



## PRINCIPALS' STRATEGIC PLANNING PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE GOAL ATTAINMENT IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE



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### **Abstract**

*The study examined principals' strategic planning practices for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Three (3) research questions and three (3) corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised 350 principals of senior secondary schools in Rivers State, consisting of 241 males and 109 females. The study sampled 350 principals from senior secondary schools in Rivers State, using a census sampling technique because the population was small. The instrument used for data collection was a 15-item self-structured questionnaire titled: Principals' Strategic Planning Practices for Effective Goal Attainment Questionnaire (PSPPEGAQ). The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical tool, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.80. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. An independent sample t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The findings of the study shows that to a high extent stakeholder engagement, setting SMART goals, and staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practices were utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that strategic planning practices adopted by principals play an important role in the attainment of educational goals in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Therefore, it was recommended that principals should establish regular forums and communication channels such as PTA meetings, community outreach, student councils to involve parents, teachers, students, and community leaders in school planning and decision-making. Also, the ministry of education should organize regular training for teachers and school leaders on instructional leadership, classroom management, and innovative teaching methods.*

**Keywords:** *Principals, Strategic Planning Practices, Effective Goal Attainment, Public Senior Secondary Schools, Rivers State*

### **Background to the Study**

Education remains one of the most potent instruments for societal transformation, human capital development, and national integration. It is universally acknowledged as a cornerstone for economic growth, social advancement, and political stability. Education equips individuals with knowledge, skills, and values needed to contribute to society and national growth. Countries that invest in quality, accessible education often enjoy higher literacy, strong institutions, and economic progress (Agi, 2017). Secondary education serves as a vital link between primary and tertiary levels, preparing students with key skills for higher studies or the workforce. In Nigeria, senior secondary school is crucial for building critical thinking, character, and career readiness (FRN, 2014). In Rivers State, a region of significant economic and cultural importance in Nigeria, the public senior secondary school sector continues to face multifaceted challenges such as resource inadequacies, administrative inefficiencies, and declining academic performance. Addressing these challenges necessitates proactive strategic planning practices by school principals, who serve as the chief executives of their institutions. Principals are strategic leaders who shape their schools' vision and outcomes through effective planning. Their practices include setting goals, managing resources, involving stakeholders, and aligning school activities with



educational priorities. Strategic planning helps schools move beyond routine operations toward clear, measurable goals (Thompson & Harris, 2019).

On the other hand, effective goal attainment refers to the successful realization of specific, pre-defined objectives in a manner that is efficient, timely, and aligned with institutional values and expectations. In educational settings, effective goal attainment may include increased student achievement levels, reduced dropout rates, enhanced instructional quality, and improved school climate. Such achievements are not accidental but are often the result of deliberate planning, competent leadership, and strategic resource deployment. In public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, effective goal attainment remains a pressing concern. The pressures to improve academic performance, respond to diverse student needs, and meet the standards set by educational authorities compel school leaders to adopt strategic measures in goal formulation and execution. Principals, as institutional leaders, must create enabling environments where both teaching and learning thrive, and where set objectives translate into verifiable outcomes. The effectiveness of a school's leadership, therefore, plays a defining role in whether institutional goals are met or missed.

According to educational scholars such as Newman (2023) and Bennett (2024), principals' strategic planning practices for effective goal attainment encompass various key practices, including conducting environmental scans, formulating clear vision and mission statements, establishing collaborative leadership teams, performing regular evaluations, engaging stakeholders, setting SMART goals, and implementing staff development programmes. This study focuses specifically on three critical variables: Stakeholder Engagement, Setting SMART Goals, and Staff Development Programmes. Stakeholder engagement as a strategic planning practice is defined as the proactive process of involving individuals or groups who have an interest in, or are affected by, the decisions and operations of a school in its planning and implementation processes. Stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, local authorities, and community leaders, play a key role in enhancing transparency, trust, and shared responsibility. Van der Westhuizen (2022) found that involving these groups in decision-making improves policy implementation and fosters a stronger sense of ownership in the community. In Rivers State, stakeholder engagement strengthens the legitimacy and sustainability of school plans. Involving stakeholders, principals can build support, enhance resilience, and access more resources. This approach helps mobilize community support, reduce conflicts, and promote collaboration, all crucial for achieving school goals. Setting SMART Goals as a strategic planning practice entails developing objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This strategic planning tool provides clarity, direction, and structure to institutional planning efforts. SMART goals help principals break down objectives into clear, actionable steps, set performance benchmarks, and track progress. This approach enhances accountability and improves academic performance (Kowalski & Tremblay, 2021). In Rivers State, setting SMART goals helps principals manage school operations amid changing policies and funding. This approach ensures better resource allocation, progress tracking, and timely adjustments to achieve school goals.

Staff development programmes as a strategic planning practice are structured initiatives aimed at enhancing the professional capabilities of teaching and non-teaching personnel within schools. Staff development programs, such as training and mentoring, improve teacher effectiveness and administrative skills. These programs help staff adapt to changes and enhance teaching quality, leading to higher motivation, performance, and student achievement (Zimmerman & Trofimova, 2017). In Rivers State, where teachers have limited development opportunities, strategic staff training is key to improving school performance. Principals who focus on staff development build stronger teams, boost morale, and align school goals with excellence. Effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State relies on the successful implementation of key factors such as Stakeholder Engagement, Setting SMART Goals, and Staff Development Programmes. These practices help ensure that schools are not only meeting their objectives but also fostering a collaborative, efficient, and growth-oriented environment that drives long-term educational success. It is against this background, the study examines principals' strategic planning practices for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.



### **Statement of the Problem**

Public senior secondary schools in Rivers State often fail to achieve their educational goals due to inadequate or ineffective strategic planning practices by principals. Despite the critical role of strategic planning in guiding schools towards success, many principals struggle with issues such as unclear goal-setting, lack of stakeholder engagement, insufficient resource allocation, and limited staff development opportunities. These challenges hinder the schools' ability to effectively implement policies and achieve sustainable improvements in student outcomes. As a result, schools fail to create a supportive environment for teaching and learning, which negatively affects the quality of education and student performance in the state. Addressing these challenges through improved principals' strategic planning practices is therefore crucial for achieving better educational outcomes and fostering long-term school success.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study was to investigate principals' strategic planning practices for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of the study sought to:

Determine the extent stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Investigate the extent setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Ascertain the extent staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

To what extent is stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

To what extent is setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

To what extent is staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory that support this study was the Mintzberg's Theory of Strategic Planning, developed by Henry Mintzberg in 1994 cited in Harrison (2024). Mintzberg's Theory of Strategic Planning focuses on how strategic decisions in organizations are made not just through top-down planning but also through a continuous, iterative process of feedback and adjustment. Mintzberg identified five key approaches to strategy formation: deliberate, emergent, realized, unrealized, and intended strategies. The theory asserts that effective strategic planning does not solely rely on rigid, predefined goals;



rather, it is a mix of formal planning (deliberate strategy) and adaptation based on the changing environment (emergent strategy). This model can be applied to the role of principals in public senior secondary schools, as their strategic planning practices must adapt to various external and internal factors such as educational policies, funding, community involvement, and student needs.

The relevance of Mintzberg's theory to the study lies in the understanding that principals in Rivers State need to engage in both long-term strategic planning and ongoing assessment and adaptation. In a dynamic educational environment, where factors such as government regulations, student enrollment, and societal expectations constantly evolve, principals must not only set clear goals but also continuously assess and adapt their strategies to ensure goal attainment. This dual approach of deliberate and emergent strategies allows school leaders to be more responsive and effective in their decision-making processes. Thus, Mintzberg's Theory of Strategic Planning is highly applicable to the practices of principals in Rivers State, offering a framework for understanding how their strategic decisions can be both planned and flexible, leading to effective goal realization in public senior secondary schools.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Principals' Strategic Planning Practices**

Principals' strategic planning practices involve systematic actions where school leaders create, implement, and evaluate plans designed to achieve specific educational goals, focusing on the effective use of resources, instructional quality, and community engagement. This approach helps principals align their decisions with broader institutional goals and ensure that the needs of students and staff are addressed in the planning process. Alvarado and Perez (2022) defined principals' strategic planning practices to the methods that educational leaders employ to establish priorities, allocate resources, and design initiatives aimed at improving academic outcomes and organizational efficiency. Schuster and Wong (2019) described principals' strategic planning practices as the structured efforts that school leaders undertake to shape the school's vision, mission, and goals. Newman (2023) and Bennett (2024), principals' strategic planning for goal attainment involves practices such as environmental scans, clear vision statements, collaborative teams, regular evaluations, stakeholder engagement, SMART goals, and staff development. This study focuses on three key areas: Stakeholder Engagement, Setting SMART Goals, and Staff Development Programmes.

### **Effective Goal Attainment**

Effective goal attainment refers to the successful realization of pre-established goals through deliberate planning, resource allocation, and continuous monitoring, leading to significant improvements in school outcomes and student performance. Olayemi and Okojie (2021) defined effective goal attainment as the process of achieving set academic, administrative, and organizational objectives within a school system through coordinated efforts among leadership, staff, and the community. Effective goal attainment is the outcome of a strategic planning process that leads to the completion of specific goals, especially in educational settings, where objectives such as improved student performance, graduation rates, and teaching quality are the benchmarks for success (Chavez & Torres, 2022). Effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State depends on the principals' strategic planning practices.

### **Stakeholder Engagement as a Strategic Planning Practice for Effective Goal Attainment**

Stakeholder engagement is the process of involving all relevant parties—teachers, parents, students, local government, and the wider community in the development and implementation of school strategies and policies. Stakeholder involvement in strategic planning is key to promoting collaboration, transparency, and better decision-making. When principals engage stakeholders, they build a shared responsibility for achieving educational goals, which can boost school performance and community involvement (Ravich & Singh, 2020). Engagement strategies may include regular consultations with parents, meetings with teachers, and gathering feedback from students and the community about their educational needs. Involving stakeholders helps principals align their plans with educational standards



while addressing the needs of key partners (Petersen & Clarke, 2021). This engagement also fosters a sense of ownership over the goals, increasing the likelihood of goal attainment (Hussein & Karim, 2023).

In Rivers State, involving stakeholders in school planning can improve goal attainment by aligning plans with community needs, boosting accountability, and addressing local challenges like limited resources.

### **Setting SMART Goals as a Strategic Planning Practice for Effective Goal Attainment**

Setting SMART goals refers to creating objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This approach to goal setting is widely recognized for its ability to help schools define clear, actionable targets that can be tracked and assessed over time. Making goals SMART, principals ensure that they are not only focused on long-term outcomes but also on measurable milestones that can guide daily operations and decision-making (Roberts & Allen, 2021). The SMART framework offers clarity and structure to strategic planning, breaking goals into achievable steps with clear success metrics. It helps principals assess whether goals are realistic based on resources, capacity, and external factors, reducing the risk of failure (Gomez & Castillo, 2023). Furthermore, SMART goals serve as benchmarks for tracking progress and adjusting plans as needed, making the process more flexible (Nguyen & Truong, 2022).

In Rivers State, where schools face challenges like limited funding and varying performance, setting SMART goals helps achieve effective goal attainment by improving progress measurement, resource alignment, and focus on priorities, boosting clarity, accountability, and motivation.

### **Staff Development Programmes as a Strategic Planning Practice for Effective Goal Attainment**

Staff development programmes are systematic efforts to enhance the skills, knowledge, and performance of educators and administrators within the school setting. These programmes may include professional development workshops, training seminars, peer mentoring, and other educational interventions that aim to improve staff competency in areas critical to achieving school goals. Effective staff development ensures teachers have the skills to deliver quality education and administrators have the leadership abilities to meet school goals (Olofsson & Hargreaves, 2020). Ongoing training helps educators stay updated on best practices in teaching, technology, and classroom management, improving student outcomes and school efficiency (Nguyen & Hoang, 2021). Principals play a key role in identifying development needs and aligning training with school goals to use resources effectively (Ahmed & Shamsuddin, 2023).

In Rivers State, strong staff development programmes can boost education quality and teacher morale. Prioritizing them helps improve student performance, supports goal attainment, and promotes continuous improvement in schools.

### **Methodology**

The research design used in this study was descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 350 principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State, including 241 male principals and 109 female principals (Source: Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools Board, 2024). The study sampled 350 principals from senior secondary schools in Rivers State, using a census sampling technique because the population was small. The instrument used for data collection was a 15-item self-structured questionnaire titled: Principals' Strategic Planning Practices for Effective Goal Attainment Questionnaire (PSPPEGAQ). A 4-point modified Likert scale was used: Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2), and Very Low Extent (1). The instrument's reliability was tested using Pearson's correlation, with a result of 0.80. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation with SPSS version 20 to answer the research questions. An independent sample t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Mean scores were interpreted using these ranges: 3.50–4.00 (Very High Extent), 2.50–3.49 (High Extent), 1.50–2.49 (Low Extent), and 0.50–1.49 (Very Low Extent). In testing the hypotheses, the null hypotheses were accepted if the Sig. (2-tailed) is greater than (>) the p-value of 0.05 level of significance, and were rejected if the Sig. (2-tailed) is less than (<) the



p-value of 0.05 level of significance. Out of the 350 questionnaires distributed, 345 were returned and used for data analysis, which represents a return rate of 98.57%.

**Research Question 1**

To what extent is stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1 Mean ratings and standard deviation on the extent stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Item Statements	Male Principals' N=238		Female Principals' N=107		Mean Set		DEC
	$\bar{X}_1$	S.D <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	S.D <sub>2</sub>	$\bar{X}_1 + \bar{X}_2$	S.D <sub>2</sub>	
		1			2		
1 Engaging stakeholders strengthens the school's decision-making process.	3.28	.53	3.22	.47	3.25	.50	HE
2 Community participation helps the school better meet students' needs.	3.30	.45	3.38	.41	3.24	.43	HE
3 Involving parents in planning increases their support for school goals.	3.32	.48	3.29	.50	3.31	.49	HE
4 Including students in planning encourages a sense of ownership.	3.23	.52	3.28	.48	3.25	.50	HE
5 Involving teachers improves internal teamwork and staff morale.	3.33	.47	3.23	.55	3.28	.51	HE
Grand Mean Set & Standard deviation	3.29	.49	3.28	.48	3.27	.49	HE

*Decisional Guide: Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) scores were interpreted as follows: Very High Extent (VHE) ranging from 3.50-4.00, High Extent(HE) ranging from 2.50-3.4, Low Extent (LE) ranging from 1.50-2.49, and Very Low Extent (VLE) ranging from 0.50-1.49*

Table 1 presents the mean ratings and standard deviation of the respondents on the extent is stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The analysis presented in the above table showed the following range perceptions for items 1 to 5: Engaging stakeholders strengthens the school's decision-making process (Mean=3.25 and SD=.50), Community participation helps the school better meet students' needs (Mean=3.24 and SD=.43), Involving parents in planning increases their support for school goals (Mean=3.31 and SD=.49), Including students in planning encourages a sense of ownership (Mean=3.25 and SD=.50), and Involving teachers improves internal teamwork and staff morale (Mean=3.28 and SD=.51). These indicated that the respondents' perceptions for items 1-5 showed a High Extent, as their mean ratings fall within the range of 2.50–3.49. Furthermore, the table showed a grand mean and standard deviation (Mean = 3.27 and SD = .49), which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, and the mean ratings fall within the range of 2.50–3.49. This further implied that, to a high extent, stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.



**Research Question 2**

To what extent is setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2 Mean ratings and standard deviation on the extent setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Item	Statements	Male Principals' N=238		Female Principals' N=107		Mean Set		DEC
		$\bar{X}_1$	S.D <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	S.D <sub>2</sub>	$\bar{X}_1 + \bar{X}_2$	S.D <sub>2</sub>	
6	SMART goals help ensure the school's objectives are clearly defined.	3.15	.69	3.27	.55	3.21	.62	HE
7	Setting measurable goals improves performance tracking.	3.28	.57	3.20	.61	3.24	.59	HE
8	Achievable goals prevent staff burnout and frustration.	3.26	.55	3.21	.57	3.23	.56	HE
9	Relevant goals keep school planning aligned with its vision.	3.22	.62	3.33	.47	3.28	.55	HE
10	Time-bound goals encourage timely completion of tasks.	3.38	.51	3.26	.62	3.32	.57	HE
Grand Mean Set & Standard deviation		3.26	.59	3.25	.56	3.26	.58	HE

*Decisional Guide: Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) scores were interpreted as follows: Very High Extent (VHE) ranging from 3.50-4.00, High Extent(HE) ranging from 2.50-3.4, Low Extent (LE) ranging from 1.50-2.49, and Very Low Extent (VLE) ranging from 0.50-1.49*

Table 2 presents the mean ratings and standard deviation of the respondents on the extent is setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The analysis presented in the above table showed the following range perceptions for items 6 to 10: SMART goals help ensure the school's objectives are clearly defined (Mean=3.21 and SD=.62), Setting measurable goals improves performance tracking (Mean=3.24 and SD=.59), Achievable goals prevent staff burnout and frustration (Mean=3.23 and SD=.56), Relevant goals keep school planning aligned with its vision (Mean=3.28 and SD=.55), and Time-bound goals encourage timely completion of tasks (Mean=3.32 and SD=.57). These indicated that the respondents' perceptions for items 6-10 showed a High Extent, as their mean ratings fall within the range of 2.50–3.49. Furthermore, the table showed a grand mean and standard deviation (Mean = 3.26 and SD = .58), which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, and the mean ratings fall within the range of 2.50–3.49. This further implies that, to a High Extent, setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

**Research Question 3**

To what extent is staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 3 Mean ratings and standard deviation on the extent staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State



Item Statements	Male Principals' N=238		Female Principals' N=107		Mean Set		DEC
	$\bar{X}_1$	S.D <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	S.D <sub>2</sub>	$\bar{X}_1 + \bar{X}_2$	S.D <sub>2</sub>	
1 Staff development improves teaching quality and effectiveness.	3.35	.42	3.22	.51	3.28	.47	HE
1 Ongoing training enhances classroom management.	3.20	.63	3.30	.55	3.25	.59	HE
1 Teachers apply new strategies after attending workshops.	3.28	.57	3.23	.62	3.26	.60	HE
1 In-service training addresses gaps in teacher knowledge.	3.32	.59	3.17	.67	3.24	.63	HE
1 Staff development helps adapt to education policy changes.	3.22	.62	3.28	.57	3.25	.59	HE
Grand Mean Set & Standard deviation	3.27	.57	3.24	.58	3.26	.58	HE

*Decisional Guide: Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) scores were interpreted as follows: Very High Extent (VHE) ranging from 3.50-4.00, High Extent(HE) ranging from 2.50-3.4, Low Extent (LE) ranging from 1.50-2.49, and Very Low Extent (VLE) ranging from 0.50-1.49*

Table 3 presents the mean ratings and standard deviation of the respondents on the extent is staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The analysis presented in the above table showed the following range perceptions for items 11 to 15: Staff development improves teaching quality and effectiveness (Mean=3.28 and SD=.47), Ongoing training enhances classroom management (Mean=3.25 and SD=.59), Teachers apply new strategies after attending workshops (Mean=3.26 and SD=.50), In-service training addresses gaps in teacher knowledge (Mean=3.24 and SD=.63), and Staff development helps adapt to education policy changes (Mean=3.25 and SD=.59). These indicated that the respondents' perceptions for items 11-15 showed a High Extent, as their mean ratings fall within the range of 2.50–3.49. Furthermore, the table showed a grand mean and standard deviation (Mean = 3.26 and SD = .58), which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, and the mean ratings fall within the range of 2.50–3.49. This further implies that, to a High Extent, staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4 Summary of t-test analysis result on the significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Respondents' Category	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Male Principals'	238	3.29	.49	343	.323	.567	Accepted
Female Principals'	107	3.28	.48				

P-Value at 0.05 level of Significance



Table 4 presents the summary of t-test analysis result on the significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The result from the table shows a calculated t-value of 0.323, with a significance level (p-value) of 0.567 at a degree of freedom of 343. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the result is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicated that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 5 Summary of t-test analysis result on the significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Respondents' Category	N (345)	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Male Principals'	238	3.26	.59	343	-.578	.713	Accepted
Female Principals'	107	3.25	.56				

P-Value at 0.05 level of Significance

Table 5 presents the summary of t-test analysis result on the significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice is utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The result from the table shows a calculated t-value of -0.578, with a significance level (p-value) of 0.713 at a degree of freedom of 343. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the result is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicated that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent setting SMART goals as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 6 Summary of t-test analysis result on the significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Respondents' Category	N (345)	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Male Principals'	238	3.27	.57	343	-.182	.855	Accepted
Female Principals'	107	3.24	.58				

P-Value at 0.05 level of Significance

Table 6 presents the summary of t-test analysis result on the significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in



Rivers State. The result from the table shows a calculated t-value of -0.182, with a significance level (p-value) of 0.855 at a degree of freedom of 343. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the result is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicated that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The discussion of findings were organized based on each research question:

**The Extent Stakeholder Engagement as Principals' Strategic Planning Practice is Utilized for Effective Goal Attainment in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State**

The findings of the study revealed that to a high extent stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings also showed that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent stakeholder engagement as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings align with the study by Ravich and Singh (2020) which found that when principals engage stakeholders, they build a shared responsibility for achieving educational goals, which can boost school performance and community. More-so, the findings are consistent with the study by Petersen and Clarke (2021) which indicated that involving stakeholders helps principals align their plans with educational standards while addressing the needs of key partners.

**The Extent Setting SMART Goals as Principals' Strategic Planning Practice is Utilized for Effective Goal Attainment in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State**

The findings of the study revealed that to a high extent setting smart goals as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings also showed that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent setting smart goals as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings align with the study by Nguyen and Truong (2022) which found that SMART goals serve as benchmarks for tracking progress and adjusting plans as needed, making the process more flexible. More-so, the findings are consistent with the study by Roberts and Allen (2021) which emphasized that making goals SMART, principals ensure that they are not only focused on long-term outcomes but also on measurable milestones that can guide daily operations and decision-making.

**The Extent Staff Development Programmes as Principals' Strategic Planning Practice is Utilized for Effective Goal Attainment in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State**

The findings of the study revealed that to a high extent staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings also showed that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the extent staff development programmes as principals' strategic planning practice was utilized for effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings align with the study by Olofsson and Hargreaves (2020) which demonstrated that effective staff development ensures teachers have the skills to deliver quality education and administrators have the leadership abilities to meet school goals. More-so, the findings are consistent with the study by Nguyen and Hoang (2021) which found that ongoing training helps educators stay updated on best practices in teaching, technology, and classroom management, improving student outcomes and school efficiency.

### **Conclusion**

The strategic planning practices adopted by principals play a pivotal role in the attainment of educational goals in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Effective planning enables principals to set clear priorities, allocate resources efficiently, and foster a collaborative school culture geared toward continuous improvement. The findings highlight the importance of stakeholder



engagement, setting SMART goals, and staff development programmes as essential components of strategic leadership. For sustained progress and improved student outcomes, it is imperative that school principals receive ongoing training in strategic management and are supported by policies that promote autonomy, accountability, and innovation. Strengthening these practices will not only enhance the quality of education but also contribute to the overall development of the state's educational sector.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance principals' strategic planning practices and ensure effective goal attainment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State:

Principals should establish regular forums and communication channels (e.g., PTA meetings, community outreach, student councils) to involve parents, teachers, students, and community leaders in school planning and decision-making.

The Ministry of Education should mandate and monitor the use of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals in school development plans, ensuring all school goals are clear, trackable, and aligned with state education objectives.

The Ministry of Education should organize regular training workshops for teachers and school leaders on instructional leadership, classroom management, and innovative teaching methods.

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