



EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALIZATION AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS PERFORMANCE IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Educational decentralization has gained significant attention in developing countries due to its potential to enhance school effectiveness. By granting local stakeholders' greater autonomy, decentralization enables decisions that reflect the specific needs and contexts of schools, ultimately leading to improved resource utilization, accountability, and student performance. This study investigated the relationship between educational decentralization and secondary school performance in Cross River State, Nigeria, focusing on administrative, financial, and curriculum decentralization. Guided by three research questions and three null hypotheses, the study employed a correlational research design. The population consisted of all 303 principals of public secondary schools across the state's three educational zones. A census approach was adopted due to the small population size. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed instrument titled *Educational Decentralization and Secondary Schools' Performance Questionnaire (EDSSPQ)*, structured on a four-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation, and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha produced values between .83 and .85, indicating strong internal consistency. To analyze the data, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used for answering research questions, while simple linear regression tested the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance using SPSS version 27. Results showed that administrative, financial, and curriculum decentralization significantly predicted secondary school performance. The study concluded that educational decentralization positively influences school outcomes: administrative autonomy improves responsiveness and accountability, financial decentralization enhances resource management, and curriculum flexibility allows for relevant instructional practices. It was recommended that financial decentralization be institutionalized through





clear policies, training, and transparent monitoring systems, enabling schools to respond promptly to local needs and improve teaching and learning conditions.

Keywords: Educational, Decentralization, Administrative, Financial, Curriculum, Secondary School, Performance

Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a powerful instrument for reducing poverty, fostering peace, and building inclusive societies. No nation can achieve sustainable progress without equitable access to quality education. In Nigeria, the education system is structured into three tiers: basic education (early childhood, primary, and junior secondary), senior secondary, and tertiary education. This study focuses on secondary education, which bridges the gap between foundational and higher levels of learning. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), secondary education serves as the stage following primary and preceding tertiary education. Its primary objectives are to equip learners with essential knowledge, skills, and values for self-development, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning (Ngene & Obona, 2024; Madukwe et al., 2024). It also aims to prepare students for higher education, vocational careers, and meaningful societal participation.

Achieving these goals depends on the overall performance of secondary schools, which in this context refers to the extent to which they realize their educational objectives in academics, character formation, and institutional effectiveness. Performance indicators include students' results in internal and external examinations, retention and completion rates, discipline, and engagement in extracurricular activities. High-performing schools are critical to national development as they produce competent, disciplined individuals who contribute to the economy and society. Teachers are central to this process, being regarded as the cornerstone of human capital development and national progress (Amagboruju et al., 2025; Ezeh et al., 2025). Iyiegbuniwe et al. (2025) describe them as indispensable tools for driving learning, while Willie et al. (2025) affirm their role as the main drivers of the educational process.

Secondary school outcomes are assessed through measurable indicators such as academic success, student retention, discipline, and commitment to learning (Willie et al., 2025). Academic performance, often measured through examinations like WASSCE and NECO, reflects the effectiveness of teaching, leadership, and learning processes (Gambari, Yaki, Gana, & Ughovwa, 2014). Retention and completion rates also highlight the level of student engagement and school support, while low rates may signal poor instructional quality, socio-economic barriers, or student apathy. Discipline and moral conduct remain





equally vital, as they create a conducive atmosphere for learning and foster socially responsible individuals (Odama, 2023; Simeon & Favour, 2020). Schools that instill strong values are generally perceived as effective and are often characterized by proper delegation of responsibilities (Obona et al., 2025).

Secondary education performance in spite of its importance, remains a challenge globally. Studies have revealed declining student outcomes across Europe, especially in mathematics and language (Peetsma, 2005; Gottfried et al., 2007). Paterson (2025) further observes that post-COVID-19 cohorts have witnessed setbacks in academic attainment, attendance, and discipline, often regressing to pre-pandemic standards. In England, a surge in unauthorized absences has worsened achievement gaps, particularly among disadvantaged students (Education Policy Institute, 2025). In Nigeria, Obona, Udokpan, and Bepeh (2024) report widespread unprofessional practices among teachers in public schools, which undermine instructional quality. These global and national concerns mirror the realities in Cross River State. The researcher's observations indicate that secondary schools in the state often fail to meet parental expectations regarding academic achievement, discipline, and student attitudes toward learning. Parents typically expect schools to nurture disciplined and academically competent children, yet many students perform poorly in examinations, struggle with literacy and numeracy, and show little enthusiasm for schooling. Rising cases of truancy, disrespect for authority, and engagement in social vices highlight the growing mismatch between home expectations and school outcomes. Compounding these issues are teacher absenteeism, low staff morale, and weak supervision, all of which hinder the delivery of quality secondary education.

Beyond academic and behavioral challenges, many secondary schools in Cross River State are constrained by severe infrastructural decay, resulting in overcrowded classrooms and poor learning conditions. In rural and semi-urban communities, schools are often characterized by dilapidated buildings, inadequate furniture, and the absence of modern instructional resources such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and functional science laboratories. These deficiencies not only demotivate learners but also limit teachers' ability to apply effective instructional strategies. Collectively, these issues depict a secondary education system in distress—one that is underperforming and ill-prepared to meet the developmental aspirations of both the state and the nation. This situation highlights the urgent need for systematic and well-structured interventions.

One promising approach to improving secondary school performance lies in the adoption of effective education policies, particularly educational decentralization. While scholars acknowledge that there is no single universally accepted definition of decentralization (Ostrom, Schroeder, & Wynne, 1993, as cited in Kalyan, Robin, & Andres, 2024), it is broadly understood as the transfer of decision-making authority from central governments to regional bodies or local institutions such as school boards, districts, or





individual schools. Kalyan, Robin, and Andres (2024) describe it as the devolution of power from national to local levels, with the aim of enhancing participation and amplifying the voices of context-specific stakeholders. Educational decentralization is widely recognized for its potential to boost secondary school performance (Oates, 2018; Winkler, 2021). By empowering local actors—principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders—to participate in decisions concerning curriculum development, budgeting, and resource allocation, schools become more responsive to the needs of their students and communities (EdCan Network, 2016; Education & Academy, 2022).

When implemented with genuine autonomy and accountability, decentralization can significantly improve student learning outcomes. This study focuses on three major dimensions of educational decentralization: administrative, financial, and curriculum decentralization. Administrative decentralization involves transferring authority over school management, staffing, and planning from the central government to local education authorities or schools, thereby enabling faster and more context-sensitive decision-making. Financial decentralization grants schools or local authorities control over budgetary allocations, allowing resources to be directed toward infrastructure development, teaching materials, and teacher motivation. Curriculum decentralization permits schools to adapt parts of the curriculum to reflect local culture, language, and community priorities. Collectively, these dimensions enhance school effectiveness by promoting efficiency, accountability, and relevance to local needs. Against this backdrop, the present study examines the relationship between educational decentralization and the performance of secondary schools in Cross River State.

Statement of the problem

Secondary school performance is commonly assessed through key indicators such as students' academic achievement in internal and external examinations (e.g., WAEC and NECO), school attendance rates, teacher effectiveness, students' discipline, and overall graduation rates. However, there has been a noticeable decline in these performance indicators across many public secondary schools in the state. The research observed that many secondary schools are grappling with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional materials, teacher absenteeism, low student motivation, and poor academic outcomes. These trends raise serious concerns about the effectiveness of the current school management system and its ability to meet the educational needs of learners in an increasingly demanding and competitive global environment.

Through personal observation and interactions with stakeholders, the researcher also noticed deep dissatisfaction among many parents and students concerning the state of secondary education in the area. Some parents have expressed frustration over the declining academic quality, frequent disruption of academic activities, poor infrastructure, and weak discipline among students. Similarly, students have complained about inconsistent teaching, lack of access to learning materials, and insufficient attention





from teachers. These complaints suggest a growing disconnect between these schools and the communities they are meant to serve. The impact of this poor performance goes beyond the school setting as it affects students' future opportunities, reduces community trust in the public education system, and poses a long-term threat to social and economic development in the state if left unaddressed.

In response to these challenges, school administrators have implemented several measures, including improved supervision, and arrangement for teacher retraining programs to address the issues. Researchers have also made various recommendations aimed at improving instructional delivery, school funding, and community engagement. However, despite these efforts, the problem of underperformance persists. Based on the researcher's observation, it appears that centralized decision-making structures may be limiting the ability of schools to address local needs effectively. This suggests that educational decentralization may offer a viable solution. Therefore, the problem of this study led to the question: What is the relationship between educational decentralization and secondary schools' performance? The need to answer this question forms the basis for the present study.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated educational decentralization and secondary schools' performance in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to find out the relationship between:

1. Administrative decentralization and secondary schools' performance
2. Financial decentralization and secondary schools' performance
3. Curriculum decentralization and secondary schools' performance

Research question

These research questions guided the study

1. What is the relationship between administrative decentralization and secondary schools' performance?
2. What is the relationship between financial decentralization and secondary schools' performance?
3. What is the relationship between curriculum decentralization and secondary schools' performance?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

1. Administrative decentralization does not significantly predict secondary schools' performance.
2. Financial decentralization does not significantly predict secondary schools' performance.





3. Curriculum decentralization does not significantly predict secondary schools' performance.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two complementary theories: the Decentralization Theorem by Oates (1972) and the Effective Schools Theory by Edmonds (1979). Together, they provide a strong foundation for examining how educational decentralization influences secondary school performance. The Decentralization Theorem (Oates, 1972) argues that public services are more effective when decision-making is transferred to the lowest competent authority. Local governments, being closer to communities, are better positioned to allocate resources, tailor services, and meet contextual needs. Applied to education, the theorem suggests that devolving administrative, financial, and curricular authority to schools enhances responsiveness, efficiency, and student learning outcomes. Its relevance to this study lies in explaining how the lack of autonomy in Cross River State schools may contribute to persistent underperformance, and how granting schools more control could improve effectiveness.

The Effective Schools Theory (Edmonds, 1979) emphasizes that all students can succeed if schools embody certain core characteristics: strong instructional leadership, high expectations, a safe climate, regular monitoring, a clear mission, and adequate instructional time. In this study, the theory highlights the internal processes that drive school effectiveness. Linked with decentralization, it underscores how empowering school leaders and teachers with decision-making authority can foster the conditions necessary for academic success.

Together, these theories suggest that decentralization is not just a governance reform but a pathway for strengthening internal school practices. This framework, therefore, directs the study's focus on exploring how decentralization relates to the performance of secondary schools in Cross River State.

Literature review

Administrative decentralization and secondary schools' performance

By granting local education authorities' greater autonomy in decision-making, and personnel management, administrative decentralization can enhance secondary schools' performance, thereby promoting responsiveness to contextual educational needs. Elacqua et al. (2021) examined the effects of administrative decentralization in Colombia, where municipalities with over 100,000 residents gained autonomy to manage education. Using statistical methods to compare decentralized and centralized areas, the study found that decentralization improved student enrollment, academic performance, and teacher quality. These gains were largely attributed to the efficient use of resources and the hiring of more qualified teachers, rather than increased funding.





Chonya (2011) investigated Academic and Administrative Service Aspects of Decentralization in Public Secondary Schools in Tanzania: The Case of Mwanza City through a mixed-methods case study involving 60 senior student leaders, 10 school heads, 50 teachers, and various education council members across ten schools. Using questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentary review, the study analyzed data with SPSS and thematic content analysis. Results showed that administrative decentralization led to increased enrollment and teacher employment.

Muthuuri (2022) explored the Influence of Decentralization of Teachers Service Commission Functions on Service Delivery in Public Secondary Schools in Tigania West Sub-county, Kenya using a descriptive survey design. The population included 12 principals, 44 teachers, county and sub-county education officers, and board members. Data were collected via questionnaires and interviews and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages). The study revealed that decentralizing recruitment, promotion, discipline, and performance monitoring increased transparency, community involvement, and teacher motivation.

Financial decentralization and secondary schools' performance

Financial decentralization influences secondary school performance by enabling school leaders to allocate resources according to local priorities, thereby improving teaching quality, learning conditions, and student outcomes. Several empirical studies provide evidence of this relationship. Toi (2010) investigated the effects of decentralization in Indonesian junior secondary education using a large-scale sample of about 5,000 schools before and after the reforms. Employing covariance structure analysis, the study assessed how budget changes and administrative authority affected test scores and dropout rates. Findings indicated that while increased budgets enhanced school environments and outcomes, the benefits weakened post-decentralization, particularly in low-budget schools, thereby widening regional disparities.

In Nigeria, Obona et al. (2025) examined the link between financial planning strategies, expenditure control, and the effectiveness of 295 private secondary schools in Cross River State using a correlational design and census approach. Data were collected with a validated questionnaire (FMSSSSEQ), which had Cronbach's Alpha values of .77 and .81. Analysis using Pearson correlation (SPSS v.26) at a 0.05 significance level revealed a significant positive relationship between financial management strategies and overall school effectiveness. Odiyo et al. (2023), in a mixed-methods study of 50 public secondary schools in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Kenya, examined the impact of fund disbursement on financial sustainability. Data from bursars, principals, and audited statements confirmed that timely and adequate fund release strongly influenced school sustainability, though no inferential statistics were reported.





Carneiro et al. (2015) conducted a randomized control trial (RCT) in 633 Senegalese primary schools involving 2,722 students. Schools receiving decentralized grants recorded significant improvements in test scores—particularly among female students—when funds were directed toward teacher training rather than infrastructure. Similarly, Hapompwe et al. (2020) studied secondary schools in Lusaka, Zambia, using survey design and inferential analysis. Results showed that variations in financing significantly shaped service quality, with better-funded schools delivering higher standards of education.

Curriculum decentralization and secondary schools' performance

Curriculum decentralization enhances secondary school performance by granting schools the autonomy to adapt teaching content, methods, and materials to local needs, thereby making education more relevant, engaging, and effective. Several empirical studies highlight this relationship. Ari Setiawan et al. (2023) investigated the effects of decentralized education on vocational skills and economic improvement in Indonesia using a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with vice-principals and vocational teachers, while the quantitative phase involved surveys of students enrolled in traditional cookery subjects across six senior secondary schools. Using descriptive statistics and MANOVA, the study found that curriculum decentralization significantly enhanced students' vocational competencies and economic skills, although dropout rates varied, and no differential effects were observed across schools.

Di Gropello and Marshall (2009) examined the PROHECO Community School Program in rural Honduras through a correlational design using standardized test scores. Sampling 120 community-managed schools across 15 states, the study employed decomposition analysis, which revealed that curriculum decentralization improved student achievement by increasing teacher effort and parent involvement. However, gains were moderated by lower levels of teacher experience and parental education. Anggia et al. (2021) assessed curriculum reform in Indonesia through a quantitative approach using propensity score matching to measure effects on student achievement. The target population included secondary school students affected by post-2001 decentralization reforms. Findings indicated that while decentralization promoted local autonomy, it did not yield substantial improvements in learning outcomes, largely due to persistent regional disparities.

In Kenya, Abdinoor and Chui (2024) studied curriculum development, implementation, and performance in 15 secondary schools in Wajir East Sub-County, involving 285 participants (255 teachers, 15 principals, and 15 board members). Using a descriptive survey design and analyzing questionnaire and interview data through descriptive statistics and correlational analysis, they found a significant positive relationship between curriculum development/implementation processes and school performance. Similarly, Bernard and Ngamesha (2013) examined education decentralization by devolution in Temeke Municipality, Tanzania, using a mixed-methods case study. Participants included education officials,





school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS, while qualitative insights were derived from content analysis. Results showed that devolved curricular authority and stakeholder involvement positively influenced student performance, though effectiveness depended on the degree of stakeholder empowerment.

The reviewed empirical studies conducted across diverse educational contexts reveal a significant relationship between administrative, financial, and curriculum decentralization and the performance of secondary schools. These scholarly contributions have greatly enhanced the researcher's understanding of the subject matter and informed critical components of the present study, including the choice of research design, the selection of appropriate statistical tools, and the development of relevant research instruments. However, a notable limitation of the existing literature is that the majority of these studies were carried out in foreign settings outside Cross River State, Nigeria. This geographic and contextual gap limits the applicability and generalizability of their findings to the unique socio-cultural and institutional dynamics of public secondary schools in Cross River State. Furthermore, no identified study has specifically examined educational decentralization in relation to secondary school performance within Cross River State using the exact variables operationalized in this research. Consequently, this study seeks to address this gap and provide context-specific empirical evidence that will enrich the existing body of knowledge and inform educational policy and practice in the region.

Research methodology

Research design: The study adopted a correlational research design, which is particularly appropriate for examining the nature and strength of relationships between variables without any form of manipulation. This design was deemed suitable for the present study on educational decentralization and secondary schools' performance in Cross River State, Nigeria, as it allows for the investigation of existing patterns and associations between the independent and dependent variables in a natural educational setting.

Area of study: The study was conducted in Cross River State, located in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone and sharing a boundary with Cameroon to the east. Administratively, the state comprises three senatorial districts—Northern, Central, and Southern—with a total of 18 Local Government Areas. For educational purposes, the state is divided into three zones: Calabar, Ikom, and Ogoja. Cross River State spans approximately 23,074 square kilometers and is geographically positioned between latitudes 4.27°–5.32°N and longitudes 2.20°–7.50°E. The state is ethnically diverse, with major groups including the Efik, Ejagham, and Bekwarra, and is culturally rich with traditional festivals such as Ekpe, Obon, and Akata. The economy is primarily agrarian, supplemented by commerce and civil service. Educationally, the state hosts both public and private schools as well as notable tertiary institutions like the University of Calabar and University of Cross River State. This setting provided a





relevant context for assessing the influence of educational decentralization on secondary school performance.

Population of the study: The population comprised all 303 principals of public secondary schools across the three educational zones of Cross River State (Cross River State Secondary Education Board, Calabar, 2025). Principals were considered appropriate for this study because they are directly responsible for implementing educational decentralization policies and overseeing school performance. Moreover, they play a key role in evaluating the administrative, financial, and curricular aspects of educational decentralization.

Sampling technique and sample: Given the manageable size of the population, this study adopted the census method to include all 303 principals of public secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. The rationale for this approach is that a census eliminates sampling error and enhances the validity and reliability of the findings by ensuring that the views, experiences, and administrative practices of all school principals are adequately represented. In addition, a total of 606 teachers (two teachers per school) were purposively selected to provide objective and reliable assessments of school performance. This study did not involve sampling, as the entire population of 303 public secondary school principals in Cross River State was utilized.

Research instrument: Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled “Educational Decentralization and Secondary Schools’ Performance Questionnaire (EDSSPQ).” The instrument was preceded by a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, assuring respondents of confidentiality, and encouraging objective responses. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Section A: Captured demographic data such as age, gender, marital status, and educational qualification. Section B: Contained 18 items measuring sub-variables of educational decentralization (administrative, financial, curriculum), with 6 items per sub-variable. Section C: Included 6 items assessing secondary schools’ performance. The items were structured using a 4-point modified Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

Validation of the instrument and reliability: To establish face and content validity, the draft instrument was submitted to three experts in Research, Measurement, and Evaluation from the Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, for review. Based on their recommendations, ambiguous and irrelevant items were either revised or removed. Ultimately, 24 items were retained for the final version of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted on 50 teachers in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, which is not part of the study area. The responses were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a reliability index ranges between .83 and .85, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.





Procedure for data collection, preparation and scoring: The questionnaire was administered with the assistance of five trained research assistants. Prior to administration, the assistants were briefed on the objectives of the study and guided on the appropriate procedures for distributing the instrument. Verbal permission was obtained from the respective school principals to involve them and their teachers in the study. All respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. They were given two days to complete the questionnaire, after which the instruments were collected. After retrieving the completed questionnaires from the respondents, the instruments were examined for completeness. The items were then sorted, and a coding schedule was developed. Responses were scored using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Negatively worded items were reverse-scored to ensure consistency in interpretation.

Procedure for data analysis: Data analysis was guided by the research questions and corresponding null hypotheses. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested with Simple Linear Regression, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 27) at 0.05 alpha level of significance. All the results are presented in tables for clarity and interpretation.

Presentation of results

Research questions one

What is the relationship between administrative decentralization and secondary schools’ performance? This question was answered with Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) and the answer is in table 1.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between administrative decentralization and secondary schools’ performance (N=303)

Variables	\bar{X}	S.D	R	Decision
Administrative decentralization	18.17	4.33		
Secondary schools’ performance	17.12	4.20	.43*	Moderate Positive Relationship

*Significant at p<.05 df=301





Table 1 presented the mean and standard deviations which indicated the response rate of the respondents on the relationship between administrative decentralization and secondary schools’ performance. The standard deviations obtained in all the sub-scales were moderate. This indicated that the respondents were consistent in the pattern of their responses to the items of the research instrument. Furthermore, the correlation coefficients of .42 between administrative decentralization and secondary schools’ performance implied that there is a moderate positive statistical relationship administrative decentralization and secondary schools’ performance in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Research questions two

What is the relationship between financial decentralization and secondary schools’ performance? This question was answered with Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) and the answer is in table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between financial decentralization and secondary schools’ performance (N=303)

Variables	\bar{X}	S.D	R	Decision
Financial decentralization	18.67	3.89		
Secondary schools’ performance	17.12	4.20	.63*	Positive Relationship

*Significant at $p < .05$ $df=301$

Table 2 presented the mean and standard deviations which indicated the response rate of the respondents on the relationship between financial decentralization and secondary schools’ performance. The standard deviations obtained in all the sub-scales were moderate. This indicated that the respondents were consistent in the pattern of their responses to the items of the research instrument. Furthermore, the correlation coefficients of .63 between financial decentralization and secondary schools’ performance implied that there is a positive statistical relationship financial decentralization and secondary schools’ performance in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Research question three

What is the relationship between curriculum decentralization and secondary schools’ performance? This question was answered with Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) and the answer is in table 3.





Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between curriculum decentralization and secondary schools’ performance (N=303)

Variables	\bar{X}	S.D	R	Decision
Curriculum decentralization	19.11	4.42		
Secondary schools’ performance	17.12	4.20	.53*	Positive Relationship

*Significant at $p < .05$ $df=301$

Table 3 presented the mean and standard deviations which indicated the response rate of the respondents on the relationship between curriculum decentralization and secondary schools’ performance. The standard deviations obtained in all the sub-scales were moderate. This indicated that the respondents were consistent in the pattern of their responses to the items of the research instrument. Furthermore, the correlation coefficients of .53 between curriculum decentralization and secondary schools’ performance implied that there is a positive statistical relationship curriculum decentralization and secondary schools’ performance in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis one

Administrative decentralization does not significantly predict secondary schools’ performance. The two variables examined are administrative decentralization and secondary schools’ performance. Simple Linear Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 4. Table 4 showed that administrative decentralization significantly predict secondary schools’ performance as shown by the simple linear regression coefficient (R) of .423 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .176 obtained. The R^2 ($R^2=.176$) meant that the variable of administrative decentralization contributed 17.6% of the total variance in secondary schools’ performance, while the remaining percentage score 82.4% was predicted by other external factors not accounted for by secondary schools’ performance. This showed that the independent variable (administrative decentralization) have significant contribution to the dependent variable (secondary schools’ performance), $F_{65.697}$, $p (.000) < .05$. Referring to the coefficients in table 4, the unstandardized coefficient for administrative decentralization is .411. This meant that for every point increase in secondary schools’ performance, there is .411 increase in administrative decentralization scores from the questionnaire instrument used. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which stated that administrative decentralization does not significantly predict secondary schools’ performance, was rejected. The alternative hypothesis was





accepted. This means that administrative decentralization significantly predict secondary schools’ performance in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Simple linear regression analysis showing the extent to which administrative decentralization significantly predict secondary schools’ performance. (N=303)

Anova^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	957.378	1	957.378	65.697	.000 ^b	Rejected
	Residual	4386.345	301	14.573			
	Total	5343.723	302				

*Significant $p < .05$; $R = .423$; $R^2 = .179$; Adj. $R^2 = .176$

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	9.658	.946		10.208	.000
	Administrative decentralization	.411	.051	.423	8.105	.000

a. Dependent Variable: secondary schools’ performance

b. Predictors: (Constant): Administrative decentralization

Hypothesis two

Financial decentralization does not significantly predict secondary schools’ performance. The two variables examined are financial decentralization and secondary schools’ performance. Simple Linear Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 5. Table 5 showed that financial decentralization significantly predict secondary schools’ performance as shown by the simple linear regression coefficient (R) of .673 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .451 obtained. The R^2 ($R^2 = .451$) meant that the variable of financial decentralization contributed 45.1% of the total variance in secondary schools’ performance, while the remaining percentage score 59.4% was predicted by other external factors not accounted for by secondary schools’ performance. This showed that the independent variable (financial decentralization) have significant contribution to the dependent variable (secondary schools’ performance), $F_{249.327}$, $p (.000) < .05$. Referring to the coefficients in table 5, the unstandardized coefficient for financial decentralization is .726. This meant





that for every point increase in secondary schools’ performance, there is .726 increase in financial decentralization scores from the questionnaire instrument used. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which stated that financial decentralization does not significantly predict secondary schools’ performance, was rejected. The alternative hypothesis was accepted. This means that financial decentralization significantly predict secondary schools’ performance in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 5: Simple linear regression analysis showing the extent to which financial decentralization significantly predict secondary schools’ performance. (N=303)

Anova^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	2420.986	1	2420.986	249.327	.000 ^b	Rejected
	Residual	2922.736	301	9.710			
	Total	5343.723	302				

*Significant $p < .05$; $R = .673$; $R^2 = .453$; $Adj. R^2 = .451$

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	3.564	.877		4.064	.000
	Financial decentralization	.726	.046	.673	15.790	.000

a. Dependent Variable: secondary schools’ performance

b. Predictors: (Constant): Financial decentralization

Hypothesis three

Curriculum decentralization does not significantly predict secondary schools’ performance. The two variables examined are curriculum decentralization and secondary schools’ performance. Simple Linear





Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 6. Table 6 showed that curriculum decentralization significantly predict secondary schools’ performance as shown by the simple linear regression coefficient (R) of .532 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .281 obtained. The R^2 ($R^2=.281$) meant that the variable of curriculum decentralization contributed 28.1% of the total variance in secondary schools’ performance, while the remaining percentage score 71.9% was predicted by other external factors not accounted for by secondary schools’ performance. This showed that the independent variable (curriculum decentralization) have significant contribution to the dependent variable (secondary schools’ performance), $F_{119.027}$, $p (.000) < .05$. Referring to the coefficients in table 6, the unstandardized coefficient for curriculum decentralization is .507. This meant that for every point increase in secondary schools’ performance, there is .507 increase in curriculum decentralization scores from the questionnaire instrument used. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which stated that curriculum decentralization does not significantly predict secondary schools’ performance, was rejected. The alternative hypothesis was accepted. This means that curriculum decentralization significantly predict secondary schools’ performance in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 6: Simple linear regression analysis showing the extent to which curriculum decentralization significantly predict secondary schools’ performance. (N=303)

Anova^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	1514.299	1	1514.299	119.027	.000 ^b	Rejected
	Residual	3829.424	301	12.722			
	Total	5343.723	302				

*Significant $p < .05$; $R = .532$; $R^2 = .283$; Adj. $R^2 = .281$

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	7.440	.911		8.171	.000
	Curriculum decentralization	.507	.046	.532	10.910	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Secondary schools’ performance

b. Predictors: (Constant): Curriculum decentralization



Discussion of findings

The findings from hypothesis one revealed that administrative decentralization significantly predicts the performance of secondary schools in Cross River State. This outcome is congruent with the contextual realities of the state and is therefore not unexpected. Administrative decentralization enhances the decision-making autonomy of school principals, enabling them to manage school resources, staff, and daily operations with greater flexibility and responsiveness. In a socio-culturally diverse setting like Cross River State, where schools face varying local challenges, the ability of principals to make context-specific decisions without waiting for approvals from central authorities contributes significantly to improved school operations and outcomes. Moreover, involving principals in policy implementation cultivates a strong sense of ownership and accountability, motivating them to work towards school improvement proactively.

This finding aligns with the study by Elacqua, Munevar, Sánchez, and Santo (2021), which reported improvements in student enrollment, academic performance, and teacher quality due to decentralization, largely attributed to efficient resource utilization and the recruitment of more qualified teachers. Similarly, Chonya (2011) observed increased school enrollment and teacher recruitment as a result of administrative decentralization. Muthuri (2022) further emphasized the importance of decentralizing functions such as recruitment, discipline, and performance monitoring, noting improvements in transparency, stakeholder involvement, and teacher motivation.

The result of hypothesis two indicated that financial decentralization significantly predicts the performance of secondary schools in Cross River State. This result reflects the financial realities within the state's education system. Through financial decentralization, school principals and management teams are granted greater control over budgeting, resource allocation, and expenditure decisions. This autonomy enables schools to address specific financial needs in a timely and efficient manner. In regions like Cross River State, where schools differ in infrastructure and access to teaching resources, financial flexibility empowers school leaders to implement context-specific solutions that improve operational efficiency and student outcomes.

This finding resonates with the conclusions of Toi (2010), who found that although increased financial investment improved educational environments and outcomes, disparities emerged in lower-budget schools following decentralization. It also agrees with the findings of Obona, Egbo, and Ukonu (2025), who noted that effective financial planning and expenditure control strategies positively influenced the effectiveness of school systems in Cross River State. Odiyo, Alala, and Oseno (2023) emphasized the importance of timely and adequate fund disbursement for the financial sustainability of public schools. Furthermore, Hapompwe, Karim, and Kambikambi (2020) demonstrated that differences in school



financing had a direct impact on service quality, indicating that better-funded schools offered more effective educational services.

Hypothesis three showed that curriculum decentralization significantly predicts secondary school performance in Cross River State. This result is consistent with the practical needs of the educational system in the state and supports the notion that flexible curriculum management is essential for quality education delivery. Curriculum decentralization permits schools to tailor teaching content and strategies to align with local needs, community expectations, and the unique socio-cultural characteristics of their student populations. In Cross River State, characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity, such flexibility enhances student engagement and learning effectiveness. Furthermore, empowering teachers and school leaders to innovate in curriculum delivery fosters improved learning environments and educational outcomes.

This finding is in agreement with the study by Setiawan et al. (2023), who observed that local curriculum adaptation significantly enhanced students' vocational and economic skills, although variations existed in dropout rates. It is also consistent with Di Gropello and Marshall (2009), who linked curriculum decentralization to increased teacher effort and parental involvement, both of which positively influenced student achievement. However, Dewi (2021) argued that despite increased autonomy, decentralization did not result in notable improvements in student learning due to persistent regional disparities. On the other hand, Abdinoor and Chui (2024) affirmed a positive relationship between curriculum development and school performance, while Bernard and Ngamesha (2013) found that devolved curricular authority, when coupled with active stakeholder participation, significantly enhanced student outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined the educational decentralization and secondary school performance in Cross River State, Nigeria, and focused on administrative, financial, and curriculum dimensions educational decentralization. The findings revealed that all three forms of decentralization significantly predict secondary school performance. The study concluded that educational decentralization is positively and significantly associated with improved secondary school outcomes. Specifically, administrative autonomy fosters responsiveness and accountability, financial decentralization enables efficient resource management, and curriculum flexibility supports contextually relevant teaching. Collectively, the results underscore decentralization as a vital strategy for enhancing the effectiveness, equity, and quality of secondary education in Cross River State and beyond.





Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made to enhance secondary school performance through effective decentralization practices in Cross River State, Nigeria:

- i. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Cross River State Secondary Education Board, should enhance the administrative autonomy of secondary school principals. This can be achieved by granting them increased authority in staff management, internal supervision, and decision-making processes. Empowering school heads in these areas is essential for fostering a responsive, accountable, and performance-oriented school leadership culture.
- ii. There is a need to institutionalize financial decentralization by developing and enforcing policies that enable principals and school management teams to prepare and control their own budgets. Adequate training and transparent monitoring mechanisms should be introduced to ensure funds are used efficiently and equitably. This would allow schools to address local financial needs promptly, contributing to improved teaching and learning environments.
- iii. Schools should be encouraged and supported to adapt parts of the national curriculum to reflect local realities. In addition, teachers should receive continuous professional development in curriculum innovation, contextual teaching, and inclusive pedagogy to make learning more effective and meaningful for students.

Limitation of the study

One major limitation of this study is that it focused exclusively on public secondary schools in Cross River State. The findings may not be generalizable to private schools or to schools in other Nigerian states with different administrative and financial structures.

Suggestion for future study

Future research should consider a comparative study involving both public and private secondary schools across multiple states or regions in Nigeria. This would help explore how decentralization practices differ across contexts and how they influence school performance in varied educational environments.



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