random sampling technique was used to select the specific respondents in form 3 and 4 from the selected schools.

With regards to the research instruments, questionnaires, observation guides, interview schedules and document analysis were used for data collection. Questionnaires were used to gather data from principals and students, while interview schedules were used to collect data from the school matrons and Sub-county quality and standard education officer. The study utilized an observation guide used to gather data on the actual state of nutrition and WASH facilities in the selected schools. Document analysis was carried out in all sampled schools. The documents analysed included; enrollment records (admission register, class register), KCSE results from the last five years, school KCSE mean score records from the last five years and inventory of school WASH facilities.

Quantitative data collected from the field was arranged, coded using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution were employed to analyse the quantitative data. The results of data analysis were presented using frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data on the other hand was analysed by arranging responses according to the research questions and objectives. Qualitative data was placed under themes consistent with the research objectives and conclusions made based on trends and patterns of responses.
RESULTS

Background data of the respondents

The background data of participants was sought with the aim of establishing their distribution by gender for both principals and students and class level for students. Out of the 10 principals, 60% were male while 40% were females. As for the students, slightly more than half of the respondents who participated in this study were male as compared to the female respondents who were 42%. 32% of the students indicated they were in form 2, 28% were in form 3 while 40% indicated they were in form 4.

Effectiveness of Constituency Bursary Funds In Enhancing Retention Of Students In Secondary Schools in Manyatta Constituency, Embu County

In this study, the effectiveness of constituency bursary funds in enhancing retention of students in secondary schools in Manyatta constituency was sought. The items analyzed included: extent to which the criteria given by the Ministry of Education on bursary allocation is followed, extent to which constituency bursary fund retains students in secondary schools, challenges faced in bursary funds disbursement and improvements that can be adapted to create efficiency of the bursary scheme.

Extent to which the Criteria given by The Ministry of Education on Bursary Allocation is Followed

The respondents were asked to give the procedure employed in disbursement of bursaries in the constituency. Table 3.1 illustrates the procedures employed in bursary disbursement in schools.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School provide forms for students to fill every term and apply for the bursary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head teachers decide the students to benefit</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and head teachers review school records and pick worthy students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The board of governors decide who to benefit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with huge fee balances are considered</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table shows that majority (80%) of the principals indicated that they decided which students benefited from the bursaries, 70% indicated that students with huge fee balances were considered while another 70% indicated that the students apply for the bursaries.

**Extent to which Constituency Bursary Fund Retains Students in Secondary Schools**

The study sought to find out the extent to which the constituency bursary fund retains students in secondary schools. Table 3.2 shows principals’ ratings of the impact of the constituency bursary scheme on secondary education retention.

Table 3.2

*Bursary scheme impact on retention*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Bursary Scheme on Retention</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has raised retention by 25% - 49%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has raised retention by below 25%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that 50% of the principals indicated that the bursary scheme had raised retention by 25% - 49% while another 50% indicated retention was below 25%.

**Challenges Faced in Bursary Funds Disbursement**

The research sought to examine the challenges faced in bursary funds disbursement at both the school level and constituency level. The distribution of these challenges is illustrated in tables 3.3 and 3.4 respectively.
Table 3.3

School level challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of transparency</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In genuine cases apply and benefit instead of the needy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of clear bursary disbursement procedures</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate funds to meet demand of needy students</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sycophancy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from the school board in disbursement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 3.3, 90% of the principals indicated that the biggest challenge they encountered was inadequate funds to meet the needs of the students, which lowered the retention rates. 80% indicated that there was lack of transparency in disbursement of funds while 70% indicated that they lacked clear bursary disbursement procedures.

Table 3.4

Constituency bursary committee level challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of precision</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process is slow and cumbersome</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited funds and the population of students to be considered is large</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No clear guidelines on identifying needy cases</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralization of bursary funds</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 shows that 90% of the principals indicated the biggest challenge at the constituency level was corruption and that the process was slow and cumbersome. Another 80% indicated that there was lack of precision while the same percentage indicated that there was centralization of bursary funds.
**Improvements that can be adapted to Create Efficiency of the Bursary Scheme**

The respondents were asked to indicate the improvements that can be adapted to create efficiency of the bursary scheme. Table 3.5 shows the participants' views on the improvements that can be adapted to create efficiency of the bursary scheme.

Table 3.5

*Improvements recommended for bursary scheme efficiency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvements</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th></th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process should be made faster</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair distribution of funds</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bursary should be allocated according to need</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms should be readily available</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate funds should be allocated to students</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The category of distribution should be clearly stipulated</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds should be sent directly to schools</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency in distribution should be practiced</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that 80% of the students and 90% of the principals indicated that there should be fair distribution of funds, 79% of the students and 70% of the principals indicated that bursaries should be allocated according to need. Further, 75% of the students and 80% of the principals indicated that adequate funds should be allocated to schools while 74% of the students and 80% of the principals indicated that there should be transparency in distribution of funds.

**DISCUSSION**

From the findings, with regards to bursary award criteria, 80% of the principals indicated that they decide on the students who benefit from the bursaries while 70% indicated that students with huge fee balances were considered. Another 70% indicated that the students apply for the bursaries. This aligns with a previous study by Sirak (2015), which showed that in most cases head teachers ultimately decided who was to receive bursary without referring to the Board of Governors or the teaching staff.
Additionally, findings from this study found out that 50% of the principals indicated that the bursary scheme had raised retention by 25% - 49%. Another 50% indicated retention was below 25%. A previous study by Oyaro, (2008) concurs with these findings since it established that despite efforts by the government to improve access and retention of students in secondary schools, evidence showed that access to secondary education was still highly skewed in favor of the rich. A study by Okoth (2009) also agrees with these results since it found out that thousands of poor students in Kenya do not benefit from CBF leading to dropouts. Okoth (2009) further reiterates that there are loopholes in the allocation of bursaries. There is therefore need to carefully assess the effectiveness of CBF against one of its main objectives which is ensuring retention of those who enter secondary schools.

Regarding the constraints faced in bursary disbursements at the school level, 90% of the principals indicated that the biggest challenge they encountered was inadequate funds to meet the needs of the students, 80% indicated that there was lack of transparency and another 70% indicated that they lacked clear bursary disbursement procedures. This concurs with a study by Forster (2008) which recommended that strategic considerations should focus on how to maximize on the impact of the limited funding available, rather than on simply finding more money for all financially needy students. Regarding challenges faced at the constituency level, 90% of the principals indicated that the process was slow and cumbersome. Similarly, 90% of the principals also indicated that the biggest challenge faced at the constituency level was corruption. This concurs with a study by Sharon (2018) that revealed numerous challenges with the existing funding mechanism, in particular the fact that some students were clearly being awarded multiple or high value bursaries, totally unrelated to their academic performance. Another study on the Secondary School Bursary Scheme by Orodho and Njeru (2003) also aligns with these findings since it identified major weaknesses of the secondary school bursary scheme. The weaknesses included: lack of transparency, inadequacy of funds, fluctuations of the amount allocated, disbursement delays; lack of uniform criteria for identification of the poor students and inadequate equity consideration (Orodho and Njeru, 2003).

On the issue of improvements that can be done to improve CBF efficiency, 72.7% of the respondents indicated that there should be fair distribution of funds, 71.8% indicated that bursaries should be allocated according to need, 75% indicated that adequate funds should be allocated to schools while 74% indicated that there should be transparency in distribution of funds. This aligns with a study by Chigos and Blagg (2017) which established that policymakers should aim for equity in education funding by ensuring that districts (and their students) across the state have access to the same resources.
CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that despite students having applied for bursary funds, not all deserving cases benefited from the funds. This is mostly because the funds allocated to constituencies were not enough to meet the needs of all the deserving students. The study established that bursary schemes slightly improved secondary school retention rates, which means that there may be other factors affecting retention rates other than the availability of funds. The study also found out that the most common challenges faced in the distribution of bursary funds were lack of transparency, lack of clear procedures, corruption and that the process was slow and cumbersome since students didn’t know the amount to expect and when they would receive it.

The study hence recommends that there should be equal distribution of funds to schools. As girls tend to have more needs than boys, this should be taken into consideration when distributing funds. Moreover, the process has been known to be slow and cumbersome, so the government should ensure close monitoring of the bursary disbursement to improve efficiency and effectiveness. There should also be greater involvement of head teachers and students in the disbursement process. Lastly, it is recommended that there should be clarification on the bursary qualification criteria because some students who have single parents or orphaned are not necessarily needy. The criteria should therefore be revised.

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