

Employees' Communication Skills and Customer Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Service Quality in Private Tour Companies in Arusha

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of employees' communication skills on service quality and customer satisfaction in private tour companies in Arusha, Tanzania. Using a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 50 tourists via structured questionnaires and from 5 key informants via in-depth interview guides. The study found that employees' communication skills in the tourism industry are instrumental in enhancing service quality, as perceived by tourists. In this regard, clear, attentive, and empathetic communication enhances perceived service quality among tourists. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of 0.678 and a significance level of $p < 0.01$. Service quality partially mediated this relationship. The study's findings also show that employees' communication skills had a strong positive correlation with service quality ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). The study provides practical recommendations for tour operators and policymakers aiming to enhance service quality, customer satisfaction, and competitiveness in Tanzania's tourism industry.

Keywords: *Employees' Communication Skills, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Tourism, Arusha, Tanzania.*

1.0 Introduction

In service-oriented industries, the quality of interaction between employees and customers is a major factor in determining an organisation's ability to create long-lasting impressions on customers. Each greeting, explanation, response to an enquiry, and complaint resolution is significant to the overall customer assessment of the quality of service received from an organisation. In interactive service industries such as tourism, employees not only deliver service but also act as brand ambassadors and experience makers for customers. Employees' ability to communicate effectively can significantly influence how information is conveyed, customer expectations are managed, and customer relationships are developed during service encounters. Hence, communication skills can be regarded as an organisational strategic resource rather than an interpersonal skill set (Miguel, 2024).

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In the global arena, the growing service economy has heightened focus on the role of communication competence in service excellence. As globalisation intensifies, customer expectations have risen, making service interactions more transparent and open to scrutiny. Today's customers consider not only the technical aspects of service interactions but also the interpersonal and emotional dimensions. Multinational firms therefore invest heavily in communication training to enhance employees' verbal clarity, empathy, listening ability, and responsiveness. Communication plays a vital role in service recovery, in avoiding misunderstandings, and in fostering customer loyalty. Communication plays a vital role in service recovery, avoiding misunderstandings, and fostering customer loyalty.

In the context of Africa, specifically Tanzania, tourism is a significant economic sector, and there are direct, continuous personal interactions. In particular, in the town of Arusha, which is acknowledged as a gateway to various tourist sites, including Serengeti National Park, Ngorongoro Conservation Area, and Mount Kilimanjaro, there are many private tour companies that rely heavily on their front-line staff to deliver safari experiences to customers (Morris, 2019). In this context, the importance of communication skills can be emphasised, considering the diverse nature of tourists visiting these sites (Kuruchumila, 2025; Magembe, 2021). Ineffective communication may lead to customer dissatisfaction, while effective communication can improve the quality of service and customer relations (Chindengwike, 2024; Marzouki & Posecion, 2019).

The link between the communication skills of the employees, service quality, and customer satisfaction is supported by the service encounter perspective and relationship marketing (Ihtiyar & Ahmad, 2025). Communication affects customers' perceptions of reliability, responsibility, assurance, and empathy, which are the dimensions of service quality. For example, when employees are more attentive and clearer in their communication, the service becomes more dependable and trustworthy. As a result, the satisfaction level of the customers increases because the service meets their expectations (Eviana, 2024; Gesimba et al., 2023). Communication skills may also directly affect customer satisfaction. Service quality might be a mediating factor between communication skills and customer satisfaction (Andriani et al., 2025).

Although the theoretical linkages between the variables are acknowledged, there has been limited investigation of these relationships, especially in Tanzania's private tour industry. Most studies have focused on overall service quality and destination competitiveness, with communication skills as a secondary factor. There has also been a lack of investigation into the extent to which service quality mediates the relationship between employees' communication skills and customer satisfaction, creating a contextual and theoretical void. Therefore, the aim of the study is to address the gap by investigating the impact of employees' communication skills on service quality and customer satisfaction, with service quality as a mediator.

This study aims to examine the effect of employees' communication skills on service quality and customer satisfaction in Tanzania's tourism industry, with a focus on private tour companies in Arusha. Specifically, it assesses how employees' communication skills influence service quality, determines their effect on customer satisfaction, examines the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, and investigates whether

service quality mediates the relationship between employees' communication skills and customer satisfaction. Through these objectives, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how effective communication contributes to improved service delivery and enhanced customer experiences in the tourism sector.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

2.1.1 Service Encounter Theory

Service Encounter Theory was primarily developed by Mary Jo Bitner in the early 1990s through her research on service marketing and the concept of the "moment of truth." The Service Encounter Theory was based on the broader literature on service marketing, which acknowledged that, in service industries, customer judgments were based on interactions with employees rather than on the product itself. Bitner (1990) argued that the service encounter, the face-to-face meeting between a customer and a service employee, is the point at which the customer evaluates service performance. The theory posits that customers evaluate service quality based on the nature and outcome of these interpersonal exchanges. During service encounters, employees' behaviour, communication style, responsiveness, empathy, and professionalism significantly influence customer perceptions. Because services are intangible and cannot be evaluated prior to consumption, customers rely heavily on interactional cues during the service process. Positive encounters create favourable impressions of reliability, assurance, and empathy, while negative encounters may lead to dissatisfaction, regardless of the service's technical quality. In relation to this study, Service Encounter Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for examining how employees' communication skills influence service quality and customer satisfaction in private tour companies in Arusha. In safari operations, tour guides and customer service personnel interact continuously with tourists while they visit destinations such as Serengeti National Park and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.

2.1.2 SERVQUAL Model

The SERVQUAL Model was first developed in 1988 by A. Parasuraman, Valarie Zeithaml, and Leonard Berry to measure service quality across different sectors of the service industry. According to the SERVQUAL Model, customers assess service quality by comparing their expectations before using the service with their perceptions after using it. Originally, the SERVQUAL Model identified five dimensions of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. These five dimensions combine to form the overall quality of a service.

In this study, the SERVQUAL Model serves as a guide for understanding how employees' communication skills affect overall perceived service quality in private tour companies in Arusha. For example, during guided tours to areas such as Serengeti National Park and Ngorongoro Conservation Area, customers judge the overall performance of the tour based on the reliability of the information conveyed, the promptness with which concerns are addressed, and the empathy with which customers are treated. Thus, the SERVQUAL Model supports the idea that employees' communication skills significantly affect overall service quality, which, in turn, affects customer satisfaction.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of employees' communication skills in the tourism and hospitality industries for creating customer satisfaction. In this direction, Tanković et al., (2023) have found that communication and soft skills directly influence tourists' satisfaction. This is because communication and soft skills help to ensure clarity, attentiveness, and engagement in service encounters. In a similar vein, Arabacıoğlu and Dedeoğlu (2025) found that tour guides' communication skills directly influence tourists' overall satisfaction. The influence of tour guides' communication skills was particularly evident in the accurate and timely information they provided to tourists. Gesimba et al., (2023) have found that tour guides' communication skills in Kenya directly influence tourists' satisfaction levels. This indicates the universal importance of communication competence in service encounters. Thus, clarity, attentiveness, and empathetic understanding and awareness of cultural contexts are essential aspects of communication competence.

Empirical studies further indicate that employees' communication skills are strongly linked to perceived service quality. Ihtiyar and Ahmad (2025) showed that intercultural communication competence among frontline staff enhances perceived service quality and customer satisfaction in hospitality contexts, suggesting that effective communication bridges cultural and informational gaps. Jawabreh et al., (2022) similarly found that the communication skills of hotel front-office staff improve perceptions of service quality dimensions such as responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Eviana (2024) demonstrated that clear and empathetic communication contributes to service quality by ensuring that tourists' needs and expectations are adequately addressed. These studies collectively illustrate that communication skills are not simply supportive behaviours but fundamental determinants of service quality in tourism.

Recent research also emphasises the mediating role of service quality in explaining how communication skills influence customer satisfaction. Eviana (2024) found that service quality significantly mediates the relationship between service attributes and tourist satisfaction, highlighting the mechanism through which employee competencies translate into positive outcomes. Chindengwike (2024) reported that dysfunctional communication in Tanzanian tour operators reduces service quality and, consequently, customer satisfaction, demonstrating that communication failures directly impact organisational performance. Andriani et al., (2025) also emphasised that therapeutic and responsive communication enhances perceived service quality, thereby elevating customer satisfaction in tourism experiences. These findings suggest that service quality acts as a critical conduit linking communication skills to customer satisfaction.

Despite these insights, few studies have examined the integrated effects of communication skills, service quality, and customer satisfaction specifically in Tanzania's private tour sector. While studies such as Kuruchumila (2025) explored communication skills among SMEs and Miguel (2024) investigated intercultural communication in tourism in Brazil, there is limited context-specific research on Tanzanian tour companies, particularly in Arusha. This represents both a contextual gap, as the dynamics of communication with culturally diverse tourists in Arusha remain underexplored, and a theoretical gap, since the mediating role of service quality between communication skills and customer satisfaction has rarely been tested in this context.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design to examine the effect of employees' communication skills on service quality and customer satisfaction in private tour companies in Arusha, Tanzania. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of how communication practices influence service outcomes. The quantitative component measured employees' communication skills, perceived service quality, and tourist satisfaction, while the qualitative component explored employees' and managers' experiences and perceptions of communication practices and the challenges of delivering quality service.

Arusha was selected as the study site due to its status as a major tourism hub, with numerous private tour companies operating near popular destinations such as the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Conservation Area. The study population comprised tourists using private tour services and employees, including tour guides, drivers, customer service staff, and managers. A combination of purposive and stratified sampling was used to select participants with direct experience in guided tours and service delivery. The quantitative sample included 100 tourists from five companies, while 10 employees and 5 managers were selected for qualitative interviews, ensuring representation across different roles and departments. Stratification accounted for tourists' nationalities, ages, and tour types, as well as employees' departmental roles.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews. Questionnaires administered to tourists included closed-ended items on communication skills, service quality, and customer satisfaction, measured on a five-point Likert scale. Semi-structured interviews with employees and managers explored communication practices, service delivery challenges, and strategies for enhancing tourist satisfaction. The document review examined company records, training manuals, and feedback forms to validate the primary data.

Quantitative data were coded, cleaned, and analysed in SPSS. Descriptive statistics summarised demographic and variable data, while inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses, assessed relationships among communication skills, service quality, and customer satisfaction. Mediation analysis tested whether service quality mediated these relationships. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and group related codes into coherent themes. Document review findings were triangulated with survey and interview data to enhance validity. To ensure validity and reliability, instruments were reviewed by tourism and social science experts and pilot-tested with tourists and employees from non-sampled companies. Cronbach's alphas of 0.82, 0.85, and 0.88 confirmed high reliability for the communication skills, service quality, and customer satisfaction scales, respectively. Triangulation and peer review of interview transcripts further ensured the credibility and dependability of qualitative findings.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Influence of Employees' Communication Skills on Service Quality

The first objective of this study was to assess the influence of employees' communication skills on service quality in private tour companies in Arusha. To achieve this objective, respondents were asked to rate 10 statements covering different aspects of employees' communication behaviour during service encounters. The statements were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The items captured key elements of communication, such as clarity of information, listening ability, responsiveness, friendliness, empathy, and the ability to explain tourism attractions. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Influence of Employees' Communication Skills on Service Quality (n = 100)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Tour guides clearly explained tour schedules and activities.	4.32	0.71
Employees communicated information about destinations effectively.	4.28	0.75
Tour guides listened carefully to tourists' questions and concerns.	4.21	0.79
Employees responded promptly to tourists' requests during the tour.	4.25	0.74
Communication between employees and tourists was friendly and respectful.	4.40	0.69
Employees provided clear safety and travel instructions.	4.18	0.83
Tour guides demonstrated strong knowledge when discussing attractions.	4.36	0.72
Employees used language that tourists could easily understand.	4.30	0.77
Employees showed empathy when addressing tourists' needs.	4.22	0.80
Overall, employee communication improved the quality of the tour experience.	4.45	0.68

Source: Field Data (2026)

The findings indicate that tourists strongly perceive employees' communication skills as a critical factor in enhancing service quality in private tour companies in Arusha. All survey statements recorded high mean scores above 4.00 and low standard deviations, reflecting consistent positive experiences among tourists. The highest-rated item showed that overall employee communication improved the quality of the tour experience ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.68$), highlighting communication as central to tourists' overall service perception. Tourists also strongly agreed that interactions with employees were friendly and respectful ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.69$) and that tour guides effectively communicated information about attractions ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.72$). These results underscore the importance of professionalism, knowledge, and interpersonal interaction in shaping tourists' perceptions. Clear explanations ($M = 4.32$), understandable language ($M = 4.30$), and effective communication about destinations ($M = 4.28$) further emphasised that clarity and comprehension are essential for building tourists' confidence and enhancing service reliability.

Despite generally high agreement, the results revealed slightly lower scores in providing safety instructions ($M = 4.18$) and listening carefully to tourists' concerns ($M = 4.21$), suggesting areas for improvement. Enhancing employees' listening skills and the clarity of safety communication could further elevate service quality. The findings demonstrate that employees' communication competence is vital in the tourism service sector. Effective communication not only provides accurate information and meets customer needs but also fosters positive interpersonal relationships, increases tourists' confidence, and contributes significantly to perceived service quality in private tour companies in Arusha.

4.2 Effect of Employees' Communication Skills on Customer Satisfaction

The second objective of this study was to examine the effect of employees' communication skills on customer satisfaction in private tour companies in Arusha. To achieve this objective, the respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with statements that measured their communication-related experiences during their tour activities. This was measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The statements measured the following aspects of the service received by the respondents: the clarity of the information provided, friendliness, responsiveness, employees' attentiveness, and employees' ability to create positive interactions with tourists. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Effect of Employees' Communication Skills on Customer Satisfaction

Statement	Mean	SD
Employees communicated clearly throughout the tour experience.	4.33	0.72
Tour guides provided helpful explanations about destinations and attractions.	4.37	0.70
Employees responded effectively to my questions and concerns.	4.28	0.76
Communication with employees made the tour more enjoyable.	4.41	0.68
Employees demonstrated friendliness during interactions with tourists.	4.44	0.66
Employees showed genuine interest in helping tourists.	4.30	0.73
I felt comfortable interacting with employees during the tour.	4.36	0.71
Employees communicated important travel information in a timely manner.	4.25	0.78
Good communication from employees increased my satisfaction with the tour.	4.47	0.65
Overall, I am satisfied with the services provided by the tour company.	4.50	0.63

Source: Field Data (2026)

The study's findings indicated that employees' communication skills have a strong, positive influence on customer satisfaction in private tour companies in Arusha. Tourist responses indicated high agreement across all statements, with a mean above 4.20 and a low standard deviation. The highest response was recorded for the statement about overall employee communication contributing to the quality of the tour experience ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.68$), indicating that effective communication is the key factor in the quality of service as perceived by tourists.

Tourists also agreed at a high level that interactions with employees were friendly ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.69$) and that tour guides communicated effectively about attractions ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.72$). Tourists reported high scores for clear explanations ($M = 4.32$), understandable language ($M = 4.30$), and employee communication regarding destinations ($M = 4.28$). This indicates that clear, professional, and knowledgeable communication helps tourists better understand schedules, attractions, and instructions, thereby increasing their trust in the company's reliability and assurance.

Although all items received high agreement, slightly lower scores were observed for providing safety instructions ($M = 4.18$) and listening carefully to tourists' concerns ($M = 4.21$), suggesting areas for improvement. Strengthening these aspects of communication could further enhance service quality and tourist satisfaction. Overall, the findings confirm that employees' communication competence is a key driver of customer satisfaction in the tourism sector. Effective communication enables employees to provide accurate information, respond to tourists' needs, and foster positive interpersonal relationships, thereby shaping tourists' overall evaluation of service quality.

4.3 Relationship Between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

To investigate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction among private tour companies in Arusha, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. This statistical method helps understand the nature of the relationship between two variables, i.e., how strong or weak it is and whether it is positive or negative. Service quality is measured across several dimensions, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, whereas customer satisfaction is measured by customers' perceptions of their overall experience with tourism services. Table 4.3 presents the results of the inferential statistical analysis applied to data from private tour companies in Arusha.

Table 4.3: Correlation between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Variables	Service Quality	Customer Satisfaction
Service Quality	1	
Customer Satisfaction	0.678**	1

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

Source: Field Data (2026)

The results in Table 4.3 indicate a strong positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of 0.678 and a p-value of < 0.01 . This correlation coefficient indicates that higher service quality is associated with higher customer satisfaction among tourists using services from private tour companies in Arusha. Furthermore, the p-value < 0.01 indicates that the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant, implying that the probability of observing this relationship by chance is very low.

The positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction implies that when tour companies provide high-quality service, customers are more satisfied. For example, if the employees at the tour company are knowledgeable, helpful, and effective

communicators, customers will be more satisfied with the tourism services. In addition, the strength of the correlation suggests that service quality is an important determinant of customer satisfaction, especially in the tourism industry. This implies that tour companies that focus on improving service quality, especially by enhancing employees' communication skills, will be successful in achieving customer satisfaction. In the competitive tourism industry, improving service quality will therefore be an important factor in attracting and retaining tourists in Arusha.

4.4 Mediating Role of Service Quality in the Relationship between Employees' Communication Skills and Customer Satisfaction

To examine the mediating role of service quality in the relationship between employees' communication skills and customer satisfaction, a regression-based mediation analysis was conducted. Table 4.4 summarises the results of this analysis, showing the direct and indirect effects of employees' communication skills on customer satisfaction through service quality. The table provides beta coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and significance levels for each regression model used in testing the mediation hypothesis

Table 4.4: Mediation Analysis of Service Quality

Regression Model	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Beta (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Model 1	Employees' Communication Skills	Service Quality	0.61	0.07	8.71	0.000
Model 2	Employees' Communication Skills	Customer Satisfaction	0.54	0.06	7.94	0.000
Model 3	Service Quality	Customer Satisfaction	0.63	0.05	9.12	0.000
Model 4	Employees' Communication Skills	Customer Satisfaction (with Service Quality)	0.29	0.08	3.62	0.002

Source: Field Data (2026)

The first step involved regressing service quality against employees' communication skills to determine if communication skills were significant predictors of service quality. The findings revealed that employees' communication skills were strongly and positively correlated with service quality ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that employees who were effective communicators, clear in expressing their ideas, and responsive to tourists' queries significantly enhanced the quality of service provided.

In the second step, the direct effect of employees' communication skills on customer satisfaction was assessed. The findings revealed that employees' communication skills had a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$) on customer satisfaction, suggesting that tourists who experienced effective communication from employees were more likely to be satisfied with the tour service. This implies that communication skills, independent of service quality, play an instrumental role in shaping tourists' perceptions of satisfaction.

The third step was to add service quality as a mediating variable between employees' communication skills and customer satisfaction. Once service quality was included in the model, it had a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$). At the same time, the direct effect of communication skills on customer satisfaction decreased from $\beta = 0.54$ to $\beta = 0.29$, though it remained significant ($p < 0.05$). This demonstrates that adding service quality reduced the direct effect of communication skills on customer satisfaction, suggesting that service quality partially mediates the relationship between employees' communication skills and customer satisfaction. Employees' communication skills have a direct and indirect effect on customer satisfaction through service quality.

The mediation effect underscores the significance of service quality as a mediator linking employees' communication skills to customer satisfaction. For tourists, the quality of communication service, speed, and accuracy are perceived as service quality, which in turn enhances satisfaction. These results align with service encounter and relationship marketing theories, which indicate that communication not only facilitates information sharing but also enhances service quality, thereby leading to customer satisfaction.

5.0 Discussion

The results of this study revealed that the communication skills of the employees play an important role in influencing the quality of services in private tour companies in Arusha, as the majority of the respondents claimed that good communication skills, such as explaining, being attentive, being friendly, and being responsive, improved their perception of the services received. Similarly, tourists claimed that good communication of information improved their experience, as effective communication helps tourists to feel informed and valued, and this is supported by other studies, such as Andriani et al. (2025) and Gesimba et al. (2023), who argued that communication competence is vital for effective service delivery in the tourism industry (Eviana, 2024; Ihtiyar & Ahmad, 2025).

The study further revealed that employees' communication skills have a direct positive impact on customer satisfaction. The study showed that positive interactions with the employees, such as friendly greetings, listening to their queries, and prompt responses, increased their satisfaction with the tour. The highest level of agreement was observed among statements regarding general satisfaction and the direct impact of communication on satisfaction. This suggests that the effectiveness of communication is an important factor in determining tourists' satisfaction with the overall service experience. This is in accordance with the findings of Arabacıoğlu and Dedeoğlu (2025), who showed that empathetic communication is an important factor in tourists' satisfaction, especially in experiential service environments such as tourism.

Inferential statistical tests using Pearson's correlation showed that service quality and customer satisfaction were strongly positively correlated ($r = 0.678$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that service quality is positively associated with customer satisfaction among tourists. The tourists noted that the service was reliable, responsive, and empathetic, which enhanced their overall experience. This study aligns with the findings of (2023), which highlight the

importance of service quality in tourists' satisfaction. Tourists do not judge service solely on the outcome; the quality-of-service interaction is critical to their overall satisfaction.

The results of the mediation analysis indicated that service quality partially mediated the relationship between employees' communication skills and customer satisfaction. When service quality was added to the regression model, the beta for the relationship between communication skills and customer satisfaction decreased from 0.54 to 0.29, although the relationship remained significant at the 0.05 level. Service quality was found to have a strong positive relationship with customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.63, p < 0.001$). This suggests that employees' communication skills contribute to customer satisfaction both directly and indirectly through the provision of high-quality service, as tourists view communication skills as a measure of high-quality service, leading to increased satisfaction..

The findings have significant theoretical implications, particularly by confirming the applicability of service encounter and relationship marketing theories in the tourism context. The results show that interactions between employees and tourists are central to shaping perceptions of service quality and satisfaction. Communication skills not only facilitate information exchange but also enhance emotional connection, trust, and comfort during service encounters. These findings support previous research emphasising that service encounters are multidimensional, combining relational and functional aspects to influence customer satisfaction (Gesimba et al., 2023; Ihtiyar & Ahmad, 2025).

From a practical standpoint, the study suggests that private tour companies in Arusha should invest in their employees' communication skills, especially those of tour guides. This should be done in collaboration with service quality improvement initiatives. Therefore, employees should be equipped with effective communication skills to improve service quality. This implies that employees should be effective communicators to improve service quality. This way, tourists will be satisfied with the tour experience, thereby improving the company's competitive advantage.

6.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of employees' communication skills on service quality and customer satisfaction in private tour companies in Arusha, Tanzania. The findings indicate that employees' communication skills significantly affect service quality and customer satisfaction. Employee communication positively influences perceptions of the reliability and professionalism of services provided to tourists. In addition, the study revealed a strong positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, implying that the manner in which service is delivered is also important in determining customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the study revealed that service quality partially mediates the effect of employees' communication skills on customer satisfaction, indicating that communication skills influence customer satisfaction both directly and indirectly through service quality. The findings align with service encounter and relationship marketing theories, which emphasise the importance of positive service encounters in creating customer satisfaction.

7.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that private tour agencies in Arusha develop their employees' communication skills through training programmes. Communication skills training programmes should focus on clarity, listening, empathy, and cultural sensitivity to enhance tourist engagement and satisfaction. In addition, it is recommended that private tour agencies in Arusha should introduce service quality improvement strategies, which include the organisation of the tour, presentation of employees, and timely response to tourist needs in order to enhance tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth, which are essential in strengthening the competitive advantage of the tourism sector in the region.

Moreover, it is recommended that tourism policymakers and regulators in Tanzania introduce communication skills and service quality standards for the tourism sector to enhance professionalism, the tourist experience, and sector growth. Future studies could also investigate the relationship between communication skills and service quality in other regions of Tanzania and across other tourism services, such as hotels, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism, to increase the generalisability of the findings and the study's reliability.

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