

Enhancing the Quality of Judicial Service Delivery through E-Filing System: The Case of Rukwa District Courts in Tanzania

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Abstract

E-filing system is advocated for improving the quality of judicial service delivery worldwide; and this has proved successful in developed countries. In 2016, the Tanzania judicial organ piloted e-filing system and later in 2018, a countrywide rollout proceeded. Despite the adoption of the e-filing system, anomalies in the procedures for case filing are common especially in Rukwa Region. Previous studies have not given enough consideration to the aspects and dimensions of quality judicial service delivery through e-filing system such as duration, accessibility and convenience in district courts. This knowledge gap made it difficult for scholars and policy implementers to comprehend the current situation in district courts where reforms in judicial service delivery are ongoing. This study aimed to examine the contribution of e-filing system in the quality of judicial service delivery in Rukwa District courts. This work applied a mixed

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approach with a case study design using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 78 respondents through survey method, while seven (7) key informants were involved in interviews and supplemented by non-participant observation method. On the other hand, secondary data were collected through a documentary review. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used to generate frequencies, percentages followed by correlation analysis. Findings revealed that e-filing system had a potential to improve the quality of judicial service delivery through time saving, increased accessibility and enhanced convenience of specific judicial services such as the case filing. However, the potential of the e-filing system was challenged by disruptions in internet connectivity, limited interoperability and inadequate ICT facilities mainly desktops. The study recommends fostering reliable internet connectivity, enabling the system to operate off-line, to integrate the system with more technological innovations, and optimizing ICT facilities such as laptops or desktops to meet the needs.

Key words: E-filing, Case filing, Judicial Service Delivery and District Courts

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Judicial service delivery has become an important aspect among many governments in an attempt to ensuring justice and human rights among the citizens (Ngulube, 2016). Experience in Europe shows that service delivery, particularly judicial service, is sophisticated and of relatively high quality in terms of inclusivity, responsiveness, omitted red tapes, swift bureaucratic procedures, reliability and timeliness while the case is different in developing countries (Bencze et al., 2017 and Council of Europe, 2018). In response, governments in developing countries have been designing and implementing reforms to improve efficiency and effectiveness in judicial service delivery (World Bank, 2017 and Judiciary of Tanzania, 2022). In addition, despite the reforms, delivery of judicial services has not improved as expected specifically in developing countries like Tanzania. In Tanzania, specifically in the judicial system, complaints have persisted in terms of inaccuracy and irrelevance of judgments associated with loss of files, bureaucratic barriers, miss-presentation of case details in proceedings, deliberate delays of case hearing besides limited access to law courts (World Bank, 2017; Mrago, 2020 and Judiciary of Tanzania, 2022).

In response, the measures taken by the Government of Tanzania (GoT) include but not limited to the adoption of E-Government in order to improve the delivery of services to the public anywhere through the internet without the necessity of physical appearance at the public offices (Newa & Mwantimwa, 2020 and World Bank, 2017). In particular, e-government comes with its own package, and in this package, there is E-filing. In this digitalised era, e-filing is regarded as an important component of any service provided by governments (Grönlund and Horan, 2014). Initially, e-filing was implemented as an inception pilot in 2016 and later, in 2018, it was formally adopted for inclusion in the country at large.

The judiciary of Tanzania adopted e-filing options in order to properly deliver judicial services to the public in the form of case files, cause lists, and copies of judgments, with the goal of increasing access, transparency, and reducing delays (Eligi & Mwantimwa, 2017). Such positive expectations from adoption of e-filing system in the judiciary are grounded in the nature of the system, which promises swiftness of procedures thereof (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice [CEPEJ], 2021). In contrast to traditional procedures, case filing through e-filing system is completed using the e-filing portal first, followed by proof and endorsement by the registry using an electronic seal. However, in the case of appeals, documents that are required might differ or need additional files to be uploaded, unlike for the new case filing requirements (Judicial Council of California, 2014). Moreover, payment confirmations are also completed electronically using a control number that is generated by the system (Chawinga *et al.*, 2019).

In Tanzania, e-filing initiatives received the government attention around 2016, and were initially endorsed in 2018 through the Judicature and Application of Laws (Electronic Filing) Rules of 2018. The reforms were intended to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system in the delivery of judicial services to the public across the country (Judiciary of Tanzania, 2022). To this end, e-filing is considered as the remedy to prolonged complaints of poor judicial service delivery in terms of inadequate availability of such services to the proximity of the targeted communities in remote areas, delays in case files associated with many "to and fro" follow-ups, irresponsiveness and declining reliability of judicial proceedings, and access to case list in particular. These problems were linked to elevated case backlog of about 23.1% in 2021 (Judiciary of Tanzania, 2022). In Rukwa Region specifically, complaints related to judicial

service delivery among clients are associated with delays or time-consuming procedures in case filing (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2021).

Since the introduction of e-filing reforms in the judiciary, initially as a pilot implementation in early 2016, and a subsequent countrywide rollout in late 2018, there has been a need to study the extent to which e-filing is used and how it improves judicial service delivery. A study by Romwald & Mwantimwa (2020) found that paper-based records management systems are still the most commonly used, indicating that it is not as effective as expected. Another study by Hassan & Mwantimwa (2022) found that e-filings system was ineffective. However, the previous studies did not give enough consideration to such aspects as dimensions of quality judicial service delivery through e-filing, duration, accessibility and convenience of the judicial services delivered through e-filing. Also, the previous studies did not focus on district courts for specific judicial services such as case filing as related to the e-filing system. The existence of this knowledge gap makes it difficult for scholars and policy implementers to comprehend the current situation of judicial service delivery, particularly in district courts where reforms in judicial service delivery are ongoing.

Thus, this study would strengthen the link between e-filing and quality judicial service delivery in district courts in Rukwa. Specifically, the study analysed the perceived quality of judicial services delivery through e-filing system at Rukwa District Courts; and examined the contribution of e-filing system in case filing at Rukwa District Courts. As a result, the study would broaden the knowledge frontier related to the contribution of e-filing system in district courts in expanding and modernising court services especially case filing.

The study was guided by two theories - the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) by Bagozzi, Davis, & Warshaw (1992); and the Dynamic Theory of Service Management (DTSM) by Forrester (1961). The former, assumes that technological innovations like e-filing system are accepted based on the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. The perceived usefulness is also influenced by the perceived ease of use. In the context of this study, TAM provides a framework for the use of the e-filing system in judicial service delivery. Specifically, TAM guided the researcher to focus on both deliverables of e-filing system case filing and related

aspects that determine the perception of system users on the usefulness and ease of use (Benbasat and Barki, 2007). As a result, the researcher was able to pinpoint two aspects of case filing, namely duration of case filing and accessibility to case filing as proxies to the perceived usefulness.

The third aspect, namely convenience of case filing reduces to perceived ease of use in terms of eliminated or minimised bureaucratic procedures (Ming-Ling and Kwai-Fatt, 2010). However, TAM could not suggest how the three aspects of case filing through e-filing system would affect the quality of judicial service delivery. Thus, DTSM bridged that linkage gap. DTSM predicts how the quality of such services would be affected through a differentiation environment created through the e-filing system (Gebauer, 2005). The theory states that service quality cannot be measured and tested in a straightforward manner as quality can be measured and tested in manufacturing (Gebauer, 2005). This is because in service industry such as the judiciary, there is a high-contact setting. Therefore, measuring quality in service industry should focus on micro-decisions and internal policies which explain operational flows and macro-behaviour to avoid service jungle especially in the long-run. With this guide, the study focused on “filing a case” which is a micro aspect of the whole judicial service spectrum at district courts. According to DTSM, this small aspect explains the perception of clients on the quality of judicial services. According to DTSM, it is through differentiation that quality can be improved without unintended outcomes of service jungle (Gebauer, 2005). Thus, in this study, the researcher allowed comparison between the traditional approach and the e-filing system, and comparison between potential and actual outcome in terms of both capacity and quality of the e-filing system on how it contributes to the quality of judicial services. Thus, the consulted theories guided the researcher to focus on the aspects of case filing – TAM, and how they affected the quality of judicial service delivery in the system users’ perspective – DTSM (JTC, 2013).

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study examined the contribution of case filing through e-filing system in judicial service delivery in Rukwa District courts. The study applied a mixed approach whereby qualitative and quantitative information was gathered and analysed. A case study design was employed to dig deep and give a broader view of the contribution of e-filing in judicial service delivery in the

context where e-filing is at the inception phase of implementation. The case study design made it possible to use primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected using survey, in-depth interviews and non-participant observation methods. The survey method helped to capture cross-sectional primary data from respondents of a diverse nature using a questionnaire. Specifically, the questionnaire tool was used to collect primary data from six (6) registry personnel, 24 lawyers/advocates and 48 clients at Sumbawanga, Kalambo and Nkasi District Courts. On the other hand, secondary data were collected using documentary review.

The study also employed in-depth interviews in order to get more detailed and specifically qualitative data from key informants. Therefore, three (3) human resource officers, three (3) district court in charges, and one (1) information and communication technology officer were interviewed using an interview guide. Also, non participant observation method was used for additional primary data to allow the researchers to observe the experiences of clients, registry personnel and advocates/lawyers regarding the use of e-filing system in case filing in Rukwa district courts. This made it possible to check for the truthfulness of the data obtained using interviews and survey as well. Moreover, documentary review was used to collect secondary data to minimize the weaknesses of interviews and questionnaires to enable a robust conclusion.

The collected data were analysed using a combination of methods given different types of data sources, data collection methods and tools. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were used concurrently. The statistical package for social sciences was used in the analysis of quantitative data, whereas correlation analysis was employed to link independent and dependent variables using $p = 0.01$ as the significance level. Specifically, the Pearson's correlation was used as a predictive measure of dependence between e-filing system and judicial service delivery in terms of nature, direction, and strength of the association (Gautam & Kumar, 2020). The Pearson's correlation coefficient ("r") would range from -1 (for absolute negative association), to 1 (for absolute positive association) including 0 (for absence of association). Subsequently, "r" above 0.5 was considered as strong positive association whereas "r" below -0.5 was considered as strong negative association (Gautam & Kumar, 2020). The researcher particularly tested the correlation of aspects of the e-filing system, including duration of case filing, accessibility of case filing and convenience of case filing to drive their linkage with the perceived quality of judicial service delivery.

3.0 RESULTS

This study examined the contribution of the e-filing system in judicial service delivery in District Courts. The study specifically analysed the perceived quality of judicial service delivery in Rukwa District courts, and the contribution of the system in case filing at Rukwa District courts. Descriptive statistics generated frequencies and percentages while correlation analysis was applied to drive the link between duration of case filing, accessibility of case filing and convenience of case filing as well as the perceived quality of judicial service delivery. Also, quotations of qualitative statements from key informants were included for triangulation, besides secondary data. This section is organised in two major sub-sections. Sub-section 1.4.1 covers the perceived quality of case filing through e-filing system at district courts while sub-section 1.4.2 covers the contribution of the e-filing system in case filing in Rukwa district courts.

3.1 Perceived quality of case filing through e-filing system

Case filing through the e-filing system is a specified service which is available in Rukwa district courts. User-based opinions on the quality of case filing through e-filing system was very crucial to answer the question on whether the system is useful or otherwise as suggested in the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM). The assumption was that e-filing system can be useful and easily used only when the perceived quality of the system is rated high. Therefore, a two-point scale was used ranging from low quality service delivery to high quality service delivery. Responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Perceived Quality of Case Filing through E-filing System

Response	Frequency	Percent
High quality service delivery	46	59.0
Low quality service delivery	32	41.0
Total	78	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2022

The results in Table 1 show that out of 78 respondents, 46 (59%) perceived service delivery as of high quality, and the remaining 32 (41%) respondents perceived it as of low quality. Explaining why some respondents perceived case filing through e-filing as of low quality, one interviewee argued that: - “...it needs some little assistance to do it well...maybe until a client reaches out to lawyers or say advocates who have electronic filing system accounts and have used the system earlier before...” (ICT officer at Sumbawanga Division of High Court -October, 2022).

This argument was also supported by secondary data, which indicated that out of 146 cases filed during the third quarter of 2022, only 78 (53.4%) were filed with advocates assistance and the remaining 68 (46.6%) were filed under the registry personnel assistance (ICTOs Dashboard Report, 2022 and Case Filing Schedule of June to September, 2022). To find out how quality judicial service delivery is enhanced through e-filing system, the researchers had to examine the contribution of e-filing system in case filing.

3.2 Contribution of e-filing system in case filing

Recently, the e-filing system has been adopted in filing civil cases in Rukwa district courts. It was thus important to examine whether the system has had any positive impact on case filing in Rukwa district courts. To that end, three dimensions were examined, namely the duration of case filing through e-filing system, accessibility of case filing through e-filing system and convenience of case filing through e-filing system.

3.2.1 Duration of case filing through e-filing system

The researchers intended to examine whether the duration of case filing through e-filing system was significantly minimised to guarantee quality improvement in judicial service delivery. Respondents were asked to state how long it took on average to complete filing a case using the e-filing system. Responses are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Duration of Case Filing through E-filing System

Response	Frequency	Percent
More than three hours	37	47.4
1-3 hours	15	19.2
Less than one hour	26	33.3
Total	78	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2022

The results in Table 2 show that out of 78 respondents, 37 (47.4%) dedicated more than three hours to filing a case using the e-filing system, 15 (19.2%) dedicated 1-3 hours and the remaining 26 (33.3%) dedicated less than one hour. The results indicate that some of the respondents spent relatively long-time filing case through the e-filing system at district courts. The finding is in line with the contention given during interviews that: - *“If there is no officer to respond timely to submissions for confirmation, endorsement time can lapse sometimes beyond client expectation”* (Human Resource Officer at Nkasi District Court (October, 2022)). The findings indicate the need for availability of registry personnel to respond to submissions in terms of confirmation, endorsement and sealing through e-filing.

3.2.2 Duration of case filing and quality of judicial service delivery

The researchers also sought to establish the relationship between duration of case filing through e-filing system and the quality of judicial service delivery. The relationship would inform the researcher on whether e-filing system saved time and added value to the quality of judicial service delivery. The relationship was tested by using Pearson’s correlation where the hypotheses were given as: -

Ho: There is no relationship between duration of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery at district courts in Rukwa region.

H1: There is a negative relationship between duration of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery at district courts in Rukwa region.

Table 3 shows correlation between duration of case filing and perceived quality of service delivery.

Table 3: Correlation between Duration of Case Filing and Perceived Quality of Service Delivery

Pearson's Correlation Perceived quality Duration of Case filing		
Perceived quality	1	-.808**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	78	78
Duration of case filing	-.808**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	78	78

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

Source: Field Data, 2022

The results in Table 3 show that the Pearson's product moment of correlation test of the null hypothesis indicates a significant strong negative relationship between duration of case filing and quality of judicial service delivery, [$r = (-.81)$, $p \text{ value} < 0.001$]. This finding resulted into rejection of the null hypothesis, that there is a negative strong relationship between duration of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery at district courts in Rukwa region at (0.01) level of significance.

3.2.3 Accessibility to case filing through e-filing system

The study also examined whether e-filing system increased inclusivity through improved access to case filing in Rukwa District courts. The focus was on whether case filing through e-filing system increased accessibility significantly enough to guarantee quality improvement in judicial service delivery. Respondents were asked to indicate how accessible case filing was through the e-filing system. Responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Accessibility of Case Filing through E-filing System

Response	Frequency	Percent
Less accessible	50	64.1
Accessible	19	24.4
Highly accessible	9	11.5
Total	78	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2022

The results in Table 4 show that out of 78 respondents, 50 (64.1%) considered case filing as less accessible, 19 (24.4%) considered it as accessible and the remaining 9 (11.5%) considered it as highly accessible. The majority argued that case filing through e-filing system in Rukwa district courts was less accessible because they could not manage to file cases without assistance, and this was available only in urban areas. For instance, it was contended that *“It could be more accessible if stationers in villages can help to guide laymen to file cases...but clients have to go town to be able to get reasonable assistance in online case filing”* (District Resident Magistrate in charge at Sumbawanga District - November, 2022). The finding implies that regardless of virtue of e-filing system still the proximity of case filing service is far for those who live away from town centers.

3.2.4 Accessibility of case filing and quality of judicial service delivery

An attempt was also made to establish the relationship between accessibility of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery. The relationship would help the researcher to confirm whether case filing through e-filing system increased accessibility significantly enough to guarantee quality improvement in judicial service delivery. The relationship was tested by using the Pearson’s correlation where the hypotheses were given as: -

Ho: There is no relationship between accessibility of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery at district courts in Rukwa region.

H1: There is a positive relationship between accessibility of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery at district courts in Rukwa region.

Table 5 summarizes the correlation between accessibility of case filing and perceived quality of service delivery.

Table 5: Correlation between Accessibility of Case Filing and Perceived Quality of Service Delivery

Pearson's Correlation	Perceived Quality	Accessibility of Case Filing
Perceived quality	1	.633**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	78	78
Accessibility of case filing	.633**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	78	78

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

Source: Field Data, 2022

The results in Table 5 indicate a significant strong positive relationship between accessibility of case filing and quality of judicial service delivery, [$r = (.63)$, $p \text{ value} < 0.001$]. This finding resulted into rejection of the null hypothesis, that there is a strong positive relationship between accessibility of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery at district courts in Rukwa region at 0.01 level of significance.

3.2.5 Convenience of case filing through e-filing system

The researcher intended to examine whether case filing through e-filing system enhanced convenience significantly enough to guarantee quality improvement in judicial service delivery. Respondents were asked to state the status of case filing through the e-filing system. Responses are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Convenience of Case Filing through E-filing System

Response	Frequency	Percent
Less convenient	38	48.7
Convenient	16	20.5
Highly convenient	24	30.8
Total	78	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2022

The results in Table 6 show that out of 78 respondents, 38 (48.7%) said case filing through e-filing system was of less convenience, 16 (20.5%) said it was convenient, and the remaining 24 (30.8%) said it was of high convenience. During interviews, one of the respondents argued that; “...sometimes clients may have to wait for long before response only to be asked to review documents or attach more other documents even after submitting the first application after due payment...in this scenario, a number of actions per application increases and hence minimise the convenience of case filing through e-filing system at district courts” (District Resident Magistrate in charge at Kalambo District - November, 2022).

It follows that the failure to provide relevant documents by court clients and human errors by registrar lead to a lot of inconveniences before the case can be thoroughly and correctly filed through e-filing system.

3.2.6 Convenience of case filing and quality of judicial service delivery

This aspect sought to establish the relationship between convenience of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery. This relationship would help the researcher to conclude whether e-filing system enhanced convenience of case filing significantly enough to guarantee quality improvement in judicial service delivery. The relationship was tested by using the Pearson’s correlation where the hypotheses were given as: -

H₀: There is no relationship between convenience of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery at district courts in Rukwa region.

H₁: There is a positive relationship between convenience of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery at district courts in Rukwa region.

Table 7 illustrates the correlation between convenience of case filing and quality of judicial service delivery.

Table 7: Correlation between Convenience of Case Filing and Quality of Judicial Service Delivery

Pearson's Correlation	Perceived Quality	Convenience of Case filing
Perceived quality	1	.410**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	78	78
Convenience of case filing	.410**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	78	78

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

Source: Field Data, 2022

The results in Table 7 show a significant weak positive relationship between convenience of case filing and quality of judicial service delivery, [$r = (.41)$, $p \text{ value} < 0.001$]. This finding resulted into rejection of the null hypothesis, that there is a weak positive relationship between convenience of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery at district courts in Rukwa region at (0.01) level of significance.

4.0 DISCUSSION

This study sought to specifically analyse the perceived quality of judicial services delivery in Rukwa District courts, and to examine the contribution of e-filing system in case filing in the courts. The study has revealed evidence of high-quality service delivery in terms of case filing through e-filing system in district courts in the study area. The finding implies that case filing through e-filing system is better than the traditional case filing system at Rukwa district courts. The finding further implies that case filing through e-filing is easily completed with less

disturbance, and more straightforward than the traditional approach which is subject to several go and returns. Also, the finding implies that when compared to the traditional case filing by paper work, case filing through e-filing was of more quality and was regarded as a feasible substitute for the former. The finding is in agreement with the dynamic theory of service management that contends that service improvement can be a result of differentiation strategy. In this context, case filing through e-filing system is a differentiation of the same service through a different approach to execution (Jeff, 2012).

On the other hand, the findings revealed that clients experienced some limitations in filing cases through e-filing, and were required to solicit experienced assistants who were not readily available. Although the finding does not reveal complete failure in filing cases, it shows that clients expected the system to work in a more user friendly way than it really was. It should be noted that case filing is not something expected to be done on regular basis for clients to gain experience because there is no regular chance for being offended as to file a case. Thus, the researcher would not expect exposure and experience in e-filing system use among clients to be at the same level as for lawyers and advocates who, in most cases, receive and work with different clients for different cases.

Based on findings, it can be concluded that the quality of service delivery at Rukwa district courts reflected varying degrees of perceptions from high quality to low quality. This is mainly because of differentiation in service delivery coupled with comparative experiences as put forward by the dynamic theory of service management. Based on the findings, when compared to the era of traditional filing system, the era of e-filing system is endowed with more quality judicial service delivery enhancements.

Regarding duration of case filing through e-filing system, the study findings indicate that, on average, it took three hours or less to complete case filing through e-filing system at district courts in the study area. The finding indicates that the e-filing system saves a considerable amount of time that could wastefully be spent on similar activity of filing a case through paper work. This is mainly because with the traditional approach, many hours were lost in case filing and, in some situations, several days could lapse before the case is accepted for final payment

and submission. The findings imply that e-filing is a key to minimising the time interval spent by clients in filing a case at district courts. On the contrary, prolonged procedures during case filing fall into the category of undesirable circumstances that should be minimised to realise client expectations as argued in the dynamic theory of service management (Jeff, 2012). However, some of the respondents spent relatively long-time intervals in filing case through e-filing system at district courts. The findings suggest the need for availability of registry personnel to respond to submissions in terms of confirmations, endorsement and sealing. The finding also implies that the e-filing system does not work in isolation from service providers and, therefore, the effectiveness of the system relies also on how responsive service providers are. Contrary to the provision of the technological acceptance model that perceived usefulness is crucial to adoption of e-filing system, the study findings suggest that the usefulness of the system depends on other related factors such as responsive registry personnel in this context (Goodhue, 2007). The finding further signifies that only and only when all other factors are in place the e-filing system becomes a time saving option in district courts regarding case filing.

Findings also indicated a strong negative relationship between duration of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial services such that traditional case filing took longer time. However, very fortunately, the e-filing system approach saves a considerable amount of time. Also, the more one is likely to save time in executing (registrar) or receiving (client) judicial services such as filing a case, the high a judicial service quality is perceived. The finding was in support of the study by the United States Agency for International Development [USAID] (2019), which established that e-litigation had positive impacts on the quality of judicial service delivery as it avoided delays in actions, and increased transparency. Furthermore, there was a strong negative relationship between duration of case filing through e-filing system and quality of judicial service delivery in district courts in Rukwa Region at 0.01 level of significance. The findings conclude that the e-filing system eases case filing by saving time not only for clients but also for registry personnel and lawyers. This is basically one of the ways in which the quality of judicial service delivery especially for case filing is enhanced.

Regarding accessibility of case filing through e-filing system, the study findings indicate that the use of e-filing system in case filing is far for those who live considerable distance from town

centers. The accessibility parameter of case filing through e-filing system in district courts is subject to technical knowhow among clients for them to use it without assistance at any place. The findings are in agreement with the ICTO system access and protocol map which showed that only registry personnel, advocates and legal officers had registered accounts and could thus have direct access to the system, and they were also allowed to assist clients in accessing prescribed services (System Access and Protocol Map, 2022).

However, other respondents considered case filing through e-filing system as highly accessible, which was contrary to the majority. The inherent explanation was that e-filing system had improved accessibility in several ways. On the one hand, clients were able to initiate case filing at any time; and as soon as the registrar is satisfied with all requisite payment, application is accepted and confirmed digitally, and this reduces or eliminates bureaucracy and red tapes. On the other hand, online case filing is readily accessible because there is no need to travel long distances to physically file a case in district court premises. The findings imply that improvement is required through authorising clients for direct e-filing system access and building the competence of clients in using the e-filing system for filing cases to guarantee accessibility to the majority regardless of their proximity to urban centres. The finding agrees with Kõlvart (2017) that access to justice in digital age depends on user authorisation and the ability to use public e-file portal in the Republic of Estonia.

Furthermore, there was a strong positive relationship between accessibility of case filing through e-filing system and the quality of judicial service delivery in district courts in Rukwa Region at (0.01) level of significance. As a result, the study findings reveal that the e-filing system has increased accessibility to case filing, and improved quality of the service. For example, the average number of new cases rose since 2018 when e-filing system was adopted as noticed through increased workload per staff member. The findings are in line with Mutimukwe *et al.* (2019), who found that e-justice system improved access to judicial services.

The study also revealed that for civil courts and civil cases, proceedings in electronic filing channels doubled as compared to traditional channels. As part of the outcomes of e-filing, the e-justice system provides citizens with more access to judicial services at their fingertips hence

enhancing the quality of judicial service delivery. The findings conclude that e-filing system contributes to the quality of case filing process by improving access especially in circumstances when system users have unlimited access to the court e-filing portal. Any limitation in authorisation of users acts as a barrier to access to judicial services, and jeopardises the quality of such services.

Regarding convenience in case filing through e-filing system, the results indicate that majority of e-filing key players in district courts in the study area experienced convenience in case filing through the e-filing system. The finding implies that during case filing through e-filing system, clients do not suffer prolonged bureaucratic processes since the process is swifter than the traditional approach. This is mainly because when filing a case, what is required of the client is easy to accomplish; and responses are made electronically to confirm next steps until the final case submission step. The process is swift except when documents are missing or are irrelevant to the case application requirements in which case documents undergo several reviews before the registrar endorses them for submission and payment.

The finding signifies the convenient nature of the e-filing system in case filing in district courts in the study area. However, the convenience of case filing through e-filing is also subject to the registrar's promptness to respond to the requests at a reasonable time and throughout the clock. This is because with the e-filing system, clients can file cases at any point in time even beyond working hours. The finding implies that the convenient nature of case filing through e-filing is subject to activeness of both the client and registry personnel to ensure adequate fulfillment of their responsibilities in the completion of case filing through the e-filing system. Inconveniences may otherwise arise due to the failure to provide relevant documents by the court client, and human errors committed by registrars.

However, there was a weak positive relationship between the convenience of case filing through e-filing system and the quality of judicial service delivery in district courts in Rukwa Region at (0.01) level of significance. This was mainly because the use of e-filing system eliminated a lot of bureaucratic procedures, and improved the convenience of case filing. This could be the major reason for improvement of the quality of judicial service delivery in Rukwa district courts. The

finding was in support of the International Growth Center [IGC] (2017) that studied electronic filing systems and found that bureaucratic efficiency and user centred service delivery was achieved through e-filing in terms of increased convenience and ultimately enhanced the quality of judicial services.

On the other hand, the study found that ICT challenges limited the potential of the e-filing system in district courts. The main challenges included occasional discontinuation of the e-filing system connectivity, limited interoperability of the system and inadequate desktops in registry offices. Of the three challenges, inadequacy of desktops was a result of the positive outcomes of using the e-filing system. With e-filing system application in the execution of judicial services, there was increased accessibility which, in turn, rose the workload per registry personnel and desktop. Thus, desktops that were optimal in number prior to the use of the e-filing system were inadequate as to meet the increased number of court clients.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that as compared to the traditional approach, the e-filing system has improved the quality of judicial service delivery among key players in Rukwa district courts. This is because the system saves time, increases accessibility, and enhances convenience in case filing. Despite the introduction and use of e-filing in court service delivery, clients depend on lawyers and registry personnel in accessing and using the e-filing system. The study recommends implementation of the e-filing system to be more comprehensive enough to cover all aspects, including delivering copies of judgments. The system also needs to consider the concerns of court clients such as their preferences for the e-filing system to harness and support more self-service features. The study suggests that the e-filing system should be upgraded to accommodate user capabilities and self-service potential in the delivery and access to court services.

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