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Strategies for Enhancing the Implementation and Use of ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard for Improved Service Delivery in Selected Public University Libraries in Kenya

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Abstract

As demand for accountability, efficiency, and customer-focused services grows, public university libraries in Kenya face increasing pressure to adopt robust quality management approaches that enhance service delivery. Effectively implementing and using the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard provides a strategic pathway to strengthen institutional processes, improve resource utilization, and ensure continuous improvement in library services. This study aimed to identify and propose strategies to enhance the implementation and use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard and improve service delivery in selected public university libraries in Kenya. The study aimed to identify strategies to enhance the implementation and use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard to improve service delivery in selected public university libraries in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design within a multiple-case study involving five purposively selected public university libraries in Eastern Kenya. The target population comprised 92 respondents: 5 Deputy Vice-Chancellors, 5 Directors of Quality Assurance, 5 Officers in Charge of ISO, and 77 university library staff. The study used a combination of stratified and census sampling to select 11 university management members who provided qualitative data through interviews and 63 university library staff who provided quantitative data through questionnaires. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in a table, while the qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive thematic method and presented as narratives. The study reveals that effectively implementing and using the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard in selected public university libraries in Kenya requires a holistic approach involving adequate funding, leadership commitment, ICT integration, staff capacity development, simplified processes, and continuous improvement mechanisms. The findings identify adequate funding and resource mobilization (98.4%) as the most critical strategy, followed by sustainability measures (87.3%), ICT integration (79.4%), simplified documentation and quality culture (76.2%), continuous monitoring and evaluation (73%), staff training (71.4%), and management support (68.3%). The study reveals that ISO 9001:2015 should be embedded as a continuous improvement framework rather than merely a certification requirement. The study recommends that university management should prioritize resource allocation, strengthen ICT integration, enhance staff training, simplify documentation, and promote a quality culture supported by continuous monitoring and evaluation to improve sustainable service delivery in university libraries.

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1. Introduction

The increasing demand for quality, accountability, and efficiency in higher education institutions has compelled universities worldwide to adopt internationally recognized quality management systems. Among these, the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard has emerged as one of the most widely accepted frameworks for enhancing organizational effectiveness through a process-based approach, customer focus, evidence-based decision-making, and continual improvement (ISO, 2015). The standard provides organizations with a systematic framework for improving service quality, managing risks, meeting stakeholder expectations, and enhancing operational performance.

University libraries are critical components of higher education institutions because they support teaching, learning, research, and innovation by providing quality information resources and services. The rapid transformation of the information environment, driven by technological advancement, digital scholarship, and changing user expectations, has increased pressure on academic libraries to improve the quality, accessibility, and efficiency of their services. Consequently, many university libraries have embraced quality management practices to standardize service delivery, improve customer satisfaction, and ensure continuous organizational improvement (Oakland, Oakland & Turner, 2020).

The adoption of ISO 9001 Quality Management Systems has gained considerable momentum in Kenya following the Government's public sector reforms aimed at improving efficiency, transparency, and customer satisfaction in service delivery. Public universities have increasingly implemented ISO 9001 standards to strengthen institutional governance, improve service delivery, and comply with national quality assurance requirements.

The release of ISO 9001:2015 introduced significant improvements over earlier versions by emphasizing organizational context, leadership commitment, risk-based thinking, knowledge management, stakeholder engagement, and continual improvement (ISO, 2015). These principles are particularly relevant to university libraries because they encourage systematic management of library processes, continuous assessment of user needs, evidence-based decision-making, and improvement of library services. Effective implementation of ISO 9001:2015 can improve consistency in library operations, responsiveness to users, resource utilization, and customer satisfaction.

Despite the widespread adoption of ISO 9001 in Kenyan public universities, evidence indicates that the quality management system has not always translated into improved service delivery. Studies conducted in Kenyan universities have reported persistent challenges, including inadequate employee involvement, insufficient training, limited management commitment, inadequate allocation of resources, resistance to organizational change, and weak monitoring mechanisms, all of which affect the effectiveness of ISO implementation (Ong'injo, Komen & Omondi, 2025; Ngigi, 2017).

Similarly, research on quality management practices in Kenyan public universities has found that although ISO 9001 contributes positively to organizational performance, many institutions experience implementation gaps that limit the realization of its intended benefits (Wangai et

al., 2021). In university libraries, these implementation challenges may adversely affect information service quality, user satisfaction, operational efficiency, and continuous improvement initiatives.

Furthermore, recent studies on ISO 9001:2015 implementation in Kenyan public universities show that quality management practices such as continual improvement significantly influence service delivery, although implementation varies across institutional departments (Muchai et al., 2022). However, most existing studies have focused on universities as whole institutions or on academic and administrative departments, with limited attention devoted specifically to university libraries despite their central role in supporting the core functions of higher education.

This limited scholarly attention creates a knowledge gap regarding specific strategies to strengthen the implementation and sustained use of ISO 9001:2015 in public university libraries in Kenya. Understanding these strategies matters because effective quality management system implementation goes beyond certification; it requires sustained organizational commitment, employee participation, adequate resource allocation, regular internal audits, management review, and a culture of continual improvement.

Therefore, this study seeks to identify strategies to strengthen the implementation and use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard to improve service delivery in selected public university libraries in Kenya. The findings are expected to contribute to policy formulation, strengthen quality management practices in academic libraries, and provide practical recommendations for university management, librarians, quality assurance practitioners, and policymakers seeking to improve library service delivery.

1.1 Problem Statement

The adoption of quality management systems has become increasingly important in higher education institutions as universities seek to improve efficiency, accountability, and customer satisfaction. The ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard provides a globally recognized framework for achieving consistent service quality through principles such as customer focus, process management, evidence-based decision-making, and continual improvement (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2015). In Kenya, many public universities have adopted ISO 9001:2015 to strengthen institutional performance and enhance service delivery across various departments, including university libraries. As key providers of information resources and services that support teaching, learning, and research, university libraries are expected to implement quality management practices that respond effectively to users' evolving needs (Barfi et al., 2023). Despite the adoption of ISO 9001:2015, studies indicate that its implementation in Kenyan public universities continues to face challenges such as inadequate staff involvement, limited training, insufficient management commitment, and resource constraints, which undermine improved service delivery (Bibi et al., 2023; Kimilu, 2026). Furthermore, empirical evidence on strategies to enhance the implementation and sustained use of ISO 9001:2015 in public university libraries remains limited. This study therefore seeks to identify strategies to strengthen the implementation and use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard and improve service delivery in selected public university libraries in Kenya.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study aims to identify and propose strategies to enhance the implementation and use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard to improve service delivery in selected public university libraries in Kenya.

1.3 Objective of the study

To determine the strategies needed to enhance the implementation and use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard to improve service delivery in selected public university libraries in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Strategies for Enhancing the Implementation and Use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard to Improve Service Delivery

Enhancing the implementation and utilization of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard in public university libraries requires a combination of organizational, technological, financial, and human resource strategies. One key strategy is strengthening awareness and sensitization programmes among library staff and stakeholders. Ongoing sensitization helps employees understand ISO requirements and apply quality principles consistently in daily operations, improving adherence to standardized procedures and service objectives (Balahadia, Dalugdog, & Cabiente, 2022). Studies also show that regular awareness initiatives, communication forums, and capacity-building activities promote employee engagement, a quality culture, and compliance with ISO requirements, improving service delivery (Celestine et al., 2024; Ezzeddine et al., 2023).

Closely related to awareness creation is the need for continuous capacity building and training. Effective training equips library staff with the knowledge and skills required to interpret ISO requirements, manage documentation, conduct internal audits, and participate in quality improvement activities (Desai, 2018; Hut-Mossel et al., 2021). Evidence indicates that professional development initiatives such as workshops, mentorship, and on-the-job training enhance staff competence, reduce resistance to change, and strengthen the sustainability of ISO 9001:2015 implementation (Alhowaish, 2024).

Leadership commitment is also essential to ensure ISO 9001:2015 moves beyond certification requirements and becomes an integral part of library operations. Strong top management support facilitates resource allocation, policy enforcement, performance monitoring, and alignment of quality objectives with institutional goals (Cotelnic, 2023). Active leadership involvement promotes employee commitment, accountability, process standardization, and continuous improvement practices (Psomas & Antony, 2017; Ojei & Popoola, 2023).

Similarly, adequate funding and resource mobilization are necessary to support training, ICT infrastructure, quality audits, modern information resources, and monitoring systems required for effective implementation (Gachomo & Wainaina, 2023; Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2017). Institutions that invest in quality infrastructure and staff development demonstrate stronger compliance with ISO requirements and improved service performance (Mwangi & Wanyoike, 2021; Juntunen, Lehtinen & Saarti, 2015).

Integrating ISO 9001:2015 with ICT and digital systems is another key strategy for improving service delivery. Digital technologies enhance documentation, communication, process monitoring, and data management, thereby improving efficiency and accountability in quality management processes (Alič, 2018). In university libraries, ICT-supported systems automate

processes, manage electronic records, improve access to information resources, and support evidence-based decision-making, leading to more reliable, user-centered services (Moturi & Mbithi, 2015; Mahmoud, 2025). Emerging technologies such as automation, cloud computing, and data analytics further support continuous improvement by strengthening monitoring, evaluation, and decision-making processes (Gorostidi, & Rubio-Arostegui, 2026; Muchai, Mulwa, & Amukowa, 2022).

Effective utilization of ISO 9001:2015 also requires simplifying documentation processes. Although documented information is essential for consistency, accountability, and process control, overly complex documentation systems may create unnecessary administrative burdens and limit staff compliance. Simplified, user-friendly documentation improves accessibility, standardizes processes, streamlines information flow, and boosts operational efficiency (Mathrani, Shanuka, & Nihal, 2021). Evidence from university settings shows that manageable documentation procedures improve staff participation in quality assurance activities, strengthen internal audits, and support continuous improvement (Moturi & Mbithi, 2015; Mutiso, 2020).

Furthermore, continuous monitoring and evaluation are critical for sustaining ISO 9001:2015 practices. Regular performance reviews, internal audits, and customer feedback mechanisms enable institutions to identify weaknesses, implement corrective actions, and improve service delivery (Benavides-Velasco, Quintana-García, & Marchante-Lara, 2014). In academic libraries, continuous assessment enhances user satisfaction, improves resource accessibility, and enables libraries to respond effectively to changing user expectations and technological developments (Mahmoud, 2025).

Monitoring and evaluation also strengthen accountability and evidence-based decision-making by ensuring that institutional performance is measured against quality objectives (Psomas, Pantouvakis, & Kafetzopoulos, 2013). A strong quality culture is equally important for sustaining ISO 9001:2015 implementation. A quality-oriented culture characterized by teamwork, customer focus, employee commitment, and continuous improvement encourages staff ownership of quality initiatives and enhances service performance (Iqbal et al., 2023). In Kenyan public universities, staff training, corrective actions, audits, and performance monitoring have been associated with improved operational efficiency and service delivery (Muchai, Mulwa, & Amukowa, 2022).

Collaboration and benchmarking further strengthen ISO implementation by enabling libraries to share experiences, resources, technologies, and best practices. Benchmarking lets institutions compare performance against recognized standards, identify service gaps, and implement improvements (Bafi et al., 2023). Collaborative approaches involving library staff, university management, and external stakeholders promote teamwork, resource sharing, and process standardization, thereby enhancing service responsiveness and quality improvement (Iqbal et al., 2023; Renaville & Prosmans, 2023).

Finally, sustainable measures are necessary to ensure ISO 9001:2015's long-term effectiveness in public university libraries. Sustainability involves efficient resource use, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and integrating quality practices into routine operations. Libraries that incorporate sustainability principles into their strategic frameworks are better positioned to align services with user needs and maintain continuous improvement (Connaway et al., 2023). Sustainable management practices enhance stakeholder satisfaction, promote efficient resource use, and strengthen quality management systems (Ensslin et al., 2022).

Therefore, integrating sustainability, collaboration, quality culture, monitoring, and continuous improvement practices provides a comprehensive approach for enhancing ISO 9001:2015 implementation and improving service delivery in public university libraries.

3. Methodology

The study was anchored on the pragmatic research paradigm and employed a mixed-methods approach using a convergent parallel design. Quantitative data were collected through a descriptive survey, while qualitative data were generated through a multiple-case study involving five purposively selected public university libraries in Eastern Kenya. The target population comprised 92 respondents: 5 Deputy Vice-Chancellors, 5 Directors of Quality Assurance, 5 Officers in Charge of ISO, and 77 university library staff. The study used stratified and census sampling to obtain 11 university management staff who provided qualitative data through interviews and 63 university library staff who provided quantitative data using questionnaires. The study analyzed quantitative data using descriptive statistics and presented them in tables and bar charts, while it analyzed qualitative data using inductive thematic analysis and presented them in narrative form.

4. Findings of the Study

4.1 Strategies for Enhancing the Implementation and Use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard to Improve Service Delivery in selected public university libraries

The study sought to identify strategies respondents can adopt to enhance the use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Standard to improve service delivery in their university libraries. This was achieved by providing suggested interventions, where respondents were expected to tick an intervention they thought was appropriate. Table 1 presents the findings.

Table 1: Strategies that can be adopted to enhance the use of ISO 9001:2015 Quality Standard in improving service delivery in public university libraries

Interventions	Respondents	
	f	%
Strengthen awareness and sensitization programs	32	50.8%
Improve capacity building and training	45	71.4%
Lobby for strong top management support	43	68.3%
Adequate funding and resource mobilization	62	98.4%
Integrate ISO with ICT and digital systems	50	79.4%
Simplify documentation	48	76.2%
Continuous monitoring and evaluation	46	73%
Promote quality culture	48	76.2%
Collaboration and benchmarking	30	47.6%
Sustainable measures	55	87.3%

The findings in Table 1 indicate that enhancing the implementation of the ISO 9001:2015 quality management standard in public university libraries requires a varied but strongly resource-centered approach. 62 (98.4%) of the respondents indicated that adequate funding and resource mobilization are their most critical interventions, suggesting that financial constraints are perceived as the primary barrier to effective implementation. This implies that without sufficient financial and material resources, other quality management processes such as training, ICT integration, monitoring and documentation may not be effectively sustained. Closely linked to funding is the strong emphasis on sustainable measures (55; 87.3%), indicating that respondents view ISO 9001:2015 as a continuous improvement framework rather than a one-time certification requirement. The high support for integrating ISO with ICT and digital systems (50; 79.4%) further reflects the need to align quality management practices with modern library technologies. Similarly, simplifying documentation 48 (76.2%) suggests that existing processes may be perceived as cumbersome, and streamlining them could enhance compliance and operational efficiency. Promoting a quality culture 48 (76.2%) and continuous monitoring and evaluation 46 (73%) highlights the importance of embedding quality principles into everyday operations. These interventions align with the standard's emphasis on evidence-based decision-making and ongoing assessment. Capacity building and training 45 (71.4%) also emerged as critical, indicating that staff competence and professional development are necessary for effective implementation. In addition, strong top management support 43 (68.3%) underscores the importance of leadership commitment to provide direction, allocate resources, and reinforce accountability. In contrast, awareness and sensitization programs 32 (50.8%) and collaboration and benchmarking 30 (47.6%) received comparatively less support. This suggests respondents may believe basic awareness of ISO already exists and that strengthening internal operations is more urgent than external partnerships. Overall, the results portray ISO 9001:2015 implementation in public university libraries as a resource-driven, leadership-supported, and system-integrated process that depends on sustainable funding, institutional commitment, and continuous improvement mechanisms to enhance service delivery effectively. Findings from senior management officers also highlight three major interventions they felt could enhance the use of the ISO 9001:2015 quality standard; first, they suggested libraries should be adequately funded to successfully adopt and use the quality standard.

One vice chancellor summarized the funding issue by indicating,

"I firmly believe that adequate funding and strategic resource mobilization are essential interventions, because without financial support, quality management systems cannot be effectively sustained. When institutions invest in staff training, infrastructure, and continuous improvement processes, ISO 9001:2015 becomes a practical driver of improved and reliable service delivery."

Another director of quality assurance had this to say on the funding intervention,

"The adoption and maintenance of quality standards in our university cannot be achieved without adequate financial investment. Sustainable funding remains the foundation for excellence in teaching, research and institutional development."

The second intervention from the interviewed respondents focused on sustainability measures. The respondents indicated that to continually reap the benefits of quality standards, public university libraries should have sustainability measures in place to ensure ISO 9001:2015 quality implementation and this can be summarized by one Director, Quality Assurance Officer, who said:

"To ensure that benefits accrued from adoption of ISO 9001:2015 quality standards are not watered down with time, our university has ensured that it has entrenched the quality standard financial requirements in the annual university operational budget"

The third intervention from the interviews was to integrate ISO with ICT and digital systems. Respondents felt that, in today's information age, integrating ISO with information and communication technology improves operational efficiency in the library through shorter service times, improved data management, and better reporting, among other benefits. Responses can be summarized by one officer in charge of ISO, who indicated,

"Automation enhances the university library's ability to track, manage and improve service delivery; hence, I would recommend university libraries automate all its operations"

The findings indicate strongly that funding support is essential to fully realize the transformative potential of ISO 9001:2015 in public university libraries. By embedding these interventions into policy and practice, libraries can ensure sustainable quality improvement and consistently enhanced service delivery for their library patrons.

5. Discussion

5.1 Strategies for Enhancing the Implementation and Use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard to Improve Service Delivery in selected public university libraries

The findings established that enhancing the implementation and utilization of ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard in public university libraries in Kenya requires a comprehensive approach involving financial support, leadership commitment, technological integration, staff development, process improvement, and continuous quality enhancement.

Adequate funding and resource mobilization emerged as one of the most critical strategies, as implementing quality management systems effectively requires investment in certification processes, audits, infrastructure, ICT systems, and staff training. This finding concurs with previous studies that identify inadequate financial resources as a major barrier to successful quality management implementation (Alshahrani & Husain, 2024; Sickinger-Nagorni & Schwanke, 2016). However, the literature also suggests that efficient utilization of available resources and managerial commitment can help institutions sustain quality initiatives despite financial limitations (Bhuvan et al., 2017).

The findings further highlighted the importance of sustainability measures in ensuring that ISO 9001:2015 remains an ongoing improvement framework rather than a one-time certification exercise. Embedding quality practices into institutional planning, monitoring processes, and daily operations enhances long-term service effectiveness and aligns with ISO 9001:2015's continual improvement principle (ISO, 2015).

Similarly, integrating ISO processes with ICT and digital systems was identified as a key strategy for improving efficiency, documentation, communication, monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making. Digital technologies enhance process control, accessibility of information, and accountability, although their effectiveness depends on adequate staff training and alignment with organizational processes (Wadesango, Sandu & Lovemore, 2024; Trenerry et al., 2021; Lu, 2024).

The study also found that simplifying documentation processes is necessary to improve ISO 9001:2015 utilization. While documentation promotes consistency, traceability, and accountability, excessive paperwork may create administrative burdens and reduce staff engagement. Streamlined documentation systems make compliance easier, improve workflow

efficiency, and let employees focus more on service improvement than administrative tasks (Iyaji et al., 2023; Hasan, 2021).

Furthermore, promoting a quality culture and strengthening continuous monitoring and evaluation were identified as essential for sustaining quality management practices. A strong quality culture encourages employee commitment, teamwork, accountability, and customer-focused service delivery, while regular monitoring enables institutions to identify gaps, implement corrective actions, and support continuous improvement (Abdulkadir, 2023; Endalamaw et al., 2024).

Capacity building and training also emerged as key strategies, emphasizing the importance of developing staff competence and awareness of ISO requirements. Continuous professional development improves employees' understanding of quality principles, enhances consistency in service delivery, and strengthens organizational adaptability (Yertas, 2024; van Assen, 2021).

Similarly, strong top management support was found to be fundamental to successful ISO implementation through resource allocation, strategic direction, employee motivation, and integrating quality objectives into institutional operations. Leadership commitment remains a critical determinant of quality management success as it shapes organizational culture and ensures sustainability of improvement initiatives (Setyaningrum et al., 2017; Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020).

Although awareness and sensitization programmes, collaboration, and benchmarking received comparatively lower support from respondents, they remain important strategies for sustaining quality improvement. Continuous sensitization reinforces staff engagement and quality awareness, while benchmarking promotes organizational learning by comparing performance with best practices and standards (Magana et al., 2020; Willmington et al., 2022).

Overall, the findings show that effective use of ISO 9001:2015 in public university libraries requires a balanced, integrated approach that combines adequate resources, leadership commitment, technological advancement, employee capacity development, simplified processes, and continuous improvement mechanisms. These strategies provide a foundation for strengthening quality management practices and enhancing service delivery in public university libraries.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that effective implementation and use of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard in public university libraries requires a holistic and sustainable approach that integrates financial, technological, human resource, and organizational strategies. Adequate funding and resource mobilization emerged as the most critical requirements, demonstrating that quality management systems cannot be effectively sustained without sufficient investment in infrastructure, staff development, ICT systems, audits, and continuous improvement activities.

The study further concludes that sustainability measures, ICT integration, simplified documentation, capacity building, strong leadership support, quality culture, and continuous monitoring and evaluation are essential in ensuring that ISO 9001:2015 moves beyond certification requirements to become an effective framework for improving service delivery.

Although respondents gave comparatively less support to awareness creation and collaboration, they remain important for maintaining stakeholder engagement and promoting continuous improvement. Overall, the study concludes that implementing ISO 9001:2015 in public university libraries should be viewed as an ongoing institutional commitment that requires coordinated efforts, adequate resources, and strong managerial support to deliver enhanced, consistent, and user-focused library services.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Public university management should prioritize adequate funding and resource mobilization to support the effective implementation and sustainability of ISO 9001:2015 in university libraries. Universities should allocate dedicated resources for staff training, ICT infrastructure, quality audits, and continuous improvement initiatives.

Library management should better integrate ISO requirements with digital systems to improve automation, documentation, monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making. In addition, libraries should simplify quality documentation processes to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and improve staff compliance with ISO procedures.

Continuous capacity-building programmes should be institutionalized to enhance staff competence and awareness of ISO 9001:2015 requirements. Top management should also demonstrate commitment through policy support, resource allocation, employee motivation, and regular reviews of quality performance.

Furthermore, university libraries should establish strong quality cultures supported by continuous monitoring, evaluation, benchmarking, and stakeholder collaboration to sustain improvements. Awareness creation and sensitization programmes should also be strengthened to enhance staff engagement and promote collective responsibility for quality management.

By adopting these recommendations, public university libraries will be better positioned to maximize the benefits of ISO 9001:2015 and enhance the quality, efficiency, and responsiveness of their service delivery.

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