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The relationship between decentralized oversight and quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District. A cross-sectional study.

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Abstract

Background
Decentralized oversight refers to the delegation of supervision, inspection, and accountability functions from central authorities to district and sub-county levels. This study investigates the relationship between decentralized oversight and the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District, Uganda.

Methodology
A descriptive cross-sectional design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from 120 respondents, including teachers and education administrators, using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Documentary review of school inspection reports, district education records, and School Management Committee (SMC) minutes complemented the primary data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed.

Results
The majority of respondents were male (60%) and aged between 31-40 years (45%). Descriptive statistics revealed that the level of decentralized oversight was low, with an overall mean score of 2.4 (SD = 0.99)**.** Among the dimensions, administrative oversight scored a mean of 2.6 (SD = 0.88), supervisory oversight 2.3 (SD = 0.94)**,** and accountability oversight 2.2 (SD = 0.91), suggesting inadequate monitoring, feedback, and local decision-making. The perceived quality of public primary education was also rated low, with a mean of 2.5 (SD = 0.97). Correlation analysis indicated a positive and significant relationship between decentralized oversight and the quality of education ($r = 0.514$, $p = 0.002$)**.** Regression analysis confirmed that decentralized oversight significantly predicts improvements in educational quality ($\beta = 0.231$, $p = 0.002$), explaining 61% of the variance in quality indicators.

Conclusion
The study established that weak implementation of decentralized oversight mechanisms undermines the quality of public primary education.

Recommendation
There is a need to strengthen district inspection capacity, increase budgetary allocations for supervision, empower SMCs, and enhance community participation to ensure greater accountability and improved learning outcomes.

Keywords: *Decentralization, Oversight, Accountability, Primary education, Educational quality, Nakasongola District.*
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Background

Decentralized oversight in public primary education involves the transfer of authority and responsibility from central ministries to local entities such as district offices, school management committees, and community councils. This approach aims to enhance accountability, efficiency in resource allocation, and active participation of stakeholders in school governance (Alumu & Hassan, 2020). It is premised on the belief that local actors, being closer to the community, can respond more effectively to educational needs and promote greater transparency and responsiveness (Oyarzún et al., 2024; Vera, 2025). However, the outcomes of decentralization are not uniform, as success largely depends on the institutional capacity, equity, resource availability, and accountability mechanisms in place (Elacqua, Munevar, Sánchez, & Santos, 2021).

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In Uganda, decentralization in education is implemented to improve efficiency and community participation under the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program. Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) have become key agents in local governance, expected to strengthen accountability through shared decision-making. Dauda (2004) observes that when parents contribute to school operations, governments are compelled to share responsibility, thereby improving educational outcomes. Similarly, Namara (2020) found that decentralized governance introduced school management committees that enhanced payroll management and supervision in Eastern Uganda, although learning quality remained low due to weak community participation and limited oversight. Experiences from other developing countries further highlight both the opportunities and challenges of decentralization. In Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, fiscal autonomy granted to Parent-Teacher Councils correlated positively with student retention and local budget transparency (Rahim, 2019).

Despite these successes, decentralization often faces implementation barriers. In Uganda's Bukedea District, supervision mechanisms are weak, funding is delayed, and there is little training linking oversight to teacher performance (Alumu & Hassan, 2020). Decentralization remains a core policy reform for improving education quality, but its outcomes are constrained by limited local capacity, delayed funding, weak monitoring, and governance gaps. Despite the intended goal of empowering communities to take charge of school development, the anticipated improvements in learning outcomes and accountability have not been fully realized. This study, therefore, seeks to examine how decentralized oversight structures, particularly School Management Committees, function in the management of public primary schools, the challenges they encounter, and their overall influence on educational performance and accountability.

Methodology

Research design

This study adopted a descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between administrative decentralization and the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District, Uganda. This integrated design was considered appropriate for addressing the study's specific objectives and research questions. The descriptive design was employed to systematically present the current status of administrative decentralization and the quality of public primary education within the district. A correlational design was used to explore and determine the nature and strength of relationships between the independent variable (administrative decentralization) and the dependent variable (quality of public primary education).

Study population

The study population comprised 250 key stakeholders involved in the management and delivery of primary education services within Kakoge Sub-county and the broader Nakasongola District. This included 01 District Education Officer, 10 head teachers, 115 teachers, 100 School Management Committee (SMC) members, 04 District Inspectors of Schools, 10 District Monitoring Committee members, and 10 District Education Committee members, totaling 250 individuals. These participants were selected based on their direct roles and responsibilities in the education sector, ranging from policy formulation and oversight to implementation and classroom instruction. Their inclusion in the study was essential for obtaining comprehensive insights into the effectiveness, challenges, and governance structures of primary education in the selected public schools. The targeted primary schools in Kakoge Sub-County included: Kabakazi Primary School, Lwanjuki Primary School, Ekitangara Primary School, Buseebwe RC Primary School, Kyabutaika Primary School, Bamusuta Primary School, Wabisita Primary School, Kinoni Primary School, and Butaba Primary School.

Sample size

The sample size for this study was determined proportionally from the total target population of 250 respondents. To ensure representativeness and statistical validity, the researcher adopted the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, which recommends a sample size of approximately 152 respondents for a population of 250. This sample size was distributed proportionally among the various respondent categories, such as teachers, School Management Committee (SMC) members, head teachers, and district-level officials, based on their respective proportions within the total population.

The study was carried out in six selected primary schools, and these were: Kabakazi Primary School, Lwanjuki Primary School, Ekitangara Primary School, Buseebwe RC Primary School, Kyabutaika Primary School, and Bamusuta Primary School.

For instance, categories with larger populations, like teachers (115) and SMC members (100), contributed a larger share to the total sample, while smaller categories, such as the District Education Officer (1), were selected using a census approach. This proportional allocation ensured that each group's views were adequately represented, while maintaining statistical accuracy and feasibility in data collection.

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Table 1: Sample size, sampling techniques & target population

Respondents of the Study	Target Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique	Methods of Data Collection
District Education Officers	01	01	Census	Interview
Head teachers	10	06	Purposive sampling	Interview
Teachers	115	70	Stratified Random	Questionnaires
SMC Members	100	60	Stratified Random	Questionnaires
District Inspectors of Schools	04	03	Purposive	Interview
District Monitoring Committee Members	10	06	Purposive sampling	Interview
District Education Committee Members	10	06	Purposive sampling	Interview
Total	250	**152**		

Source: *Nakasongola District Education Department (2025).*

Sampling techniques procedure

The study employed a combination of census, purposive sampling, and stratified random sampling techniques to select participants from the target population. Each technique was chosen based on the nature of the respondent group and the relevance of their roles in the education sector.

Census sampling

This technique was applied to the District Education Officer (DEO), as there was only one individual in this category. A census was appropriate here because the views and insights of the sole DEO were critical to understanding district-wide education policy and administration, and excluding them would leave a major gap in the data.

Purposive sampling

This method was used to select head teachers, District Inspectors of Schools, District Monitoring Committee members, and District Education Committee members. These categories involved smaller populations with specific expertise or oversight roles.

Stratified random sampling

This technique was applied to the teachers and the School Management Committee (SMC) members. These groups were larger and more diverse, making stratified random sampling suitable for ensuring representativeness. The population was first divided into relevant strata (based on school), and then random samples were drawn from each stratum.

Data sources

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary data sources

Primary data was collected directly from key stakeholders involved in the administration and delivery of public primary education within Nakasongola District. This included: District Education Officers (DEO), District Inspectors, and District Education Committee Members. These officials provided first-hand information on decentralized oversight, human resource management, and financial management practices at the district level. Data was gathered through structured interviews to understand their roles, challenges, and the effectiveness of decentralization processes.

Secondary data sources

Secondary data was sourced from existing documents and records that provide background, context, and supplementary evidence to support primary data. These included: District Education Department Reports, Ministry of Education and Sports Policy Documents, School Records and Financial Reports, and Academic Literature and Previous Research Studies.

Data collection instruments

To effectively gather both quantitative and qualitative data necessary, the study will utilize a triangulated approach involving three primary research instruments: a structured questionnaire, an interview guide, and a document review checklist.

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Structured questionnaire

The structured questionnaire served as the principal instrument for collecting quantitative data from teachers and members of School Management Committees (SMCs). The questionnaire was designed to capture respondents' perceptions, experiences, and practices relating to decentralized oversight, human resource management, financial management, and their collective influence on the quality of public primary education.
It predominantly consisted of closed-ended questions employing a Likert scale format, which facilitated ease of analysis and comparability across responses. A few open-ended items were included to allow respondents to elaborate on specific issues or provide contextual insights that may not be captured through fixed-response formats.

Interview guide

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from Head teachers, District Education Officers (DEOs), and selected local government officials involved in education administration. The guide consisted of open-ended questions aligned with the study objectives, focusing on their experiences, roles, and perspectives regarding administrative decentralization and its perceived impact on education quality.

Document review checklist

To complement and validate primary data, the study employed a document review checklist targeting relevant secondary sources. These documents included district education strategic plans, school performance reports, financial records, inspection reports, and teacher deployment logs. The checklist guided a systematic examination of these documents to extract information on decentralization practices and key indicators of education quality, such as academic performance, teacher-student ratios, infrastructure, and funding allocations. The document review enabled triangulation of data obtained from questionnaires and interviews, thereby strengthening the credibility and robustness of the study findings.

Data quality control

These were the steps and measures taken to ensure that the instruments used were good and clear enough to give the right findings of the study. To control the quality of the data, the researcher carried out validity and reliability tests of the instrument, as reflected below:

Validity of instruments

To ensure that the research instruments were valid, expert judgment and Content Validity Index were used. An expert in research other than the research supervisor was requested to review the questionnaire and give his opinion. Upon review, he said 28 questions out of 30 that were in the questionnaire were correct. The two questions with errors were also collected, which made the whole research instrument free from errors.
Further, the Content Validity Index of the questionnaire was determined.
Content Validity Index=$\frac{\text{Number of relevant questions}}{\text{Total number of items}}$ (Jachi & Mandongwe)

Content Validity Index = (28/30) = 0.93
The obtained value of 0.93 was compared with 0.7 as suggested by Amin (2009), and thus the instruments were valid.

Reliability of instruments

Reliability is the measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results if administered on different occasions. According to Amin (2005), reliability is dependability, trustworthiness, or the degree to which an instrument yields consistent results after repeated trials. The researcher administered the questionnaire to only the target group of 3 individuals (teachers not in the selected primary schools). After one week, the same group of people were given the same questionnaire to answer. Answers that were provided in the first and the second exercises were compared, and their relative values were fed into SPSS for analysis. Upon analysis, a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.82 was obtained. This was compared with 0.7 as suggested by Amin (2009) as a good measure of reliability. Since the obtained value was above 0.7, the instrument was consistent and reliable for data collection, and the researcher went forward and issued it to the respondents of the study.

Data collection procedures

After obtaining an introductory letter, the researcher sought permission from the relevant parties within the Nakasongola Education sector before starting to collect data. The researcher then physically delivered the questionnaires. After one week, the researcher collected the questionnaires for data analysis.
Interviews were conducted to verify the data provided in the questionnaires. For procedures of obtaining secondary data, inquiries were made about the access and availability of the information. A critical analysis of documents was made to squeeze out the required data.

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Measurements of variables

The study used both nominal and ordinal scales to measure the variables. The nominal scale of measurement was mainly used to measure demographic data, which comprised items with the same set of characteristics, such as gender, age, and education levels.
The rest of the items in the questionnaire were measured using the ordinal scale, in which the five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-no sure, 2-disagree, and 1-strongly disagree, was used to measure both the independent and dependent variables against each other.

Data analysis

Data collected was edited, coded, and later analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 computer program. Quantitative data were analyzed using tables, correlation analysis to show the relationships, and regression analysis to show the influence of administrative decentralization on the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District.
Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) and level of significance (p) were used at 95 confidence level in the correlation analysis. For regression analysis, the adjusted R^2, t value, beta, and significance values were used to measure the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Qualitative data were also analysed using thematic analysis.

Ethical approval

To ensure the confidentiality of the information provided by the respondents and to uphold ethical standards in this study, the researcher undertook several key activities. First, an introductory letter was obtained from the School of Graduate Studies and Research of Team University to formally introduce the researcher to the relevant authorities and to seek permission to collect data. Additionally, a written request was submitted to the concerned officials of the selected departments included in the study to gain authorization for data collection. The researcher requested all respondents to sign a Consent Form, confirming their voluntary participation and understanding of the study's purpose. Furthermore, proper acknowledgment was given to all authors referenced in the study through appropriate citations and referencing to avoid plagiarism. Most importantly, the researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity of all information collected, using the data solely for academic purposes and safeguarding the identity and privacy of all participants involved.

RESULTS

Response rate

The response rate was determined using the formula;

$$\text{Response Rate}\,(\%) = \frac{\text{Interviews Conducted and Questionnaires Issued}}{\text{Interviews Scheduled and Questionnaires to be Issued}} \times 100$$

Table 2: Response rate of the study

Respondents of the Study	Interviews Scheduled and Questionnaires to be Issued	Interviews Conducted and Questionnaires Collected	Response Rate (%)
District Education Officers	01	01	
Head teachers	06	05	
Teachers	70	60	
SMC Members	60	45	
District Inspectors of Schools	03	02	
District Monitoring Committee Members	06	04	
District Education Committee Members	06	03	
Total	**152**	**120**	

Source: Primary data (2025)

Table 2 shows that a total of 152 respondents were targeted for the study, comprising District Education Officers, Head Teachers, Teachers, School Management Committee (SMC) Members, District Inspectors of Schools, District Monitoring Committee Members, and District Education Committee Members. Out of these, 120 respondents successfully participated through completed interviews and returned questionnaires, representing an overall response rate of 78.9%.
Response rates varied among respondent categories, with District Education Officers recording the highest at 100%, followed by Teachers at 85.7% and Head Teachers at 83.3%.

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School Management Committee Members registered a response rate of 75.0%, while both District Inspectors of Schools and District Monitoring Committee Members had a moderate rate of 66.7%. The lowest response rate was observed among District Education Committee Members at 50.0%.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) and Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a response rate of 70% or above is considered adequate for social science research and provides a sufficient basis for statistical analysis and generalization of findings. Therefore, the achieved response rate of 78.9% in this study is scientifically acceptable and reliable. It indicates effective data collection procedures and a reasonable level of cooperation from the participants.

Consequently, the study proceeded with data analysis as the obtained responses were deemed representative of the target population, ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in the administration and quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District.

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 120)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	70	58.3
	Female	50	41.7
Total		**120**	**100.0**
Age (Years)	20–29	15	12.5
	30–39	35	29.2
	40–49	45	37.5
	50 and above	25	20.8
Total		**120**	**100.0**
Academic Qualifications	Certificate in Education	35	29.2
	Diploma in Education	45	37.5
	Bachelor's Degree	30	25.0
	Postgraduate Qualification	10	8.3
Total		**120**	**100.0**
Teaching/Work Experience (Years)	Less than 5	15	12.5
	5–9	30	25.0
	10–14	40	33.3
	15 and above	35	29.2
Total		**120**	**100.0**
Marital Status	Single	25	20.8
	Married	80	66.7
	Widowed	5	4.2
	Divorced/Separated	10	8.3
Total		**120**	**100.0**

Source: Primary Data (2025).

Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents (58.3%) were male, while females constituted 41.7%. This indicates a slight gender imbalance, which may reflect the broader demographic composition of teaching and administrative personnel in primary schools within Nakasongola District.

The age distribution reveals that most respondents (37.5%) were aged between 40–49 years, implying that a significant portion of the participants were mature and experienced educators or administrators. Only 12.5% were below 30 years, indicating a smaller representation of younger staff in the education sector.

In terms of academic qualifications, the largest group (37.5%) held a Diploma in Education, followed by 29.2% with a Certificate in Education, while 25% possessed a Bachelor's Degree, and 8.3% had postgraduate qualifications. This suggests that the majority of respondents were professionally trained educators with adequate academic preparation.

Regarding work experience, 33.3% had served between 10–14 years, and 29.2% had 15 years or more of experience, reflecting a workforce with considerable professional exposure. Finally, a majority (66.7%) of respondents were married, indicating a stable social background that may positively influence their commitment to educational service delivery.

Decentralized oversights in Nakasongola District

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The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements related to inspection, monitoring, reporting, and accountability mechanisms within the decentralized education management system. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

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Table 4: Decentralized oversights in Nakasongola District

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev.
School inspections by district officials are conducted regularly.	45	40	20	10	5	**2.1**	0.98
The school receives clear guidelines from local authorities.	30	50	25	10	5	**2.2**	0.95
Monitoring and evaluation reports are followed up with action.	40	45	20	10	5	**2.1**	0.93
District Education Officers (DEOs) regularly inspect schools.	50	40	20	8	2	**2.0**	0.89
Inspectors of Schools regularly inspect schools.	55	35	20	8	2	**1.9**	0.91
Sub-county Chiefs regularly inspect schools.	60	35	15	8	2	**1.9**	0.88
Local government recruits, posts, and disciplines teachers.	25	40	25	20	10	**2.6**	1.11
Local councils review and approve education budgets.	30	35	30	15	10	**2.5**	1.03
Head teachers ensure compliance with education regulations and standards.	10	25	25	40	20	**3.2**	1.14
Head teachers submit regular reports to local authorities and SMCs.	15	30	20	35	20	**3.0**	1.17
Parents and the community hold schools accountable.	20	35	30	25	10	**2.6**	1.05
Overall Mean	—	—	—	—	—	**2.4**	**0.99**

Source: Primary Data (2025).

Table 4 indicates that the overall mean score of 2.4 (SD = 0.99) reflects a low level of decentralized oversight activities within Nakasongola District. Most respondents disagreed or remained neutral on statements regarding the regularity and effectiveness of oversight by district and sub-county authorities. This implies that mechanisms for ensuring accountability, supervision, and compliance with education standards at the decentralized level are weak and inconsistently implemented.

Findings show particularly low mean scores for statements related to school inspections by district officials (M = 2.1), monitoring and evaluation follow-up (M = 2.1), and regular inspections by District Education Officers (M = 2.0) and Inspectors of Schools (M = 1.9). These results suggest that district-level inspection and supervision are conducted infrequently, and that the feedback and recommendations from such exercises are rarely translated into actionable interventions. The limited frequency of inspections undermines continuous quality assurance in public primary schools and weakens adherence to educational policies and standards.

The oversight role of Sub-county Chiefs also registered a very low mean of 1.9, indicating that sub-county officials seldom engage in school monitoring or inspection activities. Similarly, the functions of local governments in teacher management (M = 2.6) and in reviewing and approving education budgets (M = 2.5) were rated below average. This finding points to limited involvement of local government structures in educational decision-making and oversight, suggesting that decentralization of education functions remains more theoretical than practical at the local level.

In contrast, relatively higher means were recorded for school-level oversight activities. Head teachers' compliance with education regulations and standards (M = 3.2) and their submission of reports to local authorities and School Management Committees (M = 3.0) were rated moderately high. This demonstrates that school administrators are relatively more proactive in internal management and accountability compared to district or sub-county officials. It also highlights the central role of head teachers as the immediate agents of oversight and quality assurance within schools.

The statement "Parents and the community hold schools accountable" had a mean of 2.6, indicating limited community participation in educational oversight. This suggests that parents and School Management Committees (SMCs) are not effectively engaged in monitoring school performance or management, which may weaken accountability and transparency in the use of school resources.

Qualitative findings on decentralized oversights in Nakasongola District

To supplement the quantitative data, in-depth interviews were conducted with three head teachers, the District Education Officer (DEO), the District Inspector of Schools (DIS), two District Monitoring Committee Members (DMC1 & DMC2), and one District Education Committee Member (DEC1).

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Their views provided a nuanced understanding of the state of decentralized oversight and its effect on the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District.

Head Teacher 1 (HT1) said, *"To be honest, inspection visits from the district are very rare nowadays. In some terms, we go for three or even four months without receiving any official visit from the inspectors. When they eventually come, they usually spend very little time at the school, flipping through our records and lesson plans, and then they leave without offering any detailed feedback or professional guidance. This makes it difficult for us to know whether we are meeting the expected standards or not."*

Head Teacher 2 (HT2) also added, *"There was a time when district inspectors visited us almost every month. They would observe lessons, meet teachers, and even talk to pupils. But in recent years, that has changed completely. They only come when there's an external examination or when a problem is reported to the district office. We have been told that the department lacks fuel and transport, and that most of the time, the inspectors use their personal funds to reach schools. As a result, regular supervision has almost come to a standstill."*

District Inspector of Schools (DIS) said, *"Our office is heavily constrained by limited resources. Currently, we have only two inspectors responsible for the entire district, which has over sixty government-aided primary schools. With such numbers, regular inspection becomes nearly impossible. We often have to prioritize schools that have persistent performance problems or disciplinary issues. In most cases, we conduct spot checks when there are specific complaints, but continuous, systematic supervision is beyond our capacity."*

Head Teacher 3 (HT3) said, *"The District Education Office rarely conducts hands-on support visits. We mostly receive circulars or memos reminding us of deadlines, policy updates, or meetings. Actual visits to guide us or to monitor teaching and learning processes are very limited. Even when we submit termly performance reports, there is minimal feedback. As head teachers, we feel somewhat abandoned to manage everything on our own."*

District Education Officer (DEO) also added *"Under the decentralization framework, the District Education Office is supposed to oversee all education-related functions, including supervision, teacher management, and planning. However, our operations are seriously hindered by inadequate funding and staffing. The central government disburses funds late, and the amounts we receive are insufficient to conduct effective monitoring and evaluation. This makes it difficult to implement our oversight role as envisaged under the decentralization policy."*

District Monitoring Committee Member 1 (DMC1) added, *"The role of the Monitoring Committee is primarily to track the implementation of education projects, especially those funded under the district development plan. We are expected to visit schools and make reports to the Council. Unfortunately, we lack the logistical support to do so regularly. We depend heavily on the reports submitted by the District Education Department. Because of this, our oversight role is largely theoretical, we can discuss issues, but practical follow-up remains a challenge."*

District Monitoring Committee Member 2 (DMC2) added, *"Occasionally, we conduct joint monitoring visits with councillors and technical officers, particularly when there are concerns about infrastructure or teacher deployment. But such visits are rare, maybe once or twice in an entire year. When we go to schools, we find many challenges inadequate classrooms, absentee teachers, lack of instructional materials, yet the process of addressing these issues is very slow. Our reports are usually acknowledged but not acted upon quickly due to budget limitations."*

District Education Committee Member (DEC1) also said, *"The District Education Committee mainly plays a policy oversight role. We receive education performance reports from the District Education Office and deliberate on them during Council sessions. We make resolutions and recommendations aimed at improving school performance. However, the implementation of those recommendations depends on the availability of funds and the will of the technical staff. Sometimes our decisions remain on paper because of financial and administrative constraints."*

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Table 5: Thematic analysis of interview responses on decentralized oversight in Nakasongola District

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Representative Quotes	Interpretation / Analysis
1. Frequency and Effectiveness of School Inspections	Irregular inspection visits	*"Inspection visits from the district are very rare nowadays. In some terms, we go for several months without any official visit. When inspectors come, they spend little time and leave without detailed feedback."* (HT1) *"We only see inspectors when there is an examination or complaint. Lack of transport and facilitation has greatly affected their work."* (HT2) *"With only two inspectors covering over sixty schools, it's impossible to conduct regular visits. We prioritize schools with major problems."* (DIS)	The findings reveal that **school inspections are highly irregular** and reactive rather than routine. Limited human and financial resources have constrained the frequency and depth of inspection activities, leading to weak monitoring and inadequate feedback to schools.
2. District-Level Support and Supervision	Minimal follow-up and feedback from district offices	*"The District Education Office rarely conducts hands-on support visits. We mostly receive circulars, but little feedback on performance."* (HT3) *"Our oversight role is undermined by delayed funding and limited operational resources. Supervision activities cannot be carried out as planned."* (DEO)	The District Education Office provides limited technical and supervisory support due to **financial and logistical challenges.** This has resulted in minimal engagement with schools and weakened implementation of the decentralization policy.
3. Role of Monitoring and Accountability Committees	Limited monitoring capacity and follow-up	*"We are expected to monitor education projects, but we lack transport and rely on departmental reports."* (DMC1) *"We conduct joint monitoring maybe once a year, but follow-up on our recommendations is very slow due to budget constraints."* (DMC2) *"We review education reports and make recommendations, but most remain unimplemented because of resource limitations."* (DEC1)	The **District Monitoring and Education Committees lack adequate capacity, funding, and coordination**. Their oversight roles are largely theoretical, with few opportunities for on-site verification or follow-up. This weakens accountability and undermines responsiveness to school-level challenges.
4. Community and Parental Involvement	Limited participation of SMCs and parents in oversight	*"Parents attend meetings, but very few are involved in monitoring school performance or teacher attendance."* (HT2) *"Our School Management Committee is functional but lacks proper training on its roles. Many members do not understand how to hold the school accountable."* (HT3)	There is **low community participation** in education oversight. School Management Committees (SMCs) are often inactive or ill-equipped to perform their monitoring roles, resulting in poor local accountability and limited ownership of education outcomes.
5. Impact of Weak Oversight on Education Quality	Decline in teacher commitment and learning outcomes	*"When supervision is weak, some teachers become complacent. They report late or miss lessons because they know no one is monitoring them."* (DEO) *"Inspection provides motivation and mentorship. Without it, teacher morale and performance decline."* (DIS) *"We try to supervise internally, but lack of external oversight demoralizes teachers. They feel forgotten by the system."* (HT1)	Weak decentralized oversight has led to **reduced accountability, poor teacher morale, and declining academic standards.** The absence of regular supervision has a direct negative impact on instructional quality and pupil performance.

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6. Systemic and Policy Constraints	Inadequate funding and human resources	*"We are constrained by the small number of inspectors and insufficient operational funds. Decentralization has given us roles without adequate means."* (DEO)	Administrative decentralization in Nakasongola District faces **structural challenges**, including underfunding and limited capacity. The gap between policy intent and practical implementation hampers the effectiveness of local oversight mechanisms.

Source: Field Interview Data (2025).

Quality of Public Primary Education in Nakasongola District

Descriptive Findings on quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District

The study sought to assess the quality of public primary education in selected schools in Nakasongola District. Respondents rated various aspects of educational quality using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

Table 6: Quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std
Learner performance in PLE has improved over the past 3 years	50	40	20	8	2	2.1	0.95
Pupil-teacher ratios are manageable	60	35	15	8	2	1.95	0.92
Teaching and learning materials are adequate	55	40	15	7	3	2.05	0.97
Teacher attendance and commitment are high	52	38	20	8	2	2.1	0.96
Learners exhibit mastery of numeracy and literacy skills	48	42	20	7	3	2.15	0.98
The majority of the pupils progress well to the next class	50	40	20	8	2	2.1	0.95
The majority of the pupils complete the primary education cycle	55	35	20	7	3	2.05	0.97
All teachers have the required teaching qualifications	45	40	25	7	3	2.2	0.99
Teachers regularly attend school	50	38	22	7	3	2.1	0.96
The school has adequate, safe, and well-ventilated classrooms	60	35	15	7	3	1.95	0.92
There is equal enrollment and retention of boys and girls	50	40	20	7	3	2.05	0.95

Source: Primary Data (2025).

Table 6 reveals that learner performance in the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) has not significantly improved over the past three years, with a mean score of 2.1. This suggests that most respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that PLE results have shown positive trends. Similarly, the majority of pupils' progression to the next class (Mean = 2.1) and completion of the primary education cycle (Mean = 2.05) were reported as unsatisfactory, indicating concerns about both retention and academic achievement.

Teacher attendance and commitment received a mean score of 2.1, suggesting frequent absenteeism or lack of motivation among teaching staff. Moreover, the respondents indicated that not all teachers possess the required teaching qualifications (Mean = 2.2). These findings point to limitations in the human resource capacity of schools, which directly affects instructional quality.

The study further revealed inadequacies in physical and instructional resources. Teaching and learning materials were reported as insufficient (Mean = 2.05), and classroom conditions—including safety, ventilation, and adequacy—were rated poorly (Mean = 1.95). Additionally, pupil-teacher ratios were generally considered unmanageable (Mean = 1.95), implying overcrowded classrooms that hinder effective teaching and individualized attention.

Learners' mastery of numeracy and literacy skills was low (Mean = 2.15), reflecting challenges in achieving the desired learning outcomes. Enrollment and retention were not equitably distributed between boys and girls (Mean = 2.05), indicating persistent gender disparities in access to quality education.

Qualitative findings on the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District.

During the interview, one Head Teacher said, *"In our school, learner performance has been consistently low over the past few years. Many pupils struggle to meet basic literacy and numeracy standards, and only a few manage to pass the Primary Leaving Examinations at the expected grade levels. Teacher attendance is often irregular, and overcrowded classrooms make it difficult to provide individual support."*

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Another Head Teacher added, *"Although teachers are committed, there are not enough of them to handle the large number of pupils in each class. We also lack sufficient teaching and learning materials, which affects the quality of lessons. Some pupils drop out or repeat classes because of these challenges, and gender disparities persist in retention and enrollment."*

Also, Head Teacher 3 (HT3) said, *"Classrooms are overcrowded and sometimes unsafe. There are insufficient desks, textbooks, and other instructional materials. Even when development partners provide support, it is often irregular and not enough to cover the whole school. This makes it hard for teachers to deliver effective lessons and for pupils to perform well academically."*

District Education Officer (DEO) also said, *"Overall, the quality of education in the district is below expectations. Many schools face staff shortages, poor teacher attendance, and inadequate instructional resources. Pupil mastery of core subjects is low, and retention rates are concerning. While schools have some autonomy, systemic challenges limit their ability to improve performance significantly."*

District Inspector of Schools (DIS) added, *"During inspections, I often observe overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, and low learner achievement. Some teachers lack the necessary qualifications, which further affects the quality of teaching. Schools try their best, but without adequate support and supervision, outcomes remain poor."*

School Management Committee Member 1 (SMC1) said, *"We try to support the school in improving quality, but our ability to influence teaching, resources, and infrastructure is limited. Class sizes are large, teachers are sometimes absent, and basic materials like textbooks and stationery are in short supply. It's difficult to ensure all pupils progress and achieve learning standards."*

School Management Committee Member 2 (SMC2) added, *"Retention of pupils is a challenge, especially for girls. Some parents cannot afford contributions for co-curricular activities, meals, or school upkeep, which affects attendance and performance. While the SMC is supposed to monitor quality, we have very little authority to implement changes or enforce accountability."*

District Education Committee Member (DEC1) said, *"The district faces multiple challenges affecting education quality: insufficient funding, limited teacher capacity, poor learning environments, and weak accountability mechanisms. Schools are expected to perform, but without adequate support in staff, materials, and infrastructure, quality remains low across the district."*

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Table 7: Thematic analysis of interview responses on quality of public primary education

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Representative Quotes	Interpretation / Analysis
1. Learner Academic Performance	Low achievement in PLE and core subjects	*"In our school, learner performance has been consistently low over the past few years. Many pupils struggle to meet basic literacy and numeracy standards."* (HT1) *"Pupil mastery of core subjects is low, and retention rates are concerning."* (DEO)	Learners are not achieving expected academic outcomes, reflecting systemic weaknesses in teaching, learning resources, and supervision.
2. Teacher Availability and Commitment	Teacher shortages and absenteeism	*"Teacher attendance is often irregular, and overcrowded classrooms make it difficult to provide individual support."* (HT1) *"Some teachers lack the necessary qualifications, which further affects the quality of teaching."* (DIS)	Low teacher availability and competence negatively affect the learning environment, reducing instructional effectiveness and learner engagement.
3. Teaching and Learning Resources	Inadequate materials and infrastructure	*"We also lack sufficient teaching and learning materials, which affects the quality of lessons."* (HT2) *"Classrooms are overcrowded and sometimes unsafe. There are insufficient desks, textbooks, and other instructional materials."* (HT3)	Insufficient resources limit the ability of teachers to deliver lessons effectively and hinder students' learning experience.
4. Learner Retention and Progression	High repetition and dropout rates, gender disparities	*"Some pupils drop out or repeat classes because of these challenges, and gender disparities persist in retention and enrollment."* (HT2) *"Retention of pupils is a challenge, especially for girls."* (SMC2)	Low retention and progression reflect both socio-economic barriers and school-level challenges, with girls disproportionately affected.
5. School Governance and Oversight	Limited SMC and district influence on quality	*"We try to support the school in improving quality, but our ability to influence teaching, resources, and infrastructure is limited."* (SMC1) *"Schools are expected to perform, but without adequate support in staff, materials, and infrastructure, quality remains low across the district."* (DEC1)	Weak governance structures and limited decision-making authority at the school and community level impede quality improvement initiatives.
6. Overall Learning Environment	Overcrowding, poor classroom conditions	*"Overcrowded classrooms and lack of safe, ventilated spaces negatively affect learning."* (HT3) *"The school lacks basic amenities to ensure a conducive learning environment."* (DEO)	The physical learning environment is inadequate, further undermining the quality of education delivered to pupils.

Source: Primary data (2025)

Documentary review findings on the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District

A documentary review was conducted to triangulate and substantiate the primary data collected through questionnaires and interviews. The review encompassed school performance reports, District Education Office (DEO) records, school inspection reports, staff audit records, Ministry of Education circulars, and national assessment data. The focus was to examine trends and structural factors influencing the quality of primary education in selected schools within Nakasongola District.

An analysis of the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) results from 2021 to 2024, obtained from DEO records, revealed persistently low academic achievement in most schools. The data indicate that only 28–32% of pupils achieved Division I and II, while over 65% were in Division III and IV, reflecting low mastery of core competencies in literacy and numeracy. District literacy and numeracy assessment records for Grades 3, 5, and 7 showed that approximately 40% of pupils failed to meet minimum proficiency levels, particularly in English language and mathematics. DEO progress reports highlight that despite periodic teacher workshops and remedial programs, learning outcomes remain below national benchmarks, indicating systemic inefficiencies in instructional quality. The documentary evidence aligns with survey and interview data, reinforcing concerns regarding low learner achievement and inadequate classroom instruction.

School enrollment registers and SMC minutes indicate: a moderate upward trend in overall pupil enrollment;

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however, retention rates remain low, especially for girls in rural sub-counties. On average, 15–20% of pupils repeat classes annually, and approximately 5–10% of pupils drop out before completing Primary Seven. SMC and head teacher reports attribute poor progression to teacher absenteeism, insufficient teaching materials, socio-economic constraints, and overcrowded classrooms. The findings suggest that while access to education is improving, completion and progression rates are constrained by both institutional and socio-economic factors, limiting overall education quality.

Staff audit reports and inspection records provide insight into human resource management: Pupil-teacher ratios averaged 1:65, significantly exceeding the Ministry of Education's recommended ratio of 1:40, contributing to overcrowded classrooms and limited individual learner support. Approximately 30% of teachers lacked formal teaching qualifications, particularly in rural primary schools. Teacher attendance registers reviewed across five sampled schools indicated frequent absenteeism and occasional unauthorized leave, negatively affecting lesson delivery and learner performance. These findings demonstrate that human resource challenges at the district and school levels are a critical constraint to improving educational quality.

Review of school inventories and inspection reports revealed significant deficiencies in instructional resources: Most schools lacked sufficient textbooks and teaching aids, with student-to-textbook ratios often exceeding 5:1, limiting effective learning. Classroom infrastructure was generally poor; inspection reports noted overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and unsafe classrooms, which compromised learning conditions. Project reports from NGOs and government programs indicated irregular support for teaching resources, making it insufficient to meet the schools' academic needs.

The documentary review further highlighted persistent gender disparities in enrollment, retention, and academic achievement: National and district statistics show that girls' enrollment lags behind boys, particularly in remote sub-counties. School inspection reports and SMC records noted challenges in providing separate sanitation facilities, safe classrooms, and gender-sensitive learning environments, negatively affecting girls' attendance and performance.

SMC minutes and DEO reports indicated limited involvement of school governance structures in planning, monitoring, and decision-making, which affects quality improvement initiatives. Financial and HRM reports reveal that schools have minimal authority to address teacher absenteeism, resource shortages, and infrastructure gaps, highlighting the limited impact of decentralized management on educational quality.

The documentary review corroborates and enriches the primary quantitative and qualitative data, highlighting several critical issues affecting the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District: Persistently low learner achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy, reflected in PLE results and proficiency assessments. High pupil-teacher ratios, teacher absenteeism, and low teacher qualifications are undermining instructional quality. Inadequate teaching and learning materials and poor classroom infrastructure are limiting effective teaching and learning. Low retention and progression rates, with girls disproportionately affected, reflecting socio-economic and institutional barriers. Weak school governance and accountability mechanisms constrain the ability of SMCs and district authorities to implement quality improvements.

The documentary evidence indicates that the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District is generally low, consistent with survey and interview findings. Persistent structural challenges, resource inadequacies, and weak governance systems collectively limit the district's capacity to achieve expected educational outcomes. The triangulation of documentary evidence with primary data strengthens the reliability and validity of the study's conclusions regarding educational quality.

Source: Nakasongola District Education Office Reports (2021–2024), School Inspection Reports (2022–2024), Ministry of Education Statistical Abstracts (2021–2024), SMC Minutes (2022–2024).

Correlation findings of the study

To examine the relationship between decentralized governance mechanisms and the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The variables included Decentralized Oversight with the quality of public primary education as the dependent variable.

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Table 8: Correlation between decentralized oversights, decentralized human resource Management, decentralized financial management, and quality of Public Primary Education

Variable	Pearson Correlation with Health Service Delivery	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Decentralized Oversights	0.514 *	0.002	120

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: Primary Data (2025).

Table 8 indicates a positive and statistically significant correlation between decentralized oversights and the quality of public primary education (r = 0.514, p = 0.002). This suggests that schools in which district officials, inspectors, sub-county chiefs, and SMCs regularly conduct monitoring and inspections tend to exhibit better educational outcomes, including improved learner performance, compliance with regulations, and enhanced school accountability.
Interpretation: While the correlation is moderate, it demonstrates that effective oversight contributes meaningfully to educational quality, highlighting the importance of regular supervision, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms at both school and district levels.
Decentralized HRM was found to have a strong positive correlation with quality of education (r = 0.661, p = 0.001). This indicates that schools where HRM practices such as recruitment, promotion, teacher deployment, supervision, professional development, and performance appraisal are effectively decentralized tend to report higher quality outcomes.
Interpretation: The strength of this correlation suggests that teacher management, including ensuring adequate staffing, professional competence, and motivation, is a critical determinant of educational quality. Schools where HRM decisions are appropriately decentralized benefit from enhanced teacher performance, attendance, and classroom effectiveness, which positively impacts learner achievement.

The correlation analysis confirms that decentralized governance practices are significantly associated with improved quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District. Schools with well-managed oversight, HRM exhibit better learner outcomes, more effective teaching and learning processes, and higher overall performance. These findings reinforce the need for strengthening decentralized mechanisms as a strategy for improving primary education quality in the district.

Regression analysis of administrative decentralization and quality of public primary education in Nakasongola district, Uganda.

To further assess the predictive relationship between decentralized governance mechanisms and the quality of public primary education, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The model was specified as follows:

$$QPPE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(DO) + \beta_2(DHRM) + \beta_3(DFM) + \epsilon$$

Where:

- **QPPE** = Quality of Public Primary Education
- **DO** = Decentralized Oversights
- **DHRM** = Decentralized Human Resource Management
- **DFM** = Decentralized Financial Management

Table 9 Model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.781	0.610	0.598	0.462

Source: Primary Data (2025).

Table 9 shows a strong positive relationship between the independent variables and quality of education (R = 0.781). Approximately 61% of the variance in quality of public primary education is explained by decentralized oversight, HRM, and financial management (R^2 = 0.610, Adjusted R^2 = 0.598). The standard error of the estimate (0.462) indicates moderate accuracy in the prediction of QPPE based on the model.

Table 10 ANOVA (Model significance)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	45.732	3	15.244	71.32	0.001
Residual	29.215	116	0.252		
Total	74.947	119			

Source: Primary Data (2025).

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The F-test indicates that the regression model is statistically significant (F = 71.32, p = 0.001 < 0.01). This confirms that decentralized governance practices collectively predict the quality of public primary education.

Table 11: Regression coefficients

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized)	t	Sig.
Constant	0.854	0.312	–	2.74	0.007
Decentralized Oversights (DO)	0.231	0.071	0.228	3.25	0.002

Source: Primary Data (2025).

Decentralized Oversights (DO): A one-unit increase in oversight activities is associated with a 0.231 unit increase in QPPE, holding other factors constant (p = 0.002). This indicates that supervision and monitoring have a moderate but significant positive effect on educational quality.

The regression results suggest that decentralized governance mechanisms—oversight significantly and positively predict the quality of public primary education in Nakasongola District. Collectively, these variables account for 61% of the variance in educational quality, indicating that decentralized governance practices are key determinants of school performance and learning outcomes.

The findings demonstrate that strengthening decentralized governance mechanisms at the district and school levels can substantially enhance the quality of primary education. Policies and interventions targeting improved teacher management, regular school oversight are likely to yield significant improvements in learning outcomes, infrastructure, and school accountability.

Discussion of results

Decentralized oversight and quality of Public Primary Education in Nakasongola District.

The moderate positive correlation (r = 0.514, p = 0.002) between decentralized oversight and educational quality underscores the importance of monitoring, supervision, and accountability mechanisms in schools. The literature supports this finding. Nabiddo, Yawe, and Wasswa (2022) show that frequent School Management Committee (SMC) meetings and school inspections significantly predict literacy and numeracy proficiency in Uganda. Similarly, Rahim (2019) and Oyarzún et al. (2024) emphasize that local supervision and participatory governance improve retention, enrollment, and learning outcomes.

However, the literature also highlights limits: SMCs and PTAs often lack adequate induction, role clarity, and resources, reducing the effectiveness of oversight (ISER, 2024; Wafaana, 2024). This contextual constraint may explain why the correlation, though significant, is moderate rather than strong. Effective oversight appears contingent not only on the existence of local structures but also on the capacity, training, and empowerment of local actors.

Interpretation: Decentralized oversight contributes to improved educational outcomes, but its effectiveness depends on the quality of local governance and the capacity of oversight bodies.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that decentralized oversight has a moderate positive effect on the quality of public primary education. Schools that experience regular monitoring, inspections, and involvement from local authorities such as SMCs, district officials, and sub-county chiefs tend to demonstrate improved learner performance, compliance with regulations, and overall accountability.

Recommendation

- The District local government should strengthen the capacity of SMCs and PTAs through training, clear role definitions to ensure committees can effectively supervise school operations.
- District and sub-county education officers should conduct scheduled inspections and provide constructive feedback to schools.
- Clearly delineate the responsibilities of SMCs, PTAs, head teachers, and local education officials to prevent overlaps and conflicts.
- Encourage active parental and community involvement in monitoring school performance, learner attendance, and teacher accountability.

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List of abbreviations

BRMS – Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards
CESA – Continental Education Strategy for Africa
DEO – District Education Officer
DIS – District Inspector of Schools
EFA – Education for All
FPE – Free Primary Education
MDGs – Millennium Development Goals
NAPE – National Assessment of Progress in Education
NOES – National Objectives of Education in Schools
PLE – Primary Leaving Examination
QIPS – Quality Improvement in Primary Schools
SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals
SMC – School Management Committee
UPE – Universal Primary Education
UNEB – Uganda National Examinations Board
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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There is no conflict of interest.

Availability of data

Data used in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Author's contribution

FK designed the study, conducted data collection, cleaned and analyzed data, drafted the manuscript, and MS supervised all stages of the study from conceptualization of the topic to manuscript writing and submission.

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