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The Role of School Counselors in Promoting Sanitation Practices and Resilient Communities to Enhance Child Health and Livelihoods

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Keywords:

School counselors, sanitation practices, child health, livelihoods, health promotion.

Abstract: The study utilized a descriptive survey design to investigate the role of teacher counselors in promoting health and sanitation practices in schools across Anambra State, Nigeria. A purposive sampling technique selected 103 respondents and data were gathered using a structured online questionnaire. The instrument included demographic data, roles, sanitation practices, with responses measured on a 4-point Likert scale. Validated by experts, the questionnaire demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha of 0.65). Data analysis involved calculating frequencies and percentages for each response category. The findings reveal that school counselors significantly contribute to improving sanitation awareness, facilitating community engagement, and implementing effective hygiene programs. A majority of respondents recognized the counselors' effectiveness in collaborating with local leaders, creating awareness campaigns, and connecting students with sanitation initiatives. The study highlights a strong correlation between counselor-led sanitation programs and improved health outcomes for children, including reduced illness rates and enhanced personal hygiene practices. Furthermore, it emphasizes the necessity for ongoing training and support for counselors to maximize their impact on community resilience and public health.

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INTRODUCTION

School counselors hold a significant role in promoting sanitation practices that support improved child health and livelihoods. Their responsibilities go beyond academic guidance and emotional support, encompassing efforts to promote hygiene and sanitation. Educating students about sanitation and hygiene serves as a foundational element in preventing communicable diseases, especially in school environments. School counselors are ideally placed to instruct students on essential hygiene practices, including handwashing, waste disposal, and maintaining clean surroundings. Research from Abah et al, (2024) highlights the effectiveness of school-based sanitation programs in building awareness among students. Counselors often deliver these messages in ways that resonate with students, ensuring the lessons are both comprehensible and practical.

According to Nwadimkpa and Onyeaso (2023), counselors can tailor sanitation education to address the specific needs of their student population, which increases the impact of the lessons. This personalized approach includes essential topics such as waste management, water safety, and personal hygiene, all of which are critical in maintaining a healthy school and home environment. Through their work, school counselors contribute to creating a healthier school culture where children understand how their hygiene behaviors influence their well-being (Akinnubi et al, 2024). Sanitation programs implemented under the leadership of school counselors have a substantial effect on improving health outcomes for students and their families. These programs often address specific sanitation challenges, such as inadequate access to clean water or hygiene-related diseases. Hashmi et al, (2019) reported that schools with counselor-led sanitation initiatives showed a notable decrease in the occurrence of hygiene-related illnesses like diarrhea and skin infections.

Counselors frequently incorporate hands-on activities that allow students to practice hygiene behaviors in real-life situations. These practical activities reinforce the knowledge students gain, boosting long-term health behaviors. For example, Stewart et al, (2019) found that counselor-led sanitation programs not only reduced disease incidence but also contributed to improved school attendance and academic performance due to healthier school environments. Such programs also cultivate lasting changes in students' behavior. Counselors play an essential role in ensuring that sanitation practices become habitual parts of students' lives, integrated into the school's daily routines (Guth et al, 2017). This process creates an environment where hygiene is normalized and practiced consistently.

In addition to their work within schools, counselors significantly influence community involvement in sanitation efforts. School counselors act as connectors between schools and the broader community, facilitating collaboration among parents, local leaders, and health professionals. Patil et al, (2014) emphasize that community participation is critical for the long-term success of sanitation initiatives. Counselors lead efforts that engage parents in school sanitation projects, coordinate community clean-up events, and advocate for improved sanitation facilities within both schools and surrounding neighborhoods. Eden et al, (2024) found that community participation in sanitation programs increased when school counselors led outreach efforts. This involvement included constructing handwashing stations, securing clean water supplies, and improving sanitation facilities. Through these activities, counselors ensure communities understand the long-term benefits of sustained sanitation practices.

Collaborations with local health workers and non-governmental organizations also feature prominently in school counselors' efforts. Agu et al, (2022) reported that these partnerships equip



schools and communities with the necessary resources to maintain sanitation facilities and continue health-promoting activities long after initial programs are implemented. These collaborations enhance community resilience, improving the overall livelihood of the population through reduced hygiene-related illnesses. The study on the role of school counselors in promoting sanitation practices and resilient communities is important for addressing child health challenges in schools. Given the counselor's position to influence behavior, this research highlights how their efforts can boost long-term health benefits and support sustainable livelihoods within communities.

METHOD

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The research was conducted across schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised teacher counselors working in these schools, as they play a critical role in guiding students on health and sanitation practices. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 103 teacher counselors from various schools across the state. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire titled "School Counselors' Role in Promoting Sanitation and Community Resilience." The questionnaire consisted of multiple sections, including demographic data, counselors' roles, sanitation practices, and community resilience-building efforts. Responses were measured using a 4-point Likert scale, with the following weightings: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Agree (3), and Strongly Agree (4). This scale allowed for precise measurement of the respondents' level of agreement with statements regarding their role in sanitation promotion.

The instrument was validated through content validation by experts in education and public health, who ensured that the questionnaire items were clear, relevant, and aligned with the study's objectives. A pilot study involving 20 teacher counselors was conducted to test the reliability of the instrument, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.85, indicating high internal consistency. Data were collected over two months via an online survey platform. Participants were contacted through email and messaging apps, and follow-up reminders were sent to ensure a high response rate. The data analysis involved frequencies which was calculated for each response option, with percentages showing the proportion of respondents selecting "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," or "Strongly Agree." Valid percentages matched the regular percentages, as no responses were missing. Cumulative percentages were also computed to illustrate the total proportion of respondents in each category.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1.
Age Distribution of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 20-28	4	3.9	3.9	3.9
29-39	5	4.9	4.9	8.7
40-50	45	43.7	43.7	52.4
Above 50	49	47.6	47.6	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 shows the age distribution of respondents, with the majority (47.6%, n=49) aged above 50, followed by those aged 40-50 (43.7%, n=45). Younger age groups (20-28 and 29-39) represented only 3.9% (n=4) and 4.9% (n=5), respectively, indicating a predominantly older participant pool.

Table 2.
Educational Qualifications of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid NCE	5	4.9	4.9	4.9
B.Ed	6	5.8	5.8	10.7
M.Ed	49	47.6	47.6	58.3
PhD	43	41.7	41.7	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 presents the educational qualifications of respondents. A significant portion hold a Master's degree (M.Ed) at 47.6% (n=49), closely followed by those with a Doctorate (PhD) at 41.7% (n=43). Respondents with National Certificate in Education (NCE) and Bachelor's degree (B.Ed) comprise a smaller fraction, at 4.9% (n=5) and 5.8% (n=6), respectively.

Table 3.
Gender Distribution of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	4	3.9	3.9	3.9
Female	12	11.7	11.7	15.5
3	53	51.5	51.5	67.0
4	34	33.0	33.0	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 illustrates the gender distribution of respondents. The majority are female (51.5%, n=53), followed by male respondents (3.9%, n=4). Additionally, there is a notable representation of individuals categorized as "3" (11.7%, n=12) and "4" (33.0%, n=34), highlighting diverse gender identities among the participants.

Research Question 1: What is the level of awareness of sanitation practices among school counselors?

Table 4.
Awareness of Proper Handwashing Techniques Among School Counselors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	9	8.7	8.7	8.7
Disagree	3	2.9	2.9	11.7
Agree	19	18.4	18.4	30.1
Strongly Agree	72	69.9	69.9	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 displays the awareness of proper handwashing techniques among school counselors. A substantial majority (69.9%, n=72) strongly agree with the importance of these techniques, while 18.4% (n=19) agree. In contrast, a small number either disagree (2.9%, n=3) or strongly disagree (8.7%, n=9), indicating high overall awareness.

Table 5.
Awareness of Classroom Cleanliness Management Among School Counselors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	15	14.6	14.6	14.6
Agree	20	19.4	19.4	34.0
Strongly Agree	68	66.0	66.0	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 illustrates the awareness of classroom cleanliness management among school counselors. A significant majority (66.0%, n=68) strongly agree on the importance of maintaining cleanliness, while 19.4% (n=20) agree. Conversely, 14.6% (n=15) strongly disagree, indicating that most counselors recognize the need for effective cleanliness management in classrooms.

Table 6.
Awareness of Effective Waste Disposal Practices Among School Counselors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	8	7.8	7.8	7.8
Agree	24	23.3	23.3	31.1
Strongly Agree	71	68.9	68.9	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 presents the awareness of effective waste disposal practices among school counselors. A significant majority (68.9%, n=71) strongly agree on the importance of these practices, while 23.3% (n=24) agree. In contrast, a smaller percentage of respondents (7.8%, n=8) strongly

disagree, suggesting a high level of awareness regarding effective waste disposal among counselors.

Table 7.
Awareness of Regular Sanitation of School Facilities Among School Counselors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	19	18.4	18.4	18.4
Agree	14	13.6	13.6	32.0
Strongly Agree	70	68.0	68.0	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 illustrates the awareness of regular sanitation of school facilities among school counselors. A substantial majority (68.0%, n=70) strongly agree on the necessity of regular sanitation practices, while 13.6% (n=14) agree. However, a notable percentage (18.4%, n=19) strongly disagree, indicating some variability in awareness regarding the importance of sanitation among counselors.

Table 8.
Awareness of Personal Hygiene Standards Among School Counselors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	12	11.7	11.7	11.7
Disagree	8	7.8	7.8	19.4
Agree	21	20.4	20.4	39.8
Strongly Agree	62	60.2	60.2	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 presents the awareness of personal hygiene standards among school counselors. A significant majority (60.2%, n=62) strongly agree that personal hygiene standards are important, while 20.4% (n=21) agree. Conversely, 11.7% (n=12) strongly disagree, and 7.8% (n=8) disagree, highlighting a strong overall awareness of personal hygiene standards among counselors.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of counselor-led sanitation programs on child health?

Table 9.
Impact of Counselor-Led Sanitation Programs on Children's Health Awareness

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	16	15.5	15.5	15.5

Disagree	3	2.9	2.9	18.4
Agree	44	42.7	42.7	61.2
Strongly Agree	40	38.8	38.8	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 illustrates the impact of counselor-led sanitation programs on children's health awareness. A majority of respondents agree (42.7%, n=44) or strongly agree (38.8%, n=40) that these programs enhance children's health awareness. Conversely, 15.5% (n=16) strongly disagree, while 2.9% (n=3) disagree, indicating a positive perception of the programs' effectiveness among the majority of respondents.

Table 10.
Impact of Counselor-Led Sanitation Programs on Illness Reduction

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
Disagree	27	26.2	26.2	28.2
Agree	54	52.4	52.4	80.6
Strongly Agree	20	19.4	19.4	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 10 presents the impact of counselor-led sanitation programs on illness reduction among children. A significant majority, 52.4% (n=54), agree that these programs contribute to reducing illnesses, while 19.4% (n=20) strongly agree. In contrast, only 1.9% (n=2) strongly disagree, and 26.2% (n=27) disagree, indicating overall positive sentiment regarding the effectiveness of these programs in minimizing health issues.

Table 11.
Role of Counselor-Led Sanitation Programs in Preventing School-Related Infections

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	5	4.9	4.9	4.9
Disagree	2	1.9	1.9	6.8
Agree	71	68.9	68.9	75.7
Strongly Agree	25	24.3	24.3	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 11 illustrates the role of counselor-led sanitation programs in preventing school-related infections. A substantial majority, 68.9% (n=71), agree that these programs effectively contribute to infection prevention, with an additional 24.3% (n=25) strongly agreeing. Only a

small minority, 4.9% (n=5) strongly disagree, and 1.9% (n=2) disagree, reflecting strong support for the efficacy of these initiatives in maintaining health within schools.

Table 12.
Contribution of Counselor-Led Sanitation Programs to Healthier Environments

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	7	6.8	6.8	6.8
Disagree	11	10.7	10.7	17.5
Agree	53	51.5	51.5	68.9
Strongly Agree	32	31.1	31.1	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 12 presents the contribution of counselor-led sanitation programs to creating healthier environments. A majority of respondents, 51.5% (n=53), agree that these programs positively impact environmental health, while 31.1% (n=32) strongly agree. Conversely, 6.8% (n=7) strongly disagree, and 10.7% (n=11) disagree, indicating overall support for the effectiveness of these initiatives in enhancing school environments.

Table 13.
Influence of Counselor-Led Sanitation Programs on Personal Hygiene Practices

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	10	9.7	9.7	9.7
Agree	46	44.7	44.7	54.4
Strongly Agree	47	45.6	45.6	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 13 illustrates the influence of counselor-led sanitation programs on personal hygiene practices. A significant 45.6% (n=47) of respondents strongly agree that these programs enhance personal hygiene, while 44.7% (n=46) agree. Conversely, 9.7% (n=10) disagree, highlighting a strong positive perception of the programs' effectiveness in promoting hygiene among students.

Research Question 3: What role do school counselors play in mobilizing community support for sanitation?

Table 14.
Role of Counselors in Collaborating with Local Leaders for Sanitation Improvement

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Valid	Disagree	19	18.4	18.4	18.4
	Agree	55	53.4	53.4	71.8
	Strongly Agree	29	28.2	28.2	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 14 presents the role of counselors in collaborating with local leaders for sanitation improvement. A majority of respondents, 53.4% (n=55), agree that counselors effectively collaborate, while 28.2% (n=29) strongly agree. Conversely, 18.4% (n=19) disagree, indicating overall support for counselors' involvement in sanitation efforts.

Table 15.
Role of Counselors in Creating Awareness Campaigns About Sanitation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	7	6.8	6.8	6.8
	Disagree	19	18.4	18.4	25.2
	Agree	55	53.4	53.4	78.6
	Strongly Agree	22	21.4	21.4	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 15 outlines the role of counselors in creating awareness campaigns about sanitation. A significant majority, 53.4% (n=55), agree that counselors are effective in this role, while 21.4% (n=22) strongly agree. In contrast, 18.4% (n=19) disagree, indicating a strong overall perception of counselors' involvement in promoting sanitation awareness.

Table 16.
Role of Counselors in Connecting Students with Local Sanitation Initiatives

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	4.9	4.9	4.9
	Disagree	20	19.4	19.4	24.3
	Agree	56	54.4	54.4	78.6
	Strongly Agree	22	21.4	21.4	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 16 highlights the role of counselors in connecting students with local sanitation initiatives. A notable 54.4% (n=56) of respondents agree that counselors effectively facilitate these connections, while 21.4% (n=22) strongly agree. Conversely, 19.4% (n=20) disagree,

indicating a positive perception of counselors' engagement in linking students to sanitation programs.

Table 17.
Role of Counselors in Partnering with Organizations for Public Sanitation Enhancement

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
Disagree	20	19.4	19.4	21.4
Agree	51	49.5	49.5	70.9
Strongly Agree	30	29.1	29.1	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 17 examines the role of counselors in partnering with organizations to enhance public sanitation. Approximately 49.5% (n=51) of respondents agree that counselors are effective in these partnerships, while 29.1% (n=30) strongly agree. In contrast, 19.4% (n=20) disagree, indicating a generally positive perception of counselors' collaborative efforts in public sanitation.

Table 18.
Role of Counselors in Supporting Student-Led Community Cleanliness Projects

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	9	8.7	8.7	8.7
Disagree	8	7.8	7.8	16.5
Agree	65	63.1	63.1	79.6
Strongly Agree	21	20.4	20.4	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 18 highlights the role of counselors in supporting student-led community cleanliness projects. A significant majority, 63.1% (n=65), agree that counselors play an effective role, while 20.4% (n=21) strongly agree. Only a small percentage, 8.7% (n=9) strongly disagree, reflecting a positive perception of counselors' involvement in promoting cleanliness initiatives among students.

Hypothesis: Counselor-led sanitation programs have no significant impact on child health outcomes

Table 19.
ANOVA Results for the Impact of Counselor-Led Sanitation Programs on Child Health

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	109.301	3	36.434	7.415	.000
Within Groups	486.446	99	4.914		
Total	595.748	102			

Table 19 presents the ANOVA results, revealing the impact of counselor-led sanitation programs on child health. The sum of squares between groups is 109.301, with 3 degrees of freedom (df), yielding a mean square of 36.434. The F-value is 7.415, indicating a significant effect of the programs on child health outcomes. The significance level (Sig.) is .000, which is below the conventional alpha level of 0.05, suggesting strong evidence against the null hypothesis. The within-group sum of squares is 486.446 with 99 degrees of freedom, resulting in a mean square of 4.914.

Discussion

Research Question 1 explores the level of awareness of sanitation practices among school counselors, revealing encouraging findings across various practices. A significant majority of counselors strongly agree on the importance of proper handwashing techniques, indicating a high level of awareness. In contrast, a related study found only moderate awareness among health educators, suggesting a need for improvement in other educational sectors (Aminu and Udeze, 2023). Similarly, a high percentage of counselors recognize the importance of classroom cleanliness management, which aligns with the work of Iordye and Jato, T. (2023), who highlighted the critical role of cleanliness in promoting a conducive learning environment. Furthermore, a substantial number of counselors express agreement on effective waste disposal practices, contrasting with an earlier study that reported lower awareness levels among secondary school teachers (Akinnubi et al, 2024). Additionally, while many counselors recognize the necessity of regular sanitation practices, the notable percentage of those who strongly disagree reflects some variability in understanding.

Research Question 2 investigates the impact of counselor-led sanitation programs on child health, revealing a generally positive influence across multiple dimensions. As illustrated, a significant majority agree that these programs enhance children's health awareness, a finding that aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of educational initiatives in health promotion (Nwadiimkpa & Onyeaso, 2023). In contrast, studies have shown varied results in different contexts, where respondents acknowledged health education's effectiveness in rural settings (Abah et al, 2024). Moreover, the data indicates that these programs contribute to reducing illness and preventing school-related infections, corroborating findings by Wada et al, (2022), who reported a decrease in absenteeism due to improved sanitation practices. Additionally, the reported positive influence on personal hygiene practices among students reflects the importance of consistent messaging and support from counselors, which is supported by this finding agreeing with recent literature highlighting the important role of school-based health programs (Ughasoro et al, 2023). The ANOVA results further confirm a significant effect of counselor-led initiatives on child health outcomes, suggesting that continued investment in such programs is essential for promoting healthier school environments and enhancing overall student well-being.

Research Question 3 examines the role of school counselors in mobilizing community support for sanitation, showcasing their significant contributions across various dimensions. Respondents agree that counselors effectively collaborate with local leaders for sanitation improvement, a finding that aligns with recent research indicating that school counselors are important in facilitating community partnerships for health initiatives (Agu et al, 2022). In contrast, a study by Eden et al, (2024) reported lower engagement levels among counselors in rural areas, emphasizing the need for targeted training to enhance their involvement. Furthermore, the role of counselors in creating awareness campaigns is underscored, with 53.4% of respondents recognizing their effectiveness in this area (Table 15). This finding agrees with Patil et al, (2014), who found that awareness campaigns led by school counselors significantly impact community hygiene behaviors. In a related study, researchers noted that counselors also successfully connect students with local sanitation initiatives, with 54.4% of respondents affirming this contribution (Table 16), supporting previous literature on counselors' outreach efforts (Guth et al, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the role of school counselors in promoting sanitation practices and boosting resilient communities that significantly enhance child health and livelihoods. Findings indicate that counselors serve as vital links in collaborating with local leaders, raising awareness, and connecting students to sanitation initiatives, which collectively improve health outcomes. Their active involvement in creating and implementing sanitation programs leads to heightened health awareness, reduced illness rates, and improved hygiene practices among children. The study also highlights the importance of ongoing training and resources for school counselors, enhancing their effectiveness in mobilizing community support for sanitation initiatives. Empowering counselors enables schools to act as catalysts for positive change, creating healthier environments that support children's overall well-being. Ultimately, proactive engagement of school counselors in sanitation efforts not only contributes to immediate health benefits for children but also establishes a foundation for sustainable community development. As communities become more resilient through improved sanitation practices, the long-term implications for child health and livelihoods gain increasing significance, underscoring the critical need for continued investment in school counseling programs within broader public health strategies.

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