MERITS OF SAFETY PRACTICES WITHIN SCHOOL CULTURE MANAGEMENT FOR IMPROVED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN RURAL PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS WEST SENATORIAL DISTRICT

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Abstract: This study was conducted to examine merits of safety practices within school culture management for improved academic achievement in rural public secondary schools in Rivers West Senatorial District. Employing a descriptive survey design, the research targeted a population of 1,520 school staff, including 97 administrators and 1,423 teachers. A sample size of 400 participants was determined using the Taro Yamane formula, with a two-stage sampling technique integrating both stratified and disproportionate sampling methods. The final sample comprised 90 principals and 310 teachers from eight Local Government Areas (LGAs): Abua–Odual, Ahoada East, Ahoada West, Akuku-Toru, Asari-Toru, Bonny, Degema, and Ogba–Egbema–Ndoni. Data were collected through the Merits of Safety Practices within School Culture Management Questionnaire (MSPSCMQ), which underwent rigorous validation by experts and comprised 15 items distributed across three sections. Reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.78. Of the distributed questionnaires, 305 were returned, yielding an overall response rate of 76.25%. The study utilized mean scores and standard deviation to address research questions while hypotheses were tested using z-tests. Findings indicated significant inadequacies in safety practices affecting students' academic performance, leading to recommendations for comprehensive safety training, infrastructure improvements, and enhanced counseling services. The study underscores the imperative need for a holistic approach to safety in rural public secondary schools to foster a conducive learning environment.
Keywords: Safety practices; School culture management; Rural public secondary schools

1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Rural schools in Nigeria are crucial for national development but face systemic challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and limited access to educational resources. These schools are vital for fostering a literate and skilled populace that contributes to the nation's economic and social growth [1]. Therefore, effective school culture management that emphasizes safety practices is essential for creating a conducive learning environment. When school administrators prioritize safety, they enhance student performance and overall school effectiveness, as students who feel safe are more likely to engage in their studies and participate in activities. Conversely, neglecting safety can lead to negative outcomes, including increased violence, bullying, and mental health issues [2]. Effective school culture management involves establishing a positive climate that prioritizes safety, respect, and collaboration [3]. Key aspects of this management may include strong leadership practices, stakeholder engagement, and the consistent implementation of safety protocols. Prioritizing these elements may significantly improve the educational experience and academic success of students in rural settings.

In Rivers State, particularly the Rivers West Senatorial District, the rural nature of the area demands a customized approach to school culture management that prioritizes safety practices due to the unique challenges facing rural schools. This district, located in southern Nigeria, is known for its cultural diversity and primarily agrarian economy. However, its geographical and socio-economic conditions contribute to challenges for education. Many schools in the district are isolated and lack adequate supervision and essential safety measures to protect students [4]. Therefore, effective school culture management must emphasize safety practices to mitigate risks and enhance students' educational experiences. Safety practices encompass physical security, emotional well-being initiatives, and health protocols, forming the foundation for a conducive learning environment. Together, these factors help create a safe learning environment linked to better academic outcomes, including higher test scores and graduation rates. Thus, they are related to improved academic performance [5]. Therefore, this study sought to determine merits of safety practices within school culture management for improved academic achievement in rural public secondary schools in Rivers West Senatorial District.

2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the critical role of safety measures in fostering academic achievement, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding their specific impact on rural public secondary schools within school culture management practices, particularly in Nigeria's Rivers West Senatorial District. With many schools isolated and lacking adequate safety measures, the absence of a structured approach to school culture management hinders students' educational experiences and academic performance. Key variables—such as physical safety measures, emotional support systems, and health-related protocols within school culture management practices—have yet to be comprehensively evaluated in this context. Thus, this forms the crux of the study.

3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was aimed at investigating merits of safety practices within school culture management for improved academic achievement in rural public secondary schools in Rivers West Senatorial District. Specifically, the study sought to:
1. ascertain the merits of existing physical safety measures for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District;
2. measure the merits of existing emotional support systems for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District; and,
3. examine the merits of existing health-related practices for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District.

3.1 Research Questions

1. What are the merits of existing physical safety measures for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District?
2. What are the merits of existing emotional support systems for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District?
3. What are the merits of existing health-related practices for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District?

3.2 Hypotheses

The following three (3) null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level.
1. There is no significant difference in mean scores between school administrators and teachers' opinion on the merits of existing physical safety measures for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District.
2. There is no significant difference in mean scores between school administrators and teachers' opinion on the merits of existing emotional support systems for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District.
3. There is no significant difference in mean scores between school administrators and teachers' opinion on the merits of existing health-related practices for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District.

3.3 Conceptual Framework

This study's framework is centered on merits of safety practices within school culture management for improved academic achievement in rural public secondary schools in Rivers West Senatorial District, as visually depicted below.
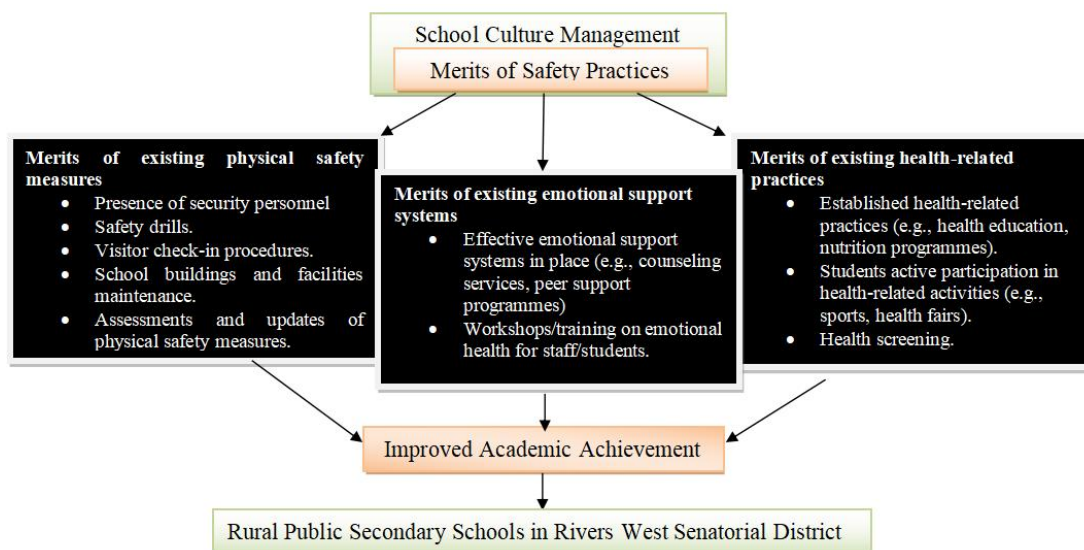
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework Showing the Relationship Between Variables
Source: Researchers' conceptualization (2024).

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "merits of safety practices" refers to the benefits and positive outcomes derived from implementing safety protocols and measures within an organizational context, particularly in educational settings. Safety practices encompass a range of strategies designed to protect students, staff, and visitors from potential harm, including physical, emotional, and health-related aspects. In the context of school culture management, these practices are integral in establishing a secure and supportive environment that promotes student learning, sense of belonging and overall well-being. School culture management involves the deliberate shaping of the values, beliefs, and behaviours that characterize the school environment [3]. It plays a critical role in secondary schools, especially in rural public settings, where resources may be limited, and challenges unique to the community may arise.

The effective management of school culture requires a strong focus on safety practices, as they are pivotal in creating an atmosphere conducive to learning. In this regard, the administrative competencies of school leaders become paramount. Administrators are expected to possess the skills to assess risks, implement safety protocols, and foster a culture of safety that permeates every aspect of school life. The presence of security personnel is one significant merit of safety practices that enhances the school's safety culture[6]. According to Ogbo et al. [7], having trained security personnel on-site not only deters potential threats but also reassures students and staff, fostering a sense of security that is essential for focused learning. Complementing this, Graham et al. emphasize that a secure environment positively influences students' emotional and psychological well-being[5], further supporting their academic endeavors. Safety drills constitute another critical component of effective safety practices. Gairín and Castro point out that regular safety drills prepare students and staff for emergency situations[8], instilling confidence and familiarity with protocols that can save lives. In tandem with safety drills, visitor check-in procedures are vital for maintaining a secure school environment. Adejare highlights that stringent visitor management helps monitor who enters the premises[9], thereby reducing potential risks. Okoh and Afangideh also underscore the importance of effective communication and supervision in ensuring safety[10], suggesting that clear visitor policies enhance overall security. Maintenance of school buildings and facilities plays a crucial role in safeguarding the well-being of students and staff. Afriani et al. admit that well-maintained facilities prevent accidents and injuries[11], thereby ensuring a conducive learning environment.

Regular assessments and updates of physical safety measures are essential for adapting to emerging threats. Naji et al. substantiate that continuous evaluation of safety protocols reinforces a culture of safety and promotes positive outcomes for students and staff alike[12]. Emotional support systems are equally vital in fostering a safe and productive school culture. Effective counseling services and peer support programmes provide essential emotional resources for students navigating challenges. Cabrera, Larrañaga, and Yubero point out that comprehensive emotional support systems reduce instances of bullying and create a more inclusive environment[2], ultimately enhancing academic performance. Furthermore, workshops and training on emotional health for both staff and students are critical. Graham et al. agree that equipping educators with the skills to address emotional health issues leads to improved student outcomes[5], as a well-prepared staff is better able to support their students. Health-related practices, such as health education and nutrition programmes, are also instrumental in promoting a safe school culture. Shikalepo highlights that health education empowers students to make informed decisions about their well-being[13], while active participation in health-related activities, like sports and health fairs, encourages a holistic approach to health. Rajan et al. corroborate the assertion that engaging students in health initiatives can lead to

improved physical and mental health[14], which positively impacts academic performance. Moreover, regular health screenings are vital for early identification and intervention of health issues. Fiorentino et al. stress that proactive health measures not only ensure students' well-being but also contribute to lower absenteeism rates[1], thereby enhancing academic achievement.

5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 Ubuntu Safety Model

Desmond Mpilo Tutu introduced the Ubuntu safety model in 1999, highlighting the philosophy of interconnectedness. This concept asserts that individual well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of others, encapsulated in the phrase "I am because we are"[27]. The Ubuntu model promotes a culture of mutual respect, empathy, and support, making it particularly relevant for managing school culture. By fostering a supportive environment, schools can encourage all members to take responsibility for each other's safety. Implementing Ubuntu principles allows for peer support systems and mentorship programmes, creating an atmosphere where every student feels valued and protected. This approach enhances physical safety, emotional support systems, and health practices essential for a conducive learning environment.

5.2 Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design, focusing on a total of 1,520 school staff, which included 97 administrators and 1,423 teachers. The sample size of 400 participants was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula. A two-stage sampling technique was utilized, incorporating both stratified and disproportionate sampling methods. Consequently, the sample consisted of 90 secondary school administrators and 310 teachers from rural areas across the eight Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the Rivers West Senatorial District: Abua–Odual, Ahoada East, Ahoada West, Akuku-Toru, Asari-Toru, Bonny, Degema, and Ogba–Egbema–Ndoni. Data collection was carried out using a self-structured instrument called the Merits of Safety Practices within School Culture Management Questionnaire (MSPSCMQ). This questionnaire underwent thorough validation by three experts and included 15 items divided into three sections. Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The reliability of the MSPSCMQ was confirmed with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.78. Out of the distributed copies of questionnaire, 305 copies were completed and returned—72 from school administrators (72/90 x 100 = 80% return rate) and 233 from teachers (233/310 x 100 = 75.16% return rate), resulting in an overall return rate of 76.25% (305/400 x 100). The study addressed the research questions using mean and standard deviation, while hypotheses were tested through z-tests.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Answer to Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the merits of existing physical safety measures for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District?

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Physical Safety Measures Impacting Management of School Culture in Rural Public Secondary Schools in Rivers West Senatorial District

S/N	Test Items- Merits of Existing Physical Safety Measures	Administrators (N = 72)		Teachers (N = 233)		Mean Set (xx)	Remarks
		$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd		
1.	I believe that while physical safety measures are in place, incidents of bullying and violence still occur and need further attention.	2.47	0.57	2.66	0.63	2.57	Agreed
2.	In my experience, the students are not satisfied with the existing perimeter fence, thereby causing distraction during school activities.	2.68	0.64	2.59	0.61	2.64	Agreed
3.	Although the physical layout of my school includes safety features, there are still areas that could pose risks during emergencies.	2.93	0.71	2.61	0.62	2.77	Agreed
4.	The existing security personnel, if given more attention, will improve in their functions.	2.52	0.59	2.58	0.61	2.55	Agreed
5	The presence of first aid kits in my school is helpful, but access to trained personnel during emergencies is often limited.	2.91	0.71	2.65	0.63	2.78	Agreed
	Cluster Mean/SD	**2.70**	**0.66**	**2.62**	**0.62**	**2.62**	**Agreed**

Results in Table 1 present the mean and standard deviation scores of the evaluation of the merits of existing physical safety measures for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District. The cluster mean score for the administrators is 2.70 with a standard deviation of 0.66, while the cluster mean score for the teachers is 2.62 with a standard deviation of 0.62, indicating a general agreement regarding the perceived merits of these safety measures. The overall cluster mean score of 2.62 surpasses the criterion mean score of 2.5, suggesting a significant level of agreement among both groups on the merits of the existing safety measures. The majority of specific items evaluated fall under the "agreed" category, indicating that both administrators and teachers recognize the positive aspects of these safety measures in promoting a supportive school culture and potentially enhancing academic performance.

Research Question 2: What are the merits of existing emotional support systems for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District?

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Emotional Support Systems Impacting Management of School Culture in Rural Public Secondary Schools in Rivers West Senatorial District

S/N	Test Items- Merits of Existing Emotional Support Systems	Administrators (N = 72)		Teachers (N = 233)		Mean Set (xx)	Remarks
		$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd		
6.	Though peer support programmes exist in my school, I believe they do not always effectively address students' emotional needs.	2.74	0.66	2.65	0.63	2.70	Agreed
7.	While we have counselors available, the accessibility of emotional support for all students is inconsistent.	2.70	0.64	2.53	0.59	2.62	Agreed
8.	The availability of mental health resources in my school is helpful, but access to these resources is often limited for students in need.	2.71	0.65	2.63	0.62	2.67	Agreed
9.	I believe that while emotional support systems are in place, issues like stress and anxiety among students still need further attention.	2.68	0.64	2.60	0.61	2.64	Agreed
10	I recognize that emotional support initiatives can enhance a positive school culture, but more structured events involving parents and guardians could foster a greater sense of community.	2.89	0.70	2.94	0.72	2.92	Agreed
	Cluster Mean/SD	**2.74**	**0.66**	**2.67**	**0.63**	**2.71**	**Agreed**

Results in Table 2 present the mean and standard deviation scores of the evaluation of the merits of existing emotional support systems for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District. The cluster mean score for the administrators is 2.74 with a standard deviation of 0.66, while the cluster mean score for the teachers is 2.67 with a standard deviation of 0.63, indicating a general agreement regarding the perceived merits of these emotional support systems. The overall cluster mean score of 2.71 exceeds the criterion mean score of 2.5, suggesting a significant level of agreement between the strata on the merits of the existing emotional support systems. The majority of specific items evaluated fall under the "agreed" category, indicating that both administrators and teachers recognize the positive aspects of these emotional support systems, such as the potential to enhance a positive school culture, even though they also acknowledge issues like inconsistent accessibility and the need for further attention to student emotional challenges like stress and anxiety. The recognition of the importance of structured initiatives involving parents and guardians indicates a shared understanding of the necessity for a collaborative approach to fostering community within the school environment.

Research Question 3: What are the merits of existing health-related practices for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District?

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation of Health-Related Practices Impacting Management of School Culture in Rural Public Secondary Schools in Rivers West Senatorial District

S/N	Test Items- Merits of Existing Health-Related Practices	Administrators (N = 72)		Teachers (N = 233)		Mean Set (xx)	Remarks
		$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd		
11.	Programmes focused on menstrual hygiene management in my school provide essential information.	2.50	0.58	2.57	0.60	2.54	Agreed

12.	I believe there could be more accessibility to sanitary products to help girls feel comfortable and maintain attendance during their menstrual cycle.	3.10	0.76	2.86	0.69	2.98	Agreed
13.	The principal encourages student participation in health-related activities.	3.08	0.76	2.91	0.71	3.00	Agreed
14.	Teachers monitor students' health practices regularly.	2.59	0.61	2.77	0.66	2.68	Agreed
15.	Teachers support students' health practices regularly.	2.50	0.58	2.43	0.56	2.47	Disagreed
	Cluster Mean/SD	**2.75**	**0.70**	**2.71**	**0.64**	**2.73**	**Agreed**

Results in Table 3 present the mean and standard deviation scores of the evaluation of the merits of existing health-related practices for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District. The cluster mean score for the administrators is 2.75 with a standard deviation of 0.70, while the cluster mean score for the teachers is 2.71 with a standard deviation of 0.64, indicating a general agreement regarding the perceived merits of these health-related practices. The overall cluster mean score of 2.73 exceeds the criterion mean score of 2.5, suggesting a significant level of agreement among both groups on the merits of the existing health-related practices. The majority of specific items evaluated fall under the "agreed" category, highlighting recognition among both administrators and teachers of the positive aspects of health-related initiatives in schools. Notably, there is strong agreement on the importance of programmes focused on menstrual hygiene management, accessibility to sanitary products, and the principal's encouragement of student participation in health-related activities. However, there is a notable disagreement concerning the regular support and monitoring of health practices by teachers, suggesting an area that requires further attention.

6.2 Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in mean scores between school administrators and teachers' opinion on the merits of existing physical safety measures for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District.

Table 4 Z-test Analysis on the Mean Differences in Administrators and Teachers' Opinion Regarding Physical Safety Measures Impact on Management of School Culture in Rural Public Secondary Schools in Rivers West Senatorial District

Status	n	$\overline{x}$	Sd	df	z-cal	z-crit value	Sig.	Level of significance	Decision
Administrators	72	2.70	0.66						
				303	3.29	1.96	0.00	0.05	Significant
Teachers	233	2.62	0.62						

Results in Table 4 present the z-test analysis on the mean differences in administrators and teachers' opinions regarding the merits of existing physical safety measures for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District. The calculated mean score for administrators is 2.70 with a standard deviation of 0.66, while the mean score for teachers is 2.62 with a standard deviation of 0.62. The z-calculated value is 3.29, which exceeds the critical z-value of 1.96 at a significance level of 0.05. With a significance level of 0.00, this indicates a statistically significant difference in the opinions of administrators and teachers regarding the merits of the existing physical safety measures. Therefore, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that there is a significant difference in the opinions of administrators and teachers on the effectiveness of these safety measures in enhancing school culture and academic performance.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in mean scores between school administrators and teachers' opinion on the merits of existing emotional support systems for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District.

Table 5 Z-test Analysis on the Mean Differences in Administrators and Teachers' Opinion Regarding Emotional Support Systems' Impact on Management of School Culture in Rural Public Secondary Schools in Rivers West Senatorial District

Status	n	$\overline{x}$	Sd	df	z-cal	z-crit value	Sig.	Level of significance	Decision
Administrators	72	2.74	0.66	303	2.20	1.96	0.00	0.05	Significant

Teachers	233	2.67	0.63

Results in Table 5 present the z-test analysis on the mean differences in administrators and teachers' opinions regarding the merits of existing emotional support systems for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District. The calculated mean score for administrators is 2.74 with a standard deviation of 0.66, while the mean score for teachers is 2.67 with a standard deviation of 0.63. The z-calculated value is 2.20, which exceeds the critical z-value of 1.96 at a significance level of 0.05. Given the significance level of 0.00, this indicates a statistically significant difference in the opinions of administrators and teachers regarding the merits of the existing emotional support systems. Therefore, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding the effectiveness of these emotional support systems in promoting a positive school culture and enhancing academic performance.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in mean scores between school administrators and teachers' opinion on the merits of existing health-related practices for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District.

Table 6 Z-test Analysis on the Mean Differences in Administrators and Teachers' Opinion Regarding Health-Related Practices' Impact on Management of School Culture in Rural Public Secondary Schools in Rivers West Senatorial District

Status	n	$\overline{x}$	Sd	df	z-cal	z-crit value	Sig.	Level of significance	Decision
Administrators	72	2.75	0.70						
				303	6.21	1. 96	0.00	0.05	Significant
Teachers	233	2.71	0.64						

Results in Table 6 present the z-test analysis on the mean differences in administrators and teachers' opinions regarding the merits of existing health-related practices for school culture management to enhance academic performance in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District. The calculated mean score for administrators is 2.75 with a standard deviation of 0.70, while the mean score for teachers is 2.71 with a standard deviation of 0.64. The z-calculated value is 6.21, which significantly exceeds the critical z-value of 1.96 at a significance level of 0.05. With a significance level of 0.00, this indicates a statistically significant difference in the opinions of administrators and teachers regarding the merits of the existing health-related practices. Therefore, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that there is a significant difference in the opinions of administrators and teachers concerning the effectiveness of these health-related practices in enhancing school culture and academic performance.

7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study reveal that although rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District have implemented various physical safety measures, their actual effectiveness remains questionable. Persistent issues such as bullying and subpar perimeter fencing undermine these safety efforts, as supported by Ogbo et al. [7] and consistent with the findings of Amadi et al. [4]. This stands in stark contrast to the insights of Mubita[15], who argues for a more precise definition of safety protocols in educational settings such as that of rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District. The average ratings from administrators and teachers in this study indicate a shared recognition of the need for improved measures to reduce risks in emergency situations, aligning with Masekela et al. and Hofmann et al.'s multilevel safety framework. Moreover[16,17], the findings of this study highlight a significant gap in safety culture management, particularly the limited availability of trained personnel for emergencies in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District, even with first aid kits on-site. This issue is similarly noted by Ambali et al. and resonates with the findings of Sabo et al. [18,19], as well as the proactive strategies suggested by Sprick et al. [20], which emphasize the importance of comprehensive safety policies that are both actively enforced and monitored.

The call for better-trained security personnel in this study is further reinforced by Muadin and Akmalia and Weiner et al. [21,22], underlining the necessity for a holistic approach to safety management within educational institutions, which is crucial for creating a supportive learning environment, as highlighted by Oragwu and Nwabueze [23]. This study also underscores the critical role of emotional support systems within school culture management practices in rural public secondary schools, which is affirmed by various researchers. Graham et al. assert that effective emotional support is essential for meeting students' emotional needs[5]. However, many peer support programmes in public schools, particularly in rural areas, often fail to achieve this goal. This concern is reflected in the findings of Rajan et al. [14], who point to ongoing stress and anxiety among students, indicating that emotional support systems require significant improvement. The inconsistency in access to counselors in rural public secondary schools of Rivers West Senatorial District, highlighted in

this study is consistent with the findings of Amadi et al. [4], indicating a crucial gap in delivering adequate emotional support to all students in rural public schools, a need further articulated by Mubita[15], who advocates for comprehensive safety management practices. Additionally, the lack of access to critical health resources, as similarly identified by the World Health Organization[25], poses a barrier preventing students in rural public secondary schools from fully utilizing available support systems. This observation aligns with Li's assertion that effective health-related initiatives can greatly enhance students' overall well-being[26]. The findings also emphasize the importance of structured events involving parents and guardians, consistent with De Leersnyder et al. [24], which argue that community engagement fosters a positive school atmosphere. Focusing on health-related practices, the findings of this study highlight the importance of menstrual hygiene management in rural public secondary schools, reinforcing the views of Fiorentino et al. [1], who stress the need to address specific health needs in rural educational settings. Thus, calls for greater accessibility to sanitary products reflect challenges identified by Shikalepo[13], advocating for improved attendance and comfort for female students. Furthermore, this study shows that administrators play a crucial role in promoting student involvement in health-related activities, as equally noted by Naji et al. as well as Okoh and Afangideh [10,12], which is vital for nurturing a proactive school culture in rural public secondary schools.

8 CONCLUSION

The study reveals significant shortcomings in the safety practices within the school culture management of rural public secondary schools in Rivers West Senatorial District, which directly impact academic achievement. While physical safety measures exist, their effectiveness is undermined by ongoing issues such as bullying and inadequate infrastructure. A pressing need for trained personnel in emergency situations highlights a critical gap in safety culture management. Emotional support systems are similarly inadequate, with inconsistent access to counselors exacerbating student stress and anxiety. Health-related practices also fall short, particularly regarding menstrual hygiene management, which affects female students' attendance and comfort. The findings underscore the necessity for a comprehensive approach to safety that encompasses physical, emotional, and health-related dimensions, supported by community engagement.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:
1. School administrators in rural public secondary schools should lead efforts to secure funding for infrastructure improvements. This encompasses enhancing physical safety features such as secure entry points, adequate lighting, and facilities for proper menstrual hygiene management, which are critical for creating a safe learning environment for all students, particularly female students.
2. School management should advocate for the hiring of additional trained counselors to ensure consistent emotional support for students. Establishing partnerships with local mental health organizations can provide access to resources and support systems that address the psychological well-being of students in rural public secondary schools.
3. Administrators in rural public secondary schools should initiate the formation of School Safety Committees comprising staff, parents, and student representatives. This committee would meet regularly to assess safety concerns, implement safety policies, and facilitate communication between the school and the wider community.
4. The school management should take advantage of the parent-teachers' association to organize safety awareness campaigns and workshops that involve students, teachers and parents. These initiatives can educate the school community about safety practices, emotional support systems, and health-related issues, thereby fostering a culture of safety and collaboration.
5. The school management should collaborate with local stakeholders to conduct regular safety audits. This process will involve collecting feedback from students, parents, and community members to identify safety gaps and develop actionable plans for improvement.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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