



Principals' Performance Contracting Practices and Service Delivery in Public Secondary Schools: Evidence from Kisii County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study examined the relationship between principals' performance contracting practices, namely target setting, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and service delivery in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. The study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, with the quantitative strand being a cross-sectional correlational survey. Schools were stratified by sub-county and selected through proportionate random sampling, and 1,079 usable questionnaires were obtained from 173 principals, 363 teachers, 322 Board of Management members, and 221 parents' representatives. Six education officers were purposively interviewed. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and document review, and were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple and multiple regression. Each practice was positively associated with service delivery: target setting ($R = .633$), resource allocation ($R = .634$), stakeholder involvement ($R = .630$), and M&E ($R = .650$), all $p < .001$. Entered simultaneously, the four practices explained 58.1% of the variance in service delivery, $F(4, 1074) = 372.299$, $p < .001$, with M&E having the largest standardised coefficient ($\beta = .265$). The study concludes that performance contracting operates as an integrated management cycle in which targets, resources, participation, and feedback are interconnected. Because the design was cross-sectional and respondents were nested within schools, the findings are respondent-level associations rather than causal effects. The study recommends that principals and education authorities link target setting to resource planning, stakeholder participation, and regular monitoring, and strengthen the use of performance information for corrective action.

Keywords: Performance contracting, Principals, Service delivery, Target setting, Stakeholders, Monitoring, Kenya

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1. Introduction

Performance contracting has become an established instrument of public-sector performance management because it translates broad institutional mandates into agreed targets and creates a basis for monitoring, accountability, and evaluation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 1999). In Kenya, performance contracting has been institutionalised as part of public-service management, with current government

guidance continuing to frame it around measurable outputs, accountability, monitoring, and service delivery (Ministry of Public Service, Performance and Delivery Management, 2024). The education sector operates within this wider performance-management environment, while school principals occupy a particularly important position because they translate institutional targets into school-level plans, resource decisions, participation structures, and monitoring processes.

The policy presence of performance contracting, however, does not by itself demonstrate that the practices through which it is implemented are associated with better service delivery. Public-service improvement is influenced by management, resources, organisational arrangements, and contextual conditions (Boyne, 2003). Similarly, performance-management systems can produce different results depending on how targets are formulated, whether resources are aligned with priorities, whether affected stakeholders participate meaningfully, and whether performance information is used for feedback and corrective action. In education, these questions are particularly important because school service delivery is multidimensional. No single managerial action determines academic performance, curriculum implementation, student welfare, responsiveness, learning facilities, and stakeholder satisfaction.

Existing Kenyan studies provide useful evidence on particular aspects of performance contracting and school management, including resource management, monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and performance-contract implementation (Muli, Cheloti, & Kasivu, 2022; Muli, Kasivu, & Cheloti, 2022). Other studies have examined performance contracting in public universities, government service centres (Wesonga et al., 2020), or individual school-management practices. Such evidence establishes the relevance of performance management but leaves a more specific question unresolved: whether the four principal practices that operationalise performance contracting in public secondary schools are jointly associated with a broad measure of school service delivery.

1.1 Study Gap and Justification

The available literature reveals three related gaps. First, performance-contracting research in education has often focused on individual practices or implementation components, while fewer studies have examined target setting, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as an integrated set. Second, school studies have frequently used narrow outcomes, especially academic performance, rather than a broader service-delivery construct that captures several dimensions of school provision. Third, evidence from Kisii County remains limited, particularly evidence that combines the perspectives of principals and other school stakeholders.

This paper addresses these gaps by treating performance contracting as an integrated management system rather than as four unrelated administrative activities. The paper makes three contributions. First, it estimates the joint statistical contribution of the four practices rather than reporting only separate bivariate relationships. Second, it draws on perspectives from principals, teachers, Board of Management members, and parents' representatives,

moving beyond reliance on a single respondent category. Third, it provides evidence from Kisii County, a setting in which the four practices and a multidimensional service-delivery construct have received limited integrated empirical attention.

1.2 Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question:

To what extent are principals' target setting, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, and monitoring and evaluation practices collectively and independently associated with service delivery in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya?

The corresponding analytical propositions are that each of the four practices has a positive association with service delivery and that the four practices jointly explain a statistically significant proportion of variance in the respondent-level service-delivery composite. These propositions are interpreted as associational rather than causal hypotheses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study draws on Principal-Agent Theory and Goal-Setting Theory. Principal-Agent Theory highlights delegation, information asymmetry, monitoring, and mechanisms for aligning the interests of those who assign responsibility with those who implement it (Eisenhardt, 1989; Jensen & Meckling, 1976). It explains why formal contracts, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms are relevant when responsibility is delegated across organizational levels, and it has also been applied to accountability relationships between education authorities and schools (Torres, 2024). In school systems, performance contracting creates formal expectations between public authorities and school leaders, but implementation is shared among principals, teachers, governance bodies, parents, and education officials. Clear targets and monitoring therefore make implementation visible and accountable. Goal-Setting Theory complements this perspective by emphasizing the importance of clear, specific, accepted goals and feedback in directing performance (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002). It explains why clear, accepted goals, alignment, and feedback can structure effort and attention.

Together, the theories imply that performance contracting is not simply a document a principal signs; it is a management cycle involving goal formulation, resource alignment, participation, monitoring, and feedback. The paper therefore tests a systemic conceptual argument:

target setting defines what the school aims to accomplish; resource allocation provides the means for implementation; stakeholder involvement connects formal targets to collective action and local knowledge; and M&E provides information for review and correction. Service delivery represents the respondent-assessed extent to which the school provides its core educational services. The four practices are expected to be complementary, although the analysis does not assume that any one practice causes the outcome.

2.2 Performance Contracting in Global Perspective

Performance contracting can be understood as a results-oriented management arrangement in which expected outputs or outcomes, performance indicators, responsibilities, and review processes are specified in advance (OECD, 1999). The logic is consistent with New Public Management, which emphasises measurable results, managerial accountability, and performance information, while also connecting to broader performance-management approaches concerned with planning, implementation, review, and improvement.

2.3 Performance Contracting Practices and School Service Delivery

Target setting is the first practical element of the performance-contracting cycle. Targets provide direction and criteria for judging progress, but their value depends on clarity, alignment, acceptance, and feedback rather than their mere existence. Available evidence links participatory and aligned target setting with curriculum implementation and other school outcomes, while also indicating that imposed or poorly understood targets may generate resistance. Resource allocation is similarly more than the volume of funding available. It concerns whether financial, human, and physical resources are distributed and prioritised in ways that support agreed performance objectives. Prior Kenyan studies suggest that participatory budgeting, needs-based allocation, transparency, and prioritisation of instructional needs are relevant to educational service delivery.

Stakeholder involvement concerns the extent to which teachers, Boards of Management, parents, and other actors participate in planning, decision-making, oversight, and implementation. Meaningful participation can create ownership and accountability, but formal representation does not necessarily mean substantive influence. Monitoring and evaluation close the management loop by tracking progress, identifying deviations, communicating information, and supporting corrective action. Available evidence suggests that monitoring is most useful when it is

systematic and developmental rather than merely fault-finding.

2.4 Summary of Literature and Study Gap

The limitation of much of the available evidence is fragmentation. Studies frequently examine one management practice, one respondent category, one institutional setting, or one outcome. The resulting evidence is informative but makes it difficult to determine whether performance contracting functions as a coherent system in schools. The present study therefore evaluates the four practices both separately and simultaneously. The integrated analysis is important because practices may share variance: a school that sets clearer targets may also allocate resources more systematically and monitor implementation more regularly. A joint model therefore provides a more informative estimate of the independent statistical association of each practice than four separate regressions alone.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Location

The study adopted pragmatist philosophy and a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative strand used a cross-sectional correlational survey, while qualitative interviews with education officers and documentary review provided contextual and triangulating evidence. The study was conducted in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya, which has nine sub-counties and a mixture of national, extra-county, county, and sub-county schools.

3.2 Population and Sampling Procedures

The school was the primary sampling unit. Schools were stratified by sub-county and randomly selected proportionately. Principals in sample schools were included, while teachers, Board of Management members, and parents' representatives were sampled within schools. Education officers were purposively included as key informants. Of 1,219 questionnaires administered, 1,079 were sufficiently complete for analysis, an overall response rate of 88.52%. The final quantitative dataset comprised 173 principals, 363 teachers, 322 Board of Management members, and 221 parents' representatives. Interviews were conducted with one County Director of Education and five Sub-County Directors of Education.

3.3 Research Instruments

The four predictor constructs were measured using multiple five-point Likert items. Target setting captured

negotiation, clarity, and alignment of targets; resource allocation captured participatory budgeting, equitable distribution, and prioritisation of core needs; stakeholder involvement captured engagement in school planning and decision-making; and M&E captured progress tracking, performance review, reporting, communication, and corrective action. Service delivery was measured as a respondent-level composite covering academic performance, syllabus coverage, student discipline and welfare, timeliness and responsiveness, adequacy of teaching and learning facilities, and stakeholder satisfaction. Importantly, documentary indicators were used as contextual and triangulating evidence but were not merged into the respondent-level service-delivery composite used in the inferential models. The interview

guide for the education officers consisted of open-ended questions arranged in sections that followed the study objectives.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Instruments were reviewed by supervisors and experts for relevance and clarity and were piloted in neighbouring Nyamira County using 40 respondents, of whom 37 returned completed questionnaires. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .86 for target setting, .88 for resource allocation, .87 for stakeholder involvement, .84 for M&E, .89 for organisational culture, and .91 for service delivery; the overall coefficient was .88.

Table 1: Internal Consistency of Study Constructs

Study construct	Number of items	Cronbach's α	Decision
Target setting	10	.86	Reliable
Resource allocation	10	.88	Reliable
Stakeholder involvement	10	.87	Reliable
Monitoring and evaluation	10	.84	Reliable
Organisational culture	10	.89	Reliable
Service delivery	Composite scale	.91	Reliable
Overall scale	50 (practice and culture items)	.88	Reliable

Note. Reliability coefficients were obtained from the pilot study. Source: Researcher (2026).

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed the pilot study and began on 12 August 2026, once all the authorisations described in Section 3.7 had been obtained. In keeping with the convergent parallel design, the quantitative and qualitative strands were collected in the same phase. Questionnaires for principals, teachers, Board of Management members, and parents' representatives were delivered to the sampled schools and collected one to two weeks later; 1,219 were issued and 1,079 were returned sufficiently complete for analysis. Face-to-face interviews were held with the County Director of Education and the five Sub-County Directors of Education using the interview guide. Documentary indicators of service delivery were reviewed alongside these two sources to provide contextual and triangulating evidence.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations, simple linear regressions, and joint multiple regression. In the joint model, the four performance-contracting practice

composites were entered simultaneously. Assumptions were assessed using residual diagnostics, tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values, and Durbin-Watson, Breusch-Pagan, Jarque-Bera, and RESET procedures. The inferential analysis used 1,079 respondent-level observations. Because respondents were nested within schools and the reported models did not use cluster-robust standard errors or multilevel estimation, the results should be interpreted as respondent-level statistical associations rather than school-level causal effects.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Mount Kenya University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee on 21 July 2026 (approval number 5270; reference MKU/ISERC/6549), and the university's Directorate of Graduate Studies issued an introduction letter on the same date. A research licence was then obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (licence number NACOSTI/P/26/4193710, issued on 26 July 2026). At county level, the research was authorised by the

County Commissioner and the County Director of Education on 27 July 2026 and by the County Government of Kisii, through the Office of the County Secretary, on 12 August 2026. Data collection commenced only after all these authorisations had been obtained.

Each prospective participant received an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, what participation involved, and how the information would be used, and written informed consent was obtained from every participant before taking part. In line with the conditions of the ethics approval, only the approved consent documents and study instruments were used. Participation was voluntary: participants were told that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time without penalty, and no inducement was offered. No minors took part in the study, which was designed to minimise any physical, psychological, professional, or social harm to participants.

Information supplied by participants was treated as confidential and used only for the purposes of the study. The names of participants and of their schools were not recorded on the instruments, in the dataset, or in the study reports; identification codes and pseudonyms were used so that no individual or institution can be identified from the findings. Electronic data were kept in password-protected files and paper records in locked storage accessible only to

the researcher and the supervisors. The data will be retained for the period prescribed by the university's regulations and then destroyed. The authors declare no conflict of interest. The findings will be shared with the relevant education authorities, including the office of the County Director of Education as requested in its authorisation.

4. Results and Discussion

The results are presented and discussed in line with the research question, which sought to establish the extent to which principals' target setting, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, and M&E practices are collectively and independently associated with service delivery in public secondary schools in Kisii County.

4.1 Response Rate and Sample Characteristics

The 1,079 usable questionnaires represented principals (16.0%), teachers (33.6%), Board of Management members (29.8%), and parents' representatives (20.5%), as shown in Table 2. Rural schools accounted for 812 respondents (75.3%) and urban schools for 267 (24.7%). Respondents were drawn from national, extra-county, county, and sub-county schools.

Table 2: Questionnaire Response by Respondent Category

Respondent category	Sampled	Returned	Return rate (%)
Principals	188	173	92.02
Teachers	384	363	94.53
Board of Management members	356	322	90.45
Parents' representatives	291	221	75.95
Total	1,219	1,079	88.52

Note. The four respondent categories constitute the quantitative analysis sample ($N = 1,079$). Source: Researcher (2026).

4.2 Descriptive Pattern of Performance Contracting Practices

Across the four practices, the aggregate ratings were generally in the neutral-to-moderate range. Target-setting, resource-allocation, stakeholder-involvement, and M&E practices were present but not uniformly strong. The descriptive pattern is important because the inferential relationships should not be interpreted as evidence that schools were uniformly high performing on the management practices.

4.3 Individual Associations between the Practices and Service Delivery

Each practice was positively associated with the service-delivery composite (Table 3). Target setting produced $R = .633$ and $R^2 = .400$, $F(1, 1077) = 719.136$, $p < .001$. Resource allocation produced $R = .634$ and $R^2 = .401$, $F(1, 1077) = 722.416$, $p < .001$. Stakeholder involvement produced $R = .630$ and $R^2 = .397$, $F(1, 1077) = 708.913$, $p < .001$. M&E produced $R = .650$ and $R^2 = .422$, $F(1, 1077) = 786.287$, $p < .001$. These values indicate substantial bivariate associations in the respondent-level data, but they do not establish causal effects.

Table 3: Bivariate and Simple Regression Results for the Four Performance Contracting Practices

Practice	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i> (1, 1077)	β	<i>p</i>
Target setting	.633	.400	719.136	.633	< .001
Resource allocation	.634	.401	722.416	.634	< .001
Stakeholder involvement	.630	.397	708.913	.630	< .001
Monitoring and evaluation	.650	.422	786.287	.650	< .001

Note. β is the standardised coefficient from each one-predictor regression. All models used $N = 1,079$ respondent-level observations. Source: Researcher (2026).

4.4 Joint Association of the Four Practices with Service Delivery

The four predictors entered simultaneously produced $R = .762$, $R^2 = .581$, adjusted $R^2 = .579$, $F(4, 1074) = 372.299$, $p < .001$ (Table 4). Thus, the four practices jointly accounted for 58.1% of the variance in the

respondent-level service-delivery composite. All four predictors retained statistically significant positive standardised coefficients: target setting $\beta = .224$ ($p < .001$), resource allocation $\beta = .215$ ($p < .001$), stakeholder involvement $\beta = .207$ ($p < .001$), and M&E $\beta = .265$ ($p < .001$). M&E therefore had the largest independent coefficient in the joint model, followed by target setting, resource allocation, and stakeholder involvement.

Table 4: Joint Multiple Regression of Performance Contracting Practices on Service Delivery

Predictor	Standardised β	<i>p</i>	Tolerance	VIF
Target setting	.224	< .001	.503	1.990
Resource allocation	.215	< .001	.520	1.925
Stakeholder involvement	.207	< .001	.509	1.966
Monitoring and evaluation	.265	< .001	.511	1.957

Note. Model: $R = .762$; $R^2 = .581$; adjusted $R^2 = .579$; $F(4, 1074) = 372.299$, $p < .001$. All inferential results are respondent-level associations; they are not causal school-level effects. Source: Researcher (2026).

Tolerance values ranged from .503 to .520 and VIF values from 1.925 to 1.990, providing no evidence of problematic multicollinearity. The joint-model Durbin-Watson statistic was 2.028. Breusch-Pagan and RESET tests were non-significant, and the joint-model Jarque-Bera test was non-significant ($p = .270$). These diagnostics support the internal adequacy of the reported regression specification, while not resolving the separate issue of respondent clustering within schools.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The central finding is that the four performance-contracting practices were jointly and independently associated with service delivery. The joint model is more informative than the four simple regressions because it shows that each practice retained a positive association after the overlap among the practices was taken into account. This supports the argument that performance contracting operates as a system of interdependent

management practices rather than as a single administrative event. The proportion of variance explained (58.1%) is close to that reported by Nyongesa and van der Westhuizen (2023), who found that performance contracting accounted for 60.1% of the variation in service delivery among employees of Huduma Centres in Western Kenya.

The strongest independent coefficient was observed for M&E ($\beta = .265$). This finding is consistent with the logic of performance management: targets and resources create intended conditions for action, while monitoring generates information about whether implementation is on course and where corrective action may be needed. It also aligns with evidence from Kenyan public-service research emphasising performance planning and monitoring and reporting as important elements of service delivery (Wesonga et al., 2020). In secondary schools, Chepkoech and Cheboi (2024) similarly found that principals' monitoring and evaluation of instruction in Londiani Sub-

County improved teacher performance and helped principals to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses. In Principal-Agent terms, monitoring narrows the information gap between those who delegate responsibility and those who carry it out (Eisenhardt, 1989). The result should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that M&E causes better service delivery. Because all constructs were measured cross-sectionally at respondent level, schools or respondents who perceive management more positively may also perceive service delivery more positively.

Target setting remained important in the joint model ($\beta = .224$). Goal-Setting Theory provides a plausible theoretical explanation: targets can focus attention and clarify expectations when they are specific, aligned, accepted, and accompanied by feedback (Locke & Latham, 2002). Nyongesa and van der Westhuizen (2023) likewise identified goal setting as critical to service delivery, and Khaemba et al. (2024) reported a significant positive relationship between performance appraisal practices and teacher performance in public secondary schools in Busia County. Wesonga et al. (2020), by contrast, found that target setting was not a significant determinant of citizen-centric service delivery in Huduma Centres. Taken with this mixed evidence, the result supports a qualified rather than deterministic view of target setting. The presence of a target is not sufficient; the management system must connect targets to implementation and review.

Resource allocation also showed a positive, independent association ($\beta = .215$). This finding reinforces the proposition that performance expectations require practical means of implementation. It aligns with Muli, Kasivu, and Cheloti (2022), who concluded that principals' failure to allocate financial resources to performance contracting activities hindered its implementation in public secondary schools in Machakos County, and with the identification of resources as one of the sources of public-service improvement (Boyne, 2003). Resource allocation should therefore be interpreted as part of the performance-management cycle rather than as a separate financial function. At the same time, the study did not estimate objective resource quantities or school-level budget effects, so the result concerns perceived resource-allocation practices rather than the causal effect of funding.

Stakeholder involvement had the smallest standardized coefficient in the joint model ($\beta = .207$), though it remained statistically significant. This pattern is theoretically meaningful. Participation may contribute to performance contracting through ownership, information sharing, accountability, and coordination, but its independent association diminishes once target setting, resources, and M&E are considered simultaneously. Mogere and Momanyi (2024), for instance, examined Board of Management practices in public secondary schools in Manga Sub-County in relation to teaching and learning

resources, physical facilities, staffing, and staff motivation, indicating how closely the involvement of governance bodies is bound up with other management functions. The finding suggests that formal participation should not be treated as an automatic substitute for effective managerial systems. Meaningful involvement may matter most when it is connected to decisions, implementation, and feedback.

The integrated pattern aligns with Principal-Agent Theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Jensen & Meckling, 1976) because performance contracting makes delegated responsibilities more visible through targets, resource accountability, stakeholder oversight, and monitoring. It also aligns with Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) because the management cycle depends on clear goals and feedback. Theoretically, these findings support a systems interpretation of performance contracting. Principal-Agent Theory explains the accountability and information functions of contracting, while Goal-Setting Theory explains the directional and feedback functions of targets. The joint model indicates that neither perspective alone fully captures the management cycle: targets require resources, implementation depends on people and governance, and monitoring creates information for adjustment. Evidence that the implementation of performance contracts in schools depends on the training of those who carry them out (Muli, Cheloti, & Kasivu, 2022), and that agencies overseeing schools have to build trust in order to balance support with accountability (Torres, 2024), points in the same direction. The empirical contribution lies in bringing these mechanisms together in one school-level management framework rather than treating them as unrelated administrative practices.

4.6 Limitations of the Study

First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inference. Second, the inferential outcome was a respondent-level perception composite rather than an independently observed school-level service-delivery outcome. Documentary indicators were used for contextual and triangulation purposes but were not incorporated into the regression outcome. Third, respondents were nested within schools, while the reported regressions were estimated at the respondent level without cluster-robust standard errors or multilevel modelling. Fourth, the study relied substantially on self-reported perceptions, creating potential common-method bias. Fifth, the service-delivery and practice scales include closely related perceptions, creating a possible item-overlap concern that should be examined through robustness analysis. Finally, the study was conducted in Kisii County, limiting direct generalisation to other counties or school systems.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

In response to the research question, the study concludes that principals' target setting, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, and monitoring and evaluation practices are positively associated with service delivery in public secondary schools in Kisii County. More importantly, the four practices remain statistically significant when considered simultaneously, explaining 58.1% of variance in the respondent-level service-delivery composite. M&E has the largest independent coefficient, but the results do not justify treating any single practice as sufficient. The contribution of the paper is therefore an integrated account of performance contracting as a management cycle in which targets, resources, participation, and feedback are mutually connected.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the study recommends that:

1. School leaders and education authorities should avoid treating performance contracts as annual compliance documents. A more useful implementation cycle links target negotiation and clarification to resource planning, stakeholder participation, regular monitoring, feedback, and revision of implementation priorities.
2. In view of the comparatively strong M&E coefficient, schools should strengthen the use of performance information for corrective action rather than limiting monitoring to documentation or end-of-cycle appraisal.
3. Because the study establishes associations rather than effects, these recommendations should be treated as management implications for further evaluation rather than as experimentally established interventions. Further research should re-estimate the main model with school-clustered standard errors or a multilevel specification, and should test a robustness model that excludes potentially overlapping outcome-worded items from the practice scales.

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