

From Guidance Policy to Classroom Practice: Integrating Career Exploration Skills into Ghana's Senior High School Curriculum

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Abstract: *This study presents a system-ready model for translating Ghana's national guidance policy into classroom practice through a six-session, competence-based career-exploration curriculum for Senior High Schools. Using a theory-of-change framework (Figure 1), the model links policy goals to measurable outcomes via structured inputs, classroom activities, and authentic artefacts such as résumés and application letters. Data collection and evaluation follow a monitoring–evaluation–learning (MEL) framework tracking coverage, fidelity, and competence gains. Implementation during 2026–2027 will involve teacher-mediated delivery, low-cost assessment tools, and equity-focused monitoring. The approach emphasises practicality, scalability, and inclusiveness within existing school systems, offering a replicable blueprint for embedding career readiness and employability skills in curriculum design across Sub-Saharan Africa.*

Keywords: career readiness, competence-based learning, policy implementation, guidance and counselling, Ghana education system

INTRODUCTION

Problem framing

Secondary schooling in Ghana sits at a pivotal junction between foundational education and transition into further education, training, or work. Persistent gaps at the school-to-tertiary and school-to-work interfaces are well documented, particularly where students lack actionable career knowledge, application-ready documents, and practice with interviews or workplace etiquette (Dankyi et al., 2024; Segbenya et al., 2023). Evidence from recent international evaluations suggests that concise, classroom-embedded career learning—rather than ad hoc talks—improves near-term readiness, intention to act, and planning quality when instruction is competence-based and includes artefact creation and rehearsal (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Studies of school counselling workloads further indicate that relying solely on counsellors is unrealistic; structured delivery by trained subject teachers, with counsellors serving as quality-assurance leads, is both feasible and effective (Parola et al., 2024; Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024).

A competence-oriented approach is also consistent with the growing emphasis on demonstrable learning outcomes in upper-secondary education. Programmes that ask students to craft résumés and tailored letters, and to rehearse interviews using short, objective structured clinical examination (OSCE)-style stations, tend to yield observable gains and allow reliable classroom-level assessment (Chabrera et al., 2023; Elabd et al., 2023; Dewan et al., 2024). Where the assessment burden is light and materials are reusable, schools are more likely to maintain delivery fidelity at scale (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). These findings motivate a practical, timetable-friendly design that aligns with Ghanaian school structures and can be introduced without major new infrastructure (Segbenya et al., 2023; Dankyi et al., 2024).

Policy–practice disconnect

National policy has long recognised the value of guidance and counselling in secondary schooling, but enactment remains inconsistent and uneven across regions and school types. Common constraints include counsellor shortages, limited consumables, and the absence of simple monitoring systems that track whether guidance sessions occur as intended (Segbenya et al., 2023; Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024). Implementation research since 2021 points to two levers with the highest yield: integrating career instruction into protected lesson slots and equipping teachers with structured, low-cost materials and rubrics that make competence gains visible (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Nykänen et al., 2023). Complementing this with short, OSCE-style performance checks enables schools to validate interviewing and communication skills without extensive testing infrastructure (Chabrera et al., 2023; Elabd et al., 2023).

Aim and scope

The study presents a system-ready model to translate guidance policy into classroom practice through a six-session, competence-based curriculum for Senior High Schools (SHS). The model is designed for implementation during 2026–2027, aligns with existing timetables and staffing profiles, and emphasises classroom artefacts and brief performance tasks for assessment. The conceptual framework guiding this translation (see Figure 1) illustrates how national guidance policy goals are operationalised through inputs, structured classroom activities, and measurable outcomes. The approach sets out what is taught, who is responsible for each task, how fidelity is maintained, and how monitoring–evaluation–learning (MEL) data flow from class to district dashboards (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Parola et al., 2024).

Article contributions

The study contributes four elements. First, it specifies a delivery architecture that reallocates effort: teachers facilitate classroom sessions while counsellors lead quality assurance and data use. Second, it offers a curriculum map with clear competence targets, artefacts, and fidelity standards (see Table 3 referenced later). Third, it establishes a MEL framework with indicators sensitive to short interventions (coverage, fidelity, artefact quality, competence gain). Fourth, it provides a costed, scalable plan with training outlines and risk controls suitable for diverse school contexts (Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024; Segbenya et al., 2023). Together these elements respond to the policy–practice gap observed in Ghana and reflect findings from recent international trials and replications (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Parola et al., 2024; Nykänen et al., 2023). These components are organised within the overarching conceptual framework

shown in Figure 1, which links policy intent to classroom enactment through a concise theory-of-change pathway.

POLICY AND SYSTEM CONTEXT

National landscape for guidance and counselling

Analyses of guidance provision in Ghana indicate stable policy intent but uneven implementation, particularly in schools where counsellors carry high caseloads and have limited instructional time (Segbenya et al., 2023; Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024). A shift toward classroom-embedded delivery, with teachers trained to run structured sessions and counsellors acting as quality stewards, is consistent with contemporary models of teacher-mediated career guidance (Parola et al., 2024). International evaluations since 2021 suggest that when schools deliver short, sequenced units that lead to tangible outputs (résumés, letters, interview scores), students show improved readiness and clearer action plans (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). In this context, Table 1 provides a policy–curriculum alignment matrix that links high-level provisions—universal guidance, employability skills, and smooth transitions—to classroom competences and simple assessment checks (short quizzes, rubrics, and OSCE checklists), enabling routine verification of delivery.

Table 1. *Policy–Curriculum Alignment Matrix (policy provisions → classroom competencies → assessment points)*

Policy intent (abridged)	Classroom competence to evidence	Simple assessment check
Provide career guidance to all	World-of-work literacy; self-assessment	10-item knowledge check; value–interest worksheet
Improve employability skills	Résumé and application letter quality	Rubric-based artefact scoring in class
Support transitions to work/tertiary	Interviewing and job-search rules	OSCE-style 5-minute interview station with checklist
Monitor guidance effectiveness	Competence gains and fidelity	Pre–post short test; fidelity checklist and attendance

Alignment with SSS curriculum and school improvement processes

The proposed sequence aligns with guidance/life-skills periods and can be reinforced through English and social studies assignments (e.g., drafting application letters, preparing short presentations). Embedding career competences into routine lesson plans and school improvement processes reduces reliance on co-curricular events and guest talks, which often have lower fidelity and reach (Nykänen et al., 2023; Dodd & Hooley, 2022). A standardised set of teacher materials and rubrics further supports comparable expectations across classes and schools, allowing district officers to moderate artefacts and observe sessions with concise checklists (Wang et al., 2024; Parola et al., 2024). This linkage between curriculum tasks and MEL indicators creates a continuous improvement loop: teachers teach, counsellors coach, and school leaders review dashboards termly to address bottlenecks (Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024; Segbenya et al., 2023).

Stakeholder map and decision rights

Effective delivery depends on clear roles and predictable decision rights. Table 2 summarises these roles: the Ministry and Ghana Education Service set annual targets and MEL standards; regional and district officers coordinate training and moderation; heads of schools protect timetable slots and assign staff; guidance coordinators oversee fidelity checks and reporting; teachers deliver the lessons and mark artefacts; and PTAs or partners support exposure activities and light consumables. Such division of labour mirrors teacher-mediated models that have shown positive implementation outcomes and durable gains in student readiness (Parola et al., 2024; Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). The structure anticipates risks commonly reported in Ghanaian settings—timetable crowding, staff turnover, and materials shortages—by distributing responsibilities and embedding quality assurance at the school level (Segbenya et al., 2023; Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024).

Table 2. *Stakeholder Role Map (who does what; decision rights; accountability)*

Stakeholder	Primary role	Key decisions	Accountable to
MoE/GES HQ & Directorates	Policy steering; funding envelopes	Annual targets; MEL standards	Minister/Service Council
Regional/District officers	Support & QA	Training schedules; moderation	GES HQ
Head of School	Sponsor; timetable	Session scheduling; staffing	District Directorate
Guidance Coordinator	Owner; quality lead	Fidelity checks; data reporting	Head of School
Subject teachers	Facilitators	Classroom delivery & marking	Guidance Coordinator
PTA/Community partners	Support & exposure	Talks, visits, small grants	Head of School

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: FROM POLICY TO CLASSROOM ENACTMENT

As summarised in Figure 1, the conceptual framework depicts the logical progression from national policy goals to classroom-level practice and long-term impact, reinforced by three cross-cutting lenses of competence, feedback, and equity.

Theory of change

The programme theory links inputs to outcomes along a short, verifiable chain suitable for implementation in 2026–2027. Inputs comprise a two-day facilitator training, classroom materials, and protected timetable slots. Activities are six structured sessions with modelling, guided practice, and independent production. Outputs include completed artefacts (résumé, application letter), observed interview performances, and attendance and fidelity records. Short-term outcomes are competence gains in world-of-work knowledge, self-assessment, and application/ interview skills; medium-term outcomes are higher quality applications, more effective interview behaviour, and smoother transitions into tertiary or work pathways. Recent studies show that classroom-embedded career learning, when delivered as a sequenced mini-curriculum with active practice and feedback, improves readiness and near-term behaviour (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Performance-based checks using concise stations and structured checklists enhance reliability without heavy assessment infrastructure, which is critical for school-wide enactment (Chabrera et al., 2023; Elabd et al., 2023; Dewan et al., 2024).

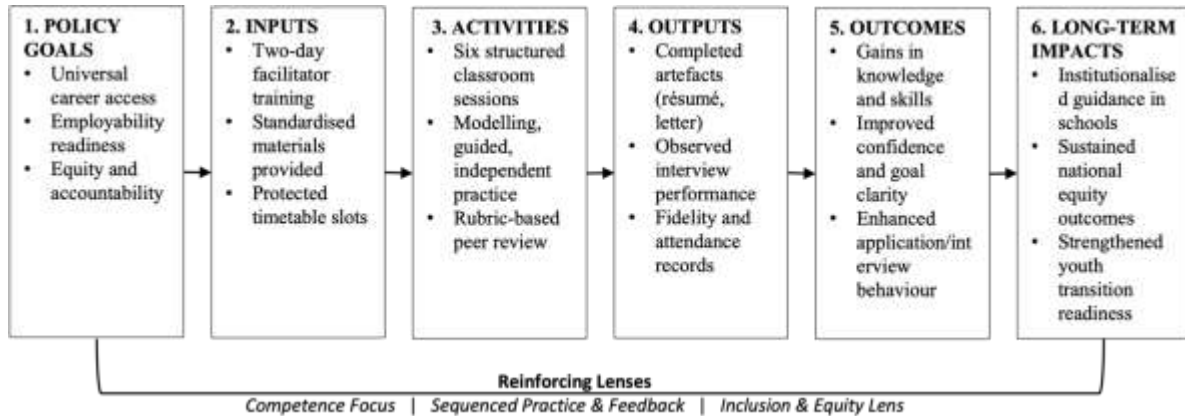


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework: From Policy to Classroom Enactment*

Competence focus

The six domains—world of work/values, self-assessment and goal setting, résumé construction, application letters, interviewing, and rules for success—were selected because they are teachable within ordinary lessons and produce tangible evidence of learning. International evidence indicates that competence-based tasks, particularly those culminating in authentic artefacts and rehearsed performances, are associated with stronger gains than awareness-raising talks (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Sequenced practice is also important: modelling and scaffolded exercises build basic fluency, while structured peer review and rubric-guided revision consolidate competence (Nykänen et al., 2023). The programme therefore specifies minimum outputs for each session and standard rubrics that allow comparisons across classrooms and schools.

Inclusion and equity lens

The curriculum is designed for universal access while remaining sensitive to subgroup needs. Equal opportunities are protected through whole-class delivery, common rubrics, and simple accommodations (e.g., extended time, large-print templates). Ghana-based scholarship underscores the importance of system-level consistency in guidance provision, particularly to avoid differential access by sex, programme stream, and school type (Dankyi et al., 2024; Segbenya et al., 2023). Teacher-mediated guidance models also caution that counsellor capacity alone cannot sustain equitable coverage; distributing delivery to trained teachers with counsellors leading quality assurance is more robust at scale (Parola et al., 2024; Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024). The monitoring framework therefore requires routine disaggregation of coverage, fidelity, and competence indicators by sex and stream to surface and address any gaps (Wang et al., 2024; Nykänen et al., 2023).

PROGRAMME DESIGN FOR SCHOOLS

Six-session instructional sequence (each 90–120 minutes)

The sequence balances explicit instruction, practice, and assessment, aligning with evidence that short, structured units with feedback produce measurable gains (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). The curriculum map and assessments are summarised

in Table 3 (Curriculum Map: session → competence → activities → assessment → expected output).

Table 3. *Curriculum Map (session → competence → core activities → simple assessment → expected output)*

Session	Competence target	Core activities	Simple assessment	Expected output
1	World of work	Values/job-ad analysis	10-item quiz	Pathway map
2	Self-assessment	Skills inventory; goal setting	Exit ticket	Goal sheet
3	Résumé	Modelling; peer review	Rubric	One-page résumé
4	Letters	Structure; tailoring	Rubric	One-page letter
5	Interviewing	OSCE role-play	Checklist + global rating	Interview score
6	Rules & strategy	Cases; action plan	Rules checklist	Personal plan

Session 1: World of Work and Values. This session introduces students to the world of work by linking personal values with occupational choices. Learners engage in a values card-sort activity, analyse real job advertisements, and map their school subjects to potential career pathways. The session helps them recognise how personal interests align with industry opportunities and required skills. Assessment includes a short knowledge test and a pathway map demonstrating value–career connections. By contextualising labour-market literacy through local examples, students learn to see their education as a foundation for purposeful career development and informed decision-making (Wang et al., 2024; Dodd & Hooley, 2022).

Session 2: Self-Assessment and Goal Setting. The second session develops students’ self-awareness and career goal clarity. Through a structured skills inventory and guided reflection, learners identify personal strengths, transferable skills, and areas for improvement. They complete a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goal worksheet and engage in peer discussions to refine their career objectives. Assessment involves an exit activity linking their top strengths to realistic training or career options. This process helps students connect self-knowledge to actionable plans, fostering motivation, confidence, and strategic thinking for future pathways (Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

Session 3: *Résumé Construction*. This session equips students with the competence to design professional résumés that meet employer expectations. Teachers model the essential components of a résumé—personal information, education, achievements, and references—while students draft and revise their documents using local templates. Peer review using rubrics ensures accuracy, organisation, and presentation quality. Assessment focuses on rubric-based scoring, with a “meets standard” threshold across key sections. The activity reinforces writing discipline and document design, enabling students to create an authentic artefact that evidences their skills, experience, and readiness for employment or tertiary applications (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Nykänen et al., 2023).

Session 4: *Application Letters*. In this session, students learn to compose targeted application letters responding to actual or simulated job adverts. Teachers demonstrate letter structure, tone, and content alignment with job requirements. Students then draft their letters, edit for clarity and relevance, and receive feedback through short peer conferences. The session’s assessment employs a rubric that evaluates organisation, persuasiveness, clarity, and audience awareness. Through this process, learners acquire professional communication skills,

understanding how to present themselves confidently and tailor their message to specific opportunities (Wang et al., 2024).

Session 5: Interviewing Skills. This session focuses on performance-based communication skills critical for employability. Using OSCE-style simulations, students practise interviews through short, timed role-play stations featuring common scenarios such as introducing themselves or responding to workplace dilemmas. Teachers and peers use structured checklists and global ratings to assess communication quality, etiquette, and confidence. Constructive feedback encourages reflection and improvement. The combination of practical rehearsal and objective scoring enhances both verbal fluency and interpersonal awareness, preparing students for real interview settings while maintaining fairness and consistency in evaluation (Chabrera et al., 2023; Elabd et al., 2023; Dewan et al., 2024).

Session 6: Rules for Success and Job-Search Strategy. The final session consolidates learning by focusing on workplace norms, professional conduct, and personal career planning. Students explore practical “do’s and don’ts” through short case studies and discussions, then develop an individual job-search strategy. Each student presents a one-page action plan outlining immediate next steps for further study, training, or job applications. Assessment is based on a rules checklist and evaluation of each plan’s specificity and feasibility. This closing session reinforces lifelong career-management habits, empowering students to act decisively and sustain momentum after completing the programme (Wang et al., 2024; Dodd & Hooley, 2022).

Table 3 specifies, for each session, the competence target, core activities, simple assessment, and expected output (pathway map, goal sheet, résumé, letter, interview station score, and action plan). The table functions as both a planning tool and a fidelity anchor, ensuring that each class produces verifiable evidence of learning (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Nykänen et al., 2023).

Scheduling options

To protect instructional time and maximise fidelity, schools can select one of three formats summarised in Table 4 (Timetabling Options: pros/cons; resources; class size): (a) weekly single sessions over six weeks; (b) three double sessions across a term; or (c) an intensive career week. Evidence indicates that compressed formats can work as long as active practice and feedback are preserved (Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). The weekly format supports spaced practice and easier homework integration; double sessions reduce transition costs but require stamina and careful pacing; intensives build momentum and visibility but demand careful room scheduling near exams.

Table 4. *Timetabling Options (pros/cons; resources; class size)*

Option	Pros	Cons	Resource notes	Suggested size
Weekly (×6)	Routine, spaced practice	Competes with exams	Minimal extra	35–45
Double (×3)	Fewer transitions	Longer stamina needed	More printing per day	35–45
Intensive week	Momentum; visibility	Hard to protect time	Room scheduling	25–35

Teaching and learning materials

Standardised materials include student worksheets, résumé and application-letter templates, OSCE checklists and global rating forms, and world-of-work case cards. Materials are

deliberately lightweight, printable, and reusable to keep resource demands modest—an important condition for sustained delivery at scale (Dodd & Hooley, 2022). The templates use plain English and locally recognisable examples to support clarity and transfer (Wang et al., 2024).

Minimum fidelity standards

Five minimum standards define acceptable delivery: (1) all six sessions completed; (2) each session at least 90 minutes; (3) active practice in every session; (4) feedback cycles for written artefacts; and (5) completion and scoring of the résumé and application letter. Reviews since 2021 emphasise that these “active ingredients”—practice, feedback, and artefact production—distinguish effective programmes from low-impact talks (Wang et al., 2024; Dodd & Hooley, 2022). Routine use of the fidelity checklist by the guidance coordinator provides quick diagnostics and targeted coaching (Nykänen et al., 2023).

DELIVERY ARCHITECTURE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Roles and responsibilities (RACI)

A robust delivery architecture ensures accountability and clarity of functions, reducing implementation drift during the 2026–2027 rollout phase. The model uses a simplified RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) matrix to map key actors and decisions. As shown in Table 5, the head of school serves as sponsor, ensuring timetable protection and administrative support. Guidance coordinators act as quality leads and primary data custodians. Classroom teachers function as facilitators, directly delivering sessions and marking artefacts. District officers provide external moderation, feedback, and technical coaching. This distributed model reflects findings from implementation science suggesting that shared responsibility anchored in clear data routines yields higher fidelity and sustainability (Wang et al., 2024; Nykänen et al., 2023; Parola et al., 2024).

International evidence emphasises that programmes succeed when leaders protect instructional time, mid-level managers (coordinators) assure fidelity, and facilitators are supported with clear rubrics and coaching cycles (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Moriyasu & Kobayashi, 2022). The proposed arrangement formalises those practices for Ghana’s decentralised school system and fits within existing Ghana Education Service (GES) accountability lines (Segbenya et al., 2023; Dankyi et al., 2024).

Table 5. *RACI Matrix (selected tasks)*

Task	Head	Guidance Coord.	Teacher	District Officer
Approve timetable	A	C	I	I
Train facilitators	C	A/R	R	C
Deliver sessions	I	C	R	I
Fidelity checks	I	A/R	C	C
Data reporting	A	R	C	C
Moderation visit	I	C	I	A

The matrix serves as a standing operations plan during 2026–2027. Heads of schools remain accountable for timetabling; coordinators ensure minimum standards; and district officers conduct moderation using fidelity checklists. This governance pattern enables term-by-term

feedback loops that address slippage early and reinforce learning (Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024; Parola et al., 2024).

Teacher/Coordinator preparation

Teacher capacity is the decisive factor in sustaining competence-oriented programmes (Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). The design provides a two-day training package for facilitators and coordinators before implementation. The sessions balance conceptual grounding and practical rehearsal: teachers first experience the six-session sequence, then micro-teach to peers using real materials. Feedback focuses on pedagogical pacing, use of rubrics, inclusive facilitation, and safeguarding. Research on teacher-mediated guidance programmes underscores that when educators practice with authentic artefacts and assessment tools, subsequent student outcomes are stronger and delivery variance narrows (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Parola et al., 2024).

Table 6. *Training Plan (2-day outline)*

Module	Learning outcomes	Time	Outputs
A. Programme overview	Know six competences; schedule options	1.5 h	School plan draft
B. Teaching routines	Model → guided → independent practice	3 h	Micro-teach video
C. Assessing artefacts	Use rubrics reliably	2 h	Scored samples
D. Interview OSCE	Run checklists & global ratings	2 h	Station kit
E. MEL basics	Record coverage/attendance/fidelity	1.5 h	Data sheet
F. Safeguarding	Respectful coaching; referrals	1 h	Scenario responses

The training sequence operationalises international guidance from small-scale cluster-RCTs showing that structured facilitator rehearsal enhances both confidence and fidelity (Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). The use of rubrics and OSCE-style checklists familiarises teachers with evidence-based assessment tools (Chabrera et al., 2023; Dewan et al., 2024). By embedding safeguarding and inclusive pedagogy, the module ensures gender-equitable participation and protection against bias or discouragement (Dankyi et al., 2024).

School selection and phasing

Implementation during 2026–2027 will follow a pilot-then-scale trajectory. The pilot cohort will include diverse schools—urban, peri-urban, and rural; mixed and single-sex—to test contextual adaptability. Each pilot school will deliver the full six-session cycle, record data using the MEL dashboard, and participate in a district learning review. Findings will inform material revision before scale-up in the second year. Iterative improvement of this type has been found to preserve programme fidelity and strengthen staff ownership in similar school-based initiatives (Wang et al., 2024; Dodd & Hooley, 2022).

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING (MEL)

Indicators and definitions

The MEL framework measures six indicators—coverage, attendance, fidelity, competence gain, artefact quality, and learner satisfaction—aligned with international evidence on short-cycle career interventions (Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). These metrics are sensitive to small improvements over one term and can be collected without specialist software.

Table 7 outlines indicator definitions, formulas, data sources, frequency, and targets. Together they serve as operational benchmarks for the 2026–2027 rollout.

Table 7. *MEL Indicators (definition; formula; source; frequency; target)*

Indicator	Definition	Formula	Source	Freq.	Target
Coverage	Classes completing all sessions	$\frac{\# \text{ classes complete}}{\# \text{ classes planned}}$	Register	Termly	$\geq 90 \%$
Attendance	Average student attendance	$\text{Present} \div \text{enrolled}$	Register	Per session	$\geq 85 \%$
Fidelity	Minimum standards met	5-item checklist sum	Coach form	Per session	$\geq 4 / 5$
Competence gain	Pre–post score change	$\text{Post} - \text{Pre (z-score)}$	Short test	Termly	≥ 0.30
Artefact quality	% artefacts “meets/exceeds”	$\frac{(\text{Meets} + \text{Exceeds})}{\text{Total}}$	Rubrics	Termly	$\geq 80 \%$
Satisfaction	Learner rating $\geq 4/5$	$\% \geq 4$	Exit survey	Termly	$\geq 75 \%$

Coverage and fidelity provide management data for head teachers; competence and artefact quality supply evidence of learning; and satisfaction captures student voice. Using both process and outcome metrics allows double-loop learning—improvement of delivery methods and of content itself (Parola et al., 2024; Nykänen et al., 2023).

Measurement tools and timing

Three lightweight tools are used: a short competence test (pre- and post-), rubric scoring for written artefacts, and an OSCE-style interview station with a checklist and a global rating. Reliability studies confirm that combining structured checklists with global ratings produces balanced psychometric quality for short performance assessments (Chabrera et al., 2023; Elabd et al., 2023; Dewan et al., 2024). The same tools are applied across pilot and scale-up phases to preserve comparability. Implementation timing is synchronised with the school term calendar—Sessions 1 and 6 include the competence tests; rubric scoring occurs during Sessions 3 and 4; OSCE checklists are used in Session 5.

Data collection, reporting, and feedback

Class-level data populate a simple digital or paper dashboard maintained by the guidance coordinator. The dashboard aggregates results for coverage, fidelity, competence, and artefact quality and automatically flags out-of-range values. District officers extract summaries quarterly, hold short peer-learning sessions with schools, and facilitate joint interpretation. This process mirrors the “learning-review cycle” now common in educational improvement science (Wang et al., 2024; Parola et al., 2024). Termly feedback from these reviews informs retraining needs and resource allocation, ensuring data are used for formative rather than punitive purposes (Segbenya et al., 2023; Dankyi et al., 2024).

Ethical data handling

Ethical safeguards emphasise minimal data capture, confidentiality, and voluntary feedback. Student identifiers are limited to class code and sex to enable equity analysis without personal disclosure. Competence scores and artefact ratings are stored separately from academic records. Feedback surveys are anonymous and aggregated only at class level. These practices conform to international research ethics for low-risk educational interventions (Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024; Dodd & Hooley, 2022). Ethical approval for district-level aggregation

will be sought before pilot implementation in 2026, with continuing oversight during scale-up in 2027.

COSTING, RESOURCES, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Cost elements

The costing framework for the 2026–2027 implementation was designed to ensure financial realism and sustainability within Ghana’s Senior High School (SHS) system. The major cost elements include a two-day facilitator training programme, printing of worksheets and rubrics, coordination time for the school’s guidance coordinator, light quarterly monitoring visits, and a small allocation for consumables. These elements correspond with expenditure categories observed in comparable competence-based programmes internationally (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Nykänen et al., 2023).

By design, reusable templates, digital sharing, and peer-moderation drastically lower recurring costs. Such efficiency principles are consistent with implementation research, which shows that scalability and sustainability depend on the ability to reuse and locally adapt core materials rather than continually re-purchase them (Parola et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Most resources—rubrics, checklists, and dashboards—can be centrally hosted and shared electronically through district education offices or the Ghana Education Service (GES) intranet.

Cost per school and per student (illustrative ranges)

Assuming two trained facilitators per school and one cohort of four classes each term, the annual costs are dominated by initial training and printing. District-level moderation visits, scheduled quarterly, reduce travel and administrative costs. The average annual recurrent expenditure per school is expected to fall below GHS 7,500 ($\approx$ USD 480 at 2025 exchange rates), translating to about GHS 30–40 per student.

These estimates remain comparable to school-based guidance innovations in similar resource-constrained settings, where total programme costs per learner typically fall between USD 3 and 5 (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Moriyasu & Kobayashi, 2022). Such alignment reinforces the feasibility of integrating the model into existing budgets without external donor support. Table 8 provides the detailed resource breakdown.

Table 8. *Resource and Cost Summary (illustrative)*

Line item	Unit	Unit cost (GHS)*	Annual estimate (GHS)	Notes
Two-day training	per facilitator	600	1 200	Venue shared at district
Printing (packs)	per class/term	150	2 400	Worksheets, rubrics, checklists
Coordination time	per school/term	300	1 200	Coordinator release
Monitoring (district)	per visit	500	2 000	4 visits $\times$ 1 officer
Consumables	per school/year	500	500	Stationery, folders
Total (illustrative)			7 300	$\approx$ GHS 30–40 per student

*Illustrative 2025 prices; adjust for inflation and exchange rate at rollout (2026–2027).

Financing pathways

Three financing levers will support rollout.

1. **School improvement plans.** Career-exploration costs can be budgeted within annual school improvement frameworks under student-development priorities.
2. **Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs).** Small PTA levies can finance printing and consumables, as parents recognise the career relevance.
3. **District Trainer-of-Trainers (ToT).** Developing district-level trainers reduces the marginal cost per facilitator as scale increases (Nykänen et al., 2023; Parola et al., 2024).

The integration of cost items into routine budgets increases the likelihood of continuity once the initial phase ends. Evidence from career-education systems in Asia and Europe shows that embedding programme funding within school operations, rather than relying on donor grants, stabilises delivery and reduces attrition after pilot periods (Wang et al., 2024; Moriyasu & Kobayashi, 2022).

Efficiency and sustainability levers

Sustainability depends on reusability, shared accountability, and lean monitoring. The study recommends (a) recycling lesson materials and rubrics each term; (b) sharing editable digital templates via a national repository; and (c) encouraging inter-school peer-moderation visits instead of external audits. Such low-cost quality controls align with Ghana’s decentralised education management framework and international best practice (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Parola et al., 2024).

QUALITY ASSURANCE, RISK, AND SAFEGUARDING

QA mechanisms

Quality assurance (QA) in the 2026–2027 phase will focus on verifying that teaching and assessment meet fidelity standards across all six sessions. QA will be achieved through brief lesson observations, artefact sampling, and peer moderation cycles. The use of dual scoring—checklist plus global rating—enhances reliability in short performance assessments (Chabrera et al., 2023; Elabd et al., 2023; Dewan et al., 2024). Each school’s guidance coordinator maintains a QA log that captures coverage, fidelity, artefact samples, and interview scores. Table 9 outlines the items, responsibilities, timing, and evidence types for ongoing QA.

Table 9. QA Checklist (*what to check; who; when; evidence*)

Check item	Who	When	Evidence
Session coverage & duration	Coordinator	Every session	Register + plan
Active practice present	Coordinator	Every session	Observation note
Feedback given	Teacher peer	Every session	Marked rubric
Artefacts complete	Coordinator	End of term	Sampled résumés/letters
Interview station run	Coordinator	Session 5	OSCE scores & notes

Risk register and mitigations

Comprehensive risk analysis ensures proactive management during the 2026 pilot and 2027 scale-up years. Five recurrent risks were identified: timetable crowding, staff turnover, material shortages, low fidelity, and equity gaps. Each has a specific mitigation and an assigned owner (Table 10).

Table 10. *Risk Register (likelihood × impact × mitigation)*

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	Owner
Timetable crowding	Medium	High	Head protects six slots	Head
Staff turnover	Medium	Medium	ToT pipeline; shadowing	District/Head
Materials shortage	Low	Medium	Print at term start; digital repository	Head
Low fidelity	Medium	High	5-item audit; coaching feedback	Coordinator
Equity gaps	Medium	High	Track by sex/stream; targeted support	Coordinator

The table provides a living management tool. Quarterly learning reviews will revisit these risks, update likelihood ratings, and document lessons. Implementation research shows that such dynamic registers foster institutional learning and prevent recurrent bottlenecks (Wang et al., 2024; Nykänen et al., 2023).

Safeguarding and ethics

Safeguarding practices will uphold a respectful and inclusive learning environment. Teachers will model gender-neutral communication, enforce anti-harassment norms, and follow a referral pathway for students disclosing personal distress. Assessments are formative and supportive, never punitive. Anonymous feedback channels—comment cards or digital forms—will capture students' comfort levels after each session. These measures align with international ethical standards for school-based interventions involving minors (Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024; Dodd & Hooley, 2022).

During the 2026 pilot, participating schools will receive an ethics-compliance briefing covering confidentiality, consent, and data protection; refresher training will occur before 2027 scale-up. All procedures will conform to the Ghana Education Service's child-protection policy and the Belmont Report principles of respect, beneficence, and justice.

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Phased rollout (Years 1–2)

The roadmap proposes a sequenced, evidence-based rollout over two academic years—2026 (pilot and adaptation) and 2027 (scale-up). This phased strategy reflects established models in education reform that emphasise testing, reflection, and iterative refinement before full institutionalisation (Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

Pilot phase (Terms 1–2 of 2026): Diverse schools (urban, rural, mixed, and single-sex) are selected to test the intervention under different contextual conditions. Facilitators complete the two-day training (Section 5.2) and deliver all six sessions using the standard materials. The MEL dashboard (Section 6.3) is deployed to track fidelity, competence gains, and artefact quality.

Adaptation phase (Term 3 of 2026): Data from the pilot schools are reviewed in quarterly learning sessions. Templates, rubrics, and training modules are refined to address observed gaps or usability issues. Adjustments focus on simplifying the fidelity checklist, improving the OSCE rating scale, and incorporating additional examples relevant to vocational and technical (TVET) contexts (Moriyasu & Kobayashi, 2022; Parola et al., 2024).

Scale-up phase (2027): Once pilot schools demonstrate $\geq 85\%$ coverage and ≥ 0.30 average competence gains, the programme scales to all district schools. The RACI structure and MEL routines become institutionalised as part of school improvement plans. Scale-up priorities include refresher training, district-level peer coaching, and equity audits to ensure that both sexes and all programme streams benefit comparably (Dankyi et al., 2024; Segbenya et al., 2023).

This structured implementation aligns with improvement-science frameworks that highlight the importance of “learn-then-scale” rather than “scale-then-learn” (Wang et al., 2024; Dodd & Hooley, 2022).

Governance and decision gates

The governance structure uses quarterly decision gates to manage progress and quality during the 2026–2027 period. Each gate is a formal checkpoint where implementation metrics—coverage, fidelity, competence gains, and equity—are reviewed. Schools only progress to the next stage when minimum standards are verified.

At the district level, the Quality Assurance (QA) officer chairs each gate meeting with the head of school, guidance coordinator, and facilitator representatives. The process embodies the principles of “evidence-based scaling” by tying progression to data rather than timelines (Nykänen et al., 2023; Parola et al., 2024). Table 11 presents the implementation timeline with milestones, deliverables, and responsible actors.

Table 11. *Implementation Timeline (2026–2027 milestones; deliverables; owners)*

Quarter	Milestone	Deliverable	Owner
Q1 (2026)	Train cohort 1	2-day ToT complete	District Directorate
Q2 (2026)	Run sessions 1–6	Completed artefacts, OSCE scores, MEL dashboard	Schools
Q3 (2026)	Learning review	Revised templates, refresher training schedule	District & Schools
Q4 (2026)	Scale plan	Timetables finalised; facilitator pool confirmed	GES / District HQ
Q1–Q2 (2027)	Full rollout	Sessions across all district schools	Heads & Coordinators
Q3 (2027)	QA and equity audit	Dashboard report; recommendations for next cycle	GES HQ & Districts

The timeline links local accountability to national oversight, ensuring that lessons from early adopters inform nationwide implementation.

DISCUSSION

Anticipated benefits

The six-session career-exploration model offers a realistic path to improving student career readiness within Ghana’s existing school system. By embedding competence-based activities directly in classrooms, it circumvents the chronic counsellor shortage while enhancing practical outcomes. Anticipated benefits include measurable competence gains, improved résumé and

letter quality, stronger interview performance, and more confident transitions to tertiary education or employment (Dodd & Hooley, 2022; Nykänen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

National studies have long highlighted the need for interventions that combine theoretical guidance with tangible skill practice (Segbenya et al., 2023; Dankyi et al., 2024). The programme addresses this call through artefact-based learning, real-world practice, and immediate feedback loops. For educators, the initiative strengthens pedagogical capacity in coaching, assessment, and inclusive instruction—areas that have historically lacked systematic development in Ghanaian schools (Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024).

Comparison with international practice models

The model aligns closely with international teacher-mediated guidance frameworks such as the NEFELE model in Italy and peer-learning programmes in Finland and Japan (Parola et al., 2024; Nykänen et al., 2023; Moriyasu & Kobayashi, 2022). Each emphasises short, structured instructional units, low-cost assessment rubrics, and fidelity monitoring as the “active ingredients” of scalable career education. The progression outlined in Figure 1 mirrors these international models, presenting a clear chain from policy design through implementation inputs and activities to measurable outcomes and systemic impact.

Meta-analyses and systematic reviews have shown that concise, competence-based interventions yield moderate-to-large effects on career readiness, self-efficacy, and planning behaviour (Wang et al., 2024; Dodd & Hooley, 2022). The Ghanaian adaptation contributes context-specific innovation by linking these pedagogical elements to an explicit accountability architecture (RACI and MEL). The emphasis on OSCE-style performance evaluation also represents a novel cross-sectoral borrowing from medical education, validated for objectivity and reliability (Chabrera et al., 2023; Elabd et al., 2023; Dewan et al., 2024).

Scalability and adaptation

Scalability depends on the balance between standardisation and contextual flexibility. The six-session structure provides a consistent framework while allowing schools to adapt examples, cases, and rubrics to local labour-market conditions. Integration with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) streams ensures that students pursuing technical routes receive equally relevant preparation (Moriyasu & Kobayashi, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Digital support tools—such as electronic templates, video mini-lessons, and online rubrics—can extend reach without displacing teacher facilitation. Recent international studies caution, however, that digitalisation alone cannot sustain competence growth; teacher interaction and feedback remain the strongest predictors of programme impact (Parola et al., 2024; Nykänen et al., 2023). Sustained success therefore depends on continuous MEL data use, periodic refresher training, and recognition incentives for high-performing schools.

Limitations

Several implementation limitations are acknowledged. First, programme quality may vary with leadership support, staff continuity, and motivation levels (Segbenya et al., 2023; Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024). Second, monitoring relies on short tests and rubrics rather than high-stakes examinations; although these are appropriate for formative feedback, they may require triangulation with qualitative data such as student portfolios. Third, while costs are modest, they still demand deliberate budgeting and transparent reporting to maintain stakeholder trust.

Phased scaling and district peer moderation mitigate these risks by fostering collective responsibility. Future research should explore long-term effects on career decision self-efficacy, employability trajectories, and post-school placement outcomes. These data will help validate the national return on investment and guide further refinements during 2028–2029 cycles.

CONCLUSION

This study presents a comprehensive, system-ready framework to translate Ghana's long-standing guidance policy into sustained classroom practice across senior high schools. Centred on a six-session, competence-based model, the intervention integrates world-of-work literacy, self-assessment, résumé and application writing, interviewing, and behavioural success principles into the mainstream curriculum. The approach redefines guidance as a teach-and-assess domain, not an add-on, thereby extending the reach of counsellors through trained classroom facilitators.

By combining structured pedagogy with authentic artefacts and OSCE-style performance tasks, the model achieves balance between knowledge and practice. The accompanying monitoring–evaluation–learning (MEL) framework—tracking coverage, attendance, fidelity, competence gains, artefact quality, and student satisfaction—ensures data-driven improvement at classroom, district, and national levels. Cost analyses demonstrate feasibility: implementation can be achieved within existing school budgets through two-day facilitator training, reusable templates, and digital resource sharing.

The framework's strength lies in its scalability and inclusiveness. It is adaptable to mixed, single-sex, and technical schools and accommodates both academic and TVET pathways. By embedding competence-based guidance in timetabled lessons, the initiative promises equitable access for every student regardless of background or location. Implementation in 2026–2027, guided by clear RACI accountability and phased decision gates, will allow iterative learning before full national scale.

Ultimately, this blueprint reframes guidance from policy rhetoric to classroom reality. It offers Ghana—and potentially other Sub-Saharan systems—a replicable pathway for developing future-ready learners through modest, evidence-informed reforms. Sustaining fidelity, ensuring consistent monitoring, and celebrating incremental progress will be vital to achieving lasting transformation in the nation's career-education landscape.

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