



# Effectiveness of the Presidential Secondary School Bursary (PSSB) on Education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Selected Sub-Counties in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** *The Presidential Secondary School Bursary (PSSB) was initiated as a complementary service to support Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in Secondary education in Kenya. However, there is limited evidence on the impact of the scheme on the enrolment, retention, and transition of OVC into higher and tertiary level education. This study examined the contribution of PSSB to the education of OVCs in Nairobi. The study anchored on the Theory of Socialist Economics of Education and Human Capital Theory. The study deployed a qualitative research design. Using purposive sampling, Nairobi County and Kasarani, Westlands, and Langata Sub-Counties were selected respectively. In each Sub-County, student beneficiaries, Principals, and Children's Officers were the respondents. The sample size consisted of 7 students, 5 Principals, and 6 Children's Officers selected using a purposive sampling method. In-depth interviews were conducted and data analysed using content and thematic analysis. The results show that the profile of student beneficiaries fit with the selection criteria of OVC benefitting from the scheme and that the PSSB was not adequate as most beneficiary absenteeism from schools was due to fee balances. Deserving students were left out due to non-observance of scheme procedures and guidelines. In terms of its impact, the beneficiaries' psycho-social wellbeing was good leading to improvement in academic performance. The retention of students also improved. The study recommends an increase in the annual allocation of funds to the PSSB.*

**Keywords:** Kenya, Bursaries, Vulnerability, Social Protection, Secondary Education

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## 1. Introduction

The pursuit of achieving SDG 4 targets is significantly hampered by poverty, which is one of the most significant issues affecting the provision of education in the developing world in general and in SSA in particular

(Chikoko & Mthembu, 2020 citing Lewin, 2009; Lewin & Akyeampong, 2009; Nudzor, 2015; Somerset, 2009; Tilak, 2009). SSA is the most underprivileged region in the world. The world's ability to accomplish SDG 4 rests largely on the issue of financing education. Given that the promise made to children in 2000 that by 2015 they

would all be able to complete primary schooling has been breached (UNESCO UIS, 2015), there is a precedence for the SDGs not being achieved.

The secondary education sub-sector plays an important function in linking basic education to further training and employment. It is an important component of human capital development and provides lifelong opportunities. However, the cost of expansion and provision of secondary education has been rising in an environment where resources are dwindling and thus locking out some learners (Wamalwa, Sakwa, & Wachilonga, 2014).

So as to realise the right to education while easing unwanted consequences of poverty and vulnerabilities that hinder access to basic education, governments have adopted demand-side financing initiatives under the banner of social protection (Wambua, Saina, & Simiyu, 2017). Social protection includes actions and policies that are put in place to enhance the opportunity and capacity of the poor and vulnerable to sustain and improve their lives, welfare, and livelihoods (Republic of Kenya, 2014).

The Kenyan policy on social protection covers three areas of social assistance, social insurance, and social security. Social assistance is a form of non-contribution transfer to people who are recognized as needing assistance by society based on their poverty or vulnerability (Republic of Kenya, 2011). This assistance is provided based on need and is frequently subjected to proxy tests and is funded by the state (Mbatia, Wamuyu, & Gichuhi, 2020).

The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) led to an increase in the transition of pupils from primary school into secondary education and the majority of this population was poor and vulnerable, and were thus unable to meet the costs of secondary education (Olang'o et al., 2021). In 2008, Free Secondary Education (FSE) was introduced to address the plight of such children subsidizing costs by reducing fees in day secondary schools. Bursaries are one of the methods of funding education that have been employed all over the world to cover the cost of education at various levels. In order to encourage students to participate effectively in their education, it has been employed to lessen the financial burden on parents and guardians.

Nevertheless, this subsidy did not cover fees for boarding schools, uniforms, and other costs. Further, the policy suffered from poor implementation as school principals did not adhere to guidelines (Oketch et al., 2020). In 2003, the National Government Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF) was used to channel bursaries to needy students who could not meet the costs of boarding fees plus other costs (Oketch, Gogo, & Sika, 2020).

Later in 2007, the Cash Transfer for Orphan and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) was introduced to provide predictable and regular cash transfers to OVC households so as to motivate the retention and fostering of children within their communities and families while promoting human capital development (Sanganyi, 2012). In 2021, the number of beneficiary households was 293,665 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2022). In 2013, the Presidential Secondary School Bursary Fund (PSSB) was introduced to enhance secondary school OVC enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion. The PSSB and CT-OVC have a glaring distinction as the former is directly disbursed to public boarding secondary schools for the OVC while the latter is disbursed to caregiver/guardian households with OVCs (Mbatia et al., 2020).

Bursaries have been inadequate and ineffective in Kenya based on past research. Njeru and Orodho (2003) noted that poor implementation of school bursaries was due to poorly developed guidelines in terms of the amount allocated to individual students, inadequate selection criteria, lack of awareness of the schemes, and low budgetary allocations for bursaries. This resulted in nepotism and lack of transparency among other aspects of mismanagement.

Mwaura (2006) in his research found that bursaries were ineffective due to being unpredictable and thinly spread, thus failing in the retention of students up to Form 3; the awarding criteria had no clarity as respondents were not knowledgeable about the procedures. Moreover, the criteria and government guidelines were not adhered to thus leading to its ineffectiveness. Kirigo (2008) found that bursary funds had no effect on the retention of students as beneficiaries were often sent home due to late payments and disbursements to institutions. Mwawughanga (2008) also found out that the NG-CDF had no effect on retention and access for girls as they experienced poor academic performance and absenteeism due to the lack of required fees.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

The PSSB Scheme was initiated as a complementary service to support OVC in Secondary Schools by increasing enrollment, retention, and transition to and from secondary schools. Based on its purpose, the PSSB boasts of helping in the transition of students from primary school to secondary school; Several OVCs have been able to access secondary education up to the completion of form 4 and have become self-reliant; a number of OVCs have qualified and proceeded to institutions of higher learning and it has also enhanced child protection and reduced drop out rates among OVCs.

There is however minimal empirical evidence on the influence of PSSB as reported achievements come from statistics of the scheme while there is less evidence of

experiences of actors in the PSSB as well as beneficiaries. Mbatia et al., (2020) conducted research on factors contributing to the effectiveness of PSSB in Borabu Constituency Nyamira County. The research findings showed that it did not effectively reduce absenteeism among OVC but overall retention was consistent. This study aimed to shed more light on participants' experience with the PSSB among the actors and beneficiaries using a qualitative approach in selected Sub-Counties in Nairobi County.

### 1.3 Objectives

The objectives of the study were;

1. To provide a description of presidential secondary school bursary beneficiaries in selected Sub Counties in Nairobi City County, Kenya
2. To examine the influence of presidential secondary school bursary in selected Sub Counties in Nairobi City County, Kenya
3. To identify constraints facing the administration of the presidential secondary school bursaries in selected Sub Counties in Nairobi City County, Kenya

### 1.4 Theoretical framework

#### Theory of Socialist Economics of Education

One of the theories adopted for the study is Louis Blanc's Theory of Socialist Economics of Education which promotes the need for creating an economy that redistributes income to the poor from the rich in an effort to create equality (Selowsky, 1979). The theory advocates for the Lorenz Curve which describes the geometric representation of income distribution among households in a state at a given time (Wambua et al., 2017). This curve estimates the cumulative percent of households from the poor to the rich on the horizontal axis and the cumulative percent of income on the vertical axis (Selowsky, 1979).

The theory's argument suggests that the allocation of bursaries can assist in increasing a balance in access to secondary schools for poor households. Or else, if education was provided with no access to bursaries; only those with the ability to pay for these costs would be enrolled in schools. In this setting, inequalities would remain; hence, it is important for the PSSB to be offered in terms of their income status and vulnerability to any shocks (Oketch et al., 2020).

The rationale for using the socialist economics of education theory is that it enabled this research to examine the intersectionality of multiple sponsorship shortfalls and how these affect vulnerable students' enrolment, retention, and transition from secondary

education. The theory is also useful in analyzing the enrolment implications of awarding different sponsorship percentages to vulnerable students and how equity in access to tertiary education can be supported.

### Human Capital Theory

Schutz (1960) is credited with proposing human capital theory (HCT), which perceives training and schooling as investments in competencies and skills. Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2008) agree that investment in education is a means to increase the power of human capabilities that can be formed by integrating natural abilities with investments in individuals (Wamalwa et al., 2014).

Economic growth has often been associated with factors of production namely labour, capital, and land. Schultz (1961) conducted extensive research in the United States and concluded that output growth could be well explained by investments in human capital that was in form of on the job training and formal education, migration and mobility of labour, and enhanced adult education and health which contributed to their adaptation to changing opportunities (Holden, & Biddle, 2017).

These investments consist of spending on-the-job training, education, nutrition, and health. Proponents (Marginson, 2019; Deming, 2022) of HCT have confirmed that basic literacy has a positive contribution to worker productivity in low skill jobs while higher education provides specialized and technical knowledge that contributes to an increase in worker productivity. The HCT is supported by empirical evidence which indicates that there exists a positive association between education investments, and economic development and growth (Olaniyan, & Okemakinde, 2008).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Beneficiaries of Bursaries

According to a study by Odebero et al. (2007) findings, bursary recipients were actually deserving, intelligent, and responsible students. This is supported by data from the Odebero et al. (2007) study, which showed that some deserving students were unfairly denied financial aid due to low performance. The next level of need was where a majority of school principals believed they were used to denying financial aid to deserving kids. Furthermore, it showed that despite the fact that the bursaries were intended for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the bulk of the recipients is from wealthy families who have close ties to the local MPs and members of the constituency bursary committee. These results were consistent with Wachiye and Nasongo's (2010) findings that politicians gave out bursaries to followers and family members even when they didn't merit them. This is in line with Mwembi's (2012) study,

which found that the criteria used to identify students in genuine need of assistance had limits in terms of governance, efficiency, efficacy, and consistency of support. Additionally, it was discovered that the fund faced obstacles like political meddling from the local officials.

## 5.2 Influence of presidential secondary school bursary

Secondary education is more accessible thanks to educational subsidies, according to a Lewin (2008) study on financing education in Mauritius. Muhindi (2012) stated that certain governments in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have recently expanded free education from primary to secondary schools despite economic difficulties and deficits. In 2006 and 2007, respectively, Rwanda and Uganda scrapped lower secondary education fees (Muhindi, 2012). According to the Rwandan government, primary through lower secondary education is free (UNESCO, 2007). To ensure high completion rates, this policy was put into place (UNESCO, 2007).

The goal of the Kenyan government's education subsidies is to boost retention and transition rates, which will result in low dropout rates and high completion rates (Masimbwa, 2010). Free Day Secondary School Education (FDSE), Constituency Development Fund (CDF) bursaries, scholarships, teaching and learning materials, and grants are some examples of educational subsidies (RoK, 2008). The Kenyan government announced its strategy on subsidized secondary school education in January 2008. The main goal was to increase the completion rates in the long run by making secondary school education available and cheap to all competent students, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Every student in a public secondary school received a yearly allowance of Kshs 10 265. Through government directive No. MOE.DSEC/5/17 of 2015, the FDSE funds were later to be increased to Ksh. 12 870 per student. Governments all across the globe were urged to offer universal education to their inhabitants at the 1990 Jomtein globe Conference on Education for All (EFA).

In order to improve access, guarantee retention, and boost completion rates, Kenya implemented the Secondary Schools Bursary Scheme in the 1993/1994 fiscal year (RoK, 2006). The bursary plan monies were channeled through Constituency Development monies (CDF) starting in 2003, in accordance with government policies on decentralization, devolution, and community empowerment (Ministry of Education, 2008). The bursary program included pockets of poverty in high-potential areas, slum areas, districts in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), orphans, and female students as its target populations (Onuko, 2012). At 78 percent, CDF provided funding for the bulk of secondary school bursary recipients.

In Kisumu West Sub-County, Menya (2015) investigated how well tuition waivers worked to cut down on educational waste in day secondary schools. Data collection involved the use of questionnaires. The results demonstrated that fee waivers decreased school drop-out rates, resulting in enhanced learning opportunities. Teachers were gracious to accept students who had not made payment and sought out additional donations on their behalf. A noteworthy point was that it is essential for the prompt provision of school funding. A study by Benjamin, Shandrack and Simiyu, (2017) revealed adequacy of constituency bursary funds had a positive and significant relationship with retention ( $r= 0.782$ ;  $p=.000$ ) of students in secondary schools.

## 5.3 Constraints facing the administration of the presidential secondary school bursaries

The fact that students were not guaranteed ongoing financing and that the payments did not correspond to the academic year presented a significant difficulty for the distribution of bursaries (Onuko, 2012). In their 2017 study, Wanjala and Ali looked into how a subsidized fee scheme will affect students' access to top-notch secondary education in the Wajir County public schools. The study used a descriptive research approach with 94 participants as its sample size and 350 as its target population. Since money was needed to run the institutions and delays occurred, it was determined that the subsidized fee plan had not achieved its goal. Payment of tuition payments on time is necessary to gain richer education.

## 3. Methodology

The study was conducted in Nairobi City County which was selected purposively as the research sites which consisted of Kasarani, Westlands, and Langata Sub-Counties have a significant number of OVCs were selected for direct study. A Cross-sectional descriptive design that was dominantly qualitative was used as the study aimed to examine the rollout and adequacy of the PSSB at a point in time. In each of the Sub-Counties in Nairobi, student beneficiaries of the PSSB, Principals, and Children Officers were selected through a purposive sampling technique by targeting participants with relevant data that informed the study. The final sample size consisted of 7 students, 5 Principals, and 6 Children's Officers. The researcher sought consent from the children through their teachers who provided written consent before engaging them in the interview. In-depth interviews were conducted with each respondent and the resulting data was analysed using content and thematic analysis. The basis of content analysis was that texts were a rich source of data that possess the power to provide in-depth insight into certain situations. In order to find differences and similarities, relationships, and patterns among groups of related groups of text – both implicitly

or explicitly – is it important to consider both the context and the participant (Kleinheksel, Rockich-Winston, Tawfik & Wyatt, 2020). By giving structure to a significant amount of textual data through a methodical process of interpretation, content analysis aids researchers in gaining a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The data that was collected on the Profile of PSSB Beneficiaries of the existence of bursary funds, Adequacy of the PSSB, Constraints facing the PSSB, and influence of PSSB on Secondary Education were presented as shown below.

### 4.1 Profile of PSSB Beneficiaries

The research reached 7 students; in terms of gender, there were 4 female and 3 male students with 5 of these students being in the final year of secondary education (Form 4) with two being Form 2 and Form 3 respectively. The students in the 16-18 age group were six while one was in the 15 and below age group. All of the students sampled were in public boarding schools as this type of school was targeted by the PSSB. These students benefited only from the PSSB with the majority indicating that it was not adequate. The PSSB is targeted towards OVC and the results showed that of the sampled students 4 were total orphans and 3 were partial orphans. In terms of their guardians/caregivers' socio-economic activity, they ranged from small-scale farming, and casual labourers, to running a small business.

### 4.2 Adequacy of the PSSB

The study sought to determine the adequacy of the PSSB. The findings revealed that all categories of respondents indicated that it was not adequate. Some of the reasons for this inadequacy were the amount of funds allocated per student and also the amount allocated to a Constituency. According to a Children's Officer;

*“There are a lot of orphan children in informal settlements in need of assistance but the allocation cuts off a majority of needy students from accessing the funds due to its inadequacy”*

The students indicated that they addressed this inadequacy by seeking other sources. This sentiment was supported by principals who shared that they assisted parents to apply for other bursaries and initiatives that support secondary school students' funding. A Principal indicated that;

*“We encourage parents to seek support from available bursary schemes as well as commit to pay school fees partially as per*

*their capability. The board of management supported with ELIMU Kenya Scholarship Fund and Wings to Fly Scholarship referrals and Alumni Association Support”*

The Principals also argued that amounts of money allocated per child also fell short of requirements for fees as the maximum amount allocated per child was Kshs. 30,000 while the required amount of fees was as high as Kshs. 53,554 for Sub-County secondary schools. According to a Children's Officer:

*“The maximum amount Kshs. 30,000 is inadequate since most boarding schools charge up to Kshs.56, 000 per year and most of the needy caregivers cannot raise the balance”.*

This meant that students were often sent home for not clearing the balances and this point to the inadequacy of the PSSB to prevent absenteeism among the beneficiaries. According to Mbatia et al., (2020), partial allocation of bursary funds means students are likely to be absent during school hours as school administrators send them home to collect fee balances thus reducing PSSB effectiveness in terms of retention. Ngatia (2015) also pointed out that the criterion used in allocating bursaries is not methodical to screen students who are more deserving and this means retention is not as effective from bursary allocations.

In other cases, Principals encouraged parents to seek alternative sources of income to cover for these costs. This finding was supported by students; one of the students indicated that relatives were some of the other sources from which they complimented the PSSB. According to one of the students;

*“My sister works for the rest of the money by doing casual labour and also trying other income-generating projects such as making handcrafts and crocheting to contribute to my fees”.*

Caregivers remain a significant part of the success of PSSB in terms of retention of students as they are expected to make up for the balance of fees. This is mainly in cases where PSSB doesn't cover the entire amount needed for school fees. This supports Izzo et al. (1999) argument that the involvement of parent/guardians in their child's academics can enhance their retention while boosting their overall performance. an argument supported by Nthiga (2014) who found that parental involvement greatly influenced the retention of learners in public secondary schools.

The PSSB was designed for OVC who were admitted to boarding schools and this was confirmed as all the students who had benefitted were in boarding schools indicating that the inclusion criteria were strictly adhered to. Nevertheless, respondents further indicated that the

PSSB targeting procedure was not adequate as there were a number of children that missed out on bursaries because they were not admitted to public boarding schools. According to a Children's Officer informant:

*"Those who qualify are allocated 30,000 until they complete Form 4. More money should be allocated to sub-counties so that more children can be able to access the funds. Most orphans are in day schools and cannot afford to join attend boarding schools therefore they drop out of school".*

### 4.3 Constraints facing the PSSB

There are constraints facing the disbursement of the PSSB and these were highlighted by the Principals. These challenges included the inconsistency of disbursement, delayed payments, and bouncing checks. One of the principals said that:

*"Sometimes the funds are late to reflect on school accounts and this often caused an inconvenience for the school as students are required to attend at a specified date and the funds should already be available in the school account"*

In dealing with these constraints, the Children's Officers undertook several actions to address these challenges. These included a recording of complaints and grievances and then giving clarification on the type of schools that meet the criteria and frequency of payment addressing issues through the Presidential Bursary Sub Committee (PBSC) which is a Sub Committee of the Constituency Social Assistance Committee (CSAC) to discuss and give feedback for the way forward by always being in contact with schools to help in addressing issues of overpayments; and liaising with caregivers and principals on issues to do with the action to be taken before the funds are disbursed.

There was evidence that needy students were left out of the PSSB allocation due to procedural issues implying that there was an issue in the application procedure for OVC beneficiaries. The Children's Officers were asked what measures they took to correct these challenges. According to a Children's Officer respondent;

*"If a student is excluded from the program by mistake, we make sure he/she is included in the next intake. In case a student is included by mistake we do remove them from the list. The committee ensures that only the deserving children are included. In the event they are not allocated we ensure they will be on the waiting list or we referred to NG-CDF or other bursaries"*

The exclusion of students in bursary schemes is not a new phenomenon as other studies have found deserving students missing out from benefitting while there was the inclusion of non-deserving students and "ghost" students. Ojwang (2022) research revealed that there were fewer students being awarded bursaries, and "ghost" students were allocated bursaries while other less deserving students were included in the scheme.

### 4.4 Influence of PSSB on Secondary Education

This research also aimed at determining the influence that the bursary had on beneficiaries' education in the selected Sub-Counties. One of these impacts was the positive influence that access to bursaries was able to have on the psycho-social wellbeing of students as student respondents indicated being less worried about their school fees and thus were able to pay attention to their academic achievement. According to a student informant:

*"At least it [PSSB] has eased my school fees though it's not enough I appreciate the role it has played in my education; I have the assurance that I can always be in school as my parent struggles to top up on the balance"*

The positive influence of PSSB on psycho-social wellbeing was also supported by Children's Officers and principals. According to a Children's Officer informant:

*"The child performs better because they are settled and they do not suffer from anxiety of being sent away from school because of fees. Students who benefit from the PSSB are protected from the emotional trauma of being overtaken by their peers in academic progression as they are able to remain in school like the others"*

On their academic performance, the respondents indicated that benefitting from the PSSB had contributed to improved academic performance. A student explained this point as follows:

*"My academic performance has been good over the years since I have more peace knowing that fees problems are solved. I give it my best to improve my performance although there are some challenges, but I try my best and pass exams".*

In terms of retention, the findings were mixed as 2 respondents reported missing out some school days due to late disbursement of funds to their schools. This number was less than the 3 who indicated not being sent away from school implying that some school administrators subscribed to sending students away from

school. A principal further elaborated on this point by stating that:

*“The admission procedure states that students have to report to school before PSSB funds are disbursed. However, there are often late payments or issues where students who were qualified and listed to benefit miss out on disbursement of funds and this leads to friction between the school, children’s office, and parents when students are sent home”.*

According to these results, it was clear that PSSB contributed to retaining the students in school. The findings concurred with another study in Baringo County in Kenya which showed that bursary funds played a role in retaining needy students in school. In a study on the Influence of public awareness of County bursary fund allocation on the retention of needy secondary school students in Baringo County, Kenya. Tallam and Njoroge (2020) found that school principals (61.1%), bursary applicants (65.9%), and bursary committee secretaries (80.0%) agreed that the fund played a role in the retention of needy students in secondary schools.

The study further aimed to determine the impact of PSSB on students’ transition from secondary education among its beneficiaries. Out of the interviews, principals argued that some of their students were able to transition into College and Tertiary institutions. However, this was difficult to establish as there was no tracing or continued communication with beneficiaries after completing their secondary education. Nevertheless, Children’s Officers and principals both explained that they were aware of PSSB beneficiaries having proceeded to higher educational institutions after completion of their secondary education. In South Africa, Lombard (2020) found that bursaries did have a contribution to the completion and transition of learners. In Malawi, Hapompwe, Siwale, and Tauro (2020) established that bursary amounts sustained girl beneficiaries in schools but it did not translate to the automatic transition of students to higher education.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that the PSSB was an important innovation in enhancing OVC access to secondary education. The scheme also contributed to better care and support for OVC because the school fees burden had been reduced and the OVC retained at the community level. This will also help to prevent cases of double dipping where some students benefit from multiple bursary schemes at the expense of other eligible beneficiaries.

The findings show PSSB was inadequate to fulfill the demand for OVC secondary education in the selected counties as well as for individual students. It is recommended that there be a mechanism where the PSSB structure and the multiple bursary schemes for OVC can be integrated to facilitate students missing opportunities from the PSSB to access other bursary schemes at the Sub-County level.

There was not much evidence of the influence of the PSSB on the transition of its beneficiaries. Thus, it is recommended that the Children’s Office establish the following mechanism and keep contact with beneficiaries of the PSSB in an effort to track their progress after the completion of their secondary education.

The study concludes that bursaries contributed to positive psycho-social wellbeing as most students indicated they were less “stressed” about the source of funds for their education and this allowed them to concentrate on their studies.

### 5.2 Recommendations

This study, informed by the findings recommends that there is a need for psycho-social support for students benefitting from bursaries due to pressure from being expected to perform highly and the stigma associated with being seen as poor and needy if one’s education is funded through a bursary. The government through the Ministry of Education may formulate a policy and guidelines on how to effect this initiative through schools.

The study further recommends an annual increment to the PSSB budget from the present Kshs. 400 Million as the findings show there is a high number of applicants that are eligible for the scheme but the funds are not adequate and this leaves some OVC out. The increase in allocation of funds to the scheme can also be used in supporting actors in the operation costs of the scheme in terms of providing allowances to perform more activities such as M&E, students’ mentorship, and follow-ups.

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