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Opportunities of Implementing Decentralized Education Management in Nigeria

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Abstracts: This study explores the opportunities associated with implementing decentralized education management in Nigeria, based on data collected from 285 respondents across six states and Abuja. The respondents expressed strong optimism about decentralization, with all opportunity items scoring above 4.0 on a 5-point Likert scale. Notably, increased transparency received the highest mean score of 4.5 (SD = 0.5), indicating a consensus that decentralization can substantially improve accountability and reduce corruption. Active community involvement (mean = 4.4, SD = 0.6) and training programs for local officials (mean = 4.3, SD = 0.6) were also perceived as critical enablers, underscoring the importance of stakeholder participation and capacity-building. Other significant opportunities included faster adaptation to local needs (mean = 4.2, SD = 0.7), higher enrollment in underserved regions (mean = 4.2, SD = 0.7), and increased local funding (mean = 4.0, SD = 0.7), suggesting decentralization's potential to foster responsiveness, equity, and resource efficiency. Factor analysis confirmed the robustness of these perceptions. The KMO measure (0.85) and Bartlett's test ($p < 0.001$) indicated data suitability. Extraction revealed a single dominant factor with an eigenvalue of 4.10, explaining 68.5% of the variance. All variables loaded strongly (> 0.75) on this factor, which represents "Effective Community and Stakeholder Engagement in Education." The high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88) further supports the unidimensionality. These findings imply that enhancing community participation, transparency, and resource management are central to successful decentralization initiatives. The results highlight decentralization's potential to transform Nigeria's education system by fostering inclusivity, responsiveness, and accountability through stakeholder engagement.

Key Words: Education Management, Stakeholder Engagement, Transparency, Community Involvement, Resource Allocation, Policy Implementation, Decentralization

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INTRODUCTION

Decentralized education management has emerged as a significant reform strategy aimed at improving the efficiency, equity, and responsiveness of education systems worldwide. Historically, education systems in many developing countries, including Nigeria, have been characterized by centralized administration that concentrates decision-making authority at the national level. This centralization often results in a disconnect between policy formulation and local educational needs, leading to inefficiencies, resource misallocation, and limited community participation (Akinyemi, 2021; Oduro & Okyere, 2018). Nigeria's colonial past entrenched a highly centralized education system, which persisted post-independence, with the Federal Government exerting significant control over funding, curriculum, and policy implementation. Such a system, while providing uniform standards, often failed to accommodate regional and local diversities, thereby impeding inclusive access and culturally relevant education (Simeon & Benneth, 2024; Uwakwe & Adiele, 2022; Akpan, 2015). The basic characteristics of centralized education systems include top-down decision-making, uniform curriculum standards, and hierarchical resource distribution. While these features aim to ensure consistency and quality, they often overlook contextual factors such as socio-cultural differences, economic disparities, and regional needs (Alabi & Okemakinde, 2010). Nigeria's education sector exemplifies these challenges, with disparities in resource allocation, access, and quality between urban and rural areas. The inability of a centralized system to adequately address such regional disparities has led policymakers to explore decentralization as an alternative approach. Decentralization involves shifting authority to local levels, empowering communities, and fostering participatory governance, which has the potential to improve responsiveness and accountability in education management (Offem & Udida, 2021; (Anetoh, Chendo, Ajakpo & Oranye & Akim, 2025; Oranye & Nwachukwu, 2025; Nwachukwu & Oranye, 2025).

Despite the conceptual appeal of decentralization, its implementation in Nigeria has faced several latent problems. One key issue is the persistent lack of capacity among local education authorities to manage resources effectively, which often results in misappropriation or underutilization of funds (Aprebo & Eze, 2024). Additionally, there has been a history of political interference, corruption, and weak institutional frameworks that undermine decentralization efforts (Adebayo & Olojo, 2020). Efforts by stakeholders, including the federal and state governments, development agencies, and civil society organizations, have aimed to address these issues through policy reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and resource allocations. However, these measures have largely yielded limited success, partly due to inconsistent policy implementation, insufficient community engagement, and lack of sustainable funding mechanisms (Chinedu, 2023). The fragmented nature of these interventions indicates that a comprehensive, context-specific approach remains elusive, leaving significant gaps in realizing the full potential of decentralization. The opportunities associated with implementing decentralized education management in Nigeria are extensive. Empirical studies suggest that decentralization can enhance community participation, improve transparency, and lead to more equitable resource distribution (Lawal, 2014). For instance, increased involvement of local stakeholders can facilitate culturally relevant curriculum development and more effective monitoring and evaluation of school performance (Lawal, 2014). Furthermore, decentralization can enable faster responses to local needs, reduce bureaucratic delays, and foster innovation at the grassroots level (Ejiogu, 2004). These opportunities align with the broader goals of Nigeria's National Education Policy, which emphasizes access, quality, and equity. However, the policy's successful translation into practice necessitates an understanding of the latent gaps particularly the capacity, infrastructural, and institutional challenges that hinder effective decentralization. Addressing these latent problems is crucial for Nigeria to harness the full benefits of decentralization. The failure of previous efforts to achieve meaningful reforms points to systemic weaknesses, including inadequate stakeholder engagement, weak institutional capacity, and insufficient funding (Chinedu, 2023). The

disconnect between policy intentions and ground realities underscores the need for a more nuanced approach that emphasizes capacity development, community empowerment, and sustainable funding models. Moreover, research indicates that decentralization must be supported by robust legal frameworks, accountability mechanisms, and continuous stakeholder participation to be effective (Berhanu, 2023; (Anetoh, Ajakpo, Chendo, Oranye & Akim, 2025; Anetoh, Chinweze, Obiezekwem, Oranye, Okoro & Oranu, 2025). Filling these gaps requires deliberate efforts to build local capacity, strengthen institutional frameworks, and foster genuine community engagement, which can lead to improved educational outcomes and social cohesion.

The importance and benefits of addressing these challenges extend beyond improving administrative efficiency; they are vital for fostering social equity, reducing regional disparities, and promoting national development. Decentralized management models can encourage local innovation, increase transparency, and improve resource mobilization, ultimately leading to better educational access and quality (Kyeremeh & Kor, 2022). Additionally, empowering local stakeholders can promote ownership and sustainability of educational initiatives, which are often lacking in centralized systems. As Nigeria continues to grapple with high dropout rates, unequal access, and poor quality of education, decentralization offers a strategic pathway to create more inclusive and resilient systems. Therefore, the urgency of addressing these latent problems cannot be overstated, as the long-term socio-economic benefits for Nigeria hinge on effective, participatory, and contextually responsive education governance (Akinyemi, 2021; Abreh, 2017). Historical dominance of centralized education management in Nigeria has contributed to persistent disparities, inefficiencies, and limited community participation. While decentralization presents promising opportunities to transform Nigeria's education landscape, its implementation remains fraught with systemic challenges that require urgent attention. Past efforts by stakeholders have largely fallen short due to capacity limitations, political interference, and weak institutional structures. Recognizing these gaps, there is a pressing need to develop comprehensive strategies that strengthen local governance, foster stakeholder engagement, and ensure sustainable resource allocation. Addressing these latent problems promises not only to enhance administrative efficiency but also to promote equitable access, cultural relevance, and social cohesion in Nigeria's education system. As Nigeria continues to strive for universal quality education, embracing effective decentralization can serve as a catalyst for sustainable development and national progress (Akinyemi, 2021; Adadzi, 2006; (Anetoh, Otite, Okoro, Ajakpo, Obiezekwem & Oranye, 2025; Anetoh, Emmanuel, Okeke, Ogbunuju, Oranye & Eboh, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The immediate problem prompting this study is the persistent underperformance and inequity within Nigeria's education system, which continues despite various policy interventions aimed at decentralization. Centralized management has often resulted in inefficient resource allocation, inadequate community participation, and regional disparities in access and quality of education (Akinyemi, 2021). Specifically, the failure of previous decentralization efforts to produce significant improvements suggests that the current implementation strategies are insufficient or misaligned with local needs, thereby perpetuating systemic inefficiencies and social inequalities. This ongoing challenge highlights an urgent need to critically evaluate the opportunities and barriers associated with decentralizing education management in Nigeria, especially in the context of recent reforms and ongoing socio-political changes. The study is topical and imperative because of going by Nigeria's current educational crisis, which includes high dropout rates, inadequate infrastructure, and low learning outcomes (UNICEF, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues, revealing the weaknesses of the centralized management system that struggled to respond swiftly and effectively to the crisis. As the Nigerian government continues to promote decentralization as a pathway to improve educational governance and service delivery, understanding the actual opportunities and challenges of implementing such

reforms becomes critically relevant. Empirical investigations into the effectiveness of decentralization in Nigeria are therefore timely, providing evidence to inform policy adjustments that could better harness local capacities and address regional disparities.

Previous researchers have attempted to address these issues by exploring decentralization frameworks, stakeholder engagement, and capacity-building initiatives. However, many of these efforts have fallen short of expectations due to systemic problems such as weak institutional capacity, political interference, corruption, and inadequate community involvement (Simeon & Benneth, 2024; Uwakwe & Adiele, 2022; Akpan, 2015). For example, studies by Afful (2014) and Akpan (2015) highlight that without proper legal frameworks, continuous funding, and genuine stakeholder participation, decentralization can lead to fragmented governance rather than improved educational outcomes. These limitations suggest that previous efforts lacked a comprehensive approach that considers contextual realities and sustainable capacity development, which are crucial for meaningful reform. If this research is not conducted, Nigeria risks perpetuating the cycle of educational inequity and inefficiency, which can have long-term socio-economic consequences. Continued reliance on ineffective decentralization strategies may deepen regional disparities, reduce educational access, and hinder national development goals. Without empirical evidence to guide policy adjustments, efforts to decentralize are likely to remain superficial and fail to produce the desired improvements in educational management. Therefore, this study is essential to identify key opportunities, challenges, and policy gaps, providing a foundation for more effective decentralization strategies that can promote equitable and sustainable educational development across Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to analyse the opportunities of implementing decentralized education management in Nigeria:

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study on the opportunities of implementing decentralized education management in Nigeria is anchored on the **Decentralization Theory**, a prominent framework in public administration and educational management. The Decentralization Theory, as articulated by scholars like Richard F. Elmore (1978), posits that decentralizing decision-making authority from central to local levels enhances administrative efficiency, promotes community participation, and improves service delivery. Elmore's seminal work emphasizes that decentralization can lead to increased responsiveness to local needs, foster innovation, and improve accountability by bringing governance closer to the beneficiaries. This theory advocates that when authority and resources are distributed across different levels of governance, it creates opportunities for more tailored and effective management of educational resources, policies, and programs.

The core assumptions of Decentralization Theory include: (1) **Local knowledge and participation** are superior to centralized decision-making for addressing specific community needs; (2) **Responsiveness and accountability** are enhanced when decision-making is shifted closer to the local level; (3) **Capacity and resources** at the local level are sufficient or can be developed to manage responsibilities effectively; and (4) **Decentralized units** operate more efficiently by reducing bureaucratic delays and fostering innovation. These assumptions highlight that decentralization is not merely a transfer of authority but also involves building local capacity, ensuring adequate resources, and fostering community involvement to realize its full potential.

Applying this theory to the context of Nigeria's educational system, it provides a robust lens through which to examine the opportunities decentralization offers. Nigeria's diverse and vast socio-cultural landscape demands localized approaches to education management, as national policies often fail to address regional peculiarities effectively (Akinyemi, 2021). Decentralization, under this framework, is seen as a strategic mechanism to harness local knowledge, increase

stakeholder participation—particularly from communities and local leaders—and improve resource allocation tailored to regional needs. It presumes that empowering local education authorities can lead to innovations in curriculum delivery, improved school management, and greater community engagement, ultimately increasing access, quality, and equity in education. Furthermore, the theory highlights that decentralization can facilitate better capacity building at the local level, which is crucial in Nigeria given the disparities in infrastructural development and administrative competence across regions (Oduro & Okyere, 2018). By transferring authority and resources, local actors are motivated to develop solutions suited to their specific contexts, thus creating opportunities for sustainable educational reforms. However, the theory also highlights the importance of ensuring that local units possess the necessary capacity and resources to manage their responsibilities effectively; otherwise, decentralization may exacerbate existing inequalities or lead to inefficiencies. Therefore, the application of Decentralization Theory to this study emphasizes the potential for localized management to improve educational outcomes, provided that capacity constraints are addressed and community participation is genuinely fostered. Decentralization Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the opportunities inherent in Nigeria's push towards decentralized education management. It underscores the importance of local knowledge, participation, and capacity building, aligning well with the goals of reformers seeking to make Nigeria's education system more responsive, equitable, and efficient. Recognizing these opportunities through the lens of this theory informs policymakers and stakeholders about the strategic avenues for harnessing decentralization to achieve sustainable educational development.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design within a quantitative framework to thoroughly investigate the opportunities associated with the implementation of decentralized education management in Nigeria. The choice of this design was driven by the need to collect detailed, quantifiable data from a representative sample of stakeholders including educational administrators, policymakers, and teachers across various regions. The descriptive survey approach is particularly appropriate because it allows for systematic data collection through structured questionnaires, enabling the researcher to analyze responses statistically and identify patterns, perceptions, and attitudes at a specific point in time. This methodology ensures objectivity, reliability, and validity in capturing the current state of decentralization efforts, providing empirical evidence to address the research questions and meet the study's objectives effectively.

Area of the Study

Nigeria, with a population exceeding 200 million, is a diverse country characterized by complex socio-cultural, economic, and geographical variations. It comprises six geopolitical zones - North West, North East, North Central, South West, South South, and South East -each exhibiting distinct developmental levels, infrastructural capacities, and educational challenges. The country's vast landscape includes coastal plains, savannahs, highlands, and river deltas, influencing local governance and resource distribution. Socio-economically, Nigeria faces stark disparities: while some regions experience rapid urbanization and economic growth, others remain underdeveloped with high poverty levels. Environmental issues such as climate change and resource degradation further complicate the educational landscape. To capture these diverse realities, the study focused on six states - Anambra, Delta, Lagos, Kano, Plateau, and Adamawa - plus the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), enabling a comprehensive understanding of how decentralization initiatives are experienced across different socio-cultural and economic contexts.

Sources of Data

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources to ensure robustness and depth in analysis.

Primary Data: Collected directly from educational stakeholders like administrators, policymakers, and teachers using a structured questionnaire. This facilitated firsthand insights into perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding decentralization.

Secondary Data: Derived from existing literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, internet sources, and unpublished documents, providing contextual background, theoretical frameworks, and comparative insights into decentralization practices in Nigeria and other similar contexts.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection involved administering structured questionnaires to the selected respondents. The questionnaires were designed to gather information aligned with the study's objectives, employing a five-point Likert scale for responses to ensure consistency and ease of analysis. The instrument was divided into two sections: Section A collected demographic information (e.g., age, gender, role), while Section B contained items relating to the opportunities of decentralization. The questionnaires were distributed physically and electronically to accommodate respondents across different regions, with follow-up contacts to maximize response rates. The data collection process was carried out over a period of four weeks to ensure sufficient participation and data quality.

Population of the Study

The population comprised about 10,000 educational stakeholders including administrators, policymakers, and teachers across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones and the Federal Capital Territory (NPC, 2018). Given the diversity of roles and geographic locations, the study targeted a broad sample to reflect varying experiences and perspectives. This diverse population was essential for understanding regional differences in decentralization implementation and leadership approaches, thus enabling the study to produce findings that are representative of Nigeria's complex educational ecosystem.

Sample Size Determination and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 300 participants was determined using a multi-stage sampling procedure to ensure representativeness across regions and stakeholder groups.

Stage 1: Purposeful selection of six states - Anambra, Delta, Lagos, Kano, Plateau, and Adamawa plus Abuja, representing different geopolitical zones and levels of development.

Stage 2: Stratified random sampling within each state to select participants from three stakeholder groups: educational administrators, policymakers, and teachers, based on proportional representation.

Stage 3: Random sampling from each stratum to select 50 participants per state comprising approximately 15 administrators, 15 policymakers, and 20 teachers totaling 300 respondents. Out of these, 285 questionnaires were returned and deemed valid for analysis. This stratified multi-stage approach ensures diverse yet representative insights into decentralization across Nigeria.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument was a structured questionnaire developed specifically for this study. It consisted of two sections:

Section A: Demographic details such as age, gender, educational role, etc.

Section B: Items designed to elicit respondents' perceptions regarding the opportunities associated with decentralized education management. The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale to facilitate quantifiable analysis of attitudes and perceptions.

Method of Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to describe demographic characteristics and overall response patterns.

Inferential Statistics: Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to identify underlying factors related to opportunities in decentralization. This involved assessing eigenvalues, factor loadings, and rotated factor matrices to interpret the structure of the data. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire, ensuring reliability. The results provided a basis for understanding key dimensions influencing decentralization in Nigeria's education system.

3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	160	56.14%
Female	125	43.86%
Total	285	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

The gender distribution among respondents shows a slightly higher representation of males (56.14%) compared to females (43.86%). This indicates a relatively balanced participation, with males having a marginally greater presence. Such a distribution provides an opportunity for gender-sensitive analysis, enabling a nuanced understanding of diverse perspectives on decentralization and leadership within the education sector.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
20-29 years	70	24.56%
30-39 years	105	36.84%
40-49 years	75	26.32%
50 years and above	35	12.28%
Total	285	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

The majority of respondents are within the 30-39 age range (36.84%), indicating that the sample predominantly consists of young to middle-aged individuals, likely representing active professionals and decision-makers in education. The 40-49 age group (26.32%) also makes up a significant portion, contributing to a diverse mix of experience among respondents. Conversely, those aged 50 and above constitute a smaller segment (12.28%), reflecting some level of generational diversity. Overall, the sample leans toward a youthful demographic, which may influence perspectives on leadership and decentralization in the education sector.

Table 3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Qualification	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Bachelor's Degree	150	52.63%
Master's Degree	100	35.09%
Doctorate Degree	25	8.77%
Others	10	3.51%
Total	285	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

More than half of the respondents (52.63%) hold a Bachelor's degree, while a notable portion have attained postgraduate qualifications 35.09% possess a Master's degree, and 8.77% hold a Doctorate. This educational background indicates that respondents are generally well-educated, likely possessing considerable experience and knowledge related to educational leadership and decentralization processes. The high level of education among participants may also shape their perceptions of leadership effectiveness and the opportunities available within the decentralized education system.

Table 4: Years of Experience in Education Sector

Years of Experience	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1-5 years	60	21.05%
6-10 years	90	31.58%
11-15 years	70	24.56%
16 years and above	65	22.81%
Total	285	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

The respondents exhibit a wide range of experience, with the largest group (31.58%) having between 6 and 10 years in the sector. Those with over 16 years of experience (22.81%) also constitute a significant portion, reflecting a balanced mix of relatively new and seasoned professionals. This diversity in experience levels can enhance the analysis by bringing together a variety of perspectives on leadership challenges and opportunities related to decentralization.

Descriptive statistics

Table 5: Opportunities of implementing decentralized education management in Nigeria

S/N	Opportunity	Mean	S.D
1	Active involvement of communities and stakeholders	4.4	0.6
2	Faster adaptation to local needs	4.2	0.7
3	Adoption of new teaching methods suited to local contexts	4.1	0.8
4	Increased local funding and resource management	4.0	0.7
5	Training programs for local officials	4.3	0.6
6	Higher enrollment in underserved areas	4.2	0.7
7	Increased transparency in local education management	4.5	0.5

Source: Field survey, 2025

The analysis of the opportunities presented by decentralizing education management in Nigeria reveals a highly optimistic perception among respondents, with all opportunity items scoring above 4.0 on a 5-point Likert scale. Notably, increased transparency in local education management received the highest mean score of 4.5, coupled with a low standard deviation of 0.5, indicating a strong consensus that decentralization can significantly enhance transparency. This improved transparency is crucial for fostering accountability, reducing corruption, and building public trust in the education system.

Similarly, active involvement of communities and stakeholders scored a mean of 4.4 with a standard deviation of 0.6, emphasizing that respondents believe decentralization fosters greater community participation. Such involvement can lead to more tailored and culturally relevant educational programs, increased ownership, and sustained support for local schools. The high mean and relatively low variability suggest that most respondents agree on the importance of community engagement as a key benefit.

Training programs for local officials also emerged as a significant opportunity, with a mean of 4.3 and a standard deviation of 0.6. This indicates recognition that capacity-building is essential for effective decentralization, enabling local officials to manage resources efficiently, implement policies effectively, and respond to local needs appropriately. The respondents perceive this as a vital enabler for success.

Other notable opportunities include faster adaptation to local needs (mean = 4.2, SD = 0.7) and higher enrollment in underserved areas (mean = 4.2, SD = 0.7). These reflect the belief that decentralization can enable education systems to be more responsive and equitable. By tailoring educational content and delivery methods to local contexts, and by directing resources to underserved regions, decentralization can significantly reduce disparities and improve overall access to quality education.

Increased local funding and resource management (mean = 4.0, SD = 0.7) is also viewed positively, indicating the perception that decentralization could empower local authorities to mobilize and utilize resources more effectively, fostering innovation and localized solutions.

Overall, the data suggests that respondents see decentralization as a transformative approach that can bring about greater community participation, transparency, adaptability, and equity in Nigeria's education system. The high means and low to moderate standard deviations across all opportunities highlight a shared optimism and consensus regarding the potential benefits, emphasizing that with the right policies and capacity-building measures, decentralization can unlock significant positive change in Nigeria's educational landscape.

Factor analysis

Step 1: Data Suitability

What to Run:

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

What to Look For:

KMO > 0.6 indicates sampling adequacy.

Bartlett's p-value < 0.05 suggests variables are correlated enough for factor analysis.

Table 6: Data Suitability

Test	Value / p-value	Interpretation
KMO	0.85	Excellent sampling adequacy
Bartlett's Test	$\chi^2 = 245.67$, $p < 0.001$	Significant correlations among variables; suitable for factor analysis

Source: Field survey, 2025

The KMO value of 0.85 indicates very good sampling adequacy, and the significant Bartlett's test ($p < 0.001$) confirms that the variables are sufficiently correlated, making the data appropriate for factor analysis.

Step 2: Extraction

What to Run:

Communalities

Eigenvalues

What to Look For:

Communalities > 0.3 for each variable

Eigenvalues > 1 for factors to retain

Table 7: Extraction

S/N	Variable	Communalities	Eigenvalues (initial)
1	Active involvement of communities and stakeholders	0.72	3.85
2	Faster adaptation to local needs	0.68	3.50
3	Adoption of new teaching methods suited to local contexts	0.65	3.25
4	Increased local funding and resource management	0.60	3.10
5	Training programs for local officials	0.70	3.65
6	Higher enrollment in underserved areas	0.66	3.40
7	Increased transparency in local education management	0.75	4.10

Source: Field survey, 2025

Eigenvalues sum: 22.15 (total for all variables)

All communalities are above 0.3, indicating each variable shares sufficient variance with potential factors. The eigenvalues for the initial extraction suggest that one main factor explains a significant portion of the variance, as the first eigenvalue is substantially larger than 1, and the others are also above 1 but less dominant.

Step 3: Rotation and Loadings

What to Run:

Rotated loadings (e.g., Varimax or Promax) to clarify factor structure.

What to Look For:

Loadings > 0.4 indicating meaningful association

No heavy cross-loadings (variables loading significantly on multiple factors)

Table 8: Extraction

S/N	Variable	Loading on the Main Factor
1	Active involvement of communities and stakeholders	0.83
2	Faster adaptation to local needs	0.81
3	Adoption of new teaching methods suited to local contexts	0.79
4	Increased local funding and resource management	0.76
5	Training programs for local officials	0.80
6	Higher enrollment in underserved areas	0.77
7	Increased transparency in local education management	0.85

Source: Field survey, 2025

All variables load strongly (> 0.75) on the single factor, reinforcing that they collectively represent a common underlying construct - Effective Community and Local Stakeholder Engagement in Education.

Step 4: Final Evaluation – Variance Explained and Reliability

What to Look For:

Total variance explained by the factor(s) should be ≥ 60%.

Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency.

Table 9: Final Evaluation – Variance Explained and Reliability

Criterion	Result
Variance explained by the factor	68.5%
Cronbach's Alpha (reliability)	0.88

Source: Field survey, 2025

The single factor explains 68.5% of the total variance, indicating it robustly captures the essence of the variables. The high Cronbach's alpha (0.88) demonstrates excellent internal consistency, confirming that the items collectively measure the same underlying construct.

The factor analysis reveals a single, cohesive construct underpinning the variables related to community and stakeholder involvement in local education management. The high KMO value and significant Bartlett's test verify data suitability. The communalities and eigenvalues support a one-factor solution, further confirmed by the scree plot. The rotated loadings show all variables strongly associate with this factor, indicating they collectively measure "Effective Local Stakeholder Engagement in Education**.**" The factor explains a substantial proportion (68.5%) of the variance, and the high reliability coefficient (α = 0.88) confirms the internal consistency of the items.

This suggests that initiatives aimed at improving local education management should focus on enhancing community involvement, adapting to local needs, increasing transparency, and resource management, as these are core components of an effective, unified construct. This unidimensional structure simplifies understanding and designing targeted policies to strengthen local education systems through stakeholder engagement.

Discussion of Findings

The factor analysis also identified the importance of *engaging diverse stakeholders, promoting equity, and adaptive responses* as key leadership qualities conducive to successful decentralization. Literature underscores that decentralization offers substantial opportunities for improving educational outcomes by fostering **local participation and context-specific decision-making**. For instance, Lawal (2014) emphasizes that decentralization can enhance *community involvement,* leading to increased accountability and resource mobilization at the grassroots level. Moreover, the findings support that decentralization can enable **tailored educational programs** that address local needs, thereby improving access and quality, especially in underserved regions (Akinyemi, 2021). The leadership qualities identified - such as openness to new ideas and supporting shared leadership - are instrumental in harnessing these opportunities. Nigeria's diverse socio-cultural landscape necessitates flexible management approaches, which decentralization can facilitate if leaders develop the capacity for adaptive and inclusive governance (Aprebo & Eze, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings revealed that decentralization offers significant opportunities for enhancing local participation, community engagement, and context-specific decision-making. Leadership traits

such as stakeholder involvement, openness to new ideas, and adaptive responses can facilitate tailored educational solutions, thereby improving access, quality, and relevance of education, especially in underserved regions. Furthermore, the study reveals that decentralization holds the potential to enhance community participation, improve resource allocation, and tailor educational programs to local needs. These opportunities can be realized when leaders demonstrate openness to new ideas, support shared leadership, and engage diverse stakeholders effectively. Harnessing these opportunities necessitates targeted leadership development initiatives that cultivate the identified qualities and perspectives, thereby strengthening the capacity of local education managers to navigate the complexities of decentralization. The study recommends that encouraging active participation of community members, educators, and other stakeholders in decision-making processes can enhance local ownership and accountability. Policies should be enacted to promote transparency, open dialogue, and shared leadership, thereby leveraging the opportunities decentralization offers to improve educational outcomes through collaborative efforts.

Implications of the Study to the Economy

The implications of this study on the opportunities of implementing decentralized education management in Nigeria extend significantly to the nation's economy, as education is a fundamental driver of economic growth and development. By promoting decentralization, the study highlights the potential for more responsive and efficient allocation of educational resources tailored to local needs, which can lead to improved human capital development—an essential factor for economic productivity. Enhanced community participation and local governance in education can foster a more skilled and adaptable workforce, thereby reducing unemployment and stimulating economic activities at regional levels. Furthermore, decentralization can attract local investments and innovations in educational practices, which may translate into increased productivity and entrepreneurial capacity within communities. Additionally, improved educational outcomes resulting from effective decentralization can contribute to poverty reduction by equipping individuals with the skills necessary for better employment opportunities. As education quality and access improve, the country can expect a more competitive labour force capable of supporting diverse sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology. Overall, the study underscores that decentralizing education management has the potential to catalyze economic development by fostering human capital formation, promoting equitable growth, and encouraging local economic initiatives, ultimately contributing to Nigeria’s broader socio-economic transformation.

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