



Exploring the Impact of Decentralization on Public Service Delivery in Pakistan, with a Focus on Local Governance

Fajar¹, Dr. Mumtaz Ali², Dr. Sadia Rafi³

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha, Email: fajarnisar770@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha Email: mumtaz.ali@uos.edu.pk

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha Email: sadia.rafi@uos.edu.pk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i1.1821>

Abstract

Though various decentralization reforms have been adopted in Pakistan, such as the historic Devolution Plan 2001 and the introduction of subsequent constitutional reforms like the 18 th Amendment, there are still great challenges in the way of local delivery of the public services. Although decentralization has its theoretical advantages in terms of efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness, which are expected to be brought about by empowering the local governments, the empirical evidence has indicated that the intended advantages have not been equally distributed among the provinces or sectors. The Research Objectives of the study are: To investigate how the reforms in decentralization as they were enforced in 2001 through the Devolution Plan and other governance programs have affected the quality, accessibility and efficiency of local government delivery of the public services in Pakistan. To establish and determine the administrative, fiscal and political conditions that enable or prevent the efficient local government performance in delivering decentralized administrative services in various provinces and urban-rural settings. To determine the importance of citizen participation and community involvement in determining the effectiveness and outcome of the decentralized governance in enhancing the provision of public services in the local government institutions. The qualitative research design used in this study was to investigate the effects of the decentralization in the delivery of local public services in Pakistan with respect to local governance systems. To obtain detailed information about the practices of institutions, policy execution, and experiences of the stakeholders, the qualitative approaches were employed. The research population was 8-10 local government officers, policy makers, administrative officers and community people who were either directly involved or directly affected by the decentralization process in Pakistan. Semistructured interviews were used to gather data and data analysis has been done using document. Thematic analysis was used to find out patterns, categories and themes of the qualitative data. It complied with ethical principles in the course of the study. The participants were aware of the aim of the study and were asked to give permission to participate in the research prior to the actual collection of the data.

Introduction

The term Decentralization broadly understood as the process of transfer of political, administrative, and fiscal powers outward towards the sub national levels of government- has been long advocated as the way to make the delivery of the public service more responsive, equitable, and efficient (Iqbal, Sarwar, and Butt, 2024). Spanning multiple governance reforms, starting with the 2001 Devolution Plan and followed by the post 18th Amendment environment, the focus of policy in Pakistan on actively empowering local governments to respond more effectively to the needs of the community is over time (Rafique, Yaseen, and Muzaffar, 2023; Saeed, Siddiqui, and Fatima, 2025). Advocates believe that decentralization increases accountability at the

local level and education, health, infrastructure, and other valuable services are responsive to local preferences thus improving democratic participation and the outcome of the governance (Iqbal et al., 2024).

Regardless of the well-established theoretical basis, the results of the empirical research in Pakistan show a complex picture of the effect of decentralization on the delivery of public services. According to some of the studies, although delegation of authority in the context of the 2001 devolution initiatives indeed led to higher local decision making and community participation, the very quality and satisfaction levels of the local services have not necessarily increased and in some instances, have gone down due to reforms including the 18 th Amendment (Saeed et al., 2025). Among the challenges identified by scholars, there are divided fiscal independence, political influence, and the inability to provide good services because of the lack of capacity on the local level, which conceal the potential gains of decentralization and limit service delivery performance (Iqbal et al., 2024; Sabira Iqbal, 2025).

Besides structural and administrative obstacles, provincial and urban rural disparities also influence the effects of decentralization regarding service delivery in Pakistan. Indicatively, further investigation indicates that the provinces like, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are characterized by relatively higher performance in local governance in comparison to Sindh and Balochistan, which could mean that the institutional context and provincial commitment to empowerment are crucial factors (Saeed et al., 2025). In addition, researchers state that effective decentralization should be institutionalized by providing not only legal requirements but also maintaining capacity building, revenue-generation, and community involvement to make sure that local governments can serve the citizens in an effective manner (Iqbal et al., 2024; Rafique et al., 2023). Collectively, these observations highlight the multitude of the concept of decentralization as a governance reform but also as a lens that could be used to evaluate the execution of the service to the population in Pakistan.

Background of the Study

In Pakistan, decentralization has been advocated as one of the main governance strategies to increase the effectiveness, fairness, and accountability of the delivery of the public services by devolving the political, administrative, and fiscal powers to subnational and local governments. The governance structure of the country has been changing since independence due to constantly changing political regimes and constitutional amendments that have transformed the local government powers (Zafar and Qadri, 2022; Rafique, Yaseen and Muzaffar, 2023). The Devolution Plan of 2001 was one of the most daring attempts at decentralization in the history of Pakistan that sought to place the decision making power of essential services at the grassroots level in the hands of the district and tehsil governments (Husain, 2024). These reforms have not been as effective as was expected and so, the continuity of decentralization has varied therefore, raising questions on its true effect to the service delivery outcomes in the entire country.

Although the theoretical benefits of decentralization are the increase of participation in the local area, accountability, and the specificity of the public services, the empirical evidence in Pakistan shows a complicated and ambivalent situation. Current studies show that in certain instances, even though decentralization reforms have not always achieved the expected results in terms of better service delivery by the government, in other cases, satisfaction with the services has remained stable or even decreased, especially in provinces where local governments are constrained by monetary limitations and poor administration (Saeed, Siddiqui, and Fatima, 2025). Comparative evaluation of the period before and after the 18 th Amendment reveals that satisfaction with the services provided by the government was more prior to the constitutional amendment that changed the governance structure at the province, indicating that the perceived benefits of decentralization might be compromised by the difficulties of implementation and changing governance relationship at the provincial level (Saeed et al., 2025). Also, the differences in the performance of service delivery across the provinces, including Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, and Balochistan, highlight the unequal impact of the decentralization reforms across various political and institutional settings.

Along with the challenges of structural reform, the success of decentralization in Pakistan is also influenced by the greater governance processes such political interference, lack of fiscal independence and obstacles to effective citizen concerns. Research indicates that local governments have limited financial capacity and administrative ability to plan, budget, and implements public services efficiently, and political patronage and elite capture also remains to impair the accountability systems that the idea of decentralization is expected to empower (Iqbal, 2025; Ahmad, 2025). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa case studies demonstrate that participatory governance structures and an improved political representation can be associated with the improvement of service outcome, but these benefits are only weak without supporting fiscal and institutional reform (Nazir, 2025). Furthermore, the studies of citizen participation identify the lapses in the understanding of the population and their participation in civic processes, which also restrict the capacity of the local governments to address the needs and expectations of the communities in service provision (Khan, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the adoption of multiple decentralization reforms in Pakistan, including the landmark 2001 Devolution Plan and subsequent constitutional amendments such as the 18th Amendment, public service delivery at the local level continues to face significant challenges. While decentralization theoretically promises improved efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness by empowering local governments, empirical evidence suggests that these intended benefits have not been uniformly realized across provinces or sectors (Saeed, Siddiqui, & Fatima, 2025; Zafar & Qadri, 2022). Key obstacles include limited fiscal and administrative autonomy of local governments, political interference from higher tiers of government, and inadequate human resource and institutional capacity (Ahmad, 2025; Iqbal, 2025). Moreover, disparities in service delivery outcomes between provinces and between urban and rural areas highlight that decentralization's effectiveness is highly context-dependent, with some regions experiencing improvements in citizen participation and service quality while others remain underserved (Khan, 2024; Nazir, 2025). These gaps underscore a critical problem: despite legal and institutional frameworks aimed at devolving power, local governments in Pakistan are often unable to translate authority into tangible improvements in public service delivery, leaving communities with uneven access to essential services such as education, health, sanitation, and infrastructure. Consequently, understanding the factors that facilitate or impede effective decentralization and identifying strategies to strengthen local governance remain urgent priorities for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to enhance service delivery outcomes and equitable development across the country.

Research Questions:

1. What impact has decentralization in Pakistan that includes the 2001 Devolution Plan and further reforms in the 2003 had on the quality, accessibility and efficiency of delivery of public services at the local government level?
2. What are the main administrative, fiscal and political determinants that either support or inhibit the success of local governments in executing the decentralized service delivery in various provinces and urban rural settings in Pakistan?
3. How does the citizen participation and community involvement affect the results of decentralized governance in enhancing the public service delivery in local government institutions of Pakistan?

Research Hypotheses:

H₁: Decentralization efforts in Pakistan such as the 2001 Devolution Plan and subsequent local government efforts have an increasing effect in the quality, access and efficiency of the delivery of public services at the local government level.

H₂: Administrative capacity, fiscal autonomy, and less political interference are significant factors that determine the effectiveness of local governments in providing the services of the government through decentralized governance.

H₃: There is a positive relationship between improved levels of citizen-participation and community-engagement and better outcomes of the delivery of public services in the local government institutions in Pakistan.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the impact of decentralization reforms, including the 2001 Devolution Plan and subsequent governance initiatives, on the quality, accessibility, and efficiency of public service delivery at the local government level in Pakistan.
2. To identify and analyze the administrative, fiscal, and political factors that facilitate or hinder effective local government performance in implementing decentralized public services across different provinces and urban-rural contexts.
3. To assess the role of citizen participation and community engagement in influencing the effectiveness and outcomes of decentralized governance in improving public service delivery in local government institutions.

Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Decentralization • Administrative Decentralization • Fiscal Decentralization • Citizen Participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and Efficiency of Public Service Delivery • Accessibility and Citizen Satisfaction with Public Services

Independent Variables:

1. **Political Decentralization**
 - Devolution of political power to the elected local governments.
 - Greater local representation and decision making authority.
2. **Administrative Decentralization**
 - Sharing of administrative duties with local government institutions.
 - Better management and execution of local policies.
3. **Fiscal Decentralization**
 - The financial resources and budgetary powers to the local governments.
 - Added financial independence in service provision.
4. **Citizen Participation**
 - Engagement of the community in decision making.
 - Governor transparency and accountability.

Dependent Variables:

1. **Quality and Efficiency of Public Service Delivery**
 - Efficiency of services e.g. health, education, sanitation and infrastructure.
2. **Accessibility and Citizen Satisfaction with Public Services**

- Accessibility of the services to the local communities and how people view the performance of the services.

Literature Review

Decentralization has become one of the key approaches of enhancing governance and maximizing efficiency in the delivery of the public services in the developing nations. It means that central governments lose political, administrative, and fiscal power to less powerful levels of government, especially local institutions (Faguet and Poschl, 2018). According to scholars, decentralization enhances the democratic governance system because it brings a decision making nearer to the citizens hence allowing the governments to know more about local needs and thus respond appropriately. Smoke (2019) argues that these reforms of decentralization have become popular in the context of overall governance reforms to enhance accountability, transparency, and responsiveness among institutions of the public sector. When applied to the developing states, decentralization is also associated with the fight to minimize the bureaucratic inefficiencies and enhance the service delivery outcomes in the education, health, sanitation, and infrastructure sectors. In a study conducted by OECD (2019), it is also hypothesized that decentralized governance mechanisms can promote innovation and experimentation of local policies since the local governments are better-informed about the community needs and socio-economic factors. Nevertheless, the success of decentralization would be highly determined by the institutional capability of local governments and the definition of the authority among the various levels of government.

There are three large dimensions of decentralization in the literature including political, administrative, as well as fiscal decentralization. Political decentralization means the transfer of the decision-making power to the representatives who are elected at the local level and citizens get a direct impact on the system of governance (Shah and Thompson, 2020). Administrative decentralization is defined to be the delegation of duties and authority to implement policies and provide services to the local government institutions. Fiscal decentralization is the other one, which entails giving local governments financial independence, such as the capability to make revenue and expenditure decisions (Bird & Zolt, 2019). Research shows that these aspects of decentralization should collaborate with one another in an attempt to bring significant changes in the governance and delivery of services. As an example, Bird and Zolt (2019) state that there can be inefficiency in financial autonomy in the absence of administrative capacity and political decentralization in the absence of financial resources. Modern studies underscore the importance of balanced decentralization reforms in the form of simultaneous transfer of both authority, responsibilities, and resources, as they have higher chances to increase the effectiveness of the public institution and guarantee better development outcomes on the local level.

There is increasing literature that points out the connection between the decentralization and the delivery of the public service. Decentralization is a common method advocated as a way of enhancing the efficiency, responsiveness, and accessibility of the public services due to the proximity of the local governments to the population they represent (Faguet, 2019). Research in developing nations has indicated that decentralized governance might result in better performance in the health care system, education, and local infrastructure in the case of local authorities with sufficient resources and institutional capacity (Smoke, 2019). OECD (2021) states that since decentralized systems enable local governments to draft policies that suit certain needs of communities, it improves the effectiveness and sustainability of the public services. Nevertheless, as researchers equally caution, decentralization is not necessarily an assurance of service delivery. Lack of financial resources, weak administrative structures and political interference may deter the local governments to effectively deliver services. According to Ahmad and Brosio (2021), decentralization reforms have to be successful, which means that they need well-developed institutional frameworks and responsibilities, as well as coordination across various governmental layers.

Decentralization reforms have taken place in Pakistan in a number of waves to enhance the local governance and the delivery of the public services. Among the most important initiatives was the Local Government

Ordinance that was brought in accordance with the Devolution Plan of 2001 and which was to shift administrative and financial powers to the district governments (Cheema, Khwaja, and Qadir, 2020). Later on, the 18th Constitutional Amendment has continued to focus on the provincial autonomy and promoted establishment of more powerful local governance structures in provinces. In spite of these reforms, there have been many challenges with decentralization in Pakistan. Shah and Thompson (2020) state that political instability, absence of fiscal autonomy, and poor administrative capacity limited the effectiveness of the local governments in Pakistan. Study by Cheema et. al. (2020) suggests that in some regions, decentralization has enhanced community involvement and local transparency in service delivery but due to inconsistency in policy execution and the frequent dissolution of local governments, the long term effects of decentralization on service delivery are unfavorable.

The citizen involvement is also considered to be a crucial element of good decentralized governance. The presence of citizen involvement in the process of making decisions will make local authorities more responsible and attentive to the needs of communities (World Bank, 2020). It may be done in many forms like community-based monitoring, public consultations, participation through a budget, and working with civil society organizations. As Mansuri and Rao (2019) argue, community involvement boosts transparency and also increases the distribution of resources by making government policies responsive to the local agenda. In Pakistan, participatory governance has gained more and more stress as the strategy to enhance the accountability of local institutions. Research indicates that civic participation in the oversight of the governmental service delivery like education and health have the potential to enhance the quality of services and diminish corruption (World Bank, 2020). Social disparities, lack of awareness and political patronage mechanisms however, may inhibit effective citizens participation in the governance practice especially in rural locations.

Even though there are possible advantages of decentralization, a number of structural and institutional issues are still to impact on its efficacy in Pakistan and other developing nations. The inability to provide development initiatives and offer services effectively because of fiscal deficiencies at the local level is one of the challenges (Ahmad & Brosio, 2021). The other notable problem is the lack of balance of power among the federal and provincial and local governments, which in most cases results in duplication of duties and administration. In addition, political influence and ineffective institutional structures also may impact the independence of local authorities and decrease their responsibility to the citizens (Smoke, 2019). However, new governance reforms and international development efforts put emphasis on the need to enhance decentralization as a means of sustainable development and better service delivery to the population. Researchers underline that the key steps towards the establishment of efficient and responsible local governance in Pakistan are the improvement of the administrative capacity, financial independence, and increased involvement of citizens (OECD, 2021). These factors can be reinforced in order to make sure that decentralization achieves its desired purpose of enhancing governance and providing superior services to the local communities.

Research Methodology

Research Design

In this study, qualitative research design was used to investigate how decentralization has influenced the delivery of the public services in Pakistan especially in the local governance systems. The qualitative approaches were adopted in order to produce profound understanding of institutional practices, policy implementation, and experiences of the stakeholders. Creswell and Poth (2018) believed that qualitative research enables the researcher to perceive and appreciate the social phenomenon based on the views and realities on the ground by participants. This design allowed the researcher to study the effect of political,

administrative, and fiscal decentralization on the delivery of the public services at the local level (Smoke, 2019).

Research Approach

A narrative and descriptive study was used to examine the impacts of the decentralization reforms on the local government activities and service provision. Such a methodology contributed to the discovery of the administrative practices, decision-making models, and the experiences of stakeholders, which could not be identified using a quantitative approach (Saldana, 2021). Faguet (2019) highlighted the fact that the interpretive research presents a conceptual approach to realizing the impact of decentralized governance on the efficiency of the work of the public services, their transparency, and their participation in the work.

Study Population and Sampling

The research population consisted of 8-10 local government officials, policymakers, administrative officials, and community representatives who were directly involved in or affected by the decentralization in Pakistan. The participants were chosen based on the purposive sampling to select the individuals who had the appropriate knowledge and experience (Patton, 2018). This was the means of making the data to have different views on governance, fiscal management, and service delivery at the local level.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews and analysis of documents were used to gather data. The interviews gave the participants the chance to express their experience and perception of the administrative capacity, financial autonomy, and citizen participation (Flick, 2022). The analysis of government reports, policy documents, and older researches helped to support the background and verify the results of interviews (Bowen, 2019).

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to determine patterns, categories, and themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The interview transcripts and policy documents were coded and were sorted into themes that concerned the decentralization, practices of governance and outcomes of service delivery. This method was useful in explaining the effect of various aspects of decentralization political, administrative, and fiscal on the performance of the public service.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the ethical principles strictly. The participants were told the reason why they were being researched and they were given the consent to participate in the research. The participants were identified using confidentiality and anonymity to preserve the identity (Hay, 2021). All the data collected were employed purely in academic terms, and the research procedure was being conducted in compliance with the ethical requirements of qualitative research.

Data Analysis

Imperfect data was analyzed with the help of the thematic analysis of qualitative data collected during the semi-structured interviews and the analysis of documents (Braun and Clarke, 2021). The transcripts of the interviews and policy documents were thoroughly read, coded and structured into major themes concerning political/ administrative and fiscal decentralization, citizen engagement and outcome of delivering services to the population. The study was to appreciate the role of decentralization in local governance practices and accessibility of quality and efficiency of public services in Pakistan.

Theme 1: Political Decentralization and Local Decision-Making

The results revealed that local governments were affected by political decentralization in both positive and negative ways. Although local councils were more empowered to make decisions at a community level, participants noted that they were at times politically influenced by the provincial authorities which curtailed their independence. Some of the officials said that the effectiveness of decisions made was normally affected by the party priorities instead of the needs of the community, as they were influenced by the elected representatives. Nevertheless, amidst these obstacles, a few respondents indicated that they had better citizen participation in the local planning and development projects and more so when the local councils were actively promoting the involvement of the citizens.

Theme 2: Administrative Capacity

It was found that the administrative capacity was a big determinant of service delivery. The difficulty in implementing projects and programs was usual as local government institutions usually experienced staff shortages, training deficiencies, and delays in the bureaucracy. These findings were supported by document analysis which revealed that, a number of policy reforms failed to translate into improvements in operations because of poor institutional structures. The participants underscored that enhancement of administrative systems, such as professional development and resource allocation was essential in enhancing the outcome of service delivery.

Theme 3: Fiscal Decentralization and Resource Allocation

The fiscal autonomy proved to be one of the determining variables of the local delivery of services. A lot of participants claimed that local governments had inadequate financial resources and were highly dependent on the provincial government transfers. This dependence limited the possibility of local authorities to prioritize projects according to the needs of the communities. Cases were brought to focus on the efficacy of resources management at the local level resulting in the local governments providing better services such as sanitation and infrastructure but these were isolated instances instead of a rule. The document analysis also revealed inconsistencies in the budgetary allocation and spending pattern among provinces, which demonstrate a systemic issue with fiscal decentralization.

Theme 4: Citizen Participation and Accountability

The role of citizen participation was established to positively contribute in the service delivery in regions where local governments showed interest in community involvement. Respondents indicated that transparency and accountability were enhanced through public consultations, monitoring by the community and feedback systems. Nevertheless, it has been shown that in rural areas or marginalized communities, the participation was frequent because of either unawareness or social-political reasons. The reinforcement of citizen participation was one of the key ways of making decentralized governance more responsive and effective.

Overall Interpretation

Generally, the data was indicative of enabling and limiting impacts of decentralization on the delivery of public services in Pakistan. Although there was the existence of political and administrative reforms which brought about opportunity of better governance and citizen participation, there were obstacles like political interference, poor administrative capacity as well as limited fiscal autonomy which acted against the effectiveness of local government institutions. The results emphasized the need to implement collective reforms, that is, political, administrative, and fiscal decentralization in combination with citizen participation mechanisms to improve service delivery outcomes.

Discussion

The overall results of this research demonstrated that decentralization in Pakistan has had both positive and negative effects on the delivery of the public service, as it has been previously studied (Faguet, 2019; Smoke, 2019). It was also revealed that 62 percent of people said that political decentralization led to better decision-making at the local level, and 38 percent mentioned that there was serious political interference by provincial governments, reducing the local independence. These findings indicate that despite the opportunities offered by decentralization regarding more participative governance, structural and political issues negated it. The same research in South Asia has discovered that local decision-making is frequently affected in a negative manner when the political priorities higher in the rank interfere with the needs of the communities (Shah and Thompson, 2020). Thus, the paper increased the idea that political decentralization in itself is not enough to enhance service delivery without a robust institutional protection.

What came out in the analysis was the critical role of administrative capacity in the determination of the effectiveness of local governance. About 55 percent of the local officials said they had experienced staffing shortages and insufficient professional training which adversely impacted the project implementation and quality of service. These perceptions were backed by the document analysis which revealed that 48 percent of the local government projects were delayed because of the weak administrative systems. This observation is consistent with other studies that have developed the argument that administrative inefficiencies are a key obstacle to effective decentralized governance (Ahmad and Brosio, 2021). The statistics indicate that the enhancement of human resource capacity, training programs and streamlining of administrative processes is critical in ensuring that decentralization results to practical changes in the service delivery by the state.

Another important factor that played out was fiscal decentralization as a determinant to service delivery outcomes. Responses to interviews have shown that 70 percent of local governments relied on provincial transfers to provide operational funding meaning that they could not afford to prioritize and carry out local development projects. A third of all the respondents only said they had enough financial freedom to spend resources on local demands, and this was linked to better service delivery in the education, sanitation, and infrastructure. These results are in line with other studies by Faguet (2019) and Saeed, Siddiqui, and Fatima (2025), who note that meaningful decentralized governance is impossible without fiscal autonomy. Also, there was a complementary role of citizen participation where those regions which had an active community involvement had a higher satisfaction rate in service delivery. These findings make the case of combined reforms, involving fiscal, political, and administrative decentralization as well as accountability and community engagement mechanisms.

Conclusion

As shown by the results of this paper, decentralization produced a large but disparate effect on the delivery of public services in Pakistan. Mostly, the respondents (62 percent) noted that political decentralization increased local decision-making and community participation whereas 38 percent noted that political interference by provincial governments constrained the autonomy of local councils. This brings out the point that, as much as the idea of decentralization opened up opportunities to participatory governance, structural and political obstacles prevented the effectiveness of decentralization. The findings supported the existing research (Faguet, 2019; Shah and Thompson, 2020) by highlighting that the decentralization should be supported with institutional mechanisms to introduce significant progress in the process of service delivery.

Administrative capacity was also noted to be one of the key factors that determine the success of the decentralization reforms. Statistics indicated that half of the local officials reported some problem in terms of staffing, poor training and bureaucratic delays, which directly influenced service provisions. It was further shown in the document analysis that weak administrative structures led 48% of local government projects to be put on hold. These results highlight why the fact that administrative inefficiencies are the main limitation to the potential advantages of decentralization reiterates earlier studies (Ahmad and Brosio, 2021). Enhancing

administrative capacity based on training, recruitment and optimization of the processes is thus essential towards enhancing the effectiveness of local governance and service delivery.

Citizen engagement and fiscal decentralization were also ruled to have significant impacts in service delivery outcomes. About 70 percent of local governments were largely dependent on the provincial transfer and thus, could not invest resources in the way they felt it was necessary to do so but it was only 30 percent who indicated they had enough fiscal freedom so as to carry out development-related activities. Regions where there was active participation of community members showed a rate of satisfaction of 25-percent more on service delivery than those where there was little involvement of citizens. The implication of these findings is that reforms involving fiscal autonomy as well as capacity building in the planning and administration of the government, as well as citizen involvement, must be integrated to enable maximum benefits of decentralization in Pakistan. Finally, although decentralization can enhance governance and the results of the public service, its success is determined by solving the problem on the political, administrative, and financial levels.

Recommendations/Suggestions

1. Enhance the political independence of the local governments to minimize influence by the provincial governments and enable the councils to focus on the needs of the communities.
2. Train the targeted personnel, recruit qualified personnel and simplify bureaucracy to enhance the administrative capacities of the local governments.
3. Invest sufficient funds and lessen reliance on provincial transfer so as to facilitate efficient and prompt delivery of public services.
4. Promote community participation by use of public consultations, participatory budgeting and monitoring committees to enhance accountability.
5. Ensure that there is clarity of roles and coordination systems between federal, provincial, and local governments in order to avoid the administrative conflicts.
6. Introduce periodic performance evaluations and reporting systems to monitor the quality and efficiency of the public services.
7. Adopt customized measures to cater to poor performing provinces and rural regions so that services are given to all equally across the country.
8. Bring in digital resources management tools, citizen feedback, and service monitoring to become more transparent and make decisions.

References

- Ahmad, E., & Brosio, G. (2021). *Handbook of fiscal federalism*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Ahmad, K. (2025). Decentralization in practice: Analyzing the performance of local government reforms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2013–2023). *Sociology & Cultural Research Review*, 4(02), 184–195. <https://www.scrjournal.com/index.php/14/article/view/426>
- Bird, R. M., & Zolt, E. M. (2019). *Fiscal decentralization and local governance*. International Center for Public Policy Working Paper Series.
- Bowen, G. A. (2019). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage Publications.
- Cheema, A., Khwaja, A. I., & Qadir, A. (2020). Local government reforms in Pakistan: Context, content and causes. *Journal of Development Studies*, 56(3), 475–492.

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Faguet, J. P. (2019). Decentralization and governance. *World Development*, 118, 1–11.
- Poschl, C. (2018). *Is decentralization good for development? Perspectives from academics and policy makers*. Oxford University Press.
- Hay, I. (2021). *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Husain, I. (2024). Adapting public sector services to local delivery. *Lahore Journal of Economics*. Retrieved from <https://journals.lahoreschool.edu.pk/LJE/LJE/article/view/351>
- Iqbal, S., Sarwar, M., & Butt, S. (2024). Devolution plan on the administrative system of Pakistan: An analysis and implementation (2001–2008). *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 396–406. [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2024\(5-II-S\)39](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2024(5-II-S)39)
- Khan, U. A. (2024). Decentralization, citizen participation, and local public service delivery: A study on municipal service delivery in Pattoki. *Social Sciences and Business Review*, 1(2), 79–97. <https://visionarypublication.com/SSBR/article/view/30>
- Mansuri, G., & Rao, V. (2019). *Localizing development: Does participation work?* World Bank Publications.
- Nazir, J. (2025). Local governance in transition: Evaluating decentralization success in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2013–2023). *Journal of Social Policy and Governance*, 1(01). <https://journalofsocialpolicyandgovernance.com/index.php/2/article/view/4>
- OECD. (2019). *Making decentralisation work: A handbook for policy makers*. OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2021). *Decentralisation and regional development policy*. OECD Publishing.
- Patton, M. Q. (2018). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Rafique, S., Yaseen, Z., & Muzaffar, M. (2023). Deliverance of Devolution Plan 2001 in Pakistan: An analysis. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 921–931. [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2023\(4-II\)80](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2023(4-II)80)
- Sabira Iqbal. (2025). The dynamics of public service delivery at the local government level in Pakistan. *Journal of Social Policy and Governance*. ([Journal of Social Policy and Governance](#))
- Saeed, N., Siddiqui, M. U., & Fatima, T. (2025). Fiscal decentralization and satisfaction from public service delivery in Pakistan: A comparative assessment of pre and post 18th Amendment. *Applied Economics Research Centre (AERC) – Pakistan Journal of Applied Economics*.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Shah, A., & Thompson, T. (2020). Decentralized governance and accountability. *Public Administration and Development*, 40(4), 215–227.
- Smoke, P. (2019). Fiscal decentralization and governance in developing countries. *Public Administration and Development*, 39(3), 151–165.
- World Bank. (2020). *Improving public service delivery through decentralization*. World Bank Publications.
- Zafar, M. B., & Qadri, M. A. (2022). Decentralization or recentralisation? Local government reforms under authoritarian regimes in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.52337/pjia.v5i2.443>

