



## AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECT OF TUITION FEES ON FINANCIAL HEALTH OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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### Abstract

The role played by universities in the growth of any economy cannot be ignored. Universities make a substantial contribution to the accomplishment of both national and international strategic educational goals. Without stable financial status in the universities, these aims cannot be met. Indeed, the greater attention towards financial challenges in private universities has been influenced by education reforms and the economic meltdown in Kenya and globally at large. This study investigated the effect of tuition fees income on the financial health of universities in the Kenya. A list of 37 private universities was obtained from Commission of University Education as per 2022. The study was guided by the revenue theory of costs and adopted the cross sectional survey design. The target population comprised of registrars in charge of finance, research and extension, Chief Finance officers and senior procurement officers. A Questionnaire was used to collect data. Qualitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study revealed that tuition fees impacted on university financial health since it contributed to payment of staff salaries, employee development, teaching facilities and infrastructural development of universities such as construction of classes, staff residences, staff offices, and libraries are all crucial for university financial health. According to the study, since private universities rely heavily on students' tuition fees, the university management board should establish accommodative ways of charging and collecting fees, branding and marketing their programmes in order to attract more students both nationally and internationally to earn more income and have abilities to fully support their operations. The study will be beneficial to the university management and the shareholders by unveiling on the strategies to increase earnings from tuition fees. In addition, pinpoint areas to venture in, enhance excellence in research, and insight to management of other private higher educational institutions and researchers.

**Keyword:** Financial Health, Tuition fees, Revenue theory of costs, Private Universities.

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### 1.0 Introduction

Strategic educational objectives at the national and international levels are greatly advanced by universities. Globally, the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) advocates for chances for everyone to continue learning throughout their lives. Kenya's national strategic education goals, which are connected to the SDG, are to assure delivery of relevant, high-quality education and training, achieve equitable access to it, and increase education's efficiency and effectiveness. Without academic institutions that are financially secure, these objectives cannot be met. Indeed, education reforms have heightened interest in the financial sustainability of universities globally,

and Kenyan universities in particular. In this study, the financial health of private universities in Kenya is critically examined.

A lot of evidence seems to suggest that private universities with sound financial systems and reliable income flows are able to fulfill their multiple missions (Cernostana, 2018; Agasisti, Modugno & Di Catalano, 2019). Thus, financial stability is about the potential of an institution to fulfill its mandate. Higher education has witnessed financially distressing seasons globally. For instance, in 2017, World Bank declared that higher education was financially challenged globally (Murage and Onyuma, 2015). Currently, private universities are facing more financial

challenges as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic (Ling, 2020).

For the last six years, university enrollment in Kenya has grown by approximately 176% from 77,929 in 2015/2016 to 94,600 in 2020/21 (Ministry of Education, 2022). The need for private universities cannot be underrated, since approximately 45% of Higher Education in Kenya is provided by the private sector (Riach, 2021). With such significant contribution to higher education, private universities are governed by laws and regulations. These universities are expected to operate within the provisions of the Commissions of University Education (CUE), No. 42 of Act 2012, revised in 2020, of the universities and other tertiary institutions. The legal provisions require institutions to deliver relevant and quality education among others. The Constitution of the republic of Kenya 2010 Article 43.1 stipulates that every person has the right to education.

Despite the growth in university education, there has been inadequate funds for operations over the last two decades (Gontareva et al. 2019; Ling, 2020). Many parents are struggling to pay university fees especially for private universities that charge slightly higher compared to public universities. Already 8.9 million Kenyans are living below the poverty line of less than 1.90 dollars a day (Kamar, 2022). The global COVID-19 pandemic and the economic meltdown made the challenges of financial sustainability in private universities worse since the universities had to be closed according to government directives (Ling, 2020). This further increased the inability of parents to pay university fees. In addition, from year 2021 the government of Kenya shifted focus to Curriculum Based Competence (CBC) and most of the spending on higher education reduced funding, since private universities receive funding from the government for government sponsored students.

Worse of, some private universities have been threatened with closure due to inability to meet their obligations, because they heavily rely on tuition fees to meet their financial commitments. If the financial status of private universities in Kenya is not addressed, the achievement of the national strategic goals and the SDG four will be a mystery. In this view, there is need to find strategies that may help private universities continue to operate. The issue was, "What effect do tuition fees play in improving university's financial health?" In this regard, the study aims to

assess the effect of tuition fees on the financial health of private universities in Kenya by considering payment of salaries, employee development, teaching facilities and infrastructural development and support of research activities.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

The revenue theory of costs was applied in the study. Bowen put up this argument in 1980 to explain the rising costs of higher education. This approach is based on the idea that the revenues directly influence the costs in university's activities. Therefore, as a university's revenue increases, they should anticipate an upward spiral in its costs. According to this approach, which is based on the prevalent educational aims of sustainability, reputation and influence, there is almost no cap on how much an institution can spend on ostensibly necessary internal requirements. The maxim "cumulative effect towards spending" refers to how much money each institution may raise and spend (Matthews, 2013).

According to Roger (2000), Bowen's theory of costs is accurate in that predicted revenues ultimately decide the amount of each year's budget. According to a study on rising higher education costs, there are additional considerations, such as technical advancements and specific mission-based needs that are exclusive to different higher education institutions, in addition to the revenue that is available, contrary to what Bowen claimed. According to the author, the fact that some universities frequently have lengthy waiting lists is proof that there is an excessive demand for spots at particular those institutions. Universities with high demand could raise tuition without experiencing high demand (Feldman, 2008).

Following a test of the Baumol and Bowen effects, Martin (2012) came to the conclusion that the student numbers have both a large individual and collective impact on revenue. The management's internal decisions have an impact on how the Bowen theory works. This theory was selected for this study because it is used to explain how money is made to pay for expenses associated with private universities. Universities prioritize which expenses to incur and which ones to postpone using cost reduction, more precisely based on the money available. More so, the theory contends that cost behavior results from

managerial choices, which is crucial for explaining how tuition fee is utilized to cover all the operational costs in private universities

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

### **2.2.1 University Financial Health**

Financial health is the strength of an institutions to support its commitment in order to remain stable now and in the future. According to Afriyie (2015), financial sustainability is all about the institution's capacity to diversify various sources of income by acknowledging and assessing the full extent of the costs associated with doing business both now and in future. According to Wachira (2018), financial sustainability refers to an institution's capacity to create enough money to cover both its current and future obligations without impairing its present operations. Similar to this, financial sustainability refers to an organization's capacity to produce enough income to cater for its demands and keep dynamic processes running at a constant and accelerating rate to produce results and an extra gain (Pop, 2019).

Financial sustainability is the company's capacity to operate with a steady net income, an expanding net asset base, and a prudent asset-liability ratio (Nalwoga, 2021). Financial sustainability is defined by Akeel et al. (2019) as the firm ability to fulfill both long and short term financial commitment so as to maintain the necessary level of delivering the services required. Since an institution's survival depends on its capacity to earn sufficient funds to pay its debts on time, the strength of cash flow also helps institutions gauge and assess its financial strength (Cernostana, 2018). More so, financial sustainability is the best indicator of a university's financial health (Sazonov, Kharlamova, Chekhovskaya, & Polyanskaya, 2015). Therefore, Nalwoga (2021) suggests that financial sustainability may be measured in terms of net income, leverage and liquidity.

Khan et. al. (2017) used financial autonomy, a metric to assess the success of how a company generates revenue internally after paying all of its expenses. The researchers also point out that greater self-sufficiency is necessary for companies to be fully sustainable, which necessitates management paying close attention to financial autonomy and how well operating revenue covers operating costs. According to Harelimana (2017), an institution's ability to function without outside assistance or subsidies is a sign of its financial self-sufficiency. Accordingly, a scenario where all

expenses resulting from previous or present occurrences are completely taken into account and catered for by self-generated revenue of a firm is viewed as being financially self-sufficient.

According to Esampally and Joshi (2016), financial self-sufficiency is a measure of whether an institution generates enough operating revenue to pay for all costs. According to Pavlov and Katsamakos (2019), enrollment trends that are on the decline are equivalent to operating deficits, particularly at institutions of higher learning that rely heavily on tuition. According to the study, fewer admissions and the resulting decrease in income result in annual shortages that could get worse without strong diversification methods. Diversification techniques are essential in a setting when enrollment is on the decline.

### **2.2.2 Tuition Fees and Universities' Financial Health**

The financial health of education institutions and the general standard of academic services are both impacted by tuition prices. To better understand how tuition costs affect universities' sustainability, many scholars have looked into this topic. Rubagora (2012) examined the elements affecting the financial viability of Tanzanian universities. The findings showed that tuition fees were a significant source of revenue for all private universities. In order to pay for their operational expenses, tuition fees were therefore considered to be their main source of income. Therefore, the study came to the conclusion that until private universities in Tanzania engage in fundraising to diversify their income, they should only invest in development and professionalization, focus on the knowledge revolution, and invest in high-quality higher education rather than a large number of universities and students.

Maganga and Demetria (2022) conducted research on how tuition fees affect the sustainability of universities in Arusha Region, Tanzania. According to the study, tuition fees play a variety of roles in a university's ability to remain sustainable, including financing employee salaries, staff training, retention efforts, and the construction of facilities like classrooms, staff residences, staff offices, and libraries all of which are crucial for maintaining a university's sustainability. Research on the effects of tuition costs and financial aid on university enrollment in the United Kingdom was done by Dearden et al. in 2011. The analysis makes use of data from the Labour Force Survey from 1992 to 2007, a time

when higher education funding underwent significant change. The information showed that university involvement was significantly impacted negatively by tuition fees.

Lee, Kim and Lee (2020) conducted a study to determine how tuition fee collection and control policies affected the financial management of Korean institutions. Data from 93 private universities in Korea, all of which were used in the study. The study was conducted during a ten-year period, from January 2006 to December 2015. The study's goal was to demonstrate how tuition fee and government grants affected operating costs, labor costs, and other university expenses. The independent variables were tuition fees and government subsidies. The agency theory of financial management served as the foundation for the study. The Least Squares Dummy Variable (LSDV) assessment methodology for analysis uses polynomial regression. The results showed that although fees in Korea were rising, the rate of growth slowed after 2011, during which time government subsidies were also rising. Labor expenditures, operating costs, and student assistance fees were among the other university expense that were revealed to be rising while research expenses, laboratory fees, and investment costs all stayed largely constant.

Chitsama (2016) examined how low school fee payments affected the operation of schools. The research involved a survey of the schools in Kenya's Nakuru County. The primary goal was to investigate the effects of low school fee payments on school administration and finances. The study had a key role in illuminating the link between paying fees and maintaining one's financial sustainability. On the other hand, it was unclear how many respondents were specifically targeted for the survey. Ahmed (2015) looked into the funding of both private and public HLIs in Nigeria using public subsidies and tuition money. The study included secondary data and interviews. According to the study, public PHLIs only get modest government funding, which must be supplemented by other sources of income.

In Zimbabwean primary schools, Ngwenya (2016) studied on the best methods for collecting fees without violating students' rights. The study was crucial in demonstrating how fee collection need not be detrimental to students. Despite the study's effectiveness, an internet survey design was employed. Such a plan was unable to reach the difficult group, in this case the fee-paying, underprivileged parents in rural areas. It also

concentrated on basic education, despite the fact that primary education faces funding issues that are undoubtedly distinct from those faced by universities and other institutions of higher learning and research. The study's conclusions were unable to pinpoint how collecting fees affects financial sustainability of primary schools in Zimbabwe.

Pavlov and Katsamakos (2019) assessed the long-term sustainability of tuition fees. Tuition fees are the primary source of funding for these colleges. The study is grounded in systems theory and makes the assumption that universities operate holistically within large-scale service networks. The study modelled the interactions among the institutions' financial and service outcomes, teaching staff, available resources, and available facilities using a computational systems dynamics model. The study's findings showed that while tuition fees supported building maintenance and reduced variable costs, they were insufficient for ensuring the long-term financial stability of universities. In 2013, Robinson and Sensoy looked into the financial developments in American higher education. The study's population of 837 funds spanned 27 years from 1984 to 2010. According to the survey, higher education institutions now collect fees in comparison to previous decades in an effort to fund their academic programs.

### 3.0 Methodology

The cross sectional survey design was used in the study. It used simple random sampling. Data for the study were gathered using a questionnaire. Through the use of expert opinion, the study demonstrated face content and built validity. To determine if the questionnaire's items were reliable, the study employed the test-retest procedure.

#### Population and sampling

The population of the study comprised of 148 employees, who included registrars in charge of finance, research and extension, chief finance officers and senior procurement officers of private universities in Kenya. The sample size was 108 respondents. The sample size was arrived at using slovin's model as shown below:

$$n = N / 1 + N (0.05)^2 \quad n = 148 / 1 + 148(0.05)^2 = 108.02$$

#### Data collection

The authors distributed questionnaires to 108



respondents, including senior procurement officers, chief financial officers, and registrars in charge of research, extension, at private institutions in Kenya. Respondents filled out the open-ended surveys by providing the essential information. The respondents were given a good amount of time to complete them.

#### Validity, reliability of research instruments and data analysis

To determine the accuracy of the data collected, the researcher employed content validity. Fifteen (15) respondents, or 10% of the total sample size, participated in the pilot study that the researcher conducted. In order to confirm that the

questionnaire cover the area intended to be investigated, the researcher also consulted research experts. Using SPSS, qualitative data was examined

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Payment of salaries

The study sought to establish the extent to which respondents agreed to the statement on payment of salaries on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Not at all, 2 = Small extent, 3 = Moderate extent, 4 = Large extent, 5 = Very large extent. Table 1 presents analyzed results from respondents in regards to tuition fee on payment of salaries and financial health of private universities in Kenya.

**Table 1: Results of respondents on tuition fees on payment of salaries and financial health**

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Employees receive their salaries promptly	108	1	5	4.3	0.652
Salary deductions are submitted to relevant institutions in time	108	1	5	1.4	0.322
Employees are satisfied with the salaries they are paid	108	1	5	2.2	0.724

The findings in Table 1 show that most of the respondents agreed to large extent that they receive their salaries promptly, which is evidenced by the mean score of 4.3 with standard deviation of 0.652. This means that all the respondents had similar views as evidenced by standard deviation of 0.652. On the issue of employee satisfaction and concerning compensation, the respondents agreed to a small extent that they are satisfied with the remuneration. The mean score of 2.2 with a standard deviation of 0.724 evidence this. This implied that the respondents had similar views. On the issue of submission of salary deductions to relevant institutions, all the respondents denied that the salary deductions are submitted. The mean score of 1.42 with a standard deviation of 0.332 evidence this. This implied that tuition fees income majorly caters for employees' remuneration that is inadequate. The finding entails that tuition fee is used for paying staff salaries. However, the staffs are not satisfied with remuneration leading to low morale. As a result, paying employees' salaries is essential for the university to remain financially sustainable. Staff members that are paid well are able to work efficiently for the sustainability of the university.

Higher work morale among paid employees is beneficial for the growth of universities. Therefore, there needs to be improvement in worker compensation in order for institutions to survive in the long run. This is in line with the work of Maganga and Demetria (2022) who found that one of the roles of tuition fees income is payment of workers' salaries. The study also confirm the work of Rubagora (2012) who found that tuition fee was a significant source of revenue and supported operational costs in all private universities. Pavlov and Katsamakakos (2019) found that tuition fees supported variable costs and assured long term financial sustainability of private colleges.

### Employee development

The study sought to establish the extent to which respondents agreed that tuition fees is utilized for employee development which result to favorable financial health of private universities in Kenya. Table 2 presents analyzed results from respondents in regards to tuition fee on employee development and financial health of private universities in Kenya.

**Table 2: Results of respondents on tuition fees on employee development and financial health**

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. dev
Staff training is done on regular basis	108	1	5	2.4	0.522
Team building workshops are organized by the university every end of the semester	108	1	5	2.1	0.332
The university sponsors employees for further trainings	108	1	5	1.3	0.141

The results in Table 2 show that the respondents

indicated that the training is not done on regular

basis since they agreed to a small extent. The mean score of 2.4 with a standard deviation of 0.522 evidence this. The respondents had similar views, implying that training is carried out occasionally. To a small extent of 2.1 with a standard of 0.332 was the response that team building workshops are organized by the university every end of the semester. The results also revealed that the universities do not sponsor employees for further trainings, which is evidenced by mean score of 1.3 with standard deviation of 0.141. The results implied that tuition fee is inadequate for developing teaching staff. In universities, employee development is essential because it encourages the introduction of fresh perspectives, abilities, and ideas that can be applied to enhance and ensure the institution's long-term sustainability.

Staff with new knowledge and skills could be able to ensure the sustainability of the institutions. This means that some of private universities are not able to upgrade staffs employees skills regularly due to inadequate income from tuition fees. Staff training is crucial because it might make employees more competent with modern techniques in teaching, such as teaching newly introduced CBC system of education in Kenya.

The findings support the work of Ahmed (2015); Robinson and Sens (2013) who found that student fees majorly supported operational cost which include staff trainings in the working station. In many Higher learning educational institutions, they classify the process as professional development, which is described as a learning

experience conducted in response to identified needs. As results, this improves institutions and individual performance in accomplishing institutional goals.

The requirement to maximize alignment between the organization and the environment, structure and purposes and individual employees demands for employee development in order to achieve the intended goal. Programs for employee development are necessary to help staff members and the organization adapt to shifting societal and environmental demands. These programs are created from the perspective of the institution in response to change that is generated either within or externally. In reaction to external changes, there is a need to maximize alignment between institutions and its environment. This is also similar in the context of a university, where the administration should make sure that tuition fees are used to conduct and provide employee development. A Similar study that supported that tuition fees is instrumental to higher education functions Chitsama (2016).

**Support teaching facilities and infrastructural development**

The study sought to establish the extent to which respondents agreed to the statements concerning tuition fee on teaching facilities and infrastructural development and financial health of private universities in Kenya. Table 3 present results of respondents in regard to tuition fees on teaching facilities and infrastructural development and financial health of private universities in Kenya.

**Table 3: Results of respondents on tuition fees on teaching facilities and infrastructural development.**

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. dev.
Refurbishment of university buildings when need arises	108	1	5	2.1	0.423
New infrastructure facilities are added as required	108	1	5	1.4	0.321
Replenishment of chairs, tables, laboratory equipment and books is done on regularly	108		5	2.8	0.500

Table 3 shows that the respondents concerning to refurbishment of buildings agreed to small extent. A mean score of 2.1 with a standard deviation of 0.423 evidences this. This implied that the respondents had similar views. This means that the buildings are maintained occasionally. Further, the respondents agreed to moderate on the issues of replenishment of chairs, tables, laboratory equipment and books is carried out on a regular basis. That shows that restocking of laboratory materials and additional books, chairs and table is done bi-yearly. On the issue of new infrastructural facilities, the respondents denied

that there was no electing of new building done by their institutions. This implied that private universities are experiencing financial crisis. The results are consistent with the idea that universities use tuition fee to upgrade facilities like classrooms, tables, and chairs as well as other relevant teaching and learning infrastructures. Investing in university infrastructure is essential because it can attract more students and competent staff that universities need in order to remain financially sustainable. This generally indicates that facilities are the foundation of

universities' ability to deliver high-quality education and sustain it.

The findings also suggested that university tuition is used to acquire the essential facilities for teaching and learning. Universities should therefore enhance their learning facilities to draw in the kind of students and faculty members that are crucial to their long-term sustainability. More so, consider acquisition of appropriate teaching equipment for quality services. The findings are in line with those of Maganga and Demetria (2022), who found that universities use tuition fees to improve and maintain learning infrastructures and teaching equipments in order to provide high-

quality instruction, which is a key component of a sustainable institution. The findings agree with those of Nyaga, (2015) who noted that there were delays in school fees payments in all the schools and that it had serious effects on teaching and learning programmes.

### Enhance research

The study sought to establish the extent to which respondents agreed to the statements concerning tuition fee on enhancing research and financial health of private universities in Kenya. Table 4 present results of respondents in regard to tuition fees on enhancement of research and financial health of private universities in Kenya.

**Table 4: Results of respondents on tuition fee on research and financial health**

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. dev
University academic staff are funded by the university to carry out research	108	1	5	1.3	0.665
University disseminates results of academic research for its growth	108	1	5	1.1	0.521
University has research publishing services for internal staff and students	108	1	5	1.2	0.442

The results in Table 4 show that respondents concurred that the tuition fee does not support research in private universities. The mean scores are between 1.1 and 1.3 is evidenced from Table 4. This implied that the private universities in Kenya do not use tuition fees for research activities. The findings confirm the work of Dearden, Fitzsimons and Wyness (2011) who found that university sustainability was negatively impacted by tuition fees concerning research and teaching services. The findings concur with the work of Lee, Kim and Lee (2020) who noted that increase in student fees correlated with operational costs, while conflicting results were observed on laboratory and research costs. In addition, a study by Ngwenya (2016) found adverse relationship between student fees on financial sustainability of primary schools in Zimbabwe.

### Conclusion

The study concluded that tuition fees are crucial to the financial health of private universities. These included building university facilities including classrooms, staff housing, staff offices, and libraries that are crucial for long-term viability and the delivery of high-quality instruction. Additionally, it was found that paying tuition is crucial for paying employees' salary. Tuition fee is also seen as a form of compensation that attract competent workers who support the growth of the university. Employees receive training through tuition fees, which is crucial for their motivation and development. To larger extent, the university must be consistent

with the shifting environment, structure, aims, and individual employees' aspirations through employee training. However, due to inadequacy of fees income research activities are rarely catered for.

### Recommendations

According to the study's findings, tuition fees are the main source of funding for all private universities. Therefore, the university management develop and enhance flexible and accommodative fee payment policy. This will attract more students and hence result to more fee income. More so, review and introduce market driven courses in consultation with various industries. The university management should introduce online learning mode. This will attract more students and lower operational costs such as furniture and space. In addition, intensify on income generating activities such as consultancy works, publishing services, diversified farming, restaurants, in order to raise more funding to support the running of university programs and plans. In order to acquire resources and funding for research activities, universities should also work to form partnerships with other national and international organizations.

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