

# Students' Utilisation of Guidance and Counselling Services in Senior High Schools

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**Abstract:** *Although guidance and counselling services are needed at every stage in human life, it is more essential for late adolescents especially those in school due to the numerous needs they ought to satisfy. In view of that senior high schools are required to offer varied guidance and counselling services for students in order to promote their personal, psycho-social, academic and vocational endeavours. This study, therefore, surveyed the extent of and hindrances to students' utilisation of these services in senior high schools in a municipality. The quantitative study used survey design to guide the conduct and analysis of the study. It was disclosed that although most of the surveyed schools have facilities and resources available for these services for students' use and the students are aware of them, the rate at which they are utilised is not encouraging. This development is underscored by factors such as lack of confidence and trust in school counselors, shyness, and stigmatisation. Given the results of the study, the following have been suggested for implementation by educational authorities in the Municipality: training of school guidance and counselling co-ordinators on trust issues in counselling relationship, organise talks for students on the importance of guidance and counselling in their lives and proper siting of guidance and counselling offices in the senior high schools, hoping that if these suggestions are well implemented, students would make a maximum use of the services to enhance their academic and personal progress.*

**Key words:** Guidance and counselling services, utilisation of guidance and counselling services, factors hindering use of guidance and counselling services, senior high school students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of education, its relevance has not been in doubt. Education is regarded as the process of developing the capacities of individuals to fit well in the society (Kuranchie, 2019). It is also regarded as the means that offers opportunities for students to reach their full potentials in the areas of educational, vocational, social and emotional development (Lunenburg, 2010).

According to Asafo-Adjaye (2012), education is a means that produces positive private and societal returns and growth, making it vital for individual and national development. The numerous benefits of education have necessitated individuals, families and countries' investment in the enterprise and hence all efforts are required to be made to ensure that stakeholders of education derive the expected dividends from it.

In order for education to achieve its objectives of developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes and values of young people, guidance and counselling services need to be made available in schools. This accounts for the incorporation of guidance and counselling services in the educational system (Stephenson, 2013). In corroborating this standpoint, Gysbers and Handerson (2001) emphasise that school guidance and counselling is to assist students with their educational development and career aspirations. The services offered by guidance and counselling units in schools aid actors to provide quality education to learners. These services aid students in various aspects of their lives. Boye-Laryea (2022), for instance, believe that school guidance and counselling services are provided to help students to handle and deal with the social and emotional challenges they encounter both at home and in school.

In view of these ideas, Dabone, Graham and Fabea (2015) consider guidance and counselling as an integral part of academic programmes of schools. Similarly, Stephenson (2013) posits that the relevance of guidance and counselling accounts for its incorporation in the educational systems. The complexities of modern life have also placed enormous demands and expectations on students that guidance and counselling services are needed to help students to stay afloat (Weissberg & Myrskis, 2007 as cited in Boye-Laryea, 2022). Guidance and counselling services are provided by qualified persons to individuals of all ages to help them manage their life (Eliamani, et al, 2014). However, students at the pre-tertiary institutions need guidance and counselling services the more as they are confronted with many educational, vocational, personal, social and emotional needs which when not addressed can result in diverse and numerous undesired behaviours (Weitten, 2007 as cited in Boye-Laryea, 2022). Studies have unveiled that students who use guidance and counselling services available in their schools demonstrate more positive attitudes toward school, good and appropriate learning behaviour and outcomes (Baker & Gerler, 2014). These tell that accessing guidance and counselling services aids students to go about their studies smoothly and effectively.

There are as many descriptions of guidance and counselling as there are many authors. To Britannica (2018) as cited in Ayamba (2020), guidance and counselling is a process of assisting people to uncover and develop their educational, vocational and psychological potentials in order to achieve an optimal level of personal happiness and social usefulness. In supporting this point, Kanga (2014) contends that guidance and counselling is a lifelong process which entails assisting people either as part of a group or at personal level to gain insights into the activities they are to pursue. With these services, the academic, career and social or personal development of students

are enhanced. Gibson and Mitchell (2007) also regard guidance and counselling as an important part of students' education, as without the services it provides, students would not gain much from the educational system. Carey and Dimmett (2012) discovered that guidance and counselling services contribute to students' academic success. This stems from the fact that guidance and counselling offers information for personal, counselling, educational, career development and placement for further education and work (Stone & Bradhes, 2003).

From the perspectives of counsellors, guidance and counselling services are a broad programme made up of services including information services, appraisal services, vocational guidance services, referral services, evaluation, follow-up and consultancy and research services (Eliamani, et al, 2014). The benefits of guidance and counselling in school are diverse including the fact that it is organised to address discipline needs of students (Ajowi & Simatwa, 2010), helps to meet the holistic developmental needs of students (UNESCO, 2002). Batt, Nic Gabhainn and Falvey (2002) also describe guidance and counselling in second cycle schools, as the full range of interventions that assist students to make choices about their lives. For secondary school students, these choices are often focused on their personal and social lives, educational choices, and career decisions. Eliamani et al (2014) found that students who used guidance and counselling services were able to choose good programmes and also study well. School guidance and counselling seeks to assist students to handle personal challenges of adjustment to developmental changes and promote students' use of their innate potentials in school (Carey & Dimmett, 2012, Nkechi, 2016). The services are also supposed to enhance personal and social development of students (Nkechi, 2016). In spite of the numerous benefits that seem to accrue from guidance and counselling by students in school, studies have found under-utilisation of the services it offers. According to Mancillas (2004), several factors may contribute to the students' reactions and attitudes towards counselling programmes. McGannon, Carey and Dimmit (2005) contend that school counselling programmes may be constrained by overburdening school counsellors with other activities such as clerical duties. That is, counsellors may not be available at the times the students may need their services. They may also not have enough time for students due to other duties they perform in school. These developments tend to compromise the counsellors' ability to deal with individual and group counselling, consultation, case management, programme evaluation, and the development of school-wide guidance programmes.

A study conducted by Chan and Quinn (2012) revealed that students refused to access guidance and counselling services due to what their colleagues would think about them. They felt that if they visit such counselling centres, their colleagues may misconstrue them as having unbearable problems and to avoid the misconception of their visits would refrain from going there. Another issue that ward off students from accessing guidance and counselling centres is lack of confidence in the school counsellors, entertaining fears that if they share their worries with them the counsellors may disclose the problems to other people. Studies have revealed that students refuse to access guidance and counselling services due to confidential issues (Ndhlovu & Phiri, 2009,

Awinsong, 2012, Kocchar, 2013, Mshaandja, Haihambo, Vergnani & Frank, 2013). If students or their colleagues experience a breach of confidence, they may develop perceptions of and attitudes toward school counselling that may motivate them to abstain from utilising counselling services. Other factors that prevent students from accessing guidance and counselling services as have been found in studies include trust issues or students do not want to disclose their problems (Mshaandja, et al, 2013), shyness (Awinsong, 2015), stigma (Ndhlovu, 2012, Kocchar, 2013), lack of convenient counselling rooms make students restrain from utilisation of counselling services (Alemu, 2013). According to Kuhn (2004), the influence of these aforementioned factors affecting counselling utilisation by students may operate on three levels; discouraging voluntary patronage of school guidance and counselling services, postponing seeking counselling services and not seeking school guidance and counselling services entirely. All these three situations go a long way to deny senior high school students of vital information and resources that they can leverage on to enable them take very essential decisions that affect various aspects of their lives.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Senior high school education is the second ladder in the academic trajectory where students make very essential decisions related to their future endeavours. It is also the level that students are in their adolescent stage which is characterised by myriad of educational, vocational, psycho-social and other behavioural issues. According to Ndichu (2005), prominent among the problems secondary school students battle with include hyperactivity, anxiety, anger, annoyance, unhappiness and withdrawal. Nasibi (2003) also asserts that students at the adolescent stage experience stress than any other group. It is also observed that adolescents depend on the relationship they value with others to pursue ambitions and also experience social change (Kanus, 2017). Consequent to these, school counselling programmes are instituted or included in most educational systems of the modern world to target adolescents. This is to help them make the right choices about their identities, who they wish to become, and to help them find acceptable ways of developing themselves and their careers to contribute meaningfully to society (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). If students fully utilise the school guidance and counselling services, they would be better placed to traverse their academic journey with less worries and pain and the opposite would be true if students are unable to access guidance and counselling services offered to them in school.

Prior studies have disclosed divergent findings on this subject; while some studies have revealed that in some schools, students greatly access the guidance and counselling services available (Kanus, 2017), in other schools the opposite happens; the students rarely access guidance and counselling services (Awingson, 2015). With the lack of unanimity in students' utilisation of guidance and counselling services, there was the need to investigate to unravel what the situation was in senior high schools in the Sunyani Municipality, one of the finest cities in the Republic of Ghana, which also has well performing senior high schools. There is sparse research data on this subject in the municipality, which denies students of decision making variables on the vocational,

career and psycho-social phenomena. To fill this knowledge gap, this study was undertaken in the senior high schools in the Sunyani Municipality.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study sought to:

1. gauge students' awareness of guidance and counselling services offered by the schools.
2. examine the rate at which students use the guidance and counselling services available in the schools.
3. ascertain factors that hinder students' use of guidance and counselling services available in the schools.

### **Significance of the study**

As numerous studies have been conducted on the guidance and counselling services offered to students, the findings of the current add to them. Thus, the study provides further insights into the participation of students in the processes involved in student counselling. This would help in the identification of appropriateness or otherwise of the approaches to student counselling and their rectifications. This response can be important for individual students, schools as well as governmental bodies with an interest in education, such as the Ghana Education Service or the Ministry of Education. The findings of the study would also serve as a vital input into educational policies and reforms, especially in the aspects that deal with student counselling.

The study would also provide further insights into students' perceptual underpinnings that influence the reaction of students to counselling. This information is essential to counsellors and social psychologists who are experts in the field of education. Furthermore, the study revealing the challenges associated with guidance and counselling in senior high schools would aid stakeholders to find antidotes to encourage students' participation in counselling. The study would also serve as a relevant source of academic reference and further research into student counselling and guidance.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This section of the write-up concentrates on the methods and materials that were used to conduct the survey in the senior high schools in the Sunyani Municipality to ascertain the extent to which students utilise the guidance and counselling services available to them and the factors that hinder students' access of the vital services that are supposed to enhance their studies and life choices. In view of the goal of the study, quantitative approach leveraging on the descriptive survey design was employed to guide the conduct of the study. This approach was deemed appropriate to gauge the views of large groups of people on issues that apply to them all as espoused by scholars such as Ary et al (2010), Creswell and Creswell (2014) and Kuranchie (2021). This line of investigating a phenomenon such as students' use of guidance and counselling services enabled utilisation of a

large number of students for the study. It also ensured high representation of students of the various senior high schools in the study.

The survey targeted the students of the senior high schools in the municipality with the final year students being the accessible population. The reason for the use of the final year students was that they were the batch of students who had traveled more than two years in the three year senior high school journey and supposedly would have had ample time and opportunity to access guidance and counselling services in the schools. The data collection was made to coincide with the time that the final year students were in school in view of the double track system which has been operating at the senior high schools in Ghana since the 2016/2017 academic year. The final year students were randomly selected in the schools in order to give fair and non-bias chances to everyone. This process yielded a sample size of 245 students.

A questionnaire was developed from the literature after which it was pre-tested for reliability. Before the pre-testing, the validity of the instrument had been done. The self-developed questionnaire was subjected to critical face and content validity scrutiny by two experts in Counselling Psychology and Measurement and Assessment respectively. The criticisms and suggestions offered by the experts were incorporated into the instrument prior to the pre-testing. The latter exercise yielded a reliability co-efficient of 0.85, which is acceptable to be used for the main study per the directions of Pallant (2011).

The personal administration of the research instrument took five days besides the days that were used to seek permission from the educational authorities and gate keepers of the schools. The instrument was distributed to the respondents after going through the necessary ethical protocols including unveiling the intent and purpose of the study and why the respondents were chosen to be part of the study, assuring them of anonymity and confidentiality as well voluntary participation in the study. To elicit high return rate, the respondents filled the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher providing an opportunity to give explanations to issues that were not clear to some of the respondents. After the data collection, the necessary screening processes were undertaken to ensure that the final data were good for analysis.

Descriptive statistical analytical tools such as frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the data collected on both the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the study objectives. Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS) version 26 was used to statistically analyse the data gathered, which results are presented in tables.

### **Study Results**

The outcomes of the data analysis are presented at this part of the study. It commences with the demographic information of the respondents and followed by the results that address the study objectives. The demographic information that was taken about the respondents are their sex, age



and programme of study. The outcomes of the data analysis of these three information are displayed in the Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic information of respondents**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage(%)</b>
Male	145	59.2
Female	100	40.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age range</b>		
<15 years	12	4.9
15-18 years	175	71.4
>18years	58	23.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Programme</b>		
Business	35	14.3
General Arts	75	30.6
Home Economics	45	18.4
Visual Arts	48	19.6
Science	42	17.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	

The results of the data analysis as shown in Table 1 indicate that more male senior high students participated in the study than their female counterparts did. This stems from the fact that the male students constituted about 60 percent of the study sample while the females hovered around 40 percent. This result is not surprising as one of the participating schools is a male single sex school, giving more male students the chance to participate in the study. Concerning the age range of the students who took part in the study, a majority of the students' ages fall within the normal school age group. The result shows that over 70 percent of the students' ages are within 15 and 18 years with about 58 of them who were more than 18 years insinuating that the latter may not have started schooling early. On the other hand, about 5 percent of the students may have started school very early as by age 15, they were in the final year of their senior high school education.

The students also were distributed across the major programmes offered at the senior high school, the majority of them being in the General Arts. The students pursuing General Arts has more than 30 percent representation in the study while the rest registering less than 20 percent respectively of the study sample. Without doubt, General Arts is a very popular programme at the senior high schools in Ghana, receiving very high subscription in almost every year. The first of objective of study sought to gauge students' awareness of the guidance and counselling services available in the senior high schools. The responses provided by the students are analysed and presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Students' awareness of guidance and counselling in the schools**

	<b>Yes Freq(%)</b>	<b>No Freq(%)</b>	<b>Total Freq(%)</b>
Are you aware that the school offers guidance and counselling services for students?	232(94.7%)	13(5.3%)	<b>245(100%)</b>
Do you know where the guidance and counselling services are offered in the school?	207(84.5%)	38(15.5%)	<b>245(100%)</b>
Do you know those who provide guidance and counselling services in the schools?	176(71.8%)	69(28.2%)	<b>245(100%)</b>
Are aware of the times, periods or days when guidance and counselling services are offered in the school?	46(19.8%)	186(80.29%)	<b>232(100%)</b>
Are you aware that individual counselling is offered for students in the school?	215(92.7%)	17(7.3%)	<b>232(100%)</b>
Have you participated in group counselling offered for students in the school?	202(82.4%)	43(17.6%)	<b>245(100%)</b>

The responses displayed in the Table 2 clearly demonstrate that a vast majority of the students are aware that the surveyed schools offer guidance and counselling services for students. On the contrary, 13 students representing 5.3 percent were not aware that such services were rendered for students in the schools. Also, a majority of them had an idea of the centres or offices in the schools where they could access guidance and counselling services with about 15 percent of them having no idea of the offices of the guidance and counselling co-ordinators.

On those who offer guidance and counselling services in the schools, a vast majority knew them while 28.2 percent of the students did not know such officers in the schools. Regarding the time, periods and days that students could access guidance and counselling services, a majority did not know; only about 20 percent of the students knew that. The majority of the students were aware that they could go for individual counselling in the schools and they constituted over 90 percent of the students with less than 20 percent of them who did not know. Further, over 80 percent of them were aware of group counselling offered to students in the schools.

The second objective of the study aimed to find out the frequency with which students access the guidance and counselling services available in the schools. Table 3 presents the outcomes of the analysis of the data from the 232 students who were aware of the guidance and counselling services offered for students in the schools.



**Table 3: Extent of students' use of counselling services offered in the senior high schools**

	<b>Never Freq(%)</b>	<b>Sometimes Freq(%)</b>	<b>Often Freq(%)</b>
Personal and adjustment issues	156 (67.2%)	62(26.7%)	14(6.1%)
Emotional and behavioural issues	202(87.1%)	25(10.8%)	5(2.1%)
Psycho-social issues	188(81.0%)	38(16.4%)	6(2.6%)
Relationship issues	205(88.4%)	17(7.3%)	10(4.3%)
Vocational or Career decisions	96(41.4%)	74(31.9%)	62(26.7%)
Academic or educational issues	64(27.6%)	125(53.9%)	43(18.5%)

The results reveal that a majority, 156(67.2%) of the students have never been to the school counsellors with personal and adjustment issues. It is only 62(26.7%) and 14(6.1%) of the students respectively who sometimes and often see the school counsellors on personal and adjustment issues. Similarly, a majority, 202(87.1%) have never consulted the school counsellors on emotional and behavioural issues with only 25(10.8%) and 5(2.1%) respectively who sometimes and often visit the guidance and counselling offices for directions on emotional and behavioural issues.

The results on the rate at which the students consulted the school counsellors on psycho-social issues are not different. The majority, 188(81%) of the students had never done that with only 38(16.4%) and 6(2.6%) respectively who sometimes and often do that. Again, a majority of the students had never gone to the school counsellors for discussion on relationship issues while only 17(7.3%) and 10(4.3%) respectively sometimes and often go to the counsellor on relationship issues.

On the contrary, 74(31.9%) and 62(26.7%) of the students sometimes and often visit the guidance and counselling officers to discuss issue on vocational or career issues. It is only about 40% of them who had never been to the counsellors for directions on career. In a similar view, 125(53.9%) and 43(18.5%) of the students sometimes and often respectively go to the officers for consultation on education issues. It is only about 27% of the students who have never been to the counsellors for consultation on academic issues.

From the results, it is crystally clear that the students' use of the guidance and counselling services in the schools is very minimal, not encouraging as most of them have never been to the officers for consultation on many of the problems students at that stage of development experience. Meanwhile, it has been found that guidance and counselling services are effective in helping students with emotional and social needs in secondary schools (Kanus, 2017) and counselling and counselling services are meant to help students deal with social, personal, psychological, vocational ad academic needs.

The only two guidance and counselling services the students access are vocational and academic services. A good number of students access guidance and counselling services on academic and

vocational issues, which is consistent with previous studies that unraveled that students gave priority to school related phenomena such as vocational and education as imperative areas as opposed to personal, emotional and behavioural issues (Eliamani et al, 2014, Bitew & Adau, 2016). In an earlier study, Mwagi (2004) also ascertained that students did not find school counselling as an effective source of help except in the area of education-vocational decision making. Majority of the students have never utilised most of the services provided by the guidance and counselling units of the schools. This may be due to students' inadequate understanding of guidance and counselling and the benefits that they may derive from it as also found by Gysbers and Anderson (2007).

For the third research objective, the students were requested to show their agreement or otherwise to the factors that may account for students' low access of guidance and counselling services in the schools. In Table 4, the responses of all the students who took part in the study are analysed and presented.

**Table 4: Factors that hinder students' use of guidance and counselling services in schools**

	<b>Disagree Freq(%)</b>	<b>Not Sure Freq(%)</b>	<b>Agree Freq(%)</b>
Inadequate knowledge of the services	204(83.2%)	5(2.1%)	36(14.7%)
Location of Guidance and Counselling offices	25(10.2%)	46(18.8%)	174(71.0%)
Lack of confidence in the counsellors	51(20.8%)	28(11.4%)	166 (67.8%)
Unavailability of counsellors at all times	154(62.9%)	21(8.6%)	70(28.5%)
Lack of trust in the counsellors	66(27.0%)	52(21.2%)	127(51.8%)
Unfriendly attitude of counsellors	204(83.2%)	36(14.7%)	5(2.1%)
Shyness of students	12(4.9%)	26(10.6%)	207(84.5%)
Stigmatisation of students	44(18.0%)	11(4.5%)	190(77.5%)
Lack of time of students	150(61.2%)	22(9.0%)	73(29.8%)
Cultural practices and beliefs	136 (55.5%)	74(30.2%)	35(14.3%)

The results in Table 4 disclose that a majority of the students disagree that they do not access the guidance and counselling services in the schools due to their little knowledge of the services. It is less than 15% of them who believe so. It is the belief of the majority (67.8%) of the students that most of them do not access the guidance and counselling services due to confidence issues. This finding is consistent with the discoveries of Ndhlovu and Phiri (2009), Awinsong (2012), Kocchar (2013), Mshaandja et al (2013) which revealed that students refuse to access guidance and counselling services due to confidence issues.

Again, the majority of the students do not agree to the fact that students in the schools refuse to visit the guidance and counselling offices because the school counsellors are not available all the

time. Lastly, a majority of the students do not agree that they do not visit the guidance and counselling centres due to inadequate time on their part. Majority also did not believe that cultural ideas prevent them from accessing guidance and counselling services in the schools. This finding is contrary to the discovery by Luyando (2014) that cultural practices hamper students' accessing of guidance and counselling services in schools.

However, a majority of the students concurred that students in the schools refuse to access the guidance and counselling services available due to the location of the guidance and counselling services in the schools. According to Alemu (2013), improper siting of counselling rooms in schools makes students refuse to access guidance and counselling services. The study also revealed that a majority of the students do not access the guidance and counselling services due to trust issues, a finding which is in line with Mshaandja, et al (2013), who disclosed that if students suspect trust uncertainty in school counsellors, they would not approach them for counselling.

In addition, a majority of the students assert that they do not go for guidance and counselling services due to the stigma that would be associated with their visits. Hence, stigma was a barrier to students' use of guidance and counselling services and this falls in line with previous studies' findings (Ndhlovu, 2012, Kocchar, 2013). Fear of being stigmatised scares students from accessing guidance and counselling services in school. Besides, due to shyness a majority of the students do not visit the guidance and counselling centres, confirming Awinsong (2015) study which says that students feel shy visiting guidance and counselling units in schools for consultations. Shyness is a stumbling block to students' use of guidance and counselling services in schools.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Due to the relevance of guidance and counselling services to the adolescent, second cycle institutions put measures in place to ensure provision of individual and group counselling, and guidance services to promote students' progress in learning, with the hope to get good academic achievement. Mostly, stakeholders of education assist in getting both material and human resources for the offices or centre to aid in offering good quality services to the students who avail themselves. While some senior high schools record high students' access of the guidance and counselling services, others experience somehow low attendance to the offices as well as some others recording very low use of those services in the schools.

This study, which was conducted in a number of senior high schools in a municipality in Ghana, discovered that although the students are thoroughly aware of the existence of the guidance and counselling services in their schools, they largely do not utilise them. In many aspects of their developmental needs, they have never spoken to their school counsellors about them in their bid to seeking assistance. It is just a few of the services that some students do access sparingly.

Impliedly, most of the students in the schools are missing a lot of ideas that would have otherwise aided them to make cogent and essential decisions to improve their developmental needs and consequently aid them to live a more enhanced life.

The findings suggest that the students' low access of the guidance and counselling services in the senior high schools could be attributed to the inconvenient places of guidance and counselling offices, confidential and trust issues, shyness and stigmatisation. To deal with these issues in order to pave ways for students to fully utilise guidance and counselling services, school authorities need to relocate or site the offices to more suitable places on campuses and also offer education on importance of guidance and counselling for developing adolescent to senior high schools especially newly admitted students. The education and sensitisation programmes can be incorporated into the orientation provided for first year students. Scholars also need to be trained to improve on the handling of confidential and trust issues. School counsellors, also need to be trained on confidential and trust issues, among other.

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