

INFLUENCE OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS ON SERVICE QUALITY OF HOTELS IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry plays a crucial role in promoting tourism and driving economic growth, with service quality serving as a key determinant of customer satisfaction and business success. Interpersonal skills are essential for achieving service excellence since they influence employee and customer interactions and the overall service experience. This study aimed to establish the influence of interpersonal skills, as a key component of soft skills, on the service quality of hotels in Kisii County, Kenya. A convergent mixed-method research design was adopted to capture both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The target population consisted of 761 employees from classified hotels in Kisii County, with the sample size determined using the Yamane formula for representativeness. Additionally, two Trade Development Officers from the Kenya Tourism Board and one Director of Trade, Tourism, Industry, and Marketing in the County were purposively selected as key informants. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and interview schedules, with quantitative data analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics

and qualitative data analyzed thematically. The reliability of instruments was confirmed through the Cronbach Alpha test, which produced coefficients above 0.70. Findings revealed mean scores ranging from 3.5944 to 4.9288, indicating a strong positive perception of the influence of interpersonal skills on service quality. Results further showed a strong, positive, and significant correlation between interpersonal skills and service quality ($r = .654^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). The study concluded that effective communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and professionalism among employees significantly enhance service quality in hotels, though variations existed in friendliness and complaint-handling effectiveness. The study recommends that hotel management should promote continuous training, workshops, and mentoring programs focused on improving interpersonal skills such as teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution to ensure consistent delivery of high-quality services and customer satisfaction in Kisii County hotels.

Key words: Soft skills, Interpersonal skills, service quality, hotels, Kisii County.

INTRODUCTION

Soft skills are defined as a combination of personal qualities and knowledge that help employees perform their jobs effectively (Lestariningsih, Asmawi, & Madhakomala, 2020). They include personal traits, attitudes, routines, and social graces that enhance cooperation and performance in the workplace (Bi & Shaheen, 2016; Colaco, 2024). In service-oriented industries such as hospitality, soft skills directly influence how staff interact with customers, thereby affecting overall service quality (Silva, Silva, & Oliveira, 2025). Hotels that prioritize soft skills training often experience improved employee morale and performance, resulting in higher customer satisfaction (Timothy, 2020; Adzoyi, Blomme, & Honyenuga, 2021).

Quality service delivery is essential for customer retention and business sustainability (Singh et al., 2023). In Kenya's hotel industry, which is highly competitive and profit-driven, maintaining superior service quality ensures repeat customers and positive word-of-mouth referrals. However, inadequate interpersonal competencies among hotel staff have been identified as a barrier to achieving desired performance outcomes (Murimi, Wadongo, & Olielo, 2021). As hotels operate within community contexts, balancing profitability and social responsibility remains crucial (Gachuru, Senaji, & Gichunge, 2022).

Previous studies have linked interpersonal skills with improved performance and conflict management in the hospitality sector. For example, Kako and Pearce (2018) found that employee performance improved with enhanced interpersonal communication among waiters, though they did not specifically focus on service quality. Wafula, Mukolwe, Korir, and Buyeke (2016) also established that interpersonal conflict negatively affected organizational performance in selected hotels in Kisii town, highlighting the importance of good communication. Similarly, Iksan and Sanjaya (2023) in Indonesia demonstrated that interpersonal communication significantly influences customer satisfaction in fast-food settings.

Soft skills are the personal and interpersonal abilities such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence that enable individuals to interact effectively and enhance performance in the workplace. The importance of interpersonal and soft skills extends beyond the hotel industry to educational and manufacturing sectors, as shown by studies in Malaysia (Saraih et al., 2019) and Indonesia (Indrawati et al., 2023), which revealed that interpersonal competencies enhance performance and work readiness.

In Kenya, particularly in Kisii County, hotels face persistent challenges in maintaining high service quality due to limited soft skills development among staff (Ongori, Iravo, & Munene, 2013; Hassan, Mugambi, & Waiganjo, 2017). Despite government interventions such as the KSh 2 billion stimulus package to revitalize the hospitality sector after the COVID-19 pandemic (KIPPRA, 2021; GOK, 2022), service inconsistencies continue to affect customer satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, this study sought to examine the influence of interpersonal skills on service quality in classified hotels in Kisii County, addressing existing knowledge gaps and providing practical insights for improving customer service and competitiveness.

Statement of the problem

The hotel industry in Kenya, and particularly in Kisii County, has experienced persistent challenges in achieving consistent service quality despite its central role in tourism and local economic growth. Recent research and customer feedback have pointed out issues such as ineffective communication, poor teamwork, and limited problem-solving abilities among hotel staff, all of which negatively affect customer satisfaction and service standards. Although technical competencies are essential in hospitality, current studies emphasize that interpersonal skills, especially communication, empathy, and teamwork, play a crucial role in influencing customer experiences and perceptions. Scholars such as Achieng and Pepela (2023), Colaco

(2024), and Tembey Mahadik (2023) observed that interpersonal competence directly enhances hotel performance, guest satisfaction, and employee collaboration.

However, many hotel employees in Kisii County had limited opportunities for professional training focused on interpersonal skill development, which contributed to weak customer loyalty and reduced competitiveness among local hotels. Previous research in Kenya mainly concentrated on financial and operational aspects of performance, with little attention given to how interpersonal abilities influenced service quality. The few studies available often generalized soft skills without examining specific attributes such as communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution that drive customer satisfaction. Consequently, there existed a notable research gap on how interpersonal skills affected service quality in classified hotels in Kisii County. The lack of adequate soft skills among hotel employees further challenged performance by causing poor customer service, reduced guest satisfaction, communication breakdowns, and weak staff collaboration, which ultimately diminished the overall quality and competitiveness of hotels. This study therefore sought to bridge this gap by analyzing the influence of interpersonal skills on service quality and proposing strategies to strengthen staff competence and customer relations within the hospitality sector.

Study Objective

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of interpersonal skills, as a key component of soft skills, on the service quality of hotels in Kisii County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal and soft skills were increasingly recognized as vital for sustaining service quality in the hospitality industry. Silva, Silva, and Oliveira (2025) found that in developed tourism economies, employees' emotional intelligence, empathy, and communication competence enhanced guest satisfaction and loyalty. The study concluded that interpersonal skills contributed to sustainability by fostering positive guest experiences and repeat patronage. However, since the research was conducted in European hotel settings, a contextual gap existed regarding how interpersonal skills influenced service quality in developing nations where operational dynamics differed.

Syahrudin (2018) examined the effect of interpersonal skills on employee performance within Indonesia's public sector and established a positive correlation between interpersonal competencies and job effectiveness. The study suggested that teamwork and communication significantly influenced performance outcomes but did not focus on the hospitality industry, creating a conceptual gap. Similarly, Tari, Pereira-Moliner, Molina-Azorin, and María (2019) discovered that interpersonal engagement among hotel staff was a major driver of service excellence in Europe. However, their study concentrated on large, well-established hotels, leaving a geographical gap concerning small and locally owned hotels in developing regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. The current study, therefore, sought to fill these gaps by empirically assessing the effect of interpersonal skills on service quality among hotels in Kisii County, Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a convergent mixed-method design that integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Quantitative data were obtained through semi-structured questionnaires administered to hotel employees at different organizational levels, while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected key informants, including two Trade Development Officers from the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) and one County Director of Trade, Tourism, Industry, and Marketing. The target population consisted of 761 hotel employees, comprising 88 managerial staff and 673 workers across 35 hotels registered under the Kenya Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA). Stratified sampling was used to ensure representativeness, where hotels were grouped into Class A, B, and C, and employees were further categorized into management and worker strata, after which proportional allocation was applied to determine the sample size. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was conducted to select respondents using a random number generator, ensuring that every hotel employee had an equal opportunity of being included in the study.

The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane formula (Yamane, 1967) as shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)} \quad n = \text{required sample size, } N = \text{target population size, } e = \text{significance level}$$

0.05, Determining sample size for each category:

$$\frac{88}{1 + 88(0.05)^2} = 72 \quad \text{Managers}$$

$$\frac{673}{1 + 673(0.05)^2} = 251 \quad \text{Workers}$$

The sample size was 72 managers and 251 workers. Data were gathered through semi-structured questionnaires that included both closed and open-ended questions designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data aligned with the study objectives. Closed-ended questions used a 5-point Likert scale to capture respondents' levels of agreement or disagreement, while open-ended questions allowed for elaboration of views. Key informant interviews were also conducted with two Trade Development Officers from the Kenya Tourism Board and one County Director of Trade, Tourism, Industry, and Marketing to gain deeper insights into service quality issues. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically, and ethical approval was obtained from JOOUST and NACOSTI before data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study conducted a descriptive analysis to assess the influence of interpersonal skills on service quality in hotels within Kisii County as presented in Table 1;

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on interpersonal skills

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interpersonal skills have significant influence on service quality in the hotel industry	323	4.0464	.28581
Collaborating with your colleagues enhances guest experiences.	323	3.7616	1.64812
Friendliness of the hotel employees during interactions with clients is important in the hotel industry	323	3.5944	1.09185
The hotel employees try to connect with customers on a personal level.	323	4.0341	.88575
The hotel employees effectively handle any issues or complaints of customers during their stay	323	4.1022	1.22554
The hotel has the ability to satisfactorily resolve customer problems should they arise	323	4.9288	.32188
The hotel employees have the ability to remain calm and professional during conflicts or challenging situations.	323	4.5728	.84339
The hotel employees always work together to provide you with quality service.	323	3.8297	1.38944
There is normally, a seamless transition between different staff members.	323	4.2848	1.12260
The various teams in the hotel communicate effectively to ensure customers' needs are met.	323	4.7585	.50821
Valid N (listwise)	323		

Results presented in Table 1 show that most respondents agreed that interpersonal skills significantly influence service quality in the hotel industry (Mean = 4.0464, SD = 0.28581). Respondents also agreed that employees' friendliness and ability to connect with customers on a personal level enhance guest experiences (Mean = 3.5944 and 4.0341, respectively). The findings further indicated that hotel employees effectively handle customer complaints (Mean = 4.1022) and can satisfactorily resolve problems that arise (Mean = 4.9288), demonstrating strong conflict management and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, respondents agreed that employees remain calm and professional during challenging situations (Mean = 4.5728) and that teamwork and communication among hotel staff contribute positively to service delivery (Mean = 3.8297 and 4.7585, respectively).

These findings align with the results of Iksan and Sanjaya (2023), who established that effective interpersonal communication among employees significantly improves customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector. Similarly, Silva, Silva and Oliveira (2025) reported that soft skills such as emotional intelligence, teamwork and adaptability are key drivers of service quality and customer loyalty in hotels. A study by Adzoyi, Blomme and Honyenuga (2021) also found that hotel employees who demonstrate friendliness and empathy create positive emotional connections with guests, thereby enhancing repeat patronage. Furthermore, Saraih et al. (2019) observed that interpersonal communication is a major determinant of employee performance and organizational success in the service industry. The present study's results confirm these findings by showing that employees' interpersonal competence, particularly in communication, teamwork and professionalism, enhances customer experiences and strengthens service delivery systems. This implies that hotels in Kisii County that invest in developing interpersonal skills among staff can achieve higher customer satisfaction and improved service quality, consistent with global trends in hospitality management.

Thematic analysis

Challenge encountered in maintaining a positive relationship with guests

Thematic analysis revealed that hotel employees encounter several challenges in maintaining positive relationships with guests, including customer dissatisfaction, disrespect, low pay, lack of off-duty days, and unique customer preferences such as gender bias in service. These issues hinder effective service delivery and employee motivation. Similar findings were reported by Rane, Achari, and Choudhary (2023), who observed that maintaining customer satisfaction remains a global challenge in the hospitality industry, where service quality is paramount. To overcome these challenges, respondents indicated that they adopt a positive attitude, remain focused, and strive to understand each customer's unique needs to deliver quality service consistently. Moreover, respondents agreed that most hotel employees possess the necessary interpersonal skills due to regular training and refresher courses, which enhance their ability to handle guests professionally and improve overall service quality.

Importance of interpersonal skills for hotel staff in delivering quality service.

The findings revealed that interpersonal skills are essential for hotel staff in delivering quality service to customers. Key informants emphasized that skills such as active listening, empathy, teamwork, flexibility, and patience enable employees to better understand and meet guest needs. They further noted that these competencies foster positive interactions, enhance customer satisfaction, and build loyalty in the competitive hospitality sector. Overall, possessing strong interpersonal skills allows hotel staff to provide personalized and professional service, thereby improving the overall guest experience.

Training programs most beneficial for enhancing interpersonal skills

The findings indicated that targeted training programs play a vital role in enhancing interpersonal skills among hotel staff. Key informants emphasized that training on leadership, teamwork, temperance, listening skills, and public relations equips employees with the ability to communicate effectively and manage diverse customer needs. Such programs also promote emotional intelligence, professionalism, and cooperation among staff, which are essential for delivering quality service. Continuous training in these areas enhances employee competence and contributes to improved service standards in hotels across Kisii County.

Service delivery

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics on service quality as an indicator of service delivery among hotels in Kisii County.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on service quality

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The number of meetings and exhibitions held in the hotel is high annually	323	4.2724	1.13119
The number of visitors arriving at hotels in Kisii county has increased	323	4.0681	.94327
Number of early bookings received by hotels in Kisii county is relatively high.	323	3.8421	1.38195
Bed occupancy among hotels in Kisii county is full during festive seasons.	323	4.9280	.32180
Valid N (listwise)	323		

The results reveal that the number of meetings and exhibitions held in hotels annually is high, with a mean of 4.2724 and a standard deviation of 1.13119, indicating that hotels are

increasingly becoming venues for social and corporate events. This finding suggests that hotels are enhancing their reputation and attracting more clients through improved facilities and customer relations. The mean score of 4.0681 shows that the number of visitors arriving at hotels has increased, implying that the hospitality industry in the county is growing steadily as service quality improves. Additionally, a mean of 3.8421 for early bookings indicates moderate customer confidence and satisfaction, though hotels still have opportunities to strengthen their marketing and booking systems. The highest mean of 4.9280 for bed occupancy during festive seasons suggests that hotels operate at near full capacity during peak times, reflecting effective service delivery and strong customer demand. Generally, these findings imply that hotels in Kisii County have made significant progress in service quality through improved customer handling, event hosting, and operational efficiency, leading to enhanced customer satisfaction and repeat business.

Correlation analysis

Table 3 presents the results of the correlation analysis conducted to determine the relationship between interpersonal skills and service quality among hotel employees in Kisii County.

Table 3: Correlation analysis

		Interpersonal Skills	Service quality
Interpersonal Skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.654**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	323	323
Service quality	Pearson Correlation	.654**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	323	323

Source: Field data, 2025

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings indicate a strong positive and statistically significant correlation between interpersonal skills and service quality ($r = 0.654$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that an increase in employees' interpersonal skills is associated with an improvement in the quality of services offered by hotels. The positive correlation implies that hotels where employees exhibit better communication, teamwork, empathy, and problem-solving abilities tend to provide superior customer experiences and achieve higher satisfaction levels. These findings align with those of Nguyen and Ha (2022), who found that interpersonal competence significantly enhances customer satisfaction and service quality in the hospitality industry. Kumar and Jain (2023) observed that employees with well-developed interpersonal attributes, such as active listening and emotional intelligence, contribute to better guest relations and organizational performance. Therefore, the results confirm that interpersonal skills are a crucial determinant of service excellence, reinforcing the need for continuous staff training and interpersonal development initiatives in the hotel industry within Kisii County.

Regression analysis

The study conducted a simple regression analysis to determine the effect of interpersonal skills on the quality of services offered by hotels in Kisii County.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.654 ^a	.428	.426	.15738

Source: Field data, 2024

a. Predictors: (Constant), interpersonal Skills

b. Dependent Variable: service quality

The results, as presented in Table 4, show that the correlation coefficient (R) was 0.654, indicating a strong positive relationship between interpersonal skills and service quality. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.428, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.426, suggesting that interpersonal skills explain approximately 42.8 percent of the variation in service quality among hotels in Kisii County. This implies that improvements in employees' interpersonal abilities such as effective communication, empathy, and teamwork lead to substantial enhancements in service quality. These findings are consistent with those of Luwiha et al. (2023), who established that interpersonal communication has a significant positive effect on service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector. Similarly, Shiddiq (2023) found that interpersonal skills significantly influence the quality of services provided in restaurant settings, emphasizing that higher interpersonal competence enhances customer experiences and satisfaction. Overall, the results underscore the importance of strengthening interpersonal training programs to promote superior service delivery in Kisii County's hotel industry.

Table 5 presents the results of the ANOVA test used to assess the overall significance of the regression model.

Table 5: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.938	1	5.938	239.757	.000 ^b
	Residual	7.950	321	.025		
	Total	13.889	322			

Source: Field data, 2025

a. Dependent Variable: service quality

b. Predictors: (Constant), interpersonal Skills

The findings show that the F-value was 239.757 with a significance level of $P = 0.000$, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the regression model was statistically significant and fit for the study. This implies that interpersonal skills had a meaningful influence on the quality of services provided by hotels in Kisii County. The results align with those of Wafula et al. (2016), who found that interpersonal skills significantly affect organizational performance by enhancing teamwork, communication, and customer relations. Similarly, Syahrudin (2018) reported that interpersonal skills have a positive direct effect on employee performance, emphasizing that well-developed interpersonal competencies contribute to better service delivery and improved workplace relationships. These findings collectively underscore the critical role interpersonal skills play in enhancing service quality within the hospitality sector.

Coefficients of the regression model

Table 6 presents the coefficients of the regression model, which examined the effect of interpersonal skills on service quality among hotels in Kisii County.

Table 6: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.400		.016	.987
	Interpersonal Skills	.996	.654	15.484	.000

Source: Field data, 2024

Dependent Variable: service quality

The results show that when other factors were held constant, interpersonal skills had a significant positive effect on service quality ($B = 0.996$, $t = 15.484$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). This implies that a one-unit increase in interpersonal skills led to a corresponding 99.6% improvement in service quality. The constant term ($B = 0.400$) suggests that even in the absence of interpersonal skills, some level of service quality would still exist due to other operational factors. These findings agree with Abdurrahman (2018), who found that interpersonal skills and work motivation significantly influence employee performance and contribute to improved service delivery. The regression equation derived from this model was expressed as $Y = 0.400 + 0.996X_2$, where Y represents service quality and X_2 represents interpersonal skills.

The results further revealed that hotel staff's ability to resolve customer problems satisfactorily, maintain effective communication among teams, and remain calm and professional during service encounters were major contributors to improved service quality. However, variations were noted in aspects such as friendliness, teamwork consistency, and seamless service transitions. Respondents also highlighted challenges such as disrespectful customers, low pay, limited rest days, and customer preferences based on gender, which sometimes hinder positive guest relationships. The correlation analysis confirmed a strong positive association between interpersonal skills and service quality ($r = 0.654$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$), indicating that improvements in interpersonal competencies directly enhance customer satisfaction and hotel performance.

The study concluded that enhancing interpersonal skills among hotel staff significantly improves service quality, contributing to guest satisfaction and competitive advantage. It recommended that hotel management should organize regular training and workshops focusing on teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution. Additionally, the Tourism Regulatory Authority should conduct periodic audits to monitor and promote service quality standards, while hotels should integrate modern technologies such as online booking and digital payment systems to further enhance service efficiency and customer experience.

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