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Resource Generation and Effective Management of Public Primary Schools in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The decentralisation reforms in Cameroon have given municipal councils responsibility for setting up, equipping and maintaining public primary schools, but there is little information available regarding whether municipal councils raise the resources needed for this work, or whether this is linked to school management. The study explored the relationship between resource generation by municipal councils and the effective management of public primary schools to help inform decisions on transfers and council capacity. Five purposively selected councils (Nkambe, Douala IV, Bafoussam III, Buea and Mokolo) in the North West, Littoral, West, South West and Far North Regions were studied using an ex post facto correlational design. The return rates of the primary school teachers and the municipal councillors for the structured questionnaires were 95.2% and 86.7%, respectively. The internal reliability of the resource generation subscales was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .795$ and .845). Council activity was low, with 80.3% of teachers responding "not at all" across all item responses, and 71.5% of councillors disagreeing with the statements. Spearman's rank-order correlation revealed that there was a strong positive and significant correlation between resource generation and effective school management ($\rho = .576$, 95% CI [.49, .65], $p < .001$; $n = 295$). The design is correlational, and the data are perceptions, so the result indicates an association, not causation. Where responsibilities have been devolved, councils appear to have lacked the capacity to mobilise resources. Recommendations include aligning transfers with mandates, increasing own-source revenue and improving financial reporting.

KEYWORDS: Decentralisation; Municipal councils; Primary schools; Resource generation; School management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralised education is widely seen as a strategy for shifting education decisions, accountability and resources towards the communities served by schools (UNESCO, 2004). The fiscal argument is founded on the notion that local authorities know their needs better than ministries in faraway capitals, and that residents who live nearby can hold local authorities to account more readily than citizens living farther away (Al-Samarrai & Lewis, 2021). This argument holds only if the authorities responsible for these new tasks have access to, or can mobilise, the resources, both financial and material, that they need to perform them. If responsibilities are assigned without the means to implement them, local institutions cannot fulfil them.

The reform in Cameroon has been a gradual process. The 1996 constitutional amendment established regions and councils as decentralised territorial communities, and the 2004 law on transferring competences established the legal framework for this (Tcheunta et al., 2026). Transfers became effective in 2010. In the primary education segment, councils were given the mandate to maintain school equipment and hire school support staff, as well as to contribute to school infrastructure, including classrooms, latrines, water points and fences (Tchuente, 2022). As of 2018, twenty-one ministries had transferred 63 powers (Eteme & Mountouzache, 2024), and Law No. 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 consolidated this in the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities.

There is a lack of fiscal capacity to match the formal responsibilities. In 2020, locally generated income accounted for less than 30% of Cameroonian local authorities' total resources, leaving councils largely dependent on external funding windows (Ngô Ndjang et al., 2024). An informant in the Adamawa Region reported that transfers amounted to no more than 2% of the state budget, whereas the decentralisation plan requires 15%; the same study also mentions complaints from ministries about the lack of means to pay their staff in the councils (Eteme & Mountouzache, 2024). According to analysts, the 2019 Code does not specify the timing, scope

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and funding of the transfer of powers over primary schools, and governors and prefects remain as representatives of the central government alongside the elected councils (Mfewou, 2022; Fombad, 2025).

The implications for schools are less clear-cut. However, two studies from Cameroon suggest that devolution does bring benefits. Using a difference-in-differences approach comparing municipalities with and without the 2010 reform, Tchuente (2022) estimated that primary pupils' test scores rose by 15.39% in literacy and 10.20% in mathematics, while Fouopi Djiogap et al. (2024) found that fiscal decentralisation was associated with more classrooms and desks per pupil. Both studies ignore the question of how council resources are raised and how they fit into the context of school management. Community resources and school management issues have been extensively studied in secondary schools in Cameroon (Eno et al., 2023; Mbua et al., 2023; Mekolle & Lyonga, 2025; Nchunke et al., 2025). There is limited evidence linking council resource generation to primary school management, with Massa (2024) being the only available study.

Statement of the Problem

Councils have a statutory duty to provide and maintain public primary schools, but there is no evidence that they are raising the funds they need, nor is there evidence on the relationship between the amount of funds raised by councils and the quality of school management. Without evidence of the impact of such measures, further decentralisation, transfers and council capacity development must rest on assumptions.

Aim and Objective of the Study

The research objective was to examine the link between resource generation and effective management of public primary schools in Cameroon. The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between the resource generation of the municipal council and the effective management of public primary schools.

Research Question

How is the effective management of public primary schools in Cameroon related to resource generation by municipal councils?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at the 5% level of significance.

H_1: Municipal council resource generation and effective management of public primary schools in Cameroon are significantly related.

H_0: There is no significant relationship between council resource generation and effective management of public primary schools in Cameroon.

Significance of the Study

The results have implications for municipal councils, the Ministry of Basic Education, the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development, school administrators and community stakeholders. They identify areas where there is a gap between legal requirements and operational capacity, and provide a baseline for subsequent, stronger designs to test whether there is a lag between council resource mobilisation and school management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications

Resource generation. This refers to the financial, material and related inputs that public primary schools require to operate and that councils generate themselves. It covers inputs for which councils have been held accountable since 2010, such as infrastructure, equipment maintenance, support staff and teaching materials (Tchuente, 2022) and support that is locally mobilised to expand public funding. Local contribution is typically measured by the percentage of the school's income that comes from fees, community contributions, and private donors (Sakamoto, 2022). Resource generation should be distinguished from intergovernmental transfers: a transfer is a decision made at the centre, whereas resource generation is the result of the council's own mobilisation efforts and capacity.

Effective school management. This refers to a school's capacity to initiate, implement, monitor and evaluate its administrative, instructional and welfare activities, covering the following aspects: planning; supervision; resource utilisation; staff coordination; facility maintenance; teacher and student support; parent and community involvement. Relevant studies emphasise two predictors of school performance, namely supervision (Ngafi, 2022) and leadership competence (Mbah et al., 2023). Community involvement has the potential to increase the capacity of schools, via networks, leadership and collective action (Thompson et al., 2003), where the school has the capacity to channel it. This study does not focus on how effective management is produced, but on the relationship between resource availability and effective management.

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Theoretical Framework

Soufflé Theory of Decentralisation

Decentralisation has three closely interconnected dimensions, political, administrative and fiscal, as outlined by Parker (1995) in what is known as the Soufflé Theory of Decentralisation. A reform in which capacity does not match functions is likely to be less effective. In this context, the theory suggests that more devolved administrative responsibility would bring about less effective school management, whilst greater fiscal capacity would be associated with more efficient management of schools.

Principal–Agent Theory

Principal–Agent Theory focuses on how a principal delegates tasks to an agent who holds different information and whose interests differ from the principal's (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). In decentralised primary education, the government can be perceived as a principal, the council as a supervisor and the school as an agent (Tchuente, 2022). Councils are presumed to be better informed about local needs, which is the source of the efficiency gains that decentralisation promises. Delegation creates accountability problems and information gaps, which is why principals must monitor and report on resources to determine whether the delegation is achieving the public interest. The theory thus focuses on transparency, monitoring and reporting on the raising and use of resources for schools.

Empirical Review

This section reviews decentralisation in Cameroon and the role of council finance and school inputs.

The evidence from Cameroon on fiscal decentralisation is mixed. Some results are encouraging: there was an increase in test scores following devolution (Tchuente, 2022), an association of fiscal decentralisation and more classrooms/desks per pupil in 45 municipalities between 2010 and 2020 (Fouopi Djiogap et al., 2024), and a link between fiscal decentralisation and more desks per pupil in the ECE sector (Abiaya'a et al., 2025). From an implementation perspective, the public investment budget, FEICOM and the National Participatory Development Programme are three main funding windows for councils. Their technical efficiency is heterogeneous and late delivery is the main source of inefficiency in the last two (Ngô Ndjang et al., 2024). Councils also face challenges in implementing budgets due to a lack of trained staff, and funds can expire or be used inappropriately (Mbah Enjei & Chi Valery, 2025). Citizens in Fako Division did not directly participate in the monitoring and prioritisation of local projects, nor was there good information flow (Eselekwe, 2024). Kountchou (2025) highlighted scope for more efficient tracking and management of public school financial resources by improving accountability and information flows, while Agboke (2025) explores recurring disparities and governance issues in decentralised education. Previous studies in Tanzania (Masue, 2010, 2014) and Latin America (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003; Winkler & Gershberg, 2000) also reported low levels of local fiscal capacity, participation, and administrative competence.

Community Resources & School Management

Secondary-level studies in Cameroon link community resources to management outcomes, with low to moderate coefficients. Principals' use of the financial resources of the community and PTA had a correlation level of .289 (Mbua et al., 2023) in Fako Division, and similarly, good PTA–administration relations in South West Region were correlated with the management of public secondary schools at r = .308 (Eno et al., 2023). The PTA has been able to support infrastructure, staff support and extracurricular activities; however, misuse of funds and a lack of trust between the administrators and the PTA limit its contribution (Nchunke et al., 2025). Parents participate in school politics (60.7%), fiscal management (49.4%) and administrative decision-making (32%), with most of the involvement being consultative (Mekolle & Lyonga, 2025). A review of 61 studies found that community engagement can create positive impacts on resource mobilisation, transparency and school facilities; however, this is not a substitute for the responsibility of the state, and should complement it (Karoli & Upadhyaya, 2026). In 14 French-speaking sub-Saharan African countries, community involvement did not significantly explain the socio-economic achievement gap, whereas school resources did (Hossain & Beretta, 2025). To sum up, participation is not a substitute for resources.

Governance, Capacity and the Limits of Resource Volume

Outcomes do not depend only on the volume of resources. In 33 African nations, citizens are more likely to experience poorly resourced schools in their localities, even after adjusting for government education spending, owing to the negative effects of local officials' corruption and ineffectiveness (Konte, 2021). In Central Uganda, schools' financial systems, management and governance significantly predicted pupils' learning outcomes, while resource allocation had no meaningful impact (Mirembe & Kizza, 2026). However, a meta-analysis of school-based management in Sub-Saharan Africa found mixed effects, with weaker effects in low-income contexts where community capacity and resources are limited (Nwosu, 2026). Institutional characteristics in Cameroon, such as the retention of central representatives (Mfewou, 2022) and the transfer of authority and resources at the discretion of the central government (Fombad, 2025), suggest that capacity, accountability and fiscal resources do not operate independently of each other.

Summary and Expectation

There is reason to believe from the literature that the relationship between resources raised and the quality of school management is positive but unlikely to be simple or causal. There is little evidence from Cameroon on councils' resource generation and primary school management, the closest evidence coming from secondary schools. In this study, the relationship is tested at

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primary level using teachers' and councillors' perspectives. Even though the theory and evidence reviewed indicate that there should be a positive association, the null hypothesis was tested using a two-tailed test.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used an ex post facto correlational design (Cohen et al., 2007). The researchers did not change the activities of the councils in relation to the generation of resources; rather, they looked at the statistical correlation between resource generation and school management after the resource generation activities had occurred, which suited the purpose of the study. The results are therefore interpreted as correlations rather than causal effects.

Five councils were purposively selected to represent the areas where English and French are the major languages in the country: Nkambe (North West), Douala IV (Littoral), Bafoussam III (West), Buea (South West) and Mokolo (Far North). All 1,825 teachers and municipal councillors in the five councils were accessible. Following Krejcie and Morgan (1970), 310 teachers and 180 councillors were sampled. Councils were selected purposively, and within each council, respondents were selected randomly. The usable returns were 295 teacher and 156 councillor questionnaires (Table 1), with return rates of 95.2% and 86.7%, respectively, and 92.0% overall. These results are not statistically representative of all councils or public primary schools in Cameroon, as these councils were deliberately selected; rather, they provide evidence from the selected councils that may inform similar decentralised contexts.

Table 1. *Sample and Return Rates*

Respondent group	Sampled	Valid returns	Return rate
Primary school teachers	310	295	95.2%
Municipal councillors	180	156	86.7%
Total	**490**	**451**	**92.0%**

Two structured questionnaires were used. The teacher questionnaire included 10 resource generation items which were answered as “not at all”, “sometimes” or “often”. The councillor questionnaire contained seven items requiring a response on an agreement scale, which were reported as agree (strongly agree or agree) or disagree (disagree or strongly disagree). The issues covered were material resources, maintenance, financial resources, mobilisation for PTA, and cooperation with NGOs/income-generating activities. Effective school management was measured with a multi-item scale given to teachers only. The scale measured the school's ability to plan, lead lessons, make use of what is available, manage staff across the school, maintain facilities, and support teaching/learning, as well as to engage parents and communities. The items were added and averaged to create a composite score for each construct; higher scores on each composite represent a higher level of perceived resource generation or better management. Only teacher data (n = 295) were used for the correlational analysis since the management scale was administered solely to the teachers.

Face and content validity were determined in the initial period of data collection for the main study (Mugenda, 2008). The internal consistency of the final resource generation subscales was adequate, with teachers' Cronbach's alpha of .795 and councillors' Cronbach's alpha of .845.

Prior to data collection, authorisation was obtained from the appropriate university and council officials. All respondents provided informed consent and confidentiality was emphasised. There was no financial incentive, and withdrawal without penalty was allowed, with participation being voluntary.

All data were entered in EpiData version 3.1 and then cleaned and analysed in SPSS version 23.0. Frequencies and percentages summarised perceptions on resource generation with percentages computed across the total set of respondents (295 teachers and 156 councillors) for each item. Responses that were left blank were assigned the lowest possible score for each item (not at all for teachers and strongly disagree for councillors). Because the analysis focused on association, and the data did not conform to the assumptions of a parametric correlation, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to test the relationship between resource generation and effective school management. The confidence interval for ρ was calculated from ρ and n based on the standard error proposed by Bonett and Wright (2000). Chi-square tests enabled a comparison of the responses across each of the demographic categories and between teachers and councillors. The alpha level for significance was .05, and where p = .000 (software output), it is reported as p < .001.

4. FINDINGS

Teachers' Perceptions of Council Resource Generation

Table 2. *Teachers’ Perceptions of Council Resource Generation (n = 295)*

Item	Not at all, n (%)	Sometimes, n (%)	Often, n (%)	N
Material/physical resources	158 (53.6%)	81 (27.5%)	56 (19.0%)	295
Preventive maintenance	222 (75.3%)	43 (14.6%)	30 (10.2%)	295

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Item	Not at all, n (%)	Sometimes, n (%)	Often, n (%)	N
Routine maintenance	235 (79.7%)	50 (16.9%)	10 (3.4%)	295
Emergency repairs	242 (82.0%)	43 (14.6%)	10 (3.4%)	295
Predictive maintenance	242 (82.0%)	24 (8.1%)	29 (9.8%)	295
Financial resources	256 (86.8%)	31 (10.5%)	8 (2.7%)	295
Setting priorities and goals	263 (89.2%)	25 (8.5%)	7 (2.4%)	295
General life improvement	249 (84.4%)	30 (10.2%)	16 (5.4%)	295
Productivity and performance	257 (87.1%)	16 (5.4%)	22 (7.5%)	295
Human resources	245 (83.1%)	37 (12.5%)	13 (4.4%)	295
All items	**2,369 (80.3%)**	**380 (12.9%)**	**201 (6.8%)**	**2,950**

Teachers' responses are presented in Table 2. Percentages are based on the total number of teachers (295) for each item. Across the ten items, teachers selected “not at all” in 2,369 of 2,950 possible responses (80.3%), “sometimes” in 380 (12.9%) and “often” in 201 (6.8%). Council support was perceived to be least limited in providing material and physical resources, with 53.6% of teachers rating it “not at all” and 19.0% rating it “often”. It was perceived to be least effective in setting priorities and goals (89.2%), productivity and performance (87.1%) and financial resources (86.8%). Each of the four maintenance items (preventive, routine, emergency and predictive) received “not at all” from at least 75% of teachers. Combining all the responses, most teachers reported that their councils contributed few resources to schools, with the lowest levels of support for financial resources, goal setting and performance-related items.

Councillors' Perceptions of Council Resource Generation

Table 3. *Councillors’ Perceptions of Council Resource Generation (n = 156)*

Statement	SA/A, n (%)	D/SD, n (%)	N
Council builds staff canteens/food sheds for income generation	28 (17.9%)	128 (82.1%)	156
Council regulates PTA fundraising for development projects	31 (19.9%)	125 (80.1%)	156
Council sponsors fundraising during academic awards	47 (30.1%)	109 (69.9%)	156
Council develops projects to raise operating funds	45 (28.8%)	111 (71.2%)	156
Council partners schools with NGOs for visibility	65 (41.7%)	91 (58.3%)	156
Council exposes pupils to income-generating activities	37 (23.7%)	119 (76.3%)	156
Council promotes resource generation through inter-school games	58 (37.2%)	98 (62.8%)	156
All items	**311 (28.5%)**	**781 (71.5%)**	**1,092**

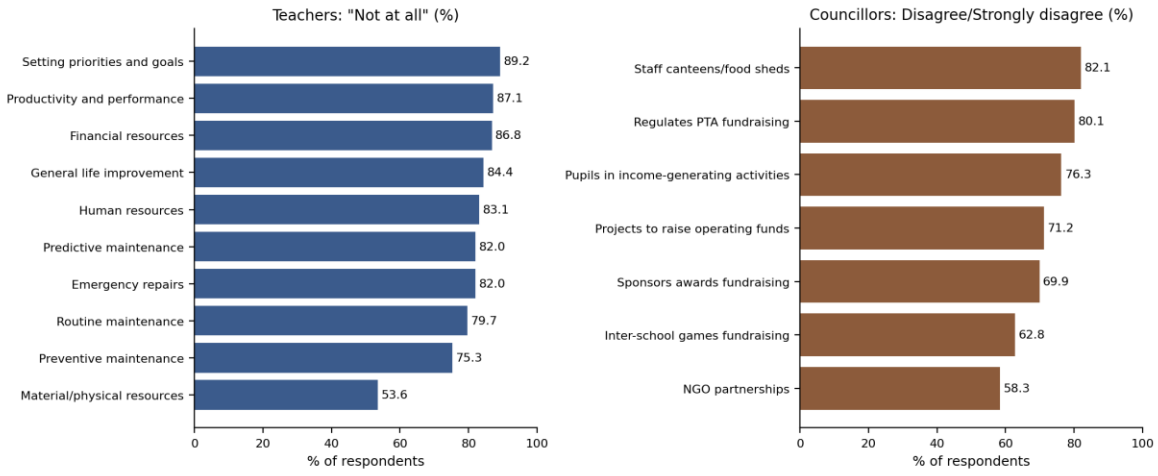


Figure 1. *Percentage of Teachers Answering “Not at All” and of Councillors Disagreeing, by Item*

Note. The left panel shows the percentage of teachers answering “not at all”; the right panel shows the percentage of councillors who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

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The pattern is the same for councillors' responses (Table 3). Percentages are calculated from the total number of councillors (156) for each statement. A total of 1,092 responses were received (7 × 156). Of this total, 781 (71.5%) said they disagreed and 311 (28.5%) said they agreed. Disagreement was highest for building staff canteens/food sheds (82.1%) and regulating PTA fundraising (80.1%), and lowest for partnering schools with NGOs (58.3%) and promoting resource generation through inter-school games (62.8%), although even for these two activities, more than half of councillors disagreed that the council performed them. The findings suggest that, like teachers, councillors perceived council resource generation to be low, although councils were seen as more involved in partnerships and council events than in income-generation projects.

Group Comparisons

The results of the Chi-square test indicated that there was no significant difference for teachers' responses based on gender, educational qualification and length of service ($p > .05$), and also for councillors' responses based on gender, age, educational qualification or length of service ($p > .05$). There was also no significant difference between teachers and councillors, $\chi^2(1) = 2.26$, $p = .133$. In both groups, a similar picture emerged: council activity was largely low. However, this comparison should be interpreted with care because the two instruments used different response scales.

Relationship Between Resource Generation and Effective School Management

Table 4. *Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Between Resource Generation and Effective School Management*

Variables	ρ	95% CI	p	N
Resource generation × Effective school management	.576	[.49, .65]	< .001	295

Table 4 shows the Spearman rank-order correlation between resource generation and effective school management. The relationship was strong, positive and statistically significant, $\rho = .576$, 95% CI [.49, .65], $p < .001$, $n = 295$ (two-tailed). The more teachers perceived their councils as generating resources for schools, the more effective they rated school management. This is a relatively large association by standard measures and the squared coefficient suggests that about 33% of the variance in ranks is shared ($\rho^2 = .33$). The lower and upper limits of the confidence interval are .49 and .65, respectively, which means that the population correlation likely falls between these values, that is, in the moderate-to-strong range.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question was: What relationship exists between the effective management of public primary schools and the council's generation of resources? The findings answer that the relationship is positive and strong ($\rho = .576$, 95% CI [.49, .65], $n = 295$). The two-tailed significance value of the hypothesis ($p < .001$) was less than .05; therefore, H_0 was rejected and H_1 was accepted, that is, the generation of resources by municipal councils is significantly related to the effective management of public primary schools in the selected councils. The association is unlikely to be due to chance, but this does not prove that the differences in management were the result of resource generation.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

There is a strong relationship between the effective management of public primary schools and council resource generation. The direction of the relationship is consistent with secondary-level Cameroonian studies, which found coefficients of .289 (Mbua et al., 2023) and .308 (Eno et al., 2023). Part of the difference in magnitude may be due to two features of the present design. First, primary schools are directly affected by councils, so a closer association between council activity and school functioning is to be expected. Second, because both variables were self-reported perceptions, the association could be inflated by shared-method bias. The finding is therefore more robust with respect to the direction of the relationship than its size.

The descriptive findings show that there is a considerable implementation gap. The majority of teachers and councillors indicated that there was little resource generation by the councils, and the two groups generally agreed. From the Soufflé Theory perspective, this suggests that the administrative transfer of primary school responsibilities has outpaced the fiscal resources needed to finance it. This is consistent with complaints about unfunded mandates (Eteme & Mountouzache, 2024), reports that transfers are much lower than the framework requires, and the small share of own resources in local authority budgets (Ngô Ndjang et al., 2024). In this respect, the positive correlation means that schools were perceived to be better managed where councils were perceived to generate more resources.

Councils were seen to be more active in providing material resources, partnering with NGOs and organising inter-school games than in financial and income-generation projects. This could be related to dependence on central funding windows and external partners rather than on locally raised income; one of these windows, the National Participatory Development Programme, is donor-financed (Ngô Ndjang et al., 2024). This explanation was not tested in the study.

Principal–Agent Theory suggests a further interpretation. Transparency and monitoring, after responsibility has been shifted to councils, will determine whether the resources raised reach schools. Findings on weak citizen participation in project monitoring (Eselekwe, 2024), limited capacity to execute budgets (Mbah Enjei & Chi Valery, 2025) and the need for increased accountability and

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information flow in school finance (Kountchou, 2025) indicate that making resources traceable and open to monitoring is as important as raising them. The evidence from Uganda is similar (Mirembe & Kizza, 2026). It is not possible to distinguish between volume and management effects with these data.

There are other possible explanations. The relationship may also run in the reverse direction: better-managed schools may attract more attention from councils. There can also be third factors affecting both of these, such as local wealth, council size, and the conflict situation in both the North West and the South West, where conflict has reduced learning and increased teacher absenteeism (Galindo-Silva & Tchuente, 2023) and/or inequalities in school supply in the region (Lebga et al., 2022). Last, the two measures are self-reported estimates, and thus are susceptible to shared-method bias.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, teachers and councillors in the five councils in Cameroon rated council resource generation for public primary schools as low, and higher resource generation was strongly correlated with better school management. The study confirms the notion that resource mobilisation is an integral aspect of decentralised school governance, but refrains from making causal inferences.

Several actions follow. Government should match each competence passed to councils with a commensurate, published transfer of resources and provide detailed guidance on councils' operational responsibilities for primary schools. Councils need to improve their internal revenue (own-source revenue), keep accurate records of resources raised and received, and submit regular financial reports (Mekolle & Lyonga, 2025; Ngô Ndjang et al., 2024). Council officials need to be trained on education budgeting and financial management (Mbah Enjei & Chi Valery, 2025), and PTAs and school management committees need to be involved in mobilising and monitoring resources with safeguards against shifting the state's responsibility for financing school budgets to households (Karoli & Upadhyaya, 2026).

Future studies should be based on council financial data, use multilevel designs that account for clustering, and use longitudinal data to see if shifts in council resource-mobilisation are followed by shifts in school management outcomes.

7. DECLARATIONS

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Author Contributions: M. E. Massa designed the study, collected the data and was the lead writer of the first draft, while E. W. Ngafi contributed to theoretical framing and literature search, and performed critical revisions of the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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