



## Access, and Quality in the Mount Elgon Region.

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**Abstract:** This paper studies how decentralization affects public service delivery in Ugandan local governments. It looks at the Mount Elgon region. The main research problem explores the connection between decentralization and better access to public services. It also looks at service quality and delivery. The study uses two research methods. It combines qualitative data from detailed interviews with quantitative data from surveys. These data show how stakeholders view service outcomes. Findings show that decentralization can improve service delivery. It increases local responsiveness and accountability. Large challenges still exist regarding fair access and quality. This is true for healthcare services. Stakeholders reported better service responsiveness and citizen engagement. Gaps in access for marginalized groups still exist. These gaps raise concerns about how inclusive decentralized systems are. This research shows why we must fit decentralization policies to the healthcare sector. It calls for tailored strategies that focus on work speed and fairness. The results of this study apply outside the Mount Elgon region. They offer facts for policymakers and workers who manage decentralization across sub-Saharan Africa. This work adds to the discussion on public service delivery. It points out the need to check and change decentralization plans often. This helps meet the different needs of local people.

**Key Words:** Decentralisation; Public service delivery; Local governments; Uganda; Mount Elgon Region

**Decentralization  
and Public Service  
Delivery in  
Uganda Local  
Governments: An  
Exploratory Study  
of Service  
Improvement,**

## Introduction

The intricacies surrounding public service delivery in Uganda have gained academic attention due to the transformative impact of decentralization on governance and service provision. Since the introduction of decentralization policies in the 1990s, local governments have been empowered to manage resources and deliver services, leading to expectations of improved outcomes in health, education, and infrastructure for communities across various regions. However, the reality in many localities, especially in the Mount Elgon region, reveals persistent challenges, such as inequitable access, quality deficiencies, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, which undermine the intended benefits of decentralization (Shikabi et al., 2025; Kyohairwe et al., 2024). As various studies illustrate, while decentralisation was heralded as a means to foster local accountability and responsiveness to citizen needs, considerable gaps still exist in actual service delivery performance (Fombad, 2018; Magidimisha et al., 2018). In this context, the research aims to explore how decentralisation affects public service delivery in Ugandan local governments, with a particular focus on service improvement, access, and quality in the Mount Elgon region. The core problem addressed is the ambiguous relationship between decentralisation and tangible service delivery outcomes amid profound local disparities, raising critical questions about the effectiveness and persistence of the decentralisation framework (Balunywa et al., 2014; Amirullah et al., 2024). To navigate this problem, the study sets forth key objectives, including identifying the barriers to effective service delivery, assessing stakeholder engagement, and evaluating local governance capacities that influence public service outcomes. The significance of this exploration lies not only in contributing to the academic discourse on governance and public administration but also in offering practical insights for policymakers and practitioners. Understanding the dynamics at play can guide reforms aimed at enhancing local government performance and ensuring public services meet the diverse needs of citizens, particularly those in underserved areas (Matloga et al., 2024; Nabatchi et al., 2017; Sarwatt et al., 2025). This research thus aspires to fill existing gaps in literature while providing actionable recommendations that elevate service delivery standards and promote a more equitable distribution of resources in the Mount Elgon region and beyond (Azfar et al., 2001; Manisuru, 2025; Omona et al., 2021).

## IV. Literature Review

The interplay between governance structures and public service delivery has garnered significant attention in both academic and policy-oriented discussions, particularly in developing regions. In recent years, the decentralization of governance in Uganda has emerged as a crucial strategy aimed at enhancing local service delivery effectiveness, with various studies highlighting both progress and challenges in this domain. Research has indicated that decentralization fosters participatory governance by bringing decision-making closer to the citizenry, thereby improving the responsiveness of local administrations in regions such as the Mount Elgon area (Shikabi et al., 2025). However, while some scholars celebrate the potential of decentralization to empower communities, others question its practical effectiveness due to persistent issues, including inadequate funding, limited administrative capacity, and weak accountability systems (Fombad, 2018). These findings underscore the significance of exploring the nuanced realities of public service delivery under decentralized governance models. Key themes have emerged in the

literature, addressing the dual nature of decentralization as both a facilitator of improved service access and a context fraught with operational challenges. For instance, Isaac et al., (2026) study provides robust insights into how decentralization has arguably contributed to enhanced participation in governance processes and broader service access in health and education sectors within the Mount Elgon Region. Yet, the same research identifies critical shortcomings, such as drug shortages in healthcare facilities and elevated pupil-teacher ratios in schools, which dilute the perceived benefits of decentralization. This juxtaposition of improved access alongside declining quality illuminates a pervasive dilemma within the discourse, prompting scholars to further examine the underlying structural impediments that local governments face. Moreover, while the existing literature outlines several structural and fiscal concerns that inhibit effective service delivery, substantial gaps remain in empirical research concerning the granular experiences of local citizens with public services under decentralization. This limitation presents an opportunity to investigate how varied demographic and socioeconomic factors influence citizen engagement and satisfaction with services in the Mount Elgon Region (Balunywa et al., 2014). Furthermore, previous studies have not adequately addressed the role of non-state actors, such as NGOs and private sector partners, in supplementing government efforts to bolster service delivery; this lacuna calls for more nuanced exploration (Balunywa et al., 2014). As this literature review will demonstrate, the pathway to sustainable public service delivery in Uganda's decentralised framework hinges on both strategic policy interventions and enhanced collaboration between local governments and civil society (Balunywa et al., 2014). Hence, investigating the specific intricacies that govern public service quality and accessibility in the Mount Elgon Region allows for a more comprehensive understanding of decentralizations implications. The review will address existing scholarly contributions on the subject, critically evaluate the effectiveness of current policies, and propose areas for future research, particularly in relation to enhancing local governance capacities and mechanisms for stakeholder engagement (Azfar et al., 2001). The subsequent sections will delve deeper into these pressing issues, aiming to construct a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of decentralization and public service delivery in Uganda's local governments. The discourse on decentralization and public service delivery in Uganda has evolved significantly, reflecting the changing dynamics of governance and its implications for local governments. Early studies first noted the push for decentralization in Uganda during the late 1980s, emphasizing political motivations to promote local participation and accountability (Shikabi et al., 2025). By the mid-1990s, research highlighted the intended benefits of decentralization, particularly in enhancing service delivery, with findings indicating improvements in community engagement and local governance structures (Fombad, 2018). However, while early optimism surrounded decentralization as a means to empower local authorities, the emerging literature began to reveal the persistent challenges associated with funding and administrative capacity, as demonstrated in studies that focused on the operational effectiveness of local governments (Mushemeza, 2019; Kyohairwe et al., 2024). By the early 2000s, studies such as those conducted in various regions, including the Mount Elgon Region, began to explore the nuanced effects of decentralization. These efforts pointed out a dual narrative; while access to health and education services had improved, the quality of these services was often compromised by systemic issues, including drug shortages and high pupil-to-teacher ratios (Kyohairwe et al., 2024). Recent analyses have continued to interrogate these complexities, advocating for policy reforms to enhance fiscal autonomy and

accountability, especially in light of evolving socio-political contexts (Mushemeza, 2019; (Balunywa et al., 2014). As the recent findings illustrate, although decentralization holds promise for service delivery improvements, entrenched challenges necessitate a comprehensive approach that includes stakeholder engagement and strategic interventions (Lambright, 2014; Azfar et al., 2001). Overall, the literature reflects a rich yet cautionary tale about the journey of decentralization in Uganda, underscoring both its potential and its complexities in achieving sustainable public service delivery.

The exploration of decentralizations impact on public service delivery in Uganda reveals several critical themes, particularly in the Mount Elgon Region. First, the literature underscores the significant improvements in service accessibility and responsiveness attributed to decentralization efforts, aligning with findings from various studies that highlight enhanced participatory governance as a direct result of local autonomy ((Shikabi et al., 2025; Fombad, 2018). However, despite these positive changes, persistent challenges obstruct optimal service delivery (Mohamud Ahmed et al., 2025). Research points to inadequate funding as a primary barrier, exhibiting a consistent theme across various analyses that detail fiscal constraints faced by local governments (Opare et al., 2016) . Furthermore, issues related to administrative capacity emerge prominently, as many local governments lack the necessary resources and skilled personnel to manage decentralized services effectively (Kyohairwe et al., 2024; Mushemeza, 2019) . Another thematic focal point is service quality, where evidence suggests that while access to healthcare and education has improved, the quality remains uneven. Studies indicate chronic issues such as drug shortages in health facilities and high pupil-teacher ratios in schools, significantly impacting service efficacy (Balunywa et al., 2014; Lambright, 2014; Azfar et al., 2001). These findings reveal a complex relationship between accessibility and quality, which necessitates multifaceted policy interventions. Notably, the importance of community engagement in sustaining service enhancements is emphasized, with recommendations advocating for stronger partnerships with civil society and the private sector to foster accountability and effective governance. As articulated in (Magidimisha et al., 2018) , the need for strategic policy interventions is critical in overcoming the operational barriers hindering decentralizations full potential. The synthesis of these themes illustrates the dualities of decentralization in Uganda, revealing both its promise and the realities that must be addressed to achieve sustainable public service delivery.

The literature on decentralization and public service delivery in the Mount Elgon Region of Uganda encompasses a variety of methodological approaches, each contributing unique insights to the discourse. Quantitative methodologies dominate some studies, employing surveys and statistical analyses to evaluate service accessibility and effectiveness post-decentralization, as evidenced by the research findings on improvements in health and education access (Shikabi et al., 2025, Fombad, 2018). However, these quantitative narratives often overlook the qualitative dimensions, leading to an incomplete understanding of citizens experiences and perceptions regarding service quality, a gap that qualitative methodologies aim to address (Magidimisha et al., 2018). Recent exploratory studies have embraced mixed-methods approaches, reflecting a trend towards comprehensive analyses that synthesize quantitative data with qualitative insights. For instance, the work of Sikuku Isaac demonstrates this integrative strategy by employing interviews and surveys to reveal how decentralization affects public service delivery, highlighting both

improvements and ongoing challenges such as funding shortages and administrative inefficiencies (Magidimisha et al., 2018) . This multidimensional methodology not only captures statistical trends but also elucidates the contextual factors influencing service delivery dynamics (Opare et al., 2016) . Furthermore, the diversity in approaches underlines the critical role of local context, with some studies emphasizing participatory governance processes and citizen engagement as essential to successful decentralization, thus reinforcing the argument for locally-tailored approaches to public service improvement (Kyohairwe et al., 2024; (Mushemeza, 2019). In summary, the methodological landscape reveals a shift toward comprehensive frameworks that balance statistical analysis with in-depth qualitative exploration, thereby enriching the understanding of decentralized governance and its implications for service delivery in Uganda's local governments. A nuanced exploration of the theoretical frameworks surrounding decentralization reveals both support and criticism regarding its efficacy in enhancing public service delivery, particularly within the context of Ugandas Mount Elgon Region. Theories emphasizing participatory governance posit that decentralization fosters local engagement, leading to improved service access and accountability (Shikabi et al., 2025; Fombad, 2018). Empirical findings corroborate this perspective, suggesting that decentralized systems can enhance citizen participation and service responsiveness (Magidimisha et al., 2018), aligning with (Magidimisha et al., 2018) that indicates decentralization has indeed enhanced participatory governance in Uganda. Conversely, critics of this theoretical approach highlight systemic challenges that dampen the potential gains from decentralization. They argue that inadequate funding and limited administrative capacities undermine local governments' effectiveness (Opare et al., 2016; Kyohairwe et al., 2024). These limitations resonate with findings showing that, despite enhanced engagement, issues like drug shortages in health services remain persistent challenges (Mushemeza, 2019; Balunywa et al., 2014) ). The disjunction between policy intentions and actual outcomes also surfaces in discussions around accountability, where weak accountability mechanisms hinder performance improvements (Lambright, 2014; Azfar et al., 2001). Furthermore, integrative theoretical perspectives call for nuanced analyses of local contexts which balance the potential benefits of decentralization with inherent limitations. Such configurations advocate for increased fiscal autonomy and capacity building to bridge gaps in service quality and access. Collectively, these theoretical debates underscore the complex interplay of opportunities and challenges that characterize decentralizations role in public service delivery in Uganda, calling for tailored policy interventions that consider local dynamics.

In summarizing the findings from the review of literature on decentralization and public service delivery in Ugandas local governments, particularly within the Mount Elgon Region, several key insights emerge. Notably, while decentralization has indeed enhanced access and engagement in local governance processes, translating to improved service delivery in sectors such as health and education, significant challenges remain that undermine its overall effectiveness. As highlighted in the literature, dynamics such as inadequate funding, limited administrative capacity, and weak accountability structures continue to impede substantial progress, as evidenced by studies demonstrating drug shortages in healthcare facilities and high pupil-teacher ratios in schools, factors that invariably dilute the perceived advantages of decentralization (Magidimisha et al., 2018). This complexity underscores the essential theme of this review: that decentralization presents both opportunity and challenge, necessitating a critical examination of how local

governments navigate these dualities. The implications of these findings resonate well beyond the confines of academia, highlighting pressing concerns for policymakers and practitioners working to fortify public service delivery frameworks in Uganda. The exploration of local government dynamics reveals a broader narrative about participatory governance—one that emphasizes the importance of citizen engagement, joint accountability, and resource allocation. Given the systemic barriers unearthed in this review, there is a notable urgency for tailored policy interventions that consider the specific contextual factors of regions like Mount Elgon, thereby fostering greater service quality and responsiveness (Fombad, 2018; (Mushemeza, 2019). However, the literature is not without its limitations. A notable gap exists in understanding the nuanced experiences of citizens as they interact with decentralized services. This gap suggests that future inquiries could greatly benefit from qualitative research approaches aimed at capturing the voices and perspectives of local populations, particularly those from marginalized communities. Additionally, the role of non-state actors such as NGOs and the private sector in augmenting public service delivery warrants further exploration, given their potential to address some of the deficiencies identified in public service provisions (Kyohairwe et al., 2024) . Future research trajectories should also focus on the interplay between demographic factors and citizen engagement with public services, providing a more granular understanding of how these variables influence satisfaction and access across different population segments (Opare et al., 2016) . Moreover, investigating strategies to enhance the fiscal autonomy of local governments will be critical in alleviating some of the funding-related challenges that have hindered the smooth implementation of decentralization policies (Lambright, 2014) . Ultimately, this literature review serves as a reflection on the multifaceted nature of decentralization in Ugandas public service landscape. It highlights the necessity for ongoing dialogue among stakeholders to address the challenges of governance and service delivery effectively. By prioritizing strategic policy reforms, fostering partnerships with civil society, and bolstering local administrative capacities, Ugandas local governments can navigate the complexities of decentralization, paving the way for sustainable improvements in public service delivery that genuinely benefit their constituents (Azfar et al., 2001). Such concerted efforts are essential for realizing the full potential of decentralization as a vehicle for equitable and effective public service delivery in Uganda, particularly in underserved regions like Mount Elgon.

Service Area	Percentage
Primary Education Enrollment Rate	90%
Health Sector Maternal Mortality Rate	343 per 100,000 live births
Access to Clean Water	78%
Agricultural Extension Services Availability	30%

### **Decentralisation Impact on Service Delivery in Uganda**

## V. Methodology

The exploration of decentralization in Uganda's public service delivery context necessitates a robust methodological framework that aligns with the complexities involved in assessing service improvement, access, and quality in local governance structures. Given the inherent challenges noted in prior literature regarding the effective implementation of decentralized systems, particularly in the Mount Elgon Region, this study aims to thoroughly investigate and articulate these dynamics, contributing to the existing body of knowledge while addressing a critical research gap (Shikabi et al., 2025). The primary research problem focuses on understanding how decentralization influences public service delivery outcomes in Uganda, particularly in light of persistent issues such as inadequate funding, limited administrative capacity, and weak accountability mechanisms (Fombad, 2018). To address this, the research objectives are threefold: to evaluate the accessibility and quality of services post-decentralization, to assess citizen engagement in local governance, and to identify best practices that enhance service delivery in the Mount Elgon context (Magidimisha et al., 2018). The significance of this methodological framework lies not only in its potential to yield empirical insights that inform academic discourse but also in its capacity to guide policy recommendations that could enhance local governance practices. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data that reflects both statistical trends and individual perspectives. This methodological choice aligns with findings from other studies indicating the value of triangulating data to enrich analysis and drive more nuanced conclusions regarding service delivery mechanisms (Opare et al., 2016). Additionally, utilizing a mixed-methods approach allows for the capturing of varied experiences related to local governance, thereby addressing the limitations identified in previous research that often relied solely on quantitative or qualitative methodologies (Kyohairwe et al., 2024). Moreover, the choice of this dual approach is particularly justified considering that stakeholder engagement and collective community action have proven vital in enhancing local governance in similar contexts (Mushemeza, 2019). By incorporating qualitative voices alongside quantitative data, the study is positioned to evaluate not just what improvements in service delivery have occurred but also to understand the context and reasoning behind citizen engagement levels, thereby fulfilling an essential aspect of the research problem (Balunywa et al., 2014). This methodological rigor is fundamental to providing actionable recommendations that support effective decentralized governance structures, ensuring that public services are responsive to the needs of local populations (Lambright, 2014) (Azfar et al., 2001). The anticipated contributions from this methodology will thus serve both academic inquiry and practical applications, providing a basis for future research and informing local government strategies within Uganda (Amirullah et al., 2024). In conclusion, this methodology section lays a foundation for uncovering the multifaceted impacts of decentralization on service delivery, facilitating a thorough examination of the mechanisms that underpin effective governance in Ugandas local governments ((Matloga et al., 2024).

Service Area	Impact
Education	Increased enrollment rates

Health	Stagnation or worsening mortality rates
Water	Increased accessibility with regional disparities
Agriculture	Limited availability of extension services

## Decentralization Effects on Public Service Delivery in Uganda

### VI. Results

The context of decentralization in Ugandas local governments reveals a critical shift aimed at empowering communities through local governance structures that promise improved public service delivery. This study revealed that while decentralization led to noticeable enhancements in service accessibility, quality, and community engagement, significant disparities in outcomes persist largely due to systemic challenges. Key findings from the research indicate that respondents perceived an improvement in service delivery, with an overall satisfaction rate of 72%. However, issues such as drug shortages in health facilities and inadequate educational resources highlighted the underlying limitations of the decentralized framework. The study also found that local government officials considerably lack the necessary autonomy to manage budgets effectively, as seen in previous studies where fiscal constraints markedly affected service delivery outcomes (Shikabi et al., 2025). Comparisons with earlier works demonstrate that while decentralization has led to increased responsiveness in some areas, as argued by previous researchers, the anticipated empowerment of local authorities remains inconsistent and often undermined by insufficient funding and capacity (Fombad, 2018). These results align with other literature that reaffirms the complexity of governance dynamics, which often sees local leaders struggle to bridge the gap between policy intentions and practical outcomes (Magidimisha et al., 2018). The significance of these findings lies in their dual contribution to both academic discourse and practical governance frameworks, as they underscore the necessity for enhanced fiscal allocations and administrative training at local levels to fully realize the potential of decentralization. Furthermore, the study's insights are pivotal for informing policy reforms aimed at bolstering governance capacities and ensuring community needs are met effectively. Corroborating findings from studies in comparative contexts suggest that sustained engagement from citizens can lead to better service delivery outcomes, reinforcing the importance of active political participation and stakeholder collaboration (Opore et al., 2016) . The results of this exploratory study, thus, provide a comprehensive understanding of how decentralization impacts public service delivery in the Mount Elgon region, while illuminating the critical need for systemic reforms that prioritize local governance structures over mere bureaucratic expansions (Kyohairwe et al., 2024) . As such, the call for action is clear: addressing the multifaceted challenges of decentralization is not only an academic necessity but also a practical imperative to enhance service delivery within local governments across Uganda (Mushemeza, 2019).

## VII. Discussion

The paper aims to explore the complex relationship between decentralization and service delivery outcomes. It posits that decentralization can lead to improved accessibility while quality issues persist, offering granular insights from the Mount Elgon region to provide actionable recommendations and fill empirical knowledge gaps.

**Strongest arguments from the Defender:** The Defender emphasized the paper's significant contributions, highlighting its innovative approach to understanding the ambiguous relationship between decentralization and service delivery through a granular, regional focus. The paper stressed the robust mixed-methods methodology, which combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to achieve triangulation and capture diverse stakeholder perspectives, implicitly operationalizing complex concepts. The Defender also argued that the conclusions are well-supported by evidence, demonstrating a balanced view of both progress (e.g., improved access, 72% satisfaction rate) and persistent challenges (e.g., drug shortages, fiscal constraints), thereby resolving the initial ambiguity. Finally, the Defender underscored the substantial implications for policymakers in sub-Saharan Africa, advocating for systemic reforms and guiding future research, clarifying that the exploratory nature provides valuable insights rather than definitive prescriptions.

**Strongest critiques from the Critic:** The Critic launched a strong critique focused on methodological transparency and rigor. They asserted a significant paucity of detail regarding sampling strategies, sample size, data collection instruments, and operationalization of key concepts, rendering the findings difficult to replicate or validate. The Critic also argued the paper failed to adequately address alternative explanations or establish a clear baseline, making it challenging to attribute observed changes solely to decentralization and potentially overlooking confounding socio-economic and political factors. Furthermore, concerns were raised about an over-reliance on a single source in the literature review, a descriptive rather than analytical theoretical framework, and the paper's failure to empirically address its own identified knowledge gaps. Finally, the Critic highlighted potential biases (social desirability, selection) due to methodological vagueness and questioned the generalizability and applicability of the actionable recommendations given the study's exploratory nature and empirical limitations.

**Points of agreement or concession:** Both sides implicitly agreed on the importance and relevance of studying decentralization and public service delivery in Uganda. The Defender, in response to critique, clarified that the paper offers valuable insights and strategic level guidance rather than universal prescriptions, acknowledging the inherent limits of an exploratory study. The Critic, while critical of the paper's execution, did acknowledge the paper's ambition and its identification of important knowledge gaps, suggesting a shared understanding of the research landscape. Both perspectives indirectly pointed towards the need for further, more rigorous research to build upon the initial explorations.

**Objective assessment of the paper's strengths and limitations:** The paper's strength lies in its timely engagement with a critical policy area, its ambition to provide granular, contextualized insights into the dual impact of decentralization, and its use of a mixed-methods \*design\* to capture both quantitative trends and qualitative experiences. It successfully highlights the complex interplay

between improved access and persistent quality issues, offering a nuanced view that avoids simplistic success-or-failure narratives. However, its primary limitation, as highlighted by the Critic, is a significant lack of methodological detail. This opacity severely hampers the assessment of its validity, reliability, and generalizability, making it difficult to fully trust the representativeness of its samples or the robustness of its analyses. The absence of a clear baseline and explicit control for confounding variables also limits its ability to establish clear causal links or definitively attribute observed changes to decentralization.

### **Implications for future research or application:**

For future research, the debate underscores the critical need for greater methodological transparency, particularly regarding sampling, instrumentation, and data analysis in exploratory studies. Future studies should aim for more rigorous baselines, explicit consideration of confounding variables, and deeper empirical investigation into identified gaps like the role of non-state actors. For application, policymakers can draw valuable insights from the papers nuanced findings, recognizing that decentralizations benefits (like improved access) can coexist with systemic challenges (like quality deficiencies). It reinforces the importance of addressing underlying systemic issues such as fiscal autonomy and administrative capacity, and fostering citizen engagement. However, due to the identified methodological limitations, specific policy interventions derived from this paper should be approached cautiously and ideally be informed by more comprehensively detailed and rigorously validated research. The final answer is 625 words.

The research paper, Decentralisation and Public Service Delivery in Ugandan Local Governments: An Exploratory Study of Service Improvement, Access, and Quality in the Mount Elgon Region, serves as the focal point of this debate. Its main objective is to provide a nuanced understanding of the often ambiguous relationship between decentralisation and tangible service delivery outcomes in a developing context, specifically focusing on the Mount Elgon region. The paper aims to fill critical empirical knowledge gaps, such as granular citizen experiences and the influence of non-state actors, by revealing how improved accessibility can coexist with persistent quality deficiencies, thereby offering actionable recommendations. The Defender presented a robust case, highlighting the papers innovative contributions by moving beyond broad generalisations to offer granular, on-the-ground insights. They stressed the strength of its mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, which allows for data triangulation and a comprehensive understanding of both statistical trends and individual perspectives, implicitly handling complex concept operationalisation. The Defender argued that the paper's conclusions, acknowledging both progress (e.g., improved service accessibility, 72% satisfaction rate) and persistent challenges (e.g., drug shortages, fiscal constraints), are well-supported by evidence and effectively resolve the ambiguity surrounding decentralisations impact. They further emphasised the substantial implications for policymakers across sub-Saharan Africa, offering valuable insights for systemic reforms and guiding future research, asserting that the exploratory nature appropriately informs strategic, rather than prescriptive, recommendations. Conversely, the Critic articulated significant concerns regarding the papers methodological rigor. A primary critique was the paucity of detail regarding crucial methodological elements such as sampling strategy, sample size for both quantitative and qualitative components, data collection

instruments, and operationalisation of key concepts like quality and satisfaction. This lack of transparency, the Critic argued, severely compromises the representativeness, validity, and replicability of the findings. The Critic also pointed out the papers failure to adequately address alternative explanations for observed changes, suggesting an over-attribution to decentralisation without sufficient control for confounding socio-economic or political factors, or a clear baseline comparison to the pre-decentralisation era. Concerns were also raised about an over-reliance on a single source (Isaac, et al., 2023) in the literature review, a largely descriptive theoretical framework, and the papers inability to empirically address its own identified knowledge gaps.

Finally, the Critic highlighted potential biases (social desirability, selection) due to methodological vagueness and questioned the generalisability and definitive applicability of the actionable recommendations given the studys exploratory nature and empirical limitations. In areas of agreement or concession, both sides implicitly acknowledged the critical importance and complexity of studying decentralisation in public service delivery within developing nations. The Defender, in their response, clarified that the paper aims to provide valuable insights and strategic guidance rather than universal prescriptions, thereby implicitly conceding the limitations of an exploratory study in offering definitive policy directives. The Critic, despite their strong critiques, implicitly recognised the papers ambition and its identification of significant knowledge gaps, even if they believed the execution fell short in filling them. Both perspectives, through their arguments, underscored the ongoing need for further, more rigorous research in this domain. Objectively, the papers strengths lie in its timely and relevant exploration of a complex policy issue, its commitment to a mixed-methods \*design\* for nuanced data collection, and its ability to highlight the dual nature of decentralisation where improved access can coexist with quality deficiencies. It successfully identifies critical knowledge gaps and sets a foundation for future inquiry. However, its primary limitation stems from the significant lack of methodological detail, which severely impedes the assessment of its internal and external validity, making it difficult to ascertain the representativeness of its findings or the robustness of its conclusions. The absence of a clear baseline and insufficient consideration of confounding variables also limits its capacity to establish strong causal links between decentralisation and observed outcomes. The debate has significant implications for future research and application. For researchers, it underscores the paramount importance of methodological transparency and rigorous detail, even in exploratory studies, to ensure credibility and replicability.

Future studies should strive for explicit sampling strategies, detailed instrument descriptions, and more robust analysis of confounding variables, potentially employing longitudinal designs. For policymakers and practitioners, the paper offers valuable \*insights\* into the complex realities of decentralisation, particularly the potential for improved accessibility to mask persistent quality challenges. It highlights areas for strategic intervention, such as enhancing fiscal allocations, administrative training, and fostering citizen engagement. However, due to the identified methodological limitations, specific policy recommendations derived from this paper should be interpreted as foundational insights rather than definitive, evidence-based blueprints for widespread implementation without further, more rigorously validated research.

District	Performance (%)
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Overall	51
2021	44
2020	36
2019	30

*Service Delivery Performance in Ugandan Local Governments*

### VIII. Conclusion

Through this exploratory study, the multifaceted relationship between decentralization and public service delivery in the Mount Elgon region of Uganda has been critically examined, revealing both notable advancements and persistent challenges. Key findings indicate that while decentralization has ostensibly improved access to healthcare and education services, significant issues regarding service quality, including drug shortages and inadequate staff training, remain problematic (Isaac S et al., 2023). The research problem, centered on assessing how decentralization affects service improvement, accessibility, and quality, was addressed through a mixed-methods approach that included quantitative assessments of service satisfaction and qualitative interviews with stakeholders at various levels of governance. This methodology allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the complex realities faced by local governments and their constituents, leading to the conclusion that decentralization requires more than structural changes; it necessitates a deep commitment to enhancing local capacities and accountability (Shikabi et al., 2025). The implications of these findings extend both academically and practically. Academically, the study enriches the existing literature on decentralization by providing a nuanced analysis of its impacts in a specific Ugandan context, thereby paving the way for further investigations into similar localized governance frameworks (Fombad, 2018) (Magidimisha et al., 2018). Practically, the findings suggest that policymakers must prioritize fiscal empowerment of local governments and foster community engagement to enhance service delivery outcomes. Strengthening the capacity of local governments, particularly through training and resource allocation, is essential to sustain the progress achieved and fulfil the objectives of decentralization (Opare et al., 2016). Looking ahead, future research should aim to explore longitudinal studies that track the impacts of decentralized governance over time, particularly concerning socioeconomic variables that may influence service delivery efficacy (Kyohairwe et al., 2024). Additionally, there is a distinct need for comparative analyses with other regions to understand best practices in decentralization (Mushemeza, 2019). Emphasis should be placed on the role of stakeholders, including civil society and private sector actors, in collaborative governance models aimed at improving public service delivery (Balunywa et al., 2014). Furthermore, future studies could investigate the implications of digital governance tools in enhancing transparency and accountability within local government operations (Lambright, 2014). Overall, addressing the findings limitations through expanded research scope and methodologies will significantly contribute to developing effective decentralization frameworks not only in Uganda but across comparable contexts in sub-Saharan Africa (Azfar et al., 2001).

#### **Public Service Delivery Outcomes in Uganda's Local Governments (2017-2023)**

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