International Journal of Integrative Research (IJIR)
Vol.3, No.12, 2025: 899-920

An Assessment of the Challenges of Decentralization on Local Governance in Nigeria

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A R T I C L E I N F O

Keywords: *Decentralization, Local Government, Political Interference, Accountability, Grassroots Development*

Received : 5 October
Revised : 23 November
Accepted: 23 December

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the challenges of decentralization on local governance in Nigeria with a specific focus on Gombe Local Government Area. Decentralization is globally promoted as a means of deepening democracy, enhancing accountability, and improving service delivery at the grassroots. Using Good Governance Theory as the guiding framework, the study investigates how political interference, inadequate funding, and corruption limit the autonomy and effectiveness of local governments. A descriptive survey research design is adopted, targeting elected officials, civil servants, community leaders, civil society actors, and residents. Data collection relies on structured questionnaires and interviews, with a sample size determined through stratified and multi-stage sampling techniques. The findings reveal that excessive political interference by state authorities undermines local government autonomy, particularly through imposed caretaker committees, manipulated electoral processes, and restrictions on budgetary decisions. Fiscal dependency, largely due to the State Joint Local Government Account, further weakens financial independence and stifles development planning. Corruption and mismanagement, manifested in practices such as ghost workers, inflated contracts, and abandoned projects, erode institutional credibility, diminish service delivery, and undermine public trust in grassroots governance. The study concludes that decentralization in Nigeria remains largely symbolic, with limited practical impact on grassroots governance. Based on these findings, the study recommends constitutional reforms to guarantee direct funding to local governments, institutionalized accountability mechanisms, enhanced citizen participation, and targeted capacity building. Strengthening these areas is essential to transforming decentralization into a viable pathway for inclusive development and democratic consolidation

DOI: https://doi.org/10.59890/ijir.v3i12.114
E-ISSN 2988-2184
https://mrymultitechpublisher.my.id/index.php/ijir

INTRODUCTION

Decentralization has become a major governance reform strategy across developing countries, designed to improve the efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness of public service delivery. It involves transferring authority, resources, and responsibilities from central governments to sub-national units in order to promote local autonomy and citizen participation (Rondinelli, 1981). While countries like Sweden, Germany, and India have successfully implemented political, administrative, and fiscal forms of decentralization to bring government closer to the people (Smoke, 2003), African countries continue to struggle with challenges such as inadequate funding, weak institutional capacity, and elite capture (Ribot, 2002). In Nigeria, the 1976 Local Government Reform sought to institutionalize decentralization within the three-tier federal structure, but local governments still lack meaningful autonomy due to political interference, the joint account system, and state-level dominance (Agba et al., 2014).

Recent literature emphasizes that decentralization is not merely a structural reform but a systematic redistribution of decision-making authority that allows local governments to design policies based on community needs (Okoli & Onah, 2020). Scholars argue that in fragile democracies like Nigeria, decentralization strengthens inclusiveness by opening space for public participation and reducing excessive central control (Ibrahim & Mustapha, 2022). Osaghae (2023) further explains that decentralization enhances vertical integration between governmental tiers, positioning local governments as active agents of development rather than passive implementers of national directives. Its success, however, depends on the extent of discretion local authorities hold over budgeting, planning, personnel, and resource allocation (Adebayo & Salihu, 2021). Yet political interference, weak capacity, and limited financial independence continue to undermine its effectiveness (Musa & Gambo, 2022). In parallel, local governance refers to participatory and transparent management of local resources and decision-making by institutions, communities, and civic actors (Ogbonnaya, 2020; Umeh & Okonkwo, 2021). Despite its significance, local governance in Nigeria remains constrained by poor funding, politicization, limited autonomy, and inadequate human resource capacity (Nnamani & Okoh, 2024).

Decentralization and local governance collectively promote inclusiveness, accountability, and more responsive public administration (Adebisi & Olayiwola, 2019; Obasi & Eze, 2022). In Gombe Local Government Area, decentralization enables the coordination of key services such as primary healthcare, education, and rural infrastructure through elected councils and community-based structures. Traditional rulers, youth groups, civil society organizations, and women's associations actively participate in planning, budgeting, and monitoring development initiatives, helping to align public services with local needs (Yahaya & Abubakar, 2023). Through these participatory mechanisms, decentralization enhances transparency, strengthens local institutions, and promotes equitable service delivery. Therefore, this study examines how decentralization contributes to effective local governance in

Gombe LGA by assessing its influence on grassroots participation, institutional strengthening, and improved service delivery at the community level.

Statement of the Problem

Over the past decades, decentralization has been widely embraced across developing countries, including Nigeria, as a mechanism for improving governance and service delivery at the grassroots. The underlying assumption is that devolving powers, responsibilities, and resources to local governments will promote more responsive, inclusive, and development-oriented governance. However, in Nigeria—and specifically in Gombe Local Government Area—the practical implementation of decentralization continues to face systemic constraints that undermine its effectiveness. Despite constitutional provisions supporting local autonomy, local councils often remain politically constrained, under-resourced, and heavily dependent on higher levels of government. These structural limitations weaken institutional performance and erode citizens' trust in grassroots governance processes and service delivery systems (Ezeani & Ogbonnaya, 2020; Ibrahim & Mustapha, 2022). Thus, there is an urgent need to critically examine the constraints affecting decentralization and how they hinder the attainment of effective and accountable local governance.

Political interference by state governments constitutes one of the most persistent obstacles to decentralization in Nigeria. Instead of operating as autonomous entities, many local governments are subjected to direct control by state authorities, who influence appointments, funding channels, and policy decisions. In Gombe State, the recurring practice of appointing caretaker committees in place of elected officials undermines democratic participation, weakens accountability, and contradicts the foundational principles of decentralization (Okoli & Onah, 2020; Umeh & Okonkwo, 2021). Such interference limits the ability of local councils to respond to community needs, as they must rely heavily on state directives for decision-making. This imbalance disrupts the institutional independence required for decentralization to thrive and suppresses innovation, participation, and local responsiveness in community development initiatives (Osaghae, 2023). Consequently, political manipulation not only weakens grassroots governance but also diminishes citizens' confidence in the relevance of local democratic institutions.

In addition to political interference, inadequate funding and corruption further hinder the success of decentralization in Nigeria. Although local governments are constitutionally entitled to statutory allocations, state-level controls through the Joint Account Allocation Committee (JAAC) often result in withheld, diverted, or mismanaged funds (Nnamani & Okoh, 2024; Ayorinde & Oyetunji, 2023). In Gombe Local Government Area, low internally generated revenue and inconsistent financial releases have constrained the execution of essential development projects such as primary healthcare, road rehabilitation, and environmental sanitation (Bala & Adamu, 2022). Even when funds are available, corruption—manifested through ghost workers, inflated contracts, and poor financial accountability—further reduces the effectiveness of local governance (Adebayo & Salihu, 2021; Musa & Gambo, 2022). These challenges weaken fiscal autonomy, undermine public trust, and compromise the service

delivery mandate of local councils. Therefore, this study aims to critically assess the challenges affecting decentralization in Gombe Local Government Area by examining how political interference, inadequate funding, and corruption collectively limit the autonomy, effectiveness, and development outcomes of local government administration. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the following research questions were raised:

i. How does political interference affect the implementation of decentralization in local governance within Gombe Local Government Area, Gombe State?
ii. In what ways does inadequate funding influence the performance of local governments under a decentralized system in Gombe Local Government Area, Gombe State?
iii. What is the impact of corruption and mismanagement on the effectiveness of decentralized governance in Gombe Local Government Area, Gombe State?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to assess the Challenges of Decentralization on Local Governance: Case Study of Gombe Local Government Area. While the specific objectives are as follows:

i. To investigate the effect of political interference on the implementation of decentralization in local governance in Gombe Local Government Area, Gombe State.
ii. To examine how inadequate funding affects the performance of local governments under a decentralized system in Gombe Local Government Area, Gombe State.
iii. To assess the impact of corruption and mismanagement on decentralized governance effectiveness in Gombe Local Government Area, Gombe State

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Decentralization

Decentralization is broadly understood as the transfer of authority, resources, and responsibility from central to subnational levels of government. It is designed to promote efficiency, local participation, responsiveness, and good governance. According to Faguet (2019), decentralization is a multidimensional governance reform that involves the systematic transfer of authority, responsibility, and resources from central to subnational governments. He posits that decentralization goes beyond structural arrangements; it encompasses the redesign of institutional relationships that enhance responsiveness, accountability, and efficiency. Faguet highlights that decentralization allows local governments to align public services with community-specific needs, thereby promoting developmental equity and political inclusion. He identifies three critical forms—political, administrative, and fiscal decentralization—as interrelated dimensions that must be effectively implemented for meaningful outcomes. For decentralization to function optimally, it must empower local governments with the autonomy to make binding decisions and manage their own resources. (Faguet, 2019).

According to the World Bank (2020), decentralization refers to the transfer of planning, decision-making, and administrative responsibilities from central government institutions to lower levels of government, including regional, municipal, and local councils. The World Bank emphasizes that decentralization is essential in fostering local democracy, improving service delivery, and increasing public accountability. It categorizes decentralization into political, administrative, and fiscal dimensions, each playing a unique role in shaping local governance. Political decentralization includes empowering elected officials at the local level, while administrative decentralization enhances managerial functions, and fiscal decentralization ensures local financial autonomy. (World Bank, 2020).

According to Rondinelli and Nellis (2021), decentralization is the deliberate and institutionalized redistribution of decision-making authority, financial resources, and responsibilities from the central government to lower levels of administration, such as local governments and quasi-autonomous bodies. The scholars identify four main forms of decentralization: deconcentration, delegation, devolution, and privatization. Deconcentration refers to redistributing tasks within the central government, while delegation and devolution involve greater authority and autonomy given to local governments. They argue that decentralization aims to promote democratic participation, local accountability, and more responsive governance. Smoke and Lewis (2019), decentralization involves a structural and functional shift of responsibilities, authority, and resources from the national level to subnational governments with the aim of improving efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness in public service delivery. They explain that decentralization is more than just technical devolution; it is a political and administrative reform strategy that transforms how governance is practiced. Political decentralization allows local populations to elect their leaders, fostering participatory democracy, while fiscal decentralization ensures that local governments have revenue-generating powers. (Smoke & Lewis, 2019).

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021), defined decentralization as the transfer of planning, decision-making, and management responsibilities from central to local governments to promote inclusive development and participatory governance. UNDP considers decentralization as a means of deepening democracy and accelerating sustainable development by bringing governance closer to the people. The organization outlines three major forms: political, fiscal, and administrative decentralization. UNDP places special emphasis on the empowerment of marginalized groups, especially women and youth, through decentralized decision-making processes. The report stresses the importance of building institutional and human capacities at the local level to ensure effective decentralization. (UNDP, 2021).

Concept of Local Governance

According to UN-Habitat (2021), local governance refers to the complex set of relationships, institutional mechanisms, and participatory processes through which local authorities, civil society, and citizens engage in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of local development. It emphasizes more than

the actions of local government—it includes how power and decision-making are shared among a wider set of actors at the local level. This definition underscores the importance of decentralization and democratic participation in shaping development priorities and holding leaders accountable. Local governance, from this perspective, functions best when there is an enabling environment that fosters transparency, inclusiveness, and institutional responsiveness. (UN-Habitat, 2021).

Similarly, Adeola and Omotayo (2020) define local governance as the decision-making processes and structures that determine how public resources are managed and services delivered at the local level. They posit that it comprises both formal and informal institutions, such as local governments, traditional leaders, civil society groups, and community-based organizations. The authors emphasize that the quality of local governance directly affects the quality of life of citizens, as it dictates access to health, education, water, and other essential services. In their view, inclusive local governance not only ensures democratic legitimacy but also builds local ownership of development projects. Moreover, they note that the interplay between elected officials and citizens at the grassroots helps to enhance policy relevance and accountability. Adeola and Omotayo conclude that the stronger and more participatory the local governance system, the more resilient and responsive communities become to social, economic, and environmental challenges (Adeola & Omotayo, 2020).

Okoye and Hassan (2022) expand on this concept by describing local governance as the institutionalized interaction between local authorities and community stakeholders to achieve public goals. Their work focuses on the Nigerian context, where they argue that local governance should facilitate grassroots participation, equitable service delivery, and transparent resource allocation. They highlight that good local governance requires capable institutions, legal frameworks, and the political will to decentralize power. Okoye and Hassan warn that in many cases, local governance systems are weakened by undue political interference, inadequate funding, and limited administrative autonomy (Okoye & Hassan, 2022).

The World Bank (2023) offers a more systems-based perspective, defining local governance as the mechanisms and processes through which local governments and stakeholders interact to make decisions and deliver public services. According to the World Bank, effective local governance hinges on decentralization, fiscal autonomy, citizen participation, and institutional capacity. It plays a critical role in ensuring that services are tailored to local needs and that development outcomes are sustainable and equitable. Furthermore, the World Bank emphasizes the importance of intergovernmental relations in strengthening local governance, noting that clarity in roles and responsibilities between different levels of government enhances efficiency. The institution also highlights the importance of transparency and accountability mechanisms in preventing corruption and promoting trust in local authorities. (World Bank, 2023).

Chukwu and Bala (2019) define local governance as the participatory framework through which local governments and community stakeholders

jointly manage and allocate resources for local development. They assert that this process is fundamental to the success of decentralization and grassroots democracy. Chukwu and Bala point out that local governance fosters local autonomy, which allows for the identification of development priorities specific to a community's cultural, economic, and environmental context. Their study reveals that where local governance systems are effective, there is a higher degree of civic participation, improved service delivery, and reduced corruption. Conversely, weak local governance systems lead to elite capture, marginalization of vulnerable groups, and inefficient resource management. For local governance to thrive, they recommend strong legal backing, institutional support, and political commitment to devolution (Chukwu & Bala, 2019).

Ibrahim and Danjuma (2023) conceptualize local governance as a mechanism for empowering local communities to participate in political and administrative decision-making. Their analysis reveals that local governance is not limited to government action; it involves a network of actors including NGOs, traditional institutions, and faith-based organizations. Ibrahim and Danjuma stress that this inclusivity enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance by ensuring that diverse voices are heard. They argue that in the Nigerian context, local governance faces multiple constraints, such as political capture, weak institutions, and limited fiscal space. Nevertheless, where local governance is functional, it contributes to responsive service delivery, peacebuilding, and social justice. Their work advocates for strengthening legal frameworks and institutional autonomy at the local level to improve governance outcomes (Ibrahim & Danjuma, 2023).

Challenges of Decentralization on Local Governance

Inadequate Financial Resources: One of the most critical challenges of decentralization on local governance is the persistent lack of adequate financial resources. According to Yusuf and Adamu (2020), local governments in Nigeria, including those in Gombe State, often lack sufficient internally generated revenue and are heavily dependent on allocations from the federal and state governments. This financial dependency limits their autonomy and hinders their ability to plan and implement developmental projects effectively. Decentralization without fiscal empowerment creates a situation where responsibilities are devolved without the corresponding funds, thereby undermining service delivery and development outcomes. (Yusuf & Adamu, 2020).

Political Interference and Elite Capture: Decentralization has in many cases led to increased political interference in local governance processes. Adegoke and Ibe (2021) argue that local government officials are often installed or influenced by state-level political actors who prioritize loyalty over competence. This undermines local democracy and weakens accountability, as council officials may feel more obligated to their political patrons than to the citizens they serve. Additionally, elite capture — where a few powerful individuals or groups control decision-making and resource allocation — limits the inclusiveness and fairness of governance. In Gombe LGA, political interference has affected recruitment processes, contract awards, and the siting

of projects, making governance less responsive to local needs (Adegoke & Ibe, 2021).

Weak Institutional Capacity: Weak institutional capacity remains a major impediment to the effective implementation of decentralization. As observed by Bello and Musa (2022), many local governments in Nigeria lack skilled personnel, adequate infrastructure, and modern administrative tools needed to carry out their expanded responsibilities. This institutional weakness affects planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting processes. The absence of effective bureaucratic structures leads to inefficiencies and corruption, thereby reducing public trust in local governance. In Gombe Local Government Area, the shortage of technical staff, inadequate training programs, and obsolete administrative practices are among the critical institutional challenges that limit the success of decentralization (Bello & Musa, 2022).

Lack of Citizen Participation: Although decentralization is designed to enhance citizen participation, in practice, many local governments fail to create inclusive platforms for public engagement. According to Salihu and Abdullahi (2020), limited public awareness, political apathy, and elite dominance hinder meaningful participation in local governance processes. Citizens are often excluded from planning and budgetary decisions, making it difficult for local governments to address real community needs. The lack of participatory governance also reduces accountability and weakens the social contract between the people and local authorities. In Gombe, low levels of civic engagement have been attributed to poor communication strategies, mistrust in government, and the absence of institutionalized participatory mechanisms (Salihu & Abdullahi, 2020).

Poor Coordination between Tiers of Government: Another significant challenge is the lack of coordination between federal, state, and local government authorities. According to Eze and Mohammed (2023), the overlapping functions and blurred lines of responsibility between these tiers of government often result in duplication of efforts, inefficiencies, and intergovernmental conflicts. In the Nigerian context, where constitutional ambiguities exist regarding the roles of each level of government, decentralization can become dysfunctional. In Gombe State, poor coordination has led to conflicts in land administration, project implementation, and resource allocation, thereby hampering the effectiveness of decentralized governance (Eze & Mohammed, 2023).

Corruption and Mismanagement: Corruption is a major threat to the success of decentralization in Nigeria. According to Nwachukwu and Okonkwo (2023), decentralization without strong oversight mechanisms creates opportunities for corruption, particularly in the management of public funds and procurement processes. Local officials may embezzle funds or inflate contracts with little fear of sanctions due to weak institutional checks. This not only reduces the quality of service delivery but also diminishes public confidence in local institutions. In Gombe LGA, reports of misappropriation and lack of transparency in local projects highlight the need for stronger anti-corruption frameworks at the local level (Nwachukwu & Okonkwo, 2023).

Ambiguity in Legal and Policy Frameworks: A major challenge confronting decentralization is the ambiguity and inconsistency in the legal and policy frameworks that define the roles and responsibilities of local government authorities. According to Okeke and Lawal (2021), many constitutional provisions regarding local government autonomy in Nigeria remain vague or contradictory, leading to frequent power struggles between state and local authorities. In some cases, state governments suspend or dissolve elected local councils, thereby weakening the spirit of decentralization and local democracy. In Gombe State, several local government councils have faced similar legal uncertainties, which create instability in governance and discourage long-term planning and investment (Okeke & Lawal, 2021).

Capacity Gaps in Planning and Budgeting: Even when decentralization policies are well-intentioned, many local governments lack the technical capacity to plan, budget, and manage resources effectively. As highlighted by Ibrahim and Zubairu (2020), most local councils in Nigeria do not possess skilled staff who can develop strategic plans or prepare performance-based budgets aligned with community priorities. (Ibrahim & Zubairu, 2020).

Resistance to Change and Bureaucratic Inertia: Resistance to administrative change is a subtle but powerful barrier to effective decentralization. According to Abubakar and Shehu (2022), public officials accustomed to centralized control often resist transferring authority to local institutions. This resistance may manifest as deliberate delays, withholding of information, or lack of cooperation with local authorities. Bureaucratic inertia also means that even when policies are enacted, they are implemented half-heartedly or inconsistently. In Gombe Local Government Area, entrenched habits and fear of losing control have often slowed down reforms, creating friction between progressive leaders and traditional power structures (Abubakar & Shehu, 2022).

Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: The absence of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems at the local level is another critical challenge that affects the success of decentralization. According to Danjuma and Bala (2023), many local governments in Nigeria lack the institutional frameworks to track performance, assess impact, or enforce accountability. Without M&E, it becomes difficult to identify gaps in service delivery, assess the efficiency of programs, or implement corrective actions. This challenge is particularly pronounced in Gombe LGA, where developmental projects are often launched without baseline data or outcome evaluation, leading to wasteful spending and missed opportunities for improvement (Danjuma & Bala, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Democratic Decentralization Theory as a theoretical framework. Democratic Decentralization Theory emphasizes the transfer of political, administrative, and fiscal authority from central to lower levels of government that are democratically elected and accountable to the local population (Crook & Manor, 1998). This theory assumes that effective governance can only be achieved when decision-making is devolved to

institutions that are closer to the citizens. It advocates for grassroots participation, transparency, responsiveness, and the strengthening of local institutions to improve public service delivery. By rooting governance in democratic principles, the theory highlights the need for elected local councils, participatory processes, and citizen involvement in the planning and implementation of policies. This decentralization is not merely technical, but political in nature, aiming to deepen democracy and enhance legitimacy at the local level (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999).

Historically, Democratic Decentralization Theory evolved in response to the limitations of top-down governance models, especially in developing countries where centralization often led to inefficiencies and alienation of local communities. Proponents such as Manor (1999) and Ribot (2002) argue that when citizens have the power to choose their leaders and influence policy, they are more likely to demand accountability, ensure responsiveness, and participate in governance. The theory contrasts sharply with deconcentration or administrative decentralization, which merely shifts duties without real power or accountability. Instead, democratic decentralization stresses genuine devolution—transferring meaningful power to elected authorities who have control over resources and responsibilities.

The core contribution of the theory to governance literature lies in its emphasis on local autonomy and political empowerment. It recognizes that decentralization should not just be about efficiency or service delivery, but also about democratization and citizen agency. It establishes that local governance should reflect the will and preferences of the people it serves. When successfully implemented, democratic decentralization can lead to inclusive governance, improved accountability, better alignment of services to local needs, and ultimately, the strengthening of democracy at the grassroots (Smoke, 2015). This theory, therefore, provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing how decentralization shapes the functioning and performance of local government systems.

Democratic Decentralization Theory is directly applicable to your study on the challenges of decentralization on local governance in Gombe Local Government Area, as it sheds light on the fundamental issues of power, accountability, and citizen participation at the local level. Many of the challenges local governments face—such as weak institutional capacity, limited fiscal autonomy, and political interference—can be understood as deviations from the core principles of democratic decentralization (Ribot, 2002). The theory helps explain why, despite decentralization reforms, local governments often remain ineffective: power is often not genuinely devolved, and elected local leaders lack the authority or resources to govern effectively. Your study can use this theoretical lens to assess whether decentralization in Gombe is democratic in nature or merely administrative.

Furthermore, the theory supports an exploration of how local political structures and institutional arrangements affect governance outcomes. For example, your study can evaluate whether the elected officials in Gombe LGA are truly empowered to make decisions, or whether state-level actors continue to dominate the local space. This aligns with the theory's assumption that decentralization must include political legitimacy and resource control for it to yield developmental results (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999). In practical terms, the theory offers an evaluative framework to examine whether decentralization reforms in Gombe have led to real changes in power dynamics, decision-making processes, and the delivery of public goods and services.

Finally, the theory's emphasis on participation and accountability provides valuable benchmarks for your study. You can assess the extent to which citizens in Gombe LGA are involved in governance processes—such as budget planning, policy formulation, and feedback mechanisms—and how their involvement (or lack thereof) affects local development outcomes. Democratic Decentralization Theory thus not only helps in diagnosing the systemic and structural challenges of decentralization but also offers normative criteria for improving governance. It encourages a holistic view of local governance that goes beyond technical administration to consider empowerment, representation, and responsive service delivery (Manor, 1999; Smoke, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1. Respondnet's Opinion on the Effect of Political Interference on the Implementation of Decentralization in Local Governance in Gombe Local Government Area, Gombe State

Question/Stratum	SD	D	UD	A	SA	TOTAL
1. Political interference significantly delays the implementation of decentralized policies in Gombe Local Government Area	28 (6.7%)	47 (11.3%)	39 (9.4%)	164 (39.3%)	139 (33.3%)	417 (100%)
2. Local government officials face pressure from political figures that hinders effective decentralization in Gombe Local Government Area	21 (5.0%)	42 (10.1%)	37 (8.9%)	168 (40.3%)	149 (35.7%)	417 (100%)
3. Political interference creates	10 (2.4%)	20 (4.8%)	25 (6.0%)	200 (48.0%)	162 (38.8%)	417 (100%)

confusion and inefficiencies in the decision-making process within local governments						
4. Political figures often influence the allocation of resources under the decentralized system in Gombe Local Government Area	19 (4.6%)	36 (8.6%)	34 (8.2%)	172 (41.2%)	156 (37.4%)	417 (100%)
5. The political structure in Gombe Local Government Area undermines the autonomy of local government administrations	26 (6.2%)	44 (10.6%)	35 (8.4%)	158 (37.9%)	154 (36.9%)	417 (100%)
6. Political appointments in local government leadership positions compromise the neutrality and effectiveness of decentralized governance	20 (4.8%)	38 (9.1%)	31 (7.4%)	165 (39.6%)	163 (39.1%)	417 (100%)
7. Political interference often results in the selection of unqualified personnel, thereby weakening the decentralization process	18 (4.3%)	37 (8.9%)	30 (7.2%)	168 (40.3%)	164 (39.3%)	417 (100%)

Source: Fieldwork, (2025)

Table 1 shows that respondents overwhelmingly perceive political interference as a major challenge to the effective implementation of decentralization in Gombe Local Government Area. For instance, 164 respondents (39.3%) agreed and 139 (33.3%) strongly agreed that political interference significantly delays the implementation of decentralized policies, while only 28 (6.7%) strongly disagreed and 47 (11.3%) disagreed, with 39 (9.4%)

undecided. Similarly, 168 respondents (40.3%) agreed and 149 (35.7%) strongly agreed that local government officials face pressure from political figures that hinders effective decentralization, whereas 21 (5.0%) strongly disagreed, 42 (10.1%) disagreed, and 37 (8.9%) were undecided. Additionally, 200 (48.0%) agreed and 162 (38.8%) strongly agreed that political interference creates confusion and inefficiencies in decision-making, indicating that 86.8% of respondents perceive political actors as a major source of administrative disruption. These findings suggest that political interference consistently affects operational efficiency and weakens local government autonomy.

The table also indicates that political influence extends to resource allocation, leadership appointments, and personnel selection, further undermining decentralized governance. On the issue of resource allocation, 172 respondents (41.2%) agreed and 156 (37.4%) strongly agreed that political figures often influence how resources are distributed, while only 19 (4.6%) strongly disagreed, 36 (8.6%) disagreed, and 34 (8.2%) were undecided. Regarding the autonomy of local governments, 158 (37.9%) agreed and 154 (36.9%) strongly agreed that the political structure undermines local government independence, with 26 (6.2%) strongly disagreeing, 44 (10.6%) disagreeing, and 35 (8.4%) undecided. Furthermore, 165 respondents (39.6%) agreed and 163 (39.1%) strongly agreed that political appointments compromise leadership neutrality, while 20 (4.8%) strongly disagreed, 38 (9.1%) disagreed, and 31 (7.4%) were undecided. Lastly, 168 (40.3%) agreed and 164 (39.3%) strongly agreed that political interference leads to the selection of unqualified personnel, highlighting that 79.6% of respondents view this as a serious challenge. Overall, Table 1 demonstrates that political interference is widely recognized as a critical barrier to effective decentralization in Gombe Local Government Area

Table 2. Respondent's Opinion on How Inadequate Funding Affects the Performance of Local Governments Under a Decentralized System in Gombe Local Government Area, Gombe State

Question/Stratum	SD	D	UD	A	SA	TOTAL
8. Inadequate funding has a negative impact on the performance of local governments under decentralization in Gombe Local Government Area.	28 (6.7%)	41 (9.8%)	33 (7.9%)	175 (42.0%)	140 (33.6%)	417 (100%)
9. Local governments in Gombe Local Government Area struggle to meet their operational and developmental goals	22 (5.3%)	37 (8.9%)	41 (9.8%)	183 (43.9%)	134 (32.1%)	417 (100%)

due to insufficient funds.						
10. The lack of sufficient financial resources limits the ability of local governments to provide essential public services.	24 (5.8%)	30 (7.2%)	36 (8.6%)	185 (44.4%)	142 (34.0%)	417 (100%)
11. Inadequate funding leads to a delay in the implementation of development projects under the decentralized system.	10 (2.4%)	18 (4.3%)	25 (6.0%)	195 (46.8%)	169 (40.5%)	417 (100%)
12. Financial mismanagement due to inadequate funding hampers local governments' capacity to perform effectively in Gombe Local Government Area.	23 (5.5%)	35 (8.4%)	46 (11.0%)	168 (40.3%)	145 (34.8%)	417 (100%)
13. Dependence on federal allocations limits the financial autonomy of local governments in Gombe Local Government Area.	19 (4.6%)	27 (6.5%)	39 (9.4%)	180 (43.2%)	152 (36.5%)	417 (100%)
14. Inadequate internally generated revenue (IGR) weakens the sustainability of decentralization at the local level.	22 (5.3%)	31 (7.4%)	37 (8.9%)	178 (42.7%)	149 (35.7%)	417 (100%)

Source: Fieldwork, (2025)

Table 2 shows that respondents perceive inadequate funding as a major factor negatively affecting the performance of local governments under a decentralized system in Gombe Local Government Area. For example, 175 respondents (42.0%) agreed and 140 (33.6%) strongly agreed that insufficient

funding has a negative impact on local government performance, while only 28 (6.7%) strongly disagreed, 41 (9.8%) disagreed, and 33 (7.9%) were undecided. Similarly, 183 (43.9%) agreed and 134 (32.1%) strongly agreed that local governments struggle to meet operational and developmental goals due to insufficient funds, with a small proportion expressing disagreement (22, 5.3%; 37, 8.9%) or uncertainty (41, 9.8%). On the provision of essential public services, 185 respondents (44.4%) agreed and 142 (34.0%) strongly agreed that financial limitations reduce service delivery, while 24 (5.8%) strongly disagreed, 30 (7.2%) disagreed, and 36 (8.6%) were undecided. These responses indicate that the majority, over 75%, recognize inadequate funding as a critical obstacle to effective decentralized governance.

The table further shows that inadequate funding contributes to delays in project implementation, financial mismanagement, and limited autonomy of local governments. Specifically, 195 respondents (46.8%) agreed and 169 (40.5%) strongly agreed that funding shortages delay development projects, while only 10 (2.4%) strongly disagreed, 18 (4.3%) disagreed, and 25 (6.0%) were undecided. Regarding financial management, 168 (40.3%) agreed and 145 (34.8%) strongly agreed that inadequate funding hampers the capacity of local governments, with 23 (5.5%) strongly disagreeing, 35 (8.4%) disagreeing, and 46 (11.0%) undecided. Dependence on federal allocations was also highlighted, with 180 (43.2%) agreeing and 152 (36.5%) strongly agreeing that it limits financial autonomy, while 19 (4.6%) strongly disagreed, 27 (6.5%) disagreed, and 39 (9.4%) were undecided. Finally, 178 (42.7%) agreed and 149 (35.7%) strongly agreed that inadequate internally generated revenue weakens the sustainability of decentralization, showing a clear majority consensus. Overall, Table 2 demonstrates that insufficient funding is a major impediment to the effective functioning, autonomy, and sustainability of local governments in Gombe Local Government Area.

Table 3: Respondent's Opinion on the Impact of Corruption and Mismanagement on Decentralized Governance Effectiveness in Gombe Local Government Area, Gombe State

Question/Stratum	SD	D	UD	A	SA	TOTAL
15. Corruption among local government officials in Gombe Local Government Area significantly undermines the effectiveness of decentralized governance.	18 (4.3%)	27 (6.5%)	39 (9.4%)	165 (39.6%)	168 (40.2%)	417 (100%)
16. Mismanagement of resources in local governments affects the ability to deliver public	21 (5.0%)	29 (7.0%)	36 (8.6%)	162 (38.8%)	169 (40.6%)	417 (100%)

services efficiently under decentralization.						
17. The lack of accountability within local government administrations hinders the effective implementation of decentralized policies in Gombe Local Government Area.	17 (4.1%)	31 (7.4%)	41 (9.8%)	160 (38.4%)	168 (40.3%)	417 (100%)
18. Transparency in local government operations is often compromised, leading to a reduction in the effectiveness of decentralized governance in Gombe Local Government Area.	19 (4.6%)	25 (6.0%)	38 (9.1%)	166 (39.8%)	169 (40.5%)	417 (100%)
19. Corruption and mismanagement in the allocation of public funds reduce the overall impact of decentralization in Gombe Local Government Area.	16 (3.8%)	28 (6.7%)	37 (8.9%)	171 (41.0%)	165 (39.6%)	417 (100%)
20. The diversion of public funds by local government officials hinders the execution of community-based projects.	10 (2.4%)	18 (4.3%)	25 (6.0%)	190 (45.6%)	174 (41.7%)	417 (100%)
21. Weak audit and oversight mechanisms encourage corruption within decentralized governance in Gombe Local Government Area.	22 (5.3%)	30 (7.2%)	35 (8.4%)	161 (38.6%)	169 (40.5%)	417 (100%)

Source: Fieldwork, (2025)

The data in Table 3 indicate that corruption and mismanagement are major impediments to the effectiveness of decentralized governance in Gombe Local Government Area. A significant majority of respondents, ranging from 78% to 87%, agreed or strongly agreed that corruption among local government officials, mismanagement of resources, lack of accountability, and compromised transparency undermine the ability of local governments to deliver public services efficiently. For instance, 165 respondents (39.6%) agreed and 168 (40.2%) strongly agreed that corruption significantly reduces governance effectiveness, while only a small fraction expressed disagreement or remained undecided. Similarly, 162 respondents (38.8%) agreed and 169 (40.6%) strongly agreed that mismanagement affects service delivery, showing that respondents widely perceive unethical practices and poor resource administration as critical challenges to decentralization.

The findings further highlight that corruption impacts both financial and operational aspects of local governance. Over 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the diversion of public funds hinders the execution of community-based projects, and 79% indicated that corruption and mismanagement in fund allocation reduce the overall impact of decentralization. Additionally, weak audit and oversight mechanisms were noted as enabling factors, with 38.6% agreeing and 40.5% strongly agreeing that inadequate monitoring encourages corrupt practices. These results demonstrate that, despite the formal existence of decentralized structures, the intended benefits of decentralization in Gombe LGA—such as accountability, effective service delivery, and citizen participation—are compromised by systemic ethical lapses and institutional weaknesses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that political interference significantly affects the implementation of decentralized policies in Gombe Local Government Area. Analysis of the responses showed that the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that political figures influence local government decision-making, appointments, and resource allocation. This corroborates the assertion by Aderibigbe (2019) that excessive political interference undermines local government autonomy, creates inefficiencies, and delays the execution of development projects. The Chi-square test further confirmed this relationship, as the calculated value exceeded the critical value, indicating a statistically significant effect. These results suggest that despite the intended decentralization, political pressures continue to hinder effective governance at the local level, confirming that political neutrality is essential for policy implementation.

The study also highlighted that inadequate funding remains a major challenge for local government performance under the decentralized system. Respondents reported that insufficient financial resources limit the capacity of local governments to meet operational and developmental goals, provide essential public services, and complete community projects on time. This aligns with the findings of Eze and Okafor (2020), who argued that lack of adequate

funding constrains local government effectiveness and delays development initiatives. The Chi-square analysis reinforced the significance of this relationship, indicating that financial insufficiency directly impacts the efficiency of decentralized governance. Therefore, improving funding mechanisms, including boosting internally generated revenue and ensuring timely federal allocations, is crucial for achieving local government objectives.

Corruption and mismanagement of resources were identified as major impediments to effective decentralized governance. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that misappropriation of funds, weak oversight, and lack of accountability reduce the impact of decentralization on community development. These findings are consistent with studies by Olowu and Akinola (2018), which emphasized that corruption erodes trust, undermines service delivery, and compromises project execution at the local government level. The statistically significant chi-square result further confirms that corruption and mismanagement are not merely perceived problems but have measurable adverse effects on governance outcomes. These results underscore the need for strict audit mechanisms, transparent financial procedures, and accountable leadership.

The research findings also indicated that political appointments in local government leadership weaken the neutrality and effectiveness of decentralized governance. Respondents noted that appointing officials based on political loyalty rather than competence creates inefficiency and diminishes policy implementation. This observation supports the argument by Adeyemo (2017) that merit-based appointments are critical to ensuring functional and accountable local government administration. The significant chi-square values from the hypothesis testing show that such political appointments are a statistically meaningful factor influencing decentralization outcomes. Consequently, adopting professional and transparent recruitment processes is essential to strengthen local government capacity.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the lack of adequate financial autonomy exacerbates local government challenges. Dependence on federal allocations restricts local authorities from making timely and independent decisions, limiting the sustainability of decentralization. Respondents emphasized that internally generated revenue is insufficient to support developmental projects without federal support. This finding aligns with the observations of Agba and Onah (2021), who argued that financial dependence undermines local government autonomy and hampers effective policy execution. The statistical evidence indicates that limited financial autonomy significantly influences performance, highlighting the need for reforms to empower local governments financially and encourage innovative revenue generation.

Finally, the study found that weak audit and oversight mechanisms allow corruption and mismanagement to thrive, affecting service delivery and community development. Respondents reported that insufficient monitoring of projects and public funds reduces accountability and creates opportunities for diversion of resources. This is consistent with the findings of Salihu (2019), who noted that robust financial controls and transparency are vital to the success of

decentralized governance. The chi-square analysis confirmed that inadequate oversight has a significant effect on governance effectiveness. Strengthening monitoring institutions, enhancing transparency, and promoting citizen participation are therefore critical to improving the impact of decentralization in Gombe Local Government Area.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that decentralization in Gombe Local Government Area faces significant challenges that hinder its effectiveness in promoting local governance and community development. Political interference was found to compromise the autonomy of local governments, influencing appointments, decision-making, and resource allocation, thereby creating inefficiencies and delaying the execution of development projects. Inadequate funding, both in terms of irregular federal allocations and weak internally generated revenue, further constrains the operational capacity of local governments, limiting their ability to deliver essential services and complete community-based projects.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the challenges of decentralization are interconnected, with financial insufficiency often exacerbating corruption and political interference weakening accountability and policy implementation. For decentralization to achieve its intended objectives of enhancing service delivery, promoting citizen participation, and fostering sustainable development, it is essential to strengthen institutional frameworks, ensure financial autonomy, enforce merit-based appointments, and promote transparency and accountability in local government operations. The study underscores that addressing these challenges is not only critical for the effectiveness of governance in Gombe Local Government Area but also offers lessons for broader policy reforms in Nigeria's local government system, emphasizing that decentralization can only succeed when structural, financial, and ethical governance barriers are effectively mitigated.

FURTHER STUDY

Based on the findings of the research conducted at Gombe Local Government Area, it is evident that the challenges of decentralization significantly hinder effective local governance. To address these challenges and enhance the performance of local governments, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. Strengthen Financial Autonomy and Resource Mobilization: Local governments should prioritize developing robust internally generated revenue (IGR) systems and reducing over-reliance on federal allocations. By diversifying revenue sources, improving tax administration, and introducing innovative income-generating strategies, local authorities can ensure timely funding for operational and developmental activities. This will reduce project delays, improve public service delivery, and enhance the sustainability of decentralized governance, allowing local governments to act independently and respond promptly to community needs.

ii. Promote Transparency, Accountability, and Anti-Corruption Measures: To curb corruption and mismanagement, local governments must implement stringent financial controls, regular audits, and transparent reporting mechanisms. Public access to financial records and active citizen participation in monitoring projects can foster accountability and deter misappropriation of resources. Ensuring that officials are held responsible for their actions will strengthen public trust, improve project completion rates, and enhance the overall effectiveness of decentralization in delivering tangible benefits to communities.

iii. Minimize Political Interference and Strengthen Merit-Based Leadership: Political influence in appointments and decision-making undermines local government efficiency. Local authorities should adopt merit-based recruitment and clearly defined institutional policies that prioritize competence over political loyalty. Ensuring that key positions are occupied by qualified personnel will improve administrative efficiency, expedite policy implementation, and promote objective decision-making, ultimately enhancing the capacity of local governments to achieve their developmental and service delivery objectives under a decentralized system.

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