

Governance Decentralization and Service Delivery in Local Government in Nigeria: A Study of South--East Geopolitical Zone

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Abstract: *Decentralization aims to bring decision-making closer to the people with the intention of enhancing governance and service delivery. This study's primary objective was to investigate the impact of governance decentralization on service delivery within Local Government areas in Nigeria, focusing on the southeast geopolitical zone. The research utilized a combination of descriptive survey research design and explanatory research design to explore, analyze, and elucidate the relationship between governance decentralization and service delivery. The study encompassed a population of 4,166,964 individuals. A multiphase sampling approach was employed to select the study's subjects, with the use of stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques to determine the sample of local governments and local government officials included in the study. A pilot test was carried out to identify any shortcomings in the study's design and instrumentation. Out of the 338 respondents initially approached, 275 successfully completed the questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 81.36%. The internal reliability of each variable used in the study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The findings of this research demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between governance decentralization and service delivery in Local Government areas in Nigeria. More specifically, the study revealed that both financial decentralization and political decentralization had a positive and significant impact on service delivery. Consequently, the study concluded that governance decentralization played a significant role in influencing service delivery outcomes. As a result of these findings, the study recommends the facilitation and promotion of practices related to financial decentralization and political decentralization to enhance service delivery within Local Government areas in Nigeria.*

Keywords: Decentralization, Governance, Service Delivery, South-East.

Introduction

Decentralization has gained widespread recognition in governance, with numerous democracies worldwide, including Nigeria, adopting it to stimulate economic development. Researchers generally support the idea that decentralized governance influences service delivery. Empirical evidence confirms a connection between decentralized governance and service delivery (Olatona & Olomola, 2015; Sow & Razafimahefa, 2015). However, most existing research primarily focuses on developed and developing countries in Asia and Latin America. The relationship between decentralized governance and service delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa remains largely unexplored, with only a limited number of studies delving into this area.

Governance decentralization is deeply rooted in the political economy argument that it enhances service delivery. Nevertheless, despite these theoretical underpinnings, findings regarding the impact of decentralized governance on service delivery are mixed and inconclusive. One set of literature suggests that decentralization leads to improved service delivery, while others find negative effects. These conflicting conclusions necessitate a study within the Nigerian context to determine the effect of governance decentralization on service delivery in the Southeast Local Governments of Nigeria.

When measuring service delivery, the majority of governance decentralization studies tend to focus on service accessibility while neglecting other dimensions such as service quality and citizen satisfaction. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding the links between decentralized governance and aspects like service quality and citizen satisfaction is notably lacking. An exception is a study in Russia by Freinkman and Plekhanov (2019), which found a positive influence of decentralization on the quality of municipal utilities provision. However, this study suffers from conceptual limitations as it only measures financial decentralization, omitting other dimensions like political and administrative decentralization. A more comprehensive analysis that considers all three dimensions of decentralization (financial, political, and administrative) can provide more robust evidence regarding the relationship between governance decentralization and service delivery, thus offering a stronger basis for future policy recommendations.

The Nigerian constitution established 774 Local Governments to enhance service delivery efficiency. However, the transition from central to devolved governance in Nigeria has faced challenges such as intergovernmental conflicts, corruption, rural neglect, poor infrastructure, and strikes. Research indicates that over 53% of citizens are dissatisfied with Local Government service delivery in Nigeria, largely due to a lack of social accountability, transparency, and rural exclusion in governance. Nonetheless, empirical evidence concerning the link between decentralized governance and service delivery in Nigeria remains insufficient.

Local studies on this topic have been limited in scope, mainly addressing the pros and cons of decentralized governance. The study by Macharia, Wambua, and Mwangulu (2014) was also contextually narrow, focusing on a single local government, whereas the current study encompasses all 774 local government areas in Nigeria. Additionally, many related studies faced methodological challenges, often relying on case studies of specific contextual areas. It is the existence of these conceptual, methodological, and contextual gaps that has prompted a comprehensive investigation into effective governance decentralization and service delivery in Nigerian local governments.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to establish the effective governance decentralization and service delivery in local governments in Nigeria.

This study specifically sought to:

1. To establish the effect of financial decentralization on the accessibility to basic infrastructure in the Local Government in Nigeria.
2. To evaluate the effect of political decentralization on quality infrastructure in the Local Government in Nigeria.

Research Question

The following questions were formulated to guide the study;

1. To what extent does financial decentralization affect accessibility to basic infrastructure in the Local Government in Nigeria.
2. To what extent does political decentralization affect quality infrastructure in the Local Government in Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

H₀₁: There is no relationship between financial decentralization and accessibility to basic infrastructure in Local Government in Nigeria

H₀₂: Political decentralization is not related to quality infrastructure in Local Government in Nigeria

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Concepts

The study examines two variables, namely financial decentralization, political decentralization and service delivery. These variables are discussed in detail below.

Financial Decentralization

Financial decentralization, in a broad sense, involves the transfer of competencies, responsibilities, and financial resources from the central (state) level to lower levels of government (Finzgar & Oplotnik, 2013). It is characterized by sub-national governments having the authority to make decisions regarding revenue generation and expenditure (Kim, 2018). Alternatively, Akorsu (2015) defines financial decentralization as a set of policies intended to enhance the fiscal autonomy of subnational governments. Fiscal decentralization is the most recognizable form of decentralization, as it directly pertains to budgetary practices. It entails delegating the power to generate and retain financial resources to fulfill specific responsibilities to local-level political and administrative bodies. This includes assigning functions and responsibilities related to revenue collection and expenditure to sub-national government institutions (Yusoff et al., 2016).

Rodríguez-Pose and Krøijer (2019) summarized arguments in favor of fiscal decentralization, claiming it enhances efficiency, improves public services, increases transparency, and ultimately contributes to economic growth. It is often argued that decentralization improves economic efficiency because local governments, due to their proximity and access to local information, are better positioned to provide public services, especially in low-income countries or emerging markets where vulnerable populations heavily rely on state interventions. In a similar context, Gemmill, Kneller, and Sanz (2013) investigated whether the efficiency gains resulting from fiscal decentralization lead to higher growth in more decentralized economies. Their study, based on a panel dataset of 23 OECD countries from 1972 to 2015, found that spending decentralization tends to be associated with lower economic growth, while revenue decentralization is linked to higher growth.

Fiscal decentralization policies can take various forms, including increased transfers from the central government, the introduction of new sub-national taxes, and the delegation of tax authority previously held at the national level. Financial decentralization policies are essential for revenue performance and play a crucial role in providing services more effectively in large and densely populated economies (Clegg & Greg, 2010). The theoretical foundations of financial decentralization include the Souffle theory, Sequential theory of decentralization, and the new public management theory.

Transferring financial authority to lower levels of government reduces central government control over public spending. It involves granting local authorities the autonomy to make independent decisions regarding revenue collection strategies and expenditure choices. This autonomy also brings local responsibilities, such as cost recovery through user charges and property taxes (Stanton, 2019). In its fullest application, fiscal decentralization grants significant taxing powers to local governments and the freedom to determine the extent of public service delivery (Grindle, 2007). By distributing authority and responsibility for fiscal management and public service delivery, fiscal decentralization can provide minorities with a stake in the system, contributing to conflict management (Ndung'u, 2014).

Halaskova and Halaskova (2014) suggest that the measurement of fiscal decentralization includes expenditures of lower levels of government as a percentage of total expenditures or Gross Domestic Product (GDP), revenues of lower tiers of government as a percentage of total revenues or GDP, the division of tax revenues between central and local governments, and the level and extent of tax authority and the share of expenditures in selected public sector areas such as education, health, and social security as a share of total expenditures of lower levels of government. The efficiency of a decentralization framework is highest when the intergovernmental fiscal framework enhances welfare, incorporates incentives for prudent fiscal management at all government levels, and provides adequate political authority for taxing and spending at the sub-national levels (Ndung'u, 2014). For instance, Shah (2006) identifies matching grants and tax revenue assignments as incentives that can motivate increased fiscal effort at the sub-national levels of government.

This study specifically focuses on four dimensions of financial decentralization: revenue decision making, expenditure decision making, local revenue generation capacity, and national borrowing. These dimensions were chosen because the study hypothesized that they would have a closer relationship with service delivery. There is limited empirical research that has tested the relationship between financial decentralization and service delivery in developing countries. Existing studies are primarily drawn from developed countries and may not be generalizable to local contexts due to variations in institutional, regulatory, and cultural factors.

Political Decentralization

According to Akorsu (2015), political decentralization involves a set of constitutional amendments and electoral reforms designed to create new spaces for the representation of sub-national politics. It aims to grant more authority to citizens and their elected representatives in decision-making and public administration. Political decentralization is also seen as supporting democratization by providing more opportunities for citizens and their elected representatives to influence the formulation and implementation of policies (Ozmen, 2014). Consequently, political decentralization encompasses the transfer of political authority to the local level through the establishment of elected local governments and political parties. The theories that apply to political decentralization include the Souffle theory, Sequential theory of decentralization, and principal-agent theories.

Political decentralization aims to empower citizens and their elected representatives in decision-making and public administration. It is believed to promote democratization by offering citizens and elected officials more influence over policy creation and implementation (Ozmen, 2014). Political decentralization also involves constitutional amendments and electoral reforms that create new avenues for the representation of sub-national politics. These policies are designed to devolve electoral responsibilities to sub-national actors. Examples include the direct election of mayors and governors, the establishment of sub-national legislative assemblies, and constitutional reforms that enhance the political autonomy of sub-national governments (Falletti 2004).

Hasnain (2018) studied the impact of political party structures on politicians' incentives to focus on patronage versus improving service delivery in Pakistan. The research argued that fragmentation and factionalism exacerbate information asymmetry issues among voters in assigning credit or blame for service delivery improvements or deteriorations. This, in turn, creates incentives for

politicians to prioritize targeted benefits. Additionally, polarization, especially along ethnic lines, reduces the ability of groups to agree on providing public goods, further motivating politicians to favor targeted benefits. Similarly, Obicci (2014) found that political decentralization can be used as a tool to promote service delivery. Furthermore, decentralization was found to have a significant effect on service delivery in the ten local governments examined in the study.

Proponents of political decentralization argue that bringing citizens closer to government and allowing them to hold elected officials accountable are essential for achieving better local governance and public services (Grindle, 2007). When local government is more accessible to service beneficiaries, they become actively involved in demanding quality services. Since local governments are responsible for service quality, citizens are more motivated to demand improvements when services decline in quality (Sujarwoto, 2012). According to Saavedra (2010), political decentralization gives citizens, through their elected representatives, more power in public decision-making. The premise is that service delivery policies formulated at the sub-national level are better informed and more relevant to diverse societal interests than those solely determined by national political authorities.

In this study, political decentralization is conceptualized in terms of legislative powers, political competition, and civil liberties. Empirical evidence on the influence of political decentral

Service Delivery

Enhancing service delivery through increased accountability has been a significant underlying motivation for the decentralization trend in developing countries (Hasnain, 2010). The fundamental theoretical argument for delegating responsibilities to lower tiers of government is that the closer proximity of local decision-makers to citizens facilitates the flow of information and enables the public to better monitor and hold government officials accountable. In response to heightened citizen vigilance, elected local officials are incentivized to prioritize the improvement of service delivery to secure re-election (Hasnain, 2010). Service delivery stands as a crucial aspect of the government-citizen relationship (Abe & Monisola, 2014), and government performance is often assessed based on its effectiveness in delivering services to the populace (Eigema, 2007).

Expectations for a government include the provision of better services to its citizens, with indicators of service delivery encompassing low inflation, improved education, accessible and affordable healthcare, access to clean water, well-maintained roads, and efficient road networks for the transportation of agricultural produce and raw materials (Abe & Monisola, 2014). Carlson et al. (2015) further describe service delivery as the nexus between policymakers, service providers, and disadvantaged populations. This encompasses various services and their accompanying systems that are typically regarded as the responsibility of the state, including social services (primary education and basic healthcare), infrastructure (water, sanitation, roads, and bridges), and services that enhance personal security (Carlson et al., 2015).

There is a dearth of research on the impact of governance decentralization on service delivery when assessed through multiple dimensions, such as citizen satisfaction, service quality, and service accessibility. In this study, service delivery is conceptualized across four dimensions: accessibility of services, efficiency of services, quality of services, and citizen satisfaction, particularly concerning water supply, healthcare, rural road infrastructure, and sewer services.

Empirical Review

In this study, the empirical literature review delves into prior research that pertains to examining the connection between governance decentralization and service delivery, as it relates to the identified variables.

Financial Decentralization and Service Delivery

Adam et al. (2012) conducted a study in Europe and America aimed at empirically investigating the relationship between fiscal decentralization and the efficiency of the public sector. The research discovered that whether the public sector efficiency is focused on education or health services, there exists an inverted U-shaped relationship between government efficiency in providing these services and fiscal decentralization. Conversely, Elhiraika (2007) utilized data from nine provinces in South Africa to explore the impact of fiscal decentralization on basic service delivery, with a particular emphasis on the role of own-source revenue. The study found that the own-source revenue variable had a negative and significant impact on the demand for health services relative to other public services. The researchers argued in favor of increased fiscal decentralization and greater revenue autonomy, especially in South Africa, to enhance service delivery by improving transparency and shifting accountability to the local population instead of the central government.

In a cross-country analysis, Diaz-Serrano and Rodríguez-Pose (2012) reported that the effect of decentralization on satisfaction with government, democracy, and a country's economic situation is inconclusive. Specifically, they indicated that fiscal decentralization, measured by the expenditure capacity of subnational governments, has a positive influence on satisfaction with political institutions. However, when fiscal decentralization is measured by revenue, the impact is negative. In line with this, Balunywa et al. (2014)

established that fiscal decentralization contributes to reduced corruption, improved revenue performance, enhanced revenue collection planning, decreased tax evasion, increased revenue sources for local units, simplified handling of taxation disputes, and a reduction in taxation bureaucracies, all leading to better revenue performance.

Wei-qing and Shi (2010) conducted an empirical study in China and found that fiscal decentralization tends to encourage governments to allocate fiscal expenditure towards infrastructure to attract external investment for local economic development. However, this can lead to a reduction in the provision of public services, particularly education. The study also highlighted regional variations in the impact of fiscal decentralization on public education provision in China. Similarly, Busemeyer (2008) analyzed data from 21 OECD countries and found that fiscal decentralization reduces public education expenditures at the national level but increases spending on public education at the regional level. In a related European study, Sow and Razafimahefa (2015) concluded that fiscal decentralization improves the efficiency of public service delivery, but only under specific conditions, such as a suitable political and institutional environment and a sufficient level of decentralized expenditures and revenues. They also noted that without these conditions, fiscal decentralization can worsen the efficiency of public service delivery.

In Russia, Freinkman and Plekhanov (2019) analyzed the relationship between fiscal decentralization and the quality of public services in Russian regions. The study revealed that fiscal decentralization had a significant positive impact on average examination results in education, controlling for key observable inputs and regional government spending on education. Additionally, the study found that decentralization had a positive impact on the quality of municipal utilities provision. In another study, Oriakhi (2006) examined fiscal decentralization and efficient service delivery in Nigeria, attributing poor service delivery by sub-national governments to factors such as a mismatch between expenditure assignments and revenue sources, favoritism towards the federal government in vertical allocation, rent-seeking behavior, and ineffective monitoring of public expenditures, among others.

For China, Uchimura and Jütting (2007) investigated the effect of fiscal decentralization on health outcomes using nationwide county-level data. They found that local governments in more fiscally decentralized provinces had lower infant mortality rates compared to provinces where the provincial government remained the primary spending authority, under specific conditions. This supported the notion that fiscal decentralization can lead to more efficient provision of local public goods, while emphasizing the necessary conditions for achieving this outcome. More recently, Olatona and Olomola (2015) explored the influence of fiscal decentralization on health and educational service delivery between 1999 and 2012. The study revealed a positive link between fiscal decentralization and educational service delivery, while a high degree of fiscal decentralization was negatively related to healthcare delivery.

Political Decentralization and Service Delivery

In Indonesia, Sujarwoto (2012) conducted a survey involving 8,320 households across 120 local governments to investigate the relationship between political decentralization and local public service performance. The study revealed that effective local political institutions, informed citizens, transparency, citizen political participation through community programs, and the presence of social groups in communities are significant factors in improving local public service performance. Enikolopov and Zhuravskaya (2007) conducted an empirical study using cross-sectional and panel data from developing and transition countries, finding that strong national political parties (a form of political centralization) combined with fiscal decentralization significantly improve government quality, measured in terms of government efficiency, regulatory quality, control of corruption, rule of law, and public goods provision (health and education outcomes).

Importantly, Nir and Kafle (2013) evaluated the implications of political stability on educational quality using a sample of 47 countries, 26 of which were politically stable and 21 politically unstable over a ten-year period (1998-2008). The study revealed that political stability plays a significant role in explaining survival rates in education, either as a single predictor or when introduced alongside GDP per capita. In Europe, Diaz-Serrano and Rodriguez-Pose (2014) analyzed the perspectives of 160,000 individuals in 31 European countries and found that political decentralization affects citizens' satisfaction with education and health delivery differently. The influence of political decentralization is highly dependent on whether local or regional governments have the authority to rule independently (self-rule) or influence national-level policies (shared-rule). Similarly, Kumar and Prakash (2012) conducted a study in India to investigate the impact of political decentralization and gender quotas in local governance on various health outcomes and behaviors. The study found a positive association between political decentralization and higher probabilities of institutional births, safe deliveries, and births in public healthcare facilities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in one primary theory, which the Sequential theory of Decentralization.

The Sequential Theory of Decentralization, as proposed by Falleti (2004), posits that decentralization represents a set of state reforms and does not inherently involve the transfer of authority to non-state actors. Akorsu (2015) referenced Falleti (2004) and emphasized

that decentralization reforms can occur in both authoritarian and democratic contexts, underscoring the importance of distinguishing between decentralization and democratization. Importantly, the Sequential Theory of Decentralization identifies three key actors in the policymaking process: the president, governors, and mayors. Each of these actors has its territorial preferences (Falleti, 2004). The president tends to favor the administrative dimension as it reduces national expenditures through the downward transfer of responsibilities. In contrast, local officials, such as governors and mayors, prefer the political dimension, particularly in relation to gubernatorial and mayoral elections. These electoral mechanisms provide legitimacy to local officials and enable them to pursue their territorial interests without fear of reprisal from the president (Falleti, 2004). Based on these foundational assumptions, Falleti (2004) and Falleti (2005) link the degree of sub-national autonomy to the years surrounding the formulation of decentralization policies. If the president's interests prevail in the policymaking process, sub-national autonomy tends to be low due to the strengthening of presidential authority through administrative decentralization. Conversely, if local officials emerge victorious, political decentralization leads to a higher degree of sub-national autonomy.

Recently, Akorsu (2015), citing Falleti (2004), argued that administrative decentralization can have either a positive or negative impact on the autonomy of subnational executives. If administrative decentralization improves local and state bureaucracies, facilitates the training of local officials, or enhances learning through the practice of assuming new responsibilities, it is likely to increase the organizational capacities of sub-national governments. However, if administrative decentralization occurs without the transfer of funds, it may decrease the autonomy of sub-national officials, who become more reliant on subsequent national fiscal transfers or subnational debt to deliver public services. Similarly, Akorsu (2015) suggests that fiscal decentralization can either positively or negatively affect sub-national autonomy, depending on the design of the fiscal decentralization policy. Higher levels of automatic transfers increase the autonomy of sub-national officials by providing additional resources without the responsibility of collecting those revenues. Conversely, granting taxing authority to sub-national units lacking the administrative capacity to collect new taxes can impose significant constraints on local budgets and increase the dependence of local officials on central government transfers (Falleti, 2004).

Relevance of the Theory to the Study:

The Sequential Theory of Decentralization holds relevance to this study as it posits that territorial decentralization manifests in political, administrative, and fiscal dimensions. Consequently, this study will investigate governance decentralization variables, namely financial decentralization, administrative decentralization, and political decentralization, based on the principles outlined in the Sequential Theory of Decentralization.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate, analyze, and elucidate the relationship between governance decentralization and public service delivery within the context of Local Government in Nigeria. The study was conducted in the South-East geopolitical zone, which is one of the six geopolitical regions in Nigeria. This zone encompasses the following states and their respective local governments: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo.

The target population for this research comprised a total of 4,166,964 individuals, representing the combined population of the 20 selected local government areas across the five states within the South-East geopolitical zone.

The research determined a sample size of 338 respondents using Cochran's Formula, which serves as a basis for ensuring a representative and manageable sample for the study.

Quantitative data were collected through the administration of questionnaires, and the ensuing dataset was subjected to analysis employing descriptive statistics. This analytical process was facilitated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were then presented in the form of percentages, means, standard deviations, and frequencies to provide a comprehensive overview of the findings.

In summary, this study adopted a robust research design and methodology, focusing on the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, with the aim of shedding light on the intricate relationship between governance decentralization and public service delivery in Local Government. The research's quantitative data analysis employed SPSS to ensure the rigorous and systematic examination of the collected data.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the key findings of the study that sought establish the effect of governance decentralization on service delivery in Local Government in Nigeria.

Research Objective One: To establish the effect of financial decentralization on the accessibility to basic infrastructure in the Local Government in Nigeria.

Table 4.3: Responses to Financial Decentralization items

Opinion Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Std. Dev.
	%	%	%	%	%		
The local government has sufficient power to decide on how to raise revenue	4.4	6.7	7	48.9	33	3.99	1.04
	5.9	23	19.7	38.7	13	3.30	1.13
The local government meet the budget for locally generated revenue in the last financial year							
The local government has the authority to set the rates and charges for devolved services	0.7	4.1	9.6	53.3	32.2	4.12	0.80
	3	2.2	11.5	52.6	30.7	4.06	0.88
The local government has significant power to decide on how to spent the local government revenue							
	9.7	13	24.9	35.7	16.7	3.37	1.19
The local government borrows loans from state government							
	5.6	14	26.8	35.3	18.6	3.48	1.11
The federal or state government consults with local government on new taxes affecting local governments							
The local government has the authority to incur debt	4.8	6.7	20	45.6	23	3.75	1.04

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Key: n= 275, SD= strongly disagree, D=disagree, N=neutral, A=agree, SA=strongly agree, M=mean, Std. Dev. =standard deviation

Results in Table 4.3 indicate that two items had standard deviation that was below 1.0. The item “The local government has the authority to set the rates and charges for devolved services” had the lowest standard deviation of 0.80. The percentages indicates that 0.7% and 4.1% of the respondents scored for strongly disagree and disagree while 53.3 % and 32.2 % scored for agree and strongly agree respectively. This shows that the two items had no extremes hence are good measure. However, five items had standard deviation that was above 1.0. This shows that the respondents were spread to the positive and to the negative hence the high standard deviation witnessed. The item “The local government borrows loans from state government” had the highest standard deviation of 1.19 which shows extremes. The percentages indicate that 9.7% and 13% of the respondents scored for strongly disagree and disagree respectively while 16.7 % and 35.7% scored for strongly agree and agree respectively. This shows extremes. The findings are not reflecting where the respondents are as they viewed the items from different angles. Most of the items hence are not a good measure.

Additionally, overwhelming majority 82% of the respondents agreed that local government has sufficient power to decide on how to raise revenue but 11% disagreed. In addition, 52% agreed that the local government met the budget for locally generated revenue in the last financial year and overwhelming majority 86% agreed that the local government has the authority to set the rates and charges for devolved services. Further, 83% agreed that the local government has significant power to decide on how to spend the local government revenue and 52% agreed that local government borrows loans from federal or state government. Moreover, 54% of the respondents agreed that federal or state government consults with local government on new taxes affecting local governments, and 69% agreed that the local government has the authority to incur debt.

Further, the highest mean was 4.12 with the lowest being 3.3. This shows the respondents took a positive position (above 3.0). All items had a mean of above 3.0. This shows that the general position was that the respondents agreed with the items. The scores for this section indicate that most local government officials agreed that financial decentralization was a key driver of service delivery in the Local Government in Nigeria. This is evidenced by 69% who agreed and strongly agreed on the statements. This information was corroborated by the themes that emerged from the open-ended questions where on average informants indicated that financial decentralization is a key driver of devolution and service delivery.

The findings are consistent with those of Simiyu et al. (2014) who used descriptive survey design with a sample of 98 respondents in Kimilili to examine effects of devolved funding on socio-economic welfare services. The researchers revealed that that devolved fund (financial decentralization) played an important role in social economic aspects of the lives of the locals and called on policy makers to improve on management of the devolved funds. The findings also concur with those in Saavedra (2010) who asserts that fiscal decentralization positively and significantly influences the health care and water provision. Moreover, Ghuman and Singh (2013) analyzed the impact of decentralization on public service delivery. The study found that the impact of decentralization on public service delivery is contingent on factors such as the design of the decentralization policy; implementation bottlenecks and diluting the model of decentralization for accommodating the dissenting segments of stakeholders including employees; and participatory governance. In particular the study revealed that decentralization has resulted in improvements in delivery of local services where devolution as a mode of decentralization is accompanied by sound financial resource base of local governments, full autonomy to local governments in human resource management matters, regular capacity building of local officials, performance-based incentive structures, and participatory governance.

Research Objective Two: To evaluate the effect of political decentralization on quality infrastructure in the Local Government in Nigeria.

Table 4.4: Responses to Political Decentralization items

Opinion Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Std. Dev.
	%	%	%	%	%		
The local government council has power to pass laws relating to local government governance	4.7	0.4	8.6	53.7	32.7	4.09	0.92
There was political competition on all elective posts during the last general election	2.4	2	6.3	42.1	47.2	4.3	0.86
The local government respects civil liberties and human rights	7.1	7.9	20.1	37	28	3.71	1.17
Most political parties are active and have party offices in your local government	7.1	8.7	21.7	37.4	25.2	3.65	1.16
Your local government has effective input in national policy making processes	3.1	5.9	23.9	42	25.1	3.8	0.99
The local government has full autonomy to formulate local policies	4.3	3.5	12.5	40.8	38.8	4.06	1.02
The local government governor is elected by popular vote	3.1	2.8	5.9	43.3	44.9	4.24	0.92
The local government executive committee are nominated by governors but approved through popular vote by local government council	2.5	2.9	10.2	47.5	36.9	4.14	0.89

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Key: n= 275, SD= strongly disagree, D=disagree, N=neutral, A=agree, SA=strongly agree, M=mean, Std. Dev. =standard deviation

Results tabulated in Table 4.4 indicate that five items had standard deviation that was below 1.0. This shows that for most of the items were good measures with no extremes. The item “There was political competition on all elective posts during the last general election” had a standard deviation of 0.86 which shows no extremes. The percentages indicate that 2.4% and 2% of the respondents scored for strongly disagree and disagree respectively while 47.2 % and 42.1% scored for strongly agree and agree respectively. This shows that majority of the respondents viewed the items from same angles (strongly agree and agree) hence most of the items are good measure.

The results also revealed that three items had standard deviation that was above 1.0. The item “The local government respects civil liberties and human rights” had a standard deviation of 1.17 which shows extremes. The percentages indicate that 7.1 % and 7.9 % of the respondents scored for strongly disagree and disagree respectively while 28 % and 37 % scored for strongly agree and agree respectively. This shows that majority of the respondents viewed the items from positive and negative angles hence three items are not good measure. The findings also indicates that majority 86% of the respondents unanimously agreed that the local government council has power to pass laws relating to local government governance, and 5% disagreed. On whether there was political competition on all elective posts during the last general election, majority at 89% agreed with the statements with a few 4% of the respondents disagreed with the statements. Majority of the respondents 65% agreed that local government respects civil liberties and human rights but 15% answered on the negative.

Additionally, the study findings depicted that majority 63% of the respondents reported that most political parties are active and have party offices in your local government while a few 16% disagreed. On whether the local government has effective input in national policy making processes 67% agreed while 9% disagreed. Overwhelming majority 80% reported that they agreed the local government has full autonomy to formulate local policies while 8% disagreed. On whether local government governor is elected by popular vote 88% agreed but 6% disagreed. An overwhelming number of respondents 84% reported that local government executive committee are nominated by governors but approved through popular vote by local government council while 5% disagreed.

The highest mean was 4.3 with the lowest being 3.65. The finding revealed that the respondents took a positive position (above 3.0). All items had a mean of above 3.0. This shows that the general position was that the respondents agreed with the items. The scores of responses for this section agreed at 75% indicating that most local government officials agreed that political decentralization was a key driver of service delivery in the Local Government in Nigeria. This result concurs with the findings by Kumar and Prakash (2012) who carried a study in India to investigate the impact of political decentralization and gender quota in local governance on different measures of health outcomes and behaviors. The study found that political decentralization is positively associated with higher probabilities of institutional births, safe delivery, and births in public health facilities. Sujarwoto (2012) also concurred by surveying 120 local governments in Indonesia and revealed that effective local political institutions are significant in improving local government public service performance.

Major Finding

From the test of hypothesis, the study revealed that:

1. There is a relationship between financial decentralization and accessibility to basic infrastructure in Local Government in Nigeria
2. Political decentralization has a significant relationship to quality infrastructure in Local Government in Nigeria

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that all dimensions of governance decentralization have a significant and positive impact on service delivery in Local Government areas in Nigeria. Specifically, the research has highlighted the positive and statistically significant relationship between financial decentralization and the provision of basic infrastructure in these areas. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Promoting Financial Decentralization:** To enhance service delivery in Local Government areas, it is recommended that federal, state, and local governments collaborate to establish deliberate and proactive processes, policies, and structures that support financial decentralization. This can be achieved by reviewing existing policies to increase funding allocation to local governments. The federal and state governments should also implement strategic interventions aimed at strengthening financial decentralization to improve citizen services.

2. **Respecting the Autonomy of Local Governments:** Central government bodies, including the executive and parliament, should recognize the importance of financial decentralization as a strategic philosophy. They should refrain from interfering in the management of decentralized services to avoid conflicts between state governments and Local Governments, ensuring a smoother service delivery process.
3. **Safeguarding Political Decentralization:** The study has confirmed that political decentralization significantly influences the quality of infrastructure and service delivery in Local Government areas. To maintain this positive relationship, federal and state governments should implement measures that protect the independence of political decentralization. This includes ensuring that local government councils have the necessary autonomy and resources to fulfill their roles effectively.
4. **Local Government Framework Alignment:** Local government council members should utilize the findings of this study to assess and, if necessary, revise the existing local government framework. This revision should prioritize the promotion of service delivery within local governments, taking into account the importance of political decentralization.
5. **Enhancing Political Decentralization:** To further enhance service delivery at the local level, it is recommended that the federal government consider granting additional political decentralization powers to local governments. This could involve extending legislative powers, promoting political competition, and protecting civil liberties at the local level.

Finally, these recommendations emphasize the importance of both financial and political decentralization in improving service delivery and infrastructure quality within Local Government areas in Nigeria. By implementing these suggestions, government authorities can work towards more effective and citizen-oriented governance at the local level.

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