Research Article

doi

Learners' perception towards the role of guidance and counselling services in colleges of education in Ghana: A case study

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Abstract

In spite the availability of guidance and counseling services at the various College of Education in Ghana, learners have been showing a lukewarm attitude toward assessing the service. This paper sought to analyze learners' perceptions and attitudes on the role of guidance and counseling at Colleges of Education. This paper adopted an ex post facto research design on a sample of 300 respondents. Data was collected using a structured interview. Findings indicate that learners had a positive evaluation and appreciation of the role of guidance and counseling services but low demand for assistance. It was recommended that guidance and counseling departments take the opportunity of students' active perception and that all teacher trainees undergo training as the service providers.

Keywords: Attitude, counseling, guidance, interview, lukewarm, perception, respondents

Public Interest Statement

The misconception of students' minds towards guidance and counseling has become a sense of worry in Ghana and particularly in Colleges Educations in Ghana. The implementation of the guidance and counseling program in higher learning institutions was aimed at assisting students to address the challenges that they face. If not addressed, such challenges may affect academic performance, self-actualization, social and psychological development of the students. Despite the increasing disciplinary and career-related challenges, not much focus has been placed on college students' perceptions and attitudes about the role of guidance and counseling.

1.0 Introduction

In realization of the social, economic, and psychological challenges facing learners at various levels of learning, there is a need for them to be properly initiated and guided through the education system. In Ghana, this was achieved with the introduction of the guidance and counseling program in learning institutions. The program was introduced in the country in 1973 during the first Guidance and Counselling Career Conference held to discuss career choices among students in learning institutions (Oketch & Ngumba, 1999). The guidance and counseling program assists students to develop their full personality and career potential. However, the program faces the threat of territory problems utilization of services which has been attributed to lack of awareness by the students; poor communication between the program and students; and student's negative perception and attitude towards the importance the role of the program, among others.

The role of guidance and counseling in colleges of education is critical as the trainees are expected to implement the program in their respective Basic schools upon graduation and posting. However, this will depend on how they appreciate the role of guidance and counseling and utilize its services. Students may differ in their perception of the role of guidance and counseling services. This, in turn, influences their reaction and attitude towards an object and either facilitates positive attitude and behaviors like seeking out guidance and counseling services or negative attitudes and behaviors like staying away. Specifically, Atebubu College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education, and Berekum College of Education have witnessed low demand and utilization of guidance and counseling services by students towards the role of guidance and counseling services in the institution.

1.1 Demographic variable and perception and attitudes towards guidance and counseling

Gender has been reported as playing a significant role in determining attitude towards seeking help. Good and Dell (1989) reported that there appear to be distinct differences in help-seeking tendencies between the two sexes as two-thirds of all clients seeking psychological help are female. They hypothesized that one possible reason why men are more hesitant to use counseling services is adherence to traditional gender roles. Seeking psychological help would be seen as admitting failure, weakness, and defeat. However, Ojenge and Muchemi (2010) in Ibrahim, Aloka, Wambiya, and Raburu (2014) found out that most girls did not believe in the counselors for lack of privacy in the counseling rooms. Nyingi (2014) gender differences in students' perceptions of the benefits of guidance and counseling services with more female than male counterpart rating guidance and counseling more highly. Similarly, Musema and Kiilu (2013) found higher though insignificant numbers of female than male students seeking help. Contrastingly, Njeri, Sindabi, and Njonge (2014) found no significant in attitudes towards seeking help. Studies have shown that class level is related to the appreciation of the importance of guidance and

counseling. Ibrahim et al, (2014) found out that as students moved to upper-class levels they developed a more positive perception towards guidance. While some studies have focused on gender and year of study, another line of study has narrowed down on the location of the institution. In one such study, Njeri et al, (2014) found significant differences in students' attitudes towards guidance and counseling in favor of Ghana. As is evident, the literature on students' attitudes and perceptions is contradictory and therefore requires further study.

2.0 Literature Review
Perception and attitudes towards guidance and counseling services

Guidance and counseling are useful in a variety of ways. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO), guidance and counseling is a broad professional field with the services geared towards assisting individuals to better understand themselves, their problems their environment, and their world and to develop an adequate capacity for making wise choices and decisions in life. Poor perception of guidance and counseling programs is one of the teachers of the main problem- counselors face (Nyamwaka, Ondima, Ombaba & Magaki, Research shows that the decision to see help is associated with varying antecedents. Sanders (1981) suggests that social comparison information from family and friends has a major influence on the decision to seek help for depressed people. Perceived confidentiality could also influence student help-seeking attitudes. Confidentiality in the educational setting is, however, associated with a dilemma that involves the counselor as a teacher and mental health provider (Lunderthal, Amaranto, Jordan & Wepman, 1984).

Help-seeking attitudes are also influenced by awareness of the provision of guidance and counseling services. In Ghana, the importance of creating awareness of guidance and counseling services has been noted. Studies have also shown that awareness of such programs determines students' attitudes and whether they are utilized. Nyingi (2014) found students from public schools to be more aware of guidance and counseling services than their counterparts in private schools. Additionally, though most students were not informed of the importance of guidance and counseling, they rated it highly. Gitonga (1999) also found out that the majority of the sample were aware of the existence of guidance and counseling services. Rutondoki (2000) found out that although students generally have a favorable attitude towards counseling-related services, only a few have a basic awareness of what opportunities are offered. In the study, it also emerged that some students did not seek help because they felt capable of solving their issues or getting help from their friends. Similarly, Nyokabi and Thinguri (2005) reported that the majority of students knew of existing programs and had a positive attitude towards them.

Essuman (2015) reports that from the 1970s up to 2010, there have been several government policy statements or directives on the establishment and development of guidance and counseling programs in the nation's educational institutions. Contradictory findings have been reported (Gitonga, 1999; Nyamwange, Nyankan & Ondima. 2012) who found out that students did not consider counseling necessary in schools. They overwhelmingly reported a negative attitude towards guidance and counseling programs. Contrastingly, however, students felt that available counseling resources were inadequate to meet their counseling needs. Negative attitudes towards guidance and counseling have been explained in the literature as due to the lack of value attached to guidance and counseling from students, own perspective and ability to solve own problems or with peers (Muema & Kiilu, 2013), and fear of being seen with a counselor and fear of the lack of confidentiality (Gitonga, 1999).

Farant (2004). Opines that education is the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed probably through schooling. Guidance and counseling is an integral component of education have also gone through significant transformations in the world and Ghana's educational system. The existentialist believed that meaninglessness, anxiety, isolation, and freedom/responsibility are central to human experiences and underlie most psychological problems (Yalom, 1980). Yalom stated that in an attempt to find meaning when we choose our values, which everyone does, we are assembling our unique meaning of life. Therefore, experiencing meaninglessness and establishing values are part of a meaningful life, which issues that become the heart of guidance and counseling. Guidance and counseling services in Kenyan schools are part of a broad delivery system designed to enhance the success of all learners. (Nasibi, 2003). Mukinde (1983) posited that guidance and counseling services are geared towards the direction, piloting, leading, or showing the right way to study.

Guidance is the process of helping individuals to understand themselves and their world. Shertzer and Stone, (1976). Guidance is the process of helping the individual to understand themselves and direct their efforts in a way that will enable them to use potentials to achieve personal satisfaction and thereby make themselves useful to society. Gyebers and Henderson, (2001). Argued by providing a historical outlook on the development of guidance and counseling. They summarized that it was introduced during the industrial revolution in the United States of America.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in the cognitive school in psychology. According to this perspective, people become what they are through their thoughts and perceptions. Each individual has a unique experience and interpretation of his or her environment. Behavior and emotions originate from thoughts, which are influenced by positive or negative perceptions based on past, present, or future events (Hough, 2010). When individuals have negative thoughts, they fear to make initiatives and generally lack the motivation to attempt or engage in any activity. Consequently, Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy (Ellis, 1991) borrowing from behavioral and cognitive approaches to counseling provided the theoretical framework for the study. It was hypothesized that students' perceptions about guidance and counseling programs would predict their attitudes and consequently whether or not they valued the services.

3. Methodology

This study adopted an ex post facto research design. The study was conducted at Atebubu College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education, and Berekum College of Education all in Ghana. 300 students from the 2019 first-year group hundred (100) each from the Colleges were randomly selected for the study. A modified questionnaire from Fischer and Turner (1970) Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help (ATSPH) was administered. The tool used for collecting data for this study were interviews and questionnaires. On the 28th day of December 2019 to 1st day of January 2020 questionnaire was administered at Atebubu College of Education. All the responses were recorded and later transcribed for the analysis. One hundred participants went through the same process the following week at St. Joseph's College of Education and a month later one hundred (100) randomly selected first-year students at Berekum College of Education administered a hundred questionnaires for the analysis. The significant information gathered was later transcribed for the analysis.

Table 1 Sample size

Colleges of Education	Respondents
Atebubu College of Education	100
St. Joseph's College of Education	100
Berekum College of Education	100
Total	300

Table 2:   Gender

Atebubu College of Education	Number	
Male	50	
Female	50	
St. Joseph's College of Education	**Number**	
Male	50	
Female	50	
Berekum College of Education	**Number**	
Male	50	
Female	50	
Total	300	

4. Findings and Discussion

Data were collected and analyzed among a sample of 300 respondents, 150 (50%) male and 150 (50%) female. The finding were presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Student' age

Age &Gender

Age	Male	Female	Total	%
17-20	10	15	25	8.3
21-25	80	75	155	51.7
26-30	45	40	85	28.3
31-35	15	20	35	11.7
Total	150	150	300	100

Finding from Table 3. suggest that majority of the students joining the College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education and Berekum College of Education are relatively young having just finished their Senior High School education. Persons in such age brackets are in a very critical stage of human development where they need adequate guidance and counseling for them to make informed career and personal decisions in life.

Students' perception of guidance and counseling service

The underlying principle of this study sought to determine students' perceptions of the role of guidance and counseling services. The perception was assessed from a series of fourteen statements seeking respondents' agreement with various aspects of guidance and counseling services. Responses to these statements were measured on a three-point like art scale ranging from 1 to 3. The higher the score, the more positive was the perception of the students about guidance and counseling services. The findings were presented in Table 4. Finding from Table 4 indicate that students rated the first twelve out

of 14 statements at least above the mean score of 2.00. This shows that they were generally satisfied with the various aspects and services offered by the guidance and counseling department in their institution. From these twelve statements, five recorded an approximate mean score of about 3.00 indicating that the respondents had a high level of satisfaction with guidance and counseling services. They considered the program as not an invasion in their privacy; beneficial and helpful in discussing and solving issues and problems; useful to everybody; and maintained confidentiality by all counselors. The remaining seven of the twelve statements showed moderate satisfaction with the capability, religion, age of the counselors; state of the department to encourage counseling; and sharing of personal problems and level of confidentiality. This suggests that the respondents were aware and appreciated the services offered by guidance and counseling and the ability of the counselors to discharge these services. However, the respondents were not satisfied with the location of the guidance and counseling department and considered it to be lacking privacy and comfort required for effective counseling.

Table 4. Indicators of perception of the role of guidance and counselling services

Statement	Response (%)			
	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Mean
Guidance and counselling is an invasion of one's privacy	1.8	6.6	91.6	2.90
The are many benefits of seeking guidance and counselling services	92.8	4.8	2.4	2.90
Guidance and counselling is not a helpful way of discussing issues and solving problems	3.0	4.8	92.2	2.89
Guidance and counselling is useful only for people with serious problems	6.6	9.6	83.8	2.77
The teacher counsellor is too young to confide in	9.0	12.6	78.4	2.69
Guidance and counselling department lacks capability to address my problems	21.6	24.0	54.5	2.33
The teacher counsellor is too busy to listen to students' problems	24.6	21.6	53.9	2.29
I am comfortable with the teacher counsellor because of his/her age	29.3	18.0	52.7	2.23
Seeking counselling does not necessarily involve sharing my issues with others	34.7	16.2	49.1	2.14
The state of guidance and counselling department in the college does not encourage one to seek counselling services	39.5	12.6	47.9	2.08
There is often a breach of confidentiality with guidance and counselling in the college	32.3	31.7	35.7	2.04
Guidance and counselling office lacks privacy and comfort required for effective counselling	46.7	19.2	34.1	1.87
The location of guidance and counselling department is not conducive for seeking counselling services	62.9	24.9	12.6	1.50

The response to each of the fourteen statements was scored on a scale of 1-3, with higher scores indicating the highest perception about the role 0f guidance and counseling services. The individual statement scores were added up to form a perception index score for each respondent. The index score varied between (14 – 42) higher scores indicating a more positive perception of students about the role of guidance and counseling services. The index score was later coded into three ordinal categories to differentiate between perception among the respondents. This included a score below

56 (14-27) indication negative perception, a score of 28 (neutral perception), and a score above 153 (29-42) meaning positive perception. Table 4 depicts the perception of the students about the role of guidance and counseling services in Atebubu College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education, and Berekum College of Education.

Table 5. Perception about the role of guidance and counselling services

Perception	f	%
Negative	56	18.7
Neutral	91	30.3
Positive	153	51.0
Total	300	100

The results in Table (5) indicate that majority of students had a positive perception of guidance and counseling services in Atebubu College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education, and Berekum College of Education. This may be attributed to the students' evaluation and appreciation of the guidance and counseling services offered in their institution and the ability of the counselors to discharge these services. Such positive perception about guidance and counseling services was expected to enable students to develop a positive attitude towards guidance and counseling services offered and if possible seek the assistance of the counselors whenever in need. This supports Mwangi (1991) and Muema and Kiilu (2013) who argue that positive perception of students about guidance and counseling is a result of access to information about the program and the positive meaning they attach.

Students' attitude towards guidance and counseling services

The indispensable question here was investigated into the attitude of students towards the role of guidance and counseling services. Like perception. The attitude was assessed from a series of 14 statements seeking respondents' agreement with their reaction on various aspects of guidance and counseling services in their institution. Responses to these statements were measured on a 5- point Likert scale ranging from 1-5. The higher the score, the more positive was the attitude of the students towards guidance and counseling services. The scale considered four dimensions including recognition to need for counseling, stigma tolerance, interpersonal openness, and confidence in help giver. The findings were presented in Table 6. Findings from Table 6 indicate that students rated the first 8 of the 14 statements at least above the mean score of 2.00 with means between 3.59 and 4.38. This shows that they were generally satisfied with the services offered by the guidance and counseling department and their willingness to seek help. The respondents agreed that they would: welcome external help when they have a personal or emotional problem; recommend a friend with a problem to see a counselor; seek for counseling help at any time in the future; not concentrated on studies to help solve personal worries and concerns; not prefer a fiend to a counselor for counseling confide in a counselor; not overcome mental conflict without counseling help; and not cover counseling services that they receive. This suggests that the respondents were aware and appreciated the services offered by the guidance and counseling department and the ability of the counselors to discharge these services. However, the respondents were moderate in their responses to the last six statements with a rating of between 2.62 and 3.42. This suggests that they were undecided on the time and effort used in seeking counseling services; seeking for counseling was a shame; sharing their problems with other people; what other people might think of them going for counseling; difficult in talking discussing personal affairs with

the respondents were aware of and appreciated guidance and counseling services offered in Atebubu College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education and Berekum College of Education there were still some impediments to their demand for the services.

Table 6. Indicators of attitude towards guidance and counselling services

					Response (%)	
Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN
I welcome external help when I have personal or emotional problem	53.9	36.5	5.4	2.4	1.8	4.38
I would not recommend a friend with a problem to see a counsellor	4.8	9.0	4.8	38.3	43.1	4.05
At no time in future would I seek counselling help	11.4	13.2	7.8	17.4	50.3	3.82
Concentration on studies help solve personal worries and concerns	9.6	13.8	7.2	26.3	43.1	3.80
I would prefer counselling from a friend than a counsellor	5.4	15.0	9.6	40.1	29.9	3.74
I would confide in a counsellor if I have a crisis in my life	20.4	50.3	12.6	9.6	7.2	3.67
One can overcome mental conflicts by himself without externa help	7.2	22.2	7.8	24.6	38.3	3.65
If I had to receive counselling services I would not cover it up	27.5	34.7	15.0	14.4	8.4	3.59
Seeking guidance and counselling services consumes a lot of time and effort	15.0	18.0	9.6	25.1	32.3	3.42
Not solving personal problems by oneself carries a burden of shame	13.2	16.8	22.8	19.8	27.5	3.32
I don't like people who want to know about my personal problems	6.6	21.6	21.0	35.3	15.6	3.32
I would be uneasy going to a counsellor because of what some people might think	14.4	31.1	4.2	19.2	31.1	3.22
It is difficult to talk about personal affairs with a counsellor	15.0	28.7	11.4	24.0	21.0	3.07
Lack of faith in counsellors in the institution	18.0	39.5	13.8	20.4	8.4	2.62

The responses to each of the 14 constituent statements were score on a scale of 1-5 with higher scores indicating a higher attitude toward the role of guidance and counseling services. The individual statement scores were added up to form an attitude index score for each respondent. The index score varied from 14 -70 with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes towards the role of guidance and counseling services in the Atebubu College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education, and Berekum College of Education. The total score was later coded into three ordinal categories of negative, average, and positive attitude. Table (6) depicts the level of attitude of the students towards guidance and counseling services in their Atebubu College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education, and Berekum College of Education.

Table 7 Attitude towards the role guidance and counselling services

ATTITUDE	f	%
Negative	42	14
Neutral/ Average	09	03
Positive	250	83
Total	300	100

Findings in Table(7) indicate that overall, the majority of students had a positive attitude towards guidance and counseling services in Atebubu College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education, and Berekum College of Education. This may be attributed to students' evaluation and appreciation of the guidance and counseling services offered in Atebubu College of Education, St. Joseph's College of Education, and Berekum College of Education and the ability of the counselors to discharge these services. The positive attitude was expected to increase students' demand for guidance and counseling services whenever they had a counseling need. The findings support Muema and Kiilu (2013) who found out that the ultimate perception and attitude of students with information gained from experience and knowledge about guidance and counseling services in their institution would be coherent with their cognition.

Conclusion
Though students had a positive evaluation and appreciation of the role of guidance and counseling services offered in their institution and the ability of the counselors to discharge these services, it did not translate into demand for help-seeking. Perception and attitude were developed from information accessed independently of gender and year of study. Social stigma and prior counseling have also been found to be negatively and positively related respectively to help-seeking behavior. It is therefore imperative that guidance and counseling departments take advantage of the positive perception and attitude of the students to publicize and create awareness about the guidance and counseling services offered.

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