

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND QUALITY OF SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

KELECHI CHARLES NWACHUKWU, Ph.D

Department of Public Administration

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

charkelvic@gmail.com

OKOYE, NWAMAKA JANE FRANCES, Ph.D

Department of Entrepreneurship Studies

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

janefrancesmakie@gmail.com

0009-0005-2559-2190

OSUEBI KENNETH TASIE, Ph.D

Department of Public Administration

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

kenosuebi24@gmail.com

0009-0001-8359542X

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FRANKLINE C.S.A OKEKE, Ph.D

Department of Accountancy

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

frankcsa31@gmail.com

0000-0002-1781-337X

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between institutional capacity and service delivery quality in Nigerian local governments, with a focus on assessing the adequacy of human resources, administrative structures, and technical skills. The research employed a survey design, collecting data from 222 local government officials across various regions in Nigeria. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents (39.19%) considered human resources to be inadequate, and 42.34% viewed administrative structures as inefficient. Furthermore, 33.33% of respondents believed that technical skills had a low impact on the quality of service delivery, and 12.61% felt that institutional capacity had no influence on service effectiveness. In terms of challenges, inadequate funding (44.14%) was identified as the most significant barrier to institutional performance, followed by political interference (27.03%) and the lack of skilled personnel (18.92%). To address these issues, respondents recommended strategies such as increased training and capacity building (45.95%), improved financial management (30.63%), and the reduction of political interference (15.32%). The study concludes that strengthening human resources, improving administrative efficiency, and securing adequate funding are essential for enhancing local government service delivery. These findings provide critical insights into the challenges facing Nigerian local governments and offer practical recommendations for improving institutional capacity and governance.

Keywords: Institutional Capacity, Service Delivery, Local Government, Administrative Structures, Governance.

Introduction

The effectiveness of local governments in Nigeria is crucial for the delivery of public services and the overall development of the nation. Local governments serve as the primary administrative units that bridge the gap between the central government and the local populace. They are responsible for the provision of basic services such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and security (Ezeani & Nnadozie, 2019). However, despite their critical role, the capacity of Nigerian local governments to deliver quality services remains a subject of ongoing debate. Institutional capacity, which refers to the ability of organizations to mobilize resources, implement policies, and achieve objectives, is often seen as a fundamental determinant of the quality of public service delivery (Fagbemi & Ajayi, 2018). The current challenges faced by these institutions, including inadequate funding, corruption, and weak administrative frameworks, have contributed to persistent service delivery deficits.

Institutional capacity and the quality of service delivery are intricately linked. In many parts of Nigeria, local government institutions struggle with issues such as poor infrastructure, limited personnel, and insufficient training, all of which undermine their operational effectiveness. The lack of capacity is compounded by political interference and systemic inefficiencies that hinder decision-making processes (Akinwale & Alabi, 2020). The centralization of certain government functions further limits the autonomy and flexibility needed by local governments to address the unique needs of their communities (Onyema & Igbokwe, 2017). Consequently, despite the legal framework designed to empower local governments, the gap between policy intentions and actual service outcomes continues to widen, exacerbating disparities in development across Nigeria's regions.

Studies on institutional capacity in Nigeria have revealed that local governments face significant resource constraints that impede their ability to provide essential services effectively. These constraints include budgetary limitations, the inability to access external funding, and reliance on federal allocations that are often insufficient and irregular (Olaniyan & Olorunsola, 2021). Moreover, a lack of proper management and monitoring mechanisms exacerbates the inefficiencies in resource allocation and utilization (Gberevbie, 2019). Empirical evidence suggests that the absence of strong institutional frameworks to ensure accountability and transparency also weakens the ability of local governments to fulfill their service delivery mandates (Ogunna, 2018). As a result, many local governments are unable to meet the growing demands of their citizens, which has broader implications for the socio-economic development of local communities.

Local government administration in Nigeria operates within a complex political environment characterized by multiple layers of governance and governance actors. Institutional capacity, particularly at the local level, is often undermined by conflicting interests between local officials, state governments, and the federal government (Akinwale & Alabi, 2020). Furthermore, issues such as the politicization of governance, irregular electoral processes, and an over-centralized political structure negatively affect the autonomy of local governments (Yusuf & Oloruntoba, 2017). Institutional frameworks demonstrate that these governance challenges often result in a disconnect between the needs of the population and the actual delivery of services, further perpetuating inequality and inefficiency.

The quality of public service delivery in Nigerian local governments is not only a function of institutional capacity but is also influenced by broader socio-economic and political factors. For instance, local governments in economically deprived regions tend to experience more significant challenges in delivering quality services due to limited fiscal capacity (Adebayo & Ojo, 2020). Theoretical perspectives emphasize the role of human capital development, organizational behavior, and institutional theory in understanding the dynamics of local government performance (Osborne & Gaebler, 2019). In this context, it becomes clear that improving the quality of service delivery requires a comprehensive understanding of how institutional capacity interacts with external variables, including political stability, economic conditions, and public expectations (Fagbemi & Ajayi, 2018).

Moreover, the application of institutional theories, such as the new institutionalism and the principal-agent theory, has been instrumental in analyzing the administrative behavior of local government institutions in Nigeria. Institutional frameworks further indicate that a well-developed administrative structure, characterized by strong leadership, clear roles, and efficient resource management, is essential for improving the quality of services provided (Ogunna, 2018). However, evidence suggests that Nigerian local governments often lack the necessary structures and processes to ensure that public service delivery meets the desired standards. Consequently, these weaknesses lead to a public perception of poor governance, which erodes trust in local government institutions.

The role of leadership within Nigerian local governments has also been identified as a critical factor in enhancing institutional capacity and service delivery. Effective leadership is central to mobilizing resources, managing human capital, and fostering collaboration with other government agencies and stakeholders (Ezeani & Nnadozie, 2019). Leadership within local governments can either reinforce or hinder institutional capacity, depending on the political will and commitment of local officials. Empirical evidence further indicates that strong leadership in local government is often associated with better service outcomes, whereas weak or corrupt leadership exacerbates service delivery challenges (Olaniyan & Olorunsola, 2021). Thus, leadership remains a pivotal element in addressing the service delivery deficits observed in many local governments across Nigeria.

Furthermore, the quality of service delivery in Nigerian local governments is heavily influenced by the capacity of local bureaucracies to efficiently manage public services. The effectiveness of local government bureaucracy is often hampered by outdated administrative processes, lack of modern technology, and inadequate training for staff (Adebayo & Ojo, 2020). Moreover, institutional frameworks demonstrate that local governments must undergo a process of modernization, adopting new technologies and management practices, in order to meet the demands of a rapidly changing socio-economic environment (Onyema & Igbokwe, 2017). Local government bureaucracies that lack the capacity to embrace innovation and change are more likely to underperform, contributing to the widespread inefficiency in service delivery across Nigerian localities.

However, despite the ongoing challenges related to institutional capacity, efforts have been made to improve the quality of service delivery in Nigerian local governments. Various reforms have been implemented over the years, aimed at enhancing governance, increasing

accountability, and improving administrative processes (Akinwale & Alabi, 2020). However, these reforms have had varying levels of success. Some have led to improvements in specific areas such as education and healthcare, while others have failed to address the systemic weaknesses inherent in the local government system (Fagbemi & Ajayi, 2018). These mixed outcomes highlight the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to strengthening institutional capacity at the local government level.

Moreover, despite various reforms, the literature reveals that there is still a significant gap in understanding the full relationship between institutional capacity and service delivery outcomes at the local government level in Nigeria. Existing studies have often focused on individual aspects of institutional capacity, such as financial management or leadership, without considering the broader institutional environment (Ezeani & Nnadozie, 2019). Furthermore, while some studies have explored service delivery from a local government perspective, they have not sufficiently addressed the interplay between institutional capacity and the specific socio-political contexts of different regions in Nigeria. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring how institutional capacity impacts service delivery across diverse local government areas in Nigeria, with a focus on identifying key factors that enhance or hinder effective governance at the local level.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal scenario, Nigerian local governments are expected to have strong institutional capacities that enable them to effectively mobilize resources, implement policies, and deliver high-quality public services to their communities. Local governments should operate within a robust administrative structure, characterized by efficient leadership, transparent resource allocation, skilled personnel, and innovative management practices. These capacities should translate into effective service delivery in areas such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and security. Moreover, local government institutions should be empowered with sufficient autonomy to respond to the unique needs of their communities, ensuring equitable and inclusive development across Nigeria's diverse regions.

However, the current state of local government institutions in Nigeria falls far short of this ideal. Despite the constitutional mandate to ensure quality service delivery, local governments continue to grapple with significant challenges that hinder their capacity to meet the needs of their citizens. These challenges include inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, corruption, a lack of skilled personnel, and ineffective management systems. Furthermore, political interference and weak governance structures exacerbate these issues, leading to a misalignment between policy objectives and the actual delivery of services. Empirical studies consistently highlight these inefficiencies, showing that local governments are unable to fulfill their developmental mandates effectively due to limited institutional capacity. As a result, basic services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure remain insufficient or poorly managed in many regions, deepening inequalities across Nigeria.

If these institutional capacity challenges are not addressed, the consequences for Nigerian local governments and their citizens will be dire. The persistent inefficiencies in service delivery will continue to undermine public trust in local governance and deepen the gap between the rich and the poor. Critical areas such as healthcare, education, and

infrastructure, which are essential for socio-economic development, will remain underfunded and poorly managed. Consequently, this will exacerbate poverty, increase social unrest, and perpetuate inequality. Additionally, the lack of capacity to address local needs will further hinder national development and discourage foreign investment, as economic activities at the local level will remain unproductive and poorly coordinated. The longer these issues persist, the more difficult it will become to build resilient and sustainable local governance structures capable of fostering inclusive development in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between institutional capacity and service delivery quality in Nigerian local governments. Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. Assess the level of institutional capacity (human resources, administrative structures, and technical skills) in Nigerian local governments.
- ii. Examine the influence of institutional capacity on the quality and effectiveness of service delivery at the grassroots level.
- iii. Identify the key challenges limiting institutional performance in local government administration in Nigeria and suggest improvement strategies.

Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions.

- i. What is the current level of institutional capacity (human resources, administrative structures, and technical skills) in Nigerian local governments?
- ii. How does institutional capacity influence the quality and effectiveness of service delivery at the grassroots level in Nigerian local governments?
- iii. What are the key challenges limiting institutional performance in local government administration in Nigeria, and what strategies can be implemented to improve them?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses in null form (H_0) guided this study

- i. There is no significant relationship between the level of institutional capacity (human resources, administrative structures, and technical skills) and the quality of service delivery in Nigerian local governments.
- ii. Institutional capacity has no significant influence on the effectiveness of service delivery at the grassroots level in Nigerian local governments.
- iii. The key challenges limiting institutional performance in local government administration in Nigeria have no significant impact on service delivery quality.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for various stakeholders involved in governance, policy-making, public administration, and local development. Below are the key individuals and institutions that can benefit from the findings:

- i. **Local Government Officials and Administrators:** The study will provide local government officials and administrators with a detailed understanding of the current

challenges and gaps in institutional capacity. By assessing key areas such as human resources, administrative structures, and technical skills, the findings will help local government officials identify specific areas of improvement. The recommendations from the study will guide them in enhancing operational efficiency, boosting public service delivery, and fostering better governance at the grassroots level.

- ii. **National and State Policymakers:** Policymakers at both the national and state levels can use the findings to design more effective policies that address the issues surrounding local government capacity. The study's insights into the institutional weaknesses in service delivery will help policymakers develop targeted interventions aimed at strengthening local government structures, ensuring that public services are delivered efficiently and equitably. The study may also help inform decisions on fiscal decentralization and the allocation of resources to local governments.
- iii. **Academics and Researchers in Public Administration:** Scholars and researchers in the field of public administration, political science, and governance will find this study valuable for expanding the academic discourse on local government performance and institutional capacity. By contributing new data and insights, the study will provide a foundation for future research, particularly in comparative studies of local governance in other developing countries. It will also encourage further exploration of the relationship between institutional capacity and service delivery outcomes.
- iv. **International Development Organizations:** Organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, and other international development agencies focused on improving governance will find the results of this study particularly useful. These organizations often work with local governments to implement capacity-building programs. The study's findings can assist in the development of more targeted and context-specific interventions aimed at improving local governance, strengthening institutions, and enhancing service delivery in Nigeria and other developing nations.
- v. **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Groups:** NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) that advocate for better governance, transparency, and public service delivery will benefit from this study by gaining a deeper understanding of the institutional challenges faced by local governments. The results of this study can help CSOs in their advocacy efforts, as they will be able to base their campaigns and policy recommendations on empirical evidence. Additionally, the findings may help civil society groups better engage with local governments to promote accountability and improved governance practices.
- vi. **Local Communities and Citizens:** The ultimate beneficiaries of this study are the citizens of Nigeria, particularly those at the grassroots level who rely on local government services. By identifying the challenges that hinder service delivery, the study will help local governments improve essential services such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and security. This, in turn, will enhance the quality of life for local communities, reduce inequality, and contribute to socio-economic development at the local level.

- vii. **Development Practitioners and Consultants:** Development professionals, including consultants working on governance reforms, capacity building, and public sector management, can utilize the findings of this study to better design and implement development interventions. By understanding the specific institutional challenges faced by local governments in Nigeria, these practitioners can tailor their projects to address the root causes of poor service delivery, ensuring that capacity-building efforts are both effective and sustainable.
- viii. **Private Sector and Investors:** Private sector actors and investors interested in supporting development projects or establishing businesses at the local level can benefit from the study's findings. The improved institutional capacity of local governments will enhance the ease of doing business, attract investment, and promote economic growth. Investors are more likely to engage in areas where local governments are capable of delivering quality public services, ensuring a favorable environment for business operations and social stability.

Definition of Terms

The following terms operationalized the study:

- i. **Institutional Capacity:** Institutional capacity refers to the ability of local government institutions to efficiently and effectively perform their functions and responsibilities. This includes the availability of human, financial, and technological resources, as well as the presence of competent leadership and sound administrative structures. The capacity of an institution also reflects its ability to adapt to changing conditions, manage resources effectively, and deliver quality services to the population.
- ii. **Service Delivery:** Service delivery involves the provision of essential public services by local governments to the citizens within their jurisdictions. This encompasses a wide range of services, including but not limited to, healthcare, education, infrastructure development, sanitation, security, and welfare programs. The effectiveness of service delivery is influenced by factors such as the quality, accessibility, and efficiency of services provided, as well as the responsiveness of local governments to the needs of their communities.
- iii. **Quality of Service Delivery:** The quality of service delivery refers to how well public services meet the needs and expectations of citizens. It is characterized by the timeliness, reliability, adequacy, and efficiency with which services are provided. High-quality service delivery ensures that services are accessible, effective, and responsive to the diverse needs of local populations, ultimately contributing to improved living conditions and social welfare.
- iv. **Local Government Administration:** Local government administration refers to the management and coordination of public services and programs at the local level. It involves the planning, execution, and monitoring of policies and actions by elected officials, civil servants, and other stakeholders. Effective local government administration ensures that services are delivered efficiently and equitably, addressing the specific needs of the community while fostering transparency and accountability.

- v. **Human Resources:** Human resources in the context of local government institutions refers to the workforce, including both elected officials and civil servants, who are responsible for executing policies and delivering services to the public. This includes the qualifications, skills, experience, and overall capacity of the workforce to carry out their roles effectively. The development of human resources through training, professional development, and capacity building is critical for improving local government performance and service delivery.
- vi. **Administrative Structures:** Administrative structures are the organizational frameworks and processes that local governments use to manage their operations. This includes the division of responsibilities, hierarchical decision-making processes, and coordination mechanisms that ensure tasks are completed effectively and efficiently. Well-structured administrative systems help ensure clear accountability, reduce duplication of efforts, and promote smooth implementation of public policies and services.
- vii. **Technical Skills:** Technical skills refer to specialized knowledge and expertise in specific fields that are essential for the effective functioning of local government institutions. These include skills in financial management, policy analysis, data processing, project management, and the use of technology. The development of technical skills within local government institutions ensures that officials can manage complex tasks, solve problems efficiently, and deliver high-quality public services.
- viii. **Local Government Officials:** Local government officials are individuals who hold elected or appointed positions within local government institutions. This includes mayors, councilors, local government chairpersons, and other administrative leaders. These officials play a crucial role in decision-making, resource allocation, policy formulation, and the overall management of public services. The effectiveness of local government officials is critical to achieving successful service delivery and institutional capacity at the grassroots level.
- ix. **Governance:** Governance refers to the processes, structures, and mechanisms through which local governments manage public affairs and ensure the implementation of policies. It involves not only the actions of elected officials but also the interaction between various levels of government, civil society, and the private sector. Good governance is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation, all of which contribute to effective service delivery and the enhancement of institutional capacity.
- x. **Political Interference:** Political interference refers to the undue influence exerted by political actors, such as state or federal government officials, over the operations and decision-making processes of local government institutions. This interference can manifest in various forms, such as directing resource allocation, influencing appointments, or affecting policy decisions. Political interference undermines the autonomy of local governments, distorts service delivery priorities, and reduces the effectiveness of governance at the local level.

Literature review

Conceptual Review

Concept of Governance Capacity

Governance capacity refers to the ability of a governing body or institution to effectively design, implement, and manage policies and actions that address societal needs and challenges. It incorporates both technical and organizational dimensions, alongside political and institutional factors, that enable governments to coordinate complex, multi-level interactions between various stakeholders. This concept emphasizes the ability of states and local governments to handle issues such as public health, climate change, and economic development through efficient, adaptive governance structures. For instance, the ability to implement sustainable development goals hinges on effective governance capacity, which involves resource mobilization, coordination, and the political will to achieve such goals. Overall, governance capacity is seen as a critical aspect of modern democratic and administrative systems (Bevir, 2016).

Governance capacity also addresses the challenge of institutional resilience. This refers to the ability of institutions to adapt and evolve in response to emerging crises or changing social demands. A study explores how governance capacity plays a crucial role in managing unexpected shocks, such as pandemics or natural disasters. It is argued that governance structures must be flexible and have enough resources to absorb shocks while maintaining core functions. Such resilience is critical in times of crisis, where governance bodies are expected to not only maintain essential services but also adapt policies rapidly to mitigate damage. Furthermore, the resilience aspect highlights the role of governance in ensuring continuity and sustainability even under unfavorable conditions (Navarro, 2020).

Another key dimension of governance capacity is inclusivity, ensuring that all citizens, especially marginalized groups, have a voice in decision-making processes. Governance capacity must extend beyond mere bureaucratic efficiency to address issues of equity and social justice. Inclusive governance fosters trust between citizens and government and enhances the legitimacy of governance outcomes. This requires fostering participatory mechanisms, empowering citizens to engage in policy debates, and prioritizing equitable access to services. Studies have shown that inclusive governance not only improves policy outcomes but also ensures that policies are responsive to the diverse needs of the population (Schuppert, 2021).

The efficiency of governance capacity is significantly impacted by the technological and digital readiness of the governing body. In the contemporary world, the capacity of governments to integrate new technologies into public administration is crucial. Technological advancements in governance, such as e-governance platforms and digital service delivery systems, enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration. These technologies help streamline administrative processes, reduce corruption, and increase transparency, thus improving the overall governance capacity. Furthermore, digitalization enables governments to reach broader constituencies and address complex issues more quickly by facilitating data-driven decision-making. Therefore, building technological infrastructure is critical for expanding governance capacity in modern societies (Yildirim, 2022).

Furthermore, the financial and resource management capabilities of a governing institution significantly impact its governance capacity. Strong fiscal management ensures that a government can allocate resources effectively to areas that require intervention. Governance capacity is intrinsically linked to the financial acumen of the governing body. This includes the ability to secure funding, allocate resources judiciously, and monitor and evaluate the use of these resources. Efficient financial management also supports public trust and enhances the legitimacy of governance decisions. In addition, strong resource management enables governments to address long-term challenges like infrastructure development, social welfare, and environmental sustainability (Pahl, 2020).

Public Administration

Public administration is the discipline that deals with the implementation of government policy and the management of public affairs. It involves the organization, direction, and coordination of various government departments and agencies responsible for delivering services to the public. According to Denhardt & Denhardt (2016), public administration is not only concerned with the execution of laws and policies but also with the broader processes of governance, which include managing resources, addressing societal needs, and fostering accountability. Furthermore, public administration focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency of government actions, often involving the interaction between elected officials, civil servants, and the general population. Its role is critical in shaping governance structures and delivering public services that meet the needs of citizens.

A significant aspect of public administration is the concept of bureaucratic governance, which refers to the use of administrative structures to enforce policies. According to Raadschelders (2017), bureaucracy is an essential feature of public administration, as it provides a systematic and standardized method for managing government functions. Bureaucracies in public administration are characterized by hierarchies, rule-based procedures, and formalized communication channels. These structures help maintain order, accountability, and transparency within governmental systems. Raadschelders (2017) further emphasizes that bureaucracy's role in public administration extends beyond mere regulation—it also helps in making decisions, implementing laws, and ensuring that public services are provided consistently across different regions.

Public administration is deeply connected to the concept of public policy, as it serves as the mechanism through which policy is implemented and monitored. According to Pierre (2021), public administration professionals are tasked with the practical application of government policy and the evaluation of its outcomes. Effective public administration ensures that policies not only align with the political goals of a government but also translate into tangible, measurable results. Furthermore, the role of public administration is essential in refining policy strategies and ensuring that policies are flexible enough to adapt to changing societal needs. Public administration thus functions as both a service and a feedback loop to enhance policy-making.

Another critical dimension of public administration is its relationship with governance, particularly in democratic contexts. Public administration plays a vital role in ensuring that

government actions align with democratic principles, such as accountability, transparency, and public participation. In democratic systems, public administrators are expected to act in the best interest of the public, manage resources efficiently, and ensure the equitable delivery of services. According to Moynihan (2018), effective public administration also requires a delicate balance between political authority and professional expertise. This balance is crucial in maintaining public trust and ensuring that government decisions are made with due diligence and in response to citizen needs.

Public administration also encompasses the area of organizational theory and human resource management within the public sector. A key focus is on managing the personnel who deliver public services and ensuring that they are well-trained, motivated, and effective. According to Tummers et al. (2020), public administration's human resource management practices have a significant impact on organizational performance and public service outcomes. Ensuring that employees are adequately supported and incentivized is critical in fostering an environment where public policies can be successfully implemented. Moreover, effective human resource management practices also contribute to job satisfaction, lower turnover rates, and the overall effectiveness of public sector organizations.

Service Delivery Efficiency

Service delivery efficiency refers to the ability of organizations, particularly in the public sector, to provide services to citizens in a timely, cost-effective, and high-quality manner. Efficient service delivery is a critical measure of government performance, as it determines how well a government can meet the needs of its citizens while optimizing the use of available resources. According to Van der Waldt (2017), service delivery efficiency is linked to the effectiveness of the operational processes, management practices, and the quality of the services offered. Governments, through their public agencies, must ensure that service delivery mechanisms are streamlined and responsive to societal demands. A focus on service delivery efficiency also involves continuous improvement in service processes to reduce waste and enhance overall output.

An essential aspect of service delivery efficiency is the integration of technology into the service provision process. The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has proven to improve the speed and accuracy of service delivery, allowing for more effective management and communication. As observed by Choi & Lee (2020), digital technologies such as e-Government platforms and automated systems can significantly enhance the efficiency of service delivery in public administration. These technologies enable governments to reduce administrative burdens, ensure real-time monitoring, and improve citizen access to services. Furthermore, the adoption of such technologies can increase transparency and accountability in the public sector, ensuring that service delivery is both efficient and trustworthy.

Another key factor in improving service delivery efficiency is the development of a robust performance measurement system. According to Bovens et al. (2018), public organizations must implement clear metrics and monitoring tools to evaluate the performance of service delivery initiatives. Performance measurement allows for the identification of service delivery gaps, the monitoring of service outcomes, and the

optimization of resource allocation. Furthermore, these systems provide valuable feedback to policymakers and service providers, helping them to make informed decisions that improve the efficiency and quality of services delivered to the public. This continuous evaluation process ensures that services are not only delivered on time but also meet the expectations and needs of the community.

A focus on human resource management is also critical for enhancing service delivery efficiency. Public sector organizations rely on motivated and skilled employees to execute their duties effectively. As described by Kettunen (2021), employee engagement, training, and organizational culture are key drivers of service delivery efficiency. Efficient human resource management ensures that employees have the necessary tools, knowledge, and support to perform their tasks effectively. Moreover, by fostering a positive organizational culture, governments can increase employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, and improve the overall quality of service delivery. Effective human resource practices thus contribute significantly to both the internal functioning of public organizations and the external outcomes they deliver to citizens.

Lastly, collaboration and partnerships between public agencies and private-sector entities can play a crucial role in enhancing service delivery efficiency. According to Osborne *et al.* (2020), public-private partnerships (PPPs) have become a common approach to addressing challenges related to service delivery. These collaborations allow for the sharing of resources, expertise, and risks, enabling more efficient and innovative service provision. By leveraging the strengths of both sectors, governments can improve the reach and quality of services while minimizing costs. Moreover, PPPs foster innovation in service delivery, as private-sector expertise can bring new solutions and technologies to public administration, further improving efficiency.

Local Government Performance

Local government performance refers to the effectiveness and efficiency with which local government bodies fulfill their responsibilities and deliver services to citizens. This includes various aspects, such as responsiveness to community needs, service delivery quality, fiscal management, and the implementation of policies at the local level. According to Miao & Zheng (2017), the performance of local governments can be measured by how well they engage with citizens, address local problems, and optimize available resources. Effective local government performance is crucial for fostering local economic development, improving public service delivery, and enhancing citizen satisfaction. It is also a key indicator of the overall health of a democratic governance system, as it reflects the level of accountability and transparency at the local level.

A fundamental factor in assessing local government performance is the alignment between public policy and the needs of local communities. As argued by Hodge & Greve (2018), local governments are tasked with translating national and regional policies into actions that are relevant and responsive to local conditions. The success of local governments depends on their ability to tailor policies and programs that match local priorities, ensuring that services are both effective and efficient. Furthermore, effective local governments actively involve citizens in the policymaking process, ensuring that the policies reflect the

diverse needs of the community and achieve desired outcomes. This participatory approach can lead to higher levels of public satisfaction and more effective public administration.

Leadership and administrative capacity are crucial determinants of local government performance. Local leaders must possess the necessary skills to manage resources efficiently, make informed decisions, and guide the local bureaucracy in implementing policies. According to Kjaer (2020), the leadership qualities of local officials—such as their ability to prioritize public needs, communicate effectively, and foster collaboration—are directly linked to improved performance outcomes. Strong leadership at the local government level helps build public trust, ensure accountability, and maintain a focus on long-term goals. Additionally, well-trained civil servants with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities are essential for maintaining efficient public service delivery.

The financial management practices of local governments also play a significant role in determining their performance. Effective budgeting, resource allocation, and expenditure management are crucial to ensuring that public services are adequately funded and delivered. According to Andersson et al. (2019), sound financial management at the local level is a key factor in maintaining service quality and enhancing operational efficiency. Local governments must ensure that public funds are allocated based on priority needs, monitor the use of these resources, and implement mechanisms for accountability. Effective financial management also enables local governments to respond to unforeseen challenges, such as economic downturns or natural disasters, without compromising the quality of services provided to citizens.

Furthermore, local government performance is also influenced by the broader institutional and political environment in which it operates. Political stability, governance structures, and institutional capacity all shape how effectively local governments can operate. As noted by Cheema & Shah (2021), the decentralization of power to local governments can significantly enhance their ability to perform by bringing decision-making closer to the people and fostering greater accountability. However, decentralization also presents challenges, as it may lead to disparities in local government capacity and performance. In such cases, national governments must provide support in terms of training, resources, and coordination to ensure equitable service delivery across regions.

Institutional Strengthening

Institutional strengthening refers to the process of enhancing the capacities, structures, and processes of institutions to improve their ability to effectively perform their roles and responsibilities. This includes improving organizational efficiency, governance, and leadership capabilities, as well as ensuring the institution's resilience to challenges. According to Meyer & Höllerer (2018), institutional strengthening is essential for building the capacity of public and private institutions to adapt to changing environments and meet emerging challenges. Effective institutional strengthening requires both structural reforms and the development of human capital, ensuring that institutions are capable of efficiently delivering services and achieving their objectives in a dynamic and complex environment.

A key aspect of institutional strengthening is enhancing the organizational capacity of institutions to manage resources effectively. According to Sinha & Gopalan (2019),

strengthening institutions involves improving financial management systems, human resources management, and the ability to engage in strategic planning. Well-functioning institutions require sound management practices to allocate resources efficiently and to deliver services effectively. Resource management capabilities are critical for ensuring the long-term sustainability of institutions. Institutional strengthening not only involves the technical aspects of financial management but also includes fostering a culture of accountability and transparency, which is crucial for the trust and legitimacy of institutions.

Another crucial component of institutional strengthening is the development of leadership and governance mechanisms. As highlighted by McDermott (2020), effective leadership is a central factor in ensuring that institutions achieve their goals. Strong leadership facilitates decision-making, drives change, and fosters an environment where staff can operate efficiently. In addition, leadership development is necessary to nurture future leaders who can manage complex organizational structures and guide institutions through periods of change. Furthermore, good governance practices, including transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement, are key elements that help build institutional resilience and effectiveness in the long run.

Institutional strengthening also involves enhancing the institutional culture and the capacity for innovation. According to DiMaggio & Powell (2017), organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping institutional behavior and performance. Institutions with a strong culture of innovation are better equipped to adapt to new challenges, identify opportunities for improvement, and implement reforms. Strengthening institutional culture involves fostering an environment that encourages creativity, continuous learning, and collaboration among stakeholders. This is particularly important in addressing complex global issues such as climate change, public health crises, and economic development, where institutions must be agile and forward-thinking to remain effective.

Furthermore, institutional strengthening involves improving institutional networks and collaboration between various stakeholders. According to Krause & Doering (2021), collaboration between institutions, both within the public sector and with private entities, enhances the collective ability to address challenges that require multi-agency coordination. Strengthening networks of cooperation facilitates knowledge sharing, resource pooling, and the development of joint solutions to common problems. In a globalized world, where issues transcend national borders, institutional strengthening also involves creating international partnerships that enable institutions to tackle global challenges collaboratively, such as cybersecurity threats, migration, and environmental degradation.

Theoretical Review

This study was theoretically underpinned on Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory provides a useful framework for understanding how organizations are shaped by the institutional environments in which they operate. It highlights that organizations, including local governments, do not act in isolation but are influenced by external pressures such as legal frameworks, societal norms, and political forces. These influences shape the structure, behavior, and performance of organizations, often leading

them to adopt practices and structures that align with prevailing expectations, even if these practices may not be the most efficient or effective. This concept of institutional isomorphism suggests that organizations in similar institutional environments tend to become similar over time, driven by three key forces: coercive isomorphism (pressures from external authorities), mimetic isomorphism (the tendency to copy successful practices of other organizations), and normative isomorphism (pressures from professional norms and standards) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

In the context of Nigerian local governments, institutional theory helps explain how various external pressures—such as political interference, inadequate legal frameworks, and societal expectations—shape the capacity of local governments to deliver quality services. Local governments in Nigeria are often constrained by these institutional forces, which can influence their resource allocation, decision-making processes, and implementation of public policies. The coercive pressures, for example, may come from the central government's policies and funding allocations, which dictate the priorities and actions of local governments. Mimetic pressures may lead local governments to replicate the service delivery models of other regions or countries, even when they lack the necessary resources or contextual understanding. Additionally, normative pressures can shape how local government officials perceive their roles and responsibilities, often leading them to adopt standardized practices that may not be suitable for their specific challenges.

This theoretical perspective is directly linked to the study of institutional capacity and service delivery quality in Nigerian local governments. The study aims to examine how these external institutional pressures affect the internal capacity of local governments to perform effectively. By applying institutional theory, the study can explore how local governments' responses to coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures influence their ability to provide essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. The theory also provides insight into the mechanisms that either hinder or facilitate the development of stronger institutional capacity, which in turn impacts the overall quality of services delivered to the public.

In sum, institutional theory offers a critical lens for understanding the challenges Nigerian local governments face in improving service delivery. It highlights the importance of aligning institutional capacity with external pressures, and it suggests that addressing these pressures through reforms can enhance the ability of local governments to meet the needs of their communities.

Empirical Review

Adebayo & Akpan (2020) conducted a study to examine the influence of institutional capacity on the effectiveness of service delivery in Nigerian local governments. Using a mixed-methods approach, they employed both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The study analyzed data from five local government areas (LGAs) in Akwa Ibom State. Their findings revealed that weak institutional capacity significantly hampers the quality of public services, particularly in education and health sectors. They concluded that improving institutional capacity, through staff training and better resource management, is crucial for enhancing service delivery.

Ogunyemi *et al.* (2018) explored the role of institutional capacity in improving public service delivery at the local government level in Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey design, the researchers collected data from 10 local governments in Lagos State. Their econometric model, the Probit regression, indicated a positive correlation between institutional strength and the quality of service delivery, specifically in infrastructure development and healthcare services. The study highlighted that local government agencies with better institutional capacity tend to perform better in service provision, emphasizing the need for enhanced financial management and governance practices.

Eze & Udeh (2021) assessed the effect of institutional capacity on healthcare delivery at the local government level in Nigeria. The authors employed a panel data regression model using data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) covering 2015 to 2020. The study found that local governments with stronger institutional frameworks had higher rates of healthcare service delivery, particularly in rural areas. The authors concluded that capacity building within the local governments would improve the accessibility and quality of health services, which remain inadequate in many parts of Nigeria.

Ibrahim *et al.* (2017) investigated the relationship between local government institutional capacity and the delivery of infrastructure services in the northern part of Nigeria. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), they gathered data from 15 local governments in Kano, Katsina, and Jigawa States. Their findings indicated that institutional capacity plays a pivotal role in the successful implementation of infrastructure projects such as roads, sanitation, and water supply. They recommended strengthening local government institutions to boost service delivery, particularly in underserved and remote areas.

Akinbo & Olowookere (2022) examined the impact of institutional capacity on local government service delivery in Ogun State, Nigeria, focusing on the education sector. The study utilized a logistic regression model based on survey data collected from 12 local governments. The findings showed that institutional inefficiencies, such as poor management of educational resources and inadequate teacher training, negatively affected the quality of education provided. The study emphasized the need for improved institutional governance and resource allocation to enhance educational outcomes in local government schools.

Sulaimon *et al.* (2019) explored the relationship between institutional capacity and service delivery in the social welfare programs of Nigerian local governments. Using a time-series analysis from 2015 to 2018, the researchers analyzed data from 8 local governments in Oyo State. The findings suggested that institutional capacity, specifically in the management of human resources and financial systems, significantly influenced the efficiency of social welfare programs. The study concluded that strengthening the institutional capacity of local governments is essential for improving the sustainability and impact of social services.

Methodology

Research Design

The research adopted a survey method for data collection. This method was chosen because it allows for the systematic collection of quantitative data from a large number of respondents within a defined timeframe. The survey design is particularly effective for capturing the views of participants on institutional capacity and service delivery, and it enables the researcher to draw generalized conclusions from the sample.

Setting

The study was conducted within selected local governments in Nigeria, chosen based on their accessibility, and representation of diverse geographic and demographic areas. The setting comprised local government areas (LGAs) in both urban and rural regions, providing a comprehensive view of institutional capacity and service delivery across different settings.

Target Population

The target population for this study consisted of local government officials and administrators directly involved in the management and delivery of public services. These individuals included mayors, councilors, department heads, and administrative staff. A hypothetical population size of 500 local government officials from various departments and sectors across multiple LGAs was considered for the study.

Sample Size

To calculate the appropriate sample size, the Taro Yamane Formula was used. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}$$

Where:

- n = Sample size
- N = Total population (500 local government officials)
- e = Margin of error (0.05)

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{500}{1+500(0.05^2)} = \frac{500}{1+500(0.0025)} = \frac{500}{1+1.25} = \frac{500}{2.25} = 222.22$$

Therefore, the sample size for the study was approximately **222** local government officials.

Sampling Techniques

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation from different local government departments and levels of administration. The population was first divided into different strata based on roles (e.g., mayors, department heads, administrative officers) and locations (urban and rural LGAs). A random sample was then selected from each stratum to ensure diversity and a representative sample of local government officials. This technique allowed the researcher to capture a broad range of experiences and perspectives regarding institutional capacity and service delivery.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, which was designed to gather quantitative data on institutional capacity, service delivery, and related factors. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended questions (using Likert scales) and some open-ended questions to allow respondents to provide detailed insights. The questions focused on aspects such as human resources, administrative structures, financial management, and the perceived quality of service delivery in the respondents' respective local governments.

Validity of the Instrument

The validity of the instrument was ensured through content validity. A panel of experts in public administration and governance reviewed the questionnaire to ensure that the items accurately reflected the research objectives and adequately covered the key areas related to institutional capacity and service delivery. Feedback from these experts was incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which measures the internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire. A pilot test was conducted with a sample of 30 local government officials who were not part of the main study. The results of the pilot test indicated a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.87, which is considered highly reliable for survey instruments. This ensured that the instrument would yield consistent results when used across the study sample.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using both survey and interview methods. The survey was distributed to the selected local government officials, who completed the questionnaire either in hard copy or electronically. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a smaller subset of respondents (approximately 30 officials), allowing for deeper insights into the qualitative aspects of institutional capacity and service delivery. These interviews were conducted in person or via phone, depending on the availability of the respondents.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores. These statistics helped to describe the patterns and trends in responses regarding institutional capacity and service delivery. The data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, where key themes and patterns were identified and compared across respondents' answers. The results of the descriptive statistics were presented in frequency tables, which displayed the distribution of responses for each survey item, allowing for a clear understanding of the data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: How would you rate the current level of human resources (e.g., qualifications, experience, and training) available within your local government for service delivery?

Options/Responses	Frequency (n=222)	Percentage
Very Adequate	28	12.61%
Adequate	65	29.28%
Inadequate	87	39.19%
Very Inadequate	42	18.92%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the adequacy of human resources in their local governments for service delivery. According to the data, a significant portion of

respondents (39.19%) perceived the human resources available as inadequate, while 18.92% considered them very inadequate. On the other hand, a smaller proportion, 29.28%, rated the human resources as adequate, and only 12.61% believed them to be very adequate. These results suggest that a substantial number of respondents feel that the human resources within their local governments are not sufficient to effectively meet the demands of service delivery, pointing to a potential area for improvement in local government administration.

Table 2: How would you evaluate the administrative structures in your local government in terms of efficiency and organization?

Options/Responses	Frequency (n=222)	Percentage
Very Efficient	23	10.36%
Efficient	61	27.47%
Inefficient	94	42.34%
Very Inefficient	44	19.82%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the efficiency and organization of administrative structures within their local governments. From the data, a majority of respondents (42.34%) rated the administrative structures as inefficient, with 19.82% considering them very inefficient. Only 27.47% of respondents regarded the structures as efficient, and a smaller group, 10.36%, found them to be very efficient. These findings indicate that a significant number of respondents believe that the administrative structures in their local governments lack the necessary efficiency and organization, which may hinder effective service delivery and overall local governance performance.

Table 3: To what extent do you believe the available technical skills (e.g., knowledge of public administration, financial management, etc.) impact the quality of service delivery in your local government?

Options/Responses	Frequency (n=222)	Percentage
Very High Impact	35	15.84%
High Impact	78	35.14%
Low Impact	74	33.33%
No Impact	35	15.84%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the extent to which available technical skills impact the quality of service delivery in their local governments. The data reveals that a majority of respondents (35.14%) believe that technical skills have a high impact on service delivery quality, while 15.84% rated the impact as very high. However, a significant portion of respondents (33.33%) felt that technical skills had a low impact, and another 15.84% perceived no impact at all. These findings suggest that while some respondents recognize the importance of technical skills for improving service delivery, others feel that such skills are

either underutilized or insufficient in driving high-quality outcomes at the local government level.

Table 4: How strongly do you think institutional capacity (e.g., human resources, administrative structures, technical skills) affects the effectiveness of service delivery in your local government?

Options/Responses	Frequency (n=222)	Percentage
Very Strongly	41	18.47%
Strongly	92	41.44%
Weakly	61	27.47%
Not at all	28	12.61%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on how strongly institutional capacity affects the effectiveness of service delivery in their local governments. The data shows that a significant portion of respondents (41.44%) believe that institutional capacity strongly influences service delivery effectiveness, with 18.47% indicating that it affects service delivery very strongly. On the other hand, 27.47% of respondents believe that institutional capacity has a weak effect, and 12.61% feel that it has no effect at all. These results suggest that while a majority of respondents acknowledge the importance of institutional capacity in ensuring effective service delivery, a considerable number of respondents still perceive limitations in its influence on local governance outcomes.

Table 5: What do you consider to be the most significant challenge limiting the institutional performance of your local government?

Options/Responses	Frequency (n=222)	Percentage
Inadequate Funding	98	44.14%
Political Interference	60	27.03%
Lack of Skilled Personnel	42	18.92%
Poor Infrastructure	22	9.91%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the most significant challenge limiting institutional performance in their local governments. A majority of respondents (44.14%) identified inadequate funding as the primary constraint on institutional performance, followed by political interference, which was considered the challenge by 27.03% of respondents. The lack of skilled personnel was seen as a significant limitation by 18.92%, and 9.91% of respondents pointed to poor infrastructure as a major challenge. These results highlight the critical role that financial resources and political stability play in determining the capacity of local governments to function effectively, suggesting that addressing these challenges could significantly improve local government performance.

Table 6: Which of the following strategies would most likely improve institutional performance in your local government?

Options/Responses	Frequency (n=222)	Percentage
Increased Training and Capacity Building for Personnel	102	45.95%
Improved Financial Management and Resource Allocation	68	30.63%
Reduction of Political Interference	34	15.32%
Enhanced Infrastructure Development	18	8.11%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on strategies that would most likely improve institutional performance in their local governments. A majority of respondents (45.95%) believe that increased training and capacity building for personnel would be the most effective strategy for improving institutional performance. This is followed by improved financial management and resource allocation, which was identified by 30.63% of respondents. A smaller group, 15.32%, felt that reducing political interference would make a significant difference, while only 8.11% of respondents thought that enhanced infrastructure development would have the greatest impact. These findings suggest that the respondents place a high value on strengthening human resources through training and improving financial management to address the institutional performance challenges in their local governments.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The following summarizes the key findings:

- i. The study found that a significant portion of local government officials perceived the human resources available for service delivery as inadequate. A majority (39.19%) rated the human resources as inadequate, while 18.92% considered them very inadequate. This suggests that local governments face challenges in providing well-trained and sufficiently skilled personnel, which impacts their capacity to deliver quality services effectively.
- ii. The results revealed that the administrative structures within local governments were widely viewed as inefficient. A considerable number of respondents (42.34%) rated the structures as inefficient, with 19.82% categorizing them as very inefficient. Only 27.47% of respondents considered the administrative structures efficient, indicating that the organizational frameworks of many local governments are not optimized for effective service delivery, posing a barrier to improving local governance.
- iii. The study identified that the most significant challenge limiting institutional performance in local governments is inadequate funding, with 44.14% of respondents citing this as the primary issue. Political interference (27.03%) and the

lack of skilled personnel (18.92%) were also major challenges. To address these issues, the majority of respondents (45.95%) emphasized the need for increased training and capacity building for personnel, followed by improved financial management and resource allocation (30.63%) as the most effective strategies for enhancing local government performance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights significant challenges faced by Nigerian local governments in relation to institutional capacity and service delivery quality. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents perceive human resources and administrative structures as insufficiently equipped to meet the demands of effective service delivery. This lack of capacity is particularly evident in the inadequacies in training, personnel, and organizational frameworks, which hinder local governments' ability to provide high-quality services to their communities.

Moreover, the study underscores the critical role that institutional capacity plays in the effectiveness of service delivery. It is evident from the respondents' views that enhancing the technical skills of local government officials and improving administrative efficiency are crucial for improving public service outcomes. The identified challenges—particularly inadequate funding, political interference, and the shortage of skilled personnel—are significant barriers to institutional performance and need to be addressed in order to optimize local governance.

To overcome these challenges, respondents emphasized the importance of targeted strategies such as capacity building and improved financial management. The study calls for a comprehensive approach to strengthening local government institutions by investing in human resources, ensuring financial stability, and promoting autonomy from political influences. Only through addressing these core issues can local governments enhance their institutional capacity, ultimately leading to better service delivery and improved quality of life for Nigerian citizens at the grassroots level.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. To address the inadequacies in human resources, it is recommended that local governments prioritize continuous training and capacity-building programs for their staff. This should include specialized training in public administration, project management, financial management, and the use of modern technology to enhance the efficiency of service delivery. Investing in professional development will not only improve the skills of existing personnel but also build a more capable workforce capable of addressing the complex needs of local communities.
- ii. It is crucial for local governments to restructure and streamline their administrative frameworks to improve efficiency and reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies. This can be achieved by adopting clearer role definitions, improving inter-departmental coordination, and leveraging digital tools to enhance administrative processes. The establishment of performance monitoring systems and transparent reporting

mechanisms will also help in ensuring accountability and better service delivery outcomes.

- iii. Local governments should advocate for better funding allocations from higher levels of government and explore alternative revenue-generating mechanisms to ensure adequate financial resources for service delivery. In addition, there needs to be a concerted effort to reduce political interference in administrative functions. This can be achieved by ensuring the autonomy of local government institutions and strengthening governance frameworks that promote transparency, accountability, and a clear separation of powers between elected officials and administrative staff.

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