

Effect of Mentorship Programs on Career Growth among Employees in Kakamega County Government: Implications for Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of mentorship programs on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government, Kenya. Although mentorship is recognized as an important human resource development practice for enhancing employee competencies, professional development, and career progression, its implementation within county governments remains insufficiently documented. The study was guided by Social Exchange Theory and Resource-Based View Theory. A quantitative approach and descriptive research design were adopted. The target population comprised 3,500 permanent employees of Kakamega County Government, from which a sample of 381 employees was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula and selected through stratified random sampling. Primary data were collected using a structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire, with 312 completed questionnaires returned, representing an 81.9% response rate. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. Descriptive findings indicated that mentorship programs were implemented at a moderate level, with relatively stronger perceptions of mentor-mentee relationship quality and mentorship duration and frequency, while aspects of formal program structure, particularly mentor matching and monitoring and evaluation, recorded comparatively lower ratings. The regression results showed that mentorship programs had a positive and statistically significant effect on career growth ($\beta = 0.768$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 37.5% of the variance in career growth ($R^2 = 0.375$). The study concludes that mentorship programs contribute significantly to employee career growth and recommends strengthening formal mentorship structures, mentor-mentee matching, monitoring and evaluation, while maintaining regular and supportive mentoring relationships. The findings provide useful implications for human resource management and public administration in county governments.

Keywords: Mentorship Programs, Career Growth, Kakamega County Government

Background of the Study

Strategic mentorship programs have become an important component of contemporary human resource management because of their contribution to employee career growth, leadership development, knowledge sharing, and organizational sustainability. While mentorship originated as an informal developmental relationship, it is now widely implemented as a structured Human Resource Management strategy that supports talent management, succession planning, employee engagement, and workforce development in both public and private organizations (Ghosh & Ellinger, 2024; Jennerdene et al., 2023). Through structured mentoring relationships, experienced employees transfer technical expertise, institutional knowledge, and professional skills to less experienced colleagues, thereby strengthening organizational capacity and improving employee performance.

Career growth, which is the dependent variable in this study, refers to employees' professional advancement through increased competencies, expanded responsibilities, leadership opportunities, and enhanced job satisfaction. Modern career development extends beyond promotions to include continuous learning, skill acquisition, and professional specialization that improve employees' long-term employability and organizational contribution (Guterman, 2023). Organizations that provide meaningful career development opportunities

through mentorship often experience higher employee engagement, stronger organizational commitment, improved retention, and enhanced leadership pipelines (Perkins & Robinson, 2025).

The relationship between mentorship and career growth has attracted increasing attention because mentoring provides career guidance, psychosocial support, coaching, networking opportunities, and constructive feedback that facilitate employee development and career progression (Gutterman, 2023). In addition to benefiting individual employees, strategic mentorship strengthens organizational learning, succession planning, knowledge retention, and institutional continuity, making it an effective workforce development strategy, particularly within public sector organizations where experienced employees possess valuable institutional knowledge (Protasenko et al., 2025).

Globally, public sector organizations are experiencing significant transformation driven by governance reforms, digitalization, and rising citizen expectations for efficient service delivery. As a result, governments increasingly recognize strategic human resource management as essential for building institutional capacity and improving public administration. Mentorship has consequently emerged as a cost-effective human capital development strategy that enhances employee capability, leadership succession, organizational resilience, and public service performance (Kalugina et al., 2025).

In Kenya, the introduction of devolved governance under the Constitution of Kenya (2010) established 47 county governments responsible for delivering essential public services while managing their own human resources. This transition has increased the need for strategic workforce development, leadership succession, and employee capacity building. Despite policy efforts to strengthen human resource management, many county governments continue to face challenges related to limited career advancement opportunities, inadequate leadership development, employee turnover, and inconsistent implementation of structured mentorship initiatives (dos Santos et al., 2025). These challenges underscore the importance of adopting evidence-based human resource strategies that promote employee career growth and organizational effectiveness.

Kakamega County Government is among the largest devolved units in Kenya and employs a substantial workforce responsible for delivering services across critical sectors. However, like many county governments, it continues to face challenges associated with employee career progression, leadership development, and limited structured mentorship opportunities (dos Santos et al., 2025). Although mentorship has received considerable scholarly attention in private sector organizations and educational institutions, empirical evidence on its influence on career growth within Kenya's county governments remains limited. This knowledge gap provided the basis for this study, which sought to examine the effect of strategic mentorship programs on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government. The findings are expected to contribute to strategic human resource management and public administration literature while informing County Public Service Boards, HR practitioners, and policymakers on evidence-based mentorship strategies that enhance workforce development, leadership succession, employee retention, and sustainable public service delivery.

Global Perspective on Strategic Mentorship Programs

Globally, strategic mentorship programs have become a fundamental component of human resource management (HRM) and public administration, supporting employee career growth, leadership development, succession planning, and organizational sustainability. As organizations respond to technological advancements, workforce diversity, and increasing institutional complexity, mentorship has evolved into a structured talent management strategy that facilitates knowledge transfer, employee development, and organizational effectiveness (Gutterman, 2023; (dos Santos et al., 2025). Kalugina et al., 2025, further recognizes mentorship as an essential workforce development practice that strengthens institutional resilience, promotes continuous learning, and improves public sector performance.

In developed economies, mentorship has been widely institutionalized within both private and public sector organizations. In the United States, federal agencies implement formal mentoring programs to strengthen leadership development, succession planning, employee engagement, and knowledge transfer, resulting in improved career advancement, higher job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and increased employee retention. Dos Santos et al., 2025. Similarly, European countries have integrated mentoring into public sector workforce development strategies to enhance professional competence, innovation, organizational

learning, and leadership capacity through continuous knowledge sharing (Perkins & Robinson, 2025; Webb, 2024).

Across Asia and the Pacific region, mentorship continues to play a strategic role in workforce development and public sector modernization. Countries such as Japan and Singapore have institutionalized mentoring as part of leadership succession and employee capability development, while empirical evidence from China demonstrates that mentorship enhances career self-efficacy, employability, and career adaptability (Zalukhu et al., 2025). Likewise, Australia and New Zealand utilize structured mentoring to facilitate knowledge transfer, strengthen leadership continuity, and improve employee engagement, organizational commitment, and career progression within the public service (Kalugina et al., 2025).

Overall, international evidence consistently demonstrates that structured mentorship programs enhance career growth, leadership development, employee retention, organizational learning, and institutional performance. These global experiences provide valuable lessons for county governments in Kenya, including Kakamega County Government, by illustrating how strategic mentorship can strengthen human resource management practices, support employee career advancement, and improve public sector service delivery.

African Perspective on Mentorship Programs

Across Africa, strategic mentorship programs are increasingly recognized as important human resource management interventions for strengthening leadership capacity, workforce development, knowledge transfer, and institutional effectiveness within public sector organizations. The African Union Agenda 2063 identifies human capital development and effective public institutions as essential drivers of sustainable development, while the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8) emphasize continuous skills development and productive employment as key priorities for strengthening public sector performance (Rwigema, 2023). Consequently, many African governments are integrating structured mentorship into workforce development strategies to enhance career growth, succession planning, and organizational capacity.

Several African countries have institutionalized mentorship as part of public sector reforms. In South Africa, mentoring supports leadership development, employment equity, and career advancement, contributing to improved employee competence, organizational commitment, and workplace performance (Ochala, 2024). Similarly, Nigeria has adopted mentorship to strengthen workforce capability, facilitate knowledge transfer, and improve employee career development and job performance (Adewale & Adebayo, 2022). Within East Africa, countries such as Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda have integrated mentoring and coaching into public service capacity-building initiatives to strengthen leadership development, employee competencies, and service delivery (Bwadene Wanyama et al., 2026).

Despite these advancements, many African public sector organizations continue to face challenges that limit the effectiveness of mentorship programs. These include inadequate institutional frameworks, limited financial resources, insufficient mentor preparation, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, and high staff turnover, all of which constrain employee career growth and organizational performance (Pillah & Okpe, 2025). Moreover, mentorship in many institutions remains informal and poorly integrated into strategic human resource management practices.

Within Kenya's devolved governance system, county governments are expected to strengthen workforce capability and leadership succession while improving public service delivery. However, empirical evidence on the influence of structured mentorship programs on employee career growth in county governments remains limited. This knowledge gap provides the basis for the present study, which examines the effect of strategic mentorship programs on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government. The findings are expected to inform human resource practitioners, County Public Service Boards, and public administration policymakers in designing evidence-based mentorship policies that promote employee career progression, organizational effectiveness, and sustainable public service delivery.

Kenyan Perspective on Mentorship Programs

In Kenya, strategic mentorship programs are increasingly recognized as vital human resource management

(HRM) practices for developing employee competencies, strengthening leadership capacity, promoting career growth, and enhancing organizational performance. National policy frameworks, including the Constitution of Kenya (2010), Kenya Vision 2030, the Public Service Commission (PSC) Human Resource Policies and Procedures Manual for the Public Service, and the Public Service Human Resource Management and Development Policy, emphasize continuous learning, leadership development, succession planning, and knowledge transfer as essential elements of an effective and accountable public service (Mokgolo & Molotsi, 2024).

The Public Service Commission advocates the adoption of structured human resource development initiatives such as mentoring, coaching, leadership development, and continuous professional development to improve employee performance and institutional effectiveness (Mokgolo & Molotsi, 2024). However, despite these policy provisions, the implementation of formal mentorship programs across public institutions remains inconsistent. Many organizations continue to rely on informal mentoring arrangements that lack clear structures, standardized procedures, and effective monitoring and evaluation systems, limiting their contribution to employee career growth (Bwadene Wanyama et al., 2026).

Mentorship has also become an important talent management strategy within Kenya's private sector, where organizations use structured mentoring to accelerate leadership development, improve employee engagement, strengthen succession planning, and enhance workforce productivity (Adewale & Adebayo, 2022). These experiences demonstrate the strategic value of mentorship and provide useful lessons for strengthening employee development within the public sector. Similarly, government ministries, departments, and state agencies, through the Kenya School of Government (KSG) and the Public Service Commission, have incorporated mentoring into leadership development and capacity-building programs to strengthen technical competence, ethical leadership, and institutional continuity (Nyonje & Kidombo, 2024). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these initiatives varies across institutions due to differences in organizational commitment, resource allocation, and implementation capacity (Mokgolo & Molotsi, 2024).

The establishment of 47 county governments under the Constitution of Kenya (2010) increased the need for strategic workforce development to support devolved service delivery. Consequently, the Council of Governors and the Public Service Commission have emphasized mentoring, coaching, leadership development, and succession planning as critical strategies for strengthening institutional capacity within county governments (Ashiko & Wachira, 2025). Despite this policy commitment, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of structured mentorship programs in promoting career growth among county employees remains limited. Most Kenyan studies have focused on employee training, leadership, and performance management rather than mentorship as a strategic HRM practice. This knowledge gap provides the foundation for the present study, which examines the effect of strategic mentorship programs on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government. The findings are expected to inform County Public Service Boards, HR practitioners, and policymakers in developing evidence-based mentorship policies that strengthen employee career progression, leadership succession, workforce development, and public service delivery.

Kakamega County Government is one of the 47 devolved county governments established under the Constitution of Kenya (2010) to deliver essential public services and promote local development. As one of Kenya's most populous counties, Kakamega relies on a diverse workforce deployed across sectors such as health, agriculture, education, infrastructure, finance, water, and public administration to implement its development agenda (Njiru & Chebet, 2026). Consequently, effective human resource management has become critical for enhancing employee performance, organizational effectiveness, and public service delivery.

To strengthen workforce capacity, the county has invested in employee development initiatives, including staff training, leadership development, and continuous professional development. It has also demonstrated commitment to mentorship through education and scholarship programs that integrate mentoring to support learners' academic achievement, leadership development, and career aspirations (Elizabeth et al., 2026). However, evidence of structured mentorship programs specifically designed for county employees remains limited. Existing human resource reports emphasize training and performance management but provide little documentation of formal mentoring frameworks that support employee career development, leadership succession, and knowledge transfer (Elizabeth et al., 2026). In practice, mentoring largely occurs through informal relationships between supervisors and junior staff, often without standardized guidelines, mentor

preparation, or systematic monitoring and evaluation.

Although Kakamega County has made progress in infrastructure development, agricultural services, vocational education, and human capital investment, it continues to face challenges related to employee productivity, organizational capacity, and effective public service delivery (Ahmed & Abdel-Halim, 2025). These challenges highlight the need for strategic human resource interventions that strengthen employee competencies, motivation, and career progression. Institutionalized mentorship programs offer an opportunity to enhance leadership development, preserve institutional knowledge, support succession planning, and improve workforce capability (Jennerdene et al., 2023).

Given its relatively mature devolved governance structure, diverse workforce, and growing commitment to human capital development, Kakamega County Government provides an appropriate context for examining the effect of strategic mentorship programs on employee career growth. The findings of this study are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations for County Public Service Boards, HR practitioners, and public administration policymakers on strengthening mentorship practices to enhance career development, organizational performance, leadership succession, and sustainable public service delivery within county governments in Kenya.

Accordingly, this study clearly delineates the two principal variables by identifying mentorship programs as the independent variable and career growth as the dependent variable. It specifically focuses on employees of Kakamega County Government as the target population within the study setting of Kakamega County Government. The study further underscores its relevance to public administration by generating evidence to inform human resource management policies and mentorship practices aimed at enhancing employee development and organizational performance. Moreover, the conceptualization of mentorship programs through the dimensions of mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency provides a comprehensive framework for examining their influence on career growth without presuming that mentorship serves solely as a mechanism for career advancement.

Statement of the Problem

Strategic mentorship programs are widely recognized as critical human resource management practices for enhancing employee career growth, leadership development, succession planning, and organizational performance. Through structured mentoring, organizations facilitate knowledge transfer, strengthen employee competencies, improve engagement, and prepare staff for higher responsibilities, thereby promoting institutional sustainability and effective public service delivery (Ghosh & Ellinger, 2024; Jennerdene et al., 2023). Despite these benefits, the implementation of structured mentorship programs remains inconsistent across many public sector organizations, particularly within Kenya's devolved county governments.

Although the Public Service Commission emphasizes mentoring, coaching, employee development, and succession planning as strategic human resource management practices (Ahmed & Abdel-Halim, 2025), many county governments continue to experience limited career development opportunities, weak leadership succession, inadequate professional development, and inconsistent implementation of formal mentorship programs (Elizabeth et al., 2026). Existing mentoring practices are often informal, poorly coordinated, and characterized by inadequate mentor preparation, irregular mentoring interactions, and limited monitoring and evaluation, reducing their effectiveness in supporting employee career progression (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (Koppenjan et al., 2022).

The challenge is evident in Kakamega County Government, where, despite investments in human capital development and mentorship initiatives within the education sector, there is limited documented evidence of structured mentorship programs specifically designed to promote career growth among county employees (Elizabeth et al., 2026). Consequently, employees may have inconsistent access to mentoring relationships that facilitate career advancement, leadership development, and knowledge transfer.

Furthermore, empirical studies examining the relationship between strategic mentorship programs and career growth within Kenya's county governments remain scarce, with most existing research focusing on private sector organizations or educational institutions (Gatumu et al., 2026). This knowledge gap limits the availability of

evidence needed by County Public Service Boards, human resource practitioners, and public administration policymakers to develop effective mentorship policies. Therefore, this study sought to examine the influence of mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government, with the aim of generating evidence to strengthen strategic human resource management and public administration practices in county governments.

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to examine the effect of mentorship programs on career growth among county employees in Kakamega County Government.

Research Hypothesis

H01: Mentorship program structure has no statistically significant effect on career growth among county employees in Kakamega County Government.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a suitable theoretical foundation for explaining how mentorship programs influence employees' career growth through reciprocal relationships between mentors and mentees. The theory posits that workplace relationships are built on the exchange of tangible and intangible resources, including trust, knowledge, support, respect, and commitment, which generate mutual obligations and long-term relational benefits (Gatumu et al., 2026).

Within strategic mentorship programs, high-quality mentor–mentee relationships characterized by trust, open communication, mutual respect, and continuous support facilitate knowledge sharing, psychosocial support, and professional guidance, thereby enhancing employee development and career progression (Hanson, 2026).

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, employees who receive consistent mentoring, coaching, and developmental support are more likely to reciprocate through increased commitment, improved job performance, continuous learning, and active career development, while mentors benefit through leadership development, professional satisfaction, and stronger organizational commitment (Okon et al., 2025).

The theory further emphasizes that sustained mentoring interactions strengthen interpersonal trust, deepen knowledge exchange, and expand opportunities for career coaching and professional networking (Kalugina et al., 2025). Consequently, Social Exchange Theory provides a strong theoretical basis for explaining how mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency collectively enhance employees' career growth, leadership development, and organizational performance within Kakamega County Government.

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, advanced by Barney (1991), provides a strategic framework for explaining how organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage by effectively developing and utilizing valuable internal resources. The theory posits that organizations attain superior performance through resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN), with contemporary scholarship emphasizing human capital, organizational knowledge, employee competencies, and learning capabilities as critical strategic assets (Barney et al., 2022).

Within human resource management, employees are regarded as strategic resources, prompting organizations to invest in mentorship, coaching, leadership development, succession planning, and continuous learning to strengthen workforce capabilities and organizational performance (Huo & Jiang, 2023). Strategic mentorship programs facilitate the transfer of technical expertise, tacit knowledge, professional values, and leadership competencies, thereby enhancing employees' career growth and organizational productivity (Ugbine, 2025).

The RBV Theory is particularly relevant to public administration because public sector organizations depend on competent employees to achieve effective governance, institutional continuity, and quality service delivery. In Kenya's county governments, strategic mentorship strengthens workforce capability, organizational learning, leadership succession, and knowledge retention while optimizing limited resources (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Popowa, 2024a). In the context of Kakamega County Government, the theory explains how investments in mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency enhance employee competencies, leadership capabilities, and career growth while improving organizational effectiveness. Accordingly, the RBV Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for this study by positioning strategic mentorship programs as valuable human resource investments that strengthen organizational capability, employee career progression, and sustainable public service delivery (Barney & Williams, 2025).

Empirical Review

This section reviews empirical evidence on the relationship between strategic mentorship programs and employee career growth. The review is organized according to the three dimensions examined in this study: mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency. It draws on findings from international and Kenyan studies, with particular emphasis on public sector organizations and their implications for human resource management and public administration.

Mentorship Program Structure and Career Growth

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that well-structured mentorship programs positively influence employee career growth and organizational performance. Unlike informal mentoring, structured mentorship programs incorporate clearly defined objectives, formal mentor selection, training, monitoring, and evaluation processes that enhance mentoring effectiveness, career guidance, professional support, competency development, career advancement, and leadership readiness (Ugbine, 2025).

Organizations implementing formal mentorship initiatives also report higher employee engagement, stronger leadership pipelines, improved career satisfaction, increased retention, and greater organizational commitment than those relying on informal mentoring practices (Firouzian & Mishra, 2022).

Within the public sector, structured mentorship has been recognized as an effective strategic human resource management practice that promotes knowledge transfer, succession planning, leadership development, employee capability, career progression, and job satisfaction. Evidence from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (Jones, 2024) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Kalugina et al., 2025) indicates that organizations implementing formal mentoring frameworks achieve better employee development and institutional performance through continuous learning and workforce development.

Similarly, studies in Kenya show that structured mentoring enhances professional competence, employee confidence, career advancement, and workplace effectiveness, while the Public Service Commission (Popowa, 2024) identifies mentorship, coaching, and leadership development as essential strategies for strengthening human resource management across the public service (Gatumu et al., 2026).

Overall, the reviewed literature confirms that mentorship program structure is a critical determinant of employee career growth by providing an organized framework for learning, professional development, leadership preparation, and career progression. However, despite growing policy recognition of mentorship in Kenya's public service, empirical evidence on structured mentorship within county governments, particularly Kakamega County Government, remains limited.

This contextual and empirical gap justifies the present study, which seeks to examine the influence of mentorship program structure on career growth among county employees and generate evidence to strengthen human resource management and public administration policies.

Summary of Research Gaps

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that structured mentorship programs positively influence

employee career growth by enhancing systematic guidance, leadership development, knowledge transfer, employee engagement, career satisfaction, retention, succession planning, and organizational performance (Webb, 2024). Similarly, studies conducted in Kenya indicate that structured mentoring strengthens professional competence, employee confidence, and workplace effectiveness (Gatumu et al., 2026). However, most empirical studies have been undertaken in developed countries or generalized public institutions, with limited focus on county governments in Kenya.

Furthermore, existing research has predominantly examined organizational outcomes such as employee performance, retention, and leadership development, while giving limited attention to career growth as a multidimensional construct encompassing career advancement, skills and competency development, career satisfaction, and professional development. The literature further reveals significant contextual, empirical, and theoretical gaps. Although mentorship is increasingly recognized as a strategic human resource management practice within Kenya's public service, limited empirical evidence exists on how mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency collectively influence employees' career growth in county governments, particularly in Kakamega County Government.

In addition, previous studies have rarely integrated Social Exchange Theory and the Resource-Based View Theory to explain the mechanisms through which mentorship programs enhance career growth and improve public administration outcomes. Consequently, this study addresses these gaps by examining the effect of mentorship programs on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government, thereby providing empirical evidence to strengthen strategic human resource management practices and inform public administration policy.

Conceptual framework

Guided by Social Exchange Theory Okon et al. (2025) and Resource-Based View Theory Wanyama et al. (2026), the conceptual framework identifies Mentorship Programs, as the independent variables and Career Growth as the dependent variable.

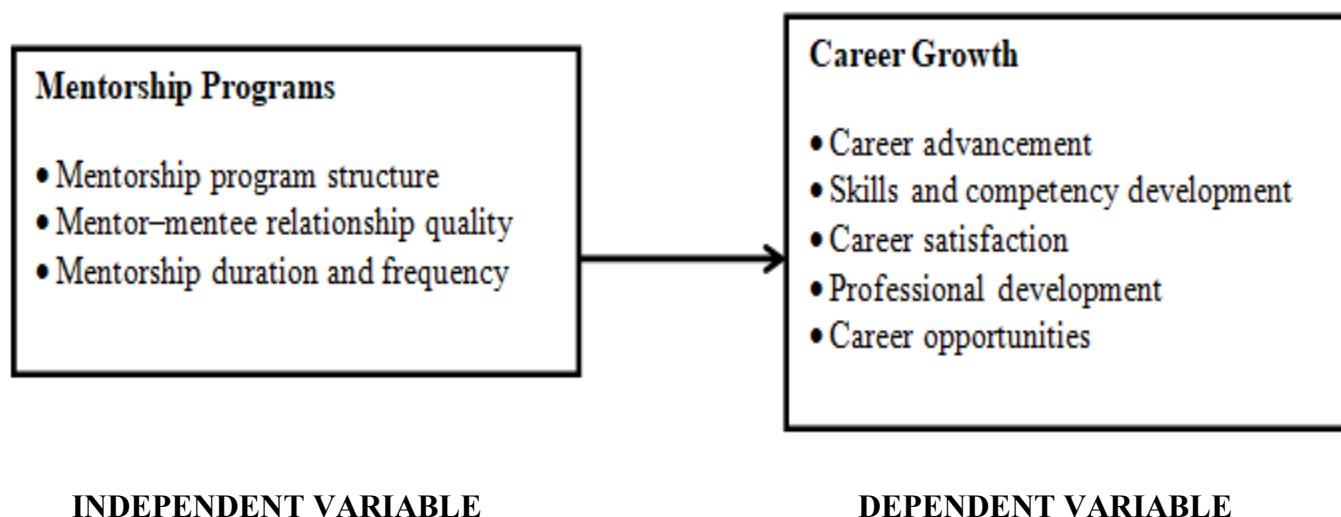


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is guided by Social Exchange Theory Okon et al. (2025) and the Resource-Based View Theory Wanyama et al. (2026), which posit that mentorship programs are strategic human resource management practices that promote employee development and organizational performance through reciprocal relationships and investment in human capital. Accordingly, the framework identifies mentorship programs as the independent variable and career growth as the dependent variable.

Mentorship programs are operationalized through three dimensions: mentorship program structure, reflected by formal mentorship policies, mentor selection and matching processes, orientation, training, and clear objectives; mentor–mentee relationship quality, characterized by trust, communication, mutual respect, feedback, mentor

accessibility, and commitment; and mentorship duration and frequency, measured by the length of mentoring relationships, frequency and regularity of interactions, and continuity of mentorship. These dimensions are expected to facilitate knowledge transfer, leadership development, employee engagement, and succession planning, thereby enhancing organizational effectiveness (Okon et al., 2025).

The dependent variable, career growth, is conceptualized through four dimensions: career advancement, skills and competency development, career satisfaction, and professional development. Career growth is reflected in employees' promotions, increased responsibilities, acquisition of professional knowledge and competencies, achievement of career goals, satisfaction with career progression, and participation in continuous learning and leadership development initiatives. The framework proposes that improvements in mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency positively influence these dimensions of career growth by providing organizational support, facilitating knowledge sharing, strengthening professional competencies, and enhancing career progression.

Consequently, the study examines the effect of mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government, with the findings expected to inform public administration by strengthening mentorship policies and human resource management practices that enhance employee development and public service performance (Wanyama et al., 2026).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach to examine the effect of mentorship programs on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government. The design approach is particularly suitable for collecting standardized numerical data on employees' perceptions and experiences regarding mentorship and career development, because they allow for triangulation of data, thereby enhancing validity, reliability, and depth of findings. The Independent variable for this study is mentorship programs, which is operationalized through mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency, while career growth was the dependent variable.

The target population for this study consisted of 3,500 employees of Kakamega County Government across various departments such as Health Services, Agriculture, Education, Roads and Public Works, Water and Irrigation, Trade and Cooperatives, and Finance and Economic Planning. Using Yamane's formula, a sample of 381 employees was selected through stratified random sampling to capture diverse perspectives from different departments. The sample was selected through a stratified proportionate sampling approach to ensure representation of employees across the different departments, with questionnaires distributed proportionately according to departmental population sizes.

The primary data for the study was collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was appropriate for the quantitative design because it enabled the researcher to collect standardized information from a relatively large number of respondents in a form that could be coded and statistically analyzed. The questionnaire consisted of items designed to measure the study variables. The mentorship programs variable was operationalized through three dimensions: mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency. Career growth was assessed in terms of career advancement, skills and competency development, career satisfaction, professional development, and career opportunities. Likert-scale questions (ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”) were employed to capture attitudes and perceptions. Of the 381 questionnaires distributed, 312 were completed and returned, representing an 81.9% response rate.

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 24, applying descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, percentages) to summarize SME responses, and inferential analysis particularly correlation and regression to examine relationships between study variables. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and their perceptions of mentorship programs and career growth. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used to establish the strength and direction of relationships between the mentorship dimensions and career growth, while regression analysis was employed to determine the individual and combined effects of mentorship program structure, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and mentorship duration and frequency on career growth.

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, and the findings were presented in Table 1. The statements were anchored on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 5 = Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3 = Undecided, 2 = Disagree (D), to 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the questionnaire statements relating to mentorship programs and career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the responses.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Mentorship Programs

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
The county government has clear objectives and guidelines for its mentorship programs.	6%	12%	38%	30%	14%	3.34	1.05
There are clear procedures for selecting and matching mentors with mentees.	10%	18%	36%	25%	11%	3.09	1.12
Mentorship programs are adequately monitored and evaluated by the county government.	15%	22%	35%	20%	8%	2.84	1.15
Employees are provided with adequate resources and support to participate in mentorship programs.	9%	17%	37%	27%	10%	3.12	1.09
Mentors and mentees maintain trust, mutual respect and open communication.	4%	9%	28%	39%	20%	3.62	1.03
Mentors provide adequate guidance, feedback and professional support to mentees.	4%	8%	27%	40%	21%	3.66	1.02
Mentors are accessible when mentees require professional guidance.	5%	10%	30%	37%	18%	3.53	1.05
Mentorship relationships are maintained for a sufficient period to support employee development.	4%	8%	27%	39%	22%	3.67	1.03
Mentorship interactions are conducted regularly and consistently	3%	8%	25%	41%	23%	3.73	1
The frequency of mentorship interactions provides adequate opportunities for guidance and knowledge sharing.	4%	7%	27%	40%	22%	3.69	1.02

In this study, mentorship programs are operationally defined as structured employee development initiatives through which experienced employees provide professional guidance, knowledge, feedback, and support to facilitate employee skills development and career growth. The descriptive statistics results show that the implementation of the mentorship programs in Kakamega County is moderate. The findings however show that there is varying perceptions among the three levels of the mentorship programs. Mentorship program structure recorded comparatively lower mean scores, particularly regarding mentor–mentee matching and monitoring and evaluation. The relatively low mean of 2.84 for monitoring and evaluation suggests that, although mentorship activities exist, systematic mechanisms for assessing their implementation and effectiveness may be limited. Similarly, the mean of 3.09 for mentor–mentee selection and matching indicates that employees were less positive about the processes used to connect mentors with mentees. These findings suggest that the structural aspects of mentorship require greater institutionalization through clear guidelines, appropriate matching procedures, and systematic follow-up.

In contrast, mentor–mentee relationship quality recorded relatively higher mean scores, ranging from 3.53 to 3.66. Respondents generally perceived mentoring relationships as characterized by trust, mutual respect, communication, guidance, feedback, and professional support. This suggests that the interpersonal aspect of mentorship is comparatively stronger within the county government. Effective mentor–mentee relationships provide an environment through which employees can seek guidance, exchange knowledge, receive feedback, and discuss professional development needs. The findings therefore indicate that while formal structures may

require strengthening, existing mentoring relationships provide a useful foundation for employee development.

Mentorship duration and frequency recorded the highest mean scores, ranging from 3.67 to 3.73. The relatively high mean for regular and consistent mentorship interactions suggests that employees generally experienced mentorship as a continuing rather than an occasional activity. Regular interactions provide opportunities for sustained guidance, knowledge sharing, feedback, and follow-up, thereby strengthening the mentoring process. The findings also indicate that employees perceived the frequency of interactions as providing reasonable opportunities for professional guidance and support.

In sum, the descriptive statistics show that mentorship programs within Kakamega County Government have relatively stronger interpersonal and continuity components than formal structural components. While employees reported positive perceptions regarding their relationships with mentors and the regularity of mentorship interactions, lower perceptions concerning mentor–mentee matching and monitoring and evaluation point to gaps in the institutionalization of mentorship programs. The findings therefore suggest that strengthening the formal structure of mentorship while maintaining supportive and regular mentor–mentee interactions is important for creating a more consistent employee development framework within the county government.

Regression Results

A regression analysis was conducted to establish the relationship between mentorship programs and its effect on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government. The various items and constructs measuring the study variables were consolidated into a single variable through a composite mean then used to regress. Regression Model summary is presented in Table 2.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.612 ^a	0.375	0.373	0.61284
Predictors: (Constant), Mentorship Programs			

Table 2 : Model Summary

The model summary indicated that mentorship programs explained 37.5% of the variance in employees' career growth in Kakamega County Government ($R^2 = 0.375$). When the model is adjusted for the number of predictors in the model, the adjusted R^2 remained at .373, indicating that the model provides a reasonable estimate of the relationship between mentorship programs and career growth among employees in the wider county government population. The significance of the regression model was subsequently established and is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	69.856	1	69.856	186	0.000 ^b
Residual	116.427	310	0.376		
Total	186.283	311			
Dependent Variable: Career Growth					
Predictors: (Constant), Mentorship Programs					

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess the statistical significance of the regression model. The results indicated that the model was statistically significant ($F(1, 310) = 186.00, p < 0.001$), and that mentorship programs significantly predict career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government. Table 4 presents the model coefficients.

Table 4: Model Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.842	0.214		3.935	0
	Mentorship Programs	0.768	0.056	0.612	13.638	0
a. Dependent Variable: Career Growth						

The corresponding regression equation for the model is as follows:

$$\hat{Y} = 0.842 + 0.768 \text{ Mentorship Programs}$$

Where $\hat{Y}$ = Career Growth and 0.842 represents the intercept, indicating the predicted level of career growth when mentorship programs are held at zero. The coefficient of 0.768 indicates that a one-unit increase in mentorship programs is associated with an estimated 0.768-unit increase in career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government. The model coefficients further indicate that mentorship programs have a positive and statistically significant effect on career growth ($\beta = 0.768$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that strengthening mentorship through clear program structures, supportive mentor–mentee relationships, and regular and sustained mentoring interactions can contribute to improved employee career growth.

Hypothesis Testing

H_{01} : There is no statistically significant effect of mentorship programs on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government.

The model coefficients showed that the p-value ($p < 0.001$) was less than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The study consequently concludes that mentorship programs have a statistically significant effect on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Based on the study findings and reviewed literature, the study concludes that mentorship program structure has a significant positive effect on career growth among employees in Kakamega County Government. Well-designed and systematically implemented programs, characterized by clear objectives and guidelines, effective mentor–mentee matching, adequate resources, and regular monitoring and evaluation, enhance employees' opportunities for promotion, skill development, and job satisfaction. This finding is consistent with Ugbiné (2025), who found that structured mentoring and access to appropriate mentors support professional growth among public-sector employees. However, the study established that mentorship program structure in Kakamega County Government remains moderate, particularly due to weaknesses in mentor–mentee matching and monitoring and evaluation. Strengthening these components would enable the county to institutionalize evidence-based mentorship, improve career development outcomes, and enhance public-sector human resource management and administration, consistent with Kenya's current emphasis on structured capacity building and career progression in public service (dos Santos et al., 2025).

Recommendations

Recommendation for Practice

Kakamega County Government should strengthen and institutionalize the structure of its mentorship programs by developing clear mentorship guidelines, establishing transparent mentor–mentee matching procedures, allocating adequate resources, and introducing systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Particular

attention should be given to matching employees with mentors based on professional expertise, career interests, experience, and developmental needs, while periodic assessments should be conducted to track mentoring outcomes, identify implementation gaps, and inform evidence-based improvements. The County Human Resource Management Department should also integrate mentorship activities into employee development plans and performance-management systems to ensure continuity, accountability, and alignment with organizational priorities.

This recommendation is supported by Baral et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of structured mentoring and appropriate mentor access in promoting professional development, and aligns with Kenya's public-service emphasis on systematic capacity building and career progression (dos Santos et al., 2025). Strengthening these structural components would enable Kakamega County Government to maximize the contribution of mentorship to employee career growth while improving workforce capability, employee satisfaction, succession planning, and the quality of public administration.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy Implications

The findings have important policy implications for Kakamega County Government and other county governments seeking to strengthen human resource development and public administration. Since mentorship program structure was found to have a significant positive effect on employee career growth, county-level human resource policies should formally institutionalize mentorship as a component of career management, capacity development, succession planning, and performance management. In particular, the County Government should develop clear mentorship policy guidelines that specify program objectives, eligibility criteria, mentor selection standards, matching procedures, roles and responsibilities, implementation timelines, resource requirements, and monitoring and evaluation indicators.

The policy should require transparent mentor–mentee matching based on employees' competencies, career aspirations, professional experience, and developmental needs, rather than informal or arbitrary selection. This is consistent with Kenya's Public Service Commission Human Resource Development Policy, which calls for public institutions to institutionalize a mentoring culture to facilitate knowledge, skills, competencies, personal development, and career growth (Thumbi et al., 2025a). In addition, policy should require periodic assessment of mentorship outcomes, including participation, competency development, career progression, employee satisfaction, and succession readiness, with findings incorporated into subsequent human resource plans and budgets.

Such an approach is supported by Tesfaye (2024), who demonstrate that mentoring needs and access vary across career stages and job levels, highlighting the importance of structured and differentiated mentorship interventions in public-sector organizations. Therefore, strengthening the policy framework for mentorship would enable Kakamega County Government to move from moderately structured practices toward a systematic, accountable, and evidence-based model of employee development, thereby enhancing workforce capability, career mobility, succession management, and the effectiveness of public administration. This direction also accords with the Public Service Commission's emphasis on integrated career management, performance management, employee development, and succession planning within the public service (dos Santos et al., 2025).

Managerial Implications

The findings have significant managerial implications for Kakamega County Government, demonstrating that a well-structured mentorship program can positively influence employee career growth. Managers and human resource practitioners should therefore treat mentorship as a strategic management intervention by setting clear objectives, selecting qualified mentors, and using transparent mentor–mentee matching based on employees' career aspirations, competencies, experience, and development needs. Adequate time, resources, supervisory support, and regular follow-up should also be provided to ensure active mentoring relationships and measurable career-development outcomes.

Given that mentoring needs and preferred support vary across career stages and job levels, managers should

adopt differentiated mentoring approaches rather than a uniform model (Baral et al., 2024). Mentorship objectives should further be integrated into individual development plans and performance-management processes, supported by periodic monitoring and evaluation of competencies, career advancement, employee satisfaction, and succession readiness.

Dos Santos et al. (2025), similarly identifies mentoring as an important approach for knowledge and skills transfer, induction, career growth, personal development, and change management, and advocates institutionalizing mentoring programs in public institutions. Strengthening managerial oversight, mentor–mentee matching, resource allocation, and evaluation can therefore address weaknesses in Kakamega County Government’s moderately structured mentorship system while enhancing employee capability, leadership development, succession planning, and public administration effectiveness.

Theoretical Implications

The findings have important theoretical implications for understanding mentorship program structure and employee career growth in public-sector organizations. The positive effect of program structure on career growth supports Social Exchange Theory, demonstrating that clearly defined mentorship programs, appropriate mentor selection and matching, supervision, and follow-up can facilitate meaningful interactions, mutual support, trust, and reciprocal exchanges that promote professional development.

The findings also support the Resource-Based View (RBV) by showing that structured mentorship can strategically develop employees’ knowledge, skills, competencies, and leadership capabilities as valuable organizational resources. Such investments can strengthen Kakamega County Government’s human-capital base while supporting leadership development and succession planning.

The study further extends existing theoretical perspectives by emphasizing the need for contextual and differentiated mentorship structures. Since mentoring needs vary across career stages and job levels (Baral et al., 2024), theoretical explanations should consider employees’ career aspirations, competencies, experience, and development needs rather than assuming a uniform mentorship model. Consistent with Thumbi et al., (2025) whose emphasis on institutionalizing mentoring for knowledge and skills transfer, induction, career growth, personal development, and change management, the findings demonstrate how formal organizational structures can transform mentoring from an informal activity into a strategic human-resource mechanism.

Overall, the study strengthens the relevance of Social Exchange Theory and RBV while suggesting that future models incorporate program structure, career-stage differences, organizational support, and institutional context when explaining mentorship and employee career growth.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research should examine mentorship program structure across different career stages and job levels to determine whether differentiated mentoring approaches produce varying career-growth outcomes. Future studies could also investigate how organizational support, mentor–mentee relationship quality, and institutional context interact with program structure in influencing employee career growth. Comparative studies across different county governments and other public-sector institutions could establish whether the findings are generalizable beyond Kakamega County Government. In addition, longitudinal research could assess the sustained effects of structured mentorship on employee competencies, leadership development, career progression, and succession readiness over time. Such studies would further test and refine the applicability of Social Exchange Theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV) by examining how reciprocal relationships, organizational support, and human-capital development jointly contribute to career growth.

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