

# **European Journal of Education Studies**

ISSN: 2501 - 1111 ISSN-L: 2501 - 1111

Available online at: www.oapub.org/edu

DOI: 10.46827/ejes.v11i5.5327

Volume 11 | Issue 5 | 2024

# STRATEGIC PLANNING COMPETENCIES UTILIZED BY PRINCIPALS IN MANAGING EMERGING ISSUES IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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#### **Abstract:**

The study examined the strategic planning competencies utilized by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools in Enugu State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised 462 respondents which made up of all the 231 principals and 231 vice-principals in the public secondary schools in Enugu State. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-developed questionnaire, structured on a 4-point rating scale that ranged from very high extent to very low extent. It was validated by two experts, one in Educational Administration and Planning and the other in Measurement and Evaluation, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu. The test-retest method of reliability of the instrument was used and the data obtained were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.85. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions. The t-test was used in testing the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that principals utilized strategic planning competencies to a low extent going by the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals. There were also no significant differences between the mean ratings of principals and vice principals on their utilization of the strategic planning competencies. Poor utilization of strategic planning competencies by principals implies that it is either that principals were not adequately trained and prepared to strategically manage schools for effective results or that the training they received was no longer adequate to meet the challenges of emerging issues in secondary school management. It was thus, recommended among

other things that Continuous training opportunities should be given to all principals through seminars and workshops to expose them to modern trends and skills in strategic planning for managing emerging issues in their schools through the optimum use of targets, standards, and scarce resources.

Keywords: strategic planning, competencies utilized, emerging issues

# 1. Introduction

Strategic planning basically includes a group of instruments, operations, and concepts structured to help managers, leaders, and planners think and act strategically. The planning process comprises a definition of the goals, a valuation of the resources available for meeting the goals, and the definition of definite plans or initiatives that are intended to achieve the goals. The process usually includes a classification exercise that identifies the highest-priority initiatives. Strategic planning involves planning fundamentally for an organization's success under challenging circumstances. According to Stoner and Freeman (2014), strategic planning is the process of selecting an organization's goals, determining the policies and strategic programmes/projects necessary to achieve specified objectives en-route to the goals, and establishing the methods necessary to assure that the policies and strategic programmes are implemented. Bedian (2017) contributed that strategic planning focuses on an enterprise's long-term relationship with its environment.

Strategic planning competencies are the skills, talents, abilities, and actions which managers (including principals) initiate to make decisions that affect, or are intended to affect, the organization (school) as a whole over a period of time. It spells out what is to be achieved, how it is to be achieved, who is to achieve it and the constraints to its' achievement considering the resources available. Wright, Kroll, and Parnell (2016), viewed strategic planning competencies as the ability for the continuous and collective exercise of foresight and taking informed decisions about the future or as the formulation of basic organizational missions, purposes, objectives, policies, and programme strategic to achieving stated objectives, which include the method necessary to ensure that plan/strategies are implemented.

Strategic competencies are needed for a systematic articulation of the proposed goals and objectives of an organization, the how, and the means with which to achieve the stated goals. Onwuchekwa (2010:6), highlighted 9 basic strategic planning competencies as the ability to formulate organizations' long-term goals, missions, and purposes. Ability to identify current objectives and strategies for effective planning. Ability to analyze environmental changes and plan to adapt to the changes. Ability to analyze the organizational resources, strengths, and weaknesses, and deal with problems, given the available resources and skills. Ability to determine strategic opportunities and threats in an environment, ability to determine the extent of change required in the current strategy. Ability to engage in strategic decision-making. Ability

to establish methods necessary to assure that policies and strategic programmes are implemented. Ability to control and monitor the progress of strategic actions. These nine competencies are intended to help principals determine their targets, capabilities, and a realistic programme for maintaining targets and capabilities. This can help improve managerial and educational effectiveness.

Utilization of strategic planning competence is the principal's" ability to appropriately strategize and plan school goals and missions, raise and manage funds, coordinate staff-student activities, effectively organize time, and enhance curriculum implementation. Emerging Issues in Nigerian Education System Requiring Strategic Planning. The rise in enrolment trends is also another emerging issue. Enyi (2011), noted that the Nigerian Education system is witnessing a rapid expansion at all levels. Such expansion increases its need for more school physical facilities, more staff, and more resources to meet the ever-growing number of students that are progressively enrolling for secondary school education. Consequently, Ogunu (2010), worried that schools are becoming more populated with small classes that have up to forty and seventy students assigned to one teacher. Hence, they should be able to say what competencies the principals possess and fail to possess. It becomes crucial to empirically investigate the strategic planning competencies utilized by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools in Enugu State.

#### 2. Literature

# 2.1 Emerging Issues in the Nigerian Education System Requiring Strategic Planning

The education sector, like the economic sector, needs the use of human, material and financial resources to function. The secondary school sector is the springboard of all educational institutions where students are prepared to make a lasting decision about who they will be in society tomorrow as they prepare to undertake a university study career. This calls for the need to engage in strategic planning to meet this expectation. Many emerging issues in the Nigerian education environment provide the rationale for advocating that principals utilize adequate strategic planning competencies.

One is that considering the introduction of the 9-3-4 system, and Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, secondary education has been experiencing some problems as a result of policy gaps. The issue of gaps in the institutional capacity to deliver secondary education of sound quality is obvious as Durosaro (2014) noted that most institutions do not have the vision whether written or unwritten nor a mission statement to guide their activities.

Some principals claim to be unaware of certain policy directives and regulations making them not to work towards the realization of the goals enunciated in educational policies. Another issue of concern in the management of secondary education in Nigeria is that of inadequate funding. According to a World Bank survey on Nigeria (2012), the federal expenditure on education seems to be below 10 percent of its overall expenditure. For instance, between 2012 and 2017, the total share of education in total federal

expenditure ranged between 9.9 percent and 7.6 percent with the trend showing a downward plunge (World Bank, 2018). The result is inadequate funding evidenced by dilapidated buildings in schools lack of laboratory equipment, a dearth of instructional materials, and insufficient human resource management (Okoye, 2014).

Research has shown that strategic planning is one of the major steps that schools can take to address the challenges they face in enhancing the quality of their programmes in the provision of education (Bell, 2012). Most times many organizational leaders walk around with a virtual strategy locked in their heads—they know where their organization needs to be and the key activities that will get it there but unfortunately, the strategy isn't down on paper and hasn't been communicated thoroughly. As a result, few people are acting on it. Therefore, there is a need to develop a strategy to get to the goals. Wilkinson (2011) gives these reasons why organizations must develop plans. It is to set direction and priorities; to get everyone on the same page; to simplify decision-making; to drive alignment and to communicate the message.

Developing a workable strategic plan means dissecting the organization's objectives and strategies and determining which takes precedence. A strategic plan becomes a management tool that serves the purpose of helping an organization to do a better job because a plan focuses the energy, resources, and time of everyone in the organization in the same direction. According to Mittenthal (2012), a strategic plan is a tool that guides in fulfilling a mission with maximum efficiency and impact. If it is to be effective and useful, it should articulate specific goals and describe the action steps and resources needed to accomplish them.

# 2.2 Components of a Developed Strategic Plan

A strategic plan component at a minimum, should generally include the following sections:

- 1) a vision statement,
- 2) a mission statement,
- 3) an outline of goals, objectives, and activities,
- 4) an assessment of current resources, and
- 5) a strategic analysis.

The principals' strategic plan components under assessment encompass these: vision and mission statements, goals/policy objectives, strategy, time-frame, targets, output, outcome and indicators of performance. These components formed the benchmark of assessment of this study for the researcher. In advanced countries such as the USA for instance (Cook, 2016) explains that Strategic planning follows a four-step process for planning a school-wide programme, conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, managing the inquiry process, designing the school-wide programme, and evaluating the programme. In Europe, schools are still faced with major challenges such as learning skills and attitudes in planning education and practice, the role of new technologies in planning education (e-learning, e-tools and e-networking) and the place

of ethics in planning education however, there have been some major strides made in the sector of school development planning (Deal, 2018).

The importance of a strategic plan document cannot be over-emphasized as a document used to communicate with the organization, the organizations goals, the actions needed to achieve those goals and all of the other critical elements developed during the planning exercise. Kiprop and Kanyiri (2012) contend that plans contain practical guidelines, precise goals and targets and a timetable for attainment. Targets can be articulated without ambiguity and measurements of attainment against them are set out. The central role of planning is the projection of targets looking and thinking forward in time.

In this view, Chemwei, Leboo & Koech (2014) explained the importance of institutions evaluating the conditions in their operating environments, examining competitive pressures, carrying out Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis and identifying strategic issues. These identified strategic issues require that the institution develop a strategic orientation and execution of strategies capable of moving the institutions to their desired future states. This equally implies that the institutions aiming at improving their situation need to engage in practical strategic planning. As Pearce and Robinson (2017) put it, strategic planning and thinking involve making choices and decisions about the long–term future of the organization. A well-developed strategic plan facilitates proper implementation. Finally, it is worth mentioning that schools that are operating without strategic plans are an indication of a lack of commitment to quality management, which may jeopardize the provision of quality education services, leading to low student achievement. This study aims to investigate the strategic planning competencies utilized by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools in Enugu State.

#### 3. Theoretical Framework

The theory on which this study anchored on based was Vroom's Expectancy Theory.

# 3.1 Victor Vroom Expectancy Theory (1964)

Expectancy theory was propounded by Victor Vroom in 1964. The theory states that the force at which one chooses to work at a certain effort level is a function of the perceived value of the outcomes stemming from that level of effort and the expectancy that level of effort will lead to the attainment of those outcomes. More so, the theory is based on the premise that between an action to be carried out and the expected outcome, the constructs of expectancy, instrumentality and valence interact between and among themselves to motivate the performance of the action. The theory is related to this study because for principals to plan diligently for instance, they must utilize strategic planning competencies in managing emerging issues in public secondary and then estimate the value of these emerging issues that are contingent upon performing at that level. More specifically, the theory further states that the force on the individual to behave in a

particular way depends on the probability that the behavior will lead to the attainment of desired goals or outcomes as well as to the perceived value of those outcomes.

This theory emphasises the fact that an individual will act in a certain way based on the expectation that the action will culminate in an outcome positive to him or her. The theory stresses the need for organizations to relate rewards directly to performance and to ensure that the rewards provided are deserved and wanted by the recipient. Adopting Vroom's theory, the study revealed that participating principals unanimously agreed that principals' strategic planning competencies are a vital factor in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools. In effect, expectancy theory holds that strategic planning competencies utilized by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools are strongly influenced by the interaction of three factors expectancy, instrumentality and valence.

Expectancy refers to the perceived probability that a given level of effort will yield a specified performance level (outcome or sets of outcomes). It is a perceived action and outcome relationship that varies from the certainty that an action will lead to an outcome. Vroom argues that action can have a variety of possible outcomes. For instance, the action of studying for an examination can have the direct outcome of a high grade, a moderate grade or a low grade. Instrumentality refers to the perceived relationship between performance and action and an expected reward. Valence refers to the perceived positive or negative value an individual places on potential outcomes. This theory is relevant to this study in predicting the strategic planning competencies utilized by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools in Enugu State.

#### 4. Statement of the Problem

Strategic planning is key to school success. Poor planning is often worse than no planning at all. The school should meet the expectations of the stakeholders. Strategic planning helps school principals to acknowledge the future, spot out significant trends and tendencies, and the need to respond to them skillfully, adapt, and modify systems and structures so as to tackle new challenges and circumstances. Principals are expected to utilize appropriate strategic planning competencies in order to manage emerging issues in public secondary schools. Hence, Principals' utilization of strategic planning competencies is part of the strategies that can be employed to ensure principals' management of emerging issues in public secondary schools.

Since government alone cannot provide all the necessary facilities, resources, and management needed in the schools, principals must employ their strategic planning competencies to plan for more ways of generating funds for schools. One wonders whether the secondary school principals in Enugu state utilize the strategic planning competencies to move their schools forward in the face of these issues. Principals are usually appointed based on experience. Many of them receive little or no training on strategic planning competencies, on the assumption that their prior knowledge and experience have adequately prepared them. Besides vice-principals work directly with

the principals and act on behalf of the principals most of the time in carrying out these functions. Based on the foregoing, the problem of this study put into question form as what are the strategic planning competencies utilized by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools in Enugu State.

# 4.1 Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

- 1) What are the strategic planning competencies required by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools in Enugu State?
- 2) To what extent do principals in public secondary schools in Enugu State utilize strategic planning competencies in managing emerging issues?

# 4.2 Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- 1) There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and viceprincipals on the strategic planning competencies required by principals in managing emerging issues.
- 2) There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and viceprincipals on their utilization of strategic planning competencies in managing emerging issues.

#### 5. Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Ihechu (2021) defined a survey as a method of obtaining information from various groups or persons mainly through questionnaires or personal interviews. The researcher used this design to collect information from a specified population, through a questionnaire on the strategic planning competencies of secondary school principals in Enugu State. The population of this study consisted of all the principals and vice-principals in public secondary schools in Enugu State. Four hundred and sixty-two (462) respondents consisting of the entire 231 principals and 231 vice-principals (administration) in the public secondary schools in the State, made up the population. This number was based on data collected from the Post Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC). Since the population of the study is small, an enumerative census survey involving all 462 respondents was used to avoid sampling errors and bias. A researcher-developed questionnaire entitled "Principals' Strategic Planning Competencies Emerging Issues Questionnaire (PSMCEIQ)" was used to collect data. The questionnaire was designed for both principals and vice-principals. The questionnaire consisted of two sessions. Session A contained two open-ended statements that sought information on the respondents' job designation, and education zone. Session B comprised seventeen items that were concerned with strategic planning competencies. Respondents were required to rate the extent of principals' strategic planning competencies on a 4-point scale that ranged from Very high extent (4 points).

High extent (3 points), Low extent (2 points), and Very low extent (I point). Two experts validated the instrument one from educational management and planning, and an expert in measurement and evaluation from Godfrey Okoye Enugu. The experts made several corrections, including modifications to some items, the research questions, and the rating scale. The corrections from the experts were effected in the final copy of the instrument. The instrument was pilot-tested using 10 principals and 10 vice principals from 10 secondary schools in Enugu State. The test-retest method of reliability of the instrument was used and the scores of the respondents were subjected to statistical analysis based on the Pearson Product Moment Correlation procedure for testing reliability. A coefficient of 0.85 was obtained, which was considered satisfactory for the study. The researcher and six research assistants visited the respondents in their offices and distributed 462 copies of the questionnaire as appropriate. They allowed each respondent some hours to respond to the items before retrieving the filled questionnaire. Repeated visits were made for respondents who could not promptly respond. At the end of the exercise, all the instruments distributed were retrieved. Thus, 462 copies representing 100 percent were retrieved and used for data analyses.

Mean and standard deviation were used in analyzing the questionnaire items for answering the research 'questions: the responses of principals and vice-principals to each item were calculated using mean scores. Then the section means- in each column was calculated. The decision rule for interpreting the mean scores of the data was that 2.50 is the cut-off point for accepting an item as the degree of adoption and strategic planning competence utilized by the respondents. The organized data was then analyzed using a t-test for the hypotheses in order to uphold or reject the null hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. The t-test was used because it is the statistical test that can determine whether a difference exists between two means and whether a significant difference exists at a given probability level.

# 6. Results

**Research Question One**: What are the strategic planning competencies required by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools in Enugu State?

Table 1 revealed that all the items had their mean score ranging from 2.53 to 3.08 which is higher than the cut-off mean of 2.50. This shows that the respondents agreed that all the items are the strategic planning competencies required by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools in Enugu State.

**Table 1:** Mean Ratings of the Items Relating to the Strategic Planning competencies Required by Principals in Managing Emerging Issues

SN	Ability to:	$\overline{\mathbf{X}}$	SD	Remarks
1	Formulate organizations' long-term goals, missions and purposes.	2.81	.65	Required
2	Identify current objectives and strategies for effective planning.	3.05	.73	Required
3	Analyse environmental changes and plan to adapt to the changes.	2.77	.66	Required
4	Analyse the organizational resources, strengths and weaknesses, and deal with problems, given the available resources and skills.	2.85	.69	Required
5	Determine strategic opportunities and threats in an environment,	2.71	.65	Required
6	Engage in strategic decision-making.	2.74	.66	Required
7	Control and monitor the progress of strategic actions.	2.55	.60	Required
8	Determine the extent of change required in the current strategy.	3.08	.75	Required
9	Establish methods necessary to assure that policies and strategic programmes are implemented.	2.71	.65	Required

**Key:**  $\overline{\mathbf{X}}$ - Mean, *SD*-Standard Deviation.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on the strategic planning competencies required by principals in managing emerging issues.

The results in Table 2 showed that the calculated t-value of 0.62 was less than the critical t-value of 1.97 when tested at a 0.05 level of significance with 460 degrees of freedom. This shows that 'the result is significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on the strategic planning competencies required by principals in managing emerging issues is thereby retained. This implies that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on the strategic planning competencies required by principals in managing emerging issues.

**Table 2:** T-test Analysis of the Mean Ratings of Principals and Vice-principals on the Strategic Planning Competencies Required by Principals in Managing Emerging Issues

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	Standard Error	tcal	ttab	P-value	Remarks
Principals	231	2.32	0.53		0.048	0.62	1.97	0.536	Ho upheld
Vice-principals	231	2.29	0.51	460					

**Research Question Two:** To what extent do principals in public secondary schools in Enugu State utilize strategic planning competencies in managing emerging issues?

In Table 3, only item 11 (considering the needs of teachers and students when planning for resource provision) got a mean rating of 2.56, which is above the cut-off point of 2,50. This indicates that the principals utilized strategic planning competencies in considering the needs of teachers and students when planning for resource provision to a moderate extent. More so, items 10, 12, 13,14, 15, 16, and 17 had mean scores ranging from 2.04- 2.42 which fall below the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that principals in public secondary schools in Enugu State utilize strategic planning competencies in managing emerging issues to a low extent as shown by the average mean score of 2.24.

**Table 3:** Mean Ratings of the Items Relating to the Extent of Principals' utilization of Strategic Planning Competencies in Managing Emerging Issues

SN	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remarks
10	Planning clear visions and goals for the school.	2.11	0.45	LE
11	Considering the needs of teachers and students when planning for resource provision.	2.56	0.60	ME
12	Planning job schedules to permit maximum use of skill and discretion by staff.	2.31	0.52	LE
13	Planning with school staff to prioritise strategies for policy implementation.	2.42	0.56	LE
14	Planning for improved students' achievement standards, in line with educational policies.	2.06	0.44	LE
15	Brainstorming and designing with staff, strategies for improved parental involvement in school management.	2.14	0.46	LE
16	Planning supervision to identify staff potentials and weaknesses in performing tasks.	2.26	0.50	LE
17	Planning special projects to motivate students to study hard and desist from examination malpractice.	2.04	0.43	LE
	Average mean	2.24	0.50	LE

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on their utilization of strategic planning competencies in managing emerging issues.

**Table 4:** T-test Analysis of the Mean Ratings of Principals and Vice-principals on their Utilization of Strategic Planning Competencies in Managing Emerging Issues

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	Standard Error	tcal	ttab	P-value	Remarks
Principals	231	2.26	0.50	460	0.048	1.05	1.97	0.293	Ho upheld
Vice-principals	231	2.31	0.52						

The results in Table 4 showed that the calculated t-value of 1.05 was less than the critical t-value of 1.97 when tested at a 0.05 level of significance with 460 degrees of freedom. This shows that the result is not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on their utilization of strategic planning competencies in managing emerging issues is retained. This implies that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on their utilization of strategic planning competencies in managing emerging issues.

# 7. Discussion of Findings

The finding from research question one showed that the ability to formulate organizations' long-term goals, missions, and purposes, identify current objectives and strategies for effective planning, analyze environmental changes and plan to adapt to the changes, analyze the organizational resources, strengths, and weaknesses, and deal with

problems, given the available resources and skills, determine strategic opportunities and threats in an environment, determine the extent of change required in the current strategy, engage in strategic decision-making, establish methods necessary to assure that policies and strategic programmes are implemented and control and monitor the progress of strategic actions are the strategic planning competencies required by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary school in Enugu State. The corresponding hypothesis affirmed that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on the strategic planning competencies required by principals in managing emerging issues.

In the results of research question two, it was found that principals could be more competent in a range of strategic planning tasks. Apart from utilizing competencies in planning school goals and visions and considering the needs of staff and students in resource provision, as the principals claimed, the extent of the utilization of the rest of the strategic planning competencies was low. The vice-principals did not rate the extent of principals' utilization of any of the competencies high, indicating that in the viceprincipals' views, secondary school principals in Enugu State lacked strategic planning competencies. In addition, hypothesis one showed that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on their utilization of strategic planning competencies in managing emerging issues. This goes on to buttress that the extent to which principals utilized strategic planning competencies was quite low. This finding is consistent with Igwebuike (2013), who reported that job experience is a significant factor in principals' competence. The results are also in agreement with the finding of Nwafor (2013) who found out that secondary school principals did not plan their administrative functions and that is why they are ineffective administrators. A reason for this finding might be because due to their longer years of experience, the principals have understood the centrality of strategic planning competencies in school management. Hence, they made more efforts to strategically plan some programmes than their vice principal counterparts.

## 8. Conclusion

The study examined the strategic planning competencies utilized by principals in managing emerging issues in public secondary schools in Enugu State. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that both principal and vice principals are guilty of a lack of strategic planning. That principal and vice principals performed below optimal expectations in strategic planning for school management. By admitting their low extent of utilization of strategic planning competencies, the principals have shown that they are yet to be ideally positioned and prepared to plan for managing emerging issues in their schools through the optimum use of targets, standards, and scarce resources. Without these strategic planning competencies, principals might be handicapped in terms of setting school goals, allocating resources to staff and students based on need, result-oriented supervision, efficient job scheduling, raising academic standards, and curbing

examination malpractices, which are among the essential things needed to turn around secondary schools in Enugu state. There is an adage that says "*If you fail to plan, you plan to fail*". It can thus, be said that in a situation where secondary school principals in Enugu State did not sufficiently possess requisite strategic planning competencies, their extent of engineering school improvement is highly limited.

Finally, it was concluded that principals are highly lacking in strategic planning competencies. This indicates that principals might not be competent enough to manage the schools given the emerging issues, which secondary schools presently face. If the principals who must take the lead in planning their schools to meet the challenges of emerging issues in secondary school management, do not possess sufficient or an appreciable degree of strategic planning competencies, then they are not capable of planning effectively for the future growth of their schools. Hence it is imperative that principals should possess a high deal of strategic planning competencies, which will help them in prioritizing strategies for coping with emerging issues in secondary school management.

#### 9. Recommendations

Consequent to the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Continuous training opportunities should be given to all principals through seminars and workshops to expose them to modern trends and skills in strategic planning for managing emerging issues in their schools through the optimum use of targets, standards, and scarce resources.
- 2) There should be a periodic evaluation of principals' utilization of strategic planning competencies and an introduction of a reward system for excellence and commitment to duty to the principals.

# **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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