

EFFECT OF ACCOUNTABILITY ON QUALITY OF SERVICE DELIVERY IN MARSABIT COUNTY GOVERNMENT, KENYA

ABSTRACT

Any organization's continued viability rests in large part on the quality of the services it provides. According to the theoretical literature, the level of professionalism shown by workers is a major factor in the quality of service clients get. However, there has been a lack of empirical research on the relationship between accountability and service quality. The main purpose of this study was to assess the effects of accountability on quality of service delivery in Marsabit county government. The study was anchored under The Service Quality Theory. The target population for this study was 303 Marsabit County employees working at various ministries within the County headquarters and with an adoption of sample size of 45% the study established a sample size of 137 respondents. Stratified random sampling was used to select the respondents. A questionnaire was used as the primary instrument for data collection. The study employed both descriptive statistics such as percentages, means and standard deviations and inferential statistics such as Pearson's correlation and Multiple Regression to present and analyze the data. The statistical package for social science (SPSS) aided the data analysis. The study established that accountability has a strong positive effect on quality of service delivery and accounted for 72.2% ($R^2 = 0.722$) of the variation in quality of service delivery. This study suggests that there is need for counties top leadership to ensure that accountability practices are formulated, enforced and adhered to. It is also important that counties to adopt code of conduct/ethics to improve on quality of service delivery. It is recommended that a more comprehensive survey covering different counties to be done to shed more light on this subject.

Key words: accountability, service delivery, service quality theory

Introduction

The topic of workplace ethics has been front and center in the media for quite some time. According to Schneider et al. (2016), "everyday decency," which includes things like honesty, fairness, and integrity, is at the heart of business ethics in the corporate world. To maintain the long-term health and success of any organization, its members are expected to conduct themselves in an ethical way (Abubakar et al, 2021).

Any company with long-term success must make quality its top priority (Owolabi, 2018). In today's interconnected global economy, citizens, customers, and other stakeholders are looking on public and governmental institutions to set and uphold more rigorous norms of professional ethics and conduct. Work ethics, according to Cheteni and Shindika (2017), are just as vital to a

public worker as blood is to a human being. Citizens are watching closely and becoming more anxious; many of them want to see the end of the outdated, immoral behaviors and structures that have long persisted throughout Africa.

Public sector organizations in Kenya have been implementing anti-corruption measures, such as codes of conduct, transparency initiatives, work ethics and integrity systems, and anti-corruption agencies, with significant success in recent years (Ombiro, 2016). Organizations should make sure they have the correct goods and services for the modern market since a happy consumer means more revenue for them in the form of repeat customers and word-of-mouth advertising. In general, customers have high standards for the service they get and only consider it adequate if it meets or surpasses those standards. The Kenyan government established ethical standards for its employees to follow in order to maintain a consistently high standard of service delivery. Service quality and revenue growth are both enhanced by a focus on professionalism. All members are expected to uphold the principles of honesty, fairness, responsibility, and trustworthiness as outlined in the public code of work ethics.

Integrity, competence, objectivity, accountability, and commitment are only few of the guiding characteristics of a public servant as outlined in the Kenyan constitution, namely in chapters six on Leadership and Integrity and thirteen on Values and Principles of a Public Servant. As stated in their Quality statements and other associated papers, most counties aim to provide all of their customers with high-quality service.

Nakiwala (2017) argues that an organization's disregard for ethics is unacceptable. In fact, several businesses now include ethics among their core principles. In order to incorporate ethical practices and skills, however, organizations need assistance in developing a deeper and more consistent knowledge of ethics. Numerous studies have shown that ethical practices inside an organization significantly impact the likelihood that its goals will be met.

Statement of the problem

The county government is especially susceptible to corruption and unethical behavior. Ten percent to twenty-five percent of public procurement expenditure, including that in the local government sector, is lost to corruption on average in developing nations (Omisore & Adeleke, 2015). Corruption wastes money that might be used to purchase consumables or hire much-needed local government experts, reducing access to basic services and perhaps causing long-term social problems. The service delivery system and the population's developmental condition

may both be negatively affected by unethical acts inside the county administration. It might manifest as a misallocation of government funds.

It is estimated that 25–65% of total expenditures in low-income countries are wasted due to low and compromised ethical standards, which could result in significant financial loss. Additionally, image and trust are affected because inefficiency and lack of transparency undermine the credibility of public institutions, erode public and donor trust, and reduce investments in local governance (Mackey & Cuomo, 2020). Aspects including administrative discretion, corruption, nepotism, and health management secrecy, leaks of private information, public accountability, and policy concerns are some of the most frequent ethical problems county government personnel deal with.

It is possible that the public local government administration is deliberately complicit in malpractices that threaten professionalism, ethical conduct, and transparency, via the use of improper procedures, a lack of discipline, and unethical policies. Failure to articulate and implement fundamental ethical/integrity principles in the overall service delivery as well as regulations that deprive local government employees of ethical/integrity guidance are examples of institutional flaws in the local government system that contribute to malpractices. Additionally, it has been observed that local governments fail to define and uphold restrictions on political and personal pressures, which permits these influences to affect the workers' public judgments. The entire local government system is exposed to malpractices and corruption in the absence of clearly stated and enforced policies to promote ethical values delivery. Additionally, it can be difficult to enforce a code of ethics, guide employees' performance, and enforce performance standards, which can result in a lack of accountability and the erosion of ethical values.

A lack of direction for integrity in the whole county government delivery and the subsequent reduced condition of professionalism would be reflected in the county government are, in fact, the consequences of the aforementioned flaws. This study sought to analyze the effect of accountability as tools for effective county government service delivery in Marsabit County.

Research objective

To assess the effect of accountability on quality of service delivery in the county government of Marsabit

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical literature review

This study was informed by the service quality theory.

The Service Quality Theory

Independent variable of service quality is clarified by the theory. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry developed it to help businesses in the service industry and retail sector measure and evaluate service quality in accordance with the principles of service quality theory. It was the product's usefulness that was highlighted. According to the principle, service quality is determined by how closely actual results match those promised to customers. Reliability, responsiveness, competence, accessibility, courteousness, communication, reputation, protection, understanding customer knowledge, and tangibles are the 10 aspects for assessing service quality outlined by Parasuraman et al., 1985. The 10 components have been reorganized into five distinct classes. Among them were trustworthiness, reassurance, concrete deliverables, promptness, and compassion.

To paraphrase Parasuraman et al. (1991), "tangibles" include things like buildings, equipment, and personnel' outward appearances. The term "reliability" is used to describe the degree to which a corporation always and accurately fulfills its promises. The firm's eagerness to assist clients and provide timely service is an example of responsiveness, whereas assurance relates to the employee's expertise, demeanor, and ability to inspire trust and confidence. Customers are treated with empathy when a business goes out of its way to meet their needs. The research provided additional clarification of SERVQUAL as a theory. The SERVQUAL takes a broader view of service than just customer satisfaction. One of the motivating factors for the creation of the SERVQUAL was the unique qualities of buildings as opposed to commodities (Parasuraman et. al., 1988).

This theory's creation allowed service businesses and retailers to more objectively evaluate the factors that affect customers' views of the company's overall service quality. Service quality refers to a customer's evaluation of a company based on their satisfaction with the product or service they received (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Based on Oliver's (1980) definition of service quality theory, "...when consumers perceive quality as poor if the performance does not match their expectations and quality, as high when performance surpasses their expectations," we conduct this research. Harmonizing what the client expected with what they actually got is

necessary to close the gap. Customers evaluate the quality of a service or product by determining how well it meets, falls short of, or exceeds their expectations. Some county government institutions are adopting International Standards for Organizations as part of an effort to boost customer satisfaction in a methodical, controlled manner.

According to Kiran and Singh (2016), most service excellence models evaluate service quality by contrasting the actual quality of service with the quality that was promised. Despite this, it affords researchers the chance to use the SERVQUAL, which is adaptable enough to cover a larger range of customer service expectations and public service delivery than any of the other service quality models. Providing high-quality service is crucial for ensuring client satisfaction.

Empirical review

Empirically the study reviewed related literature in the study variables identifying the gap in relation to the current study.

Accountability and Quality Service Delivery

Researchers in South Africa, Bangladesh, South Korea, and the United Kingdom tested the hypothesis that if citizens took a more active role in receiving urban services, service providers would be held more accountable, hence improving the quality of delivery. However, the studies concluded that accountability did not serve the specific purposes proposed by the theoretical frameworks (Sohail & Cavill, 2004; Seetharam et al, 2020). To be accountable is to live up to one's duties as a county employee toward one's peers, the public, the county government, local businesses and other stakeholders, and the larger national and worldwide community. Workers are required to be aware of their place in the county government and to assume personal and professional accountability for their actions at all times. In order to carry out their responsibilities responsibly, they must have access to enough information and ensure they have the necessary understanding, competence, expertise, and resources. Employees are forbidden from doing anything that might damage the county's reputation or prevent it from achieving its financial or strategic objectives.

Increasing accountability for urban services can be achieved in a few different ways: by making accountability a function of good customer relations; by empowering service users to take action and generate new ideas; by establishing mechanisms to encourage a more collaborative approach; and by encouraging the use of competitive alternative providers (Sohail and Cavil, 2004; Seetharam et al, 2020). This study tested the premise that increased accountability would

lead to greater user satisfaction with the design, delivery, and maintenance of urban services, but found instead that these factors had not affected the sustainability of these services. Respondents felt they were just marginally better off than they were before changes were implemented. It was indicated by the vast majority that neither the quality of services nor the degree of happiness among users had improved (Sohail and Cavil, 2004; Seetharam et al, 2020). Similarly, Herzog (2019) reports that both technology use and responsibility are crucial to service quality, although neither was supported.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework shows how several aspects of employees' behavior in the workplace relate to the provision of high-quality services by the county administration of Marsabit. All of these factors are treated as independent variable in the analysis. The dependent variable is people' happiness with the service they get; this is influenced by the provider's dependability, responsibility, assurance, tangibles, and empathy.

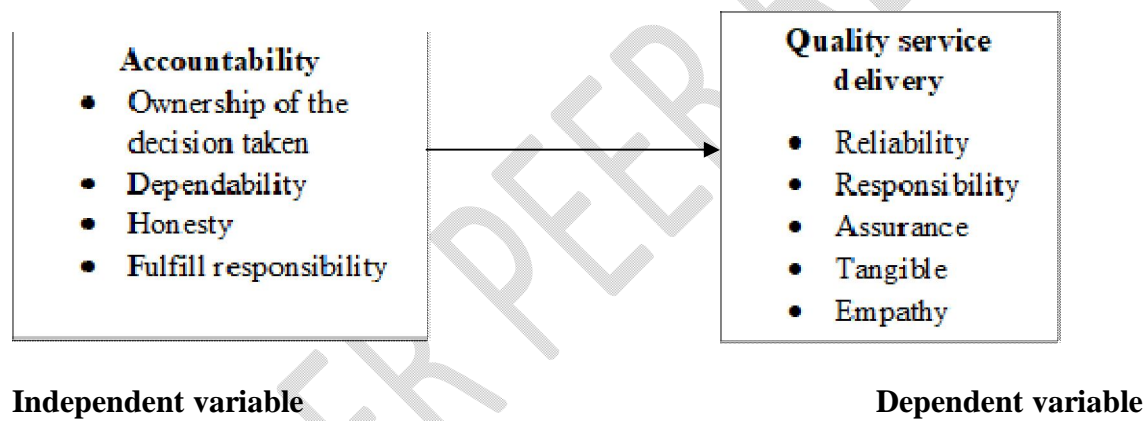


Figure 1: conceptual framework
Source: researcher (2023)

Research Methodology

Research design

The term "research design" refers to the process through which arrangements are made for data collecting and analysis in a manner that is both pertinent to the study purpose and procedurally efficient. The methodological approach of this investigation was descriptive. This is so because a descriptive research design would analyze every aspect of the study, painting a whole picture for the reader and providing an explanation of what has occurred or is currently occurring. The

researcher utilized the available data to determine what factors contributed to the occurrences being studied (Kothari & Garg, 2014).

The research also made use of mixed-method approach integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. This strategy used investigation methods, such as sequential or simultaneous data collection, to better comprehend study concerns. To generate an in principle all-encompassing and generalizable analytical framework, a mixed-methods strategy was recommended (Cukurova et al., 2016).

Target population

Population was defined by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) as "the whole set of persons, events, or things sharing certain observable features." Since the focus of the research is on the relationship between employee ethics and the quality of services provided by the government of Marsabit County, it makes sense to survey the County's public servants. The 303 County workers who were divided into County Executive, Top Management, Middle Management, and Operations Level categories and who work in several ministries inside the County headquarters will be the primary audience. Eight (8) members of the County Executive Committee, nine (9) chief officers, thirty (30) directors, and 256 department/ministry officials made up the target population. The Human Resources office of the County Government of Marsabit provided the list of responders. The research treated the population as diverse on the basis of the staff's categorization of its members.

Sampling Procedures and Techniques

Kombo and Tromp (2006) describe a sampling technique as a method for picking a specified sample size from a defined population to serve as a statistically valid representation of the population. Subjects were recruited using stratified random selection to ensure that the study's sample is representative of the population at large (Mugenda and Mugenda 2015).

Research Instruments

Both qualitative and quantitative primary data was used to inform the research. Data was gathered via the use of questionnaires. In order to collect data, we designed a questionnaire containing questions about the implications of work ethics for service provision. In order to gather all relevant statistical data and respondent feedback, the questionnaire was structured such that each part is dedicated to a single research aim.

Data Analysis Techniques and Procedures

Response Rate

The study sample was 137 respondents. Out of 137 questionnaires issued out, 122 respondents completed the questionnaires contributing to 89% response rate. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009), any response rate that is above 50% is adequate for analysis and that a response rate of above 60% is good and that of 70% is excellent. This is to mean that the study response rate of 89% is excellent for analysis and generalization of the study.

Reliability Test

Reliability is the degree to which repeated experiments provide the same or very similar findings or data (Mohajan, 2017). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the research instrument by calculating the internal consistency or average correlation of its items. To do this, we used SPSS's reliability command to put the questionnaire questions through a Cronbach's alpha test.

This coefficient of internal consistency will be computed as follows:

$$Alpha = \frac{N_r}{1 + r(N - 1)}$$

Where r = the mean inter-item correlation

N = number of items in the scale

Assuming the extra items do not reduce average inter-item reliability, as is the case with this method, increasing the number of items on a scale will result in higher reliability (Mugenda, 2013). The Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient, a measure of reliability, takes values between 0 and 1 as its normal range. When the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is near to 1.0, it is considered more dependable than when it is well below that value. A scale's alpha value is based on the number of items on the scale and the average correlations between the items. The following are some rules of thumb suggested by George and Mallery (2003): The prefix alpha > refers to a position above another. Having an alpha of 0.9 or more is excellent, an alpha of 0.8 is very good, and an alpha of 0.7 is satisfactory. When compared to the threshold of 0.5 for acceptable alpha

Respondent Demographic Information

Respondents' Gender

The researcher determined the respondents' gender. The result on gender is presented below in Figure 2.

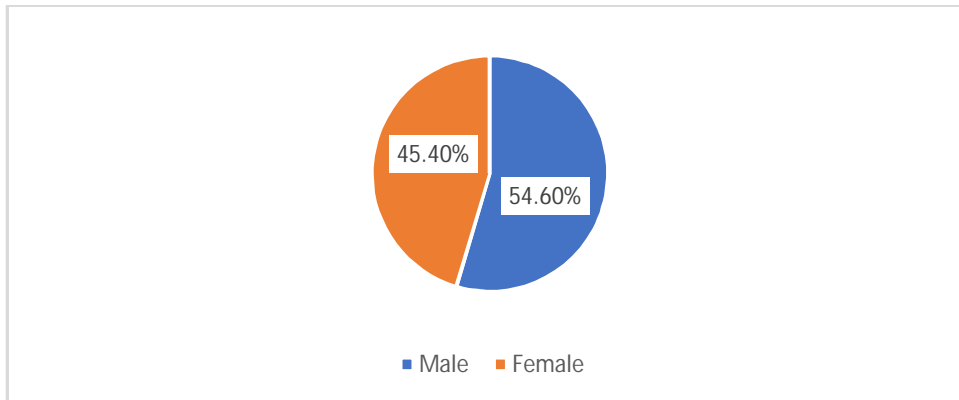


Figure 2: Respondents Gender

Source: Field data (2023)

The finding established in Figure 2 shows that, Males represented the largest majority of the respondent accounting for 54.6% while female were at 45.6%. This is an implication that staff at Marsabit county government are gender balance that there is no wide disparity between the two genders. This assured the researcher that the study responses were gender balance.

Respondent's Age

As part of the background information, the researcher saw it important to determine the age distribution of the respondents. The study established the age distribution of the respondent as stipulated in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents Age

Age	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
18 – 30 years	6	5.4
31 - 40 years	19	15.5
41-50 years	51	41.8
51- 60 years	32	26.1
Above 60 years	14	11.2
Total	122	100.0

Source: Field data (2023)

Results shows that majority (41.8%) of the of the respondents were aged 41-50 years, 26.1% were aged between 51 and 60 years, 15.5% were aged between 31 and 40 years, 11.2% aged above 60 years, while 5.4% of the respondents were between 18 and 30 years of age. This means that the largest age group of respondents fell between age 31 and 60 years, however all respondents were adults, hence were deemed to give genuine and informed opinion on the study.

Level of Education

Figure 3 presents the findings on the level of education of the respondents as requirement to establish the eligibility of the respondents.

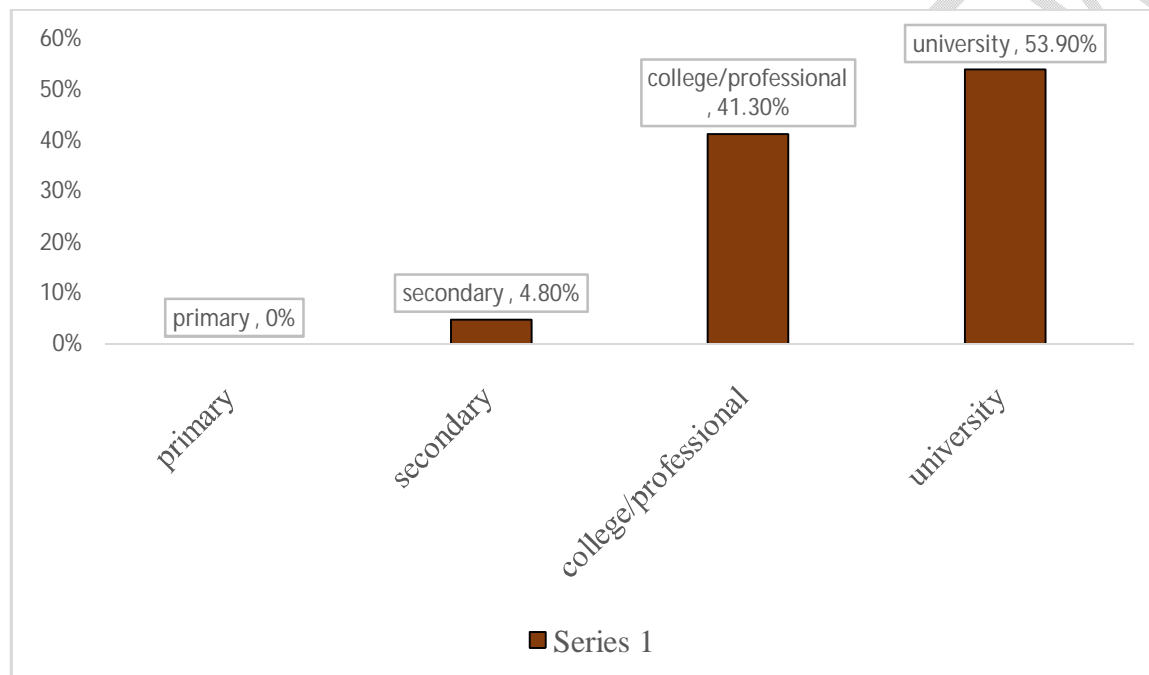


Figure 3: Level of Education

Source: Field data (2023)

As depicted in the figure 3, majority (53.9%) of the research participants had a university education as their highest education level, 41.3% were college and other professional qualifications as their highest academic qualification, 4.8% of the respondents had secondary school certificate as their highest education qualification and none of the respondent was below secondary education. Since majority had achieved some form of post high school education and professional training, they can be deemed competent enough to respond to questions contained in the questionnaires.

Duration of Service

The study sought to determine the period of time the respondent have been working in the current positions.

Table 2: Duration of service

	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
1- 5 years	44	36
6- 10years	39	32
11- 15 years	24	20
Above 16 years	15	12
Total	122	100

Source: Field data (2023)

Results shows that most (36%) of the respondents had served in their current position for 1-5 years and 32% had served for 6- 10 years. Further, 20% and 12% of the respondents had served 11- 15 years and above 16 years respectively. This implies that the respondents were conversant with the work ethics concerns at the county government of Marsabit, as the majority of the respondents had served for over five years.

Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

The objective of the study aimed at assessing the effect of accountability on quality-of-service delivery in the county government of Marsabit. The findings are as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for Measures of Accountability

Accountability elements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Keep confidential information	122	1	5	2.56	0.978
Maintain confidentiality	122	1	5	4.27	0.926
Timely delivery of service	122	1	5	4.06	1.009
Misuse of property for personal gain	122	1	5	3.38	1.082
Answerable to all situations	122	1	5	2.86	1.033
Accountable in work	122	1	5	2.53	1.004
Avoid injury of reputation of others	122	1	5	2.70	0.920

Responsibility for mistake done	122	1	5	2.57	0.898
Correct errors done	122	1	5	3.98	0.897
Observe official working hours	122	1	5	4.80	1.008
Valid N (list wise)	122				

Source: Field data (2023)

Based on the findings in Table 3, respondents strongly agreed on observation of official working hours (M=4.80, SD=1.008). The respondents agreed on maintaining confidentiality, timely delivery of service and correct errors done (M=4.27, SD=0.926), (M=4.06, SD=1.009) and (M=3.98, SD=0.897) respectively. The respondents were not sure on the following elements of accountability; keeping confidential information, misuse of property for personal gain, answerability to all situations, accountability in work, avoiding injury of reputation of others and responsibility for mistake done as depicted by (M=2.56, SD=0.978), (M=3.38, SD=1.009), (M=2.86, SD=1.033), (M=2.7, SD=0.920) and (M=2.57, SD=0.897) respectively. The results agree with those of Wainaina *et al.*, (2015) study that comparatively, the conduct of the employees towards their colleagues relating to the aspect of not revealing confidential information or making false statements concerning them received highest number of favorable responses. However, the need for the employees to treat others with respect and dignity was given low rating.

Inferential statistics.

With the aim of establishing the predictive power of the independent factors in quality-of-service delivery, the researcher adopted the use of general linear model, which included the Model, ANOVA of regression and coefficient of determination. SPSS version 25.0 was employed in the coding and analysis of the data.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.875 ^a	.722	.759	.261

a. Predictors: (Constant), Accountability

Source: Field data (2023)

The R² model summary results in Table 4 indicate that accountability accounted for 72.2% (R square = 0.722) of the variation in quality-of-service delivery. This implies that factors outside this study contribute 27.8% of quality-of-service delivery.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	32.194	4	8.046	118.226	.000 ^b
Residual	9.871	118	.068		
Total	42.065	122			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality Service delivery

b. Predictors: (Constant), Accountability

Source: Field data (2023)

The ANOVA results show that the model is significant (F = 118.226, p < 0.05). This shows that the effect of accountability on Service delivery is significant.

Coefficient of Determination

The study also adopted the use of multiple regression analysis to establish the influence of the independent Variables on the quality-of-service delivery at county government of Marsabit.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.333	.083		4.014	.000
Accountability	.128	.025	.247	5.072	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Service delivery

Source: Field data (2023)

Results from Table 5 indicate that the un-standardized beta coefficients indicate that integrity in accountability ($\beta = 0.128$, p < 0.05) was the strong predictors of quality-of-service delivery. This suggests that accountability affected quality-of-service delivery at County government of Marsabit.

From the regression equation $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$,

$$Y = 0.333 + 0.128X_1 + \epsilon$$

This indicates that when the other factors are held constant a unit increase in accountability would affect 0.128 times on the quality service delivery in the county government of Marsabit.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of the study was to assess the effects of accountability on quality of service delivery in Marsabit county government. The study established that the respondents observed official working hours, maintained confidentiality, they timely deliver services and correct errors done. Consequently, the study revealed that there was a positive effect of accountability on quality-of-service delivery in the county government of Marsabit. Furthermore, the results revealed that there was a strong statistically significant positive relationship between accountability and quality of service delivery of ($r=0.128$, $p<0.05$) Thus there was a statistically significant positive relationship between accountability and quality of service delivery.

Conclusions

The study established that accountability had a positive effect of commitment on quality of service delivery in the county government of Marsabit. The results reveal that accountability had a statistically significant positive relationship on quality of service delivery in the county government of Marsabit. This is an indication that the combined accountability practices in the county government of Marsabit positively influences the quality of service delivery in the County government of Marsabit. The study further concluded that adoption of accountability in the county is likely to significantly improve/ enhance the quality of service delivery in the county.

Recommendations

As revealed from the results of the study that accountability enhance quality of service delivery in the county governments, it is necessary that county government adopt accountability practices to improve their service delivery. It is also important that HR departments in the county government ensure that these work ethics rules are made available and adhered to by all employees. The study also recommends that county government should adopt work ethics to improve on quality of service delivery. The county government should evaluate the policies continually to see if they indeed encourage integrity among employees.

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