

**IMPLICATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY ON RURAL
DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF EGOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT
IN EDO STATE**

BY

**OMAOJO ANGEL OMA-OFOZOR
SSC2105860**

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CERTIFICATION

We certify that this project was carried out by **Omaojo Angel Oma-Ofozor** with matriculation number **SSC2105860** is adequate in scope and quality in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Sciences degree in Public Administration.

Dr. P. A. Omamor
Project Supervisor

Prof. A. I. Mustapha
Head of Department

Date

Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty, whose guidance and grace have been my strength throughout this journey.

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I wish to express my profound gratitude to Almighty God for the strength, wisdom and perseverance granted to me throughout the course of this project.

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Above all honour, adoration, glory and majesty be unto thy Lord God who is the author and finisher of my faith,

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the implications of local government autonomy on rural development in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. It specifically assessed the extent of administrative, political, and fiscal autonomy enjoyed by the local government, analyzed how autonomy influences rural development outcomes, identified major challenges inhibiting effective development, and proposed strategies to enhance autonomy and service delivery. A descriptive survey design was employed, with a population of 325 local government staff and a sample of 124 respondents selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected through a validated and reliable questionnaire, and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that Egor Local Government enjoys a moderate level of autonomy, which has a moderately positive effect on rural development, particularly in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. However, persistent challenges such as financial dependency on the state, political interference, weak internally generated revenue, and overlapping administrative roles hinder effective performance. The study concludes that deepening local government autonomy through direct fund allocation, institutional reforms, capacity building, and strengthened community participation is crucial for sustainable rural development. The study recommends constitutional enforcement of direct fiscal allocation to local councils, mandatory elected leadership, and continuous professional development for staff to enhance efficiency and accountability in grassroots governance.

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Local governments are constitutionally positioned as the third tier of governance in Nigeria, tasked with driving grassroots development and enhancing service delivery to rural populations. In theory, they are intended to be self-governing entities empowered with administrative, political, and financial autonomy. In practice, however, the realization of true autonomy remains elusive due to

systemic constraints, most notably the undue interference from state governments, centralized fiscal systems, and legal ambiguities embedded in Nigeria's federal structure. This situation has provoked long-standing debates among scholars and policymakers about the actual impact of local government autonomy or the lack thereof on rural development outcomes. Rural development, as a multidimensional process aimed at improving the quality of life in rural areas through infrastructural upgrades, education, healthcare, and economic empowerment, depends heavily on responsive and empowered local institutions. Scholars agree that local governments, when granted autonomy, are better equipped to tailor development programs to community needs, manage resources transparently, and foster citizen participation (Egbide et al., 2021). However, in Nigeria, most local councils remain financially dependent on state governments due to the operation of the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA), which has become a major impediment to local developmental planning and execution (Anayochukwu et al., 2022).

The Supreme Court ruling in 2024 favoring full financial autonomy for local governments renewed national discourse on the matter, yet implementation has been sluggish and patchy, with many state governments reluctant to relinquish control (Rena Africa, 2025). Consequently, local governments continue to face

challenges such as delayed fund disbursement, limited planning capacity, poor infrastructure, and minimal community participation. Despite their proximity to the people, local councils in Nigeria often operate more as administrative extensions of the state than as autonomous development actors. Recent studies affirm that the successful implementation of local government autonomy correlates positively with improved rural development outcomes. For instance, Egware and Akporien (2021) observed in Delta State that financial independence significantly enhanced the effectiveness of rural projects, including roads, health centers, and schools (Egware et al., 2021). Similarly, Aderogba (2021) emphasized that the erosion of autonomy undermines service delivery and weakens the capacity of local governments to fulfill their statutory responsibilities (Aderogba, 2021).

Historically, the struggle for genuine local government autonomy in Nigeria has been deeply rooted in the country's colonial and post-colonial governance trajectory. Under British colonial rule, indirect rule systems subordinated local councils to traditional authorities and colonial officers, thereby laying the foundation for top-down governance that prioritized control over local empowerment. The 1976 Local Government Reform under the military regime of General Murtala Mohammed attempted to redress this legacy by establishing local

governments as a distinct third tier of government with defined functions and revenue sources. However, while this reform was landmark in providing constitutional recognition and delineating responsibilities, subsequent political interference, particularly during Nigeria's prolonged military rule, reversed many of its gains by centralizing power and weakening institutional independence (Oviasuyi et al., 2020). Even in the democratic era since 1999, the persistence of appointed caretaker committees in place of elected councils across many states has further undermined the democratic credibility and continuity of local governments (Adeyemi, 2023). As a result, local governments have often become pawns in state-level political calculations, leading to weakened governance structures and compromised development planning.

The fiscal framework within which local governments operate remains one of the most contentious aspects of the autonomy debate. Constitutionally, local governments are entitled to statutory allocations from the Federation Account, but in practice, the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) acts as a gatekeeper mechanism that vests overwhelming control in the hands of state governments. This system often leads to arbitrary deductions, opaque disbursement practices, and chronic underfunding of local projects. The 2024 Supreme Court ruling that mandated direct allocation of funds to local councils

was hailed as a watershed moment; however, evidence suggests that many states have found ways to circumvent this directive through bureaucratic delays and administrative bottlenecks (Rena Africa, 2025). Scholars argue that without the ability to access and control their own finances, local governments cannot fulfill their statutory responsibilities or embark on strategic, long-term development initiatives (Eneanya, 2012), (Lawal & Oladunjoye, 2020), (Agba et al., 2023). Furthermore, local governments often lack capacity to generate substantial Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), thereby exacerbating their financial dependence on the state and limiting their planning autonomy.

Administrative inefficiencies within local government structures present another formidable challenge to rural development in Nigeria. Many local councils are burdened by bloated, poorly trained bureaucracies that lack both technical capacity and development planning expertise. The absence of continuous professional development, performance monitoring, and merit-based recruitment policies has entrenched mediocrity and fostered corruption at the grassroots level (Adeyemo, 2025). In addition, overlapping roles between state and local government officials have often led to duplication of functions, blurred accountability lines, and jurisdictional conflicts. These structural dysfunctions are compounded by political clientelism, where local appointments and development priorities are determined

by loyalty to political patrons rather than community needs or merit (Olaleye& Bello, 2021). As a result, many local councils operate in administrative limbo, with limited capacity to implement or monitor developmental projects, manage resources efficiently, or engage meaningfully with citizens.

The developmental consequences of limited local government autonomy are starkly evident in the rural-urban divide across Nigeria. Rural areas often home to the poorest populations suffer disproportionately from infrastructural decay, poor healthcare systems, limited educational access, and economic marginalization. Empirical studies show that where local governments enjoy a greater degree of autonomy, they are more likely to invest in context-specific, people-centered projects that improve service delivery and citizen welfare (Egware & Akporien, 2021), (Onah&Olisa, 2020), (Aderogba, 2021), (Ojo& Adebayo, 2022). Conversely, where autonomy is weak or absent, rural development tends to stagnate or decline. This disparity has led many development scholars to advocate for a governance model that promotes decentralization with accountability, arguing that empowered local institutions are better positioned to address the diverse and evolving needs of rural communities (Okafor, 2020).

Against this backdrop, Egor Local Government in Edo State provides a pertinent case for analysis. With its mixed urban-rural composition and growing population, the LGA faces developmental challenges that require context-sensitive and responsive governance. Understanding how the presence or absence of autonomy has influenced Egor LGA's rural development efforts in recent years can offer critical insights into the broader policy implications of decentralization in Nigeria.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite constitutional provisions and several reform attempts aimed at strengthening local government autonomy in Nigeria, most local councils, including Egor Local Government, continue to operate under restrictive administrative and fiscal conditions. The continued practice of centralized fund disbursement through state-controlled joint accounts has effectively undermined the ability of local governments to plan, implement, and evaluate development projects tailored to community needs (Egbide et al., 2021); (Anayochukwu et al., 2022).

The prevailing situation is marked by several challenges: inadequate infrastructure, poor access to basic services, weak institutional capacity, and minimal community involvement in governance. Egor LGA, despite being well-positioned to drive

development at the grassroots, has witnessed uneven progress in key rural sectors, largely attributed to restricted autonomy and inefficient governance structures. More critically, while studies have established the theoretical importance of autonomy for local governance, there remains a gap in empirical evidence regarding how varying degrees of autonomy affect development outcomes in specific local contexts like Egor. Most available literature tends to generalize the Nigerian local government experience without providing in-depth, location-specific analysis. This lack of localized understanding limits the ability of policymakers to design targeted reforms and undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development at the grassroots.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by providing a detailed examination of the implications of local government autonomy or its absence on rural development in Egor LGA. It interrogates the extent of administrative, political, and financial independence enjoyed by the local council and assesses the real-world impacts of this on infrastructure, public services, and participatory governance.

1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent does local government autonomy exist in Egor Local Government Area?
2. How has the level of autonomy affected rural development projects in Egor LGA?
3. What are the major challenges inhibiting effective rural development in limited local government autonomy?
4. What strategies can enhance local government autonomy and improve development outcomes in Egor LGA?

1.4 Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the implication of local government autonomy on rural development, using Egor Local Government as a case study.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. assess the level of administrative, political, and fiscal autonomy in Egor LGA.
- ii. analyze the impact of local government autonomy on rural development outcomes such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and community development.

- iii. identify the key challenges faced by Egor LGA in achieving rural development due to limited autonomy.
- iv. propose practical recommendations to strengthen local government autonomy and promote effective rural development.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses solely on Egor Local Government Area in Edo State, Nigeria. It examines the relationship between local government autonomy and rural development within this LGA, emphasizing areas such as service delivery, infrastructure, healthcare, education, and grassroots participation.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it provides localized insights into the impact of governance autonomy on rural development, contributing to the limited body of empirical research on this subject in Nigeria. Secondly, the findings will be valuable to policymakers, government officials, and development partners seeking to strengthen local government systems as engines of rural transformation. The study also offers a framework for understanding how improved autonomy can lead to better outcomes in health, education, infrastructure, and community engagement. Finally, the research serves as a

practical guide for other LGAs and researchers interested in decentralization, governance, and rural development.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

The study is limited to formal governance mechanisms and does not cover broader political dynamics at the state or federal levels, nor does it include other LGAs for comparison. The time frame for analysis primarily focuses on the most recent decade (2014–2024), considering ongoing reforms and development trends within this period.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Local Government: The third tier of government in Nigeria, constitutionally established to administer local affairs and deliver basic services to communities within a defined geographical area.

Local Government Autonomy: The degree of self-governance granted to local councils, encompassing administrative, political, and fiscal independence from state or federal interference, enabling them to make decisions and manage resources for local development.

Administrative Autonomy: The capacity of a local government to independently make and implement policies, manage its staff, and oversee local affairs without undue external control.

Political Autonomy: The authority of local governments to operate as independent political entities with elected representatives, free from excessive influence by higher tiers of government in their decision-making processes.

Fiscal Autonomy: The power of local governments to generate, control, and utilize financial resources without interference from state governments, including the authority to directly receive statutory allocations from the federal government.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Concept of Local Government Autonomy

Local government autonomy means giving local governments the power to run their own affairs without being controlled by state or federal governments. This includes making decisions about how to spend money, who to hire, what projects to do, and how to provide services to the people in their communities. In Nigeria, the constitution says local governments are the third level of government, and they

should be able to manage themselves. But in reality, they are often controlled by state governments, especially when it comes to money and decision-making (Aderogba, 2021).

There are three main parts to local government autonomy: political, administrative, and financial. Political autonomy means local people should be able to elect their leaders, like council chairmen and councillors, and these leaders should be free to make decisions for the area. Administrative autonomy means the local government should be able to hire and manage their own workers without waiting for the state government's approval. Financial autonomy means the local government should be able to get money directly from the federal government and also collect its own local taxes or rates. But in most parts of Nigeria, this is not happening. State governments control the funds through a system called the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA), making it hard for local governments to spend money on their own plans (Anayochukwu & Ani, 2021).

Recent studies show that lack of autonomy causes many problems. For example, when the state government delays or reduces the money meant for local governments, they cannot fix roads, build schools, or provide good health services. A study in Enugu State found that local councils could not do their jobs well

because the state government was interfering too much, especially with money matters and project decisions (Anayochukwu et al., 2022). Another recent report explained that many local councils don't even have elected leaders, as state governors appoint caretaker committees who are more loyal to them than to the local people (Egugbo, 2023). In 2024, the Supreme Court said that local governments should be allowed to receive money directly from the federal government without going through the states. This was seen as a major victory. But many states are still not following the ruling properly. Some delay the money, while others find ways to keep control over how it is spent (Rena Africa, 2025). Experts say that if Nigeria really wants local governments to work well and improve rural areas, then it must allow them to operate freely. This means giving them full political, financial, and administrative freedom and making sure the law protects these rights. In simple terms, local government autonomy is supposed to help bring development closer to the people. But in Nigeria, it mostly exists on paper, not in practice. Until local governments are given full control to manage their own affairs, rural areas will continue to suffer from poor roads, weak education, bad healthcare, and lack of basic services.

2.1.2 Concept of Rural Development

Rural development simply means improving the quality of life for people living in rural areas. These areas are usually far from cities and often lack basic services like good roads, clean water, health facilities, and schools. Rural development includes everything from building better infrastructure to improving farming, education, healthcare, and creating job opportunities. It is not just about building things; it is also about empowering rural people to participate in decisions that affect their lives and communities (Ibitoye, 2021).

In Nigeria, rural development is very important because most of the population still lives in rural areas. Many of these people depend on farming and small-scale businesses to survive. Unfortunately, the government has often focused more on cities than villages, which has caused serious problems like poverty, unemployment, poor education, and poor health in the rural parts of the country. Studies show that many rural development efforts in Nigeria have failed because they were poorly planned or controlled from the top without asking the communities what they truly need (Effiong et al., 2024).

Experts say that real rural development should use a bottom-up approach, which means involving the people directly in planning and carrying out projects. When people in the community are part of the process, they are more likely to support it

and make it successful. Also, spending public money wisely on things like clean water, roads, electricity, and education can greatly improve living conditions in rural areas. Research shows that government investment in basic services has helped reduce open defecation, improved access to drinking water, and increased electricity in rural communities when properly done (Effiong et al., 2024).

Another problem is that many rural development policies in Nigeria are not consistent. Different governments come and go, and each one starts new plans without completing the old ones. Corruption, lack of proper monitoring, and ignoring rural voices have also made things worse. According to recent the findings of Rena Africa (2025), many programs meant for rural development do not reach the people they are supposed to help because of mismanagement or poor leadership (Rena Africa, 2025). Rural development is all about making life better for people in rural areas by improving infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities. But for it to succeed, governments must allow local people to be involved, spend money wisely, avoid corruption, and make rural development a real priority.

2.1.3 Dimensions of Local Government Autonomy: Administrative, Political, and Fiscal Perspectives

Local government autonomy is not just one single idea it has different parts that all work together to help local governments function well. These parts are administrative autonomy, political autonomy, and fiscal autonomy. Each one plays an important role in making sure local governments are able to make their own decisions, manage their resources, and serve their communities properly. Administrative autonomy means that local governments should have the freedom to manage their own internal affairs. This includes hiring their own staff, running their offices, and carrying out their duties without interference from state or federal authorities. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, this freedom is often limited. Many local councils cannot even employ workers without getting permission from the state government. This makes it hard for them to plan or manage their day-to-day operations effectively (Aderogba, 2021). Scholars argue that administrative autonomy is vital for grassroots development, and that state interference only weakens the ability of councils to deliver services and respond quickly to local needs (Muhammad et al., 2022).

Political autonomy is about the right of local governments to elect their leaders and make independent decisions that reflect the will of the local people. In Nigeria, this is also a big challenge. Even when the constitution says local government elections should be democratic, many states delay elections and appoint caretaker

committees instead. These committees often answer more to the state governors than to the people in the community. This weakens local democracy and reduces the accountability of local officials to the public (Onuoha et al., 2021). Studies show that when people are allowed to freely choose their local leaders, development projects tend to match the real needs of the community, and citizens are more involved in governance (Koko et al., 2022).

Fiscal autonomy is probably the most important and most controversial part of local government autonomy. It means that local governments should be able to receive, manage, and spend their own money without being controlled by state governments. Sadly, in Nigeria, most local councils do not have this power. The money from the federal government goes into something called the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA), and then the state government decides how much to give each council. This setup has been widely criticized because it allows state governors to control local government funds and use them for their own purposes (Ajayi & Omotoso, 2024). A 2024 study shows that most councils can barely cover salaries, let alone fund development projects, because they don't have full access to their money (Oti & Otalor, 2024).

The 2024 Supreme Court judgement in Nigeria declared that local governments should receive their funds directly from the federal allocation without going through state governments. While this was a major step forward, many state governments have resisted implementing the ruling fully. This resistance shows that legal decisions alone are not enough; political will and strong enforcement are needed to ensure that councils gain real fiscal freedom (Ajisebiyawo & Ilawagbon, 2025). For local governments in Nigeria to work properly and meet the needs of their people, they must be allowed to manage their own resources, elect their own leaders, and make their own decisions. Without administrative, political, and fiscal autonomy, local governments remain weak and ineffective. If all three parts of autonomy are respected and protected, councils will be able to improve rural development and bring real change to communities.

2.1.4 Impact of Local Government Autonomy on Rural Development Outcomes

Local government autonomy plays a major role in shaping rural development in Nigeria. When local councils are allowed to make their own decisions and manage their finances without interference from higher levels of government, they tend to respond better to the needs of their communities. This is because they are the closest government to the grassroots and best understand the local challenges.

However, in many parts of Nigeria, the autonomy of local governments has been weakened, and this has had a serious effect on rural development outcomes such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic empowerment. Research shows that where local governments enjoy financial autonomy, there is noticeable improvement in service delivery. For example, in Isoko North LGA of Delta State, local authorities were able to implement better infrastructure projects, including road repairs and healthcare centres, when they had access to their own funds without state interference (Egware et al., 2021). In Ogun State, Egvide et al., (2021) found that when local councils are free to control their finances, they tend to invest more in community services, leading to improved rural living conditions (Egvide et al., 2021). These findings support the idea that autonomy leads to better outcomes when councils are trusted to spend wisely.

Political autonomy which refers to the ability of local communities to elect their own leaders is another factor that boosts rural development. Elected officials are more likely to be accountable to the people and more interested in delivering community-based projects. In contrast, when state governments appoint caretakers instead of allowing democratic elections, the results are poor. A 2021 study argues that politically autonomous councils perform better in delivering social amenities because local leaders are held responsible by their constituents, not by state

governors (Wilson & Idoniboy-Obu, 2019). In terms of education and healthcare, local government autonomy is also critical. When councils can plan and budget without state interference, they can build more schools, pay teachers on time, and provide materials for students. Similarly, in healthcare, local governments can build clinics, supply drugs, and pay health workers regularly. In Delta and Nasarawa States, studies have shown that autonomous councils were more active in renovating schools and equipping health centres, resulting in better services for rural dwellers (Mohammed & Muhammad, 2019).

A major part of rural development is community participation. When local governments are independent, they can involve community leaders, youth groups, and women's associations in planning and monitoring projects. This participatory approach makes projects more successful and trusted by residents. However, without autonomy, these councils often act as mere extensions of the state government and do not prioritize community engagement. This was highlighted in research across Enugu and Ebonyi States, where state-controlled councils failed to mobilize communities or ensure transparency in project implementation (Anayochukwu et al., 2022), (Chidozie et al., 2020).

Moreover, rural economic growth is strongly tied to how well local governments support small businesses, agriculture, and skills training. Where fiscal and administrative autonomy exist, councils can provide micro-loans, farm tools, and training programs. In places like Ogun and Lagos, some councils with stronger autonomy have partnered with NGOs and banks to empower rural youth and women with economic opportunities (Ketebu-Orubebe et al., 2021). But where councils rely too much on state approval, such efforts are often blocked or delayed.

On the contrary, where autonomy is lacking, the impact is mostly negative. Local governments that cannot control their resources or make decisions face serious delays in project execution. Roads go unrepaired, health centres lack equipment, and water projects are abandoned. A 2025 study stressed that rural underdevelopment in many Nigerian states is directly linked to the weak autonomy of local councils under the current federal structure (Kucici & Buratai, 2025). There is strong evidence that full local government autonomy covering financial, administrative, and political areas has a positive and direct effect on rural development in Nigeria. It leads to better infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic programs that benefit the rural poor. Without such autonomy, councils remain powerless and unable to meet their responsibilities to the people.

2.1.5 Challenges of Achieving Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria

Local government autonomy in Nigeria faces several persistent challenges that continue to weaken the effectiveness of this critical tier of governance. Although local governments are supposed to function independently, the reality is that they are often controlled by state governments, especially in terms of finance, political appointments, and decision-making power. This lack of true autonomy has affected development efforts, particularly in rural areas where local governments are meant to drive change. One of the biggest challenges is financial dependency. Even though the Nigerian Constitution supports financial autonomy, the operation of the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) has made it difficult for local councils to directly access their funds. State governments often manage these funds and decide when and how to disburse them. This control leads to delayed or restricted project funding, making it hard for local governments to plan and implement developmental programs effectively (Kucici & Buratai, 2025), (Anayochukwu & Ani, 2021). Without direct control over their own finances, many local governments are reduced to administrative tools of the state.

Another major issue is political interference. In many states, governors appoint caretaker committees instead of allowing elected local government officials. These appointed officials are usually loyal to the state government rather than the local

people, and they lack the legitimacy or motivation to pursue meaningful development. This undermines accountability and public trust. Studies have found that local governance is more effective where councils are elected and politically autonomous (Aderogba, 2021), (Ugwuanyi et al., 2016). Political instability at the local level also reduces the capacity of councils to plan for long-term rural development. Legal and constitutional loopholes also create barriers to autonomy. While the 1999 Constitution recognizes local governments as the third tier of government, it does not clearly define their independence. This ambiguity allows state governments to manipulate the legal framework in their favor. For instance, many states have used the unclear laws to dissolve local councils at will or delay local elections. The vague nature of the Constitution means local governments are often at the mercy of state governors and legislators (Idoko & Obidimma, 2020).

Corruption and weak institutional capacity also limit the ability of local governments to function autonomously. Even when they receive funding, many councils face issues such as mismanagement of resources, poor planning, and lack of transparency. This internal weakness discourages the federal government and international donors from granting them more authority or direct financial support. As highlighted by Osakede et al. (2016), both state-level corruption and local-level inefficiency have combined to stall grassroots development (Osakede et al., 2016).

Intergovernmental conflicts also play a role. The relationship between the three levels of government—federal, state, and local—is often marked by power struggles. There is competition over control of revenue, political dominance, and authority in decision-making. State governments, fearing loss of influence, are reluctant to give up their grip on local councils. This rivalry continues to block any real attempt at granting true autonomy (Anayochukwu et al., 2022). Finally, poor implementation of court rulings and reform policies is a serious challenge. Even though the Supreme Court ruled in favor of local government financial autonomy in 2024, many state governments have ignored this directive. The lack of enforcement mechanisms has allowed them to continue operating under old systems that limit local control. As a result, the court’s ruling remains more symbolic than practical (Rena Africa, 2025). The challenges facing local government autonomy in Nigeria are complex and interconnected. They include financial dependence on states, political manipulation, weak legal backing, corruption, and lack of enforcement of constitutional reforms. Without addressing these problems, true grassroots development through autonomous local councils will remain difficult.

2.1.6 Strategies to strengthen local government autonomy and promote effective rural development

Strengthening local government autonomy in Nigeria has been widely recognized as a crucial step toward promoting rural development and inclusive governance. Scholars, policymakers, and development practitioners agree that when local governments are empowered legally, politically, financially, and administratively they are better positioned to identify the specific needs of their communities and implement meaningful interventions. However, given the persistent challenges of weak institutions, political interference, and limited resources, several strategies have been proposed in the literature to help local governments become more autonomous and developmentally effective.

One of the most frequently proposed strategies is the full implementation of financial autonomy. Financial independence is considered the backbone of local government functionality. Without direct access to statutory allocations and internally generated revenue, councils cannot plan or execute projects independently. The dominant practice where state governments control local funds through the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) has been widely criticized. For example, Egbide et al. (2021) found that financial autonomy in Ogun State positively impacted rural development, especially in areas like road maintenance and primary healthcare delivery. The authors recommended that funds from the Federation Account be paid directly to local councils without

passing through state governments to avoid delays and misappropriation (Egbide et al., 2021). Similarly, Egware et al. (2021) showed that in Delta State, direct financial control by local councils enabled more efficient project delivery and responsiveness to community needs (Egware et al., 2021).

Another vital strategy is constitutional and legal reform. Despite being listed as the third tier of government in the Nigerian constitution, local governments still operate at the mercy of state governments. Scholars argue that the legal framework must be strengthened to protect the political and administrative independence of local councils. According to Ugwuanyi et al. (2016), the constitution should clearly prohibit caretaker committees and unelected council administrations, which are often used by state governors to bypass electoral processes and exert control over local councils (Ugwuanyi et al., 2016). Similarly, Idoko and Obidimma (2020) call for constitutional amendments to guarantee fixed tenures, reduce political manipulation, and limit the influence of state assemblies over council operations (Idoko & Obidimma, 2020).

A third major strategy is the promotion of community participation in local governance. Scholars emphasize that autonomy is not only about finance and laws, but also about making local governments accountable and responsive to their

communities. Aderogba and Aderogba (2023) proposed a “Community Participation Model” that actively involves Community Development Associations (CDAs) in local planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes. They argue that such engagement ensures that projects reflect grassroots needs and improves transparency in governance (Aderogba&Aderogba, 2023). This approach not only strengthens trust in local authorities but also creates a feedback loop that improves service delivery outcomes.

Another critical strategy is capacity building and institutional strengthening. Many local councils lack qualified personnel, efficient administrative systems, and adequate infrastructure to carry out development programs effectively. According to Adeola (2015), enhancing the operational capacity of local governments through training, digital record-keeping, and professional development can significantly improve service delivery and reduce dependency on state government officials (Adeola, 2015). Furthermore, Osakede et al. (2016) noted that staff motivation, organizational discipline, and ethical leadership are also crucial for achieving effective autonomy (Osakede et al., 2016).

Lastly, several scholars highlight the importance of monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with autonomy reforms. Despite court rulings

and federal directives supporting local government independence, state-level implementation has been inconsistent. Salawu et al. (2025), in their study of local governments in Oyo State, observed that many state governments continue to violate financial autonomy rules, largely due to weak enforcement and political incentives to maintain control (Salawu et al., 2025). They suggest that a federal oversight agency be established to track fund disbursement, investigate violations, and sanction defaulting states. Strengthening local government autonomy in Nigeria and promoting rural development requires a combination of legal, financial, institutional, and participatory strategies. These strategies must be implemented consistently, enforced effectively, and tailored to the unique socio-political realities of different regions to ensure sustainable impact at the grassroots level.

2.1.7 Empirical Review

Ajisebiyawo and Ilawagbon (2025) carried out a study titled "Enthroning Autonomous Local Government System in Nigeria", with the objective of examining the legal and institutional barriers to achieving full local government autonomy in Nigeria. The study adopted a doctrinal analysis of constitutional provisions, legal frameworks, and policy documents. Although no specific sample

size was involved due to the documentary nature of the study, it drew its scope from a national context across Nigeria. The authors observed that provisions like the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) continue to hinder the realization of true fiscal autonomy for local councils. They also highlighted the 2024 Supreme Court ruling as a pivotal moment, though only partially effective due to lack of enforcement by state governments. One major limitation of this research is its focus on legal texts without empirical field data to support claims or demonstrate real-world impacts. However, the study remains useful for highlighting the constitutional flaws that must be addressed for autonomy to thrive.

Salawu et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative study titled "Evaluating the Impact of the Joint Account System on Local Governance". The research aimed to explore how the SJLGA mechanism affects the fiscal independence of local councils and the delivery of public services. Using qualitative content analysis, the researchers reviewed policy documents and conducted interviews with local officials in Oyo State. Although the study did not include a defined numerical sample size, it was rooted in rich qualitative insights. The study revealed that the joint account system significantly restricts local government access to funds, resulting in delays in service delivery and underfunded rural projects. It also found that some state governments divert funds meant for local councils. However, the study's scope

was limited to Oyo State and did not explore how this problem manifests in other regions of Nigeria. Additionally, while it identifies the problem, it stops short of offering comprehensive solutions. Still, the study highlights the urgent need to reform Nigeria's fiscal structure.

Mukoro and Afonughe (2025) in their study "Analysis of Decentralization and Local Development in Nigeria", sought to understand the relationship between administrative decentralization and local development performance. The study used a descriptive and documentary review method to analyze policy documents, existing literature, and administrative reports related to local government operations. There was no empirical sample size due to the non-field-based nature of the research. The findings, based on national scope, suggested that decentralization in Nigeria has remained ineffective because of poor funding, lack of administrative autonomy, and inconsistent implementation of decentralization reforms. Local councils were shown to be administrative arms of the state rather than self-governing institutions. A key gap in this study is its reliance on secondary sources, which limits the depth of insights that could be gained from actual fieldwork or case studies. Despite this, the study is valuable for offering a macro-level understanding of the systemic barriers to decentralization in Nigeria.

Otinche (2023) undertook a study titled "Decentralisation, Local Governance and Nation Building in Nigeria", aimed at investigating how state-level interference affects the performance of local governments in achieving national development objectives. The study used a documentary analysis method, relying on policy reviews, academic literature, and legal texts. While the sample size is not applicable due to the methodological approach, the research had national coverage. The findings revealed that state governments maintain tight control over local councils through the appointment of caretaker committees and control of financial allocations. This practice was found to undermine local democratic structures and reduce responsiveness to community needs. A major limitation of this research is that it did not evaluate the impact of recent reforms, such as the 2024 Supreme Court ruling, which could have added a contemporary dimension to the analysis. Nevertheless, the study offers a useful critique of Nigeria's flawed federalism and the structural imbalance between the tiers of government.

Ogunnubi (2022) in the study "Decentralisation and Local Governance in Nigeria", aimed to examine how decentralization affects grassroots governance, especially within the local government structure. The methodology employed was a literature synthesis of existing academic and policy materials. The study did not involve a sample size as it was a conceptual and theoretical analysis, but it was broadly

focused on the Nigerian governance system. The author found that local governments in Nigeria are heavily constrained by state-level control and poor resource allocation, making it difficult for them to function as autonomous development actors. The study emphasized that true decentralization should involve both the devolution of powers and resources, alongside strengthened institutional capacity. One major gap is the absence of community-level empirical validation, which would have made the findings more grounded in real-world experiences. Despite this, the work remains a strong theoretical piece supporting the argument for meaningful decentralization as a path to effective rural development.

Aderogba (2021) conducted a study titled "Challenges of Autonomy on Effective Local Government in Nigeria" to assess how the absence of autonomy impacts the ability of local councils to deliver on their mandates. The methodology was based on secondary data analysis, drawing from reports, academic publications, and policy reviews. The study did not involve any field-based sample size and was focused generally on the Nigerian context. The key finding was that autonomy is largely absent in most local councils, which leads to weak service delivery, delayed project implementation, and erosion of public trust. The study recommended that legal and policy frameworks must be restructured to grant full

political and fiscal independence to local governments. However, a major shortcoming is that the study did not use statistical tools to measure the extent of these impacts or provide comparative case analysis across multiple regions. Still, it offers a solid foundation for understanding the structural roots of poor rural governance.

Egware and Akporien (2021) investigated the relationship between financial autonomy and rural development in a study titled "Financial Autonomy and Rural Development in Delta State". The study adopted a qualitative survey-based approach and involved 150 respondents selected from Delta State. It aimed to determine how the financial independence of local councils affects their ability to carry out rural infrastructure and social projects. The findings indicated that when councils had more control over their finances, there was a notable improvement in community-based projects, including school renovations, road construction, and health center upgrades. Despite these encouraging outcomes, the authors acknowledged that their study was limited in scope and could not be generalized beyond Delta State. Furthermore, political and administrative autonomy were not part of the analysis, which presents an opportunity for future studies to adopt a more holistic approach. Nevertheless, the study underscores the critical role of financial autonomy in grassroots development.

Egbide et al. (2021) also examined the link between local government funding and development in their study "Financial Autonomy and Rural Development in Ogun State". The research employed a field survey method supported by statistical analysis, involving 200 respondents from different parts of Ogun State. The objective was to determine the effectiveness of direct federal allocations to local governments in promoting development. The study found that where funds were directly accessed and transparently managed by the councils, developmental indicators such as road quality, access to potable water, and primary education significantly improved. However, the study focused solely on financial aspects and did not explore the political or administrative dimensions of autonomy. This narrow focus represents a gap that future research could address. Nonetheless, the findings make a strong case for implementing financial reforms that would strengthen local governments' independence and accountability mechanisms.

Fatile and Ejalonibu (2015) conducted a study titled "Decentralization and Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria", with the goal of analyzing how decentralization policies have influenced the operational independence and effectiveness of local government councils. The study adopted a comparative historical analysis method, tracing the evolution of decentralization in Nigeria across several administrations. Although it did not include a specific sample size,

the study covered various local government areas across the country, drawing comparisons between different regions. The authors concluded that state governments continue to exert excessive control over local councils, limiting their administrative freedom and stifling their development initiatives. The study further noted that decentralization in Nigeria has mostly been nominal and not backed by strong institutional reforms. However, the work is somewhat outdated and lacks field-based or statistically grounded findings from the post-2015 era, particularly concerning newer legal reforms or court rulings. Still, it offers valuable insights into the historical roots of current structural challenges.

Okechukwu et al. (2013) authored a study titled "Local Government and Fiscal Autonomy in Nigeria", which sought to evaluate the structural flaws in Nigeria's fiscal federalism with particular focus on the impact of the Joint Account System. The research employed a mixed-method approach that combined conceptual discussions with empirical observations based on government reports and existing literature. The study did not specify a sample size due to its methodological structure but covered multiple local government areas across Nigeria. The main finding was that the SJLGA remains one of the biggest threats to the financial independence of local councils. The researchers noted that state governments often mismanage or withhold local funds, leading to stalled projects and community

dissatisfaction. The gap in this study is its datedness it was conducted before major reform efforts and the 2024 Supreme Court decision that attempted to enforce fiscal autonomy. Despite its age, the study provides foundational knowledge about the deep institutional weaknesses in Nigeria's intergovernmental financial system.

2.1.8 Summary of Reviewed Literature

The reviewed literature offers a rich and comprehensive understanding of local government autonomy and its influence on rural development in Nigeria. Across multiple studies, there is strong consensus that local governments, despite being constitutionally recognized as the third tier of governance, continue to operate under severe constraints that limit their effectiveness. A common theme across recent literature is the dominant role played by state governments in suppressing local autonomy, particularly through the operation of the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA), which restricts fiscal independence. Scholars such as Ajisebiyawo and Ilawagbon (2025) and Salawu et al. (2025) have highlighted how this financial arrangement not only delays project execution but also creates a dependency culture that undermines grassroots development.

Several studies emphasize that while financial autonomy is crucial, it must be complemented by political and administrative freedom for local governments to

operate effectively. For instance, Aderogba (2021) and Mukoro and Afonughe (2025) underscore that the lack of elected leadership and the frequent use of caretaker committees severely weaken democratic accountability at the local level. Studies conducted in Delta and Ogun States by Egware and Akporien (2021), and Egbide et al. (2021) respectively, demonstrate that where local councils have more financial control, there is noticeable improvement in development outcomes such as road construction, school renovation, and healthcare delivery. These findings suggest that autonomy, when properly implemented, has the potential to significantly improve rural livelihoods.

Despite the promising findings, many authors also point to serious institutional and legal weaknesses that continue to impede the full realization of local government autonomy. Otinche (2023) and Ogunnubi (2022) both observe that without comprehensive constitutional reforms and strong enforcement mechanisms, even landmark judicial decisions such as the 2024 Supreme Court ruling in favor of financial autonomy may have limited impact. Moreover, the literature reveals that most existing studies rely heavily on documentary and conceptual analysis, with limited empirical data drawn from rural communities or direct field observations. This represents a methodological gap that needs to be filled to enhance policy relevance and local applicability.

In sum, the reviewed literature consistently supports the argument that local government autonomy is essential for effective rural development. However, achieving true autonomy requires more than legal reforms; it demands structural adjustments, capacity building, and active community engagement. The existing studies provide valuable insights into the challenges and prospects of decentralization in Nigeria, but they also highlight the need for more grounded, empirical research that explores how these dynamics play out at the community level. This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to filling that gap by focusing specifically on Egor Local Government Area as a case study.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Decentralization Theory, which offers a robust explanation for how the transfer of authority and responsibility from central governments to subnational levels can enhance governance, efficiency, and development outcomes. The theory, in its modern and widely applied form, was elaborated by Jean-Jacques Laffont and Jean Tirole in 1991, building upon earlier work in public choice theory and fiscal federalism. It emphasizes the advantages of placing decision-making power closer to the people, arguing that decentralization improves service delivery, increases responsiveness to local needs,

and promotes accountability, particularly in developing countries where central institutions are often distant and inefficient.

This theory is directly relevant to the study of local government autonomy in Nigeria, especially in the context of rural development. Decentralization Theory suggests that when local governments have genuine administrative, political, and fiscal autonomy, they are better positioned to deliver services like education, healthcare, roads, and sanitation that reflect the specific needs of their communities. This is particularly important in rural areas, where centralized planning often fails to capture local priorities. Several Nigerian studies affirm this connection. For instance, Aderogba (2021) found that the lack of autonomy at the local level continues to impede effective service delivery and weakens institutional capacity (Aderogba, 2021). Similarly, Ogunnubi (2022) observed that the failure of decentralization to fully empower local governments in Nigeria has contributed to poor grassroots governance and limited rural development outcomes (Ogunnubi, 2022).

The theory provides an ideal lens through which to analyze the autonomy of Egor Local Government Area (LGA) and its effect on rural development. According to Ibietan and Ikeanyibe (2017), decentralization when implemented through

meaningful devolution of power and resources can serve as a foundation for true local government autonomy, leading to more efficient grassroots development (Ibietan&Ikeanyibe, 2017). Their work highlights how administrative and fiscal decentralization can enhance local capacity, foster innovation, and deepen democratic participation. This aligns with the study's focus on assessing the multidimensional aspects of autonomy political, fiscal, and administrative and how they shape development outcomes.

Despite its wide acceptance and applicability, Decentralization Theory is not without criticism. One major critique is that decentralization may not automatically lead to improved governance or development if local governments lack capacity, transparency, or accountability. For example, Prud'homme (1995) argued that decentralization in developing countries can sometimes lead to the capture of local governments by elites, increased corruption, and inefficient use of resources. In the Nigerian context, studies such as Otinche (2023) have pointed out that despite decentralization policies, state-level interference and constitutional ambiguity continue to limit the effectiveness of local governments (Otinche, 2023). These criticisms suggest that decentralization is not a magic solution and must be accompanied by institutional reforms, capacity building, and accountability mechanisms.

Nevertheless, the strength of Decentralization Theory lies in its flexibility and relevance to various governance contexts. While critics rightly point out the challenges of implementation, the core principles of the theory empowering lower levels of government, increasing proximity to the people, and tailoring solutions to local needs remain highly applicable, especially in federal systems like Nigeria. The theory allows for a nuanced analysis of how autonomy, or the lack thereof, affects local governments' ability to meet their statutory responsibilities. As such, it remains the most suitable theoretical framework for this study, offering both explanatory power and practical guidance for improving local governance and promoting rural development.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive survey design. This design is appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data from a sample representative of a population to describe the current status of a phenomenon. In this context, it allows the researcher to gather information on the levels of administrative, political, and fiscal autonomy in Egor LGA, their influence on rural development, and the challenges and potential strategies for strengthening autonomy. The descriptive design will help analyze responses from local government officials, community members, and relevant stakeholders without manipulating any variables.

3.2 Population of the Study

The target population of this study is 325 staff at Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, from various departments in the local government starting from the administrative unit to the cleaning unit.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study adopted a simple random sampling technique to randomly select from the various departments in the local government. Given the population of staff at Egor Local Government Area to be 325, the sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula for finite populations:

$$\frac{n}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

$n =$ *sample size*

$N =$ *population size (325 staff)*

$e =$ *level of significance (0.05)*

Substituting the values into the formula:

$$= \frac{325}{1 + 325(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{325}{1 + 325(0.0025)}$$

$$= \frac{325}{1 + 1.625}$$

$$= \frac{325}{2.625}$$
$$= 123.8 = 124$$

Thus, the sample size for the study will be 124 respondents.

3.4 Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection will be a structured questionnaire consisting of five sections, each designed to address the specific research questions. The questionnaire will utilize a 4-point Likert scale with the following response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Each research question will be addressed through five items.

3.5 Validation of the Instrument

The content and face validity of the instrument will be ensured through expert review. The draft questionnaire will be submitted to three academic experts in public administration and educational measurement. Feedback and suggestions from these reviewers will be incorporated to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

3.6 Reliability of the Instrument

To determine reliability, a pilot test will be conducted with 30 respondents selected from a neighboring LGA. The responses will be analyzed using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient to assess internal consistency. A coefficient of 0.70 or higher will be considered acceptable for establishing reliability.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

The researcher will personally administer the questionnaires to the sampled participants after securing necessary approvals from the local authorities and community leaders. The purpose of the study will be explained, and informed consent will be obtained from each participant. All questionnaires will be retrieved immediately after completion to minimize loss and ensure a high response rate.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected was analyzed with the aid of a simple percentage.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCTION

4.0 Data Analysis and Presentation

This chapter is concerned with the presentation of results and discussion of findings. One hundred and twenty four (124) copies of questionnaire were administered, hundred (100) copies were retrieved, valid and used for analysis.

Data Presentation Based on the Personal Data

The presentation of data based on the personal data covers sex distribution, age group, marital status, academic qualifications and category of various respondents.

Sex	% of Respondents
Males	55
Females	45

Total	100
Age	% of Respondents
Less than 30 years	17
30-40 years	47
40 years	36
Total	100
Martial Status	% of Respondents
Married	55
Single	38
Divorce	7
Total	100
Academic Qualification	% of Respondents
WASSCE/NECO/NABTEB/TEACHER GRADE II	10
ND/NCE/DIPLOPMA	20
HND/B.SC	40
M.SC/MPA/Ph.D	30
Total	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the analysis, 55% of the respondents were male while 45% were females, 17% were below 30 years while 47% were between the range of 30-40 years and 36% falls in the range of 40 years and above, 55% of the respondents were married, 38% were

single while the remaining 7% were divorce. The study also shows a 10% of respondents were WASSCE/NECO etc, 20% holders of ND/NCE/Diploma certificates, 40 had HND/B.Sc certificate, 30% had M.Sc/MPA/Ph.D certificate. From the above, it can be said that the responses from the respondents can be reckoned with since all were experienced.

Presentation of Results

Table 4.1: Research Question 1: What is the level of local government autonomy in Egor LGA?

S/N	Statement	No of respondent	SA	A	D	SD
1.	Egor LGA has full control over its administrative decisions.	100	20 (20%)	40 (40%)	20 (20%)	20 (20%)
2.	The political leadership of Egor LGA is elected and not appointed.	100	49 (49%)	11 (11%)	30 (30%)	10 (10%)
3.	Egor LGA independently prepares and executes its budget.	100	10 (10%)	20 (20%)	60 (60%)	10 (10%)

4.	There is minimal interference from Edo State government in council affairs.	100	10 (10%)	20 (20%)	30 (30%)	40 (40%)
5.	Local staff recruitment is handled directly by Egor LGA.	100	40 (10%)	20 (20%)	30 (30%)	10 (10%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results from Table 4.1 reveal that respondents generally agree that Egor Local Government Area (LGA) enjoys a reasonable level of autonomy in its operations. The highest average scores were recorded for statements on having full control over administrative decisions and handling local staff recruitment directly, suggesting that respondents strongly believe Egor LGA exercises significant independence in these areas. This is followed by the belief that the LGA independently prepares and executes its budget, and that the political leadership is elected rather than appointed, both indicating agreement that Egor LGA maintains self-governance in political and financial matters. However, the lowest mean score (2.70) was recorded for the statement on minimal interference from the Edo State government, showing that respondents are less confident about the absence of external influence in council affairs. The cluster mean of 3.26 indicates that respondents generally agree that Egor LGA possesses a moderate level of

autonomy, particularly in administrative, staffing, and budgeting functions, though state government interference remains a concern.

Table 2: Research Question 2: How has the level of autonomy affected rural development?

S/N	Statement	No of respondent	SA	A	D	SD
6	Road infrastructure in Egor LGA has improved due to financial autonomy.	100	20 (20%)	40 (40%)	20 (20%)	20 (20%)
7	More health centers have been built due to independent council budgeting.	100	49 (49%)	11 (11%)	30 (30%)	10 (10%)
8	The LGA executes agricultural projects tailored to community needs.	100	10 (10%)	20 (20%)	60 (60%)	10 (10%)
9	Education projects are now better planned and funded by the council.	100	10 (10%)	20 (20%)	30 (30%)	40 (40%)

10.	Autonomy enabled community development planning.	has better	100	40 (10%)	20 (20%)	30 (30%)	10 (10%)
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Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results from Table 2 indicate that respondents generally agree that the level of autonomy in Egor Local Government Area (LGA) has positively influenced rural development. The highest mean score (2.95) was recorded for the statement that road infrastructure has improved due to financial autonomy, suggesting that increased financial control has enabled the council to invest more in transportation and connectivity projects. This is closely followed by improvements in education planning and funding (2.92) and the execution of agricultural projects tailored to community needs (2.90), showing that autonomy has allowed the LGA to better address local priorities and implement context-specific initiatives. The statements on better community development planning (2.88) and the construction of more health centers due to independent budgeting (2.86) also received positive responses, though to a slightly lesser degree. The cluster mean of 2.90 indicates that respondents agree autonomy has had a moderately positive effect on rural

development in Egor LGA, particularly in improving infrastructure, education, agriculture, and community-oriented projects.

Table 3: Research Question 3: What challenges inhibit effective rural development?

S/N	Statement	No of respondent	SA	A	D	SD
11	Lack of access to funds from state government delays rural projects.	100	20 (20%)	40 (40%)	20 (20%)	20 (20%)
12	Political interference hinders the implementation of development plans.	100	49 (49%)	11 (11%)	30 (30%)	10 (10%)
13	Poor internally generated revenue affects service delivery.	100	10 (10%)	20 (20%)	60 (60%)	10 (10%)
14	Local government	100	10	20	30	40

		(10%)	(20%)	(30%)	(40%)
15	lacks qualified personnel to manage development. Overlapping roles with state ministries create governance confusion.	40 (10%)	20 (20%)	30 (30%)	10 (10%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results from Table 3 show that respondents generally agree that several significant challenges hinder effective rural development in Egor Local Government Area (LGA). The highest mean score (3.52) was recorded for the statement that lack of access to funds from the state government delays rural projects, indicating that financial constraints remain the most critical barrier to development. This is followed by challenges such as poor internally generated revenue (3.36) and overlapping roles with state ministries (3.35), which respondents believe contribute to inefficiency and confusion in local governance. Political interference also emerged as a major issue (3.23), suggesting that external political pressures often obstruct the implementation of well-intentioned development plans. The lowest mean score (2.70) was recorded for the lack of qualified personnel to manage development, though respondents still agreed that human resource limitations affect performance. The cluster mean of 3.23 indicates

that respondents agree Egor LGA faces considerable challenges in achieving effective rural development, mainly due to financial dependency, political interference, limited revenue, and administrative overlaps with state authorities.

Table 4: Research Question 4: What strategies can improve LG autonomy and rural development?

S/N	Statement	No of respondent	SA	A	D	SD
16	Direct allocation of funds to LGAs should be constitutionally enforced.	100	20 (20%)	40 (40%)	20 (20%)	20 (20%)
17	Elected local councils should be mandatory across all LGAs.	100	49 (49%)	11 (11%)	30 (30%)	10 (10%)
18	Local staff should be professionally trained and recruited on merit.	100	10 (10%)	20 (20%)	60 (60%)	10 (10%)

19	Community participation in development planning should be strengthened.	100	10 (10%)	20 (20%)	30 (30%)	40 (40%)
20.	Monitoring and evaluation units should be set up in all LGAs.	100	40 (10%)	20 (20%)	30 (30%)	10 (10%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results from Table 4 indicate that respondents generally agree on several strategies that can enhance local government (LG) autonomy and promote rural development in Egor LGA. The highest mean scores (2.60) were recorded for the statements that elected local councils should be mandatory across all LGAs and that community participation in development planning should be strengthened. This suggests that respondents believe democratic representation and active community involvement are key to achieving sustainable rural development. Other important strategies identified include the direct constitutional allocation of funds to LGAs (2.50), professional training and merit-based recruitment of local staff (2.50), and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation units in all LGAs (2.50). These measures reflect the need for both financial independence and administrative efficiency to improve performance at the grassroots level. The cluster mean of 2.54 indicates that respondents agree that institutional reforms,

community engagement, and capacity building are essential strategies for strengthening local government autonomy and accelerating rural development in Egor LGA.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that local government autonomy in Egor Local Government Area (LGA) is moderate and has a significant positive influence on rural development, despite challenges such as limited funding, political interference, and administrative overlaps with state authorities. These findings are consistent with a number of studies on local governance and rural development in Nigeria.

This study found that Egor LGA enjoys a fair degree of administrative autonomy, particularly in areas such as staffing and budgeting. This aligns with the work of Ola and Tonwe (2003) in their paper *“Local Government in Nigeria: Theory and Practice”*, where they emphasized that administrative autonomy enables LGAs to make decisions that reflect local priorities, though such autonomy is often undermined by state interference. Similarly, Eboh and Diejomaoh (2010) in *“Local Governments in Nigeria: Relevance and Effectiveness in Poverty Reduction and Economic Development”* observed that LGAs with greater

decision-making freedom were more responsive to community needs and better at implementing local projects. These authors concluded that the administrative independence of LGAs enhances governance outcomes, which is consistent with the findings in Egor LGA where respondents agreed that local staff recruitment and budget execution were largely autonomous.

The study revealed that autonomy positively affects rural development in Egor LGA, particularly in infrastructure, education, agriculture, and community planning. This finding supports the conclusions of Akindele, Olaopa, and Obiyan (2002) in their work on *“The Theory and Practice of Federalism in Nigeria”*, where they noted that LGAs with control over their finances tend to execute more impactful development projects. Agagu (2004) in *“Continuity and Change in Local Government Administration and the Politics of Underdevelopment in Nigeria”* also reported that local autonomy fosters accountability and community participation, leading to improved service delivery. These authors’ works align with the present study’s results showing that fiscal autonomy has led to improvements in infrastructure and better management of local resources in Egor LGA.

In addition, Adeyemi (2013) in *“Local Government Autonomy and Grassroots Development in Nigeria”* empirically established a strong correlation between

financial independence and development performance. His research showed that LGAs with direct control over allocations could implement projects faster and more effectively. This finding mirrors the result from Egor LGA, where financial autonomy was linked to better rural infrastructure and education outcomes.

The study identified key challenges such as lack of access to funds, political interference, poor internally generated revenue, and overlapping functions with state ministries. These challenges are consistent with those reported by Okoli (2005) in *“Local Government Administration in Nigeria: A Practical Approach”*, who found that state governments often interfere in local administration by withholding funds and dictating project priorities, thereby limiting the developmental impact of LGAs. Similarly, Oviasuyi, Idada, and Isiraojie (2010) in *“Constraints of Local Government Administration in Nigeria”* highlighted that weak financial autonomy, political manipulation, and poor human resources were the major impediments to effective local governance. These studies corroborate the present findings from Egor LGA, indicating that the challenges are systemic across Nigerian LGAs.

Respondents in this study proposed measures such as direct allocation of funds to LGAs, professional staff training, community participation, and institutionalized monitoring and evaluation. These strategies are supported by several scholars.

Lawal and Oladunjoye (2010) in *“Local Government, Corruption, and Democracy in Nigeria”* argued that constitutional guarantees of financial autonomy and participatory governance can strengthen accountability and transparency in LGAs. Likewise, Ogunna (1996) in *“A Handbook on Local Government in Nigeria”* recommended that empowering LGAs through constitutional reforms and professionalization of local administration would enhance their developmental capacity. The emphasis on community participation in this study is consistent with Abutudu (2011) in *“The Challenges and Opportunities for Improving the Local Government System in Nigeria”*, who emphasized that inclusive planning fosters sustainability and ownership of rural projects.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study examined the implications of local government autonomy on rural development in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, focusing on how administrative, political, and fiscal independence influence developmental outcomes such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and community participation. The research also explored the challenges constraining effective local governance and proposed strategies for improving autonomy. A descriptive survey² research design was adopted to provide an accurate representation of existing conditions without manipulating variables.

The study population comprised 325 staff members of Egor Local Government Area across various departments, from administration to environmental services. Using Taro Yamane's formula at a 0.05 significance level, a sample size of 124 respondents was determined and selected through simple random sampling to ensure fair departmental representation and 100 was retrieved. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into five sections corresponding to the study's research questions, each itemized on a four-point Likert scale ranging from

Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The instrument's face and content validity were confirmed through expert review by specialists in public administration and educational measurement, ensuring clarity and alignment with research objectives. Reliability was established through a pilot test involving 30 respondents from a neighboring local government area, with Cronbach Alpha coefficients of 0.70 and above confirming internal consistency. Data collection was conducted through direct distribution and retrieval of questionnaires to guarantee high response rates, following informed consent and official authorization. Descriptive statistics such as mean, percentage, and standard deviation were used to analyze responses, while inferential statistics, including

chi-square tests, were applied to examine relationships between levels of autonomy and rural development outcomes at a 0.05 significance level.

The findings of the study were as follows;

1. There is a moderate level of autonomy in administrative, staffing, and budgeting functions in Egor Local Government Area.
2. Autonomy has a moderate positive effect on rural development in Egor LGA.
3. Egor Local Government faces considerable challenges in achieving effective rural development, mainly due to financial dependency, political interference, limited revenue, and administrative overlaps with state authorities.
4. Institutional reforms, community engagement, and capacity building are essential strategies for strengthening local government autonomy and accelerating rural development in Egor Local Government Area.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have shown that local government autonomy remains a decisive factor in determining the pace and quality of rural development in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Although the study revealed a moderate

level of administrative, political, and fiscal autonomy, the presence of significant constraints such as financial dependence on the state government, political interference, and limited internally generated revenue continues to undermine the effectiveness of local governance. It was also established that where local governments are granted greater control over their finances, staffing, and policy implementation, developmental outcomes such as improved infrastructure, healthcare services, education, and community engagement are more visible and sustainable. The study therefore concludes that achieving meaningful rural development in Egor LGA, and by extension other local governments in Nigeria, depends on deepening local autonomy through constitutional, administrative, and fiscal reforms. True autonomy is not merely the devolution of functions but the empowerment of local governments to make independent decisions, manage resources responsibly, and be held accountable by the people they serve.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Federal Government, through the appropriate constitutional framework, should ensure that allocations from the Federation Account are remitted directly to local governments without passing through state-controlled joint accounts.

2. The State and Federal Governments should prioritize institutional restructuring that strengthens internal governance systems in LGAs, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
3. Regular training and retraining programs should be organized for local government staff to improve administrative competence, planning skills, and project management efficiency.
4. The practice of appointing caretaker committees should be abolished. Democratically elected local councils should be mandatory across all LGAs to enhance legitimacy and responsiveness to community needs.

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