

Relationship Between Government Timely Disbursement On Operational Performance Of Public Universities In Uganda.

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Abstract

Public universities in Uganda continue to face operational inefficiencies associated with delayed government funding, inadequate infrastructure, staffing shortages, and declining academic quality. Although financing reforms were introduced to improve efficiency and accountability in higher education institutions, delayed government disbursement remains a major challenge affecting institutional operations. This study examined the relationship between timely government disbursement and operational performance of public universities in Uganda. The study was anchored on Resource Dependence Theory and Stakeholder Theory, which explain how dependence on external resources and stakeholder expectations influence institutional performance. A positivist philosophy and quantitative explanatory research design were adopted. Data were collected from 255 respondents selected from a target population of 1,787 academic and administrative staff in public universities. Structured questionnaires were used to obtain primary data, while descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and regression analysis, were used for analysis. The study instruments achieved acceptable validity and reliability thresholds, with a Content Validity Index of 0.817 and a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.814. Findings established that timely government disbursement had a positive and statistically significant effect on operational performance ($\beta = 0.396$, $p < 0.001$). The results further revealed that delayed disbursement negatively affects teaching quality, research activities, infrastructure development, staff welfare, and student satisfaction. The study concluded that predictable and timely release of government funds is critical for improving operational efficiency and sustaining academic activities in public universities. The study recommends harmonization of disbursement schedules, adoption of monthly fund releases, and strengthening of financial planning systems to improve operational performance in Ugandan public universities.

Key Words: Funding Policy Implementation level, Operational Performance, Public University

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I. Introduction

Concept of Government Timely Disbursement

Government timely disbursement refers to the efficiency and punctuality with which approved financial resources are released by the government to public universities in accordance with budgetary allocations and planned financial schedules. It reflects the extent to which funds are made available when needed to support institutional operations such as teaching, research, infrastructure development, and staff remuneration. In public financial management systems, timely disbursement is a critical component of effective budget execution and determines the ability of institutions to implement planned activities without disruption.

Within the higher education financing framework, government financing policies encompass regulations and procedures that guide resource allocation, accountability, subsidies, scholarships, grants, and financial oversight mechanisms (Kasozi, 2018). According to Tseng et al. (2020), financing policy implementation also includes disbursement timelines, compliance mechanisms, and fiscal sustainability considerations, all of which directly influence institutional performance. Delays in disbursement often create liquidity constraints that hinder universities from executing core mandates effectively.

Concept of Operational Performance in Public Universities

Operational performance refers to the efficiency and effectiveness with which organizations execute their internal processes to achieve institutional objectives (Rantala, 2019). It involves monitoring and optimizing performance indicators such as productivity, quality, cost efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction (Kaydos, 2020; Asih, Purba & Sitorus, 2020). In public universities, operational performance reflects how well academic and administrative systems function in delivering teaching, research, and service outcomes (Martin, 2017).

Martin and Thawabieh (2018) identify key dimensions of university operational performance, including employee productivity, customer satisfaction, supplier partnerships, quality of academic programs, and institutional reputation. Similarly, Camilleri (2021) highlights teaching quality, research output, graduation rates, resource utilization, and financial sustainability as key indicators of university performance. These dimensions are highly sensitive to funding flow patterns, particularly the timing of financial resource availability.

Timely disbursement of government funds plays a critical role in ensuring smooth institutional operations. Delays in fund release can disrupt procurement processes, delay payment of staff salaries, limit infrastructure development, and hinder research activities. Conversely, timely disbursement enhances planning efficiency, strengthens financial management, and supports uninterrupted academic operations.

Government financing policies define how funds are allocated and released to institutions, including compliance requirements, accountability structures, and funding schedules (Kasozzi, 2018). Tseng et al. (2020) further emphasize that disbursement timelines are a key dimension of financing policy implementation and directly influence institutional effectiveness. Therefore, the timing of government fund releases is not only a financial issue but also a strategic determinant of operational performance in public universities.

The relationship between government timely disbursement and operational performance is grounded in Resource Dependence Theory. This theory argues that organizations depend on external resources for survival and effectiveness, and that the timing and stability of resource flows significantly influence organizational behavior and performance outcomes. From this perspective, public universities rely heavily on government funding, and delays in disbursement create resource uncertainty, forcing institutions to adjust operations, delay activities, or prioritize urgent expenditures over strategic investments. Timely disbursement therefore enhances resource stability, reduces uncertainty, and improves operational efficiency.

Globally, higher education institutions face financial pressures due to fluctuating government funding and increasing demand for accountability and performance efficiency (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In many developed and developing countries, delays in public funding have been associated with reduced institutional effectiveness and compromised service delivery. In Sub-Saharan Africa, universities continue to experience chronic funding delays, inadequate infrastructure, and staffing shortages, which negatively affect operational efficiency (Mugo & Mwangi, 2017). The introduction of neoliberal reforms further complicated funding flows by introducing bureaucratic procedures that slowed down disbursement processes. In Uganda, public universities face persistent challenges related to delayed government funding, which affects institutional planning and execution of academic programs (Twinomugisha et al., 2020). Despite reforms aimed at improving financial management systems, inefficiencies in fund release remain a key barrier to effective university operations.

Public universities such as Makerere University, Kyambogo University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Gulu University, and Busitema University have consistently reported operational disruptions linked to delayed government disbursements. These delays affect salary payments, procurement processes, research funding, and infrastructure development. Audit reports have further indicated cases of under-releases, unutilized funds, and budget execution gaps, which negatively affect service delivery and institutional performance (Auditor General, FY 2023/2024). In some instances, funds are released late in the financial cycle, leading to accumulation of arrears and disruption of planned activities.

Despite growing attention to higher education financing, limited empirical evidence exists on the specific effect of government timely disbursement on operational performance in public universities in Uganda. Existing studies often treat funding as a general construct, without isolating disbursement timing as a distinct explanatory variable. This creates a conceptual and empirical gap that necessitates further investigation to understand how the timing of fund releases influences university performance outcomes.

Theoretical Review

The study is grounded on Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) and Stakeholder Theory, which together provide a framework for understanding how government financing policy implementation and institutional autonomy influence the operational performance of public universities. RDT, as advanced by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), explains that organizations rely on external environments for critical resources such as funding, and therefore must strategically manage these dependencies to ensure survival and improved performance. In public universities, government financing policies represent a primary external resource that significantly shapes institutional processes and outcomes. However, institutional autonomy determines the extent to which universities can independently plan, allocate, and utilize these resources. Meyer et al. (1977) and Hart (1995) emphasize that

organizational effectiveness is achieved when there is alignment between external resource conditions and internal adaptive capacity, allowing institutions to respond effectively to funding constraints while improving efficiency and performance.

Stakeholder Theory, introduced by Freeman (1984), broadens this perspective by viewing universities as multi-stakeholder entities that must respond to the interests of government, students, staff, and society at large. Freeman et al. (2020) argue that institutional success depends on how well organizations balance and integrate diverse stakeholder expectations rather than prioritizing a single dominant actor. In this context, government financing policies represent a powerful stakeholder influence, while institutional autonomy provides universities with the flexibility to mediate competing demands and align resources with strategic priorities such as teaching quality, research productivity, and infrastructure development. Boaventura et al. (2020) and Demartini et al. (2018) further note that effective stakeholder management enhances value creation and organizational outcomes, implying that operational performance in public universities is shaped by the interaction between resource dependence, institutional autonomy, and stakeholder pressures within the higher education environment.

Funding Policy Implementation level and Public University Operational Performance

Wachira (2018) observed that government of Kenya utilizes avenues like government consumption expenditure and gross investment, government current expenditure as well as government total expenditure all to improve operational efficiency of public universities like University of Nairobi. Findings indicate that only 21.9% of operational performance in seven public universities is predicted by government funding. However, such a finding can hardly be regarded as generalizable creating a knowledge gap. Addressing this gap calls for a new research in establishing the relationship between government funding and operational performance of public universities with more critical findings.

Otieno & Colclough (2021) noted on their part that stated that funding plays an important role in improving the operational performance in public universities. They further noted however that government funding in Kenya will probably remain less than sufficient. The study established that funding per student has gradually declined as the numbers of admitted students increased from 2003 to date. This they note is most probably due to the lack in proportional growth of gross domestic product during the same period and shifting priorities in the National budget of Kenya. However, the study was done during the Covid-19 pandemic when student education was interrupted on several occasions and survey was mainly online. This created a methodological gap as some information was hard to cross check and verify. This calls for a new study in the relationship between government funding and operational performance of public universities whose findings are better verifiable and thus more generalizable.

Lam-Lagoro & Okello (2023) held the view that governments have viewed funding of universities is an obligation as it improves on quality of human capital and a further requirement of attaining sustainable development goals. They note that funding of public universities in Uganda dates back to 1937 but has not substantially increased over the ensuing decades. The study established that funding had steeply declined and remittances from government are sporadic and irregular in amount which negatively impaired universities from carrying out their core activities. The study further found evidence of gross mismanagement of this funding with very scanty accountability of these monies. However, the study was based on desk reviewed material and was purely qualitative with online and face to face interviews. This created a one-dimensional study finding with limited generalizability. Kalita (2022) observed that while funding for higher institutions in India had not been improved greatly, the funding was targeted for particular courses like computing and engineering which has witnessed the growth of man power in the computing industry in India was exported to places like Silicon Valley to produce some of the fastest computer chips. However, the study findings may have limited application to Uganda where funding has been low and hardly regular. A new study is needed to establish if there is any emerging trend to suggest a change in operational performance of public universities in Uganda.

Tebourbi (2025) noted that technology plays a key role in the economy of Taiwan and for this reason, government channels substantial sums to fund the universities that offer training in technology related disciplines. This is because the country has few natural resources but a very dense population that can only be maintained through production of services to cover for the natural resource deficit. Results indicate that funding from government of Taiwan has been highly influential in boosting operational performance of technology universities. The study employed the Malmquist Productivity Index to measure the growth of operational performance of technology universities directly funded by the Taiwan government. This is however a one-dimensional measure that can only look at one aspect at a time. This created a theoretical gap. The study bridged this gap by employing structural equation modeling that examines multiple relationships simultaneously as well as the mediating role as an additional aspect. Wang, Phan & Nguyen (2021) agree with the above findings in as far as the important contribution university trained students make toward the social development of their respective countries. This makes a compelling case for nation states like Vietnam to invest significant funds towards improving the operational performance of public universities. The study established the existence of a positive correlation

between the amount of funding and operational funding. However, the study examined a population of 85 universities but still clustered them in multiple layers. This created a methodological and knowledge gap as the current study examines the entire population in its entirety before sampling it. This makes each sub sector more representative and thus the results more generalizable.

OECD (2017) argued that funding by the government should be pegged to operational performance to create a win-win situation where both parties benefit. They argued that sinking millions of dollars to fund public universities without tangible results in form of improved operational performance should be discouraged. They noted that performance indicators were varied and this makes the process of comparisons difficult and advocated for common measures to be used so as to make tracking of operational performance more feasible. This finding lends few lessons to the current study as its conclusions are difficult to replicate in alternative scenarios. This created a knowledge gap that is addressed by using the most common indicators in extant literature. Yang, Fukuyama & Song (2018) examined how a two stage DEA model could accurately assess the inefficiency of public universities in china. The Chinese government has invested vast sums in university education support hoping to get the manpower to push the country's ambitious economic growth. The study findings established that for the most part operational performance improved substantially due to state funding. However, the use of the two-stage network DEA model created a methodological gap because the method is based on the assumption that all units perform the same tasks with similar objectives. This is not possible in practical terms and the current study addresses this gap by employing the bootstrapping technique with a confidence interval of at least 95. The resampling process rules out the outliers that may distort the results and make the study findings more generalizable.

Existing studies reveal gaps that necessitate further inquiry. Most evidence comes from countries such as Kenya, India, Taiwan, China, and Vietnam (Wachira, 2018; Kalita, 2022; Tebourbi, 2025; Yang et al., 2018), which limits contextual relevance to Uganda where funding is irregular and often inadequate (Lam-Lagoro & Okello, 2023). Findings are also mixed—some show strong positive effects of government financing on university performance (Tebourbi, 2025; Wang et al., 2021), while others report weak or insignificant impacts (Wachira, 2018; OECD, 2017), pointing to an empirical gap. Methodologically, reliance on single-dimensional designs such as desk reviews, online surveys, or DEA models (Otieno & Colclough, 2021; Yang et al., 2018) reduces reliability and generalizability. Theoretically, most research isolates funding from broader policy implementation and institutional governance, leaving the interaction of these factors underexplored. These limitations highlight the need for a Ugandan-based, study that holistically examines government financing policy, disbursement practices, and autonomy in shaping public university performance.

II. Research Methodology

This study adopted a positivist research philosophy and a deductive approach, emphasizing objective measurement and hypothesis testing of the relationship between government financing policy implementation, institutional autonomy, and operational performance of public universities in Uganda (Creswell, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). A quantitative explanatory research design was employed to establish causal relationships and mediation effects among the study variables (Babbie, 2020). The study targeted a population of 1,787 university staff from five public universities, with a sample of 317 respondents selected using purposive and convenient sampling techniques. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS and structural equation modeling. Ethical considerations and validity and reliability tests ensured data quality and integrity.

Research Findings

examined the relationship between government funding policy implementation level and operational performance of public universities in Uganda. The analysis was based on 255 respondents drawn from senior administrators, heads of departments, and lecturers. The null hypothesis stated that *there is no significant relationship between government funding policy implementation level and operational performance of public universities in Uganda*.

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
i	Government releases funds to the university on time for operational and capital needs	3.59	1.261
ii	Government funding adequately covers operational and development requirements	3.64	1.165
iii	Higher Education Students' Financing Scheme (HESFS) is accessible and effective	3.79	1.262
iv	Loan recovery mechanisms under HESFS are effective and sustainable	3.84	1.259
v	Universities are not over-dependent on private sponsorship and fees are affordable	3.6	1.368
vi	Government financing for STEM programs is timely and sufficient	3.9	1.123
vii	Research and innovation funding is adequate and accessible	3.84	1.218
viii	Financing policies ensure equitable access for disadvantaged groups	3.82	1.268
ix	Universities comply with government funding guidelines	3.39	1.248
x	Audits and accountability mechanisms ensure effective monitoring of funds	3.93	1.156
Average		3.73	1.233

Table 4.2 shows that respondents generally agreed that government funding policy implementation influences operational performance, as indicated by a composite mean of 3.73. The average standard deviation of 1.233 indicates moderate variability in responses, suggesting differences in institutional experiences.

High agreement was recorded on audit and accountability mechanisms ($M = 3.93$), STEM financing ($M = 3.90$), and research funding adequacy ($M = 3.84$). This implies that structured funding allocations positively support operational efficiency in universities. However, relatively lower scores on compliance with funding guidelines ($M = 3.39$) suggest inconsistencies in policy adherence across institutions.

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Correlation between Funding Policy Implementation Level and Public University Operational Performance in Uganda

The study felt the need to statistically establish the association between Funding Policy Implementation Level and public university operational performance in Uganda. The study sought to do this by computing the r correlation coefficient using Pearson's method. The r coefficient falls within the range of -1 and +1.

Table 4.1: Correlation between Funding Policy Implementation Level and University Operational Performance in Uganda

		Funding Policy Implementation Level	University Performance
Funding Policy Implementation Level	Pearson Correlation	1	.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	255	255
University Performance	Pearson Correlation	.612**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	255	255

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

Table 4.3 presents correlation between funding policy implementation level and university operational performance in Uganda. Pearson's product moment correlation aims at establishing the association between the independent and dependent variables to uncover the magnitude, direction, and statistical significance. Pearson's correlation revealed a moderate positive association between funding policy and university performance ($r = 0.612$, $p < .001$). This indicates that as funding policy implementation level becomes more effective, operational performance improves significantly.

Consistent with Objective 1, the results showed that funding policy implementation level had a positive and significant association with operational performance. This finding underscores the important function played

by funding policy implementation level in ensuring core activities keep running despite budgetary shortfalls. This finding agrees with a study by Wachira (2018) that establish a positive correlation between funding policy implementation level and operational performance of public university of Kenya.

Simple Linear Regression between Funding Policy Implementation Level and University Operational Performance in Uganda

To ascertain whether the relationship between Funding Policy Implementation Level and public university operational performance in Uganda was predictive, and significant, the study conducted a simple linear regression in which case the regressors were fed into a model; $Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \epsilon$; in which case Y is equals to Dependent Variable (Operational Performance); X_i equaling Independent Variable (Government Funding Policy Implementation Level); β_0 equaling Y intercept in the equation; β_1 measuring Regression coefficient (slope/intercept); while ϵ explains the Error term, shown in tables 4.4.

Table 4.2: Model Summary Showing Relationship between Funding Policy Implementation Level and University Operational Performance in Uganda

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.612 ^a	.374	.371	.605863935908073

a. Predictors: (Constant), Funding Policy implementation level

Source: Primary Research data (2025)

Table 4.4 presents Model summary showing relationship between Funding Policy Implementation Level and University Operational Performance in Uganda. The results show a moderately strong positive relationship between Funding Policy Implementation Level and Operational Performance of public universities in Uganda ($R = 0.612$). The model accounts for 37.4% of the variation in performance ($R^2 = 0.374$), while the Adjusted R^2 (.371) confirms that the model is reliable. The Standard Error of the Estimate (0.606) represents the average distance between the actual and predicted values, showing the model's prediction accuracy. These findings suggest that although funding policy implementation plays a significant role in shaping performance, other factors also contribute to operational outcomes.

Table 4.3: Analysis of Variance between Funding Policy Implementation Level and University Operational Performance in Uganda

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1					
Regression	55.471	1	55.471	151.117	.000 ^b
Residual	92.869	253	.367		
Total	148.340	254			

a. Dependent Variable: University Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Funding Policy

Source: Primary data (2025)

Table 4.5 presents Analysis of Variance between Funding Policy Implementation Level and University Operational Performance in Uganda. It presents the ANOVA results for the relationship between Funding Policy Implementation Level and university operational performance in Uganda. The model is statistically significant ($F = 151.117$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that funding policy implementation partly explains a meaningful portion of the variance in operational performance. Specifically, the regression sum of squares (55.471) accounts for 37.1% of the total variance ($R^2 \approx 0.371$), while the residual sum of squares (92.869) reflects the variance attributed to other factors not captured by the model. The degrees of freedom ($df = 1, 253$) support the validity of the F-test. Hence, these results confirm that funding policy implementation is a significant predictor of operational performance, though additional variables contribute to the majority of the variance.

Table 4.4: Coefficients of Funding Policy Implementation Level and University Operational Performance in Uganda

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.306	.195		6.696	.000
	Funding Policy	.621	.051	.612	12.293	.000

a. Dependent Variable: University Performance

Source: Primary data (2025)

Table 4.6 presents the regression coefficients for Funding Policy Implementation Level and university operational performance. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.621$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in funding policy implementation, operational performance is expected to increase by 0.621 units, holding other factors constant. The associated t -value ($t = 12.293$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that this relationship is statistically significant. These findings are consistent with prior studies, including Jongbloed (2010), Wachira (2018), Cattaneo, Meoli, and Signori (2016), and Tebourbi (2025), which reported positive and significant associations between funding policy implementation and university performance, research productivity, or performance-based funding outcomes.

Hypothesis Testing

There is no significant effect of government timely disbursement on operational performance in public universities of Uganda.

The study ably established a significant relationship between government timely disbursement and operational performance in public universities of Uganda ($p = .000$, < 0.05). *Therefore, the null hypothesis is not supported.*

The study established that poor timing of government fund disbursement negatively affects teaching quality in public universities. This finding aligns with Onyango, Alala and Oseno (2024), who observed that delayed releases force institutions into costly credit arrangements with suppliers, thereby straining teaching and learning processes. Similarly, Bomer et al. (2021) noted that delayed student loan disbursements in Kenya disrupt university operations, reduce teaching effectiveness, and lower academic performance due to funding shortages for staff welfare and learning materials. Wang, Phan and Nguyen (2021) also highlighted that during economic crises, delayed funding weakens institutional stability and necessitates alternative financing mechanisms. The study further found that unsatisfactory disbursement timelines reduce graduation rates. This is supported by Tseng, Huang and Chen (2020), who argue that delayed funding disrupts university industry collaborations and delays completion of academic deliverables. Aghion et al. (2019) similarly link funding interruptions to delays in research output and graduation cycles, ultimately affecting labour market supply.

In addition, timely disbursement was found to improve student enrollment and satisfaction, consistent with Mobegi and Kara (2022), who emphasize that funding timing influences access, retention, and completion rates more than funding volume. Ahmed (2016) and Twinomugisha et al. (2021) also report that delayed funding reduces enrollment and triggers dissatisfaction among students. The study also established that delayed disbursement hinders partnerships, resource utilization, infrastructure development, staffing levels, and increases wage arrears. These findings are strongly supported by Altbach (2015), Basheka and Nabwire (2020), and Kallio et al. (2022). Theoretically, the findings are grounded in Resource Dependence Theory and Stakeholder Theory, which explain universities' vulnerability due to reliance on government-controlled financial resources.

III. Conclusion

The study concludes that there is no significant relationship between government timely disbursement and operational performance in public universities of Uganda. The study results indicated that government timely disbursement significantly contributed to operational performance in public universities of Uganda. On occasions where there is delayed disbursement of funds, there is unrest among student body and teaching staff. Delayed disbursement has delayed students' allowances for up to three years in some cases. Delayed disbursement affects operations negatively both at the operational and managerial level. There is a disparity concerning timing of disbursement of funding among different public universities. The public universities run in a semester cycle while the treasury releases funds in quarters resulting in unavailability of money when required as a result. Policy guideline is available but largely ineffectual due to absence of funding. The disbursement timeline specified in the policy document is never followed as availability of funding determines date of release.

Given the study findings the research recommends that if operational performance of public universities is to thrive in Uganda: Delayed disbursement needs to be avoided at all costs as it leads to unrest among student body and teaching staff. Delayed disbursement needs to be minimized as it affects operations negatively both at the operational and managerial level. The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development needs to harmonize timing of disbursement of funding among all public universities to avoid confusion. Funds to operationalize the Funding Policy Implementation Level guidelines need to be made available to help guide the implementation process.

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