



PRINCIPALS' TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE AND TEACHERS' JOB PERFORMANCE IN PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of principals' transactional leadership style on teachers' job performance in private secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study was guided by the following objectives: to investigate the influence of principals' contingent reward behaviour on teachers' job performance and to find out whether principals' passive management by exception behaviour influences teachers' job performance in private secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study was anchored on Transactional Leadership Theory. A convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Design was used for the study. The target population was 206 schools, 206 principals, and 2099 teachers. The study used systematic sampling to select 20 out of 206 schools, purposive sampling to include all 20 principals from the selected schools, and proportionate stratified and simple random sampling to select 336 out of 2,099 teachers. Data collection tools included questionnaires for teachers and in-depth interview guide for principals. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), which were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Science Version 29. Tables were used to present the quantitative data. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis and presented in the form of narratives and direct quotations. Findings revealed that principals' contingent rewards behaviour positively

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influenced teacher motivation, syllabus coverage, and classroom management. In contrast, passive management by exception, where principals intervene only after problems escalate, was associated with reduced morale and inconsistent performance. The study recommends that the government develop frameworks emphasizing clear reward systems and accountability measures. Policies should ensure principals are adequately trained to implement transactional leadership strategies effectively, including setting clear expectations and providing timely feedback. The principals should strengthen structured reward systems, professional development, and timely feedback to enhance teacher effectiveness and improve student outcomes.

Keywords: Kenya, principals, transactional, leadership style, teachers, job performance, private, secondary schools

1. Introduction

Leadership has been studied widely, and many theories have been developed around it (Yukl, 2013). Smith (2020) defines leadership as a process of influencing and guiding individuals or groups to achieve specific goals or objectives within an organization. Robbins and Judge (2007) also define leadership as the ability to influence a group of people towards the achievement of a vision or a set of goals. Northouse (2021) particularly defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group to achieve a common goal.

As highlighted in the definitions of leadership, the concept of influence is central because it forms the essence of leadership. Ghasabeh, Soosay, and Reaiche (2015) affirm that leadership is fundamentally the ability to influence and guide others toward the achievement of goals. Understanding the practical implications of this influence within organizational or institutional contexts is therefore crucial because, this influence exerted by leaders extends significantly to several aspects of employee experience, and undoubtedly, there exists a correlation between leadership itself and different aspects of subordinates' work experiences.

To put the concept of leadership into a clearer perspective, studies continue to classify leadership styles into categories such as autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transformational, and transactional. According to Iqbal, Anwar, and Haider (2015), these styles shape the nature of leader–follower interactions and significantly influence organizational performance. Among these, transactional leadership remains a central focus of this study due to its structured, goal-oriented nature. Northouse (2021) explains that transactional leadership emphasizes exchanges between leaders and followers, where compliance is achieved through a system of rewards and penalties. Similarly, Wamalwa and James (2020), in their study of public secondary schools in Kenya, found that transactional leadership is widely practiced among school principals and is associated with improved teacher accountability and performance outcomes. Zareen, Razzaq, and Mujtaba (2015) further describe transactional behaviors, ranging from

passive management by exception to active monitoring and contingent reward strategies. While transactional leadership is often effective in ensuring task completion and maintaining organizational structure, it may not sufficiently inspire intrinsic motivation or long-term commitment (Dartey-Baah, 2015). However, when applied with clear expectations and consistent feedback, transactional leadership can enhance teacher productivity and institutional performance (Chika & Emerole, 2020).

Given the central role of leadership in shaping followers' behavior and performance outcomes, this study explores the relationship between school principals' transactional leadership style and teachers' job performance in private secondary schools in Kenya. Zopiatis and Constanti (2010) emphasizes that transactional leaders motivate followers by offering valued rewards such as recognition and compensation. Similarly, Saleem *et al.* (2020) found that principals who employ transactional leadership styles can foster environments where teachers are more likely to meet performance expectations due to clear goal-setting and the use of contingent rewards. In the Kenyan context, Wanjala *et al.* (2017) investigated the impact of transactional leadership on employee organizational commitment in technical institutions, revealing a significant positive correlation. These findings collectively suggest that transactional leadership may play an important role in enhancing teacher performance through structured incentives and clear expectations.

A transactional leader uses three strategies: contingent reward, active management by exception (MBE-A), and passive management by exception (MBE-P). Contingent reward strategy can be described as an exchange process between leaders and followers (Northouse, 2018). In contingent reward, principals clarify expectations and offer rewards when teachers meet set performance standards. This exchange-based approach has been widely studied in Kenya. For example, Musyoka and Ngugi (2021) found that principals who consistently applied contingent reward strategies such as recognition, promotions, or incentives based on student results fostered a performance-driven culture among teachers in private secondary schools in Nairobi County.

Similarly, Mwangi and Simatwa (2017) observed that contingent reward strategies improved teacher morale and performance in public secondary schools, especially when rewards were transparent and aligned with institutional goals. However, they also noted that over-reliance on extrinsic motivation might limit teachers' long-term commitment. Regarding management by exception, active management (MBE-A) involves principals closely monitoring teacher conduct and academic delivery, addressing issues before they escalate. Kipkosgei and Bett (2019) found that MBE-A was effective in maintaining discipline and academic standards, particularly when leaders set clear expectations and followed up consistently.

In contrast, passive management by exception (MBE-P) is more reactive, where intervention occurs only after problems arise. This approach has been criticized by Wamalwa and James (2020), who observed that delayed corrective action by school heads often led to poor performance and frustration among teaching staff. Despite this, when transactional leadership is implemented with consistency and fairness, it has been shown

to enhance teacher accountability and improve performance outcomes in Kenyan schools.

Studies have documented the diverse effects of leadership styles on teacher job effectiveness. In Vietnam, Maheshwari (2021) performed a study to examine the impact of leadership styles on teacher satisfaction and performance in public high schools. Also, Shalahudin *et al.* (2021) in Indonesia assessed the influence of headmasters' transformational and transactional leadership styles on the performance of high school teachers. The research results indicated that the transformational leadership style has a significant impact on teacher performance ($\text{sig.}t = 0.038 < 0.05$), whereas the transactional leadership style does not exert a significant influence on performance ($\text{sig.}t = 0.126 > 0.05$).

Sougui *et al.* (2015) in Yemen conducted a study that investigated the impact of various leadership styles on employee performance within telecom engineering companies. Results indicated that non-transactional leadership styles, such as the bureaucratic approach, do not significantly affect organizational performance. However, these styles can be effective when achieving goals requires longer tenures and adherence to specific procedures. This evidence suggests that non-transactional leadership may be appropriate in environments that value routine tasks and stability.

Itoya and Igbokwe (2021) carried out a study to investigate the impact of different leadership styles on employee performance inside the organization in Nigeria. The test findings indicated that the transactional leadership style has a favorable and significant impact on employee performance ($P < 0.05$). These findings demonstrate that transactional leadership has a favorable and significant impact on employee performance within enterprises; however, their study concentrated on a general organizational context, compared to this proposed study, focusing on a school environment. Odunlami *et al.* (2017) conducted a similar study in private universities in Nigeria and determined that the transactional leadership style does not significantly affect employee performance, with a correlation of -0.159 and a significance level of 0.01.

In Kenya, Anyango (2015) researched the impact of leadership styles on employee performance at the Bank of Africa. The findings showed that both transactional and transformational leadership positively correlated with employee performance and job satisfaction, with transformational leadership having a stronger correlation compared to transactional leadership. These findings highlight the importance of aligning leadership style with organizational context and employee expectations. While non-transactional leadership may suit structured environments, transactional and transformational leadership styles appear more effective in enhancing performance and satisfaction across diverse sectors.

Chirchir (2014) examined the impact of head teachers' leadership styles on teachers' commitment in Kenya. A notable positive association exists between Transformational leadership style and normative commitment ($r = 0.403$; $p < 0.01$). The link between transactional leadership style and organizational commitment is low ($r = 0.358$; $p < 0.01$) and statistically significant. This indicates that the perceived transformational leadership style employed by head teachers in primary schools directly influences

normative commitment. Similarly, Kilonzo *et al.* (2020) conducted a study examining the influence of principals' leadership styles on teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. The study utilized a quantitative methodology, employing a standardized questionnaire to gather data from educators. The findings demonstrated a significant positive link between transformational leadership and teacher performance ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$), whereas the correlation between transactional leadership and teacher performance was less robust ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that although transactional leadership can impact teacher job performance, it is inferior to transformational leadership in terms of effectiveness regarding teacher job performance. This study was conducted in a public school, and the results cannot be generalized to private secondary schools in Kenya.

Mwangi *et al.* (2021) conducted further investigation into the influence of leadership styles on teacher effectiveness in Kenya. This research examined the impact of transformational and transactional leadership styles on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Nyandarua County, Kenya. The researchers adopted a quantitative methodology, employing a structured questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 150 educators from diverse institutions. The results demonstrated a substantial positive association between transformational leadership and teacher performance ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that teachers who viewed their principals as transformational leaders indicated elevated levels of work performance and satisfaction. The correlation between transactional leadership and teacher performance was weaker ($r = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that although transactional leadership offers some structure and accountability, it does not substantially improve teacher performance relative to transformational leadership.

While transactional leadership is acknowledged for its significance in educational and organizational contexts, there is a distinct absence of empirical research focused on its impact on teacher job performance in private schools in Nairobi, Kenya. Most existing studies have focused on its comparison with transformational leadership and were conducted in various educational contexts, such as universities, which may not be directly relevant to the Kenyan private school environment. Theoretically, it has produced both desirable and undesirable outcomes. Understanding its influence on teacher job performance is essential for the development of effective leadership strategies in secondary schools. School principals are highly influential figures, and their role in shaping key aspects of the school is significant. Leaders occupy a critical position within organizations, and their behavior greatly impacts work patterns, productivity, and the overall well-being of employees. This study sought to examine the influence of school principals' transactional leadership style on teachers' job performance in private secondary schools in Nairobi County.

2. Statement of the Problem

The performance of teachers in private secondary schools is closely linked to the leadership practices of school principals, who play a central role in motivating staff, setting expectations, and ensuring instructional effectiveness (Winarsih & Purnomo, 2024). Leadership style is widely recognized as a determining factor in employee performance, with ineffective leadership leading to low morale, poor accountability, and reduced productivity, while effective leadership fosters organizational growth, teacher motivation, and improved learning outcomes. Transactional leadership, in particular, is one of the most widely applied leadership approaches in school settings due to its emphasis on structure, supervision, and performance-based rewards (Hieng *et al.*, 2024).

In Kenya, private secondary schools are increasingly seen as key providers of quality education, yet there have been concerns about inconsistencies in teacher performance. Reports by the Kenya National Examinations Council (2023) have highlighted gaps in syllabus coverage, lesson planning, and learner engagement, particularly in schools where performance appraisal and supervision systems are informal or inconsistently applied. While public schools benefit from standardized measures such as the Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development (TPAD) framework, private institutions often lack formalized systems for teacher appraisal, leading to variations in instructional quality and learner outcomes (Mutua & Wanjala, 2023).

Despite these challenges, transactional leadership remains a dominant style among school principals, especially in institutions that prioritize structure, accountability, and measurable results. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how specific elements of transactional leadership, including contingent reward and passive management by exception, affect teacher motivation, professional conduct, and overall job performance in private school settings. Previous studies, such as those by Sengendo and Musinguzi (2024), have demonstrated the significant influence of leadership style on teacher performance in other contexts, but research focusing specifically on private secondary schools in Nairobi County remains scarce.

This knowledge gap raises questions about whether transactional leadership, as practiced by school principals, effectively addresses performance-related challenges in private secondary schools. This study, therefore, sought to examine the influence of principals' transactional leadership style on teachers' job performance in Nairobi County, Kenya.

2.1 Objective of the Study

- 1) To investigate the influence of principals' contingent reward behaviour on teachers' job performance in private secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya.
- 2) To find out whether principals' passive management by exception behaviour influences teachers' job performance in private secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya.

2.2 Research Question

- 1) How does contingent reward behaviour influence teacher job performance in private secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya?
- 2) How does passive management by exception behaviour influence teacher job performance in private secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya?

3. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on transactional leadership theory, which was introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and later expanded by Bernard Bass in 1985. The theory conceptualizes leadership as an exchange-based relationship in which leaders rely on rewards and corrective measures to sustain employees' performance. It highlights the importance of supervision, structure, and compliance in ensuring efficiency within organizations, including schools. Unlike transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision and long-term inspiration, transactional leadership is more task-oriented, focusing on ensuring that employees fulfill their responsibilities through contingent rewards and management by exception (Arenas, Connelly, & Williams, 2017). Transactional leadership is typically exercised through three main strategies: contingent reward (CR), active management by exception, and passive management by exception (Susanto, 2018). Contingent reward involves leaders establishing clear performance standards and reinforcing positive behaviors with appropriate rewards.

4. Contingent Reward and Teachers' Job Performance

Transactional leadership is a performance-driven leadership approach that relies on structured transactions between leaders and followers. Contingent reward (CR) is a central element of this leadership style, where leaders set expectations for their followers and utilize rewards to reinforce positive performance (Arenas, Connelly, & Williams, 2017). Damanic (2014) states that contingent reward is based on active and positive transactions between leaders and followers. This, according to Mendez-Keegan (2019), may include emphasizing tasks that must be completed to receive a reward while offering supervision. Li *et al.* (2021) found that contingent rewards increase compliance behavior, whereas contingent punishment decreases it.

Scholars such as Dartey-Baah (2015) argue that rewarding success may enhance extrinsic motivation. As Njanja *et al.* (2013) indicate, reward management is an essential organizational strategy to improve performance. Liang *et al.* (2013) assert that leaders should apply both rewards and punishments to shape employees' compliance behavior. In the educational sector, rewards for teachers have been found to be one of the main organizational policies influencing teacher performance and organizational output (Ajila, 2004). Ibbotson (2007) similarly argues that rewards play a powerful role in improving teacher performance when effectively implemented. However, empirical findings on contingent rewards remain inconclusive. For example, Akuoko (2012) found that pay and

allowances significantly enhanced teacher performance, while Adkins (2004), in a study on teacher performance pay in Florida, USA, found that teachers generally disagreed that performance-based pay motivated them to work harder. Similarly, Uzonna (2013), in Cyprus, found that growth opportunities, recognition, and non-cash rewards were more effective motivators than monetary incentives such as salary, bonuses, and pensions.

Cemaloğlu, Sezgin, and Kılınç (2012) examined the connection between principals' leadership styles and teachers' organizational commitment in Ankara, Turkey. A total of 237 randomly selected teachers employed in 18 primary schools in Ankara participated in this correlational study. Data was collected using surveys. The study discovered that transformational leadership had a bigger effect on affective commitment than transactional leadership. However, the contingent reward dimension of transactional leadership was a better predictor of teacher continuance commitment ($\beta = .33$, $p < .05$). This finding suggests that teachers may work more efficiently when their efforts are appreciated by school principals.

Yamoah (2013) carried out a study on the rewards and job performance of teachers in public schools in Ghana. The objective was to assess the performance of teachers and ascertain if rewards affect their performance significantly. The study targeted teachers employed in public basic and secondary schools in selected districts across Ghana. The target population consisted of teachers in the public education sector, and a sample size of 200 teachers was drawn using simple random sampling. The result indicated a significant relationship ($P < .05$) between teachers' rewards and job performance. The study then recommended that school management initiate additional reward programs, such as free lunches and beneficial loans, to increase the performance of teachers. While this study focuses on rewards and being a motivator to teacher job performance, further research is needed to examine whether other principal behaviors, like active management by exception and passive management by exception, could influence teacher effectiveness.

Gaad and Musiimenta (2024), in Uganda, explored the relationship between performance-based rewards and teacher performance in public secondary schools in Mbarara City. The study focused on how both financial and non-financial incentives, as well as teaching experience, influence the effectiveness of teachers in a public-school setting. Using regression analysis, they explored whether these factors had a measurable impact on teacher performance outcomes. The findings revealed that teaching experience significantly influenced teacher performance, with a positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that more experienced teachers tended to perform better. On the other hand, financial performance-based rewards ($\beta = 0.112$, $p > 0.05$) and non-financial performance-based rewards ($\beta = -0.098$, $p > 0.05$) showed insignificant relationships with teacher performance, suggesting that these rewards, as currently structured, do not significantly enhance teacher performance.

In Tanzania, Zalwango (2014) conducted a study assessing how motivation influences the performance of teachers in private primary schools. A descriptive survey design was employed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The sample

comprised 50 respondents, including teachers and head teachers from various schools. The study utilized motivation indicators such as opportunities for career development, performance appraisals, and access to training programs. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to teachers and school heads, and performance was evaluated based on classroom delivery, punctuality, and student outcomes. The study found that, despite limited motivational incentives, teachers demonstrated high levels of performance, suggesting intrinsic motivation or professional commitment might have played a role. However, the focus areas of motivation in this study, career growth and professional development, differ from those of the present research, which assesses motivation through tangible incentives such as rewards, promotions, and recognition. Therefore, while Zalwango's findings provide valuable insights into teacher motivation, they may not directly align with the variables under investigation in this study, particularly within the context of private secondary schools in Nairobi, Kenya.

Chebets (2015) also carried out research to find out if performance-based rewards (monetary and non-monetary) influence the performance of teachers in private primary schools in the Kasarani sub-county, Kenya. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across different private schools in Kasarani sub-county. The performance-based rewards that were studied were group/individual-based incentives, annual bonuses, gift vouchers, free lunches and coupons, recognition and promotion, supplemental pay, insurance benefits, retirement benefits, employees' benefits, and sustainability of compensation programs in the schools. The results indicated that both monetary and non-monetary rewards influenced the performance of teachers. This study was geographically confined to a single sub-county and at the primary school level, whereas the current study expands the scope to private secondary schools across Nairobi County.

Chebonye *et al.* (2021) investigated the influence of transactional leadership style on teacher service delivery in primary schools in Nandi Central sub-county, Nandi County. The target population comprised 1536 teachers drawn from 193 primary schools in Nandi Central Sub-County. Utilizing a descriptive survey research design, the researchers employed both questionnaires and interview schedules to collect data from teachers and head teachers. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across different school zones.

The study specifically focused on the effects of the contingent reward aspect of transactional leadership. It found that while contingent rewards, where teachers are aware that fulfilling specific tasks leads to rewards, are meant to boost motivation, they had a negative and significant effect on service delivery in this context. One interpretation was that assigning overly simplified or easily achievable tasks diminished the perceived value of the reward, thereby lowering overall engagement and professional initiative. The study on transactional leadership style concluded that contingent reward leadership exhibited a negative and significant effect on teachers' service delivery. Under contingent reward leadership, the staff understood their responsibilities to receive rewards for their efforts. However, when head teachers assigned tasks that allowed instructors to easily

accomplish, it did not contribute to service delivery. Therefore, there is a need for additional research on this topic, as enhancing teacher motivation leads to improved service delivery.

4.1 Passive Management by Exemption and Teachers' Job Performance

Passive Management by Exception (MBE-P) is a leadership approach where principals only intervene when problems become severe or errors are unavoidable. This style of leadership is reactive rather than proactive and may have implications for teacher job performance, particularly in environments where guidance and accountability structures are essential. Hasija *et al.* (2019) describe MBE-P as a "reactive approach," where leaders wait for mistakes to occur before taking corrective action. Van Eeden *et al.* (2008) further describe passive leaders as unresponsive and disengaged, intervening only after failures have occurred. Theoretically, passive leadership is sometimes seen as a hybrid between MBE-P and laissez-faire leadership (Chebonye, 2021), often resulting in confusion among teachers and diminished performance.

Bass and Avolio (2002) characterize MBE-P as a hands-off approach where leaders avoid specifying performance expectations until significant issues arise. In a comparative study conducted in the United States, Avolio and Bass (2004) noted that schools where principals practiced MBE-P scored lower in teacher motivation and overall instructional quality. Teachers under MBE-P leadership often reported ambiguity in expectations, leading to inconsistent job performance.

A U.S.-based study conducted in New York City public schools examined the connection between instructional supervision and student achievement, highlighting how absent or minimal supervision impacts teaching quality (ERIC, 2006). The study revealed that teachers perceived school leaders, particularly principals and their assistants, as largely preoccupied with non-instructional administrative duties, offering little support for classroom teaching. Supervision was often limited to evaluative functions rather than developmental dialogue, and professional development efforts were rarely teacher-driven or sustained. These passive leadership behaviors created a gap in instructional support, leading to reduced teacher engagement and stagnant professional growth. The findings align with critiques of MBE-P, where leadership is reactionary rather than proactive, contributing to diminished instructional quality and lack of motivation among teachers. This evidence reinforces the argument that meaningful supervision is critical to fostering teacher performance and ultimately improving educational outcomes.

The negative effects of passive leadership on teacher performance have also been observed in the South Asian context. Farooq, Dilshad, and Qadir (2022) conducted a study in Pakistan examining the influence of various leadership styles, including democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire, on teacher performance while accounting for demographic variables such as teaching experience and qualification. Their findings revealed that laissez-faire leadership, which closely mirrors Passive Management by Exception (MBE-P) due to its non-interventionist and reactive nature, had a statistically

non-significant influence on teacher performance across all demographic groups. This suggests that when school leaders avoid providing timely supervision or feedback, teachers may lack the necessary direction and accountability to maintain high levels of performance. These results reinforce prior findings from broader meta-analyses, such as Judge and Piccolo (2004), who noted that MBE-P had the weakest correlation with employee performance ($r = -0.13$) across multiple sectors. Taken together, these studies underscore the limited effectiveness of passive leadership styles in fostering motivation, professional growth, and instructional quality among teachers.

The limited effectiveness of leadership styles such as *laissez-faire* and passive approaches in influencing employee performance is supported by studies beyond the educational context. In Ghana, Malcalm and Tamatey (2017) conducted a mixed-method study to assess the impact of transformational, transactional, and *laissez-faire* leadership styles on employee performance within the public sector, specifically at the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission. Using descriptive linear regression, the study found that none of the leadership styles examined had a statistically significant impact on employee performance, including *laissez-faire* leadership ($R^2 = 0.056$, $p > 0.05$). These findings suggest that leadership styles that lack direct supervision, feedback, and consistent engagement, such as *laissez-faire* and, by extension, Passive Management by Exception (MBE-P), may fail to provide the structure and accountability necessary for improving performance outcomes. Although the study was situated outside the education sector, its implications are relevant for school settings where passive leadership may similarly lead to disengaged staff and diminished instructional effectiveness. This underscored the need for more proactive and responsive leadership models in improving teacher performance.

Chepkirui, Kitonga, and Pete (2023) explored the use of management-by-exception at the Multimedia University of Kenya. Although the study primarily focused on employee satisfaction, it revealed that many supervisors preferred a passive approach when staff were perceived to be meeting performance thresholds (TRS4, mode = 5, SD = 1.26). However, the study did not assess the long-term impact of this passivity on continuous improvement or innovation in teaching. Also, Chebonye *et al.* (2021), in their large-scale survey of 1,536 teachers in Nandi County, noted that task delegation without adequate follow-up was common in schools where passive leadership traits were observed. While the study emphasized contingent reward, the data implied that the absence of proactive supervision diminished the overall effectiveness of leadership strategies. Njiru (2014) found that some principals, especially in under-resourced public schools, defaulted to passive leadership due to workload and lack of support. His qualitative findings revealed that teachers under such principals often lacked direction and accountability structures, affecting KCSE outcomes and classroom engagement.

Despite the increasing recognition of transactional leadership dimensions, empirical literature addressing Passive Management by Exception and teachers' job performance in private secondary schools in Kenya remains scarce. Most available studies are either situated in public institutions or fail to isolate MBE-P as a standalone

factor. Furthermore, while MBE-P is generally seen as a negative leadership approach, context-specific nuances such as cultural expectations, institutional policies, and teacher autonomy are often overlooked. This study addresses this gap by examining how principals' transactional leadership style, specifically the dimension of Passive Management by Exception and teacher job performance in private secondary schools in Kenya.

5. Research Methodology

A convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Design was used for the study. The target population was 206 schools, 206 principals, and 2099 teachers. The study used systematic sampling to select 20 out of 206 schools, purposive sampling to include all 20 principals from the selected schools, and proportionate stratified and simple random sampling to select 336 out of 2,099 teachers. Data collection tools included questionnaires for teachers and an in-depth interview guide for principals. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), which were processed using Statistical Package for Social Science Version 29. Tables were used to present the quantitative data. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis and presented in the form of narratives and direct quotations.

6. Research Findings

6.1 Principals' Contingent Reward on Teachers' Job Performance

The first research question of this study sought to determine how contingent reward behavior influences teachers' job performance in private secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. Teachers were asked to select the response that best represented their opinions using a five-point Likert scale. The rating scale included: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (UD), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA). Table 1 presents the findings.

The findings in Table 1 reveal that a majority of teachers (56.89%) strongly disagreed that their principals clearly communicate performance expectations to help them improve their job performance, while only 25.6% agreed. This suggests a gap in effective communication, which is critical for transactional leadership, as the style relies heavily on setting clear expectations, monitoring performance, and offering contingent rewards. During interviews, several principals acknowledged challenges in maintaining consistent communication due to heavy administrative responsibilities and large teacher workloads, which may hinder effective leadership interactions. One of the principals emphasized that expectations are communicated through staff meetings, notices, and appraisal systems, but noted that not all teachers respond positively. These findings indicate that transactional leadership in these schools may lack the clarity and feedback mechanisms needed to fully motivate teachers and improve performance.

Table 1: Principals' Contingent Reward Strategy and Teachers' Job Performance (n=327)

Statements	SD		D			UD		A		SA	
	F	%		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
My principal clearly communicates performance expectations, which helps me improve my teaching.	186	56.89%	9	2.75%	00	00		84	25.69%	48	14.68%
When I perform well, the principal offers appropriate incentives that encourage me to continue working hard.	214	65.44%	49	14.98%	9	2.75%		34	10.40%	21	6.42%
Being acknowledged by the principal during meetings motivates me to maintain high performance.	187	57.19%	88	26.91%	11	3.36%		28	8.56%	13	3.98%
Constructive feedback from the principal helps me improve my performance.	56	17.13%	56	17.13%	00	00		56	14.98%	166	50.77
The current reward system in my school encourages me to put extra effort into my work.	214	56.44	26	7.95%	00	00		16.82%	26	32	9.79%
When my contributions are fairly rewarded, I am more motivated to meet performance goals.	27	8.26%	38	11.62%	5	1.53%		215	65.75%	42	12.84%

The findings indicate that a significant majority of teachers (65.44%) strongly disagreed that principals offer appropriate incentives when teachers perform well, while only 10.40% agreed. This highlights a major gap in contingent reward practices, a core component of transactional leadership, which emphasizes recognition, rewards, and reinforcement to drive job performance. During interviews, several principals admitted challenges in providing tangible rewards, citing *“limited school budgets”* and a focus on *“non-monetary recognition such as verbal praise and staff acknowledgments.”* One principal explained, *“We recognize good work in meetings, but financial incentives are difficult to sustain.”* Another added, *“We rely on promotion opportunities rather than frequent rewards.”* These insights suggest that while principals may value teacher performance, their reward strategies lack consistency and may not meet teachers' expectations. This disconnect limits the motivational potential of contingent rewards, emphasizing the need for affordable, meaningful incentives to strengthen teacher morale, accountability, and overall instructional quality.

The findings revealed that recognition and praise from principals are perceived negatively by most teachers, with 57.19% strongly disagreeing that they receive such

acknowledgement, while only 8.56% agreed. This demonstrates a gap in the application of contingent reward behavior, which emphasizes positive reinforcement as a key motivator for improving teacher performance. During interviews, principals acknowledged these challenges, with one stating, *"We try to recognize good performance in meetings, but time constraints and workload make it hard to appreciate everyone individually."* Another principal said, *"Recognition is often informal, but perhaps teachers expect more structured appreciation."* These statements highlight a disconnect between principals' intentions and teachers' perceptions, suggesting that informal or inconsistent recognition may fail to motivate. Effective contingent reward practices require intentional, timely, and visible acknowledgement to boost morale, engagement, and accountability. Strengthening recognition strategies, even though low-cost approaches, could enhance teacher motivation, satisfaction, and overall job performance in private secondary schools. A study by Khaemba and Manini (2022) found a strong, positive, and significant relationship between recognition practices and teacher performance.

The findings reveal that most teachers (57.19%) strongly disagreed and 27.22% disagreed that principals' praise and encouragement enhance their commitment to quality teaching, highlighting a weakness in contingent reward behavior. Principals' encouragement, a key motivator in transactional leadership, appears ineffective or inconsistent. During interviews, one principal admitted:

"We try to encourage teachers through meetings, motivation talks, and informal recognition of their achievements. However, heavy workloads and limited resources make it difficult to consistently appreciate everyone's efforts, which might make some teachers feel overlooked or undervalued despite their dedication and hard work." (Principal 1, 15/08/2025).

This disconnect indicates that praise and encouragement lack structure and visibility, limiting their motivational impact. Strengthening recognition systems could improve teacher morale, accountability, and performance.

The findings show that 50.77% of teachers agreed that constructive feedback from principals helps improve their performance, while only 1.13% disagreed. This suggests that feedback, a key element of contingent reward behavior, positively influences teacher growth and job performance. Principals' engagement through regular feedback aligns with transactional leadership, reinforcing accountability and motivation. One principal emphasized:

"I make it a priority to give teachers timely, constructive feedback after class observations and assessments. I've seen that this builds trust, encourages professional growth, and motivates them to perform better because they feel supported and valued." (Principal 2, 17/08/2025)

The findings reveal that 56.44% of teachers disagreed that the current reward system in their schools motivates them to put in extra effort, while only 9.79% agreed. This highlights a critical weakness in the application of contingent reward behavior, a key element of transactional leadership that emphasizes recognition and rewards to inspire improved performance. The results suggest that existing reward systems may lack structure, meaningful incentives, or alignment with teachers' professional needs, limiting their impact on motivation and job satisfaction. During interviews, principals acknowledged these challenges, with one explaining:

"Our schools face financial constraints, so tangible rewards are rare. We focus on verbal praise and recognition in meetings, but I understand many teachers feel this doesn't adequately reflect their effort or motivate them to go beyond expectations." (Principal 3, 23/07/2023).

This gap between principals' intentions and teachers' perceptions highlights the need for creative, low-cost recognition strategies, such as awards, certificates, or public acknowledgment, to supplement limited financial incentives. Strengthening reward systems could significantly enhance teacher morale, commitment, and instructional quality.

The findings reveal that 65.75% of teachers agreed that fair rewards for their contributions significantly motivate them to achieve performance goals, with only 1.53% undecided. This demonstrates the critical role of contingent reward behavior, a key aspect of transactional leadership, in influencing teacher motivation and performance. When teachers perceive rewards as fair and equitable, they are more likely to feel valued, resulting in greater commitment to their roles, higher accountability, and improved instructional quality. This aligns with research emphasizing that recognition and fair compensation enhance morale and job satisfaction, which directly impact student outcomes. During interviews, one principal stated, *"We have seen that when teachers' efforts are fairly recognized, even though small bonuses, certificates, or public praise, they feel motivated to work harder and achieve more because they know their dedication is valued and appreciated."* These findings highlight that transactional leadership practices centered on fairness and consistency in rewards can effectively drive teacher engagement, professional growth, and overall school improvement, particularly in resource-constrained environments like private secondary schools.

5.2 Passive Management by Exception and Teacher Job Performance

The second question of the study sought to determine how passive management-by-exception (MBE-P) behavior influences teachers' job performance in private secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. Teachers were asked to select the response that best represented their opinions using a five-point Likert scale. The rating scale included: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (UD), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA). Table 2 presents the findings.

Table 2: Passive Management by Exception and Teachers' Job Performance (n=327)

Statements	SD		D		UD		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Feedback from the principal is often given only after performance issues arise.	278	85.02%	13	3.98%	17	5.20%	8	2.45%	11	3.36%
Delayed intervention from the principal sometimes affects my ability to improve on time.	3	0.92%	10	3.06%	49	14.98%	70	21.41%	195	59.63%
I receive little monitoring from the principal unless there is a noticeable drop in performance.	6	1.83%	22	6.73%	4	1.22%	59	18.04%	236	72.17%
My principal rarely provides proactive guidance before issues develop.	268	81.96%	6	1.83%	30	9.17%	20	6.12%	3	0.92%
I feel unsupported because the principal only reacts when things go wrong.	232	70.95%	66	20.18%	6	1.83%	8	2.45%	15	4.59%
The lack of regular oversight sometimes causes avoidable mistakes in my work.	84	25.69%	21	6.42%	8	2.45%	34	10.40%	180	55.05%

As shown in Table 2, an overwhelming majority of teachers (85.02%) strongly disagreed with the statement that their principals provide feedback only after performance issues have been raised. This suggests that, in practice, most principals do not rely heavily on MBE-P. Instead, they appear to adopt a more proactive approach to supervision, consistent with active management by exception (MBE-A), where performance is continuously monitored and issues are addressed promptly. Such behavior is aligned with the core assumptions of Transactional Leadership Theory, which emphasizes structured oversight, corrective feedback, and performance reinforcement as mechanisms for achieving organizational goals.

Nevertheless, the small proportion of teachers (2.4%) who agreed that feedback is only given after problems arise points to the existence of isolated cases of MBE-P within the sampled schools. In these instances, principals intervene reactively, addressing teacher performance only when shortcomings become visible. Transactional Leadership Theory suggests that while MBE-P is part of the transactional framework, it is the least effective dimension since it neglects opportunities for early intervention and continuous improvement. Teachers exposed to this leadership behavior are likely to experience reduced motivation, inconsistent performance, and missed chances for professional growth.

The perspectives of principals largely corroborated the teachers' majority view. Principals emphasized that they intentionally provide regular feedback and close supervision to enhance teacher performance. Most of them argued that timely intervention helps teachers remain organized, improve lesson planning, and uphold

instructional standards. This demonstrates a deliberate avoidance of passive oversight and a preference for active monitoring, which reflects the more effective side of transactional leadership.

Open-ended teacher responses further reinforced the importance of proactive feedback. Teachers highlighted that regular supervision motivated them to prepare thoroughly and remain accountable. They also observed that timely intervention not only corrected weaknesses but also validated effective teaching practices, thereby boosting morale and confidence. One teacher noted that continuous review by principals helped align instructional practices with school objectives, which in turn improved student outcomes.

The findings revealed that a majority of teachers (59.63%) strongly agreed that delayed intervention by principals negatively affects their ability to improve performance on time. This suggests that when school leaders adopt a passive management by exception (MBE-P) approach, where action is taken only after problems have escalated, teachers often experience frustration and diminished capacity to make timely instructional adjustments. In transactional leadership theory, MBE-P is generally considered less effective because it weakens proactive support and accountability structures, leaving teachers to navigate challenges with limited guidance until the issue becomes critical.

The 14.98% of teachers who were undecided may reflect a mixed reality in schools, where some principals apply delayed intervention inconsistently. For these teachers, the effects of MBE-P may not be constant or clearly distinguishable, creating uncertainty in their perceptions of its impact on performance. Nonetheless, the overall trend underscores that passive intervention undermines timely professional growth and compromises instructional quality. Principals' views offered further insight into this dynamic. While most acknowledged the importance of supervision, some admitted that heavy workloads and competing administrative responsibilities occasionally delayed their interventions. One principal explained:

"Sometimes, by the time I finally get to review a teacher's work, the issue has already grown bigger than it should have. It is never intentional; however, the overwhelming demands of school management often make it difficult for me to respond immediately." (Principal 5, 19/08/2025).

This principal's acknowledgment reflects the structural challenges that can foster passive leadership tendencies. Open-ended responses from teachers reinforced the quantitative findings. Teachers emphasized that lack of timely feedback often left them repeating mistakes or struggling to meet performance expectations. As one teacher put it, *"If the principal waits until a problem is visible, it means we lose valuable time that could have been used to correct and improve earlier."* Others noted that delayed supervision sometimes lowered morale, as they felt unsupported in addressing classroom challenges. The evidence shows that MBE-P behavior hinders teacher performance by slowing corrective

action and creating gaps in accountability. Both teacher and principal perspectives highlight the need for more structured and timely supervision to prevent escalation of problems and ensure consistent instructional improvement.

The study findings revealed that a significant majority of teachers (72.17%) strongly agreed that they receive little monitoring from their principals unless there is a noticeable drop in performance. This indicates that in many private secondary schools in Nairobi County, principals tend to adopt a passive management by exception (MBE-P) approach, intervening only after problems become evident. Such a reactive stance contrasts with the principles of effective supervision, which emphasize continuous monitoring and timely support. Within the framework of Transactional Leadership Theory, MBE-P is considered the least effective dimension because it neglects proactive engagement and corrective action until after errors have occurred.

The small percentage of teachers who strongly disagreed (1.83%) and those who were undecided (1.22%) suggest that not all schools experience this behavior consistently. However, the overwhelming agreement shows that MBE-P remains a notable feature in some schools' leadership practices. For teachers, delayed intervention can reduce opportunities for professional growth, lower morale, and limit the ability to address performance issues before they escalate. Principals' views provided important insights into why such passive approaches occur. While most acknowledged the value of supervision, several admitted that administrative demands sometimes hinder consistent monitoring. One principal explained:

"Sometimes the workload is overwhelming, and by the time I check a teacher's performance, the problem is already visible. It's never intentional, but school management duties often delay timely follow-up." (Principal 7, 22/08/2025).

This admission highlights structural challenges that may lead to passive leadership tendencies, even when principals recognize their limitations. Teachers' open-ended responses reinforced the negative consequences of MBE-P. Many noted that waiting for performance to decline before receiving feedback left them feeling unsupported. One teacher wrote, *"We are only corrected when results have already dropped. This makes us feel like the principal is more interested in outcomes than in guiding us along the way."* Another added that such reactive supervision sometimes created anxiety and diminished confidence, as they were uncertain about expectations until weaknesses were highlighted.

From the lens of Transactional Leadership Theory, these findings underscore the contrast between active and passive management by exception. Active MBE ensures that principals monitor performance continuously and address issues before they escalate, fostering accountability and supporting improvement. In contrast, passive MBE, as reflected in the teachers' experiences, tends to erode trust and create a perception of neglect. Bass and Avolio (1994) argued that MBE-P is linked to lower levels of employee motivation and inconsistent performance outcomes.

The findings revealed that a large majority of teachers (81.96%) strongly disagreed with the statement that their principals rarely provide proactive guidance before issues develop. This indicates that, in most private secondary schools in Nairobi County, principals are not primarily characterized by passive management by exception (MBE-P). Instead, they appear to adopt a more proactive leadership style, offering continuous monitoring and feedback to prevent challenges from escalating. This aligns more closely with the active management by exception (MBE-A) dimension of Transactional Leadership Theory, where leaders closely supervise performance and intervene early to ensure standards are met. The 9.17% of teachers who were undecided may reflect uncertainty stemming from inconsistent supervisory practices. For instance, while some principals may consistently offer timely guidance, others might do so selectively, depending on workload or perceived urgency. However, the overall trend strongly suggests that proactive feedback mechanisms dominate in these schools, which in turn supports teacher performance. Principals' responses reinforced this interpretation. Many principals emphasized that timely feedback was part of their intentional leadership strategy. One principal noted:

"I make it a priority to guide teachers before small mistakes develop into larger challenges. Early correction is always easier, and from experience, teachers genuinely appreciate knowing that I am attentive, supportive, and committed to their professional growth."
(Principal 11, 20/08/2025)

Such a statement from one of the principals reflects a deliberate avoidance of passivity in supervision, consistent with Transactional Leadership Theory's emphasis on monitoring as a central component of effective transactional leadership. Teachers' open-ended responses also highlighted the benefits of proactive guidance. Several teachers mentioned that regular monitoring encouraged accountability and motivated them to remain well-prepared. One teacher shared, *"When the principal checks our work consistently, it keeps us alert. We don't wait until mistakes are noticed; we try to do it right from the beginning."* This shows that teachers perceive proactive intervention as supportive rather than punitive, boosting morale and performance.

Still, some teachers expressed concern about lapses that occasionally reflected MBE-P tendencies. For example, a few mentioned that principals sometimes became too occupied with administrative responsibilities, delaying feedback until problems became noticeable. As one teacher explained, *"There are times when we only get attention after performance drops, and by then the damage is harder to undo."* This perspective illustrates the risks associated with MBE-P, which Bass and Avolio (1994) identified as less effective because it allows problems to escalate before corrective action is taken.

Thus, the evidence suggests that while elements of MBE-P exist in isolated cases, they are not dominant in the majority of private secondary schools in Nairobi County. Instead, proactive supervision and timely feedback appear to define principals'

leadership style, helping teachers to improve instructional planning, maintain consistency, and align their work with school goals.

It must therefore be said that study findings, supported by both quantitative and qualitative data, demonstrate that principals generally avoid the pitfalls of MBE-P by adopting a proactive supervisory approach. Grounded in Transactional Leadership Theory, these practices enhance teacher performance, morale, and accountability, while minimizing the risks associated with delayed intervention. Research by Bass and Avolio (1994) and Ng'ethe (2019) supports these findings, showing that proactive supervision under active management by exception fosters accountability and performance, while passive management by exception often leads to delayed improvement, reduced teacher motivation, and inconsistent instructional outcomes.

The study revealed that most teachers (70.95%) strongly disagreed with the statement that they felt unsupported because their principals only react when things go wrong. This indicates that, in the majority of private secondary schools in Nairobi County, principals are not predominantly characterized by Passive Management by Exception (MBE-P) behavior. Instead, teachers perceive their principals as more engaged, offering proactive guidance and continuous support rather than waiting until problems escalate before taking corrective action. This trend suggests that many principals align more closely with Active Management by Exception (MBE-A), which emphasizes timely intervention and consistent oversight.

The small percentage of teachers who agreed (2.45%) or were undecided (1.83%) demonstrates that while isolated cases of MBE-P exist, they do not represent the dominant leadership practice. These responses may reflect experiences in schools where principals are occasionally overwhelmed by administrative duties, leading to delayed intervention. Such tendencies are consistent with Bass and Avolio's (1994) Transactional Leadership Theory, which recognizes MBE-P as a reactive and less effective dimension that can leave subordinates feeling unsupported or demotivated.

Principals' perspectives provided further clarity on the issue. Many emphasized that they intentionally avoid reactive supervision by offering continuous feedback and guidance. One principal explained:

"I believe in walking alongside teachers step by step, rather than waiting until mistakes accumulate. Support should be continuous and intentional, because preventing problems through early guidance is always easier and more effective than correcting them later."
(Principal 9, 21/08/2025).

This proactive stance demonstrates an understanding of the importance of early guidance, which aligns with Transactional Leadership Theory's assertion that consistent oversight ensures performance standards are met and prevents errors from escalating. Teachers' open-ended responses supported this interpretation. Several teachers shared that they appreciated regular feedback and monitoring, which reassured them that their efforts were recognized. One teacher noted, *"Our principal checks in regularly, and this*

makes us feel valued and supported. We don't wait for results to fall before getting guidance." Another teacher added, *"The support we receive motivates us to prepare better and avoid unnecessary mistakes, which benefits both us and the students."* Such comments suggest that proactive supervision fosters a positive work environment where teachers feel encouraged, motivated, and accountable.

Nevertheless, a few teachers highlighted instances where principals became reactive, particularly during busy school terms. As one teacher expressed, *"Sometimes feedback only comes after results have dropped, and by then, it feels like we are being blamed instead of guided."* This shows that while MBE-P is not the norm, it occasionally surfaces due to competing administrative demands. Therefore, the findings demonstrate that most principals in Nairobi's private secondary schools provide proactive support, minimizing the negative effects of MBE-P on teacher job performance. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative data reveals that while isolated cases of passive intervention exist, proactive supervision dominates. Grounded in Transactional Leadership Theory, the evidence underscores that reducing reliance on MBE-P and strengthening consistent, timely feedback mechanisms enhances teacher morale, performance, and student outcomes.

The study revealed that slightly more than half of the teachers (55.05%) strongly agreed with the statement that the lack of regular oversight from principals sometimes leads to avoidable mistakes in their work. This finding suggests that when principals demonstrate Passive Management by Exception (MBE-P) behavior, intervening only after errors have occurred, teachers may feel insufficiently supported in their daily responsibilities. Within the framework of Transactional Leadership Theory, MBE-P is identified as a reactive and less effective leadership dimension because it allows problems to develop before corrective action is taken. In the school context, this can result in inefficiencies, repeated errors, and missed opportunities for professional growth.

The 6.42% of teachers who disagreed and the 2.45% who were undecided reflect the variability of principals' supervisory practices across schools. Some principals may practice more consistent monitoring, while others might lapse into passivity due to competing administrative duties. This diversity underscores the mixed application of transactional leadership styles in Nairobi's private secondary schools. Principals' perspectives provided important context. While most acknowledged the importance of continuous oversight, they also admitted that heavy workloads sometimes prevented them from offering regular monitoring. One principal observed:

"There are times when I am unable to check every detail of a teacher's work until performance results begin to decline. It is not due to lack of concern, but rather the overwhelming administrative demands that restrict how frequently I can supervise." (Principal 10, 23/08/2025).

This admission demonstrates how structural pressures may inadvertently push some leaders toward MBE-P tendencies, even when they value proactive guidance.

Teachers' open-ended responses reinforced the consequences of insufficient oversight. Several teachers reported that delayed feedback resulted in errors that could have been avoided through earlier correction. One teacher explained, *"Sometimes we only know what went wrong after an issue is highlighted, and by then, it feels like wasted effort that could have been prevented with closer monitoring."* Another remarked that such lapses occasionally lowered morale, as teachers felt their challenges were overlooked until they became more serious. However, not all responses were negative. A number of teachers noted that when principals did engage proactively, it helped them refine their teaching practices and avoid repeated mistakes. This contrast illustrates the difference between MBE-A, where leaders actively monitor performance, and MBE-P, where intervention is delayed.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that principals' contingent rewards behaviour positively influenced teacher motivation, syllabus coverage, and classroom management. In contrast, passive management by exception, where principals intervene only after problems escalate, was associated with reduced morale and inconsistent performance. The study recommends that the government develop frameworks emphasizing clear reward systems and accountability measures. Policies should ensure principals are adequately trained to implement transactional leadership strategies effectively, including setting clear expectations and providing timely feedback. The principals should strengthen structured reward systems, professional development, and timely feedback to enhance teacher effectiveness and improve student outcomes.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

As the authors of the journal article titled "Principals' Transactional Leadership Style and Teachers' Job Performance in Private Secondary Schools in Nairobi County, Kenya," we declare that we have no conflicts of interest. All authors have reviewed and approved the contents of the manuscript, and there are no financial interests to disclose. We further certify that this submission is original and has not been submitted for review or publication elsewhere.

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