

ASSESSING GUIDANCE SERVICES IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA: A CASE OF A SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN THE SUNYANI WEST DISTRICT

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Abstract

The study assessed guidance services in a senior high school in the Sunyani west district of Ghana. A mixed-method approach was employed for the study with the concurrent triangulation strategy as the design. The population of this study comprised all the Green Track students of the school. The sample size was 122 respondents made up of 120 students and two counselors. The students were selected through the convenience sampling method while the two counsellors were purposively selected. Instruments for data collection were questionnaire and semi-structured interview guides. The study revealed that all the students were aware of counselling departments as well as guidance services. The study recommended that the Management of the school should provide facilities like counselling offices, magazines, and audio and video tapes, for effective guidance and counselling services.

Keywords: Assessment, Guidance Services, Senior High Schools, Counselling

Introduction

Guidance service in schools has become to a large extent a key element of lifelong learning policy. Guidance services are an interpersonal process designed to assist individuals with career development problems (Nayak & Rao, 2004). Thus, the individual is assisted to choose, enter, adjust and advance in a particular sphere of endeavour. It is clear from the above concept of guidance services as given by Nayak and Rao (2004) that a guidance service is premised on a cordial relationship between the client and the helper (Counsellor). Sometimes these relationships are formal while others are informal. Guidance services involve a plethora of services rendered to individuals or groups of people to effect intended and unintended changes for the well-being of the benefactors both presently and in the future. Guidance programmes are so multifaceted to the extent that each area requires the necessary attention to promote the necessary personality growth and development.

According to Shertzer and Stone (1976), guidance services are formalized actions undertaken by the school to make guidance operational and available to students. These are orientation service, appraisal service, information service, placement service, counseling service, consultation service, evaluation service, and follow-up service. According to Fruehling (2009), educational guidance serves as a process of helping students to achieve the self-understanding and self-direction necessary to make informed choices and move toward personal goals. Thus, the individual is guided to take good decisions and solve personal challenges that are likely to impact negatively on the present as well as future life.

The importance and significance attached to guidance services programmes in our educational system may make it necessary for effective guidance services in our present senior high schools. However, guidance services are likely to face a lot of challenges in terms of implementation. Taylor and Buku (2006) state that the main aim of the guidance is to assist the student to develop physically, mentally, emotionally, morally, and educationally to cope with the learning situations within and outside the school environment. Some of these services provided by counsellors are hindered because of the

following challenges: Inadequately trained counsellors: Lack of Parental Support, Lack of or inadequate funding, and Confidentiality.

Guidance services have not been properly established in the senior high schools despite the Government policy directing that all schools should have guidance programmes functional schools (Affum, Tawiah & Laryea, 2019). This has been attributed as a major causative factor in the recurring incidence of student indiscipline in senior high schools in Ghana (Affum et al., 2019). Students in senior high school go through a lot of psychological challenges and these challenges coupled with issues like vocational choice issues, academic problems, dealing with depression, aggression and other family-related issues are predominant among students at the senior high school level which have enormous implications on the wellbeing of the students.

According to Animasahun (2014), these problems are largely responsible for the alarming increase in the wave of indiscipline problems that are fast eating deep into the fabric of the educational system. He further explains that if these challenges are not well catered for, they may lead to such problems as examination malpractices, cultism, sex abuse, vandalism, drug abuse, and prostitution, among others. Guidance as a support service is expected to deal with these challenges in the senior high school education system (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). According to Ahyia (2012), it appears that the state of affairs of students in Ghanaian schools may partly be due to the ineffectiveness of the guidance and counselling services in the schools.

Again, from a feasibility study by the researchers, it was observed that students in various schools in the Sunyani West District exhibit various forms of moral decadence such as examinations malpractices, drug abuse, and engaging in premarital sexual activities. Such eventualities are noted to have immense repercussions on the academic outcomes of the students. In light of this, the study focused on the assessment of guidance services in Odumaseman senior high school in the Sunyani West District.

Methodology

The mixed method approach was employed for the study with the concurrent triangulation strategy as the design. The population of this study comprised all the Green Track students of Odumaseman senior high school. The sample size was 122 respondents made up of 120 students and two counselors of the school. The students were selected through the convenience sampling method while the two counsellors were purposively selected. Considering the descriptive nature of the study, primary data for the study were gathered using a questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide. Data were analysed employing descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

Analysis and Discussion

A questionnaire consisting of 2 items was first administered to the 120 participants on their awareness of the guidance services programme available in Odumaseman Senior High Schools in the Sunyani West District. Table 1 depicts the responses obtained.

Table 1. Existence of Guidance and Counselling Services in Odumaseman SHS

<i>Nature</i>	<i>Aware Freq. (%)</i>	<i>Not aware Freq. (%)</i>
Existence of an office dedicated to guidance and counselling in the school	120 (100.0)	0
Student's awareness of the existence of guidance and counselling services in the school	120(100.0)	0

From Table 1, it was revealed that all the students were aware of the counselling department in the school and students were as well aware of guidance services. It was noted that students were not just aware of the existence of a counselling department in the school, but also aware of guidance and counselling services in the school. The 2 school counsellors were also interviewed to find out about the existence of a guidance and counselling department, and whether students are aware of the services provided by the counselling department. Below are their comments. The following are their responses:

Yes! We have a counselling department in the school and students are aware of it. Students do not often visit the department. Students who visited the department were either referred to the department by a teacher or a parent.

The school has a counselling unit. I was recently given an office to serve as a counselling officer. Students rarely come for guidance and counselling services. Teachers also come for guidance and counselling.

From both students' and the counselor's perspectives, it was noted that guidance and counselling existed in the school and all the students were aware of the existence of such services in the schools. It indicates a high awareness rate among students. It was therefore inferred, that publicity for the counselling programmes within the school was reaching the student population. The findings of the study confirm with Gysbers and Henderson (2006), who speculate that such a situation is an ideal initial step toward a successful programme for students. Again, the findings are in line with Lambert and Barley, (2001) who posit that one significant facet of students' participation in guidance programmes is their awareness of the programme in their schools.

The researchers further enquired from the participants about the type of services being rendered by the counselling department. Table 2 shows the responses received from the participants through a questionnaire.

Table 2. Guidance Services in the School

Response	Aware Freq. (%)	Not aware Freq. (%)
Orientation (adaptive) service	101 (84.2)	19(15.8)
Appraisal service	38(31.7)	82(68.3)
Information service	52(43.3)	68(56.7)
Placement service	0	120(100.0)
Counselling service	120	0
Consultation service	75(62.5)	45(37.5)
Follow-up evaluation service	0	120(100.0)
	0	120(100.0)

From Table 2, (101) 84.2% of the respondents were of the view that the school offered orientation services for students. Again, 82 (68.3%) said that the schools do not offer appraisal services for students. Also, the majority 68(56.7%) said that the schools do not offer information services to students. Nonetheless, a significant number of the respondents 52(43.3%), were of the view that the school offers information services to students. Furthermore, all the respondents (100%) were of the view that the schools do not offer placement services for students. All the respondents were of the view that the school offers counselling services for students. Moreover, 75(62.5%) of the respondents were of the view that the schools offer consultation services for students. Finally, all the respondents again said the schools do not offer follow-up services and evaluation services.

In an interview with the counsellors of the school, the following responses were given;

I am a professional counsellor with the capability to offer any guidance service to students at the secondary school level. Nonetheless, the scope of my services in the school has been limited to orientation services, counselling services, consultation services, information services, and appraisal services. (CPS1)

I offer almost all the various components of guidance services to students in the school. However, my services are limited to a few counselling services which are mostly demanded by students. I offer orientation services for fresh students and also prepare final-year students for their final examinations (CPS2).

From Table 2, orientation services, counselling services, consultation services, information services, and appraisal services were the main guidance services practice in the surveyed schools. The guidance services in the school conform with Erford (2007) who contends that the primary mission of a school's guidance program is to provide a broad spectrum of personnel services to the students and these services according to him include student assessment, the information service, placement and follow-up, and counselling assistance. These four areas should constitute the core of any guidance program and should be organized to facilitate the growth and development of all students from kindergarten through post-high school experiences.

A 10-item questionnaire was administered to the student participants to solicit their views on the role or importance of guidance services in the school. Table 3 shows the responses obtained from the respondents on 3 levels Likert scale (1=Disagree, 2=Neutral, 3=Agree).

Table 3: Student's Response to the Role of Guidance

Item	Agree Freq. (%)	Neutral Freq. (%)	Disagree Freq. (%)
Guidance gives effective assistance toward career development	98 (81.6)	7 (5.8)	15 (12.6)
Guidance sets meaningful occupational goals for students	85 (71)	10 (8)	25 (21)
Subject choice and career Guidance help in the efficient use of human recourses	105 (87.5)	5(4.5)	10 (8)
Guidance help students know more about job prospects and what they study	108 (90)	3 (2.5)	9 (7.5)
Guidance helps students develop an integrated picture of themselves	82 (68)	8 (7)	30 (25)
Subject choice and career guidance make students focused on career choice	110 (91)	2 (2)	8 (7)
Guidance improves student perception that they were being prepared for a better future	106 (88)	5 (4)	9 (8)
Guidance leads to more future orientation and greater self-efficacy	94 (78)	7 (6)	19 (16)
Career guidance leads to career choices	110 (91)	2 (2)	8 (7)
Career choice information leads to knowledge of job market requirement	108 (90)	4 (3)	8(7)

Table 3, above represents students' responses on the role of guidance in helping SHS students achieve success in their academic life. 98 (81.6%) of the students agreed with the statements that guidance helps in effective assistance towards career development while 15 (12.6%) of them disagreed and 7 disagreed. Also, 85 (71%) of the respondents agreed that guidance sets meaningful occupational goals for students and 25 (21%) disagreed while 10 (8%) of them were neutral. Regarding the statement that subject choice and career guidance help in the efficient use of human recourse, 105 (87.5%) of the respondents agreed, 5 (4.5%) were neutral and 10 (8%) disagreed. Also, 108 (90%) of the students agreed that guidance help students know more about job prospects and what they study, 9(7.5%) disagreed and 3 (2.5%) were neutral to this view. Furthermore, 82 (68%) of the respondents agreed that guidance helps students develop an integrated picture of themselves while 30 (25%) disagreed and 8 (7%) were neutral. Also, 110 (91%) of the respondents agreed that subject choice and career guidance make students focused on career choice, 2 (2%) were neutral while 8 (7%) disagreed. 106 (88%) of the students agreed that guidance improves student perception that they were being prepared for a better future, 5 (4%) were neutral and 9 (8%) disagreed. 94 (78%) of the respondents also agreed that guidance leads to more future orientation and greater self-efficacy while 7 (96%) were neutral and 19 (16%) disagreed. Regarding the statement that career guidance leads to career choices, 110 (91%) of the respondents agreed, 2 (2%) were neutral and 8 (7%) disagreed. Finally, 108 (90%) of the students agreed that career choice information leads to knowledge of job market requirements, 4 (3%) were neutral and 8 (7%) disagreed.

In an interview with the counsellors, the following comments were given:

I have so many roles I play as a counsellor. I help students who are addicted to drugs. Selecting an appropriate career is a critical task that faces all adolescents in all societies. The wrong choice of career and course affects the life of the adolescent.

Most students would want to study science not because they can but because their friends are reading science and it is a perception that students who read science are brilliant and therefore are being respected. (CPS,)

The findings are in agreement with Nkala (2014) who points out that some students engage in antisocial behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse and irresponsible sexual behaviour, which leads to a decline of moral integrity because they lack knowledge on how to effectively spend and manage their leisure time and it is the role of guidance and counselling to help resolve problems of drug addiction among students.

Table 4 sought to consider the challenges confronting the practice of guidance services programmes in Odumasiman SHS in the Sunyani West District.

Table 4: Challenges of Guidance Services in the school

Item	Agree Freq. (%)	Neutral Freq. (%)	Disagree Freq. (%)
Inadequate funding	120(100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
The counsellor is not always available to attend to the needs of students	105(87.5)	3 (2.5)	12 (10)
Lack of trust and confidentiality in the counsellor	87 (73)	4 (3)	29 (27)
Guidance meant for Students with mental or emotional Problems	95 (79.2)	6 (5)	19 (15.8)
Insufficient counsellors in the school	115 (96)	0 (0)	5 (4)

From Table 4, all the respondents were of the view that inadequate funding was a challenge facing the counselling department in the school. Again, 105 (87.5%) of the respondents were of the view that the counsellor is not always available to attend to the needs of the students. Also, 87 (73%) of the respondents attributed the challenges of guidance and counselling in the school to a lack of trust and confidence in the school counsellors. Moreover, 95 (79.2%) of the respondents were of the perception that guidance meant for students with mental and emotional issues is a challenge and lastly 115 (96%) of the student participants were of the opinion that there are insufficient counsellors in the school.

In an interview with the counsellors, the following comments were given:

A major problem facing guidance services in the school is the lack of sufficient funding. There is no budget allocation for guidance and counselling services in this school. I always have to improvise to carry out various counselling activities in the school. I also double as a subject teacher in the school; hence I am not always available to attend to the counselling needs of students. (CPS1)

There is only me as a counsellor in the school with a student population of over 1000. Aside from offering counselling services to students, I also double as a subject teacher in the school. Again, most of the students in the school have a misconception about guidance services in the school (CPS2)

It was revealed that challenges facing guidance and counselling in the school include insufficient funding, a busy schedule of counsellors, and inadequate counsellors in the schools. The findings are in line with Bobga (2016) who contends that the main aim of guidance and counselling is to assist the student to develop physically, mentally, emotionally, morally, and educationally to cope with the learning situations within and outside the school environment. Nonetheless, these services provided by counsellors are hindered because of a lack of trained counsellors and the inadequacy of guidance Counsellors in secondary schools. Again, the findings of the study confirm Oye, Obi, Mohd, and Amos (2012) who postulate that lack of or inadequate funding impedes effective guidance and counselling in

schools. Table 5, looked at the appropriate ways in which academic guidance services can be improved in the school.

Table 5: Ways to Improve Guidance Services in Schools

Item	Agree Freq. (%)	Neutral Freq. (%)	Disagree Freq. (%)
Create awareness of the existing guidance services	120(100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Motivating counsellors	120(100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Training the counsellor	115(95.8)	0 (0)	5 (4.2)
Reducing the teacher counsellors' workload	110 (92)	3 (2.5)	7(5.5)
Supporting the guidance and counselling team	120 (100)	0 (0)	0(0)
Providing the required facilities and funds	120	0	0
Establishing strong guidance services	120	0	0
Supportive parents	114 (95)	0 (0)	6 (5)
Confidentiality, trust, and respect for students	120 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Sensitizing students on the importance of guidance services	120 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Making use of peer counsellors	101 (84)	4 (3.5)	15(12.5)

From Table 5, which represents student's responses on how guidance services can be improved, all 120(100%) of the students respectively agreed that creating awareness of the existing guidance services, motivating counsellors, training the counsellor, supporting the guidance team, providing the required facilities and funds, establishing strong guidance services and sensitizing students on the importance of guidance services are measures when put in place will improve the guidance services in schools. Also, the majority, 110, representing 92% of the students claimed that reducing the workload of teacher counsellors will improve the service but a minority of 7 (5.5%) of the students disagreed with this factor of improving guidance services. Again, the majority 114(95%) of the students claimed that parents' support may improve guidance service in the school while a minority 6 (5%) of the students disagreed with this factor. Making use of peer counsellors, 101 (84%) of the respondents agreed to this assertion while only 15(12.5%) of them disagreed.

Below were the responses that ensued between the researchers and the school counsellors.

I believe that to improve guidance services in the school, enough funding should be allocated to support guidance services. Again, the counselling department should be staffed adequately. Students should also be sensitized to the significance of guidance services on their well-being (CPS1)

I am certain that counsellors should endeavour to sensitize their clients (students) on the importance of guidance and as well act professionally to instill trust and confidence in their clients. (CP2)

The findings revealed that respondents believed that creating awareness of guidance services would help improve the service within the school since students rarely visit. This is in agreement with Eyo, Joshua, and Esuong (2010) who contends that school counsellors should create awareness of the existing counselling services by giving them wider publicity in the schools. It was also noted that confidentiality, trust, and respect for students in guidance services would improve guidance services in the schools.

Conclusions

From both students' and the counsellors' perspectives, it was noted that guidance and counselling existed in the school and all the students were aware of the existence of such services in the schools, and that orientation services, counselling services, consultation services, information services, and appraisal services were the main guidance services practice in the surveyed school. Inadequate funding for the guidance department and an insufficient number of teacher counsellors in the school were the main challenges identified in the study. The study also concludes that creating awareness of guidance services would help improve the service within the school since students rarely visit.

Recommendation

From the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The study recommends that school management should organize seminars frequently for students to be aware of the various counselling services offered by the school.
2. School management should organize in-service courses for all teachers on how to offer guidance and counselling in the school.
3. School management should equip guidance and counselling units in terms of professionals and other relevant resources to make their operations effective by providing them with adequate funding.

Implications

This paper was a case study but it has implications for other senior high schools in the country since the student characteristics and provision of guidance services in all schools in Ghana have a lot of similarities. It is, therefore, recommended that all the items in Table 5 on the ways to improve guidance services in the school should be taken seriously and be worked out judiciously to achieve better guidance services in the Ghanaian senior high school.

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