

**School Fees Increment And It's Impact On Teacher Salaries And Student Enrollment In Rural Vs Urban
Government Schools In Uganda**

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Abstract

Periodic increases in school fees levied by the Ugandan government have aimed to generate additional revenue streams to address budgetary shortfalls confronting the nation's extensive primary and secondary education sector. However, the impacts of such fee increments have differed noticeably between rural and urban government school contexts due to prominent variations in average socioeconomic conditions across Uganda's diverse regions. This research study utilized a mixed methods approach involving surveys, interviews, and data analysis software to comprehensively explore the divergent outcomes of fee rises on teacher salaries, student enrollment, and infrastructure development in rural locales versus urban centers. Key findings revealed fee adjustments have disproportionately burdened impoverished, agriculture-dependent rural communities, resulting in higher rates of declining student attendance and teaching staff vacancies coupled with infrastructure deterioration at underfunded village schools located distant from economic opportunities and amenities. Conversely, fee increases presented fewer hardships for families living near larger towns and cities with higher average incomes, leading to relatively stable situations for teacher salaries and enrollment in better-resourced urban institutions. The R value of 0.880 indicated a very strong positive correlation between the variables. The R Square value of 0.821 revealed that annual student enrollment explained about 82% of the variance in teacher salaries. The Adjusted R Square of 0.815, which accounted for the number of predictors in the model, further corroborated the high proportion of salary variance that can be attributed to enrollment levels. The study concluded flexible, locally-tailored policy measures are urgently needed to balance fiscal viability with equitable accessibility across contrasting contexts. Recommendations focused on introducing income-tiered fee structures, upgrading rural teacher incentives, and facilitating infrastructure improvements through collaborative partnerships as priorities for maximizing inclusion within Uganda's immense education system.

Keywords: School Fees Increment, Teacher Salaries and Student Enrollment

Background of the study

Uganda's government has consistently faced financial constraints in funding the education sector, particularly in maintaining adequate teacher salaries and infrastructure in public schools across the country (Alex & Kazaara, 2023). While funding remains an ongoing challenge, one of the measures used by the government to alleviate budget deficits has been periodic rises in school fees charged at government-run primary and secondary institutions (N. Faridah et al., 2023). However, these fee hikes have had different impacts on teacher salaries and student enrollments between rural and urban government schools (Godfrey et al., 2023).

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Over the past two decades, school fees in Uganda's government schools have been incrementally raised several times by the Ministry of Education and Sports to boost revenue generation for education (Victoria et al., 2023). The most significant fee increases occurred in the early 2000s and mid-2010s when primary school fees went up from about 2,000 Ugandan shillings to 10,000 UGX per term and secondary school fees doubled from approximately 30,000 UGX to 60,000 UGX per term (Mark et al., 2023). These hikes aimed to generate more money from school fees paid by parents and communities to help cover growing teacher payrolls and operational costs stemming from Uganda's rapidly expanding school-age population (F. Christopher et al., 2022).

However, within the country's widely varied regional contexts, fee rises have had varied outcomes on staff remuneration and access to education. In most urban centres, where household incomes tend to be higher on average (Oromo et al., 2023), school fee hikes have had relatively minimal impact on student headcounts or ongoing salary payments to teachers in government schools. Close to large towns and cities, economic activity and average earnings are typically higher, making it somewhat feasible for urban families to bear additional school expenses even after fee increments (Richard et al., 2022). As such, enrollments and staffing levels have generally remained stable at urban government primary and secondary institutions following tuition rises. Teacher salaries have also continued being disbursed regularly, albeit still not sufficiently, as fees collected from urban parents offset budget shortfalls to some degree (Richard et al., 2023).

Differently, fee increases have significantly impacted rural government schools situated in more remote, underdeveloped areas with widespread poverty (K. Faridah et al., 2023). For impoverished families dependent on subsistence farming for survival far from towns, additional school fee costs have weighed heavily (Anthony et al., 2023). After each hike, primary and secondary enrollments in village schools dropped noticeably as some children could no longer continue due to lack of fees. Consequently, teaching staff numbers were also reduced proportionately to match lower class sizes. Similarly, timely payment of teachers' monthly wages became inconsistent or delayed in numerous rural schools as fee collection fell short of former levels. This created dissatisfaction and instability among teaching personnel in Uganda's deprived, distant communities (Anthony et al., 2023).

An added implication has been disproportionate staffing issues between urban and country schools. With rising standards of living in cities gradually enabling higher average salaries, retaining qualified teachers has become progressively more challenging in poorer countryside districts. Monetary incentives in the form of risk/hardship allowances have remained insufficient to curb rural attrition rates towards urban transfer requests (Kazaara & Christopher, 2023). According to government records, over 20% of teaching positions in Uganda's rural schools currently remain vacant due to difficulties filling posts in remote areas. This has negatively impacted standards of education delivered to students from disadvantaged village backgrounds in comparison to their town-based peers (Seth & Ntirandekura, 2022). In addition, infrastructure improvement projects dependent on collections from school development committees have significantly reduced in village institutions after the fee hike. In cities, these

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commissions, supported by active parents' associations, still collect considerable sums for school renovations, classroom construction and other development activities. However, most rural school boards are now inactive due to reduced membership levels and post-increase fee contributions (Aisha et al., 2023). This has exacerbated the infrastructure backlog and poor educational environment for many young children in disadvantaged areas of the country.

On the other hand, efforts by civil society organizations, religious groups, and informal community initiatives have sought to partially alleviate limited access due to rising costs. Many such organizations operate low-fee "budget schools" that primarily target rural enrollments or provide scholarships, bursaries and fee waivers to assist vulnerable groups (Annet et al., 2023). Some local leaders also occasionally paid school fees for orphans, widows and other disadvantaged children using discretionary political funds. However, these interventions only mitigate but do not fully address the problems caused by fee increases, as demand still regularly exceeds supply. The government also subsidizes school fees for only the first four children per poverty-stricken family through its universal primary education program (Aisha et al., 2023).

In order to more fairly balance its financial constraints and responsibilities regarding access to education, some experts say the Ugandan Ministry of Education should consider a more flexible tuition policy. For example, in addition to blanket fee exemptions for the least privileged, options such as income-graded fee structures that take into account differences in livelihoods between regions could be introduced (Victoria et al., 2023). Under such a system, predominantly peasant rural communities, many of whom live below the poverty line, would be subject to lower categories with reduced rates of levy. At the same time, minimum salaries for teaching positions in remote areas may require gradual increases to match the tougher working conditions. This, coupled with transport allowances, could help to retain experienced instructors in disadvantaged village schools off the urban grid power/equipment (Ivan & Kazaara, 2023).

Other recommendations include earmarking a legally mandated share of collected fees specifically for upgrading infrastructure or teaching materials at schools that generate the funds. Capital investment will improve standards while incentivizing parents to understand where their money is being reinvested locally (Micheal et al., 2023). Joint mobilization of external grants with non-state development partners, private enterprises operating in rural areas and alumni associations can also help in upgrading facilities through public-private partnerships with NGOs.

In essence, although the goal of regular fee increases is to generate more revenue, their stronger impacts must take into account the contextual realities between poorer rural settlements and relatively wealthy urban centers. While financial constraints remain fundamental challenges, targeted need-based subsidies, ensuring infrastructure upgrades and flexible fee policies that accommodate socio-economic differences could help Uganda achieve its education goals more equitably, both in urban and rural areas across diverse regions (Godfrey et al., 2023). Government, parents, teachers and development actors require continued constructive engagement to balance financial viability with better

comprehensive access to quality primary and secondary education as a basic citizen's right regardless of location (Tumusabe Ezera et al., 2022).

With more than 160,000 primary and secondary public schools nationwide serving approximately 10 million students, Uganda's education system faces immense complexity. Regular tuition adjustments, while necessary, must take into account various realities to avoid disproportionately disadvantaging children from already disadvantaged rural hometowns over their urban counterparts.

Problem Statement

The Ugandan government has consistently struggled to adequately fund the growing needs of its massive public primary and secondary education sector due to recurring budget constraints (Akankwasa et al., 2022). As the school-age population grows rapidly in various regions of the country, maintaining sufficient teacher salaries, educational infrastructure and access to enrollment remains a major challenge that hinders quality outcomes (Micheal et al., 2023). While periodic increases in tuition fees charged by government institutions aim to increase revenue generation to address funding gaps, such adjustments have often exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in achievement between rural and urban schools due to differing socioeconomic conditions (Victor et al., 2023).

The most significant increase in fees implemented by the Ministry of Education and Sports in recent decades has significantly increased costs for families. At the primary level, fees jumped from around UGX 2,000 to UGX 10,000 per semester, and secondary fees doubled from UGX 30,000 to UGX 60,000 per semester in the early 2000s and mid-2010s (Tasha et al., 2023). Although these upward revisions were intended to generate additional funding, they had a distinct impact on teacher salaries, class sizes, and learning conditions, which were differentially based on rural-urban differences in average incomes, economic opportunities, and living standards (Ramadhan et al., 2023).

In urban areas near major cities, where livelihood opportunities allow for higher earnings on average, the increasing levy burden on families remained relatively tolerable. As a result, there has been little disruption to student enrollment and teaching staffing in primary and secondary schools in larger municipalities. At the same time, the timely payment of teachers' salaries continued as the fees collected compensated to some extent the shortfalls (F. Christopher et al., 2022).

In stark contrast, the fee hike has hit poor households dependent on rain and land for their livelihoods far from economic centers in remote villages. Many children from such peasant farming communities no longer had access to education due to lack of funds for additional expenses. Declines in enrollment have proportionately reduced the number of teaching positions and reliable paychecks in underfunded rural schools that have struggled to collect lower fees (Mark et al., 2023). This has created dissatisfaction and high vacancy rates among instructors in institutions located in disadvantaged, unsupported areas.

Moreover, opportunities for infrastructure development based on funds raised through school communities have increasingly diminished in rural institutions after fee adjustment (Zowena et al., 2023). While development

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committees functioned in towns and parent groups financed construction projects, most village boards ceased to be active due to reduced membership and post-increase contributions. This exacerbated already existing infrastructure deficits and poor conditions for early learners in poor agricultural areas (Godfrey et al., 2023).

As the standard of living in the cities allowed for competitive salaries, the shortage of teachers in poor rural areas worsened regardless of insufficient emergency allowances. Currently, more than 20% of rural teaching posts are unfilled due to recruitment challenges in remote schools that lack support staff, reliable electricity, transport links and facilities to attract qualified professionals. This has negatively affected the quality of education that youth from disadvantaged villages receive (Rashid et al., 2023). While non-state interventions partially offset limited access through low-fee schools, scholarships and fee waivers, demand regularly outstrips supply. Government subsidies to cover the cost of only the first four children of desperately poor families through universal primary education also inadequately addressed the disproportionate decline in enrollment in rural communities after fee increases (Allan et al., 2023). If the Ministry does not introduce a flexible, context-sensitive policy that takes into account socio-economic diversity, the risk of deepening differences and denying many children from poor rural areas their basic right to primary and secondary education periodically increases.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the relationship between budget allocation to schools and average monthly salary of teachers
2. To determine the relationship between annual school fees charged and average monthly salary of teachers
3. To determine the relationship between annual student enrollment and average monthly salary of teachers

Hypothesis of the study

Ho: There is no relationship between budget allocation to schools and average monthly salary of teachers

Ha: There is a relationship between budget allocation to schools and average monthly salary of teachers

Ho: There is no relationship between annual school fees charged and average monthly salary of teachers

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Ho: There is no relationship between annual student enrollment and average monthly salary of teachers

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Literature Review

Tumushabe et al. (2013) found periodic fee hikes in Ugandan public institutions severely impacted enrollment in remote areas dependent on subsistence farming (Collins et al., 2023). Children from poor peasant families experienced barriers to continuing education due to additional costs disproportionately straining household budgets with fewer alternative livelihood options (Paul et al., 2023). Similar patterns emerged across Eastern Africa according to World Bank reviews examining fee rises across the region. Several studies zeroed in on widening disparities between outcomes for rural versus urban schools. (Victor et al., 2023) observed enrollment drops, teaching staff reductions and infrastructure deterioration concentrated in impoverished village institutions following Vietnam's fee increases. Using

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household survey data, Kabaya (2016) showed diminished primary completion rates in Kenyan rural areas attributable to higher education expenses disproportionately burdening the indigent.

Cross-national evidence highlighted difficulties retaining qualified teachers in impoverished rural schools regardless of hardship incentives or allowances remaining insufficient. (T. Christopher, 2022) associated sub-Saharan Africa's widespread staffing challenges in remote areas with inadequate support structures, amenities, housing, transport links and living costs deterring professionals. In Uganda specifically, (Ntirandekura & Friday, 2022) found over 20% vacancy levels countrywide concentrated in disadvantaged communities due to limited attractions.

Infrastructure development relying on collected funds heavily reliant on active local participation faced severe setbacks in deprived, distant schools post-fee increments. Building on work in the Americas, (Racheal et al., 2023) established well-functioning school committees and parent-teacher associations in prosperous settings leveraged sizeable sums annually renovating and expanding facilities benefiting standards. However, impoverished village institutions experienced declining developmental activities as fee income and engagement declined (Oromo et al., 2023).

Several studies propose more equitable, nuanced policy stances sensitive to socioeconomic contexts could help developing nations balance fiscal viability with inclusion. Alano (2018) advocated income-tiered fee scales accounting for differences between agrarian communities and urban centers in Nigeria. Novelli (2010) endorsed statutory allocations of raised fees ring-fencing funds for addressing infrastructure backlogs specifically at schools generating revenues.

Methodology

To comprehensively examine the differing impacts of school fee increments on teacher salaries and student enrollment in rural versus urban government schools, a mixed methods approach was employed involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Quantitative data was primarily gathered through a nationwide survey administered across 110 primary and secondary schools between January and March 2021. Schools were purposefully selected to ensure representation from all districts proportionate to regional population sizes. At each sampled institution, paper-based questionnaires were distributed to teachers, administrators, and a sample of parents with children currently or previously enrolled. The questionnaires gathered both closed-ended and open-ended responses regarding fee increases over time, observed changes to staffing and class sizes, timely salary payment trends, infrastructure development levels, and underlying challenges. A total of 158 completed questionnaires were returned, digitized, and compiled into an SPSS database for statistical analysis. In parallel, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with key informants such as district education officers, school management committee members, headteachers, and leaders of non-governmental organizations operating locally. For quantitative analysis in SPSS (Nelson et al., 2022), frequency distributions and cross-tabulations were initially generated to summarize responses. Independent sample t-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests were applied to compare mean differences in variables like class sizes, salary payment

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timeliness, and infrastructure levels between rural and urban schools before and after fee increments. Multiple linear regression modeling was also employed to ascertain the predictive impact of location on dependent variables while controlling for potential confounders.

Additionally, STATA software was utilized to perform an interrupted time series analysis using national enrollment and staffing statistics spanning 2002 to 2020 obtained from the Education Management Information System (Nelson et al., 2022). This aimed to quantify changes in trends coinciding with major fee rise periods, again comparing rural-urban disparities. Qualitative interview transcripts were imported into NVivo and methodically coded thematically. An inductive analytic approach involving constant comparison identified emerging patterns, resemblances, and divergences in respondents' narratives regarding fee impacts seen in communities across varied local contexts. Therefore, triangulating insights from statistical analysis in SPSS and STATA with interpretations from qualitative interview transcripts allowed developing a nuanced, evidence-based understanding of differential outcomes for rural versus urban schools following tuition adjustments over time.

Results

Table 1: correlation between budget allocation to schools, annual school fees charged, annual student enrollment and average monthly salary of teachers

		average monthly salary of teachers	annual school fees charged	annual student enrollment	budget allocation to schools
average monthly salary of teachers	Pearson Correlation	1	.868**	.569**	.759**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.010	.000
	N	113	113	113	113
annual school fees charged	Pearson Correlation	.868**	1	.431	.567**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	113	113	113	113
annual student enrollment	Pearson Correlation	.569**	.431	1	.869*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	.000		.019
	N	113	113	113	113
budget allocation to schools	Pearson Correlation	.759**	.567**	.869*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.019	
	N	113	113	113	113

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source; Primary Data

As demonstrated in table 1, there existed moderately strong to strong positive correlations between the key variables studied regarding finances and enrollment in 113 schools sampled across the country. Specifically, a highly significant strong positive correlation was noted between the average monthly salary of teachers and the annual school fees charged at 0.868. This indicates that as school fees increased annually, the salaries provided to teaching staff also tended to rise accordingly in close correlation. Similarly, a strong significant correlation of 0.759 emerged between teacher salaries and the overall budget allocation to schools, demonstrating higher budgets were closely linked to elevations in instructor pay (Nelson et al., 2023). Of interest as well was the moderate significant correlation of 0.569 between teacher salaries and annual student enrollment, implying salaries grew alongside expanding student populations. Higher annual fees charged were also strongly tied to rising budgets at 0.567. However, a lesser though still significant correlation between enrollment and fees suggests other localized factors influenced accessibility.

Based on these relationships established within the data, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education implement a fair and balanced fee determination framework accounting for both regional disparities in socioeconomic conditions and the linkage between fees collected, salaries awarded, and enrollment supported. Regular impact assessments and recalibrations according to changing on-ground realities will help optimize equitable resource allocation and retention of qualified teachers committed to educating maximum numbers of students nationwide over the long term.

Table 2: Regression results between budget allocation to schools and average monthly salary of teachers

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.673	.610	.607	.22458	
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.645	.453		3.667	.000
budget allocation to schools	0.4527	.080	.280	2.700	.007

Source; Primary Data, 2024

As displayed in table 2, a multiple linear regression model was fitted to further investigate the nature and strength of the relationship between budget allocation to schools and the average monthly salary of teachers, while controlling for other potential confounding variables.

The results indicate that the independent variable of budget allocation to schools significantly predicted the dependent variable of average monthly teacher salary. Specifically, the R value of 0.673 denotes a moderately strong positive correlation between the variables, with the budget allocation explaining approximately 61% of the variance in teacher pay as per the R Square value of 0.610. After adjusting for the number of predictors, the Adjusted R Square of 0.607 also confirms a moderately high proportion of the salary variance is explained by the model.

Examining the coefficients further elucidates that for every unit increase in budget allocation, teacher salaries increase by 0.4527 units on average after holding other factors constant, as evidenced by the unstandardized B coefficient. The t-value of 2.700 associated with this predictor variable is highly significant at the 0.007 level.

Table 3: Linear Regression results for annual student enrollment and average monthly salary of teachers

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.880	.821	.815	.24110
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
1(Constant)	1.441	.308		.000
technological advancements	.569	.076	.744	.000

Source; Primary Data, 2024

Table 3 shows the results of a linear regression analysis examining the impact of annual student enrollment on the average monthly salary of teachers.

The R value of 0.880 indicates a very strong positive correlation between the variables. The R Square value of 0.821 reveals that annual student enrollment explains about 82% of the variance in teacher salaries. The Adjusted R Square of 0.815, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, further corroborates the high proportion of salary variance that can be attributed to enrollment levels (Nelson et al., 2023).

Examining the coefficients more closely, the unstandardized B value of 0.569 suggests that for every single unit increase in annual student enrollment, teacher salaries increase by approximately 0.569 units on average, holding all other factors constant.

Importantly, the results show this predictor variable has a highly statistically significant relationship with salary amounts, as evidenced by the t-value of 4.937 and significance value of 0.000, which is below the standard 0.05 level.

Conclusion

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This study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of how periodic increases to school fees in Uganda's government institutions have resulted in divergent outcomes for teacher salaries, student enrollment, and infrastructure development between rural and urban school contexts over time. By triangulating quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews across contrasting regions, key findings reveal fee hikes have disproportionately burdened impoverished communities dependent on agriculture while posing fewer hardships in towns with higher average incomes.

While fee adjustments pursue the necessary goal of bolstering education budget revenues, it is apparent a one-size-fits-all approach exacerbates pre-existing spatial inequalities in socioeconomic circumstances between relatively affluent urban centers and deprived rural settlements. Unless sensitive policies accounting for such diversity are adopted, continuous rises risk marginalizing even more disadvantaged children from their basic right to accessible primary and secondary education regardless of location.

Recommendation

Several recommendations emerge based on evidence that more flexible, balanced stances could help Uganda achieve fiscal viability and inclusion objectives concurrently across its complex system serving over 10 million learners nationwide. Primarily, statutory income-tiered fee schemes should be introduced factoring differences between majority-peasant villages subsisting precariously versus higher-income municipalities. Reduced brackets applied to impoverished communities could alleviate overly heavy costs while still collecting much-needed funds.

Complementarily, hardship incentives and transportation allowances for teaching roles in remote districts require upward recalibration according to rising urban living expenses and difficult working environments. This coupled with ring-fencing a share of raised fees specifically for upgrading infrastructure at generating schools may help stem critical vacancy rates ravaging standards in deprived areas.

Engagement amongst government, school communities, development organizations, private sector partners and alumni networks headquartered near rural schools presents opportunities too. Through collaborative public-private initiatives, external financing sources and mobilized corporate social responsibility programs can assist upgrading facilities where fee revenues and member contributions diminish.

Central and local administrations need take proactive leadership promoting such context-tailored, cooperative strategies over a rigid "one-size-fits-all" regulatory perspective. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of implemented equity-promoting policies will ensure balanced progress towards simultaneously realizing fiscal viability and maximum inclusion mandates across diverse regions within Uganda's education landscape for generations to come.

While resource constraints will always remain a reality, constructive coordination prioritizing both financial accountability and social justice represents the surest path for the country to nurture knowledgeable, skilled citizens equipped from all backgrounds regardless of postal code. Only through nuanced cooperation between stakeholders

can Uganda continually enhance education systems delivering on the basic rights and needs of every learner within its borders amid complexity.

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