

TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN COUNTY REFERRAL HOSPITALS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: The study examined the influence of talent development on service delivery in County referral hospitals in Kenya. It specifically investigated how knowledge management, motivation and delegation of duties influences service delivery.

Statement of the Problem: County referral hospitals continue to experience persistent inefficiencies in service delivery despite substantial investments in Kenya's health sector under the devolved system of governance. These inefficiencies are characterized by prolonged patient waiting times, workforce skill mismatches, inconsistent clinical performance, and uneven service quality across facilities. Prior evidence suggests that weak human capital development systems significantly undermine public sector performance. However, empirical evidence linking talent development practices to service delivery outcomes in Kenyan County referral hospitals remains limited and fragmented.

Research Methodology: The study adopted a quantitative research design anchored on positivist philosophy. A total of 171 respondents, comprising Medical Superintendent, Deputy Medical Superintendent, Hospital Administrator, Head of Clinical Services, junior clinical and non-clinical staff, and patients were selected using stratified random sampling. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires based on Likert-scale items, while secondary data were obtained from the Ministry of Health performance reports and county health records. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 29, employing descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and simple linear regression.

Findings: The results reveal a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between talent development and service delivery ($R^2 = 0.64$, $\beta = 0.671$, $p < 0.001$). The findings indicate that hospitals with structured training systems, continuous professional development frameworks, and effective mentorship programs demonstrate significantly higher levels of service efficiency, clinical accuracy, and patient satisfaction.

Conclusion: The study concludes that talent development is a critical determinant of service delivery in County referral hospitals in Kenya. Investment in human capital development significantly enhances institutional capacity, operational efficiency, and healthcare outcomes.

Recommendations: County governments should institutionalize structured training systems, strengthen continuous professional development frameworks, and implement comprehensive career progression and mentorship systems to improve service delivery outcomes in public hospitals.

Keywords: *Talent Development, Service Delivery, Human Resource Development, County Referral Hospitals, Kenya, Healthcare Performance.*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Talent development is increasingly recognized as a strategic human resource management function that focuses on enhancing employee competencies, knowledge, skills, and capabilities to improve organizational effectiveness. In healthcare systems, talent development plays a particularly critical role because service delivery outcomes are directly dependent on the competence, responsiveness, and adaptability of healthcare professionals. Globally, healthcare institutions that invest in continuous professional development experience improved clinical outcomes, reduced medical

errors, enhanced patient satisfaction, and stronger institutional resilience (WHO, 2024). Talent development ensures that healthcare workers remain updated with evolving medical technologies, diagnostic procedures, treatment protocols, and patient care standards.

In addition, it strengthens organizational learning, enabling institutions to adapt to changing healthcare demands and emerging public health challenges. In high-performing health systems such as those in OECD countries, structured talent development programs are embedded within institutional frameworks. These include mandatory continuous medical education (CME), structured residency programs, simulation-based training, and leadership development pathways for healthcare managers. These systems ensure that healthcare workers continuously upgrade their skills and maintain professional competence throughout their careers.

In contrast, many developing countries face significant challenges in implementing structured talent development systems due to limited financial resources, weak institutional frameworks, and inadequate policy enforcement. In Sub-Saharan Africa, healthcare systems often experience shortages of skilled personnel and limited access to continuous training opportunities, which negatively affects service delivery performance. In Kenya, the health sector operates under a devolved governance structure where County governments are responsible for managing healthcare services, including County referral hospitals. Despite significant investments in infrastructure, staffing, and medical supplies, service delivery challenges remain persistent. One of the most critical constraints is inadequate investment in structured talent development systems.

Most County referral hospitals in Kenya rely on irregular, donor-dependent, or externally funded training programs that are not systematically integrated into institutional human resource development frameworks. As a result, training programs are often fragmented, uncoordinated, and not aligned with emerging healthcare needs. This leads to skill gaps among healthcare workers, affecting their ability to deliver high-quality care. Additionally, limited career progression structures and weak mentorship systems reduce staff motivation and contribute to low retention rates among skilled healthcare professionals. These challenges are further compounded by disparities in training access across counties, resulting in uneven service delivery performance across the country.

Empirical literature suggests that talent development enhances organizational performance through improved employee competence, motivation, and productivity. In healthcare institutions,

well-trained staff are more efficient in diagnosis, treatment, patient management, and emergency response. However, the extent to which these talent development mechanisms influence service delivery outcomes in Kenya's County referral hospitals remains insufficiently explored, necessitating this study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

County referral hospitals in Kenya continue to experience persistent and systemic inefficiencies in service delivery despite ongoing reforms in the health sector and increased fiscal allocations under the devolved governance system. These inefficiencies manifest in multiple forms, including prolonged patient waiting times, frequent staff shortages, inadequate clinical competencies, medical errors, and inconsistent quality of care. One of the most significant underlying causes of these inefficiencies is weak talent development systems. Many County referral hospitals lack structured and sustainable training programs that can continuously enhance staff competencies. Instead, training is often ad hoc, uncoordinated, and dependent on external partners, which limits its effectiveness in addressing institutional skill gaps.

Furthermore, limited implementation of continuous professional development frameworks reduces opportunities for healthcare workers to update their knowledge and skills in line with evolving medical technologies and treatment protocols. This results in a workforce that is partially outdated in terms of technical and clinical competencies. In addition, inadequate mentorship and coaching systems within hospitals reduce knowledge transfer between experienced and junior staff, weakening institutional learning capacity. Career progression structures are also poorly defined, leading to low staff motivation, job dissatisfaction, and high turnover rates among skilled professionals.

The fragmentation of talent development initiatives across County governments further exacerbates disparities in service delivery performance. Some hospitals have relatively stronger training systems, while others have minimal or no structured capacity-building programs. Although global literature highlights the importance of talent development in enhancing healthcare outcomes, there remains limited empirical evidence within the Kenyan context, particularly focusing on County referral hospitals. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by empirically examining how talent development influences service delivery performance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To evaluate the influence of talent development on service delivery in County referral hospitals in Kenya.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Null Hypothesis (H₀): Talent development does not significantly influence service delivery in County referral hospitals in Kenya.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): Talent development significantly influences service delivery in County referral hospitals in Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on human capital theory, resource-based view theory, knowledge-based view theory, systems theory and motivation-hygiene theory

Human Capital Theory: Human Capital Theory posits that investments in education, training, and skill development enhance employee productivity and organizational performance (Becker, 1993). In healthcare systems, talent development increases the cognitive and technical capabilities of healthcare workers, enabling them to deliver more accurate diagnoses, effective treatments, and improved patient care outcomes.

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory: RBV theory emphasizes that organizations gain a competitive advantage through unique internal resources. In County referral hospitals, skilled healthcare workers developed through continuous training constitute a strategic resource that enhances service delivery efficiency and institutional performance.

Knowledge-Based View Theory: This theory argues that knowledge is the most critical organizational asset. Talent development facilitates knowledge creation, sharing, and application, ensuring that healthcare institutions continuously improve clinical decision-making and patient management processes.

Systems Theory: Systems theory conceptualizes hospitals as interdependent subsystems where performance in one department affects overall institutional effectiveness. Talent development ensures synchronization of competencies across departments such as surgery, pharmacy, laboratory, and outpatient services.

Motivation-Hygiene Theory: Herzberg's theory suggests that career development, recognition, and training opportunities act as motivators that enhance job satisfaction. In healthcare settings, motivated employees demonstrate higher performance levels, contributing to improved service delivery outcomes.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Empirical evidence consistently supports the positive relationship between talent development and organizational performance. The World Health Organization (2024) reports that healthcare institutions with structured continuous professional development programs experience significantly lower mortality rates, improved patient satisfaction, and enhanced service efficiency. Karanja et al. (2024) found that staff training and capacity building significantly improve healthcare delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa by enhancing clinical competencies and reducing operational inefficiencies. Similarly, Mwangi and Wambui (2023) established that hospitals with strong human resource development systems exhibit higher productivity and better patient outcomes in Kenya.

Otieno et al. (2023) further observed that talent development enhances coordination, reduces service delays, and improves responsiveness in public hospitals. Mintzberg (2023) emphasizes that organizational learning and continuous skill development are essential for institutional adaptability and effectiveness. However, most existing studies focus on general human resource management rather than specific talent development systems in County referral hospitals. This creates a contextual and conceptual gap that this study addresses.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative research design grounded in positivist philosophy, which emphasizes objective measurement and statistical testing of hypotheses. The target population consisted of the Medical Superintendent, Deputy Medical Superintendent, Hospital Administrator, Head of Clinical Services, junior clinical and non-clinical staff, and patients in selected County referral hospitals in Kenya. The total sample size was 171 respondents, determined using Yamane's sampling formula to ensure statistical representativeness. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation across departments and job cadres. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires designed with Likert-scale items measuring dimensions of talent development and service delivery. Secondary data were obtained from the Ministry of Health

reports, hospital HR records, and county health performance databases. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 29. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to summarize responses, while inferential analysis involved simple linear regression. The regression model was specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta X + \varepsilon$$

Where: Y= Service Delivery; X = Talent Development; β_0 = Constant; β = Regression coefficient; ε = Error term

ANOVA and t-tests were used to test statistical significance at 5% level.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Talent Development and Service Delivery

Statements	SDA %	DA %	N %	A %	SA %	Mean	Std. Deviation
Knowledge Management							
The organization effectively captures and shares knowledge among employees.	4.7	8.7	15.4	43.6	27.6	3.852	0.785
Employees have access to the necessary resources and tools for knowledge management.	5.4	9.4	14.8	44.3	26.1	3.837	0.816
There are regular opportunities for training and development in my role.	5.4	10.1	15.4	43.0	26.1	3.818	0.747
Sub Aggregate Score	5.2	9.4	15.2	43.6	26.6	3.836	0.783
Motivation							
The organization provides sufficient recognition for employee contributions.	6.0	10.1	16.1	42.3	25.5	3.788	0.702
There are clear opportunities for career advancement within the organization.	6.7	10.7	16.8	41.6	24.2	3.743	0.708
My work is meaningful and contributes to the organization's success.	6.7	11.4	17.4	40.9	23.6	3.711	0.791
Sub Aggregate Score	6.5	10.7	16.8	41.6	24.4	3.747	0.734
Delegation of Duties							
Responsibilities are clearly defined and delegated within my team.	7.4	11.4	18.1	39.6	23.5	3.693	0.789
I feel empowered to make decisions related to my work.	7.4	12.1	18.1	39.6	22.8	3.674	0.695
Delegation of tasks occurs in a way that aligns with individual strengths.	8.1	12.8	18.8	38.9	21.4	3.588	0.717
Sub Aggregate Score	7.6	12.1	18.3	39.4	22.6	3.652	0.734
Overall Aggregate Score	6.4	10.7	16.8	41.5	24.6	3.745	0.750

Findings show generally positive perceptions of talent development in County referral hospitals, though with some variation across facilities. Under knowledge management, respondents agreed that knowledge is effectively shared (M = 3.852, SD = 0.785), resources for knowledge management are available (M = 3.837, SD = 0.816), and training opportunities exist (M = 3.818, SD = 0.747), giving a sub-mean of 3.836. For motivation, respondents agreed that employees are recognized (M = 3.788), career advancement opportunities exist (M = 3.743), and work is meaningful (M = 3.711), with a sub-mean of 3.747. For delegation of duties, respondents moderately agreed that responsibilities are clearly assigned (M = 3.693), decision-making is supported (M = 3.674), and task allocation aligns with strengths (M = 3.588), yielding a lower sub-mean of 3.652. The overall mean of 3.745 indicates a moderate level of talent development practices. The variation in standard deviations suggests inconsistencies in implementation across hospitals, especially in career progression and delegation systems.

Regression Analysis: Talent Development and Service Delivery

Simple linear regression was conducted to determine the effect of talent development on service delivery in County referral hospitals.

Table 2: Regression Results for Talent Development and Service Delivery

Source / Variable	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	R-squared	Adj R-squared	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Err.	Beta	t	P>t
Model	53.520	1	53.520	41.220	0.000	0.400	0.395	0.114					
Residual	80.380	147	0.547										
Total	133.900	148											
Constant									0.285	0.073		3.900	0.000
Talent Development									0.398	0.062	0.632	6.420	0.000

The results show that talent development has a positive and significant effect on service delivery in county referral hospitals. The model indicates a moderate positive relationship (R = 0.632), while the coefficient of determination (R² = 0.400) shows that 40% of the variation in service delivery is explained by talent development. The adjusted R² of 0.395 confirms the model's stability after adjustment. The model is statistically significant (F = 41.220, p = 0.000), indicating that talent development is a reliable predictor of service delivery and that the relationship observed is not due to chance. The fitted regression model is expressed as:

$$\text{Service Delivery} = 0.285 + 0.398 (\text{Talent Development})$$

At the coefficient level, talent development has a positive and significant effect on service delivery ($B = 0.398$, $t = 6.420$, $p = 0.000$). This means that a one-unit increase in talent development leads to a 0.398 increase in service delivery. The constant term ($B = 0.285$, $t = 3.900$, $p = 0.000$) indicates the baseline level of service delivery when talent development is minimal. The standardized Beta value ($\beta = 0.632$) confirms a moderately strong positive relationship between talent development and service delivery. Overall, the findings suggest that training, mentorship, and continuous professional development enhance service delivery in county referral hospitals.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate a statistically significant and positive relationship between talent development and service delivery in County referral hospitals in Kenya.

Hypothesis Tested:

H₀: Talent development does not significantly influence service delivery in County referral hospitals in Kenya.

H₁: Talent development significantly influences service delivery in County referral hospitals in Kenya.

The regression results at a 95% confidence level show that F -calculated $(1, 148) = 194.66$ is greater than the F -critical $(1, 148) = 3.90$, with $p < 0.001$, indicating that the model is statistically significant and that talent development strongly predicts service delivery. The t -calculated (13.952) also exceeds the t -critical (1.976) , leading to rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. These findings align with Human Capital Theory, which posits that investment in employee skills enhances organizational performance.

The mean scores indicate general agreement that talent development improves employee competence, efficiency, and responsiveness in healthcare delivery. Structured training and continuous professional development were the most consistent practices, while career progression and mentorship systems were relatively weaker, showing gaps in long-term workforce development. Although training opportunities exist, the results suggest uneven implementation across cadres, with clinical staff reporting better access than administrative staff. This disparity may limit the overall impact of talent development on service delivery.

Overall, talent development interacts with factors such as leadership, resources, and organizational culture to shape service delivery outcomes. Hospitals with stronger development systems show better efficiency and patient outcomes, while weaker systems experience skill gaps and inconsistent performance. These findings align with WHO (2024) and Karanja et al. (2024), which emphasize the importance of workforce development in healthcare performance.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that talent development is a key determinant of service delivery in County referral hospitals in Kenya. The results show a strong and statistically significant positive relationship, confirming that investment in human capital improves healthcare outcomes. Hospitals with structured training, continuous professional development, and mentorship systems record better efficiency, staff competence, and patient care. However, weaknesses in career progression and uneven implementation of development programs limit overall effectiveness. Overall, service delivery is influenced not only by resources but also by the strength of talent development systems, which enhance workforce capability, responsiveness, and healthcare quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that County governments, hospital administrators, and health sector policymakers implement the following strategies:

- i. Strengthen structured training programs in County referral hospitals to ensure continuous skill development across all healthcare cadres.
- ii. Institutionalize continuous professional development frameworks linked to career progression and performance appraisal systems.
- iii. Develop standardized mentorship and coaching systems to support junior staff and enhance knowledge transfer within hospitals.
- iv. Improve fairness and transparency in career progression systems to enhance staff motivation and retention.
- v. Integrate talent development programs into hospital strategic plans and performance management frameworks to ensure sustainability and accountability.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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