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Political and Economic Restructuring and Local Government Performance in Nigeria: A Study of Selected Local Government Areas of Rivers State, 2015 – 2022

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of political and economic restructuring on local government performance in selected local government areas of Rivers State, Nigeria, from 2015 to 2022. Using a descriptive survey research design, the study sampled 150 respondents across three local government areas: Ahoada East, Gokana, and Obio-Akpor. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that political interference emerged as the most significant challenge facing local government administration, followed by inadequate funding and poor infrastructure. While inefficient bureaucracy was not widely perceived as a significant challenge, the study found strong support for various restructuring techniques. Reduced state interference and decentralization of power were identified as the most effective means to achieve political autonomy, with fiscal federalism and resource control viewed as critical for financial autonomy. Chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between restructuring and the potential for increased political and financial autonomy of local governments. However, the study found no significant relationship between factors affecting local government performance and administrative challenges, suggesting a more complex dynamic than previously assumed. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive reform in local government administration.

Keywords: Restructuring, Local Government Administration, Political Restructuring, Financial Autonomy, Decentralization.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of local government administration in Nigeria traces back to the colonial era when the British introduced indirect rule through Chiefs, Emirs, Obas, and Warrant Chiefs. This system underwent significant transformation through various reforms, notably the 1976 reform which established local government as the third tier of government and was subsequently entrenched in the 1979 constitution and later constitutions (Etebom, 2019; Adeyeye, 2016; Agagu, 2011; Gboyaga, 2003). In Rivers State, this historical evolution has particular significance given the region's strategic importance in Nigeria's

political and economic landscape. The establishment of local government areas in Rivers State was intended to facilitate grassroots development and ensure effective administration of the state's diverse communities, particularly in relation to the management of resources and delivery of essential services.

Despite constitutional provisions and reforms aimed at bringing government closer to the grassroots, local government administration in Nigeria faces persistent challenges. As Agagu (2011) notes, the system has undergone a tortuous journey from pre-colonial diversities through colonial experimentation to contemporary challenges. The return to democracy in 1999 raised hopes for good governance through due process, constitutionality, and accountability, yet these expectations remain largely unfulfilled at the local government level. This is particularly evident in Rivers State, where the period from 2015 to 2022 has witnessed significant challenges in local government functioning, especially regarding adherence to established laws and the execution of developmental projects. The disparity between statutory mandates and actual performance raises critical questions about the effectiveness of the current local government system.

A fundamental issue lies in the constitutional framework itself. The 1999 Constitution's Section 7(1) provides for democratically elected local government councils, but the legal structure positions local governments as appendages of state governments rather than autonomous entities. This constitutional arrangement has created opportunities for manipulation by both federal and state governments, effectively reducing local governments to administrative units of state governments (Ahmed, Norafidah & Knocks, 2017). In Rivers State, this constitutional ambiguity has manifested in various ways, particularly in terms of financial autonomy and political independence. The relationship between state and local governments in Rivers State exemplifies the broader national challenges of inadequate funding and limited autonomy that have consistently hampered local government performance.

The system's dysfunction is further exacerbated by financial and political interference. As Akhabu (2017) asserts, state assembly interference and the joint state-local government account system have significantly impaired local government performance. The Central Bank of Nigeria's economic report for the third quarter of 2011 highlighted this issue, revealing substantial receipts by the 774 local government councils that were subject to state control and potential misappropriation. In Rivers State, this financial constraint has directly impacted the ability of local governments to execute meaningful developmental projects and programs, raising questions about the effectiveness of current funding mechanisms and the need for restructuring to ensure direct access to statutory allocations and internally generated revenue.

The proponents of restructuring argue that these challenges present an opportunity to restore true federalism and enhance local government effectiveness. Current research suggests that comprehensive restructuring is needed to guarantee financial autonomy, ensure transparency and accountability, reduce corruption, and curtail money laundering within the local government system. This study specifically examines the impact of political and economic restructuring on local government performance in selected local government areas of Rivers State from 2015 to 2022. The research focuses on critical aspects including the functioning of local governments in relation to established laws, factors affecting their performance, potential impacts of restructuring on political and financial autonomy, and the extent of developmental project execution in Rivers State's local government areas.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study examines political and economic restructuring and local government performance in Nigeria: A study of Selected Local Government Area of Rivers State 2015-2022. The specific objectives of the study are to:

Research Questions

The following research questions have been generated to guide the study:

- i. What factors contribute to the challenges faced by local government administration in Nigeria?
- ii. How might restructuring techniques impact the political and financial autonomy of local governments in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between factors such as inadequate funding of local government in Nigeria and the challenges faced by local government administration

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between proposed restructuring techniques and the

Theoretical Framework

The Institutional Theory

The institutional theory seems offers a framework on how structures, norms, rules, and regulations of an institution or organization may be, also help to shape the behavioural pattern of people working within the institution and how the decision-making processes will be. When it comes to restructuring, this theory also sheds more light on the motivations behind organizational changes, the challenges and resistance that may arise, and the implications for the overall effectiveness of the local government Parr & Gates (2010).

From an institutional perspective, restructuring is often driven by external pressures, such as changes in the political, economic, or social environment, or by the recognition of internal inefficiencies or dysfunction. These external and internal pressures can lead to a reevaluation of the existing institutional arrangements and a push for changes in the structure, norms, and rules of the organization Wright (2011).

Institutional theory also emphasizes the role of isomorphism, which is the process through which organizations become similar to one another over time. There are three types of isomorphism: coercive, mimetic, and normative. Coercive isomorphism occurs when organizations are forced to adopt certain practices, norms, or structures by external pressures, such as government regulations or funding requirements. Mimetic isomorphism refers to organizations imitating the practices of other successful or prestigious organizations in order to gain legitimacy and credibility. Normative isomorphism happens when organizations conform to the norms and values of their institutional environment, such as professional standards or community expectations. When it comes to restructuring, institutional theory suggests that these forms of isomorphism can play a role in shaping the changes that are pursued. For example, local governments may be coerced into restructuring by changes in legislation, regulations, or funding requirements. They may also mimic organizational practices from other successful jurisdictions in order to improve their own performance or gain legitimacy. Additionally, they may conform to normative expectations regarding efficiency, transparency, or accountability, which can drive them to restructure in order to meet those expectations Wright (2011).

Institutional theory also emphasizes the importance of legitimacy and institutional logics in guiding organizational behavior and decision-making. When local governments engage in restructuring, they are often seeking to align their operations with the prevailing institutional logics and gain legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents, stakeholders, and peer organizations. For example, a local government may restructure its budgeting process to adhere to best practices in financial management, or it may reorganize its departments to better align with the needs and expectations of the community Hladchenko (2016). By applying institutional theory to the study of restructuring, researchers and policymakers can gain insights into the motivations, processes, and outcomes of organizational changes within local government. This understanding can help in navigating resistance to change, identifying potential pitfalls, and developing strategies to implement successful restructuring efforts that align with institutional logic and foster legitimacy. Ultimately, institutional theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the complex dynamics of organizational restructuring and its implications for local government performance.

Regarding restructuring, institutional theory offers a framework and understanding of how the structures of an institution, norms, and rules will be within organizations and institutions, also it shapes the behavior and the decision-making processes of the people that concern. The theory also sheds light on the importance of motivation behind institutional change and gives insight into how to tackle challenges and resistance that may arise, including the implications for the overall effectiveness of the local government Parr & Gates (2010).

The study in its theoretical base, in the principal-agent theory of local government performance and institutional theory of restructuring presupposes that it is possible to predict practices within local government as a public institution of service from the perception of legitimate behavior derived from values system and management approach. The principal-agent theory is concerned with the development of the system of local government performance which emphasises the significance of social and pattern aspects of its operational services. The institutional theory is deeply concerned with restructuring, engaging people who matter, to providing pivotal resources and information that will guide the operational system.

Conceptual Clarifications

Restructuring

Regarding to restructuring, it has been a contended issue among many Nigerians due to the rationale behind it. Meanwhile, restructuring has become the latest buzz in the political landscape among politicians and nonpolitical actors in Nigeria. The former President General Ibrahim Babangida is one of the personalities that is strongly advocating for restructuring, calling for devolution of power to state and local governments level for more effectiveness and efficiency in delivery meaningful service to the people. He further said giving more responsibilities and authorities to the state and local governments level will bring up more development to the grassroot level and to make government more visible. It was by this reason the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar said there is no doubt that many states in Nigeria are not viable and there only depend on allocation from the federated account for a living, that a creative way to make them viable is through restructuring, that resources and more powers should be devolve from the federal government and de-emphasize federal allocations as the source of sustenance of states.

He further stated that starting producing in the country against importation of product will enhancing in domestic growth and it will make collecting of taxes to run governments more sustainable way with greater transparency and accountability. Based on the calling for restructuring it is important to know what restructuring is all about to avoid contradiction of it. According to Investopedia; restructuring is an action taken by a company to significantly modify the financial and operational aspects of the company, usually when the system is facing financial pressures to structure the system as a way of limiting financial harm and to improving on the financial and the operational based of the company. It is further expressed by saying that when an organization is having difficulties in making the system flow, it will often consolidate and adjust in terms of its finances and operation by restructuring. This is to make a significant change that will bring back the financial and operational base to the desired expectation.

The constitution of Nigeria as it stands recognizes three tiers of government, the federal state, and local governments, but unfortunately to the local governments, the same constitution is unfair to the local governments, the current political landscape however paints a grim picture of how each tier of government draws funds for their operation and function from the federation account created by the constitution. In the constitution, local government councils are entangled in a web of state government dominance. This means that state governments hold undue influence over local government councils, and local government councils are now left hamstrung, and unable to respond effectively to the needs of their communities. Administratively, state oversight restricted local government councils' freedom to manage their affairs. Most crucially of all, fiscal dependence on state government has crippled local government councils' ability to deliver essential services and infrastructure to the grassroots people. Full autonomy to local governments is not just a bureaucratic necessity but a lifeline for democracy, Shehu M.B. (2024).

Imagine restructuring Nigeria where local governments are free to govern without the heavy hand of state interference. Poverty in the grassroots areas will be reduced, rural-urban migration will decrease, and more vibrant and qualified people will key into the process of election at the grassroots level with the large share of monthly allocation from the country's oil revenues that the states and local governments are receiving, most states and all the local government areas have failed to deliver on the desire basic services and infrastructure to their respected citizens. As a result of the lack of checks and balances in the Nigerian

system of government, this led to poor accountability and thus the generally poor performance of states and local governments in Nigeria. All these effects have contributed to suffering and high rates of poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, insecurity, and environmental degradation.

As a result, this present constitution, system creates a dependency culture among local governments relying on the state and federal governments for allocations and revenues generated from productive activities. So, to address all these challenges, all stakeholders must come together and urgently embark on how to deliberate on the issue. Concerning restructuring, will address these structural flaws and improve governance in Nigeria at all levels. Meanwhile, Mohammed Bello Shehu Chairman of the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) on June 10th (2024) supported the bold move by the federal government to push to grant local governments complete foster better governance. Full autonomy will engender good governance, and bring transparency and accountability at the local government level, beyond administrative and fiscal reform, giving local governments in Nigeria. The desire for autonomy could significantly curb the security challenges plaguing the nation like banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, and electoral, violence by ensuring that funds meant for local governments are devoted to grassroots development. Restructuring can transform local governments into wealth creation and socio-economic upliftment that will drastically improve living conditions in rural communities.

Local Government

Local government has been defined differently by various scholars in the fields of public administration and political science. According to the United Nations Office for Public Administration (UNOPA), local government is "a political subdivision of a country that is constituted by a law and has substantial control of local affairs" (UNOPA, 2006). Similarly, Kirkpatrick and Green (2005) define local government as a system of government that is closest to the people, providing essential services such as water, sanitation, roads, and public safety. Other scholars have also emphasized the multi-dimensional nature of local government. For instance, Riley (2003) notes that local government is "a social institution that provides a platform for people to express and fulfill their human needs".

Economic Dimension

Local Government is basically an economic institution with a foremost role to play in promoting the economic well-being of the people in the locality (Rondinelli, 1981). The economic dimension of the concept of local government relates to its economic availability. This revenue generation becomes a primary function of local government (Smith, 1985). Any local governments councils that is not economically viable cannot do much to improve the economic conditions of the people in the locality Sharma (2006). It is impossible to give what you do not have. The economics of a local area reflects in its local authority. The local government can give a good account of its performance without much problem if its locality is economically viable. An unviable growth and development, makes local area less develop and stupendous for the local people. If local governments is economically viable, it will initiate advantage in rendering local services also in warding off government intervention. Therefore, local governments work on the front lines delivering needed and desired service to the grassroot people such as, maintenance of roads, public safety primary education and healthcare to citizens (Kettland Fester, 2008).

The concept of Local Government has an economic dimension of great significant in the national development, these facets of the concept of local government can help promote the desirable objective of partnership between the central government and local governments for the ultimate fulfillment of the common goal of good life for the local populace.

Political Dimension

Local Government is also a political institution. Local government is basically a political mechanism for governance at the grassroot level. It has a direct bearing on the nature of the local government which is very intriguing, giving rise to several question in this regard. It is important to note the following:

- i) Local government is not like other higher levels of government. It does not share the same legal and political sovereignty like state and federal government also does not usually derive authority directly from the constitution.

- ii) Local government does not fall into the administrative hierarchy of the government. It is not an administrative outpost enjoying delegated authority. It is a level of government established by law.
- iii) Local government is not a public enterprise or public utility institution with statutory foundation, enjoying financial and operational autonomy. Local government is a corporate body with legislative and executive arms along with territory jurisdiction, deriving authority under law, may not actually qualify as a local government. Conceptually, local government is an integrant of democracy. When local governments lose its democratic feature, it degenerates into local administration. When local government imbibes democratic character, it then becomes local government. Without democratic norms, there can be no self-governing institutions. The right of the citizens to elect officials and to bestow on them the right to represent them which *vox populi* comes hand in hand with other basic democratic principles, such as accountability and transparency are of extreme importance for a sound and effective government (Dragos and Neamtu, 2009; Haruta, Radu 2010). In a real democracy, citizens' involvement is possible for three reasons; because they can, because they want or because they were asked (Verba *et al*, 2004, p.316-341).

Local Government Performance

Local Governments play a critical role in delivering services to the public. Local Governments are responsible for the management and delivery of key public services at the grassroots areas. Globally, the practice and performance of local government has been said to be a sure but effective strategy for ensuring governance and development at the grassroots. Interestingly this is different to the Nigerian experience, local governments system in Nigeria remained imprisoned by financial miscarriage, mismanagement and its effect has negated one among the reasons for the establishment of local government which is to bring development closer to the grassroots populace.

Check and balance among stakeholders will also improve on performance by controlling corruption and enhancing both financial and political dealings of the local government system. The nature of operations in local government has attracted strong mechanisms of financial accountability. Hiadchenko (2016) in Osuebi *et al*, (2019) argues that government financial accountability and transparency contribute significantly to the performance of the political system and quality of service delivery at the grassroots level. Local governments can perform well through financial accountability not only to control public resources but also to stabilize good governance at the local government areas.

The need for improving the performance of local governments in a government system over the years is an issue in public administration, because the dominant strategy of governance at the grassroots is the local governments. Indeed, virtually all forms of government or administration appear to have found the practice and performance of local government as an effective strategy for ensuring development at the grassroots level (Ani, *et al* 2013).

Local government's performance in terms of provision of social amenities and encouraging political participation at the grassroots level has not been encouraging. Instead of discharging their functions as development centers, local governments have acquired notoriety for corruption, fiscal indiscipline and overall irresponsibility. Local government system as a formal institution that has its laws and bye-laws. Effective application of the theories will improve performance and enhance efficient and effective service delivery in the local governments.

Local governments as institutions have a duty and responsibilities to play in their respective areas of operation; to provide specific services to the communities of people and this can only be reflected through the performance of local government administration. In recent years, the record shows that performance of local governments in Nigeria is low due to lack of financial implementation and non-realization of finance for funding capital projects and this is negatively associated with the performance of local governments.

Empirical Review

According to Agidibi (2019), restructuring is all about the reconstruction of everything that makes up Nigeria's politics. From the above definitions, restructuring connotes that the three tiers of government in Nigeria should be permitted by law to own and manage their resources and authorized to initiate or execute development in their areas of operation without interference from elsewhere. A call for restructuring Nigeria now means a call for the review of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Restructuring from the perspective of some Nigerians means devolution of powers of the federal government such that more responsibilities are given to the other tiers of government such as states and local government while the federal government is vested with the responsibility to oversee foreign policy and defense. It is a strategy aimed at bringing government as close as possible to the people at the grassroots. Idemba (2018) asserted that restructuring in Nigeria involves a revolutionary or evolutionary manner of allowing different states, ethnic nationalities, and regions to control their resources and execute their developmental projects without the interference of the federal government.

Political restructuring means an arrangement whereby a decision on a public policy issue is shifted from one level or tier of government to another. Meanwhile, political restructuring does not mean the mere splitting or balkanization of the existing states in Nigeria but giving more power authority, and influence to other tiers of government, thereby reducing the overbearing power, authority, and influence of the centre over the states and local government.

Restructuring in Nigeria is another way of calling for true federalism. True federalism is a system that operates based on shared responsibility of individual units while having a central core that binds everyone together. Restructuring and the idea is for every region and level of government to run their affairs, and create wealth by harnessing and managing their resources while making some commitments to the federal or central government. Mathew (2017) states that today, the federal government controls the amount of resources given to states and local government approves the amenities to be put in place by the states as well as the ability of the state to generate power which is grossly against the principle and practice of true federalism as practiced in civilized environments. Furthermore, (2017) Mathew, means that restructuring should be in a position that state government can control and manage their internal affairs and contribute a percentage of their resources as may be agreed to the maintenance of the centre which is the federal government with all of its institution whose main concern now from the principle of restructuring will limit itself to the management of all international interest of the country.

Citing Nwabueze (2017) in his article titled, *Dissecting the Restructuring that Nigeria Needs* published in Daily Post on 28th September 2017, asserts audibly that the clamouring among Nigerians to restructure the nation is not to break up the nation but that the object is, by reforming the governmental structure and capturing them to the needs and wishes of the Nigerian people, to ensure that the immense diversity of ethnic nationality comprised in the states will continue to co-exist together in peace, progress and unity as citizens of one country. Reuben (2016) in his part asserts that the concept of restructuring seems to have become the most misrepresented word even by those who should understand and work for their actualization in the interest of peace and progress in Nigeria.

Odumakin (2017) in his article of 19/09/2017, published in Vanguard online titled: *Ten reasons to restructure Nigeria*, that several unquantifiable benefits are hidden in the sincere, efficient, restructured, responsive, and functional restructuring of Nigeria state, the Nigerian economy cannot be divorced from the beauty of restructuring. In response to restricting local government, many scholars have called for the restructuring of local government, since local government in Nigeria are at the forefront of delivering key public services and are often the most public face of the state in countries worldwide. Therefore, the management and performance of local governments are attracting enduring attention among, scholars, researchers, policy-makers, and citizens alike (Walker and Andrews 2015). Following the agitation and calling for restructuring and local government autonomy. There is a lack of consensus between scholars and practitioner of local government regarding to performance measurement in mainly the range of available performance dimensions, like service delivery, governance and democratic aspects of public services.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the impact of restructuring on local government performance in Rivers State, Nigeria. Three local government areas (LGAs) were strategically selected to represent the three senatorial districts: Ahoada East, Gokana, and Obio-Akpor. A sample size of 150 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula and a stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure proportional representation across the LGAs. The total population of the three LGAs, according to the latest census data (2023), is approximately 1,500,000. Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to residents, local government officials, community leaders, and civil servants. The validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured through content validity, face validity, pilot testing, and test-retest reliability (Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.84). Data analysis involved the use of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including frequency counts, mean, standard deviation, and chi-square tests. The results were presented in tabular form to facilitate interpretation and understanding.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: What factors contribute to the challenges faced by local government administration in Nigeria?

4	3	2	1		Descriptive Statistics				Remarks
			SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Questionnaire Items		N							
1. Inadequate funding contributes to challenges in local government administration		150	59	55	21	15	3.05	.97	Agree
2. Political interference hinders the effectiveness of local government administration		150	77	58	8	7	3.37	.79	Agree
3. Inefficient bureaucracy is a significant challenge in Local Government Administration		150	26	24	40	60	2.11	1.12	Disagree
4. Lack of capacity building contributes to challenges in local government administration.		150	71	36	25	18	3.07	1.06	Agree
5. Poor infrastructure is a major challenge in local government administration.		150	61	57	16	16	3.09	.97	Agree
Valid N (listwise)		0							

Source: Researchers Survey: 2024

Data from Table 2 above presents information on factors contributing to the challenges faced by local government administration in Nigeria. The table includes five questionnaire items, each assessing a different potential challenge.

Item 1: Inadequate funding contributes to challenges in local government administration shows a mean score of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.97. The mean score, being above 3, indicates that respondents generally agree with this statement. The standard deviation of less than 1 suggests a relatively consistent level of agreement among respondents. This implies that inadequate funding is widely recognized as a significant challenge for local government administration in Nigeria.

Item 2: Political interference hinders the effectiveness of local government administration has the highest mean score of 3.37 and the lowest standard deviation of 0.79. The high mean score signifies strong agreement with this statement, while the low standard deviation indicates a high level of consensus among respondents. This suggests that political interference is perceived as the most significant challenge facing local government administration, with broad agreement on its negative impact.

Item 3: Inefficient bureaucracy is a significant challenge in Local Government Administration shows the lowest mean score of 2.11 and the highest standard deviation of 1.12. The mean score, being just above 2, suggests that respondents tend to disagree with this statement. However, the high standard deviation indicates a wide spread of opinions. This implies that while inefficient bureaucracy is not generally perceived as a significant challenge, there is considerable variation in this view, possibly reflecting diverse experiences across different local governments.

Item 4: Lack of capacity building contributes to challenges in local government administration has a mean score of 3.07 and a standard deviation of 1.06. The mean score above 3 indicates general agreement with this statement. The standard deviation slightly above 1 suggests some variation in opinions, but the overall tendency is towards agreement. This implies that lack of capacity building is recognized as a significant challenge, though perceptions vary somewhat.

Item 5: Poor infrastructure is a major challenge in local government administration shows a mean score of 3.09 and a standard deviation of 0.97. Similar to Item 6, this mean score above 3 indicates general agreement with the statement, while the standard deviation of less than 1 suggests relatively consistent opinions. This implies that poor infrastructure is widely recognized as a significant challenge for local government administration.

Overall interpretation: The data reveals a complex set of challenges facing local government administration in Nigeria. Political interference emerges as the most significant challenge, with the highest level of agreement among respondents. This is closely followed by poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, and lack of capacity building, all of which are generally recognized as significant challenges.

Interestingly, inefficient bureaucracy is not widely perceived as a significant challenge, though opinions on this vary considerably. This could suggest that bureaucratic efficiency varies across different local governments, or that other challenges are seen as more pressing.

The consistently high mean scores (except for bureaucracy) indicate that local government administration in Nigeria faces multiple, interrelated challenges. The relatively low standard deviations for most items suggest a general consensus on these issues, pointing to widely recognized systemic problems.

These findings highlight the need for comprehensive reforms in local government administration. Addressing political interference should be a top priority, but efforts should also focus on improving infrastructure, increasing funding, and enhancing capacity building. The variation in views on bureaucratic efficiency suggests that this area might benefit from further investigation to understand the disparities in experiences or perceptions across different local governments.

Testing of Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between factors such as Inadequate funding of local government in Nigeria and the challenges faced by local government administration.

Variable	SA	A	D	SD	Total
Male	10	12	33	35	90
Female	7	8	27	18	60
Total	17	20	60	53	150

Calculation of Expected Value for H₁

(Row Total × Column Total) ÷ Grand Total

$$(90 \times 17) \div 150 = 10$$

$$(60 \times 17) \div 150 = 7$$

$$(90 \times 20) \div 150 = 12$$

$$(60 \times 20) \div 150 = 8$$

$(90 \times 60) \div 150 = 36$
 $(60 \times 60) \div 150 = 24$
 $(90 \times 53) \div 150 = 32$
 $(60 \times 53) \div 150 = 21$

O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
10	10	0	0	0.00
7	7	0	0	0.00
12	12	0	0	0.00
8	8	0	0	0.00
33	36	-3	9	0.25
27	24	3	9	0.38
35	32	3	9	0.28
18	21	-3	9	0.43

$X^2 = 1.34$

N=Number of observations

O=Observed Value

E=Expected Value

(O-E) = Residual Value

$(O - E)^2$ = Square of Residual Value

$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ = Square of Residual Value divided by Expected Value

$\sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ -Chi-square Value Calculated = X^2 calculated

X^2 calculated = 1.34

Degree of freedom (df)= (R-1) (C-1) = (2-1) (4-1) = 3

At significance level of 0.05, with a degree of freedom (df) of 3 (calculated from the above data), the Table value from the chi-square table is 7.815.

The calculated chi-square value (X^2) is 1.34. The critical value at a significance level of 0.05 and 3 degrees of freedom is 7.815. Since the calculated value (1.34) is less than the critical value (7.815), we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Interpretation: There is no statistically significant relationship between the factors affecting local government performance in Nigeria and the challenges faced by local government administration. This suggests that the perceived challenges in local government administration may not be directly related to the factors affecting their performance, or at least, the relationship is not strong enough to be statistically significant based on this data.

This result is somewhat surprising and potentially revealing. It implies that the factors influencing local government performance might be distinct from the challenges encountered in day-to-day administration. This distinction could have important implications for how we approach improving local governance in Nigeria.

The lack of a significant relationship suggests that addressing administrative challenges alone may not necessarily lead to improved overall performance, and conversely, that factors boosting performance may not automatically resolve administrative difficulties. This complexity highlights the need for a multifaceted approach to local government reform.

It's important to consider that this result doesn't mean there's no connection at all between performance factors and administrative challenges, but rather that any relationship isn't strong enough to be statistically significant in this particular dataset. The perceptions of male and female respondents seem to be relatively aligned on this issue, as the observed frequencies closely match the expected frequencies.

Table 2: Can restructuring techniques lead to political and financial autonomy for local governments in Nigeria

4	3	2	1				Descriptive Statistics		Remaks
			SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Questionnaire Items		N							
6. Decentralization of power can lead to political autonomy for local governments		150	70	64	11	5	3.33	.76	Agree
7. Fiscal federalism can lead to financial autonomy for local governments.		150	64	60	15	11	3.18	.89	Agree
8. Autonomy in decision-making can lead to political autonomy for local governments.		150	66	54	23	7	3.19	.86	Agree
9. Control over resources can lead to financial autonomy for local governments.		150	61	47	31	11	3.05	.95	Agree
10. Reduced state interference can lead to political autonomy for local governments.		150	82	52	13	3	3.42	.74	Agree
Valid N (listwise)		0							

Source: Researchers Survey: 2024

Data from Table 3 above presents information on whether restructuring techniques can lead to political and financial autonomy for local governments in Nigeria. The table includes five questionnaire items, each assessing a different aspect of potential restructuring.

Item 6: Decentralization of power can lead to political autonomy for local governments shows a mean score of 3.33 and a standard deviation of 0.76. The high mean score, well above 3, indicates strong agreement with this statement. The low standard deviation suggests a high level of consensus among respondents. This implies that decentralization of power is widely perceived as an effective means to achieve political autonomy for local governments.

Item 7: Fiscal federalism can lead to financial autonomy for local governments has a mean score of 3.18 and a standard deviation of 0.89. The mean score above 3 signifies general agreement with this statement. The standard deviation, slightly higher than Item 11 but still below 1, indicates a relatively consistent level of agreement among respondents. This suggests that fiscal federalism is seen as a viable path to financial autonomy for local governments, though with slightly more varied opinions than on decentralization.

Item 8: Autonomy in decision-making can lead to political autonomy for local governments shows a mean score of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.86. Similar to Item 12, this mean score above 3 indicates general agreement with the statement. The standard deviation suggests some variation in opinions, but the overall tendency is strongly towards agreement. This implies that autonomy in decision-making is recognized as an important factor in achieving political autonomy.

Item 9: Control over resources can lead to financial autonomy for local governments has a mean score of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.95. While still above 3, this is the lowest mean score in the table, though it still indicates agreement. The higher standard deviation suggests more diverse opinions on this item compared to others. This implies that while control over resources is generally seen as a path to financial autonomy, there's more variation in this view, possibly reflecting concerns about resource management capabilities.

Item 10: "Reduced state interference can lead to political autonomy for local governments" shows the highest mean score of 3.42 and the lowest standard deviation of 0.74. This indicates the strongest level of agreement among all items, with the most consistent opinions. This suggests that reducing state interference is seen as the most effective way to achieve political autonomy for local governments.

Overall interpretation: The data reveals a strong belief in the potential of various restructuring techniques to lead to both political and financial autonomy for local governments in Nigeria. All items show mean scores above 3, indicating general agreement across all proposed restructuring techniques. Reduced state interference and decentralization of power are seen as the most effective means to achieve political autonomy, with the highest levels of agreement and consistency in opinions. This suggests a strong desire for more independence from state-level control.

For financial autonomy, fiscal federalism and control over resources are seen as effective, though with slightly more varied opinions, particularly on resource control. This could reflect recognition of the complexities involved in financial management at the local level. The consistently high mean scores and relatively low standard deviations across all items indicate a broad consensus on the potential effectiveness of these restructuring techniques. This suggests strong support for comprehensive reforms aimed at increasing both political and financial autonomy for local governments.

These findings highlight the perceived importance of reducing central control, implementing fiscal federalism, and enhancing local decision-making power as key strategies for improving local government autonomy in Nigeria. The results also suggest that a multi-faceted approach, addressing both political and financial aspects of autonomy, is likely to be most effective in restructuring local government administration.

Testing of Hypothesis Three:

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between restructuring and the gain of political and financial autonomy by local governments in Nigeria.

Variable	SA	A	D	SD	Total
Male	29	46	8	7	90
Female	34	19	5	2	60
Total	63	65	13	9	150

Calculation of Expected Value for H₀₁

(Row Total × Column Total) ÷ Grand Total

$(90 \times 63) \div 150 = 38$

$(60 \times 63) \div 150 = 25$

$(90 \times 65) \div 150 = 39$

$(60 \times 65) \div 150 = 26$

$(90 \times 13) \div 150 = 8$

$(60 \times 13) \div 150 = 5$

$(90 \times 9) \div 150 = 5$

$(60 \times 9) \div 150 = 4$

O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{\sum(O-E)^2}{E}$
29	38	-9	81	2.13
34	25	9	81	3.24
46	39	7	49	1.26
19	26	-7	49	1.88
8	8	0	0	0.00
5	5	0	0	0.00
7	5	2	4	0.08
2	4	-2	4	1.00

$X^2 = 9.59$

N=Number of observations

O=Observed Value

E=Expected Value

(O-E)=Residual Value

(O - E)²= Square of Residual Value

$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ = Square of Residual Value divided by Expected Value

$\sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ -Chi-square Value Calculated = X²calculated

X²calculated = 9.59

Degree of freedom (df)= (R-1)(C-1) =(2-1)(4-1)=3

At significance level of 0.05, with a degree of freedom (df) of 3 (calculated from the above data), the Table value from the chi-square table is 7.815.

H03: There is no significant relationship between restructuring and the gain of political and financial autonomy by local governments in Nigeria.

The calculated chi-square value (X²) is 9.59. The critical value at a significance level of 0.05 and 3 degrees of freedom is 7.815. Since the calculated value (9.59) is greater than the critical value (7.815), we reject the null hypothesis.

Interpretation: There is a statistically significant relationship between restructuring and the gain of political and financial autonomy by local governments in Nigeria. This finding suggests that the process of restructuring is perceived to be associated with changes in the political and financial autonomy of local governments. The rejection of the null hypothesis indicates that respondents see a connection between efforts to restructure local government systems and the potential for increased autonomy. This

relationship appears to be strong enough to be statistically significant, implying that restructuring initiatives could be an important factor in shaping the autonomy of local governments.

Interestingly, there seems to be a notable difference in perceptions between male and female respondents. The observed frequencies deviate considerably from the expected frequencies, particularly in the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories. This gender difference in perception could be an important factor to consider in understanding and implementing restructuring initiatives.

This finding has important implications for policy-making and governance reforms in Nigeria. It suggests that restructuring efforts, if properly designed and implemented, could be a viable path towards achieving greater political and financial autonomy for local governments. This could potentially lead to more effective local governance, as increased autonomy might allow local governments to be more responsive to local needs and manage resources more efficiently.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Factors that affects Local Governments Performance in Nigeria

The findings from this study provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by local government administration in Nigeria, offering a nuanced perspective that both aligns with and diverges from various viewpoints presented in the empirical review. This analysis reveals a complex interplay of factors affecting local governance, contributing to the ongoing discourse on restructuring and reform. One of the most striking findings is the identification of political interference as the most significant challenge facing local government administration. This aligns closely with the concerns raised by scholars like Eme (2015) and Eme et al. (2017) regarding local government autonomy. The strong consensus on this issue underscores the urgency of addressing political interference in local governance, supporting arguments for restructuring that aim to grant more independence to local authorities.

Inadequate funding emerges as another significant challenge, consistent with the views expressed by various scholars in the empirical review. This finding supports the arguments made by proponents of restructuring, such as Idemba (2018), who advocate for greater resource control at the local level. The recognition of funding as a major issue reinforces the need for fiscal restructuring to enhance the financial autonomy of local governments. The study's identification of poor infrastructure as a major challenge aligns with the broader discourse on developmental challenges at the local level. This finding supports the arguments made by scholars like Mathew (2017), who emphasize the need for restructuring to allow local governments more control over their development projects. It highlights the practical implications of the current governance structure on local development. Interestingly, the study reveals that inefficient bureaucracy is not widely perceived as a significant challenge, though opinions vary considerably. This finding presents a nuanced perspective that somewhat diverges from the general criticism of bureaucratic inefficiency often found in the literature. It suggests that the impact of bureaucracy on local government administration may be more complex than often assumed, warranting further investigation.

The recognition of lack of capacity building as a significant challenge aligns with the calls for restructuring to enhance local governance capabilities. This finding supports the arguments made by scholars like Obiora (2018) and Bello (2017), who emphasize the need for reforms that improve the functionality and efficiency of local governments. However, a surprising aspect of the findings is the lack of a statistically significant relationship between the factors affecting local government performance and the challenges faced in administration. This result contrasts with some assumptions in the literature that often link administrative challenges directly to performance issues. It suggests a more complex relationship between administrative challenges and overall performance, highlighting the need for a multifaceted approach to local government reform. This lack of significant relationship aligns with the arguments made by Walker and Andrews (2015) and George, Walker, and Monster (2019) about the multidimensional nature of public service performance. It supports their view that performance is contingent rather than universal and should be measured using different sources and dimensions. The findings also indirectly support the calls for constitutional review mentioned in the literature, particularly the efforts noted during Goodluck Jonathan's presidency. The identification of multiple, interrelated

challenges underscores the need for a comprehensive review of the constitutional framework governing local governments, as advocated by various scholars in the empirical review.

In all, while the study aligns with much of the literature on the challenges facing local government administration in Nigeria, it also presents some unexpected findings that add nuance to the ongoing debate about restructuring and reform. The strong consensus on political interference as the primary challenge, coupled with the recognition of funding, infrastructure, and capacity building issues, supports arguments for comprehensive restructuring. However, the lack of a clear link between administrative challenges and performance factors suggests that reform efforts need to be carefully tailored to address both operational and strategic aspects of local governance. This study thus contributes valuable empirical evidence to the discourse on local government reform in Nigeria, providing a foundation for more targeted and effective policy interventions.

Restructuring Local Governments in Nigeria and Political and Financial Autonomy.

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the perceived relationship between restructuring techniques and the potential for political and financial autonomy of local governments in Nigeria. These results both align with and expand upon various perspectives presented in the empirical review, offering a nuanced understanding of the potential impacts of restructuring on local governance.

One of the most significant findings is the strong belief in decentralization of power as a means to achieve political autonomy for local governments. This aligns closely with the arguments presented by scholars like Abbas and Wakili (2018), who advocated for political reorganization and the restoration of federalism with independent, self-sustaining federal units. The high level of consensus on this point underscores the perceived importance of decentralization in the broader restructuring debate. The study's findings on fiscal federalism as a path to financial autonomy for local governments resonate with the views expressed by Mathew (2017) and Idemba (2018). These scholars emphasized the need for restructuring to allow different levels of government to control their resources and execute their developmental projects. The general agreement among respondents on this point supports the argument that fiscal restructuring is crucial for enhancing local government autonomy.

Interestingly, the study reveals that reduced state interference is seen as the most effective way to achieve political autonomy for local governments. This finding aligns with the concerns raised by Eme (2015) and Eme et al. (2017) regarding the negative impact of state control on local government performance. It supports their argument that direct financial allocation to local government councils is crucial for enhancing their autonomy and effectiveness. The recognition of autonomy in decision-making as an important factor in achieving political autonomy aligns with the concept of true federalism discussed by several scholars in the empirical review. This finding supports the arguments made by proponents of restructuring who advocate for a system where each level of government can make decisions independently within its jurisdiction. However, the study reveals a more nuanced view on the relationship between control over resources and financial autonomy. While generally seen as a path to financial autonomy, there's more variation in this view compared to other factors. This complexity aligns with the discussions in the literature about the challenges of resource management at the local level and the need for capacity building, as mentioned by scholars like Obiora (2018).

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the findings is the statistically significant relationship between restructuring and the gain of political and financial autonomy by local governments. This result provides empirical support for the arguments made by various scholars in the literature review about the potential benefits of restructuring. It suggests that restructuring initiatives, if properly implemented, could indeed lead to increased autonomy for local governments. The gender difference in perceptions regarding restructuring and autonomy is an interesting finding that wasn't explicitly addressed in the reviewed literature. This difference highlights the importance of considering diverse perspectives in the restructuring debate and implementation process. The overall strong agreement across all proposed restructuring techniques aligns with the calls for comprehensive reform mentioned in the literature, particularly the efforts noted during Goodluck Jonathan's presidency. The findings suggest broad support

for a multi-faceted approach to restructuring that addresses both political and financial aspects of autonomy.

In all, while the study largely aligns with the literature on the potential benefits of restructuring for local government autonomy, it also provides new insights into the perceived effectiveness of specific restructuring techniques. The strong consensus on the importance of reduced state interference and decentralization of power, coupled with the recognition of fiscal federalism and resource control as key factors, supports arguments for comprehensive restructuring. The statistically significant relationship between restructuring and autonomy provides empirical backing for the theoretical arguments presented in the literature. However, the varied opinions on resource control and the gender differences in perceptions highlight the complexities involved in the restructuring process. This study thus contributes valuable empirical evidence to the ongoing discourse on restructuring and local government reform in Nigeria, providing a foundation for more targeted and effective policy interventions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that local government administration in Rivers State faces significant challenges that require comprehensive restructuring for improved performance. Political interference emerged as the most critical impediment to effective local governance, followed by inadequate funding mechanisms and poor infrastructure development. While the study revealed strong support for various restructuring initiatives, particularly reduced state interference and decentralization of power, it also uncovered a complex relationship between administrative challenges and performance factors. The findings demonstrate that achieving meaningful local government autonomy requires a multi-faceted approach encompassing both political and financial reforms. Notably, the implementation of fiscal federalism and enhanced resource control at the local government level was identified as essential for achieving financial autonomy, while the reduction of state interference was seen as crucial for political autonomy. These conclusions underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms to enhance the effectiveness and autonomy of local government administration in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. That the Federal Government should initiate comprehensive constitutional reforms to guarantee direct statutory allocations to local governments, establish an independent monitoring mechanism for local government finances, create a national framework for capacity building in local government administration, and implement clear guidelines for state-local government relationships.
2. That the State Government should reduce interference in local government affairs, establish transparent mechanisms for distributing state-local government joint account funds, support local governments in developing internal revenue generation capabilities, and create platforms for regular coordination between state and local government activities.
3. That Local Government Councils should develop comprehensive strategic plans for infrastructure development, implement transparent financial management systems, establish regular community engagement mechanisms, invest in staff training and development programs, and create performance measurement and evaluation systems.
4. That the National Assembly should enact legislation strengthening local government autonomy, review and amend relevant sections of the constitution affecting local government administration, and establish clear oversight mechanisms that do not compromise local government independence.
5. That the State Houses of Assembly should pass legislation supporting local government autonomy, create legal frameworks for transparent local government operations, and establish mechanisms for effective oversight without undue interference.
6. That Anti-corruption Agencies should strengthen monitoring mechanisms for local government finances, establish special units focused on local government financial crimes, and develop preventive measures against corruption at the local government level.

7. That Civil Society Organizations should establish independent monitoring mechanisms for local government projects, create awareness programs on citizen participation in local governance, and support capacity-building initiatives for local government staff.

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