
**Administrative Decentralization And Social Development: A Case Of Local Governments In Wakiso District,
Uganda**

Ssebitosi Robert

Metropolitan International University

Abstract

Administrative decentralization is widely recognized as a governance mechanism to enhance local service delivery and social development outcomes. However, empirical evidence on its disaggregated impact in rapidly urbanizing contexts like Wakiso District, Uganda, remains limited. This study investigated the distinct effects of three constructs of administrative decentralization local staffing and management capacity, delegation of planning and implementation powers, and administrative process efficiency on three dimensions of social development: access to education, access to healthcare, and access to clean water and sanitation. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, collecting primary data from a stratified random sample of 326 respondents, including local government officials, political leaders, and community members, between May and July 2025. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression in SPSS version 25. Results revealed significant positive relationships for all hypothesized paths: staffing capacity predicted education access ($\beta = .68$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .462$), delegation of powers predicted healthcare access ($\beta = .65$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .423$), and administrative efficiency predicted water and sanitation access ($\beta = .70$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .490$). The study concludes that administrative decentralization is a multidimensional driver of social development and recommends targeted capacity-building, enhanced local autonomy, and streamlined administrative systems to improve service delivery outcomes.

Keywords: Administrative decentralization, social development, service delivery, local governance, Uganda, sub-county governments

1. Introduction

Administrative decentralization, defined as the transfer of managerial and service delivery responsibilities to local government units, has been a cornerstone of Uganda's governance reforms since the 1990s (Ministry of Local Government [MoLG], 2020). The ideal situation posits that empowered local administrations should enhance the efficiency, responsiveness, and equity of public service delivery, thereby accelerating social development in education, healthcare, and water provision (Faguet, 2014). In Uganda, this vision is embedded in the Local Government Act of 1997, which devolves administrative functions to districts and sub-counties to bring governance closer to the people.

However, the real situation in many sub-counties of Wakiso District one of Uganda's most populous and rapidly urbanizing districts presents a stark contrast. Despite formal decentralization structures, service delivery gaps persist, manifested in understaffed health facilities, overcrowded schools, and inconsistent water supply (Kafeero & Musoke, 2022). Recent district reports indicate that administrative bottlenecks, limited local autonomy, and

Received: 20.01.2026

Accepted: 25.01.2026

Published on: 30.01.2026

inefficient processes continue to undermine the potential benefits of decentralization (Wakiso District Local Government, 2022). This disparity between policy intent and on-ground outcomes represents a critical impediment to achieving Uganda's social development targets.

The consequences of this gap are profound: inadequate service delivery perpetuates poverty, exacerbates inequalities, and erodes public trust in local governance (Birakwate, 2020). While prior studies have broadly linked decentralization to development, few have disaggregated administrative decentralization into specific constructs and examined their distinct effects on discrete social development outcomes. This study addresses that gap by investigating the individual relationships between three administrative decentralization constructs and three dimensions of social development in Wakiso District, guided by Public Choice Theory (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962). The purpose is to generate empirical evidence to inform more targeted and effective administrative reforms. **The study was guided by the following specific objectives:**

- i. To examine the effect of local staffing and management capacity on access to education services in Wakiso District.
- ii. To assess the impact of delegation of planning and implementation powers on access to healthcare services.
- iii. To determine the relationship between administrative process efficiency and access to clean water and sanitation.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite over two decades of decentralization reforms in Uganda, social development outcomes in Wakiso District remain suboptimal. Access to quality education, healthcare, and clean water is uneven, with rural and peri-urban sub-counties particularly disadvantaged (UBOS, 2023). This persistent service delivery deficit occurs amidst significant administrative devolution, suggesting a disconnect between decentralized structures and actual developmental impacts.

The core of the problem lies in the homogeneous treatment of administrative decentralization. Policies and programs often address "administrative capacity" as a monolithic barrier, without distinguishing the unique mechanisms through which specific constructs such as staffing adequacy, delegated authority, or procedural efficiency affect discrete social outcomes. Consequently, local governments lack evidence-based guidance on whether to prioritize human resource development, enhance local autonomy, or streamline administrative systems to improve specific services.

If this problem remains unaddressed, Wakiso District risks entrenching service delivery inequalities, undermining public trust, and stalling progress toward national development goals. There is an urgent need for a disaggregated empirical investigation that isolates and measures the individual impact of distinct administrative decentralization constructs on specific social development dimensions. This study seeks to fill that gap by rigorously examining the relationships between (a) staffing capacity and education access, (b) delegation of powers and healthcare access, and (c) administrative efficiency and water and sanitation access.

Received: 20.01.2026

Accepted: 25.01.2026

Published on: 30.01.2026

3. Literature Review

This study is grounded in Public Choice Theory (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962), which applies economic reasoning to political and administrative behavior. The theory posits that decentralizing administrative functions can reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and align public services with local preferences, thereby enhancing development outcomes. In the context of this study, administrative decentralization is conceptualized through three constructs: staffing and management capacity, delegation of planning and implementation powers, and administrative process efficiency. These constructs are hypothesized to influence social development outcomes by improving the quality, responsiveness, and equity of service delivery (Boex & Yilmaz, 2010).

Globally, evidence suggests that administrative decentralization can improve service delivery when local governments possess adequate capacity and autonomy (Faguet, 2014). In Sub-Saharan Africa, however, the effectiveness of administrative decentralization is often constrained by human resource gaps, limited financial discretion, and weak accountability mechanisms (Smoke, 2015). In Uganda, studies such as Francis and James (2003) highlight that while decentralization has improved citizen participation, administrative bottlenecks remain a significant barrier to service delivery.

Recent research in Wakiso District identifies specific administrative challenges, including understaffing, overlapping mandates, and delayed decision-making, which impede the implementation of education, health, and water projects (Nabayego, 2022; Mbowe & Kaaya, 2021). However, these studies typically treat administrative decentralization as a unified construct, leaving a gap in understanding how its specific dimensions differentially affect social development outcomes. This study addresses that gap by examining the distinct relationships between three administrative constructs and three social development dimensions, thereby providing nuanced insights for policy and practice.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive and correlational cross-sectional survey design. This design was appropriate for collecting data at a single point in time to describe the relationships between the independent and dependent constructs without manipulating the environment (Creswell, 2021).

4.2 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised local government officials, political leaders, and community members directly involved in or affected by administrative decentralization in selected sub-counties of Wakiso District. Administrative records and community registers estimated this population at $N = 4,000$. A sample size was calculated using Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error ($e = 0.05$):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{4000}{1 + 4000(0.05)^2} = \frac{4000}{11} \approx 364$$

Received: 20.01.2026

Accepted: 25.01.2026

Published on: 30.01.2026

A total sample size of 364 was targeted, with 326 valid responses obtained a response rate of 89.6%. Stratified random sampling was used, with strata based on respondent category (officials, leaders, community members) and sub-county location to ensure representativeness.

4.3 Data Collection and Instruments

Primary data were collected between May and July 2025 using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was developed based on the study’s conceptual framework and piloted. Key sections measured: Independent Constructs (IVs): Local Staffing & Management Capacity (5 items), Delegation of Planning & Implementation Powers (5 items), Administrative Process Efficiency (5 items) Dependent Constructs (DVs): Access to Education Services (4 items), Access to Healthcare Services (4 items), Access to Clean Water & Sanitation (4 items). All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The instruments were validated by experts (Content Validity Index, CVI = 0.92) and demonstrated good internal consistency in a pilot test (Cronbach’s α for all scales > 0.80).

4.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Analysis proceeded in two stages: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations summarized demographics and key variables. Inferential Statistics: Pearson’s correlation (r) assessed bivariate relationships. Simple linear regression analysis was conducted separately for each of the three hypothesized paths to test the predictive power of each independent construct on its respective dependent variable. The significance threshold was $p < .05$.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Metropolitan International University Research Ethics Committee. Permission was secured from the Wakiso District Local Government and sub-county administrations. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was maintained. Data were used solely for academic purposes.

5. Results

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The final sample comprised 326 respondents from Wakiso District: 45.1% local government officials, 30.7% political leaders, and 24.2% community members. The majority (58.3%) were male, reflecting prevailing gender dynamics in local governance. Respondents’ average length of service/residence was 8.2 years (SD = 3.1), indicating substantial experience with decentralization processes.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Constructs (N = 326)

Construct	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Staffing & Management Capacity	4.12	0.78

Received: 20.01.2026

Accepted: 25.01.2026

Published on: 30.01.2026

Delegation of Powers	3.98	0.85
Administrative Process Efficiency	4.05	0.76
Access to Education Services	3.88	0.91
Access to Healthcare Services	3.75	0.94
Access to Water & Sanitation	3.69	0.97

Note. All constructs measured on 5-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Source: Primary survey data, 2025.

Interpretation: The descriptive statistics indicate moderately positive perceptions of administrative decentralization constructs, with staffing capacity rated highest (M = 4.12). Social development outcomes show relatively lower means, particularly for water and sanitation access (M = 3.69), suggesting ongoing service delivery challenges.

5.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Intercorrelation Matrix for Study Constructs (N = 326)

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Staffing Capacity	—					
2. Delegation of Powers	.71**	—				
3. Administrative Efficiency	.68**	.66**	—			
4. Education Access	.68	.62**	.60**	—		
5. Healthcare Access	.64**	.65	.63**	.70**	—	
6. Water & Sanitation Access	.61**	.59**	.70	.65**	.67**	—

Note. **p < .01 (two-tailed). Bolded correlations represent hypothesized paths. Source: Primary survey data, 2025.

Analysis & Interpretation: All correlations are positive and statistically significant. The bolded coefficients represent the specific hypothesized relationships and are among the strongest in their respective rows/columns, providing preliminary support for all three hypotheses. For example, staffing capacity shows the strongest link with education access (r = .68), while administrative efficiency correlates most strongly with water and sanitation access (r = .70).

5.4 Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 1: Staffing Capacity Predicting Education Access: A simple linear regression was conducted to test whether staffing capacity significantly predicts education access. The model was statistically significant, F(1, 324) = 147.22, p < .001, and explained 46.2% of the variance in education access (R² = .462). Staffing capacity was a significant positive predictor.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Analysis for Staffing Capacity Predicting Education Access

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	1.15	0.24		4.79	<.001	[0.68, 1.62]

Received: 20.01.2026

Accepted: 25.01.2026

Published on: 30.01.2026

Staffing Capacity	0.70	0.06	.68	12.13	<.001	[0.58, 0.82]
-------------------	------	------	-----	-------	-------	--------------

Note. $R^2 = .462$. Dependent Variable: Education Access. Source: Primary survey data, 2025.

Hypothesis 1 is supported. Staffing capacity is a strong, significant predictor of education access ($\beta = .68, p < .001$). For every one-unit increase in staffing capacity, education access increases by 0.70 units on the Likert scale.

Hypothesis 2: Delegation of Powers Predicting Healthcare Access. A simple linear regression was conducted to test whether delegation of powers significantly predicts healthcare access. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 324) = 118.94, p < .001$, and explained 42.3% of the variance in healthcare access ($R^2 = .423$). Delegation of powers was a significant positive predictor.

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression Analysis for Delegation of Powers Predicting Healthcare Access

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	1.28	0.26		4.92	<.001	[0.77, 1.79]
Delegation of Powers	0.67	0.06	.65	10.91	<.001	[0.55, 0.79]

Note. $R^2 = .423$. Dependent Variable: Healthcare Access. Source: Primary survey data, 2025.

Hypothesis 2 is supported. Delegation of powers significantly predicts healthcare access ($\beta = .65, p < .001$), accounting for 42.3% of the variance.

Hypothesis 3: Administrative Efficiency Predicting Water & Sanitation Access. A simple linear regression was conducted to test whether administrative efficiency significantly predicts water and sanitation access. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 324) = 155.88, p < .001$, and explained 49.0% of the variance ($R^2 = .490$). Administrative efficiency was a significant positive predictor.

Table 5: Simple Linear Regression Analysis for Administrative Efficiency Predicting Water & Sanitation Access

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	1.02	0.22		4.64	<.001	[0.59, 1.45]
Administrative Efficiency	0.72	0.06	.70	12.48	<.001	[0.60, 0.84]

Note. $R^2 = .490$. Dependent Variable: Water & Sanitation Access. Source: Primary survey data, 2025.

Hypothesis 3 is supported. Administrative efficiency is a powerful predictor of water and sanitation access ($\beta = .70, p < .001$), explaining 49.0% of the variance.

6. Discussion

The findings provide robust empirical evidence that administrative decentralization is a multidimensional construct, with distinct components exerting specific influences on different social development outcomes. This validates the application of Public Choice Theory, which posits that decentralized administrative structures can enhance service delivery by aligning resources and processes with local needs (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962).

Received: 20.01.2026

Accepted: 25.01.2026

Published on: 30.01.2026

The strong relationship between staffing capacity and education access ($\beta = .68$) underscores the critical role of human resources in delivering quality education services. This aligns with Nabayego (2022), who found that understaffing in Wakiso sub-counties directly compromises school supervision and support. The significant impact of delegation of powers on healthcare access ($\beta = .65$) highlights the importance of local autonomy in health planning and resource allocation, consistent with Boex and Yilmaz's (2010) emphasis on decision-making authority as a driver of service responsiveness.

The powerful prediction of water and sanitation access by administrative efficiency ($\beta = .70$) points to the importance of streamlined procedures, timely decision-making, and reduced bureaucratic delays. This resonates with Smoke (2015), who argues that administrative bottlenecks often undermine the implementation of infrastructure projects in decentralized systems.

The significant intercorrelations among administrative constructs suggest synergistic relationships for instance, better staffing may enhance efficiency, which in turn supports effective delegation. This synergy recommends integrated administrative reforms that simultaneously address capacity, autonomy, and process improvements.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the three administrative decentralization constructs staffing and management capacity, delegation of powers, and administrative efficiency are distinct, significant, and specific predictors of social development outcomes in Wakiso District. To enhance service delivery, interventions must move beyond generic decentralization approaches and target these specific constructs based on the desired social outcome.

7.1 Recommendations

To the Ministry of Local Government and Wakiso District Authorities:

Strengthen Human Resource Capacity: Implement targeted recruitment, training, and retention strategies for sub-county staff, particularly in education and health sectors.

Enhance Local Autonomy: Clarify and expand delegated powers for sub-counties in planning, budgeting, and project implementation, especially for healthcare services.

Streamline Administrative Processes: Simplify bureaucratic procedures, digitize service delivery systems, and establish clear timelines for decision-making to improve efficiency in water and sanitation projects.

To Development Partners and NGOs:

Design integrated programs that address multiple administrative dimensions simultaneously, recognizing their synergistic effects on social development.

Support capacity-building initiatives that combine technical training with institutional strengthening for sustainable impact.

7.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Longitudinal studies to establish causal relationships and long-term effects of administrative reforms.

Comparative studies across districts to examine contextual moderators of decentralization effectiveness.

Received: 20.01.2026

Accepted: 25.01.2026

Published on: 30.01.2026

Qualitative investigations into the political and cultural factors that shape administrative decentralization implementation.

8. References

Birakwate, B. (2020). Fiscal decentralization and service delivery in Wakiso District. Makerere University Institutional Repository.

Boex, J., & Yilmaz, S. (2010). An analytical framework for assessing decentralized local governance and the local public sector. Urban Institute Center on International Development and Governance.

Buchanan, J. M., & Tullock, G. (1962). The calculus of consent: Logical foundations of constitutional democracy. University of Michigan Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2021). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Faguet, J. P. (2014). Decentralization and governance. *World Development*, 53, 2–13.

Francis, P., & James, R. (2003). Balancing rural poverty reduction and citizen participation: The contradictions of Uganda's decentralization program. *World Development*, 31(2), 325–337.

Kafeero, S., & Musoke, J. (2022). Urban governance and service delivery in Wakiso District. *African Journal of Public Administration*, 10(1), 34–52.

Mbowa, S., & Kaaya, I. (2021). Political decentralization and local governance in Uganda. Economic Policy Research Centre.

Ministry of Local Government [MoLG]. (2020). Annual sector performance report. Government of Uganda.

Nabayego, R. (2022). Administrative challenges and local development in Wakiso District. Nkumba University Repository.

Smoke, P. (2015). Rethinking decentralization: Assessing challenges to a popular public sector reform. *Public Administration and Development*, 35(2), 97–112.

Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS]. (2023). Population and housing census report. UBOS.

Wakiso District Local Government. (2022). Annual performance report. Wakiso District Council.