



Assessment of Local Government Autonomy and Infrastructural Development in Akwanga Local Government Area of Nasarawa State

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Abstract

Study was conducted to examine the effect of local government autonomy on infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government of Nasarawa State. The study focused on the relationship between fiscal autonomy, administrative autonomy, political autonomy, and infrastructural development. This study adopted the survey research design. The target population of this study comprised the residents of Akwanga Local Government while the sample size was 350 respondents selected using a questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. The results of this study revealed that fiscal autonomy, administrative autonomy, and political autonomy have a significant effect on infrastructural development. The result further showed that fiscal autonomy has a positive relationship with infrastructural development. This implies that fiscal autonomy bolsters financial independence which enhances proper execution of development projects. The study also revealed that administrative autonomy has a positive effect on infrastructural development. This suggests that administrative autonomy promotes efficient planning and operation of activities which ultimately leads to infrastructural development. Similarly, the result of this study revealed that political autonomy has a positive and significant effect on infrastructural development which implies that political autonomy reduces political dominance and promotes local government freedom hence effective infrastructural development. The regression result shows that fiscal, administrative and political autonomy jointly explain the variance of infrastructural development in the study area. The study recommends fiscal autonomy, administrative autonomy, reduction of political interference. The study therefore concludes that local government autonomy fosters grassroots development and effective public service delivery in the study area. Finally, the study adds to the existing literature on the effect of decentralisation policy on local government autonomy and infrastructural development.

Keywords: Local Government Autonomy, Fiscal Autonomy, Administrative Autonomy, Political Autonomy, Infrastructural Development.

1. Introduction

Local governments were established in Nigeria to speed up grassroots development by empowering them to take care of their own needs such as roads, primary healthcare centres, markets, drainage, potable water, sanitation, and other infrastructure and social services. The Nigerian Constitution mandates that local governments are charged with the responsibility of promoting socio-economic development in their areas, as well as improving the standard of living of the people (Okorie et al., 2023; Umenweke, 2024). Despite the constitutional provisions and regular Federation Account allocations to local governments, infrastructure development in most local government areas (LGAs) in Nigeria has been inadequate, uneven, and poorly maintained (Okorie et al., 2023; Umenweke, 2024). This inadequacy has been attributed to the lack of fiscal, administrative, and political autonomy for local governments to utilize their resources for development purposes (Oti & Otalor, 2024; Dance et al., 2024). Nigeria's state government has been interfering with the internal autonomy of the LGAs, thereby impeding their ability to finance and plan developmental projects (Okorie et al., 2023; Umenweke, 2024). The State-Local Government Joint Account stipulated in the 1999 Constitution (Section 162:6) has allowed the Nigerian states to exert excessive control over the LGAs (Ajisebiyawo & Ilawagbon, 2025). This has resulted in the states withholding, skimming, and manipulating the Federation Account shares allocated to LGAs on a yearly basis (Ajisebiyawo & Ilawagbon, 2025). Thus, LGAs have been unable to develop infrastructure due to insufficient funding from the Federation Account.

Consequently, many rural communities in Nigeria are still struggling with the absence of all-weather roads, potable water, primary healthcare centres, and other much-needed infrastructures. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), a large percentage of rural communities still lack some form of road access, potable water, primary healthcare centres, and other crucial services. The World Bank (2023) estimates that Nigeria requires an

investment of between 5 and 7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) over an extended period to bridge the identified infrastructure gap. The African Development Bank (2024) highlights that local infrastructural inadequacy has become a significant constraint to agricultural production, rural industrialization, employment, and poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa. It appears that despite heavy public spending on infrastructure in Nigeria, local governments (LGAs) are unable to contribute meaningfully to community development.

Nasarawa State LGAs are not an exception to the problem as most of them lack adequate road infrastructure, drainage, rural markets, primary healthcare organisations, potable water supply, and sanitation facilities. Akwanga Local Government is one of the thirteen LGAs in Nasarawa State that plays a strategic role in facilitating commercial activities in the North-Central region. The LGA borders the Federal Capital Territory and Plateau State, making it an important commercial and agricultural centre in the region. Therefore, it is surprising that Akwanga LGA is still facing infrastructural deficits such as lack of drainage and other drainage-related amenities, poor road access to communities, poor markets, deficient health services, and lack of potable water in some villages (Nasarawa State Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Adeoye et al., 2024).

The situation has worsened since the Supreme Court ruling in 2024, which gave LGAs constitutional and fiscal autonomy. It was expected that with more autonomy, LGAs would spend more from the Federation Account on local infrastructural developments (Okorie et al., 2023; Umenweke, 2024). However, there is still much to be done, especially in terms of local infrastructure, in Nasarawa State and Akwanga Local Government Area (LGA). Previous studies on local governments and LGAs in general, as well as in Nasarawa State and Akwanga LGA, specifically, have dwelled on the constitutional, fiscal, administrative autonomy, local government finances, and local government performance. Studies related to Akwanga Local Government were mostly published before the 2024 ruling on local government autonomy.

Thus, this study will further the understanding of local government autonomy and local infrastructure in general and also contribute to the existing literature related to local government autonomy in Akwanga, Nasarawa State.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, little is known about the impact of the 2024 autonomy ruling on local government development, in general, and infrastructure development in Akwanga LGA, in particular. Most of the earlier studies have emphasized the effect of local government autonomy on such aspects as service delivery, accountability, and rural development, among others. Local infrastructure development has not been studied in-depth in most of these works. Additionally, the researchers did not find any study that specifically tested the impact of fiscal, administrative, and political autonomy for Akwanga LGA. The researchers also found that most of the previous works used secondary data and were conducted before the 2024 ruling. There is, therefore, a need to carry out this study to establish the effect of the autonomy changes on local government infrastructure development with a focus on Nasarawa State, Akwanga LGA.

This study added to the existing body of knowledge on local government autonomy by establishing the relationship between local government autonomy and infrastructure development in Akwanga, Nasarawa State. The result of the findings aimed at providing evidence for the local government policymakers and administrators in Nasarawa State to consider more investment in local infrastructure development through greater autonomy.

1.1 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested:

H₀₁: Fiscal autonomy has no significant effect on infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

H₀₂: Administrative autonomy has no significant influence on infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

H₀₃: Political autonomy has no significant effect on infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1 Concept of Infrastructural Development

According to the African Development Bank (2024), infrastructural development means investing in physical assets that provide access to, promote, and enable economic activity, raise productivity, and reduce poverty. Infrastructure contributes to commercialization, trade, health, education, and private-sector investment, which in turn contribute to national economic growth and local development. Adeoye et al. (2024) define infrastructural development as the provision and maintenance of public goods and services conducive to raising living standards and promoting socio-economic activities. At the local level, infrastructural development includes the provision and maintenance of rural roads, drains, markets, primary healthcare centres, schools, water services, environmental sanitation, motor parks, street lighting, and recreational facilities.

According to the European Commission (2020), rural development means the improvement of employment opportunities and living conditions in rural areas through specific actions to promote innovation, renewable energy, and the sustainable use of natural resources. The European Commission emphasizes the significance of empowering local authorities and ensuring the role of regional governments in supporting rural development strategies, as well as the need for differentiated approaches to rural development in different regions. The UNDP (2020) considers rural development as a transformation process that raises agricultural productivity, develops infrastructure, and provides access to education, healthcare, and other

essential services, with a particular focus on diminishing the urban-rural development gap and promoting equitable development.

1.2.2 Concept of Local Government Autonomy

Local government autonomy is a democratic decentralization principle that demands self-governance, political, administrative and fiscal responsibilities to the local government agencies, ensuring them the rights to raise and spend money and to make decisions on their own and be free from the control and influence of the higher levels of government. It means that the local government councils have to take initiatives, make decisions, organize and manage their own personnel, finances, and development programs to satisfy their constituencies (Okorie et al., 2023; Umenweke, 2024).

The authors define local government autonomy in terms of fiscal, administrative, and political autonomy. The fiscal autonomy is the ability and right to get budget appropriations, raise internal revenues, and manage finances to achieve sustainable development. In turn, administrative autonomy determines the extent to which local government has control and authority over its personnel, organization, planning, and policy-making process. Finally, political autonomy means democracy and freedom from the control and interference of the state government (Ajisebiyawo & Ilawagbon, 2025; Dance et al., 2024).

1.2.3 Fiscal Autonomy

According to Okorie et al. (2023), fiscal autonomy is the ability of local governments to control their finances and determine how to spend the money they have at their disposal in the provision of public goods and services. This autonomy is crucial to decentralization as it provides the required flexibility in meeting local government needs. Ajisebiyawo and Ilawagbon (2025) add that fiscal autonomy means having the right to the sums due to the local government and the

freedom to use them without restrictions, together with effective financial management and the ability to raise additional revenues.

1.2.4 Administrative Autonomy

According to Oti and Otalor (2024), administrative autonomy fosters the effective performance of the functions of local government through the control of personnel administration, organization, method, and project planning. Administrative autonomy has been presented as a critical requirement that, when removed, creates a number of limitations and impediments to local government's ability to carry out its functions (Oti & Otalor, 2024). Administrative autonomy promotes effective planning, organization, and management of human resources, technical know-how, and monitoring of development projects in local government (Adeoye et al., 2024).

1.2.5 Political Autonomy

According to Umenweke (2024), political autonomy is a constitutional and democratic devolution principle that provides local governments with the freedom to carry out their functions as an independent level of government, rather than as an agency of the state. In other words, political autonomy ensures that local government officials are directly elected by and therefore answerable to the people they serve. Okorie et al. (2023) explain that local government autonomy promotes accountability, participation, and transparency in democracy and governance. Local councils with democratically elected members have a strong mandate to deliver on matters of local government and therefore respond more efficiently to the needs of the people because their mandates are contingent upon their ability to deliver on their governance mandate.

1.3 Empirical Review

Out, Ukpe and Udoh (2025) assessed the effect of local government administration on rural development in Eket Local Government Area. The survey design was adopted for the study, out of which the population of the study constituted the 220,600 indigenes of Eket Local Government Area. The sample size was 399 respondents selected from the population. The simple random sampling technique was adopted, where the questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The simple percentage method was used for analyzing the data, which involved using the Chi-Square procedure to test the three hypotheses proposed for the study. The study found that there is a positive contribution of local government administration to the rural development of Eket Local Government Area as demonstrated by its achievements in the infrastructural, educational and health sectors.

Mustapha (2025) researched the effect of local government autonomy on grassroots development in Nigeria. The study adopted a survey design, which involved both primary and secondary data collection procedures. Mustapha found that although the Nigerian local government system enjoys a certain degree of autonomy as provided by the constitution, such autonomy is however undermined by the state's dominance over the local government system through the state joint local government account, personnel management, and care taker committees. The findings of Mustapha demonstrate that the development stagnation experienced in Okene is partly attributed to the lack of autonomy of the local government resulting from the domination of the state over local government in personnel matters, finances, and political appointment of care taker committees. In addition, Mustapha showed that political and administrative dominance by the state over the local government has greatly affected the development of Okene.

Ogunnaike and Adeyemi (2021) studied the effect of local government autonomy on rural development in Nigeria. The study employed a survey design, using both primary and

secondary data sources. The study found that the level of autonomy enjoyed by local government councils in Nigeria is inversely related to the rate of rural development. The findings further revealed that the fiscal and administrative autonomy of the local government councils has a positive effect on rural development, but at the same time, the state government's intervention has a negative effect on local government autonomy. As a result, the study concluded that states with greater fiscal autonomy have been able to promote better rural development than those that have less fiscal autonomy.

Arowolo and Aluko (2021) investigated decentralization and local government service delivery in Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative research design, which involved a study of literature and the use of empirical evidence to demonstrate the issues raised regarding local government service delivery. Arowolo and Aluko found that decentralization does not promote local government service delivery due to the political and administrative dominance of the state over the local government system.

Agba, Akwara, and Idu (2022) assessed local government autonomy and infrastructural development in Nigeria. The study employed a survey design, involving the use of questionnaires to gather data from respondents for the study. The study found that financial autonomy enhances infrastructural development, while political interventions hinder infrastructural development. The authors conclude that ensuring financial autonomy in the local government will promote the provision of public goods and services such as roads, health services, and water.

Faguet (2022) examined decentralization and local governance in developing countries. The study assessed how decentralization affects public investment decisions and contributes to local government spending efficiency. Faguet found that decentralization helps local governments make better public investment decisions if the local level has the institutional capacity to do so.

Smoke (2023) evaluated fiscal decentralization and local development in the context of fiscal decentralization. The study found that fiscal decentralization promotes local development by enabling local governments to make decisions concerning expenditure, which, in turn, accelerates the achievement of local public goods and services. Smoke highlights that fiscal decentralization is key to promoting local development by ensuring local governments have the financial capacity to deliver public goods and services.

Okafor and Eze (2023) investigated the challenges of local government autonomy and grassroots development in selected councils in Nigeria. The study adopts a survey research design, which involved gathering facts, opinions, and issues raised to arrive at specific conclusions regarding the research questions and hypotheses proposed for the study. The findings reveal that the state's lack of fiscal autonomy, administrative inefficiency, and political interference hinder the local government's ability to provide infrastructure and services to promote grassroots development. The study further recommends that a need exists for constitutional reforms to provide autonomy in the fiscal, political, and administrative aspects.

On the other hand, Ibrahim and Yusuf (2024) assessed the effect of decentralization reforms on public infrastructure development in local government areas. Using a survey design and inferential statistics to analyze the data collected, the study found that decentralization reforms have had some impacts on public infrastructure development in the local government areas. The variables that affected public infrastructure development in the local government areas were fiscal autonomy, administrative capacity, and political accountability. The study further concluded that local governments with higher levels of decision-making authority have been able to achieve better results in terms of public infrastructure development.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

1.4.1 Development Administration Theory

Development Administration Theory grew out of studies of how to structure administrative systems to achieve planned socio-economic change, particularly in post-independence developing countries facing economic problems, poverty, and inequality. Prominent writers on developmental administration include Weidner (1995) and Kiggundu (1989), who argue that administrative agency, effectiveness, and resources are key aspects of development administration. Ndoh (2002) as cited in Udoh (2014) views development as a process that requires people, society, and their environment to work together to accomplish a higher level of well-being. Development administration theory focuses on the role of government in developmental planning and policy implementation and how leadership and public administration can promote development (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007; Haque, 1999). The perspective is concerned with enhancing people's voices in decision-making to foster participatory governance, wherein communities, stakeholders, and citizens can influence development matters according to their needs and interests (Gaventa, 2004; Mchombu, 2010). Development administration encourages boosting the capacity of agencies and local administrators to execute and evaluate developmental activities effectively (UNDP, 1997; Van der Molen, 2013). It prioritizes addressing the needs of each community considering their context and situation, thus focusing on community-oriented development (Elliott, 2012; McGann, 2014). My study examines how local government autonomy in finance, administration, and governance can enhance the power of local government to deliver on development outcomes. Therefore, the study uses the development administration theory to highlight the need for local governance reforms, including fiscal, political, and administrative autonomy, to improve infrastructure and services at the local government level.

1.5 Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design because it is appropriate for obtaining primary data. The target population comprised the residents of Akwanga Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. According to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006), Akwanga Local Government Area has a population of 113,430. Using the Taro Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula at a 5% level of precision, a sample size of 399 respondents was obtained for the study. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary instrument for data collection. A total of 399 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the selected respondents. Of these, 390 copies were successfully retrieved, representing a response rate of 97.7%. After careful screening for completeness and consistency, 350 questionnaires were found to be properly completed and suitable for analysis, representing an effective response rate of 89.7% of the retrieved questionnaires. The formulated hypotheses were tested using Multiple Linear Regression Analysis.

$$ID = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FA + \beta_2 AA + \beta_3 PA + \varepsilon$$

Where:

ID = Infrastructural Development

FA = Fiscal Autonomy

AA = Administrative Autonomy

PA = Political Autonomy

β_0 = Constant

$\beta_1 - \beta_3$ = Regression coefficients

ε = Error term

2. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs (N)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Fiscal Autonomy (FA)	350	3.549	1.121
Administrative Autonomy (AA)	350	3.417	1.290
Political Autonomy (PA)	350	3.443	1.278
Infrastructural Development (ID)	350	3.457	1.270

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 1 is the summary descriptive statistic of the variables used for the study with a total of 350 observations. From the table, Fiscal Autonomy (FA) has a mean score of 3.549 which implies that the respondents have moderately fiscal autonomy. Administrative Autonomy (AA) has a mean value of 3.417 which implies that the respondents have average administrative autonomy with varied perceptions. On the other hand, Political Autonomy (PA) has a mean score of 3.443 which suggests that the respondents perceived moderate political autonomy. Lastly, the mean score of Infrastructural Development (ID) is 3.457 which implies that the respondents perceived moderate level of infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government Area.

1.5.1 Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.853 ^a	.727	.725	.66587

a. Predictors: (Constant), Political Autonomy , Administrative Autonomy , Fiscal Autonomy

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

The findings of the model reveal that there is a significant relationship between the autonomy of local governments and the infrastructural development of Akwanga Local Government Area as revealed by the value of the correlation coefficient ($R = 0.853$). This finding implies that fiscal autonomy, administrative autonomy, and political autonomy explain 72.7% of the variations in the infrastructural development of Akwanga Local Government Area. This is proved by the fact that the value of R-square is 0.727, while that of the adjusted R-square is 0.725. Therefore, the analysis reveals that although fiscal autonomy, administrative autonomy, and political autonomy explain a significant portion of the variations in the infrastructural development of Akwanga Local Government Area, there are other variables that explain the remaining 27.3%. Also, the value of the standard error of estimate is 0.66587 which implies that the model has a small prediction error and therefore, a good fit.

Table 3: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	409.447	3	136.482	307.822	.000 ^b
Residual	153.410	346	.443		
Total	562.857	349			

a. Dependent Variable: Infrastructural Development

b. Predictors: (Constant), Political Autonomy , Administrative Autonomy , Fiscal Autonomy

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

The results of the ANOVA test indicate that the regression model is statistically significant at the P-value of $0.000 < 0.05$ that was obtained from the analysis of variance. This implies that infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government Area can be predicted using fiscal, administrative and political autonomy levels. The test results show that the regression sum of squares which is 409.447 is higher than the sum of squares of residuals of 153.410. This further

implies that fiscal, administrative, and political autonomie explain a significant percentage of variability in infrastructural development. As a result, the rejection of the null hypothesis which states that the three variables have no significant combined effect on infrastructural development is necessitated.

Table 4 Coefficients

Model	Unstand Coeff.		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.089	.119		.753	.452
Fiscal Autonomy	.398	.069	.352	5.796	.000
Administrative Autonomy	.272	.047	.276	5.791	.000
Political Autonomy	.298	.048	.300	6.271	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Infrastructural Development

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

The regression results in Table 5 below reveal that fiscal autonomy, administrative autonomy, and political autonomy have positive and significant relationships with infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government. Specifically, fiscal autonomy was found to have a positive and significant effect on infrastructural development in Akwanga with a coefficient of ($\beta = 0.352$), t-statistic of 5.796, and a significance level of 0.000. This outcome suggests that fiscal autonomy plays a critical role in promoting infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government Area. The results are in line with Oates (2021) and Smoke (2023) who argued that fiscal decentralisation fosters greater efficiency in the provision of public goods and services through the local government system. Similarly, administrative autonomy was revealed to have a positive and significant effect on infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government with a coefficient of ($\beta = 0.276$), t-statistics of ($t = 5.791$), and a significance level of ($p = 0.000$). The observation reveals that administrative autonomy fosters

infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government Area. The outcome coincides with the position of Faguet (2022) that administrative decentralisation fosters government responsiveness by transferring decision-making authority to a lower level, closer to the citizens. According to Arowolo and Aluko (2021), administrative autonomy is crucial for local government development because the administrative systems in Nigeria have been characterised by too many levels, which has impeded developmental efforts.

Finally, the analysis reveals that political autonomy has a positive and significant effect on infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government with a coefficient of ($\beta = 0.300$), t-statistics of ($t = 6.271$), and a significance level of ($p = 0.000$). The result suggests that political autonomy fosters infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government. In a similar vein, Ribot (2021) posits that decentralisation promotes political accountability, which ultimately fosters better performance and responsiveness in the delivery of public goods and services. In addition, Agba, Akwara, and Idu (2022) reveal that political autonomy is often compromised in Nigeria, which has adversely affected the ability of local governments to execute their mandates efficiently.

Fiscal autonomy recorded the highest standardised effect size at ($\beta = 0.352$), followed by political autonomy at ($\beta = 0.300$), and administrative autonomy at ($\beta = 0.276$). This result suggests that fiscal autonomy is the most critical type of autonomy for infrastructural development, followed by political autonomy and administrative autonomy. Overall, the results suggest that the three types of autonomy are critical for infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government. The findings are an indication that local government autonomy fosters infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government Area. The outcome supports the position of decentralisation theorists that decentralisation fosters efficiency in the delivery of public goods and services (Oates, 2021; Smoke, 2023). As such, the study rejects

the null hypothesis that fiscal autonomy, administrative autonomy, and political autonomy have no significant effect on infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government.

1.6 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study set out to establish the effect of local government autonomy on infrastructural development in Akwanga Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. The study focused on fiscal autonomy, administrative autonomy and political autonomy. The results of the study revealed that the three forms of autonomy have an impact on infrastructural development. The higher the level of autonomy the higher the rate of infrastructural development. The study finally concluded that lack of autonomy is a great constraint to local government autonomy in Nigeria. Giving autonomy to local government agencies in Nigeria will foster accountability and good governance as well as promote infrastructural development in the rural areas.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

The government should put in place measures to increase the financial autonomy of local government councils. This can be done by ensuring adequate appropriation from the state, improving internally generated revenues by the councils and giving the councils more control over the finances.

Administrative autonomy should be enhanced by giving the councils more power over administration of their staff and processes.

Political autonomy should be enhanced by ensuring free and fair elections of local government councils without political pressure.

As the government increases the autonomy of local government councils it should also ensure proper checks and balances to prevent misuse of the powers by the local government councils especially with respect to monies appropriated for infrastructural development in the area.

There should be a constant training of the council workers and elected members on aspects of financial handling, project appraisal, procurement and other related matters.

Local government councils should involve the people in the process of laying foundation of a project, supervising the project and evaluating the completed projects. This will ensure that the projects that are useful to the people are carried out and also make people development agents of the government.

The relevant authority should make efforts to ensure that the autonomy of the local government councils is improved upon to enable infrastructural development take place in Nigeria.

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