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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE INFLUENCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALISATION ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN THREE SELECTED COUNTIES OF WESTERN EQUATORIA STATE, SOUTH SUDAN

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Abstract

This study assessed how administrative decentralization influences service delivery in Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri Counties of Western Equatoria State. A descriptive–correlational design was used, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions. From a population of 260, a sample of 158 respondents per county was studied, including government officials, health personnel, community leaders, civil society actors, and residents. Statistical analysis using SPSS examined the strength of decentralization service delivery relationships, thematic analysis explored contextual factors. Regression results show uneven effects across counties: Yambio recorded significant positive contribution ($B = 0.205$, $p = .018$), Tambura showed a smaller but significant effect ($B = 0.044$, $p = .048$), and Mundri demonstrated a negative, non-significant relationship ($B = -0.037$, $p = .513$). Although decentralization can enhance accountability and community participation, its impact remains constrained by capacity gaps, limited resources, political interference, and unclear administrative mandates.

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Introduction:-

Administrative decentralization refers to the transfer of operational responsibilities, including planning, personnel management, and implementation of public services, from central authorities to lower levels of government. In theory, this form of decentralization enhances efficiency and responsiveness by bringing decision-making closer to citizens. In fragile and post-conflict contexts such as South Sudan, however, administrative decentralization operates within conditions of limited capacity, political instability, and weak institutions. Since independence, South Sudan has adopted decentralization as a core governance principle, with counties expected to play a central role in service delivery. Evidence from previous studies suggests that decentralization can improve outcomes when local governments possess sufficient authority and capacity. For instance, research in Bor County found that devolved administrative authority was associated with improvements in education services. Nevertheless, other studies

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highlight persistent challenges, including shortages of skilled personnel, unclear mandates, and tensions between statutory and customary authorities. In Western Equatoria State, these challenges are particularly pronounced in remote and conflict-affected counties. Overlapping authority between county administrations, state ministries, and traditional leadership often creates uncertainty regarding service delivery responsibilities. This study therefore examines how administrative decentralization influences service delivery outcomes in Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri Counties, with the aim of generating empirical evidence to inform decentralization policy in fragile settings.

Statement of the problem:-

The central issue addressed under this topic is the persistent gap between the formal transfer of administrative authority to local governments and the actual improvement of basic service delivery at county level in Western Equatoria State. Although administrative decentralization is intended to bring decision-making and delivery closer to communities, local administrations in Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri often lack adequate capacity, resources, clarity of roles, and autonomy to plan and implement services effectively. This misalignment results in weak coordination, delayed service provision, limited accountability, and uneven access to health, education, and other public services. The study therefore focuses on understanding how the design and practice of administrative decentralization shape service delivery outcomes in a fragile, post-conflict context, where institutional weaknesses and political dynamics continue to constrain local governance performance.

Main Objective:-

The main objective of the study was to evaluate the effect of administrative decentralization on service delivery in three selected counties of Western Equatoria State, South Sudan.

Research Question:-

What is the effect of administrative decentralization on service delivery in Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri Counties of Western Equatoria State?

Literature Review:-

This section reviews relevant literature examined from both theoretical and empirical perspectives on the influence of administrative decentralization on service delivery in three selected counties of Western Equatoria State, South Sudan, as well as in other global contexts. The review is guided by the third specific objective of the study titled “Decentralization Policy and Service Delivery in Three Selected Counties of Western Equatoria State, South Sudan,” with the purpose of identifying existing knowledge gaps. Emphasis is placed on scholarly works, including empirical studies, conceptual analyses, and policy discussions that address administrative decentralization, service delivery, or closely related variables. By synthesizing the arguments, findings, and recommendations of previous scholars, this section situates the current study within the broader body of knowledge and highlights areas that remain insufficiently explored and therefore warrant further investigation.

The concept of Administrative Decentralization:-

Administrative decentralization (sometimes referred to as institutional decentralization) involves the full or partial transfer of any array of functional responsibilities to the local level institutions such as health care service, the operation of schools, the management service personnel, the buildings and maintenance of roads and garbage collection (Yusoff et al., 2016). As Stanton, (2009), asserts, administrative decentralization is concerned with the functional tasks of decentralization. It relates to the assignment of service delivery powers and functions across levels of government and determining where responsibility is situated. Administrative decentralization involves transfer of civil servants and public functions to the lower level of government (Olatona & Olomola, 2015). It involves full or partial transfer of functional responsibilities to the sub-national units of governance. The national government assigns local governments the authority to hire and fire local staff without prior approval of central government (Stanton, 2009).

Administrative decentralization seek to distribute authority, responsibility, and financial resources for providing public services between different levels of government. Therefore, the responsibility for planning, financing, and managing certain public function is transferred from the central government to subordinate levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, or area-wide, regional, or functional authorities (Ozmen, 2014). Administrative decentralization is often seen as part of civil service reform and is generally perceived as the narrowest form of decentralization because local institutions to which tasks are transferred are not based on political representation controlled from below (Yusoff et al., 2016). On the other hand, it involves the de-concentration of

bureaucratic structures away from the central government to lower levels of structure without removing their accountability to the central government. In this way as Smoke, (2003) reveals, administrative decentralization requires the establishment of administrative bodies, systems and mechanisms at local and regional levels to manage and support the decentralization process while maintaining links between the formal government bodies and other key local actors. The effective decentralization of government administration requires local and regional governments the ability to establish ordinance, regulations or by laws which they consider to be appropriate within their jurisdiction (Yusoff et al., 2016). Akorsu (2015) citing Falleti, (2004) argued that administrative decentralization have either a positive or negative impact on the autonomy of sub-national executives. If administrative decentralization improves local and state bureaucracies, fosters training of local officials, or facilitates learning through the practice of delivering new responsibilities, it will likely increase the organizational capacities of sub-national governments. Nevertheless, if administrative decentralization takes place without the transfer of funds, this reform may decrease the autonomy of sub-national officials, who was more dependent on subsequent national fiscal transfers or sub-national debt for the delivery of public services, (Akorsu, 2015).

Recently, Feizy, Moghali, Gramipour, and Zare, (2015) asserts that there are two types of administrative decentralization. First, deconcentration which involves transfers of authority and responsibility from one level of the central government to another while maintaining the same hierarchical level of accountability from the local units to the central government ministry or agency which has been decentralized. Secondly, delegation which refers to redistributes authority and responsibility to local units of government or agencies that are not always necessarily branches or local offices of the delegating authority. While some transfer of accountability to the sub-national units to which power is being delegated takes place, the bulk of accountability is still vertical and to the delegating central unit. Review of previous research reveals that there is limited evidence on influence of administrative decentralization on services delivery. Majority of research has analyzed the impact of decentralization on services delivery from either political or fiscal decentralization rather than from all three forms of decentralization (fiscal, administrative, or political) simultaneously. Allowing for interaction of all three dimensions of decentralization in the same analysis can bring more robust evidence on the relationship between decentralization and service delivery and hence bring stronger basis for providing policy advice in the future. In this study, administrative decentralization is conceptualized as autonomy to contract services, hire and fire county employees, sign employment contracts and expertise and capacity of the county employees.

Administrative Decentralization and Service Delivery:-

Kosec and Mogue, (2015) analyzed the impact that administrative district level decentralization on agricultural and rural service delivery. The study used sample data from eight districts in seven regions in Ethiopia, 1,899 individuals and 1,117 households. The study found that administrative decentralization has led to increased access to agricultural extension services, and to greater use of modern agricultural inputs, such as fertilizer and improved seed. Another study in United States, Saavedra (2010) examined the effects of administrative decentralization on access to two key services: health care and improved drinking water sources. The study provided evidence supporting positive and significant effects of administrative decentralization on access to health care, and improved water provision. In another study, Mobarak, Rajkumar, and Cropper (2006) using data from Brazilian municipalities found that administrative decentralization only provides good results when it is accompanied by good governance.

A study in South Africa by Stanton (2009) explored to what extent the problems of providing basic services currently experienced by municipalities are influenced by the administrative configuration of the decentralized system of governance. The study concluded that local councils have the authority to pass by-laws with respect to the implementation of their legally assigned functions and responsibilities. However, municipalities had limited autonomy and need provincial approval when contracting out responsibilities and services. In related study, Bogopane, (2014) explored the impact of perceived erosion of the politics-administration dichotomy on good governance and service delivery. The study concluded that strong visionary political and administrative leadership; vibrant a political strong public bureaucracy and integrated political and administrative structures lead to improvement to the functionality and performance of politics-administration dichotomy relations.

In Ghana, Alornyeku, (2011) carried a case study in Kumasi metropolis on administrative structure and service delivery. The study revealed even though there is a clear practice of division of labour, there is department's lack of technical equipment which results in delays in meeting the expectation of citizen's. In addition, assembly low productivity, due to excessive bureaucracy negatively impacted performance of the central government. In another study in Nigeria, Boris (2015) carried an empirical study to examine challenges confronting local government

administration in effective and efficient social service delivery at the grassroots. Using secondary data, the study concluded lack of funds, corruption, and undue political interference amongst others as major constraints to local government service delivery.

Research Gap:-

Most existing studies on decentralization in South Sudan emphasize political or fiscal dimensions, with limited attention to administrative decentralization as a distinct driver of service delivery. Moreover, few studies examine decentralization outcomes comparatively across counties or consider inter-county spill-over effects. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing administrative decentralization across three counties and by integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Methodology:-

The study employed descriptive and Correlation research design. This design is preferred because it gives a report on things as they are or happen. Correlational design measures the correlation between two variables. The study employed purposive and simple random sampling to select the sample and the sample elements. This resulted to a sample size of 158 respondents each County. Both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interviewing) data collection approaches was used in order to achieve a high degree of reliability and validity of results. The two methods complemented one another because the whole research here wants to address the inadequacies of each method. A questionnaire and Interview guide as data collection instruments was used. The field data was statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) and MS Excel to generate descriptive and inferential statistics analyses.

Data Collection methods:-

The main objective in this study was to examine the decentralization policy (independent variable) on service delivery (dependent variable) with e-government being a moderating variable. Several methods were used in this study to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. These will include questionnaires survey, interview guide, Focus Group discussion, observation and review of primary and secondary documents. As observed by (Research Directory, 2014) data collection methods were used to collect the information required from various sources to provide insights and answers required by the set objectives and hypotheses for quantitative data and research questions for qualitative information.

Study Population:-

The Study population refers to the specific group of individuals or subject that a researcher is interested in studying. It presents a larger target population from which the sample is drawn. According to Amin (2005: 235), a target population is the population to which the researcher ultimately generalized the results. Each of the three selected counties have an estimated population of 113,051 people according to South Sudan Population of 2010. The study constituted categories of respondents from each selected county and they include Area residents, Local government officials, Political leaders, non governmental organizations, religious leaders and Clan leaders because they are all important stakeholders as guided by Trochim, (2006) in as far as service delivery in three selected counties in Western Equatoria State, in South Sudan is concerned.

Sample size for each selected county:-

The same sample size of the population in this study (as illustrated in table 4.1 below) was made of 158 respondents and was selected from each of the three counties above basing on a formula for determining Sample size by Yamane (Yamane, 1967, p.886). Respondents will include area residents, local government officials, political leaders, non-governmental organizations, clan leaders. Formula is illustrated below-

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{260}{1 + 0.65} = 158$$

Where:-

n - Sample size

N - Population size

e - Level of precision

Therefore, the sample size expected to be used here is 158

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Sampling Selection Techniques and Procedure:-

The study used both simple random sampling and purposive sampling procedures. Purposive sampling was used to select different activities in the area of investigation to get first-hand information from the key informants. Simple random sampling was used because respondents had equal chances of being selected. The sampling process was guided by the table below-

Table 1. Sampling Procedures

SN	Category	Target Population	Sample size	Sampling procedure
1	Area residents	242	140	Simple random sampling
2	Local government officials	3	3	Purposive sampling
3	Political leaders	4	4	Purposive sampling
4	Non-governmental organizations	4	4	Purposive Sampling
5	Religious leaders	4	4	Purposive Sampling
6	Clan leaders	3	3	Purposive Sampling
	Grand Total	260	158	

Source; Primary data, (2023) and Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D.W. (1970)

Preparation for Data collection:-

Data collection and preparation was done systematically so as to accurately collect information from various sources to provide insights and answers, such as testing a hypothesis or evaluating an outcome. In this study, the procedure for data collection was guided by the study objectives, hypotheses and research questions. The main objective in this study is to examine the decentralisation policy being an independent variable and e-governance as a mediating variable and service delivery being dependent. In order to collect data on variables from area residents, a questionnaire was developed in accordance with the guidelines given by Rotter (1966), Bandura (1997), Boles et al. (2000) as per the study objectives. In addition, an interview guide was prepared for data collection from the key informant's i.e local government officials, political leaders, religious leaders, NGOs officials and clan leaders according to the study research questions and an observation checklist. Before going to the field, the researcher obtained introductory letters from Nkumba University, Directorate of Post-Graduate Studies and Research studies off to the three selected Counties namely Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri west Counties in Western Equatoria State - South Sudan. Research assistants were identified and trained for data collection. They were trained on the procedures of data collection using the different research instruments, local government structure of South Sudan, decentralization policy and the nature of service delivery to be observed.

Methods of Analyzing Quantitative Data:-

The quantitative approach to data analysis involved the presentation of the findings descriptively in form of frequency tables with varying percentages. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the basic features of the data. SPSS software version 17.0 was used to obtain inferential statistics, to reach conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data alone and to make inferences from the data to more general conditions (Cohen et al 1998). The following multivariate statistical techniques was employed in generating inferences on the population: descriptive statistics, linear regression analyses and Pearson's Product Moment coefficient.

Descriptive statistics:-

In analyzing the responses from the Likert scale of the questionnaire, Descriptive statistics which included means and standard deviation generated through the SPSS package was obtained and an appropriate scale to interpret the means was used. Generally, the scale hinged on the following categorization:

Table2: Likert scale of the questionnaire

Mean Range	Response Mode	Interpretation
4.51-5.00	Strongly agree	Highly Exceeds Expectation
3.11-4.50	Agree	Exceeds Expectation
2.51-3.10	Neutral	Meets Expectation
1.00-2.50	Disagree	Lowly Meets Expectation
Less than 1	Strongly disagree	Does not Meet Expectation

The variables in the questionnaire was measured using ordinal scale and using a 5 point like rt scale format (Strongly Disagree=1; Disagree=2; Not sure=3; Agree=4 and Strongly Agree= 5) adopted from Firdaus(2006) and modified according to the objectives of the study. The Self Administered Questionnaire was divided into sections based on the constructs as per the four study objectives.

Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient:-

Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine how strongly the scores of two variables are associated with each other in the following objectives: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to test hypothesis 3 that established the relationship between decentralization policy and service delivery in three selected counties in Western Equatorial.

Data Analysis:-

Data collected was entered into the SPSS and analysis was done descriptively, by regression and correlation analysis for quantitative data. Qualitative data on the other hand was analyzed thematically within the context of the study findings as per the research questions. Concurrent triangulation for qualitative and quantitative data was done at the same time within the study.

Results of the study:-

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the study's findings on objective three which is the relationship between administrative decentralization and service delivery in three selected counties in western Equatorial state in South Sudan. The chapter begins by examining the response rate of the administered research instruments, subsequently, the core findings are systematically presented and interpreted in alignment with the study's specific objective three and research questions of objective three

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics on Administrative decentralization and service delivery in three Selected Counties in Western Equatorial.

Descriptive Statistics						
County	Administration Decentralization and Service Delivery	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Citizens enjoy Local governance Administration efficiently	142	1	5	3.02	1.15
	There are Mechanism for participation, responsiveness, equity, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability	142	1	5	3.1	1.11
	The local governance authority is always supported financially by the central government of South Sudan	142	1	5	3.37	1.08
	There is capacity development of western equatorial state	142	1	5	2.82	1.18
	There is collaborative stakeholder relationships exist in Local governance administration	142	1	5	3.15	1.12
	Efficient, effective, and responsive service in your local governance are always practiced in your administration	142	1	5	3.23	0.97
	Participatory decision-making process is always open and fair to every member	142	1	5	3.51	1.04
	The local governance administration promotes the personal participant of citizens to clearance	142	1	5	3.43	1.07
	The local governance administration management is free from corruption	142	1	5	3.08	1.11
	Citizens enjoy Local governance Administration efficiently	142	1	5	3.18	1.21
	There are Mechanism for participation, responsiveness, equity, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability	142	1	5	2.76	1.07
	The local governance authority is always supported financially by the central government of South Sudan	142	1	5	3.22	1.15
	There is capacity development of western equatorial state	142	1	5	2.85	1.09
	There is collaborative stakeholder relationships exist in Local governance administration	142	1	5	3.03	1.16
	Efficient, effective, and responsive service in your local governance are always practiced in your administration	142	1	5	3.44	1.04
	Participatory decision-making process is always open and fair to every member	142	1	5	2.65	1.14
	The local governance administration promotes the personal participant of citizens to clearance	142	1	5	3.39	1.06
	The local governance administration management is free from corruption	142	1	5	3.41	1.09
	Citizens enjoy Local governance Administration efficiently	142	1	5	2.92	1.12
	There are Mechanism for participation, responsiveness, equity, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability	142	1	5	3.06	1.07
	The local governance authority is always supported financially by the central government of South Sudan	142	1	5	3.11	1.10
	There is capacity development of western equatorial state	142	1	5	2.88	1.22
	There is collaborative stakeholder relationships exist in Local governance administration	142	1	5	3.12	1.16
	Efficient, effective, and responsive service in your local governance are always practiced in your administration	142	1	5	3.05	1.16
	Participatory decision-making process is always open and fair to every member	142	1	5	3.06	1.10
	The local governance administration promotes the personal participant of citizens to clearance	142	1	5	3.35	1.11
	The local governance administration management is free from corruption	142	1	5	2.79	1.20
	Valid N (listwise)	142				

The descriptive statistics presented provide critical insights into the status of administrative decentralization and service delivery in the counties under study, with a consistent sample size of 142 respondents across all variables. The results reveal that participatory decision-making processes recorded one of the highest mean scores ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.04$), indicating that respondents generally perceive decision-making in local governance as relatively inclusive and fair. This aligns with literature emphasizing the importance of democratic participation in enhancing administrative legitimacy and local responsiveness (Rondinelli, 1981; Smoke, 2003). Nonetheless, slight variations across counties suggest uneven implementation, possibly due to structural or institutional constraints at the sub-national level.

Financial support from the central government of South Sudan is another dimension that scored relatively high ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.08$), signaling that fiscal decentralization mechanisms are in place to some extent. This finding resonates with the fiscal decentralization theory, which argues that adequate financial backing is essential to enhance the capacity of local governments in delivering services (Bird & Vaillancourt, 1998). However, while funding is evident, the capacity development of the Western Equatorial State remains one of the lowest-rated items ($M = 2.82$ – 2.88), suggesting a disconnection between fiscal transfers and long-term institutional or human resource development. This contradiction reflects limitations in decentralization design where financial transfers are not necessarily coupled with technical or managerial empowerment. Moreover, the findings show mixed perceptions on stakeholder collaboration and corruption. While collaborative stakeholder relationships in local governance scored a moderate mean ($M = 3.03$ – 3.15), the belief that local governance administration is free from corruption fluctuates

(M = 2.79–3.41), highlighting variability in transparency and accountability frameworks across different counties. This echoes scholarly critiques that decentralization, in the absence of strong institutional checks, can localize rather than reduce corruption (Manor, 1999; Crook & Manor, 1998). Therefore, despite structural devolution, the governance culture and regulatory environments remain critical to performance outcomes. Lastly, citizens' enjoyment of efficient local governance services yielded mean scores around 3.0, indicating neutral to moderately positive perceptions. The relatively high standard deviations across variables (ranging from 0.97 to 1.22) point to heterogeneous experiences among respondents. This reinforces empirical insights from the decentralization literature that local governance efficacy depends significantly on contextual factors such as administrative capacity, leadership, and historical marginalization (Boex & Yilmaz, 2010). Overall, while the data shows some progressive elements of decentralization, it also reflects underlying institutional and operational disparities that must be addressed for equitable and efficient service delivery.

Table 4: Correlation results on the relationship between administrative decentralization and service delivery in three selected Counties in western Equatoria State

		Administration decentralization Tambura	Administration decentralization Yambio	Administration decentralization Mundri	Service Delivery Tambura	Service Delivery Yambio	Service Delivery Mundri
Service Delivery Tambura	Pearson	1	.094	.751**	.127	.108	-.054
	Sig. (2-		.266	.000	.131	.200	.521
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Service Delivery Yambio	Pearson	.094	1	-.073	-.017	.018	.055
	Sig. (2-	.266		.387	.840	.833	.513
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Service Delivery Mundri	Pearson	.751**	-.073	1	.049	.197*	-.073
	Sig. (2-	.000	.387		.562	.019	.388
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Administration decentralization Tambura	Pearson	.127	-.017	.049	1	-.084	-.133
	Sig. (2-	.131	.840	.562		.318	.116
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Administration decentralization Yambio	Pearson	.108	.018	.197*	-.084	1	-.051
	Sig. (2-	.200	.833	.019	.318		.545
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Administration decentralization Mundri	Pearson	-.054	.055	-.073	-.133	-.051	1
	Sig. (2-	.521	.513	.388	.116	.545	
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

The correlation matrix reveals key interrelationships between administrative decentralization and service delivery across the counties of Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri, reflecting how variations in governance structures may impact service outcomes. Notably, there is a statistically significant and strong positive correlation between administrative decentralization in Mundri and service delivery in Tambura ($r = .751$, $p < .01$). This suggests a potential regional influence where administrative practices in one locality could positively shape or mirror service delivery experiences in another, possibly due to spill-over effects, shared resources, or coordinated governance mechanisms across counties. This inter-county dynamic resonates with the decentralized governance theory, which posits that when local units are empowered, they often collaborate, learn from each other, and optimize resource allocation for mutual benefit (Smoke, 2003; Faguet, 2014). In addition, the data shows a statistically significant

positive correlation between administrative decentralization in Yambio and service delivery in Mundri ($r = .197$, $p < .05$). Although this correlation is moderate, it aligns with the literature suggesting that decentralization does not function in isolation but within a network of regional interdependencies, especially in post-conflict states like South Sudan where governance systems are still maturing (Boex & Yilmaz, 2010). This finding implies that reforms in administrative functions in one county could catalyze improved public service outcomes in a neighboring jurisdiction, reinforcing the value of regional integration in decentralized settings.

On the other hand, the correlations between administrative decentralization within individual counties and their corresponding service delivery scores were mostly weak and statistically insignificant. For instance, administrative decentralization in Tambura showed a weak and non-significant relationship with service delivery in Tambura ($r = .127$, $p = .131$). Similarly, Yambio ($r = .018$, $p = .833$) and Mundri ($r = -.073$, $p = .388$) did not demonstrate statistically meaningful intra-county associations. These findings echo concerns from decentralization critiques which argue that structural devolution alone is insufficient to guarantee service improvements unless it is accompanied by capacity development, accountability mechanisms, and adequate resource transfers (Ribot, 2002; Manor, 1999).

Moreover, service delivery across counties appeared largely uncorrelated, with the exception of a significant correlation between service delivery in Tambura and Mundri ($r = .751$, $p < .01$), indicating perhaps a harmonized or jointly influenced implementation approach. This pattern reinforces the argument that service outcomes under decentralization can be influenced by broader institutional contexts rather than localized administrative reforms alone. The high interdependence between service delivery outcomes in different counties underscores the need for a coordinated decentralization strategy that accounts for both local autonomy and regional coherence to enhance effectiveness and equity in public service delivery (Oates, 1999; Shah & Thompson, 2004).

Regression results on the relationship between administrative decentralization and service delivery in three selected Counties in Western Equatoria State:-

Table 5: Model summary on the relationship between administrative decentralization and service delivery in three selected Counties in Western Equatoria State

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.695 ^a	.483	.623	.57279
a. Predictors: (Constant), Administrative Decentralization at Mundri, Administrative Decentralization at Yambio, Administrative Decentralization at Tambura				

Source: Primary Data 2025

Regression results demonstrate differentiated effects of administrative decentralization across counties. Yambio County exhibited a strong and statistically significant positive effect on service delivery ($B = 0.205$, $p = .018$). Tambura County showed a modest but significant effect ($B = 0.044$, $p = .048$). In contrast, Mundri County displayed a negative and non-significant relationship ($B = -0.037$, $p = .513$). The model explained approximately 48% of the variance in service delivery, indicating moderate explanatory power.

Table 6: Coefficients on the relationship between Administrative decentralization and service delivery in three Selected Counties in Western Equatorial.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.404	.366		6.573	.000
	Administrative Decentralization at Tambura	.044	.063	.039	.695	.048
	Administrative Decentralization at Yambio	.205	.086	.200	2.387	.018
	Administrative Decentralization at Mundri	-.037	.057	-.055	-.655	.513

a. Dependent Variable: Service Delivery

Source: Primary Data 2025

The coefficient analysis in Table 28 provides nuanced insights into the differential effects of administrative decentralization across Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri on service delivery in Western Equatoria. The overall model

reveals a statistically significant constant ($B = 2.404$, $p < .001$), suggesting a baseline level of service delivery even in the absence of decentralization initiatives. Among the counties, Yambio exhibits the most substantial and statistically significant positive contribution to service delivery ($B = 0.205$, $p = .018$), with a corresponding standardized beta of .200, indicating its relative strength in the model. This aligns with decentralization literature, such as by Smoke (2003) and Crook & Manor (1998), which emphasizes that effective decentralization hinges on local capacity and institutional maturity factors likely more robust in Yambio. Conversely, the coefficient for Tambura, though positive ($B = .044$), is marginal and just reaches significance ($p = .048$), implying a weaker yet present contribution to service delivery, possibly reflecting partial implementation or nascent administrative capacity. In stark contrast, Mundri shows a negative but statistically non-significant effect ($B = -0.037$, $p = .513$), which may suggest administrative inefficiencies or governance challenges that undermine the intended outcomes of decentralization in that locale.

These results echo the arguments of Agrawal and Ribot (1999), who caution that without institutional coherence, local autonomy does not automatically translate into improved service outcomes. Hence, the findings underscore the contextual and heterogeneous nature of administrative decentralization's impact, reinforcing the imperative for tailored governance reforms responsive to localized institutional realities. The insights into administrative decentralization among the counties, Yambio exhibits the most substantial and statistically significant positive contribution to service delivery ($B = 0.205$, $p\text{-value} = .018$). In stark contrast, Mundri shows a negative but statistically non-significant effect ($B = -0.037$, $p\text{-value} = .513$). Conversely, the coefficient for Tambura, though positive ($B = .044$), is marginal and just reaches significance ($p = .048$), implying a weaker effect.

Focus Group Discussion Findings on the Role of Administrative Decentralization on Service Delivery:-

This section presents findings from FGDs held in Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri Counties regarding how administrative decentralization has affected public service delivery. Discussions were held with local government officials, civil society actors, service providers, and community members to understand how shifting administrative authority to the local level influences the quality, accessibility, and efficiency of services.

Tambura County:-

In Tambura, FGD participants were largely critical of the administrative decentralization process, citing a lack of qualified personnel, poor coordination, and limited decision-making powers at the county level.

A health officer stated:

"Even though we are supposed to manage local services, decisions still come from the state or national ministries. We have little authority to act independently." Many participants felt that the decentralized structures exist only nominally, with local offices operating with inadequate staff, limited training, and poor logistical support. Administrative responsibilities were reportedly duplicated or overlapped between county and state authorities, causing inefficiencies.

A local leader mentioned:

"We don't know who is really in charge sometimes. The commissioner says one thing, but then the state ministry contradicts it."

This confusion often led to delays in service delivery, especially in education and health, where personnel deployment, procurement, and supervision are slow due to bureaucratic bottlenecks.

Yambio County:-

In Yambio, participants acknowledged some progress in administrative decentralization, particularly in terms of local-level staffing and planning capacity. However, challenges persist related to authority, resource allocation, and inter-governmental coordination.

A county education officer shared:

"We can now hire some teachers and plan school calendars locally. That's a big step forward. But we still rely heavily on approvals from Juba for many things." Participants noted that while there is a clearer administrative structure at the county and payam levels, many decisions—especially on personnel and infrastructure—still require central or state-level clearance, leading to slow service response.

Civil society actors advocated for more capacity building and training for local administrators to enhance effectiveness:

“Decentralization is not just about moving offices closer to the people; it’s about building real local authority and competence.”

Overall, Yambio shows moderate administrative decentralization, but progress is undermined by weak capacity, inconsistent delegation of authority, and limited local discretion.

Mundri County:-

In Mundri, FGD participants were frustrated by administrative instability and frequent turnover of local officials, which they said undermines service continuity and planning.

A local education officer commented:

“We get new directors every year. How can we plan long-term when there is no consistency in leadership?” There were also concerns about interference from state-level officials, who were reported to override or undermine local administrative decisions. This has created a perception that decentralization is partial and politically manipulated.

A women’s leader remarked:

“Our local departments are often sidelined by people from outside. Even though the offices are here, the real decisions are made somewhere else.” Many participants felt that local authorities lack the operational independence and resources to implement decisions, making the whole administrative structure heavily dependent on higher levels. Recruitment, performance management, and project oversight remain weak at the county level.

Cross-County Themes:-

Table 7: Summary of Key Themes Across the Three Counties

Theme	Tambura	Yambio	Mundri
Local Administrative Capacity	Low	Moderate	Low
Autonomy in Decision-Making	Very limited	Moderate	Limited
Staff Stability & Skills	Inadequate	Improving	Unstable
Inter-governmental Coordination	Poor	Improving	Weak
Impact on Service Delivery	Negative	Mixed	Negative

Across the three counties, common challenges included limited administrative capacity, unclear mandates, weak intergovernmental coordination, and insufficient accountability mechanisms. Yambio emerged as relatively better positioned, while Tambura and Mundri faced more severe constraints.

Discussion:-

Linking focus group discussion findings on administrative decentration and service delivery on existing literature:-

The focus group discussions held across Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri counties provided valuable perspectives on how administrative decentralization has shaped the quality and accessibility of public service delivery. While administrative decentralization in South Sudan aims to transfer decision-making authority, personnel management, and service implementation responsibilities to sub-national units, the actual experience in these counties is marked by uneven progress, limited local autonomy, and persistent capacity constraints. Participants in all three counties consistently noted that administrative functions are nominally devolved but often remain under the influence or control of central-level authorities. This reflects a core critique in decentralization literature, particularly by Rondinelli (1981) and Grindle (2007), who argue that without genuine devolution of authority and local administrative discretion, decentralization risks becoming symbolic rather than functional. The concerns expressed in Tambura and Mundri about delayed approvals, centralized personnel decisions, and inadequate autonomy at the county level affirm this concern.

In Yambio, however, some participants acknowledged modest gains in local responsiveness and flexibility in managing education and basic health services. This suggests that administrative decentralization can facilitate improved service delivery when accompanied by capable local leadership and clear functional responsibilities. Such observations align with Manor (1999) and Smoke (2003), who emphasize that the success of decentralization depends heavily on the ability of local governments to make independent decisions and manage resources effectively. A recurring theme across FGDs was the mismatch between devolved responsibilities and the limited administrative capacity available at the county level. Respondents frequently cited lack of skilled personnel, inadequate infrastructure, and confusion over roles between county and state authorities. These findings echo Bossert's (1998) "decision space" framework, which posits that even where decentralization is formally implemented, the scope of local discretion may be restricted by technical, legal, or political constraints. Participants in Mundri, for instance, spoke of county officers being unable to plan or act without lengthy consultations with state officials—an indication of limited local control and bureaucratic inefficiency.

Another critical insight from the discussions was the fragmentation of authority and overlapping mandates between administrative tiers. This ambiguity often led to service duplication or neglect, particularly in health and agricultural extension services. The literature warns against such institutional fragmentation; Smoke and Lewis (1996) highlight that lack of clear administrative delineation can erode accountability and reduce efficiency in service delivery.

Furthermore, participants across the counties expressed concern about poor supervision and weak monitoring mechanisms for frontline service providers. Teachers and health workers were reportedly irregular in some areas due to weak enforcement and oversight. This aligns with WorldBank (2004) findings that in fragile and decentralized systems, absence of strong administrative mechanisms can result in service delivery breakdowns, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas. Despite these challenges, the FGDs also revealed potential for community involvement in administrative functions. Some respondents in Yambio cited increased local participation in planning and oversight committees, suggesting that administrative decentralization can improve responsiveness when linked with citizen engagement. This supports Olowu (2001) who argues that decentralized systems perform better when local governments are accountable not just upward to central ministries, but also downward to the local population.

Conclusion and Contribution to New Knowledge:-

This chapter examined the relationship between administrative decentralization and service delivery in Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri counties of Western Equatoria State. Drawing on quantitative analysis and qualitative evidence from FGDs, the findings demonstrate that administrative decentralization has a statistically significant but uneven influence on service delivery outcomes in fragile contexts such as South Sudan. The descriptive results show that participatory decision-making and fiscal transfers are present to a moderate degree, suggesting that decentralization structures formally exist. However, weak capacity development, inconsistent accountability, and variable perceptions of corruption indicate that administrative decentralization has not translated uniformly into effective service delivery. Correlation results further reveal that service delivery outcomes are more strongly associated across counties than within individual counties, highlighting regional interdependencies rather than purely localized administrative effects. Regression analysis confirms that administrative decentralization explains a meaningful proportion of variation in service delivery (48.3%), but its impact differs by context: Yambio demonstrates a positive and significant effect, Tambura shows only marginal gains, while Mundri records no meaningful contribution.

Qualitative findings reinforce these patterns. FGDs reveal that in Tambura and Mundri, decentralization is largely nominal, characterized by limited autonomy, staff instability, unclear mandates, and persistent interference from higher levels of government. In contrast, Yambio illustrates that where administrative capacity, leadership continuity, and partial decision-making space exist, decentralization can modestly improve responsiveness and planning. Overall, the chapter concludes that administrative decentralization alone is insufficient to guarantee improved service delivery in fragile states; its effectiveness depends on how authority, capacity, and accountability are operationalized at the local level.

Recommendations:-

The study recommends targeted capacity-building interventions in counties with weak administrative systems, clearer delineation of roles across levels of government, timely and predictable fiscal transfers, and strengthened inter-county collaboration frameworks. Protecting county-level decision-making from excessive political interference is essential for realizing the benefits of decentralization.

Contribution to New Knowledge:-

Based on these findings, this study contributes new knowledge to the decentralization literature in fragile and post-conflict states in three keyways:

- 1. Decentralization as a Networked, Not Isolated, Process:-**

The strong inter-county correlations suggest that service delivery in fragile settings is shaped by regional administrative spill-over effects, shared resources, and coordinated practices rather than by isolated county-level reforms. This challenges conventional decentralization assumptions that local service outcomes are primarily determined within individual jurisdictions.

- 2. The Capacity–Authority Gap as a Central Constraint:-**

The study empirically demonstrates a persistent gap between devolved responsibilities and actual administrative capacity and decision space at the county level. This refines existing theories by showing that in fragile states, decentralization failure is less about the absence of structures and more about misaligned authority, skills, and institutional support.

- 3. Context-Sensitive Administrative Decentralization:-**

The differentiated outcomes across Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri confirm that administrative decentralization functions as a context-dependent intervention, not a uniform policy tool. This supports the need for a fragility-responsive approach in which decentralization reforms are sequenced, adaptive, and tailored to local political stability, leadership continuity, and institutional maturity.

To address administrative decentralization challenges in South Sudan, the study proposes a shift from symbolic devolution toward functionally empowered decentralization, characterized by: (i) clear delineation of administrative roles across levels of government; (ii) sustained investment in local human and institutional capacity; (iii) protection of county-level decision-making from excessive political interference; and (iv) stronger horizontal coordination mechanisms among counties. By embedding decentralization within a fragility-responsive governance framework, South Sudan can better align administrative reforms with realistic service delivery outcomes in conflict-affected environments.

Declaration of Interest:-

The authors declare that there are no known financial, professional, or personal interests that could have influenced the research reported in this manuscript titled “The Influence of Administrative Decentralization on Service Delivery in Three Selected Counties in Western Equatoria State, South Sudan.” The study was conducted independently, and the supervisors’ involvement was limited to academic guidance and oversight. All views and conclusions expressed in the manuscript are solely those of the authors.

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