

Original Research Paper

STUDENTS' PATRONAGE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA

Abstract

Guidance and counseling services are extensively known to be advantageous in shaping the decision making and thinking capabilities of both students and even people at work places. However, the services appears to be lacking in Senior High Schools (SHSs) in Ghana. This study explored students' patronage of guidance and counselling services in SHSs in Ghana. The study further identified the factors affecting students' patronage of guidance and counselling services. The study was targeted to Form 2 and 3 students. Using a cross sectional design, 24 SHSs were selected out of 475 through a multi-stage sampling technique. The final sample made up of 2,969 Form 2 and 3 SHS students with a return rate of 98.25 percent. Survey questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument. The data was analysed using percentages and frequency counts, as well as one-sample t-test analysis. It was found that students are aware of the presence of guidance and counselling services (educational counselling especially) in their schools. However, the patronage of the services was low due to factors like accessibility of the services, misconceptions held by the students, issues of confidentiality, and counsellor as teacher. The study recommended that GES together with headteachers of SHSs to provide guidance and counselling facilities and logistics which enhances the work of the counsellor. Again, the GES is advised not to allow counsellors posted to schools to engage in any teaching activities.

Keywords: Guidance and counselling services, patronage, counsellor, Senior High Schools

INTRODUCTION

In most communities, there has been, and there still is, a deeply rooted conviction that under appropriate conditions, people can help others with their problems. Some individuals assist others find ways of solving, dealing with, or transcending their problems (Shayo, 2011). In schools, if the cooperation between students and teachers is good, students learn in a practical way. Young people develop degrees of freedom in their lives as they become aware of options and take advantage of them. At its best, helping should enable people to throw off chains and manage life situations effectively (Badu, 2011).

Extraordinary social and economic changes have, over the years, changed the ways in which we manage our lives. Consequently, not all the lessons of the past can effectively deal with the challenges of modern times. Effective counselling, especially in institutions of learning has now become important (Appiah, 2013). Boys and girls, and young men and women, need to be guided in the relationships between health and the environment, earning skills, knowledge, and attitudes that lead to success and failure in life. The need for counseling has become paramount in order to promote the well-being of the child. Effective guidance and counseling should help to improve the self-image of young people and facilitate achievement in life tasks. Counselling should empower people to participate fully in, and benefit from, the economic and social development of the nation (Aspen et al., 2015). **It is clear that counselling services in schools is imperative in providing confidential support to learners in order to create a conducive learning environment for the learner where he or she will devote more time and energy studying whilst receiving assistance.**

In everyday life, guidance and counselling goes on at many levels, for instance in a society doctors counsel patients, lawyers counsel clients, parents counsel their children and teachers counsel students in school at all levels of education (Egbo, 2015). It is important to emphasize that one way of achieving educational excellence is through comprehensive guidance and counselling. That means that subject teachers must be involved in offering guidance and reorganizing the academic curriculum to allow time for developmental guidance (Appiah, 2013). Guidance and counseling services are extensively known to be advantageous in shaping the decision making and thinking capabilities of both students and even people at work places (Gumisiriza, 2012). It is further recommended to have such services in places where youngsters are growing without knowing what is expected of them. There seems to be little or no traces of counseling services in secondary schools in Ghana (UNESCO, 2011). Incidences of children growing without any direction and making regrettable mistakes are quite many. For example, several young people choose to embrace

early marriage while others select subjects that do not have appropriate combination in during school enrolment (UNESCO, 2011).

Inception of Guidance and Counselling in Ghana

The need for formalised Guidance and Counselling became very crucial in Ghana with the inception of the educational reforms of 1987. This led to the establishment of Junior and Senior Secondary Schools in 1990. The Junior Secondary School (JSS) system was centred on introducing basic scientific and technical skills and preparing students for academic work and acquisition of technical/vocational skills at the secondary level. This makes guidance and counselling essential since it must see to the educational and social growth of the individual and society at large.

The first directive by the government of Ghana on the establishment of Guidance and Counselling services in second cycle institutions was issued in 1976 (Essuman, 2001). This was later followed with another directive in 1982 indicating the introduction of Guidance and Counselling Services in first cycle institutions. To see to the implementation of these directives, the University of Cape Coast was charged with the training of counselling personnel who would offer their services in the schools. In addition to this, as a temporary measure, the Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (I.E.P.A.) of the University of Cape Coast was charged to train selected teachers from second cycle institutions to act as Guidance Co-coordinators in these schools so that the needs of students would be catered for.

With respect to the first cycle institutions, the directive requested for the institute to provide in-service training courses in guidance and counselling for head teachers. This is to equip them to play the role of guidance co-ordinators in their schools (Ackumme, 2003). Two more directives were issued in 1980: one for the inclusion of guidance and counselling in the 1981/82 budget estimates and another one was in 1982 for the introduction of guidance and counselling in first cycle schools (Ackumme, 2002). By 1981, 200 co-ordinators had been trained and were working in the regional and district offices of Ghana Educational Service or in the second cycle institutions (Assuah, 2004). Therefore, in addition to the existing content, vocational, technical and business subjects were added to the school curriculum. This suggests that the Ghana found guidance and counselling in the educational set up a crucial factor. The dynamic nature of our present technological world brings into operation a number of forces that create problems of adjustment. As educational systems reflect and respond to

the needs of the societies they serve, the proposed new structure and content of education in Ghana which has the guidance and counselling service as a component part should be handled with all seriousness. This has led to the establishment of guidance and counselling programmes in government and private tertiary institutions such as University of Cape Coast, University of Education, Winneba. These institutions have the mandate to train guidance and counselling experts to provide counselling services to students and other people from all walks of life.

Rationale for the Study

My personal experience in teaching have revealed that many students of Senior High Schools (SHS) find themselves engulfed in personal adjustment problems: feelings of insecurity, low academic achievement, peer influence, loneliness, and conflict with peers, teachers and parents, as well as stress problems which create tensions and anxieties in them. Parents are more pre-occupied with their own problems for which they are seeking solutions. Most children are therefore left with little or no guidance throughout their schooling life. These children in most cases are left to make decisions ranging from what school to attend; to what courses to offer as well as the occupation to engage in the future. As a result they go through stress as they try to make these crucial decisions (Taylor & Buku, 2006). Most students made wrong career decisions because they had no informed counsellors to support them in their decision-making process (Ogunlade & Akeredolu, 2012). Over the years, adolescents have had to face identity formation crisis as well as wrestle with conflicts in making decision and problem solving. Indeed, some adolescents do carry these problems into adulthood despite the availability of guidance and counselling services in their schools (Alice, Alice, & Patrick, 2013).

Guidance and counselling programmes in educational institutions are designed to provide professional relationships between counsellors and students and intended to guide, direct and assist students to solve their problems as well as develop their potentialities (Appiah, 2013). Unfortunately, this programme is not being given the desired patronage by students (Setiawan, 2006). A student throughout his/her schooling may never experience or may fail to seek guidance and counselling service. Even if he/she does seek for the service, it may not be to the degree that is beneficial (Alice, Alice, & Patrick, 2013).

Essuman (2001), for instance evaluated guidance and counselling programmes in schools throughout the nation, Ghana. These studies were done within the 1980s and 1990s (i.e. from

1983-1997). The review examined the availability of guidance and counselling programmes in the first and second cycle educational institutions, the guidance services run by guidance coordinators, the ones least run, how effectively these services were implemented and the problems encountered in establishing and running the programmes. Essuman (2001) discovered that most SHSs studied had guidance and counselling programmes. However, the programmes were not effectively run. Teachers and headmasters in first cycle schools were found to play some guidance roles. Students, teachers and heads of schools, all indicated the need for guidance and counselling in schools.

Fia (2011) also studied guidance and counselling services in schools in the Ho Municipality, Ghana. He reported that educational, vocational, and person-social counselling were lacking in schools in Ho even where some of them possessed clearly demarcated counselling centers to cater for the needs of clients. The absence of group school counselling of students by any counsellor in the school was noted to have created ignorance among students about counselling. Findings from Fia's (2011) study indicates that students did not make good use of the guidance and counselling services available in the school

Essuman (2001) and Fia (2011) have made it clear that guidance and counselling services are available in schools. However, these services are ineffective. A number of debates arise from this finding. First, is it that students are not aware of the availability of these services or they are aware of the availability of the services but are not patronizing the services due to some reasons? In another sense, are the guidance and counselling services available to students unable to meet the needs of the students? The latter would suggest that students are not satisfied with the services or do not have the confidence in the services provided and as a result do not patronise them. Answers to these mind boggling questions are not readily available in the Ghanaian context. This presupposes that little is known on students' patronage of guidance and counselling services. This study, therefore, seeks to explore students' patronage of guidance and counselling services.

Again, international studies have found a number of factors which influence students' level of patronage of guidance and counselling services. Awinsong, Dawson and Gidiglo (2015), for one, concurred that students' knowledge of guidance and counselling services influences their patronage of the services. Chan and Quinn (2012) also discovered that the worry that other people will find out about one's reasons for seeking professional help was an important factor that inhibits access to counselling. Students shied away from counselling due the fear of

being teased and stigmatized by peers in the school. In Eliamani, Richard, and Peter's (2014) view non-professional counselling greatly influence students accessibility of guidance and counselling services. Due to the non-professionalism of counsellors, some students doubt the degree of confidentiality assured by counselors and that serve as a hindrance to their seeking guidance or counseling services (Jenkins & Palmer, 2012; Mushaandja, Haihambo, Vergnani, & Flanks, 2013). Menon (2010) found that the dual responsibilities of teacher and counselor adversely affected access to counseling programmes by most students. Due to the discrepancies in the context of the previous studies, there is the need to found out which factors influence students' patronage of guidance and counselling services.

Research Questions

The study was guided by two research questions:

1. What is the level of students' patronage of guidance and counselling services in SHSs in Ghana?
2. What factors influence students' patronage of guidance and counselling services in SHSs in Ghana?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional survey using quantitative approach. This design was used for this study because the research was interested in exploring the current state of guidance and counselling from the perspective of students. The study covered SHSs in Ghana which were 475 as at the time of conducting the study. The study was, however, targeted to SHSs in Greater Accra, Central and Western Region of Ghana which were randomly selected. **Students in three regions served as the sampling elements.** Only Form 2 (**students in second year/grade 11**) and Form 3 (**students in third year/grade 12**) students were sampled for the study through multi-stage sampling technique. Form 2 and 3 students were used because they have been in the school for some time and would be in a position to provide the relevant information with regards to guidance and counselling. **Again, these students are more likely to have accessed or might have heard of guidance and counselling services**

The multi-stage sampling technique first comprised of simple random sampling technique (Table of Random Numbers) which was used to sample the **three regions (Greater Accra, Central and Western Region)**. Secondly, purposive sampling technique was used to sample SHSs who had formal guidance and counselling services available **within the three regions.**

Stratified sampling was then used to sample 24 SHSs within each stratum (based on regions with regards to SHSs with the services). Quota sampling technique was lastly used to sample participants from the selected schools using 40 percent for Form 2 students and 60% for Form 3 students. Finally, 3,022 students were conveniently sample but 2,969 of them responded to the instrument. This led to a return rate of 98.25 percent. The sample comprised 54.5 percent of male students and 45.5 percent female students. The majority of the students were between 15-18 years of age.

A survey questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection. The items on the questionnaire reflected the objectives to be achieved at the end of the study. The instrument comprised on three sections and all the questions were closed-ended in nature. The first section comprised demographic data which included gender, class and age. The second part entailed items on the patronage of guidance and counselling where respondents were indicated their awareness of the type of services, availability of the services, and whether participants patronised the services. The last part of the questionnaire had a number of factors which affects the patronage of the services. Respondents rated these factors on a four point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree).

To validate the instrument, copies were sent to the supervisor to vet for its authenticity. According to Anim (2005) content and construct validity is determined by expert judgement. This ensured content validity. To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot testing was done using 60 students in Edinaman SHS in Central Region. The internal consistency of items in the questionnaires was determined by the use of Cronbach coefficient Alpha reliability method as majority of the items were Likert scale. The Cronbach Alpha reliability estimates for the questionnaires was 0.81 which signifies that the instrument had less errors.

Issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality were taken into account. The researchers ensured that participation was purely voluntary at all times. Before the participants responds to the instruments the researchers explained the objective of the study together with the merits associated with the study to the participants. Their co-operation and assistance was sought before the instrument was administered to them. Informed consent was taken. This ensured that participants were not coerced in any way to partake in the study. In addition to that, the issue of anonymity was also not compromised. Anonymity protects privacy by not disclosing a participant's identity after the information was gathered. Respondents were assured of their anonymity since names and other personal details were not

associated with specific responses given. Participants were assured that information provided will not be disclosed to any third party other than its intended purpose (Creswell, 2012).

The data gathered were carefully sorted and processed using SPSS (version 25). Data regarding research question one was analysed using frequencies and percentages. Data collected on research question two was analysed using one-sample t-test analysis using an alpha level of .050. A test value of 2.5 was obtained and was compared with a test variable obtained from the data. Test variable means which were significantly ($p < .050$) above the test value suggested that the variable influenced students' patronage of guidance and counselling services.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the analysis highlighted on two major areas: (a) the patronage of guidance and counselling, and (b) factors Affecting students' patronage of guidance and counselling services in SHSs in Ghana.

Students' Patronage of Guidance and Counselling Services

The students were asked whether they were aware of the existence of guidance and counselling services available in their schools, and the types of services available to them. Table 1 and 2 highlight on the results.

Table 1: Awareness of Guidance and Counselling Services (n=2,969)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Aware	2,789	93.9
Not aware	180	6.1
Total	2,969	100.0

The result, as shown in Table 1, revealed that over 90% of the students were aware of the guidance and counselling services (93.9%). However, 6.1% of the students reported that they were unaware of the guidance and counselling services. Out of the students who indicated that they are aware of the guidance and counselling services, the majority of them indicated that they were aware of educational counselling (86.8%) (Table 2). About 32.6% of the students, however, state that they were aware of person-social counselling. It appeared the students were unaware of the availability of vocational counselling (17.1%).

Table 2: Students Awareness on the Forms of Guidance and Counselling Services (n=2,789)

Forms of counselling	Aware		Not Aware	
	f	%	f	%
Educational counselling	2,439	86.8	530	13.2
Person-social counselling	1410	32.6	1559	67.4
Vocational counselling	480	17.1	2489	82.9

Further analysis was conducted to find out whether students who were aware of the services have for once patronised the services. The result is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Patronage of Guidance and Counselling Services

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Patronised before	480	17.2
Not patronised	2309	82.8
Total	2,789	100.0

Result, as shown in Table 3, suggests that the majority of the students (82.8%) did not patronise the guidance and counselling services even though they were aware of it. However, 480 out of 2,789 students indicated that although they were aware of the services, they have not patronized before.

Factors Affecting Students' Patronage of Guidance and Counselling Services in SHSs in Ghana

Analysis in Table 4 highlights on the factors which influences students in the patronage of guidance and counselling services.

Table 4: Factors Affecting Students' Patronage of Guidance and Counselling Services in SHSs in Ghana (n=2,969)

Factors	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Accessibility of the Services	3.12	.88	2968	38.65	.000*
Counselling is for weak students	3.02	1.08	2968	26.53	.000*
Counsellor cannot help me	2.87	1.07	2968	14.52	.000

Confidentiality	2.86	.89	2968	21.72	.000*
Counsellor as my teacher	2.84	1.03	2968	17.85	.000*
School counsellor do not have time	2.68	1.13	2968	8.66	.000
Stigmatization/Teasing	2.69	1.03	2968	10.20	.000*
Trust for the counsellor	2.61	1.05	2968	5.87	.000*

*significant at .05 level; Test value=2.5

The results revealed that three major factors which affected the patronage of guidance and counselling services were accessibility of the services, the believe that counselling is for the weak students, and the perception that counsellors cannot really help them. Other important factors which were reported to affect the patronage of guidance and counselling services included issues of confidentiality, counsellor as teacher, insufficient time of the counsellors, stigmatization/teasing and trust for the counselors.

DISCUSSIONS

The result of this study clearly showed that SHS students are aware of the presence of guidance and counselling services (educational counselling especially) in their schools. However, they indicated low patronage of the services. Further analysis revealed that the low patronage was due to a number of factors. This speaks to the fact that just the awareness of the students regarding the guidance and counselling services was not enough to increase the patronage of the services. This seems contrarily to the case of Nigeria, where Adejimo and Tayo-Olajubu (2009) found counselling services to be lacking and this affected the patronage of the service. It must be made clear that the schools used had counselling services of which the students were aware of it. This awareness, however, was not enough for them to patronise the services. Fia (2011) reported that despite the clearly demarcated guidance and counselling centers in schools in Ho Municipality, counselling services were lacking. Fia (2011) further stated that students were ignorant of the services unlike the case of this study were students were aware of the services. Although Fia concluded that unawareness of students of counselling services resulted in low patronage, this study had inconsistent finding. This study provided evidence to the fact that awareness contributed little to students' patronage of the services.

Paramount of the factors which affected the patronage of guidance and counselling services were accessibility of the services, the believe that counselling is for the weak students, and the perception that counsellors cannot really help them. Other imperative factors which were reported to affect the patronage of guidance and counselling services included issues of confidentiality, counsellor as teacher, insufficient time of the counsellors, stigmatization/teasing and trust for the counselors.

It is common to find in SHSs that most counsellors do not have a personal office to meet clients with challenges. In some cases, these counsellors share offices which do not promote their work. This can account for the reason why most of the students had not even tried going for counselling. It appeared the students held some misconceptions which could have been addressed when they have encountered the services or by organising programmes to enlighten them. **In recent times, counselling has not been given attention needed. Schools now prefer counsellor who can teach while they go about their counselling duties.** This study have underscored that this affect the patronage of the services. This argument has been centered on a number of debates: (a) students see counsellors who teach them as teachers and not counsellors, therefore, there should be that strict and rigid relationship between them, (b) because the counsellor also teaches, it is possible that he/she might not get enough time to attend to clients. In some cases, students might need their services while they have class at the same time, (c) students might have the perception that information about them they provide to this counsellor teacher can be discussed with other teachers or headteachers. Take for example a student who have relationship (romantic) problem. **Since having romantic relationship in the school might not be acceptable by the authorities, the student will never open up to take about it.** This will make the students not trust these teacher counsellors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from my study clearly indicate that although students are aware of the existence of guidance and counselling services, they did not patronise the services. This low patronage was ascribed to factors like accessibility of the services, misconceptions held by the students, issues of confidentiality, counsellor as teacher, insufficient time of the counsellors, stigmatization/teasing and trust for the counselors. The implication is that the low patronage of guidance and counselling services in SHSs can be attributed to the counsellors and the school management. It must be emphasised that any school who is poised to promote guidance and counselling services would do well to provide all logistics and facilities

associated with the work. Counsellors would then be motivated to effectively draw out programmes and attend to the students with problem. It appears that the misconceptions held by students, if addressed would also improve the patronage of the services.

The findings of this study is a wake-up call for the Ghana Education Services (GES), Headteachers, counsellors, parents and all stakeholders to collectively find out policies and strategies to address these factors which have been reported by students as affecting the patronage of the services. It is important that GES together with headteachers of SHSs to provide guidance and counselling facilities and logistics which enhances the work of the counsellor. Again, the GES is advised not to allow counsellors posted to schools to engage in any teaching activities. **The study recommends that GES should have a Post Provisioning Norm, increasing its allocation of teachers based on the ratio of learners to compensate for counsellors who will not teach or be class teachers. Counsellors should be added to the Post Establishment with a timetable allocated for counselling services and writing reports. The GES should conduct advocacy sessions with the communities on counselling services.**

Due to the misconceptions held by most students, counsellors are encouraged to map-out adequate programmes which will enlighten students on the need to seek for help when the need arises. Parents are also recommended to sensitize their wards on the need to go for counselling when they need assistance.

Notwithstanding the findings of this study, further should investigate the patronage of guidance and counselling in tertiary institutions in Ghana. Again, further studies should find out the effectiveness in the implementation of guidance and counselling services in Senior High Schools in Ghana.

LIMITATIONS

The study covered Senior High School students in three regions out of the ten regions in Ghana. The implication is that the findings is, to some, extent limited to the three regions. This affects the external validity of the results. The questionnaire used was self-reported and thus, responses provided by the respondents might not reflect the reality.

CONSENT: Informed consent was taken.

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