

FUNCTIONING OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING CENTRES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SURVEY OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN GHANA

FUNCIONAMIENTO DE LOS CENTROS DE ORIENTACIÓN Y ASESORAMIENTO EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR: UNA ENCUESTA DE LAS UNIVERSIDADES PÚBLICAS DE GHANA

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Abstract

This study examined the functioning of guidance and counselling centres in public universities of Ghana, focusing on the services provided to students and teaching staff. A descriptive survey design was employed. Stratified random sampling was used to group the 15 public universities into three zones. The lottery method was used to select the universities in each zone. All counsellors (42) from the selected universities form the sample. Data was collected through a 57-item questionnaire, covering vocational, educational, and social/personal guidance, use of time, counselling tools, online counselling, and record-keeping practices. The major findings revealed that counsellors provided comprehensive support, including vocational guidance on career skills and job information, educational counselling on scholarships and curriculum guidance, and social/personal support for personality development and interpersonal relationships. Most counsellors utilised traditional face-to-face counselling, with

limited engagement in online counselling due to unreliable internet infrastructure. Counsellors effectively used various counselling techniques and maintained records of sessions. While guidance and counselling centres are functioning well, there are areas for improvement, particularly in enhancing online counselling services and implementing standardised digital record-keeping systems. Implications for government of Ghana, university authorities, and guidance and counselling units include improving internet access, organising frequent vocational and educational seminars, and investing in counsellor training to support better students and teaching staff academic and personal development.

Resumen

Este estudio examinó el funcionamiento de los centros de orientación y asesoramiento en las universidades públicas de Ghana, centrándose en los servicios prestados a estudiantes y profesorado. Se empleó un diseño de encuesta descriptiva. Se utilizó un muestreo aleatorio estratificado para agrupar las 15 universidades públicas en tres zonas. Se empleó el método de lotería para seleccionar las universidades de cada zona. Todos los consejeros (42) de las universidades seleccionadas conforman la muestra. Los datos se recopilaron mediante un cuestionario de 57 preguntas, que abarcaba orientación vocacional, educativa y sociopersonal, uso del tiempo, herramientas de asesoramiento, asesoramiento en línea y prácticas de mantenimiento de registros. Los principales hallazgos revelaron que los consejeros proporcionaron un apoyo integral, incluyendo orientación vocacional sobre habilidades profesionales e información laboral, asesoramiento educativo sobre becas y orientación curricular, y apoyo sociopersonal para el desarrollo de la personalidad y las relaciones interpersonales. La mayoría de los consejeros utilizaron el asesoramiento presencial tradicional, con una participación limitada en el asesoramiento en línea debido a la infraestructura de internet poco fiable. Los consejeros utilizaron eficazmente diversas técnicas de asesoramiento y mantuvieron registros de las sesiones. Si bien los centros de orientación y asesoramiento funcionan satisfactoriamente, existen áreas de mejora, en particular la optimización de los servicios de orientación en línea y la implementación de sistemas estandarizados de registro digital. Las implicaciones para el gobierno de Ghana, las autoridades universitarias y las unidades de orientación y asesoramiento incluyen mejorar el acceso a internet, organizar seminarios vocacionales y educativos frecuentes e invertir en la formación de orientadores para apoyar el desarrollo académico y personal de estudiantes y profesorado.

Keywords: Functioning guidance and counselling centres; vocational; educational and social/personal

Palabras Claves: Centros de orientación y asesoramiento en funcionamiento; profesionales; educativos y socio-personales.

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in fostering students' academic growth and personal development, providing them with opportunities to nurture their talents and abilities. However, students in educational institutions, particularly in Ghana, encounter numerous challenges that hinder their academic progress and overall personal development (Atta-Frimpong, 2013; Harper, 2023). These challenges often lead to confusion, disappointment, and frustration, especially when students experience academic failures or face external pressures from parents and relatives during the university enrollment and course selection processes (Fia, 2018; Khan, 2019). The struggle to acquire adequate educational and vocational knowledge is pervasive across all educational levels in Ghana. However, it is particularly evident among university students aspiring to further their studies and enter the workforce (Taylor & Buku, 2006; Millacci, 2023). Many students lack proper guidance and are often uncertain about their future career paths, leaving them unprepared for the challenges ahead (Salawu, 2008; Egbo, 2015). This uncertainty highlights the importance of providing educational, vocational, and personal/social guidance throughout the Ghanaians university experience rather than delaying this support until after graduation. The absence of clear direction in these areas frequently results in confusion and disappointment as students navigate their academic and professional futures without adequate support.

To address these challenges, the government of Ghana has developed educational policies that promote the practice of guidance and counselling at all levels of education, ensuring the establishment of guidance and counselling centres at the university level (Adu, 2022; Eyo, Joshua & Esuong, 2010). In 1976, the Ministry of Education took significant strides by officially incorporating guidance and counselling

into the educational policy framework. This move was aimed at addressing the academic, vocational, social, behavioural, and personal challenges faced by students in higher education institutions (Taylor & Buku, 2006). In 1981/82 academic year, the Ghanaian government further reinforced its commitment to guidance and counselling by allocating funds for these services in the national budget. This budgetary allocation aimed to improve the quality of guidance and counselling provided to both teachers and students, marking an important step towards strengthening support systems within the educational sector (Essuman, 1999). In 2007, the Ghana Education Reform Committee, under the leadership of Anamuah-Mensah, highlighted the critical role of guidance and counselling in supporting students in making informed decisions, planning their academic and career paths, and fostering discipline within higher education (Ministry of Education Republic of Ghana, (2007). Further developments in educational policy came in 2008 with the introduction of a white paper on educational reforms. This document called for the planning, coordination, and supervision of guidance services across the country (Atta-Frimpong, 2013). The most recent policy developments, outlined in the Ministry of Education Republic of Ghana 2018 policy document, focus on the strategic integration of guidance and counselling services within the educational system. The policy emphasises the need to develop curricula that incorporate life skills education, sexual education, and support for orphans and vulnerable children, and special educational needs (Ministry of Education Republic of Ghana, 2018). These policies aim to support students and teachers in achieving balanced personal, academic, social, and vocational development, which is essential for their success.

In Ghana, guidance and counselling services emerged in the 1960s, although the practice of guidance can be traced to informal and

traditional methods before this period. In the pre-modern context, guidance was often provided by influential community members such as elders, traditional chiefs, and religious leaders. These individuals were regarded as sages, offering advice on a range of matters including marriage, morality, and social conduct. Their guidance was typically delivered through various cultural practices such as dance, poetry, music, and traditional medicine (Atta-Frimpong, 2013). Additionally, guidance was informally integrated into educational settings, where teachers, chaplains, school prefects, and housemasters offered moral and social advice to students (Essuman, 1999). Guidance and counselling in Ghana have been conceptualised as a means of helping individuals achieve a physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and vocationally balanced personality tailored to their unique needs (Corey, 2018; Plant, 2012). In the context of universities, guidance and counselling services aim to support the holistic development of students, addressing their educational, vocational, and personal/social needs while also assisting teachers with their personal and social concerns (Aidoo, 2011; Gordon, Guez, & Allen, 2000; Adu & Mpuangnan, 2022). As guidance and counselling services become integral to educational systems in Ghana as well as worldwide, they serve to meet the comprehensive developmental needs of students and teachers, supporting their overall growth. Educational guidance, in particular, plays a pivotal role in helping students navigate their academic journey, providing support for course selection, academic planning, and personal development (Kathuri, Magero & Wamalwa, 2018). This type of guidance helps students make informed decisions regarding their future educational paths, fostering academic success and personal growth (Davidson, 2020; Suhag et al., 2017).

Vocational guidance and counselling are equally important, as they assist Ghanaian students in making informed decisions about their career paths, considering their interests, skills, and capabilities (Taylor & Buku, 2006; Atta-Frimpong, 2013). This guidance area prepares students for the workforce, helping them align their academic pursuits with future career opportunities. By offering insights into potential career paths, vocational guidance aids students in understanding their strengths and weaknesses and empowers them to make rational and informed occupational decisions (Adu & Srivastava, 2024; Lunenburg, 2010). Moreover, as the job market continually evolves, it is essential for university students to receive up-to-date information on career opportunities and trends, enabling them to make realistic and informed career choices (Taylor & Buku, 2006).

In addition to educational and vocational guidance, personal and social guidance plays a critical role in addressing the emotional and social challenges that Ghanaian students and teachers face. Personal and social guidance focuses on self-knowledge, developing social skills, and addressing anxiety, frustration, and maladjustment (Saminu & Isa, 2022; Ocansey, 2018). It helps students and teachers develop positive attitudes and habits while eliminating negative behaviours that may hinder their academic and personal progress (Alemu, 2013). This type of guidance also provides essential support for navigating social, health, moral, and ethical challenges, which are common in university settings (Hordofa, 2018; Sedofia, 2011). By fostering essential life skills such as communication, empathy, and respect, personal and social guidance helps create a supportive and healthy educational environment (Ocansey, 2018; Sultana & Watts, 2004).

Despite the critical importance of guidance and counselling, many Ghanaian students and teachers struggle with a lack of direction, leading

to feelings of confusion and frustration (Alale, 2019). Students in these institutions are grappling with numerous difficulties, such as academic pressures, economic constraints, and personal adjustment problems. Common issues include peer group influence, substance abuse, problems with relationships, poor self-esteem, suicide and the lure of cultism and violence. In some cases, these challenges manifest in destructive behaviours, such as participation in internal riots, violent clashes, and property destruction, which not only disrupt the academic environment but also pose significant threats to students' social, vocational, and educational development (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) (2022). The severity of these problems calls for effective intervention through guidance and counselling services. Therefore, effective functioning of guidance and counselling centres is crucial in helping students and teachers navigate their personal, academic, and professional challenges.

From the above scenario of guidance and counselling in Ghana, this study examines the functioning of guidance and counselling centres in addressing students and teaching staff issues in public universities of Ghana.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey method research design. The population consisted of all fifteen public universities of Ghana, as well as all counsellors at guidance and counselling centres in the 15 public universities of Ghana. Stratified random sampling was used to group the 15 public universities into three zones. The lottery method was used to select the universities in each zone. 30% of the public universities, i.e. one out of the three public universities in the North zone, one out of the

four public universities in the Central zone, and three out of eight public universities in the South zone, were selected. All 42 counsellors of the five sampled public universities formed a part of the sample.

Materials

The constructed questionnaire for counsellors focused on one key dimension: the functioning of guidance and counselling centres. The functioning of guidance and counselling centres covered vocational, educational, and social/personal guidance and counselling services, use of time, counselling tools and techniques, services provided by the counsellor, online counselling, records keeping and recordings of counselling sessions. The questionnaire was close-ended. The total number of items was 57.

Data Collection Procedure

An introductory letter from the Department of Education, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, to seek permission from the sampling universities' authorities and respondents (counsellors). The respondents participated in this study willingly. As part of the preliminary phase of the study, informal introductory visits were made to the guidance and counselling centres of the universities included in the sampling frame. These visits were essential for establishing rapport and a better understanding of the centre's operations. The research data was collected using a questionnaire personally administered to the respondents. The questionnaire was distributed during the respondents' free time to ensure their work hours were not disrupted. To maintain the integrity of the data collection process, no interference with the respondents' regular duties was made. The data collection process took

place over a period of three months, from June to August 2023. The researchers personally visited various counselling centres across the selected universities, administering the questionnaire to the sample participants in each zone. This approach was carefully designed to ensure the data gathered was accurate and reliable.

Results

The data collected from the respondents were analysed quantitatively using percentage analysis and presented in a tabular form for clarity.

The data related to educational, vocational, and social/personal guidance and counselling, use of time, counselling tools and techniques, services provided by the counsellor, online counselling, records keeping and recordings of counselling sessions in guidance and counselling centres at Ghanaian public universities have been analysed, and the findings are presented below.

Table 1: Vocational Guidance and Counselling

Responses	N=42	
	Frequency	Percentage
Areas of Vocational Guidance and Counselling		
Career choice	41	97.6%
Student self-employment	40	95.2%
Developing career skills	42	100.0%
Career assessment	39	92.9%
Assistance Given to Students in Vocational Guidance and Counselling		
Assistance in occupational choices	41	97.6%

Assistance with the latest and appropriate job information for students	42	100.0%
Assist students with the needed skills for applying for employment	41	97.6%
Organisation of Vocational Orientation for Students		
Organise students with knowledge in a specific career	40	95.2%
Organise entrepreneurial seminars for students	39	92.9%
Organise students with information on career choices	42	100.0%
Frequency of Organisation of Vocational Seminars for Students		
Once a year	18	42.9%
Twice a year	20	47.6%
Thrice a year	4	9.5%

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that all counsellors (100%) provided vocational guidance and career skills development to their students. This was further confirmed by the fact that all counsellors (100%) offered their students the latest and most relevant job information concerning vocational guidance. Additionally, all counsellors (100%) organised vocational orientation sessions aimed at helping students make informed career choices. In terms of vocational seminars, the majority of counsellors (47.6%) organised these seminars twice a year.

Table 2: Educational Guidance and Counselling

Responses	N=42	
	Frequ ncy	Percenta ge
Areas of Educational Guidance and Counselling		
Choice of educational programmes	41	97.6%
Information on the availability of scholarships, stipends, loans, etc	42	100.0%
Developing good study habits	41	97.6%
Assistance Given to Students in Educational Guidance and Counselling		
Assist students in getting information on further education	41	97.6%
Assist students with the prescribed curriculum	42	100.0%
Assist students in developing knowledge and skills necessary for further studies	41	97.6%
Organisation of Educational Guidance and Counselling Programmes		
Yes	42	100.0%
No	0	0.0%
Frequency of Educational Seminars for Students		
Once a year	16	38.1%
Twice a year	20	47.6%
Thrice a year	6	14.3%

Table 2 highlights that all counsellors (100%) provided educational guidance and counselling, particularly regarding information on scholarships, stipends, and loans. They all (100%) also assisted students with the prescribed curriculum for educational guidance and counselling.

Furthermore, all counsellors (100%) organised educational guidance and counselling programmes annually. Similar to vocational seminars, the majority of counsellors (47.6%) organised educational seminars twice a year.

Table 3: Social/ Personal Guidance and Counselling

Responses	N=42	
	Freque ncy	Percent age
Areas of Social/Personal Guidance and Counselling		
Assertiveness	37	88.1%
Personality development	40	95.2%
Safety issues	39	92.9%
Interpersonal skills	36	85.7%
Safety issues	39	92.9%
Interpersonal skills	36	85.7%
Assistance Given on Social/Personal Guidance and Counselling		
Assistance to teaching staff and students with different types of emotional problems	38	90.5%
Assistance to teaching staff and students in carrying out character-building activities	40	95.2%
Assists teaching staff and students recognising their strengths and weakness	42	100.0%
Organisation of Social/Personal Orientation		
Successful adjustment to the environment	38	90.5%
Solution to their emotional problems	36	85.7%

Effective use of teaching staff and students leisure time	40	95.2%
Cooperation with friends of the opposite sex effectively	42	100.0%
Frequency of Social/Personal Seminars		
Once a year	13	30.9%
Twice a year	28	66.7%
Thrice a year	1	2.4%

According to Table 3, most counsellors (95.2%) provided social/personal guidance and counselling focused on personality development for both teaching staff and students. Furthermore, all counsellors (100%) assisted their teaching staff and students in recognising their strengths and weaknesses during social/personal counselling. All the counsellors (100%) also ensured that teaching staff and students received orientation on cooperating effectively with the opposite sex. Most counsellors (66.7%) organised social/personal seminars twice a year for both teaching staff and students.

Table 4: Use of Time in Guidance and Counselling Centres

Opening Time for the Centres			Closing Time for the centres		
Time	N=42		Time	N=42	
	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage
Working Hours of the Centres					
7:00 am	0	0.0%	1:00 pm	0	0.0%
8:00 am	42	100.0%	2:00 pm	0	0.0%

9:00 am	0	0.0%	3:00 pm	0	0.0%
10:0 0 am	0	0.0%	4:00 pm	0	0.0%
11:0 0 am	0	0.0%	5:00 pm	42	100.0%
Reporting Time for the Counsellors			Leaving Time for the Counsellors		
Reporting and Leaving Time for the Counsellors					
7:00 am	0	0.0%	1:00 pm	0	0.0%
8:00 am	42	100.0%	2:00 pm	0	0.0%
9:00 am	0	0.0%	3:00 pm	0	0.0%
10:0 0 am	0	0.0%	4:00 pm	0	0.0%
11:0 0 am	0	0.0%	5:00 pm	42	100.0%
Weekly Working Days of the Counselling Centre					
1 day		0	0.0%		
2 days		0	0.0%		
3 days		0	0.0%		
4 days		0	0.0%		
5 days		42	100.0%		
Average Time Counsellors Spend in a Counselling Session					
30 minutes		11	26.2%		
45 minutes		25	59.5%		
1hr		6	14.3%		

1hr 30 minutes	0	0.0%
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As indicated in Table 4, all the counsellors (100%) stated that guidance and counselling centres in public universities of Ghana typically open at 8:00 a.m. and close at 5:00 p.m. All the counsellors (100%) adhered to this schedule, reporting at 8:00 a.m. and leaving at 5:00 p.m. All (100.0%) counsellors indicated that the centres work five days a week. On average, 59.5% of the counsellors spent approximately 45 minutes per session with their students or teaching staff.

Table 5: Counselling Tools and Techniques

Tools Used to Collect Data			Techniques Used to Collect Data		
Response	N=42		Responses	N=42	
	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage
Tools and Techniques Used to Collect Data					
Achievement tests	35	83.3%	Interview	40	95.2%
Aptitude test	30	71.4%			
Diagnostic tests	30	71.4%	Observation	39	92.9%
Intelligence tests	3	71.4%	Sociometry	38	90.5%
Personality tests	38	90.5%			
Medium of Communication during Counselling Process					

Verbal communication	35	83.3%
Non-Verbal communication	35	83.3%
Video playbacks	5	11.9%
Psychological Theories on which Counselling is Based		
Behavioural theory	36	85.7%
Cognitive theory	39	92.9%
Humanistic theory	34	81.0%
Psychoanalytic theory	38	90.4%
Rational emotive behavioural theory	39	92.9%
Techniques Used in Counselling		
Direct counselling	42	100.0%
Eclectic counselling	41	97.6%
Non-direct counselling	41	97.6%

Table 5 reveals that that 90.5% of the counsellors employed personality tests and 95.2% used interview techniques to gather data on their students and teaching staff. It was found that 83.3% of the counsellors used verbal and non-verbal communication. It was found that majority of the counsellors (92.9%) used cognitive theory and all the counsellors (100.0%) used direct counselling.

Table 6: Services Provided by the Counsellor

Responses	N=42	
	Frequency	Percentage
Information Impacted About Guidance and Counselling Centres		
During orientation programmes for fresh students at the university	41	97.6%
During university gatherings	39	92.9%
At the university student facilitation centre	19	45.2%
Place of Meeting for Counselling Sessions		
Guidance and counselling centre	42	100.0%
Staff common room	0	0.0%
Classroom	0	0.0%
Guidance Services Provided		
Information service	42	100.0%
Evaluation service	42	100.0%
Orientation service	42	100.0%
Follow-up service	42	100.0%
Provision of Follow-up Services		
Online	41	97.6%
Face-to-face interview	41	97.6%
Discussion	38	90.5%
Roles played as a Counsellor		
Advocate to create awareness of the guidance and counselling centre	42	100.0%
As a resource person for the community	42	100.0%

As a liaison between the university and the community	42	100.0%
As a counsellor for clients	42	100.0%

Table 6 demonstrates that 97.6% of the counsellors informed students about the guidance and counselling services available during orientation programmes for new students. Additionally, it was found that 100.0% of the counsellors meet their students at the guidance and counselling centre and all the counsellors (100.0%) provided a range of services, including information, evaluation, orientation, and follow-up. The findings indicated that 97.6% of the counsellors provided follow-up services to their students through online and face-to-face interview. All counsellors (100.0%) acted as advocates, creating awareness about the guidance and counselling centre, serving as resource persons, acting as liaisons between the university and the community, and providing counselling to both teaching staff and students.

Responses	N=42	
	Frequency	Percentage
Online Counselling Conducted by Counsellors		
Yes	19	45.2%
No	23	54.8%
Preferred Mode for Counselling		
Online Counselling	10	23.8%
Face-to-face counselling	32	76.2%
Reliability of Internet Facilities for Online Counselling		

No	37	88.1%
Yes	5	11.9%
Devices Used for Online Counselling		
Desktop computer	8	19.0%
Laptop	5	11.9%
Tablet	7	16.7%
Smartphone	23	54.7%
None of above	19	45.2%
Online Counselling Benefits		
Yes	23	54.8%
No	19	45.2%

Table 7: Online Counselling

Table 7 found that, 54.8% of the counsellors did not conduct online counselling sessions. This limitation highlights a barrier to expanding the reach of counselling services, particularly in a digital age where online platforms can increase accessibility and flexibility for both students and teaching staff. It was found that 76.2% of the counsellors preferred face-to-face counselling mode. 88.1% of the counsellors stated that the centres do not have reliable internet facilities for online counselling. However, most of the counsellors (54.7) used smartphones for these sessions. It was also found that 54.8% of the counsellors indicated that students benefited from online counselling.

Responses	N=42	
	Frequency	Percentage

Maintenance of Records after Counselling		
Yes	42	100%
No	0	0%
Storage of Records		
Counsellor office	42	100.0%
Staff common room	0	0.0%
Storeroom	0	0.0%
Note Keeping		
Session notes	0	0.0%
Progress notes	0	0.0%
Session notes; progress notes	42	100.0%
Checking of Counselling Records		
No	8	19.0%
Yes	34	81.0%

Table 8: Keeping Records of Counselling Sessions

Table 8 highlights that counsellors (100%) in university guidance and counselling centres maintained records of counselling sessions and progress notes for their students and teaching staff. All the counsellors (100%) store their records at their office. It was also found that all the counsellors (100%) keep session and progress notes. Moreover, 81.0% of the counsellors reported that university authorities periodically checked their counselling records.

Table 9: Recordings of Counselling Sessions

Responses	N=42	
	Frequency	Percentage
Recording of Teaching Staff and Students during Counselling Sessions		
No	8	19.0%
Sometimes	34	81.0%
Always	0	0.0%
Devices Used for Recording Teaching Staff and Students		
Desktop computer	7	16.7%
Laptop	21	50.0%
Tablet	3	7.1%
Smartphone	27	64.3%
None of the above	6	14.3%
Recordings Used in the Centres		
Audio recording	26	61.9%
Visual recording	6	14.3%
Audio-visual recording	2	4.8%
None of the above	8	19.0%

Table 9 reveals that 81.0% of the counsellors sometimes recorded their counselling sessions with students and teaching staff. Majority of the counsellors (64.3%) used smartphones for recording. Most of the counsellor (61.9%) used audio recordings to record their sessions.

Discussion

The study found that all counsellors (100%) in the sampled universities were involved in providing vocational guidance and career skills development. This indicates a strong commitment to equipping students with the necessary tools and information to navigate the job market effectively. The findings may be that counsellors not only assist students in understanding various career options in Ghana but also help them develop the necessary skills for success in the workplace. The finding supports Brown & Lent (2008) study, which highlights that career guidance is integral in helping individuals align their career goals with their skills and interests. Moreover, vocational guidance has enhanced self-efficacy and career adaptability, which are critical factors in navigating the evolving job market (Savickas, 2013). This finding also aligns with the findings of Gati & Asher (2001), who emphasised that career counselling programmes should equip students with practical skills to cope with challenges and make informed decisions. It can be seen that all counsellors provide latest and most relevant job information. Offering up-to-date information, counsellors in Ghana can help their students make informed decisions about their career paths in an ever-changing job market. The finding aligns with Betz (2004), who states that accurate and timely career information is crucial for making well-informed vocational decisions, as it helps individuals match their interests and skills with available opportunities. Additionally, Nauta (2004) study suggests that access to relevant job data can improve self-efficacy as students gain confidence in navigating the job market. By ensuring that students know the latest vocational opportunities, counsellors play a key role in facilitating career adaptability, which is vital in today's dynamic employment landscape (Savickas, 2013). It was found that all counsellors organised vocational orientation sessions.

Vocational orientation counsellors provided to Ghana students will probably help them get information about various career paths, required skills, and education options, essential for making well-informed career decisions. According to Super (1990), career development is a lifelong process, and providing students with early, targeted vocational guidance helps them make choices that align with their evolving interests and strengths. Additionally, Gati & Asher (2001) found that structured vocational guidance programs significantly reduce career indecision by equipping students with relevant information and coping strategies. Such programmes can also increase self-efficacy and career adaptability, key factors in navigating the uncertainties of the modern job market (Savickas, 2013). Additionally, the fact that a significant number of counsellors (47.6%) organised vocational seminars twice a year reflects a structured and recurring approach to career guidance, further enhancing students' readiness for the workforce. The findings may probably be that students in Ghana lack career information that will enable them to make good career choices. According to Brown & Lent (2008), regular exposure to career information enhances students' ability to make informed choices, increasing their self-efficacy and confidence in their future careers. Moreover, Savickas (2013) proposed that career development theory supports the idea that ongoing vocational support helps students adapt to the evolving labour market and refine their career goals over time.

Educational guidance, as observed from the results, is an area in which all counsellors (100%) were highly involved. By providing essential information about scholarships, stipends, and loans, counsellors ensure that students have access to financial resources that could alleviate some of the barriers to their educational success. This may be because Ghanaian students need more information to make informed decisions

about funding their education, which can significantly influence their academic and career success. This finding supports Perkins & Neumark (2008) study that providing students with information about financial aid options improves their ability to pursue higher education, especially for those from underprivileged backgrounds. Additionally, financial counselling can alleviate anxiety about educational costs, fostering a more focused and motivated approach to academic goals (Long, 2004). Furthermore, the support provided to students regarding the prescribed curriculum further emphasises the counsellors' role in guiding students towards academic success. Assisting students with curriculum-related guidance, Counsellors in Ghana help their students connect their education with long-term aspirations, ultimately facilitating a more purposeful and fulfilling academic journey. The finding aligns with Nauta (2004) finding that educational counselling helps students make well-informed decisions about their studies, enhancing their academic motivation and performance. Additionally, Super's (1990) career development theory suggests that aligning academic choices with career interests and skills is key to educational and career success. The organisation of educational guidance and counselling programmes each year underscores a continuous commitment to student development. This may be because counsellors in Ghana are committed to providing continuous and structured support for student's academic and career development. These annual educational guidance programmes support students in making informed decisions, reducing uncertainty, and improving academic outcomes and career readiness. The finding aligns with Super (1990) findings that providing ongoing guidance is crucial in supporting students' long-term career development and aligning their educational choices with their evolving interests and goals. The frequency of educational seminars (47.6% organising twice a year) reinforces the

importance of ongoing dialogue and information sharing in the academic context. This finding may be that counsellors have seen the need to provide students in Ghana with structured opportunities to gain valuable insights into their educational paths and career options. These seminars will help students to receive timely and updated information about academic requirements. According to Nauta (2004), career and educational guidance programmes can enhance students' self-efficacy and decision-making abilities, as they are equipped with relevant, up-to-date information. Additionally, such seminars can reduce career indecision by exposing students to various options and helping them make more informed, confident decisions about their futures (Gati & Asher, 2001).

Social and personal guidance plays a critical role in fostering the emotional and psychological well-being of students and staff. The results indicated that most counsellors (95.2%) provided guidance on personality development, demonstrating a recognition of the importance of self-awareness and growth in both personal and professional life. This finding supports Goleman (1995) study that emotional intelligence is a key aspect of personality development and is crucial for success in both academic and professional settings. For students, personality development can foster better self-management and interpersonal skills, helping them navigate the social dynamics of school and future workplaces (Schultz & Schultz, 2013). Additionally, personal development programmes for educators have been shown to improve their effectiveness in the classroom by promoting stronger teacher-student relationships and fostering a positive learning environment (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The widespread provision of support in recognising strengths and weaknesses help teaching staff and students to know their strengths and weaknesses Counsellors assisted students

and teaching staff in identifying their strengths and weaknesses, which may help students and teachers in Ghana build on their strengths and address areas of improvement. This process will also help them foster personal growth, boost confidence, and promote more effective interactions in both academic and social contexts. According to Goleman (1995), self-awareness is a key component of emotional intelligence and is vital for effective personal development. For students, recognising their strengths and weaknesses can lead to better academic performance and more informed career decisions, as it helps them align their capabilities with their goals (Schunk, 2003). Similarly, for teachers, self-awareness can improve their instructional practices, interpersonal relationships, and ability to manage classroom dynamics, ultimately leading to a more positive educational environment (Pianta et al., 2012). Facilitating effective cooperation with the opposite sex indicates that counsellors aim to promote healthy interpersonal relationships and emotional intelligence. This finding may probably be that Ghanaian students lack collaboration with friends of the opposite sex, which will enable them to foster healthy, respectful, and cooperative interpersonal relationships across genders. The finding supports Gilligan (1982), who states that understanding and respecting gender differences in communication styles and emotional expression is essential for building strong interpersonal relationships. Additionally, Johnson & Johnson (1999) found that cooperative learning environments, encouraging positive interactions between students of different genders, lead to improved social skills, higher academic achievement, and greater emotional intelligence. Furthermore, fostering respectful interactions between genders can reduce the likelihood of conflicts and contribute to a more harmonious and productive educational environment (Halpern, 2004). The frequency of social/personal seminars (66.7% organised twice a year)

is also indicative of a proactive approach to addressing the social and personal challenges that students and staff might face. This finding may be that students and teaching staff in Ghanaian public universities have challenges related to social/personal issues such as interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, stress, anxiety, and teamwork, for which they need consistent support. The findings support Goleman (1995) study, which emphasises the importance of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness and social skills, for personal and professional success. Regular seminars provide a platform for reinforcing these skills and offering practical strategies to handle social challenges effectively. Furthermore, Johnson & Johnson (1999) found that cooperative learning environments, supported by social/personal guidance, promote better interpersonal interactions and improve educational outcomes.

The operational hours of the guidance and counselling centres (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., five days a week) reflect a structured and consistent approach to providing counselling services. The fact that most counsellors spend an average of 45 minutes per session with students and teaching staff suggests that the centres are dedicated to providing quality, individualised attention. These time allocations are indicative of a well-organised structure in which counsellors aim to maximise their impact within the time constraints. The finding aligns with Sahito & Vaisanen (2017) finding and reinforces the importance of time consciousness in the university guidance and counselling centres, promoting efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity.

The findings on counselling tools and techniques reveal that counsellors primarily rely on personality tests and interview techniques for data collection. This approach allows counsellors to gain a comprehensive understanding of their clients' needs and tailor their interventions accordingly. The use of both verbal and non-verbal

communication during counselling processes emphasises the importance of effective communication in building rapport and understanding clients' concerns. The prevalence of cognitive and rational emotive behavioural theory, along with direct counselling techniques, indicates that counsellors employ evidence-based approaches to facilitate meaningful change and development among students and teaching staff. Khan (2019) studies advocate for supporting, strengthening, and effective use of verbal and non-verbal communication to address teaching staff and students' fundamental issues and concerns and enhance the efficacy of guidance and counselling centres.

The services provided by counsellors extend beyond individual sessions. The widespread dissemination of information about counselling centres during orientation programmes for new students is crucial for creating awareness and promoting accessibility to services. This may be because it is the only opportunity for counsellors to meet a large number of fresh students in the universities. This finding aligns with the study of Lasode et al. (2017), which states that students get to know the guidance and counselling centres during orientation programmes for fresh students. Furthermore, the provision of services such as evaluation, orientation, and follow-up shows a holistic approach to supporting students throughout their university journey. The finding is compatible with Anna & Bojuwoye (2019) studies, reinforcing the significance of various guidance services provided by university counselling centres. Counsellors also take on advocacy roles, such as acting as liaisons between the university and the community and serving as resource persons. These roles contribute to building a strong network of support that extends beyond individual counselling sessions. This aligns with Nkechi et al. (2016) findings on the multifaceted services a counsellor provides within the guidance and counselling centres. The inadequate

number of counsellors may be attributed to the above causes in the universities guidance and counselling centres. According to the American Counseling Association (ACA) (2014), a referral may occur if the counsellor is incapable of helping or lacks the knowledge or skills necessary to support the teaching staff or the student.

Despite the benefits of online counselling, the study found that most counsellors did not engage in this modality, with a lack of reliable internet facilities being a key challenge. This limitation highlights a barrier to expanding the reach of counselling services, particularly in a digital age where online platforms can increase accessibility and flexibility for both students and teaching staff. Nonetheless, the fact that counsellors who did provide online counselling noted its benefits indicates the potential for incorporating this medium more widely, especially if infrastructural challenges are addressed. However, counsellors prefer face-to-face to online counselling. The findings align with Tannous (2017) and Aidoo (2011) findings regarding the benefits of online counselling and counsellors' preference for face-to-face counselling. Although counsellors prefer face-to-face counselling to online counselling because of inconsistent internet problems but, due to the distances from one campus to another in the same university. However, it has been made necessary for counsellors to conduct online counselling for their teaching staff and students. Counsellors have shown growing support and interest in providing online counselling services through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Virtual Reality (VR) methods (Lustgarten & Colbow, 2017). Counselling through computers, telephone, webcam, video conferencing, teleconferencing, instant messaging, and chat rooms, for instance, enables communication, simulations, the creation of virtual realities and interaction between counsellors and teaching staff and students at a distance (Dawson et al., 2011).

The maintenance of counselling records and progress notes is an important practice that ensures continuity and accountability in the counselling process. The findings suggest that most counsellors kept records of their sessions, and university authorities regularly checked these records. This practice not only supports the monitoring of students' progress but also ensures that counsellors can provide informed and consistent support over time. Bell (2013) found in his study that counsellors keep teaching staff and students' records, protecting teaching staff and students' confidentiality and adhering to legal and ethical standards. Documentation and record-keeping are crucial ethical factors in counselling, pushing the boundaries of privacy and secrecy (Estabrook et al., 2010). Countries and state laws and statutes require counsellors to keep their records in a safe, secure format (such as computer-encrypted files) (ACA, 2014).

The occasional recording of counselling sessions, with a preference for audio recording using smartphones, suggests that counsellors may be adopting modern technologies to aid in documentation and analysis. However, the fact that these recordings were not conducted routinely raises questions about consistency in documentation and whether this practice could be further developed to enhance the quality of counselling services. This may be because counsellors in the centres are used to smartphones rather than other devices, and it is easy for them to keep teaching staff and students confidential.

Implications

The Ghanaian government and university authorities should invest in improving internet access and digital tools within guidance and counselling centres to enable reliable online counselling services. This

would ensure that students and teaching staff have equal access to counselling support, especially in remote or underserved areas. Also, the university authorities should implement standardised digital record-keeping systems for counsellors to ensure secure, organised, and easily accessible records of counselling sessions. This will improve the efficiency and accountability of the counselling process while facilitating better follow-up services for students. Again, the guidance and counselling unit should organise workshops and in-service training for the lecturer counsellors in the guidance and counselling centres. Lastly, the guidance and counselling unit should organise more frequent vocational and educational seminars (at least twice a year) to ensure students receive up-to-date career and academic guidance. This can be achieved by allocating resources for event planning and involving industry professionals to provide practical insights.

Conclusion

This study examined the functioning of guidance and counselling centres in higher education: A survey of the public universities in Ghana, focusing on their effectiveness and service delivery. The findings indicate that these centres operate effectively, providing valuable educational, vocational, and social/personal counselling services to teaching staff and students. The counsellors utilised various counselling tools and techniques, managing their time efficiently and maintaining comprehensive records of counselling sessions. Additionally, the availability of online counselling services further enhances accessibility and support for the university community, however the internet connectivity need to be strengthened. The study underscores the importance of guidance and counselling centres in educational

institutions and highlights the ongoing need for counsellors to remain committed to strengthening their efforts. By continuing to provide essential guidance services, they play a critical role in assisting students with career planning, academic development, and personal well-being, thereby ensuring they have access to relevant job information and the necessary support to navigate the prescribed curriculum.

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Data Availability Statement

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

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