

Public Financing and Enrollment in TVET Institutions: Policy Efficacy and Sustainability Challenges in Kenya

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Abstract: Kenya has significantly expanded public financing for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to drive skills development and youth employment, as outlined in its Vision 2030 and the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA). However, the efficacy of these financing policies in fostering sustainable enrollment growth remains a critical policy question. This study assesses the effect of public financing policies specifically government capitation grants, bursary accessibility, budgetary disbursement efficiency, and public awareness strategies, on enrollment rates in public TVET institutions in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. This study applied systematic review methodology, guided by PRISMA standards, to synthesize empirical and theoretical evidence on the influence of public financing mechanisms such as capitation grants, bursary schemes, disbursement efficiency, and public awareness on TVET enrollment in Kenya, using a comprehensive search across major databases and government sources, predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria, and a structured multi-stage screening process. Data from the final 12 eligible studies were analyzed through a thematic narrative synthesis that identified key patterns, mediating factors, and sustainability challenges shaping the relationship between financing policies and enrollment outcomes in TVET institutions. Findings indicate that while capitation grants and bursaries have a statistically significant positive effect on enrollment, their impact is substantially moderated by chronic disbursement delays and inadequate public awareness. The study reveals a tension between quantitative enrollment success and qualitative strain on institutional capacity. We conclude that the current financing model, while improving access, risks compromising training quality and long-term sustainability. Policy recommendations include institutionalizing timely and predictable fund disbursement, integrating targeted awareness campaigns with simplified application processes, and decoupling funding from enrollment numbers to include performance and capacity-based grants to ensure both access and quality.

Keywords: TVET Financing, Enrollment Rates, Education Policy, Capitation Grants, Kenya, Skills Development

I. Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is globally recognized as a strategic lever for equipping youth with employable skills, reducing unemployment, and fostering inclusive economic growth (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO, 2016). In Kenya, TVET reform is central to national development goals, notably Vision 2030 and the recent Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA), which position skills training as a pathway to structural transformation (Republic of Kenya, 2007; 2022). To operationalize this, the government has enacted policy frameworks like the TVET Act (2013) and introduced financing mechanisms including capitation grants, bursaries, and, most recently, a student-centered funding model based on the Differentiated Unit Cost (DUC) (MoE, 2023).

Despite these substantial policy and financial commitments, the outcomes are paradoxical. National enrollment has soared from 275,139 in 2018 to over 500,000 in 2023 (KNBS, 2023), yet this quantitative success is shadowed by growing concerns over overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and overstretched instructors (KNQA, 2023). This suggests a potential misalignment between policy intent, increasing access and on-the-ground outcomes concerning quality and sustainability.

Uasin Gishu County, a regional educational hub hosting three national polytechnics, epitomizes this tension. It serves as an ideal case study to investigate the efficacy of public financing policies. The core problem is that the relationship between financing inputs and enrollment outcomes is not straightforward; it is mediated by implementation factors such as disbursement efficiency and policy communication.

This article investigates the effect of public financing policies on enrollment rates in this context. The primary research question is: To what extent do government capitation grants, bursary accessibility, budgetary disbursement efficiency, and public awareness strategies influence student enrollment in public TVET institutions in Uasin Gishu County? The study contributes to the economic policy literature by providing localized, empirical evidence on the implementation gaps of a major human capital investment, offering actionable recommendations for enhancing the sustainability and equity of Kenya's TVET expansion.

II. Literature Review and Policy Context

This systematic review synthesizes empirical and theoretical literature on public financing mechanisms for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), with a focused lens on enrollment outcomes and sustainability challenges. The review aims to: (1) establish the theoretical foundations of TVET financing; (2) critically analyze global and regional empirical evidence on the financing-enrollment nexus; (3) examine the specific policy evolution of TVET financing in Kenya; and (4) identify key research gaps this study seeks to address. The synthesis is guided by the research question: *To what extent do specific public financing instruments influence student enrollment in TVET institutions, and what mediating factors determine their efficacy?*

Theoretical Underpinnings: Human Capital Theory and Its Critiques

The dominant paradigm justifying public investment in TVET is Human Capital Theory (HCT), pioneered by Becker (1964). HCT posits that education and training are investments that enhance an individual's skills and productivity, leading to higher future earnings and, in aggregate, national economic growth. From this perspective, public financing for TVET—through mechanisms like capitation grants, bursaries, and subsidized tuition—is a rational policy to reduce private cost barriers, thereby increasing enrollment, accumulating human capital, and ultimately driving structural economic transformation (World Bank, 2020). Kenya's Vision 2030 and subsequent policies are explicitly grounded in this logic, viewing expanded TVET access as a direct pathway to skills development and youth employment (Republic of Kenya, 2007, 2022).

However, the application of HCT to TVET financing has been critiqued for its often overly linear and mechanistic assumptions. The theory presupposes that increased financial input automatically translates into effective skills supply and labor market success. This overlooks critical mediating variables in the "policy implementation chain" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Resource Dependence Theory, for instance, argues that institutional outcomes are profoundly shaped by the predictability and timeliness of resource flows from external entities like the state. Chronic disbursement delays can paralyze institutional planning, negating the positive impact of allocated funds. Furthermore, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) highlights that individual enrollment decisions are not solely based on objective financial availability but are mediated by awareness, attitudes, and perceived behavioral control. Thus, while HCT provides a strong rationale for investment, its limitations necessitate examining the governance, institutional, and communicative factors that determine policy efficacy.

Global and Regional Empirical Evidence on TVET Financing and Enrollment

Empirical studies across different contexts reveal a complex and non-uniform relationship between financing and enrollment, challenging the straightforward HCT narrative.

Positive Correlations and Success Factors: Several studies affirm the foundational role of funding. Wasike, Ingendi, and Maiyo (2020), in a study of TVET institutions in Bungoma County, Kenya, established a statistically significant positive correlation between budget adequacy and student enrollment. They concluded that sufficient funding for infrastructure, instruction, and student support is a prerequisite for access. Similarly, UNESCO (2016) global reports emphasize that strategic public investment is critical for making TVET inclusive and responsive to labor market needs, particularly in developing economies.

Mediating Role of Governance: A substantial body of literature identifies governance and implementation efficiency as critical mediators. Marzuki et al. (2022), in a Malaysian context, found that increased financial allocation did not correlate with expected enrollment growth. They attributed this discrepancy to bureaucratic inefficiencies, misaligned funding formulas, and negative societal perceptions of vocational pathways. This underscores that financial inputs are necessary but not sufficient; their impact is filtered through the quality of public administration. Studies from Sub-Saharan Africa consistently highlight that budget execution rates and disbursement timelines are often more impactful than allocation figures on paper (World Bank, 2020). Delays create operational uncertainties, forcing institutions to compromise on quality, which can deter prospective students over time.

The Quality-Access Trade-off: A recurring theme in the literature is the tension between quantitative expansion and qualitative sustainability. Research from multiple countries, including Ghana and South Africa, documents that rapid enrollment surges driven by financing policies frequently lead to overcrowding, depletion of workshop equipment, and overstretched teaching staff (UNESCO, 2016). This creates a "capacity paradox," where the policy success of increasing access undermines the very quality of training that makes TVET valuable. This paradox suggests that enrollment-based funding models, while effective for boosting numbers, can create perverse incentives that strain institutional ecosystems.

Awareness and Perceived Value: The literature also points to demand-side factors. Studies indicate that the effectiveness of bursaries and scholarships is heavily contingent on public awareness and the complexity of application processes (Anyiendah, Odundo, & Ganira, 2023). Furthermore, societal perceptions of TVET as a secondary choice compared to university education can dampen enrollment responses to financial incentives, indicating that financing policies must be coupled with robust advocacy and career guidance.

The Kenyan TVET Policy and Financing Landscape

Kenya's TVET sector has undergone profound reforms, making it a critical case study. The policy trajectory has evolved from the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 to the TVET Act of 2013, which established a coordinated framework under the TVET Authority (TVETA). Financing mechanisms have similarly advanced.

Capitation Grants and Devolution: The introduction of direct capitation grants to institutions aimed to improve operational stability. However, the devolution of some TVET functions to county governments, while intended to enhance local relevance, has introduced complexities in funding flow and accountability, sometimes exacerbating disbursement delays (Anyiendah et al., 2023).

The Shift to a Student-Centered Model: The most significant recent shift is the move from block funding to a student-centered funding model based on the Differentiated Unit Cost (DUC), fully implemented in 2023 (MoE,

2023). This model allocates funds based on actual student enrollment and program cost, aiming for greater equity and efficiency. It theoretically aligns funding directly with the policy goal of increased access. However, as this study investigates, its sustainability hinges on addressing the accompanying challenges of predictable disbursement and institutional capacity.

Bursary Schemes: The national government and county administrations have proliferated bursary and scholarship funds, such as the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) bursaries. While these are vital for equitable access, studies like that of Wasike et al. (2020) point to issues of transparency, politicization, and administrative bottlenecks that limit their reach and impact.

Identification of Research Gaps

This systematic review identifies several salient gaps in the existing literature that the current study aims to fill:

Disaggregated Analysis of Financing Instruments: Many studies treat "public financing" as a monolithic variable. There is a lack of granular, empirical research that disentangles and simultaneously assesses the specific effects of distinct instruments—capitation grants versus bursaries—on enrollment within the same context.

Integration of Implementation Variables: While challenges like disbursement delays and low awareness are frequently acknowledged anecdotally or in isolation, few studies integrate them as core explanatory variables in a robust analytical model testing their moderating effect on the financing-enrollment relationship.

The Localized Capacity Paradox: Although the global quality-access tension is known, there is limited localized, empirical evidence from Kenyan counties—particularly major educational hubs like Uasin Gishu—documenting how financing-driven enrollment directly translates into institutional strain, using mixed-methods data from both students and administrators.

Post-Reform Evidence: With the recent rollout of Kenya's DUC-based funding model, there is a critical gap in empirical evidence assessing its early-stage implementation challenges and effectiveness in a real-world setting, beyond policy design documents.

The literature conclusively establishes that public financing is a necessary driver of TVET enrollment, rooted in Human Capital Theory. However, evidence from global, regional, and national contexts complicates this picture, revealing that the efficacy of financing is profoundly mediated by governance efficiency, institutional capacity constraints, and public awareness. The Kenyan context, characterized by ambitious policy reforms and rapid enrollment growth, epitomizes the promise and pitfalls of this endeavor. By investigating the specific effects of capitation, bursaries, disbursement efficiency, and awareness strategies within a rigorous analytical framework, this study directly addresses the identified gaps. It moves beyond asking *if* financing affects enrollment to interrogate *how, under what conditions, and with what sustainability implications*, thereby contributing actionable insights for refining Kenya's TVET expansion strategy to balance access with quality.

III. Conceptual Framework

The study is guided by a conceptual framework that posits student enrollment rates (the dependent variable) as a function of four key independent variables derived from public financing policies:

Government Capitation Grants: Timeliness, adequacy, and review frequency.

Bursary and Scholarship Accessibility: Number of beneficiaries, qualification criteria, and application processes.

Budgetary Allocation and Disbursement Efficiency: Percentage of budget received, transfer delays, and utilization rates.

Public Awareness and Communication Strategies: Availability of campaigns, media outreach, and community engagement.

The framework hypothesizes that improvements in these independent variables will lead to an increase in enrollment rates, measured by the number of new enrollees, growth trends, and enrollment-to-capacity ratios. The analysis will test the individual and collective strength of these relationships.

IV. Methodology: Systematic Review Protocol

This study employs a systematic review methodology to synthesize existing empirical and theoretical literature on the relationship between public financing policies and enrollment in TVET institutions, with a focus on Kenya. The review was conducted following established guidelines to ensure rigor, transparency, and reproducibility (Page et al., 2021).

Research Aim

The primary aim of this systematic review is to critically synthesize evidence on how specific public financing mechanisms affect TVET enrollment and to identify the mediating factors that influence this relationship. It is guided by the review question: *What is the empirical evidence regarding the impact of government capitation grants, bursary schemes, disbursement efficiency, and public awareness strategies on enrollment rates in TVET institutions, and what are the key sustainability challenges identified?*

Search Strategy

A comprehensive and systematic search for relevant literature was conducted between October and December 2025. The search was designed to capture peer-reviewed journal articles, government and institutional reports, doctoral theses, and working papers. The following electronic databases were searched: Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and the African Journal Online (AJOL). To include critical grey literature, targeted searches were performed on the websites of the Kenya Ministry of Education, the TVET Authority (TVETA), the World Bank, and UNESCO.

Search terms were combined using Boolean operators and included: ("TVET" OR "technical and vocational education") AND ("financing" OR "funding" OR "capitation grant" OR "bursary") AND ("enrollment" OR "access" OR "participation") AND ("Kenya" OR "Sub-Saharan Africa"). The search was not restricted by date to capture the evolution of policy, but focus was given to literature from 2000 onwards to ensure relevance to the current policy context.

Eligibility Criteria (Inclusion and Exclusion)

Studies were screened against the following pre-defined criteria:

Inclusion Criteria: (1) Empirical or analytical focus on public financing of TVET; (2) Examination of the link between financing and enrollment/access; (3) Context: Kenya or comparable Sub-Saharan African countries; (4) Publication type: peer-reviewed articles, official reports, dissertations; (5) Language: English.

Exclusion Criteria: (1) Studies focused solely on higher academic university education; (2) Commentary articles without empirical or analytical data; (3) Studies published before 2000, unless deemed seminal to policy history; (4) Literature not accessible in full text.

Study Selection and Screening Process

The study selection process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. Initial database searches yielded 487 records. After removing 112 duplicates, 375 titles and abstracts were screened for relevance. This screening excluded 241 records that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The remaining 134 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 122 were excluded with reasons (e.g., wrong context, no focus on enrollment, inadequate methodology), resulting in 12 studies being included for final synthesis. This process was conducted independently by the author, with a sample verified by a research supervisor to ensure consistency.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data from the 12 included studies were extracted using a standardized template capturing: author(s) and year, study location, methodology, financing variables examined, key findings on enrollment, and identified challenges. Given the methodological diversity of the included studies (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods), a thematic narrative synthesis approach was adopted. This involved: (1) Developing initial descriptive themes aligned with the review questions (e.g., "Effect of Capitation," "Role of Disbursement Delays"); (2) Iteratively analyzing and categorizing findings from each study into these themes; (3) Identifying cross-cutting patterns, contradictions, and emergent themes (e.g., the "capacity paradox"); and (4) Synthesizing the evidence into a coherent analytical narrative that addresses the review aim.

V. Synthesis of Findings

The synthesis of 12 included studies reveals a complex and nuanced picture of how public financing influences TVET enrollment. The evidence confirms the foundational importance of financial investment but consistently highlights that policy outcomes are powerfully mediated by implementation factors and systemic constraints. The findings are organized into four central thematic areas.

Capitation and Bursaries

The literature unequivocally identifies direct financial injections as primary drivers of enrollment. Studies from multiple Kenyan counties, including Bungoma (Wasike et al., 2020) and Vihiga (Anyiendah et al., 2023), establish a strong positive correlation between the availability of government capitation grants and increased student intake. The mechanism is straightforward: reliable institutional funding allows for stable operations, making TVET provision viable. Similarly, bursary and scholarship schemes are consistently cited as critical demand-side enablers. Research indicates that for a significant majority of students from low-income backgrounds, these financial aids are the decisive factor in choosing to enroll (MoE, 2023).

However, the synthesis uncovers a critical divergence between policy intent and lived reality. While the *allocation* of funds is linked to higher enrollment, the *management* of these funds introduces severe friction. A dominant theme across administrative and audit reports is the chronic unpredictability of disbursements. Studies incorporating institutional leader interviews (e.g., in national polytechnics) reveal that capitation grants often arrive late and in fragmented tranches (KNQA, 2023). This unpredictability paralyzes strategic planning, forcing institutions to defer essential capital expenditures on workshop equipment and infrastructure maintenance. Consequently, the very funds designed to boost enrollment indirectly undermine the capacity to deliver quality

training to the enlarged student body. On the bursary front, the literature points to significant administrative bottlenecks. Complex application procedures, opaque eligibility criteria, and politicized allocation processes are frequently cited barriers that prevent equitable access, thereby "leaking" the potential enrollment impact of these funds (Anyiendah et al., 2023).

Disbursement Efficiency

Emerging as perhaps the most potent theme, the efficiency of fund disbursement is not merely an operational detail but a central determinant of policy success. The synthesized evidence suggests that timely and predictable fund flows are as consequential as the funding amount itself. Studies that specifically examined budget execution found that institutions experiencing regular delays faced greater difficulty in resource planning and reported lower staff morale, which indirectly affected program attractiveness (World Bank, 2020). This aligns with Resource Dependence Theory, illustrating how institutional stability and effectiveness are contingent on reliable resource streams from government.

The literature further indicates that disbursement inefficiency creates a cascading negative effect. Late funds disrupt the academic calendar, delay the procurement of training materials, and erode trust between the institution and its stakeholders, including potential students and industry partners. This finding critically moderates the positive relationship between financing and enrollment; it suggests that an enrollment-focused funding model is fundamentally compromised if the funds do not arrive in sync with institutional planning cycles and student recruitment periods.

The Critical Awareness Gap

A consistent finding across consumer-focused studies is a significant information asymmetry. Research surveying prospective and current TVET students in regions like the Rift Valley indicates that a large proportion have incomplete or inaccurate knowledge of available financing options (e.g., government bursaries, HELB loans for TVET) prior to enrollment (KNBS, 2023). Official communication strategies are often described as top-down, reliant on formal notices, and lacking penetration into rural and marginalized communities where TVET could have the greatest transformative impact.

This awareness gap acts as a major, yet often policy-neglected, barrier. The synthesis suggests that well-funded bursary schemes can have diminished enrollment returns if their existence and accessibility are not effectively communicated through trusted, localized channels. The literature points to a reliance on informal peer networks for information, which are unreliable and often exclude the most disadvantaged. This theme underscores that financing policies operate within a behavioral context; the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is relevant here, as awareness shapes attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control regarding TVET enrollment.

The Systemic Trade-off Between Access and Quality

The most critical and emergent theme from the synthesis is the capacity paradox. Numerous studies, including institutional assessments and quality assurance reports (KNQA, 2023), document that the undeniable success in boosting enrollment has created intense systemic strain. This paradox describes a self-defeating cycle: financing policies successfully increase quantitative access (enrollment), but this very growth overwhelms the existing physical and human resource infrastructure, thereby degrading the quality of education.

Evidence from multiple national polytechnics highlights overcrowded workshops, overstretched instructor-to-student ratios, and depletion of tools and consumables. This strain directly threatens the core competency of

TVET: hands-on, practical skills acquisition. The literature reveals a clear tension: funding formulas tied to student numbers incentivize enrollment growth without providing concomitant, timely support for capacity expansion. Administrators report being caught in a bind where financial sustainability (driven by per-student funding) conflicts with pedagogical sustainability (maintaining quality training standards). This paradox, identified in contexts from Kenya to Malaysia (Marzuki et al., 2022), suggests that enrollment figures are an insufficient metric of success and can mask an erosion of the educational value proposition. It presents the fundamental policy trade-off between the quantity of access and the quality of training, a challenge that remains unresolved in the current financing paradigm.

VI. Discussion and Policy Implications

The results confirm that public financing is a powerful driver of TVET enrollment in Kenya, aligning with the core tenets of Human Capital Theory. However, the findings also expose critical fissures in the policy implementation chain that undermine its sustainability and ultimate goals.

First, the strong positive effect of disbursement efficiency underscores that *the timing of funds is as important as the amount*. Erratic disbursement disrupts institutional planning and signals unreliability to prospective students, effectively acting as a hidden tax on enrollment. This finding resonates with Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) Resource Dependence Theory, illustrating how institutional behavior and outcomes are constrained by their dependence on unpredictable external resources.

Second, the capacity paradox presents a fundamental policy dilemma. The success of enrollment-driven funding models creates a self-defeating cycle: more students lead to more strain, which degrades quality, potentially reducing the labor market value of TVET qualifications and making them less attractive in the long run. This aligns with Marzuki et al.'s (2022) findings in Malaysia, where investment and enrollment were mismatched due to systemic issues.

Third, the modest impact of public awareness, coupled with low reported awareness levels, indicates a significant leak in the policy pipeline. Well-designed financial aids are ineffective if the intended beneficiaries are unaware of them or find them inaccessible, a point supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Policy Trade-offs: The primary trade-off is between quantity (access) and quality. The current model prioritizes the former at the risk of the latter. A secondary trade-off exists between a simple, enrollment-based funding formula and a more complex, multi-indicator model that accounts for institutional capacity and performance.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the evidence, we propose the following actionable recommendations for policymakers in Kenya and similar contexts:

Institutionalize Timely and Predictable Disbursement: The National Treasury and Ministry of Education should enforce a strict, transparent calendar for capitation and budgetary transfers to TVET institutions. This could be backed by a performance-monitoring framework that penalizes delays, providing institutions with the financial certainty needed for effective planning.

Decouple Funding from Enrollment with a Hybrid Model: Introduce a revised funding formula that combines a base grant (linked to institutional capacity and infrastructure) with a variable enrollment component. This would prevent the penalization of institutions for exceeding their physical capacity and incentivize sustainable growth.

Launch Integrated and Targeted Awareness Campaigns: TVETA and MoE, in partnership with county governments and local media, should roll out simplified, multi-platform campaigns (radio, social media, community barazas) in local languages to demystify TVET financing options. Bursary application processes should be streamlined and digitized to reduce bureaucracy.

Strengthen Accountability and Quality Assurance: Link a portion of future funding increases to clearly defined quality metrics, such as graduate employment rates, competency certification pass rates, and strength of industry linkages. This shifts the focus from mere enrollment to meaningful skills acquisition.

VII. Conclusion

This study set out to assess the effect of public financing policies on enrollment rates in public TVET institutions in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The findings affirm that government capitation, bursaries, and efficient disbursement are significant enablers of enrollment. However, the study crucially identifies that the current policy framework is inadvertently creating a sustainability crisis by emphasizing quantitative expansion over qualitative capacity building.

The success of Kenya's ambitious TVET agenda hinges on moving beyond a narrow focus on enrollment numbers. Future reforms must address the implementation gaps—particularly disbursement inefficiencies and low public awareness—and confront the quality-quantity trade-off head-on. Further research should track the labor market outcomes of TVET graduates and conduct cost-benefit analyses of the proposed hybrid funding model to provide even more robust evidence for policymaking. By doing so, Kenya can ensure its investment in TVET yields not just a larger, but a more skilled and productive, workforce.

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