

## Problems Facing the Functioning of Guidance and Counselling Centres in Public Universities of Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

Guidance and counselling centres are the core of the educational system and provide professional advice to teaching staff and students to solve their problems. The study aimed to find out problems facing guidance and counselling centres in public universities of Ghana. A descriptive survey method was adopted. The population consisted of all fifteen public universities of Ghana, all counsellors at guidance and counselling centres in the 15 public universities of Ghana. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. The 15 public universities were grouped into three zones: South zone, Central zone, and North zone. The lottery method was used to select the universities in each zone. 30% of the public universities, i.e. Three out of eight public universities in the South zone, one out of the four public universities in the Central zone, and one out of the three public universities in the North zone, were selected. All 42 counsellors of the five sampled public universities formed part of the sample. An open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from counsellors. The data collected were analysed qualitatively using content analysis. The study revealed that guidance and counselling centres in public university of Ghana are facing problems such as inadequate number of counsellors, inadequate funding for the campus and community outreach programmes, inadequate number of offices for counsellors and inactive internet networks for online counselling. Recommendations were given to the government of Ghana and university administrations to solve the problems.

**Keywords:** *Guidance and counselling centres, problems, counsellors, public universities*

Education is an instrument for society's change. It seeks to impart knowledge, techniques, skills, and information, informing the individual of his duties and rights to be accepted in society and the nation. It sustains economic, human, social, and cultural prosperity while laying the groundwork for international collaboration by encouraging mutual tolerance and understanding (Karthikeyan, 2015). Many developed nations are prosperous because of the quality of their education system, which minimises poverty and inequality and builds the foundation for long-term economic success (World Bank, 2016), while less developed countries struggle partly due to their weak education system (Abugieye, 2010).

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Despite the benefits of education, most university teachers and students in Ghana face problems (Atta-Frimpong, 2013). Students problems are related to educational, vocational and personal/social issues, while teachers problems are related to personal/social issues. A significant number of students in Ghanaian universities face many educational problems. These problems include wrong programme choices, lack of educational information, gender stereotyping in the subject selection, challenges in notetaking, bad study habits, exam difficulties, and most of all; these students have no one to share their concerns with (Salawu, 2008). Many university students have vocational problems. These problems include career information, indecision, rigidity and unwillingness to change, realism, and knowledge about one's abilities and interests (Salawu, 2008).

Since Ghanaian university teachers and students grew up in a complex and rapidly changing society, they have faced many problems in and out of university settings. Students in educational institutions, particularly in Ghana, encounter many challenges that hinder their progress (Adu & Srivastava, 2024). Many students struggle to meet these demands, leading to confusion, disappointment, and frustration, especially when faced with exam failures. External pressures from parents or relatives often compound this struggle during university enrollment and course selection processes. Some also face problems, including sexually transmitted diseases, anxiety, suicide, stress, difficulty asserting themselves, alcohol and tobacco problems and drug and alcohol abuse, difficulty in decision-making, teenage pregnancy, problem-solving, and low self-image (Salawu, 2008). Some of these problems are mild, while others are serious. Teachers and students respond to such problems in various ways. In the end, emotions pose a threat to both them and society (Ocansey, 2018). These problems of university students disturb parents and educational stakeholders (Ocansey, 2018).

Additionally, university institutions in Ghana are pressured to provide valuable solutions and services to help students attain their education (Ocansey, 2018). To solve the above problems, the government of Ghana has developed educational policies that promote the practice of guidance and counselling at all educational levels (Essuman, 2015). These policies ensure the establishment of guidance and counselling centres at the university education level.

Guidance and counselling centres in Ghana are the core of the educational system and provide professional advice to students for a successful university education (Atta-Frimpong, 2013, as cited in Taylor & Buku, 2006). Any university educational institution that ignores guidance and counselling centre programmes may experience extraordinary educational waste and disorder in its educational system and society (Adu, 2022; Ocansey, 2018). With this, various universities in Ghana have established guidance and counselling centres to provide academic, professional, and character/moral advice to students on their educational, vocational and social/personal problems and teachers on social/personal problems (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Ocansey (2018).

The atmosphere within Ghanaian public universities has been marred by internal unrest, including riots, strikes, and instances of violence, which have resulted in injuries and property damage. Alarmingly, there has been a rise in student suicides within these institutions (Brooklyn, 2023). Such incidents not only disrupt the educational experience but also pose significant threats to students' vocational and social development. The consequences could be dire if these issues persist without adequate professional counselling. Addressing the above challenges of university students requires effective and efficient guidance and counselling

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centres with adequate resources to support both teaching staff and students within the universities.

Guidance and counselling centres in Ghana are facing human, financial, and physical infrastructure problems (Aidoo, 2011). The inadequate number of qualified counsellors further exacerbates challenges for guidance and counselling centres. An inadequate number of counsellors can significantly diminish the quality and quantity of support available to both teaching staff and students at the guidance and counselling centres (Bedu-Addo, 2016). Financial constraints also play a critical role in the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services. Insufficient funding can lead to inadequate counsellors, increased workloads, and decreased service quality (Athar, 2019). Additionally, these financial limitations can result in inadequate facilities and resources, restricting the ability to create a supportive environment for counselling sessions (Lai-Yeung, 2014). As a result, guidance and counselling centres may find it challenging to reach underserved populations, diminishing the overall impact of their services and leaving vulnerable groups without necessary assistance. Ongoing financial issues threaten the sustainability of these services, potentially leading to closures or reduced operational hours. Such constraints can severely limit access to mental health support for both instructors and students (Unwada & Godfrey, 2020). Therefore, the funding resources and deficiency of finances need to be investigated in Ghana's guidance and counselling centres. The physical infrastructure of guidance and counselling centres, such as offices, furniture, computers, and internet connectivity, is crucial for effective service delivery (Taylor & Buku, 2006). A lack of these can hinder counsellors' ability to conduct workshops, facilitate group discussions, or provide one-on-one support, including online counselling (Atta-Frimpong, 2013).

These problems hinder the smooth administrative functioning of the centres. According to a study conducted by Alale (2019) in Ghana Colleges of Education guidance and counselling centres indicated that the centres faced resource problems, which prevent the centres from functioning as expected to render effective service to teaching staff and students. Aidoo (2011) conducted a study titled "Administration of Guidance and Counselling in Colleges of Education in Ghana." The study showed that tutors and students regarded the introduction of guidance and counselling centre services as satisfactory but were not satisfied with the administrative operations of the centre due to the unavailability of resources in the centre. These and many other problems have made the guidance and counselling centres not beneficial to teaching staff and students (Kathuri, Magero & Wamalwa, 2018). Parents and students also perceive the centres as poor (Alemu, 2013; Hordofa, 2018). There was a lack of confidentiality in counsellors (Fia, 2018). As a result, some teaching staff and students consider visiting the guidance and counselling centres unnecessary (Sedofia, 2011). Therefore, Ghana, as a developing country, the study needs to examine its public universities guidance and counselling centres problems to find out whether it has improved from time to time.

The study aimed to find out the problems facing guidance and counselling centres in public universities of Ghana.

### **METHODOLOGY**

A descriptive survey method was used in this study. The population consisted of all fifteen public universities of Ghana, all counsellors at guidance and counselling centres in the 15 public universities of Ghana. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the

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sample. The 15 public universities were grouped into three zones: South zone, Central zone, and North zone. The lottery method was used to select the universities in each zone. 30% of the public universities, i.e. Three out of eight public universities in the South zone, one out of the four public universities in the Central zone, and one out of the three public universities in the North zone, were selected. All 42 counsellors of the five sampled public universities formed part of the sample.

### *Materials*

An open-ended questionnaire was constructed and used to collect data from counsellors on problems facing guidance and counselling centres. The questionnaire consisted of 4 dimension included human resources, financial resources, physical infrastructure resources, and online counselling.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The data collected was analysed qualitatively using content analysis through frequency and percentage.

*Table 1: Demographic of Counsellors*

| Gender         | N=42      |            |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
|                | Frequency | Percentage |
| Male           | 23        | 54.8%      |
| Female         | 19        | 45.2%      |
| Age            | Frequency | Percentage |
| 30-39 years    | 8         | 19.1%      |
| 40-49 years    | 20        | 47.6%      |
| Above 50 years | 14        | 33.3%      |

From table 1, it can be observed that the 42 counsellors in the five sampled public universities in Ghana, 54.8% were males, while 45.2% were females. 47.6% of counsellors were 40- 49 years old, 33.3% fell within the ages of above 50 years, and 19.1 % were aged between 30-39 years.

The data related to the problems facing guidance and counselling centres in public universities of Ghana have been analysed, the findings, discussed and presented below.

### *Human Resources*

All the 42 counsellors in the five sampled public universities in Ghana (100%) stated that the centres have inadequate number of counsellors, 61.9% stated heavy workload problems as lecturer counsellors, and 33.3% stated inadequate number of counsellors and heavy workload problems as lecturer counsellors. The study found that the majority of guidance and counselling centres in the public universities of Ghana had an inadequate number of counsellors. This may be because there are a limited number of trained counsellors in Ghana or because of financial constraints, which prevent the university administration from recruiting more counsellors. This inadequacy of trained counsellors within university guidance and counselling centres services is a pressing and recurrent challenge, consistently underscored by researchers in the field (Bobga, 2016; Arfasa & Weldmeskel, 2020; Nkala, 2014). The inadequate number of counsellors may probably be due to insufficient funds the universities received from the government. This inadequate of qualified counsellors

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significantly hampers the efficient and effective operation of guidance and counselling centres within educational institutions. The inadequate number of trained counsellors in universities guidance and counselling services can adversely affect the quantity and quality of guidance and counselling available to teaching staff and students. This inadequacy often leads to prolonged waiting times for teaching staff and students seeking counselling, hindering their timely access to crucial mental health and academic support. Additionally, the existing counsellors may become overburdened, limiting the attention and care they can provide each teaching staff and student. Consequently, the effectiveness and impact of counselling sessions may be compromised, diminishing the intended benefits for the teaching staff and students. To address the problem of the lack of counsellors in the guidance and counselling centres, the Ghana Education Service has approved guidance and counselling subjects among the study leave with pay subjects list (Isaac, 2023). The aim is to give teachers who want to pursue further study in the field of guidance and counselling the opportunity to enrol in tertiary institutions within the country to pursue guidance and counselling while receiving monthly pay every month. This initiative will help increase the number of counsellors in the country to fill in the lack of counsellors in the guidance and counselling centres.

### ***Financial Resources***

All the counsellors (100%) stated that the centres face inadequate funding for the campus and community outreach programmes. 95.2% stated inadequate financing to organise seminars and programmes, and 24.6% stated inadequate funding for adequate logistics. The findings revealed insufficient funding for university guidance and counselling centres. The allocation of budget to align education by the government of Ghana may be less due to their developing economy. This insufficient funding, as highlighted by Bobga (2016) and Aidoo (2011), significantly hampers the regular organisation of vital seminars and programmes essential for teaching staff and students holistic growth and development. The impact of this financial constraint is multifaceted and extends to both the teaching staff and students as well as the overall effectiveness of the educational institution. First and foremost, inadequate funding limits the scope and frequency of essential seminars and programmes designed to enhance teaching staff and students' well-being and mental health. These events often provide a platform for teaching staff and students to openly discuss their concerns, seek advice, and learn crucial life skills. Inadequacy of funding obstructs the scheduling of such events, which are instrumental in fostering a supportive and nurturing conducive environment to academic success and personal growth. Moreover, the scarcity of funds affects the hiring and retaining of qualified and experienced counsellors. Skilled professionals are imperative for providing adequate guidance to teaching staff and students with various academic, personal, and emotional challenges.

### ***Physical Infrastructure Resources***

All the counsellors (100%) responded that the centres were facing inadequate offices for counsellors, 76.2% responded inadequate tables and chairs. 19.0% responded that they did not have separate rooms for testing and interviews, and 21.4% responded that there were inadequate computers, printers, and scanners problems. The findings found inadequate offices for counsellors. This may be because of budget constraints prioritising other academic needs or physical limitations within university facilities. This finding supports Adanna et al. (2023), Heragu (2018), and Sanders & Lehmann (2019), who found that guidance and counselling centres had insufficient offices for counsellors.

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### *Online Counselling*

All the 42 counsellors in the five sampled public universities in Ghana (100%) responded that the centres have inactive networks. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Alale (2019) in colleges of education in Northern Ghana, highlighting a pressing issue about inactive internet network systems affecting guidance and counselling centres. The inactive internet networks in guidance and counselling centres in Ghana may be due to budgetary constraints that restrict investment in reliable internet services and a lack of technical support and maintenance, leading to ongoing connectivity problems. University administrations' limited focus on digital resources may also contribute to the neglect of internet infrastructure. The increasing demand for internet access from various departments may strain existing resources, leading to inconsistent connectivity in counselling centres. Internet connectivity is a crucial component for guidance and counselling centres' functionality. Inactive internet network issues pose challenges for facilities for online counselling.

### *Recommendations*

The government should establish more universities offering guidance and counselling courses that will train more trained counsellors to stop the inadequate number of counsellors in the guidance and counselling centres. Also, the university administrations should recruit more qualified personnel to reduce the workload on existing counsellors and ensure that teaching staff and students receive adequate guidance and counselling. This will help the counsellors to reduce prolonged waiting times for teaching staff and students seeking counselling, hindering their timely access to crucial mental health and academic support. Again, the university administrations should invest in technological infrastructure like better internet connectivity to facilitate online counselling, which is increasingly important in the current educational landscape. Allocate space on the university website for guidance and counselling centres to facilitate session bookings, which could substantially augment the utilisation of online counselling services. Lastly, the university administrations should use their internally generated funds to construct office spaces for the counsellors in the guidance and counselling centres.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that guidance and counselling centres in public university of Ghana are facing numerous problems, such as inadequate number of counsellors, inadequate funding for the campus and community outreach programmes, inadequate number of offices for counsellors and inactive internet networks for online counselling. Hence, the government of Ghana and university administrations should corroborate to solve the problems.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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