

Local Government Financing and Education Service Delivery in Mbale district

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Abstract

Decentralized financing involves the transfer of power and resources from the Central government to local governments, which holds great potential in improving service delivery in the different local governments including education service delivery. However, the practical implementation of decentralized or local government financing has posed significant challenges in third world countries, including Uganda. This study aimed at examining the influence of local government financing on education service delivery in Mbale district. The specific objectives of the study were to examine the influence of local financial resources on education service delivery, and to analyze the influence of intergovernmental transfers on education service delivery in Mbale district. A quantitative approach was adopted and simple linear regression analysis was employed to establish the strength, direction, and the significance of the influence of the independent variables (local financial resources and intergovernmental transfers) on the dependent variable (education service delivery). The findings indicated that local financial resources have a statistically weak positive and significant influence on education service delivery in Mbale district. It was also revealed that intergovernmental transfers have a statistically strong positive and significant influence on education service delivery in Mbale district. Therefore, the study concludes that local government financing has a significant influence on education service delivery in Mbale district in that as local government financing in terms of local financial resources and intergovernmental transfers increases, there will also be a resultant improvement in the education service delivery in Mbale district. The study suggests that the central government should increase on the rate or volume of transfers in form of intergovernmental transfers that are provided to the local governments, Mbale district inclusive as these play a fundamental role in improving education service delivery and also local government authorities should implement measures aimed at raising and increasing local financial resources as these also significantly influence and improvement in education service delivery when effectively and efficiently utilized in Mbale district.

Key Words: Local Government, Financing, Education Service Delivery

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I. Background to decentralized education

In recent years, there has been a growing global focus on decentralization. This process entails shifting power from the central government to local governments, encompassing fiscal, administrative, and political aspects (Rondinelli, 1981 as cited by Nsibambi, 1998). Administrative decentralization pertains to the structure of local governments, while political decentralization involves the appointment of executives to lead local government. Fiscal decentralization centers on financial and expenditure arrangements between local and central governments (Rodden, 2016). The distribution of decentralized powers plays a crucial role in advancing service delivery to the grassroots.

From an economic standpoint, these justifications serve to enhance the efficiency of fiscal decentralization based on the following factors. Firstly, fiscal decentralization empowers local governments to determine the optimal levels of service delivery. Secondly, the competition among various local governments in

offering public services enables citizens to choose their preferred service delivery and tax rates by moving from one jurisdiction to another. Lastly, building on the works of Tiebout (1959), Musgrave (1956) and Oates (1995) as cited by Sagoe (2017) regards decentralization as a mechanism that ensures efficiency in service production, leading to the highest level of satisfaction.

Numerous case studies have provided empirical evidence that the anticipated benefits of decentralization are not easily attained. In some instances, even when achieved, there are challenges related to quality. Several researchers (Sagoe, 2017; Ibeanusi, 2011; Jutting et al., 2005; Doh, 2017; Karachiwalla & Park, 2017; Glewwe & Muralidharan, 2016; Fox et al., 2011; Rodden, 2016) have highlighted this fact. Therefore, it is crucial to meet specific conditions at the local level and within decentralized bodies in order to realize these gains. In essence, decentralization serves as a means to improve service delivery. However, for it to be effective, it requires a well-designed policy and mechanisms that promote maximum participation, transparency, and accountability.

The findings of Ibeanusi (2011) sheds light on the shortcomings of decentralization in achieving power balance, accountability to local communities, and improved government efficiency. These failures have a direct impact on the quality of services offered by local governments, and they can be attributed to various factors, including political influences, incentive structures, and the implementation of decentralized institutional designs. In contrast, Doh (2017) argues that the primary cause of the failure in providing quality services in decentralized governments lies in the low motivation and competence levels of the staff members.

The decentralization policy in Uganda was introduced in 1992 to empower citizens in decision-making and enhance service delivery (Olum, 2014; Nsibambi, 1998). The Local Government Act Cap 276, specifically Section 5, outlines the responsibilities of a council, including the implementation of government policies and development plans, with a particular focus on six priority areas, such as primary education. Local councils play a vital role in political decision-making, participation, and accountability to ensure successes of education service delivery in a decentralized system.

1.2 Statement of problem

The government places great importance on education service delivery as a powerful tool for societal transformation. To ensure effective management of primary schools, local councils are granted responsibilities and financial powers (Mushemeza, 2019). At helm of implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) at the district level is the District Education Officer, supervised by the district councils (Mulindwa, 2006).

It is also expected that for this to be achieved, district councils must allocate local revenue to finance primary education in their districts. However, local government are grappling with financing of primary education with over 90% of education funding coming the central government with little or no contributions from the local revenues (USAID, 2016).

This has caused deficiencies in education service delivery especially in Mbale district, including insufficient school infrastructures, unequal distribution of education services, poor academic performance, inadequate teacher quality, and ineffective school management (Mbale district Five Year Development Plan 2016-2021). The researchers sought to make an investigation by exploring the connection between local government financing and education service delivery in Mbale district.

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 General objective

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of local government financing on education service delivery in Mbale district.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

1. To examine the influence of local financial resources on education service delivery in Mbale district.
2. To analyze the influence of intergovernmental transfers on education service delivery in Mbale district.

1.4 Study hypotheses

The specific objectives were guided by the following alternative hypotheses;

Ha1: Local financial resources have a statistically significant influence on education service delivery in Mbale district.

Ha2: Intergovernmental transfers have a statistically significant influence on education service delivery in Mbale district.

2.1 Legal and Policy framework

The current legal and policy framework in Uganda divides responsibilities for delivering education and sports services between the local and central government. The Second Schedule of the Local Government Act CAP 243 mandates local government councils to provide education and sports functions and services in line with article 176(2) of the Constitution and Sections 96 and 97 of the Local Government Act. These include; providing quality education services from pre-primary, primary, secondary, teacher education, science

technology innovation, special needs, career guidance and technical and vocational education and also managing education budgets.

Also, local governments have duty to provide support supervision, monitor and inspect education service provision, Sports & Co-curricular Development Services. Another function is to recruit, train and purchase of specialized equipment and equipping the institutions to support learners with special needs and to ensure that issues affecting learners' inability to complete education cycle are addressed (MoES, 2021).

This study examined local government financing and education service delivery in Mbale district. This article is organized as follows; we start by giving insights to decentralized education in Section 1. In Section 2, we explain the legal and policy framework of education financing, in section 3, we review literature on local government financing and education service delivery. In section 4, we explain the adoption of the methodology, and in Section 5, we present the findings. Lastly, we conclude with implication of the findings in section 6.

2.1.1 Significance of the study

The results of the study give address the complexes regarding LG responsibilities, planning, financing and accountability in education service delivery which for long remained poorly understood. The fact that few studies have been made regarding local government financing mechanisms of education service delivery, this study provided findings which remained hugely unexplored before.

2.1.2 Contribution of the paper

The findings provide valuable information which guides local governments in how to fund primary education using local revenue. It also provides emphasis in identifying local revenue sources which is critical in sustaining primary education financing.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Local Government Financing and Education Service Delivery

In terms of local government financing, decentralization plays a crucial role in achieving efficiency gains in the provision of education services (Heinelt, Hlepas, Kuhlmann, & Swianiewicz, 2018). By decentralizing the financial decision-making process, decision-makers and local communities are brought closer together, resulting in a more efficient and effective service delivery (Giorgio, 2014). According to classical theorists like Tiebout and Musgrave, decentralized financing empowers local decision-makers with better access to information about local conditions, which directly impacts revenue generation and service delivery. This advantage enables them to tailor education services and public spending patterns to better suit the specific needs and preferences of the local population. Overall, this is expected to significantly improve the efficiency and quality of education services, particularly for the local constituents.

In his work (1972) Oates as cited in Sagoe (2017) puts forth an economic argument that stems from the variety of tastes and spillover effects of public goods. Oates employed models to illustrate how local governments can customize their services to cater to local preferences. In contrast, the central government delivers standardized services to all regions. Furthermore, sub-national governments, due to their proximity to local populations, can adjust their budgets to align with local preferences, thus reflecting the preferences of their communities more accurately.

Scholars also explore the efficiency argument that supports decentralization from the stand point of the advantages gained by consumers through allocative efficiency and the gains achieved by producers in terms of technical efficiency in delivering goods and services (Rondinelli & Cheema, 1983). Allocative efficiency can be realized by providing a more appropriate bundle of services to the citizens by the local government. This implies that the proportions of public spending allocated to services such as education, health, water provision, and others can be adjusted based on the local government's response to local demands in a decentralized financial context. Higher technical efficiency is attained when larger quantities and higher quality of goods and services are provided using the same number of resources. Overall, delegating some of the centralized responsibilities to local levels has been envisioned as a means to enhance both allocative and technical efficiency across different public services in most decentralization agendas.

McLure (2002) suggests that decentralization, especially in terms of fiscal and financial aspects, has a significant impact on service provision at the sub-national level. He argues that having sufficient fiscal resources and the authority to make expenditure decisions are essential for effective service delivery by local governments. McLure distinguishes between external sources and locally raised revenues as two main types of fiscal resources that can enhance accountability at the sub-national level. Additionally, sub-national governments should have the necessary discretion to determine how to allocate these revenues to fulfill their public service obligations like education.

The four-pillar structure of the inter-governmental fiscal framework governs the financing of local service provision by sub-national governments. These pillars include revenue assignments, sub-national borrowing, transfers, and expenditure responsibilities. Sub-national governments employ various channels

within this framework to finance their expenditure responsibilities, which encompass the provision of services. These channels include self-financing through local tax revenues, user charges, or shared revenues with the central government. Intergovernmental fiscal transfers can also be utilized, either through general-purpose block transfers or earmarked-specific purpose transfers (Bird, 2015). Sub-national borrowing serves as an additional option for financing. In the context of local service delivery, financing options encompass public-private partnerships, co-financing or co-production arrangements where users contribute monetarily or through labor, and other co-participative schemes. These avenues have also been encouraged by decentralization processes (Saavedra, 2010).

In terms of fiscal resource management, central governments establish varying levels of discretion to ensure a specific level of spending on particular goods and services provided by sub-national budgets. These levels are influenced by factors such as the local capacity to manage resources, fiscal considerations, national objectives, political issues, and institutional constraints. The central government typically has the ability to regulate spending allocations through conditions attached to shared revenues and transfers to local governments, controls on sub-national borrowing, or other fiscal mechanisms (Arze & Martinez-Vazquez, 2003). Moreover, the government can implement borrowing controls or tighten local borrowing to raise funds exclusively for specific categories of goods and services provided at the local level (World Bank, 2014b). Due to these factors, the measurement of fiscal decentralization presents several complexities and limitations when examined empirically (Bird, 2010).

Allocative and productive efficiency form the theoretical underpinning of decentralized financing, essential for the efficiency and sustainability of service delivery (Sujarwoto, 2017). This model also promotes equity in economic resource management. Decentralization is expected to enhance accountability, responsiveness, transparency, and efficiency in local service delivery. By aligning education with the needs and preferences of the local population, decentralization can drive participation, broaden coverage, and elevate the quality of education. However, the potential efficiency gains from decentralization have sparked debates and uncertainties in the literature, particularly concerning community financing schemes and the fiscal implications for education provision (World Bank, 2014b).

The two studies conducted by Sow & Razafimahefa (2015) and Sagoe (2017) both support the notion that increasing expenditures allocated to service delivery is crucial for achieving positive outcomes in service delivery. However, it is important to note that this does not necessarily lead to a proportional improvement in service quality, as measured by service delivery outcomes. In order to achieve efficient and effective decentralization for quality service delivery, certain institutional factors need to be in place. Sow and Razafimahefa (2015), Smoke (2015b), and Sagoe (2017) all highlight the importance of a strong capacity at the local level, accountability across different levels of institutions, good governance, and the autonomy of local governments. While decentralized financing plays a significant role, it is not the sole determinant. Merely improving the output of local service delivery is insufficient; the quality of the services provided at the local level is of utmost importance (Faguet & Poschl, 2015). Interestingly, the literature reviewed in this study does not extensively discuss the impact of decentralized financing on the quality of education service provision. This raises the question of how local financing can effectively enhance education service provision at the local level.

The distribution of financial resources and delivery of services in Uganda are significantly influenced by political authority (Kato, 2008; Olum, 2014). The recent introduction of direct fund transfers from the central government to primary schools has expedited decision-making processes at the local level. Local Governments, as stipulated in Section 77 of the Local Government Act, have the authority to devise, sanction, and implement their budgets, with a particular emphasis on priority areas such as Education. This allows them to prioritize education infrastructure projects and allocate resources accordingly. Additionally, local councils are tasked with budget approval, ensuring that funds are utilized in accordance with council decisions (Mushemeza, 2019). However, there is a concern that the dominant ethnic group may restrict public spending to maintain their dominance and prevent others from benefiting.

4.0 Methodology

The quantitative data approach was utilized, particularly the questionnaire (Amin, 2005). This was due to the big number of teachers. As a result, quantitative data on local government financing and education service delivery in Mbale district was collected in government-aided primary schools as well as the education department. A sample of 80 respondents provided feedback. The study employed both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze and interpret the findings, with a specific emphasis on quantitative data. Simple linear regression was used to address the study's objectives. Simple linear regression analysis helped identify the significant influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable under study.

5.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

This section gives an overview on data presentation and analysis of the findings in relation to the study objectives as presented subsequently below;

5.1 Findings on the study objectives

The findings presented in this section are in line with the specific objectives of the study.

5.1.1 Influence of local financial resources on education service delivery in Mbale district

The study sought to examine whether local financial resources influence education service delivery in Mbale district. The findings are presented using Simple linear regression analysis at a 5% level of significance in Table 1.

Table 1: Regression findings on the influence of local financial resources on education service delivery in Mbale district

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.375 ^a	.141	.130	1.02657		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Local Financial Resources						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.917	.575		1.596	.000
	Local Financial Resources	.510	.143	.375	3.572	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Education Service Delivery

Source: Author's computations based on primary data (2024)

The regression findings from Table 1 indicate a statistically weak positive and significant influence of local financial resources on education service delivery in Mbale district ($\beta=0.375$, P-value=0.000) at a 0.05 level of significance. The regression findings indicate that a unit increase in local financial resources significantly results into an improvement in education service delivery by 37.5%. The results imply that as local financial resources increase, it results into an improvement in education service delivery in Mbale district.

The model summary results indicate that the coefficient of determination (Adjusted R-square) was 0.130, which indicates that local financial resources explain 13.0% of the total variations in education service delivery in Mbale district and the remaining 87.0% of the variations are explained by other factors. This implies that local financial resources slightly but significantly influence education service delivery in Mbale district. Therefore, to improve education service delivery there has to be an increase in local financial resources in Mbale district.

5.1.2 Influence of intergovernmental transfers on education service delivery in Mbale district

The study also sought to analyze whether intergovernmental transfers influence education service delivery in Mbale district. The findings are presented using Simple linear regression analysis at a 5% level of significance in Table 2.

Table 2: Regression findings on the influence of local financial resources on education service delivery in Mbale district

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.602 ^a	.362	.354	.57907		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Intergovernmental Transfers						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.321	.410		3.223	.002
	Intergovernmental Transfers	.677	.102	.602	6.651	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Education Service Delivery

Source: Author's computations based on primary data (2024)

The regression findings from Table 2 reveal a statistically strong positive and significant influence of intergovernmental transfers on education service delivery in Mbale district ($\beta=0.602$, P-value=0.000) at a 0.05 level of significance. The regression findings indicate that a unit increase in intergovernmental transfers significantly results into an improvement in education service delivery by 60.2%. The results imply that as intergovernmental transfers increase, it results into an improvement in education service delivery in Mbale district.

The model summary results indicate that the coefficient of determination (Adjusted R-square) was 0.354, which indicates that intergovernmental transfers explain 35.4% of the total variations in education service delivery in Mbale district and the remaining 64.6% of the variations are explained by other factors. This implies

that intergovernmental transfers immensely and significantly influence education service delivery in Mbale district. Therefore, to improve education service delivery there has to be an increase in intergovernmental transfers in Mbale district.

6.0 Conclusions

The study concludes that local government financing in terms of local financial resources and intergovernmental transfers has a significant influence on education service delivery in Mbale district in that as local financial resources and intergovernmental transfers increase, there will also be a resultant improvement in the education service delivery in Mbale district.

7.0 Recommendations

The study suggests that the central government should increase on the rate or volume of transfers in form of intergovernmental transfers that are provided to the local governments, Mbale district inclusive as these play a fundamental role in improving education service delivery and also local government authorities should implement measures aimed at raising and increasing local financial resources as these also significantly influence and improvement in education service delivery when effectively and efficiently utilized in Mbale district.

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Appendix

Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree i.e. (5- Strongly Agree, 4- Agree, 3- Not sure, 2- Disagree, 1-Strongly Disagree)

3-

		1	2	3	4	5
	Local financial sources					
1	LG responsibilities are accompanied with financial capacity to deliver education services					
2	sufficient local financial resources have increased education expenditures in the district					
3	LG planning enables local leaders to allocate enough resources in education needs					
4	decentralization has helped local leaders to align their budgets with local education needs					
5	local revenue has enabled higher technical efficiency in the delivery of education services					
	Intergovernmental transfers	1	2	3	4	5
1	LG has the power to borrow funds to finance education needs					
2	LG have a lot of discretion to allocate funds for education services					
3	LG have embraced public private partnership model of education financing					
4	LG revenue has enhanced accountability, responsiveness, transparency and efficiency in education service delivery					
5	CG transfers to LGs has expedited education decision-making processes at the local level					
	Education service delivery	1	2	3	4	5
1	There is efficient education service delivery					
2	There is effective education service delivery					
3	Education services are timely					
4	Education services are regularly delivered					