

Students' Perception of the Role of Counsellors in the Choice of a Career: a study of the Mfantseman Municipality in Ghana

Moses Awinsong

Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education
University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Omar Dawson

Department of Religion
University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Belinda Enyonam Gidiglo

Ghana National College, Cape Coast, Ghana.

Abstract. This study investigated students' perception of the role of counsellors in the choice of career using two schools in the Mfantseman Municipality in the Central Region. The study aimed at finding out the available counselling services in schools, the frequency of access to counselling in schools, and the perception students hold about the role of counsellors in the choice of careers. The descriptive research design was used in this study. Student respondents numbered 349 while 2 counsellors were involved in the study. Questionnaires and an interview guide were used to gather the necessary data for the study. The study revealed that counselling services are available in schools and include educational, vocational, and person-social counselling. Secondly, the study found that students had access to counselling but their frequency of access was inhibited by counsellor characteristics and other factors. Lastly, the study uncovered that students thought counsellors to be central to the process of making career choices. The government, Ghana Education Services, and school authorities should give much heed to counselling especially career guidance by making resources available to counsellors for work. Career guidance programmes should be routinized in schools for greater benefits to students. Counsellors should also endeavour to seek opportunities for skill upgrade and higher training so that they can become more relevant to the needs of students.

Keywords: counsellors; perceive; career; decision-making.

Introduction

High school drop-out rates result in unemployment, poverty, low quality of life, high dependency ratio and many other social problems which call for an effective career guidance programme in schools. Ocansey (2001) observes that making a correct or realistic career choice as well as planning for it is a difficult or delicate task. It is therefore important that school guidance programmes keep up with the latest trends, so that guidance services are provided in our schools to equip students to make them well prepared to make better choices in life. Whether students make use of school counsellors or not depends on how students perceive these counsellors' roles in the choice of a career (Mittendorff, Beijaardb, den Brok, & Koopman, 2012).

In the school system, the ultimate aim of both teaching, and guidance and counselling is to prepare and guide students into a better future. Though guidance and counseling may not be a time-tabled activity as teaching, McLaughlin (1999) asserts that it carries an educational function. This means its place in the school system is no less important. The failure to offer or effectively provide guidance services has often led to wrong career path decisions that have adversely affected the victims and the nation. Lack of enthusiasm in a chosen field, low productivity at work, emotional depression, and lack of focus in life are some of the consequences of bad career decisions made by students (Fox & Butler, 2007). The need to maximize the benefits of school-based services like guidance and counselling therefore becomes ever important. But getting students to talk to counsellors remains unrealistic given the varying perceptions students hold about counsellors which hinder the natural human conversation process between both parties (Fox & Butler, 2007). Without such a conversation, good career decisions, which are a product of the conversational process, will not be possible. And since counsellors hold great secrets and information in store, these treasures are lost forever to these students.

Statement of the Problem

It is expected that by the time a student leaves Senior High School, they should have decided on the occupation or career they intend to pursue. In contrast, it has been observed that most students complete second-cycle schooling without having an idea as to the occupation to pursue (Kelechie & Ihuoma, 2011). According to Kelechie, & Ihuoma (2011), students do not make informed career choice because they are largely influenced by their peers and parents' preference for certain careers. School counsellors are not significant in the decision making process because students may have some perception about these counsellors which prevents them from seeking guidance and counselling on career choices.

According to Oladele (2000), teachers and school administrators hold different perception about the roles school counsellors play as regards to adolescent reproductive life, academic life, relationship issues, and most of all, career guidance. Examining the perception of people on the role of the counsellor, earlier studies by Alexitch, Kobussen, and Stookey (2004) and Ojirah

(2004) reported different views and ideas from teachers, administrators and parents. The study concluded that the image of counsellors held by most participants was that of an academic advisor. The teachers, for instance, expected the counsellor to be abreast with school courses, curricula, and educational matters as well as personal and social issues. Unfortunately, they did not expect the counsellor to solely deal with career choice.

It is then imperative to know students' perception of school counsellors' role in the choice of a career since some researchers (Oladele, 2000; Ocansey, 2001; Mittendorff, Beijaardb, den Brokb, & Koopman, 2012) have established that even teachers, administrators and parents have different perceptions about the role school counsellors play regarding career choice and other relevant issues. It is this gaps in the research for knowledge and information in education studies that has necessitated this study.

Research Questions

The following were questions that were used to guide the study:

1. what are the guidance and counselling services available in SHS in the Mfantseman Municipality?
2. how often do SHS students access guidance and counselling services in their schools?
3. what are Senior High School students' perceptions of school counsellors' role in the choice of a career?

Review of Related Literature

This section presents a review of related literature that supports the current research being undertaken.

Availability of Counselling Services

Counselling services in schools have been found to be lacking (Adejimola & Tayo-Olajubu, 2009). This subsequently affects students' access to information about career choices at the high school level. Okeke and Okorie (2006) reported from a study in south-east Nigeria that there was a lack of counselling centres in schools. This, they noted, had affected the decision-making of students and resulted in maladjusted behavior. One-on-one counselling interactions between the counsellors and the students was found to be lacking and thus entrenched the belief of counselling unavailability. Ofor (2008) concurs that counselling services in most Nigerian schools were non-exist though they are supposed to be. It was realized that though policy makers design policies on counselling and career guidance for schools, the lack of certain fundamentals like resources, administrative commitment, and expertise mitigate the realization of the aims envisaged in such policy documents.

Also, Fia (2011) undertook a study of guidance and counselling services in schools in the Ho Municipality. He reported that educational, vocational, and person-social counselling were lacking in schools in Ho even where some of

them possessed clearly demarcated counselling centers to cater for the needs of clients. The absence of group school counselling of students by any counsellor in the school was noted to have created ignorance among students about counselling. Nwokolo, Anyamene, Oraegbunam, Anyachebelu, Okoye, and Obineli (2010) in a Nigerian study discovered that services for academic guidance and counselling were not available in schools. Of five states that were studied, two states-Ebonyi and Enugu- had no guidance and counselling centres in most of their schools. This was attributed to the lack of deepened awareness of the relevance of counselling. They report that group counselling, which can be effective in large schools or school districts, was not carried out.

Fox and Butler (2007) explained, while not discarding the fact that services may not be available in some school, that counselling services seem unavailable in school due to low publicity. In their work, they found that no career conferences were organized to educate and introduce students to career options and professional paths. Kano (2012) also contend that guidance and counselling services were unavailable in schools in Tanzania until the government adopted guidelines for the implementation of these programs in schools in 2007. The effect was that many students failed to gain academic, personal, and vocational counselling support when they were in need. There is therefore the preponderance of the view that counselling and guidance services are unavailable in many schools and this affects students' welfare in the making of decisions about their career destinies.

Access to Counselling Services in Schools

Whether students know about the availability of guidance and counselling services in the school or not is a major determinant of how well they access or do not access them. Fox and Butler (2007) found that some respondents' problem with school guidance and counselling services was that it was not widely known. About 29% of respondents in the study recommended better promotion of the service so that it will be frequently accessed by students. Publicity is therefore a major blockade to access to guidance and counselling services and by extension, career guidance.

Chan and Quinn (2012) discovered that the worry that other people will find out about one's reasons for seeking professional help was the fourth important factor that inhibits access to guidance and counselling. The respondents shied from counselling due the fear of being teased and bullied by peers in the school. This highlights the fact that students did not seek guidance because they might be stigmatized by others who find out or see them going for such services. As much as possible therefore, students avoid the counsellor and their office. This is in sync with Setiawan's (2006) observation that the fear of someone finding out limits the urge to seek career guidance. This attitude has been perpetuated due to the rumour and gossip many hold through years of observation in school that guidance and counselling is for those who are academically weak or excessively truant.

Ogunlade and Akeredolu (2012) discovered in a study that most counselors in the school system are untrained and this can affect efficiency and the ability to woo more clients. A majority of students in the study made career choices without much information because professionally trained counsellors with the requisite knowledge were either absent. This absence of professionally trained counsellors discouraged students from seeking guidance and counselling. Eliamani, Richard, and Peter, (2014) also found non-professional counselling greatly affected access to counselling services. The lack of trained counsellors in Tanzanian schools, they found, denied and discouraged many students accessing professional services. Anagbogu (2008) reported that many school counsellors do not have access to the requisite professional training that empower them to be impactful in schools. Ogunlade and Akeredolu (2012) advise that counsellors should be given more training to prepare them for work. Thus, the greater the professional knowledge and expertise of the counsellor, the more likely students are to seek counselling service help in periods of need.

Again, some students doubt the degree of confidentiality assured by counselors and that serve as a hindrance to their seeking guidance or counseling services (Le Surf & Lynch, 1999; Jenkins & Palmer, 2011; Mushaandja, Haihambo, Vergnani, and Frank, 2013). Le Surf and Lynch (1999) gathered from respondents in their study that the trust that a counselor would not tell anyone about one's secrets no matter how awful can encourage one to seek counseling. Setiawan (2006), who studied undergraduate university students in Indonesia, discovered that most students do not access counseling services frequently due to confidentiality issues among other pressing ones. Jenkins and Palmer (2011) particularly note that fear that one's secrets will be exposed made clients dread the counsellor. Even where referrals are made to the school counsellor by teachers or administrators, the counselee will fail to be open about his or her life difficulties. Mushaandja, Haihambo, Vergnani, and Frank (2013), in a qualitative study, found counsellors complaining about the lack of trust learners had in them. This, they attributed to cultural barriers and family influence. "How can a learner trust me if he or she knows I will not keep her information confidential?" one of the counsellors asked. Counselors therefore have a responsibility to win students' trust if they are to convince more students to take career guidance seriously.

Equally significant is the problematic nature of the dual role of teacher-counselors which put restraints on the counsellor's time and which can discourage students from accessing counselling facilities (Walker, Alloway, Dalley-Trim, & Patterson, 2006; Kuhn, 2004; Menon, 2010). This finding is supported by Menon (2010) found that the dual responsibilities of teacher and counselor adversely affected access to counseling programmes by most students. Many counsellors in this study complained about the lack of a defined role for the counsellor in the school which results in most counsellors becoming engaged in non-counselling related work. A study by the US Department of Education (2003) asserted that 49% of public schools reported that counselling and guidance staff spent more than 20% of their time on registering students. June, Curry, and Gear (1990) reported that Black students valued interaction with school counsellors as helpful in informing the frequency of their access of counsellors' service. Thus, one can conclude that accessibility to the counsellor is

key to most students' view of counsellors and the guidance and counselling process. Menon, (2010) and Walker et al (2006) reported that counselors who devoted their time to counseling needs encouraged students' decision to seek constant professional support. Conversely, those who paid equal or more attention to other responsibilities like teaching and administrative work were graded very lowly by students. Kuhn (2004) emphasized that the use of counsellors as principals, disciplinarians, and registration officers reduced students' value for their roles as counsellors so that they are not propelled to go to them for professional guidance. The lesson is that the availability of the counsellor in the school when truncated by other callings like teaching and administrative work can affect the decisions of students to seek counseling services.

Students Perception of Counsellors' Role

Students' perception of counsellors' impact in their decisions about the future is covered considerably by the literature (Walker et al, 2006; Alloway, Walker, Patterson, Dalley & Lenoy, 2004; Aspen, Cooper, Liu, Marowa, Rubio, Waterhouse, & Sheridan, 2015). Aspen et al (2015) assert that counsellors play a crucial role in students' career decisions and can influence the decision making process through the information they provide students. Contrastingly, Menon (2010) reported that students did not consider counsellors as central in the decisions made about careers. This means the influence of counselors in the career decisions of students is one dictated by students' view of how central they, the counsellors, are to the decision making process.

Agi (2014) reported from a study that 71.8% of respondents held a negative view of counselling due primarily to perceptions held about the counsellor. Again, 72.5% of respondents held a hostile attitude towards counselling. This was traceable to the lack of informed and well researched counsellors. Ogunlade and Akeredolu (2012) learnt from their study that most students made wrong career decisions because of they had no informed counsellors to support them in their decision-making process. Many students therefore held counsellors to be impactful in their career choice making if these counsellors are well informed, intelligent, and well researched. Counsellors armed with a wide repertoire of knowledge are deemed important and impactful in students' choice making (Eliamani, Richard, & Peter, 2014). Walker et al (2006) equally discovered that prompt counsellor response to student inquiries created positive perceptions about the counsellor in the mind of the student.

Egbo (2015) contend that respect for and recognition of the individual differences of students is central to the guidance and counselling process. Thus, students perceive counselors to be impactful in their choices in life if those counsellors recognize the individual differences of each student and strive to meet the needs shown by these differences as appropriately as possible. The American Personnel and Guidance Association Statement of Policy on the characteristics of a good counsellor buttress this by saying that a good counsellor is one who belief in each individual. The counsellor believes in the personal worth of each person, in his capacity for growth and change, and in his ability to

cope with life situations. Patterson and Levy (2007) also further that counsellors who took a genuine interest in people rather than just provide information made a great impact on the decisions of students. Many respondents in Patterson and Levy' study acknowledged that the personal attention they received from counsellors greatly made them feel better, stronger and informed. The indispensability of counsellor interest in counsellees is appropriately highlighted.

Kuhn (2011) tasked 223 student respondents to rate the counsellors' work based on their perception of who they think counsellors are. He discovered that students rated 'counsellor/coordinator' first. Other perceptions included leader, advocate, collaborator, and data utilizer in order of importance. Thus, counsellor professional availability was found to significantly affect students' perception of the counsellor. Their finding is in sync with McLaughlin's (1999) assertion that counsellors who were inaccessible due to added teaching or administrative responsibilities were bound to have limited or no impact at all on students' choice of career. When counsellors offer less and less professional services to many students, it becomes difficult for them to influence the decisions students make about their lives (Chan & Quinn, 2012).

Lastly, Badu (2011) realized from a study that counsellees favourably perceived the input of counsellors in their decisions when there is a positive counselling relationship between the counsellor and the counsellee. This relationship can include how trustworthy the counsellor is, his paralinguistic skills in making students comfortable, and the commitment shown in helping counsellees. Rafeffesperger (2010) confirmed this by reporting that a positive counselling relationship was central to the success of the counselling process. Confidentiality, service flexibility, and location of the counselling centres all fed into establishing a positive relationship between the counsellor and the counsellee. Alice, Alice, and Patrick (2013) reported a Unesco study in which 46% of responding students in rural Uganda perceived counsellors negatively due primarily to persistent sexual harassments they had received from counsellors. This means there is the need for human centredness and professionalism in the counselling process. The more honest, humane, and exemplary a counsellor is to students and their difficulties, the more influential he will be in impacting students' choices in life including career decisions.

From the literature, one notices that a voluminous amount of information exist on career choice-making in schools. Though a lot has been done on school counselling, the perception students hold about the role of counsellors in the choice of career is yet to be more empirically known. The present study will therefore add to the literature by investigating the availability of counselling services in schools, the frequency of use of counselling services by students, and the perceived roles counsellors play, according to students, in the choice of a career.

Methodology

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design was used for the study. Sarantakos (1998) intimates that descriptive research is able to describe a phenomenon and make generalizations concerning a larger group where a sample was drawn. Amedahe (2003) also holds that in descriptive research, accurate description of activities, objects, processes and persons is objective. This research design will therefore aid the researchers determine the exact nature of conditions that prevail in high schools on counselling and students view of the school counsellor. Descriptive research design is also widely used in educational research since data gathered by way of descriptive survey represents field conditions (Seidu, 2006; Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990).

Population

The target population for the study was senior high school students in the Mfantseman Municipality. The accessible population for the study, however, was all students in Mankessim Senior High School and Saltpond Methodist Senior High School. Both are mixed gender schools with students from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds in the Central Region of Ghana. According to data gathered by the researchers, the total number of total students and counsellors in the two schools for the 2014/2015 academic year is about 4000 (Records of the schools, 2014/2015 Academic Year).

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 351 students and counsellors were used for the study based on the accessible population as described by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). This method of determining the sample size is deemed effective because it gives representative statistical sample in empirical research. Simple random sampling technique was used to select two schools from the municipality. This was done to ensure adequate representation of schools for the study. Also, the researchers simple randomly sampled 176 students out of 2013 students and a counsellor from Mankessim Senior High School, and 173 out of 1989 students and a counsellor from Saltpond Senior High School each school making a total of 351 out of 4002 students. All the students in the two schools were willing to partake but the researchers sampled only 349 students out of the total number. These 349 were those who eventually partook in the study. The allocation of these student numbers to both schools was to ensure representativeness of the sample from each participating school for the study. The school counsellors were purposively selected because of their unique knowledge and experience as guidance and counselling personnel.

Research Instrument

Questionnaires were developed and used for the data collection. In-depth personal interviews were conducted with the counsellors. The questionnaire used for the study contained Section A which had information on the bio-data of respondents mainly age, gender, class, and school. Section B

contained information eliciting responses on the availability of counselling services in school with four items. Section C had items that questioned how often SHS students accessed guidance and counselling services in their schools and held eight items. The last part was Section D which enquired into students' perception of the role counsellors play in the choice of a career. This section contained seven items. The statements were based on a Likert Scale format ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Students were to tick as was applicable to their situation.

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers collected an introductory letter from the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, University of Cape Coast to formally introduce themselves to the headmasters in the schools selected for the study. Permission was sought from the management of the schools and respondents before the questionnaires were administered to the respondents. No one was compelled to take part in this study. The researchers administered the questionnaires themselves after explaining the purpose and significance of the study to the respondents. The researchers encouraged the respondents to provide honest responses to increase the girth of reliability of the study. The terms in the questionnaire which were not understood by some respondents were explained in the process of gathering the data. The questionnaires were administered to students during the last week of the school term. The schools scored a return rate of 84.7% and 86.2% for Mankessim SHS and Saltpond Methodist SHS, respectively. Two counsellors were interviewed, the outcome transcribed, and subsequently presented as part of the discussion of the study's outcome.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from the questionnaires administered were first organized, coded and categorized. Following this, the data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Service Solutions (SPSS) software version sixteen. Descriptive statistical method was also employed during the analysis of the data, making extensive use of frequencies and percentages. The interview with the counsellors was transcribed, and subsequently presented as part of the discussion of the study's outcome.

Results and Discussions

This chapter discusses and interprets the results based on the data gathered from 351 participants. In analyzing the data, we followed the three research questions that guided the study. Tables showing the frequencies and their corresponding percentages for each item were constructed. The background information of participants, availability of counselling services in schools, access to counselling services, and students' perception of the counsellor in the choice of a career were looked at in this chapter.

Background Information of Respondents

Table 1: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	187	62.3
Female	113	37.6
Total	300	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2015.

Table 1 represents the gender of respondents and shows a high percentage for male respondents at 62.3% of the total in both schools. The females' number is no discouraging because their figure is almost about 40% of the total of respondents who participated in the study. The disparity in access to education between boys and girls in Ghana may account for this difference.

Table 2: Age of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
13-15	65	21.7
16-18	176	58.6
19-21	50	16.7
Above 21 years	9	3.0

Source: Field Data, 2015.

In Table 2 above, we have the age distribution of the respondents. The highest respondent age group is those between 16-18 years. Students who were between 13-15 formed 21.7% and were the second highest age group of respondents. This is unsurprising because many students enter high schools at around 13 to 15. The lowest age groups were those between 19-21 and above 21 years who scored 16.7% and 3% respectively. This is logical given that many people complete high school by the time they are twenty years old.

Table 3: Class of the Respondents

Form	Frequency	Percentage
SHS1	65	21.7
SHS2	166	55.3

SSS3	69	23.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2015.

Table 3 shows the class of the respondents in the study. Greater numbers of second year students responded to the study than other classes. They formed 55.3% of the respondents. Both first and third year students formed 21.7% and 23.0% of respondents respectively. This was due to the scarcity of third year students for the study since the data were collected during the examination week when many third year students were writing intensive mock examinations. Though all classes were difficult to access due to the examinations, the first and second year classes were not as hard to access as the final year class because of the added burden of preparing for the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). The high numbers of second and third year students gave the study a high degree of reliability because they are those most fitted to inform on the counselling atmosphere due to duration of their stay in the schools.

Table 4: Schools of the Respondents

Name of School	Frequency	Percentage
Mankessim Senior High Technical School	146	48.7
Methodist Senior High School	154	51.3
Total	300	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2015

The information in Table 4 details the schools of the respondents who participated in the study. The returned questionnaires indicated that Methodist High School in Saltpond registered 51.3% of the total number of respondents for the study. Mankessim Senior High Technical School followed up with 48.7% of the respondents. The figures are very close. This stems from the almost equal nature of the available population in both schools.

Analyses of the Study

Availability of Guidance and Counselling Services

The information in Table 5 below gives insight into the responses given by students to the first research question which sought to determine the availability of guidance and counselling services in schools in the Mfantseman Municipality.

Table 5: Availability of Guidance and Counselling Services

Statement	SD N (%)	D N (%)	A N (%)	SA N (%)
I have heard of counselling since I reported to SHS	31(10.3)	50(16.5)	132(44.2)	87(29.0)
The guidance and counselling co-ordinator or the tutors discusses privately what I should do as a student to achieve academic success	42(14.0)	57(19.0)	135(45.0)	66(22.0)
The guidance and counselling co-ordinator meets the student body to provide useful career and life guidance	68(22.6)	132(44.0)	55(18.4)	45(15.0)
The counsellor organizes career conferences for the students	114(38.0)	91(30.3)	68(22.6)	27(9.0)

Source: Field Data, 2015

On the whole, more than half of respondents agreed that they have heard of guidance and counselling during their stay in the high school. The figure represented is 73.2% for those who agreed. There is therefore a great awareness of the availability of counselling services in the schools of the respondents. Nwokolo et al (2010), Fia (2011) and Fox and Butler's (2007) assertion that there is low publicity of guidance and counselling services in schools seems not to be the case in the Mfantseman Municipality. Students also agreed (67% of respondents) that their counsellors have met them to discuss academic strategies so as to help them achieve success in school. This shows that counsellors have been able to attend to students' academic needs. It contradicts Okeke and Okori's finding that one-on-one interaction between counsellors and students is unavailable in school. However, a majority of students disagreed (66.6%) that the counsellor have ever met the student body to discuss career issues. This concurs Nwokolo et al (2010) and Kano (2012) finding that group counselling is unavailable in most schools.

Close on the heels of this staggering fact is the revelation that 205 (61.1%) of students said school counsellor do not organize career conferences for students. These discoveries show that though counsellors meet students singly to discuss academic issues, they do not either meet the general student population or organize formal career guidance events for the students in the schools. It could also be that the school counsellor does well to meet students individually once they report to school but fail to carry follow ups on them as time pass by. The school counsellor's work is therefore not routinized to assure maximum benefit for those it is meant to help, namely students. Fox and Butler's (2007) view that lack of career conferences created notions of career counselling unavailability is very much confirmed here. There is no general meeting of the school population with the counsellor from time to time.

A school counsellor asserted that “mostly career counselling and maybe some minor, minor individual issues like how to study” are the areas of counselling offered by counsellors to students. This largely confirms the response by students that guidance and counselling services are available in their schools. A second counsellor furthered, when asked what kind of counselling services are available in the school, said that counsellors “usually offer counselling with respect to poor academic performance. When a student is seen to be performing poorly or abysmally continually, before the school decides to repeat that child, they normally take the child to the counselling section for them to speak to that child.” He added that “sometimes too if there are behavioural attitudes that seem to be happening often in the school, they (the school counsellors) fish people who are involved and then they talk to them to know exactly what is motivating them to be involved in those acts.” Thus available counselling services are not limited to career guidance but include educational and person-social counselling as well. Both counsellors also held that whereas there are no career guidance programmes on a regular basis, teachers do provide career information to students during normal teaching periods and outside the classroom.

It is therefore clear that teachers play an important role in providing career information which the school counsellor might not be able to do due to frequency of teachers’ meeting with students compared to the counsellor. Overall, there seem to be some form of counselling in schools but their effectiveness in areas like group counselling and career guidance is questionable. That validates Kano’s (2012) claim of lack of effective counselling in schools.

Access to Counselling Service in Schools

The facts in Table 6 details the respondents’ view on their level of access to counselling in school.

Table 6: Access to Counselling Service in Schools

Statement	SD N (%)	D N (%)	A N (%)	SA N (%)
I have gone to the guidance and counselling co-ordinator to discuss a personal issue	97(32.3)	126(42.0)	50(16.6)	27(9.0)
My school has a counselling centre	45(15.0)	34(11.3)	154(51.3)	67(22.3)
I know where to find the counselling office in the school	45(15.0)	34(11.3)	154(51.3)	67(22.3)
I go for counselling due to the confidence I have in the counsellor that s/he will not tell anyone	89(29.6)	111(37.0)	78(26.0)	22(7.3)

I go for counselling because I think the counsellor is well trained to help me	85(29.3)	121(40.3)	43(14.3)	51(17.0)
The counsellor is available always to address my personal issues	71(23.6)	114(38.0)	85(29.3)	30(10.0)
I go for counselling because I do not shy someone will find out	83(27.5)	142(47.3)	40(13.3)	35(11.6)

Source: Field Data, 2015

Exactly 51.3% of students indicated that they knew that their schools had a counselling centre and that they knew where to find the counselling office. Thus, access to guidance and counselling services by students is not hampered by a lack of awareness. This response is contradictory to Fox and Butler's (2007) finding that publicity is a major hindrance to access to counselling. This is confirmed by 77% of respondents who agreed that they have discussed a personal issue with the counsellor. If they did not know about counselling services or where to locate the office of the counsellor, then students will had been unable to have personal issues discussed with the school counsellor. But one of the counsellors disclosed that "it is only when the issue is at the extreme" that students come for counselling.

An important response given by students was the fact that they do not access counselling because of confidentiality problems. A total of 66.6% disagreed that they access guidance and counselling because of their faith in the counsellor that he or she will not tell anyone. This illuminates that students do not have confidence in the secrecy of counsellors. Both Setiawan (2006) and Jenkins and Palmer (2011) had also found confidentiality as inhibiting access to counselling in their own studies. The statistics in this study confirm the studies by Setiawan (2006), Le Surf and Lynch (1999), and Mushaandja, Haihambo, Vergnani, Jenkins and Palmer (2011), and Frank (2013) that confidentiality can be a hindrance to access to counselling.

Again, many students (69.6%) disagreed that counsellor had the requisite skill and professional ability to guide them. This shows a lack of skilled professional training visible in the counsellor as observed by students. The totality of disagreement stands at 69.3% of all respondents on this rubric. The figure is significant because it brings to the fore the necessity of professional know-how of counsellors to the guidance and counselling process and how it can positively impact the access level of students to professional guidance support. The discovery of Ogunlade and Akeredolu (2012) that untrained counsellors discourage students from accessing counselling has been aptly buttressed in this study by the almost 70% of respondents who saw ill-trained counsellor as inhibiting access to counselling. Eliamani, Richard, and Peter, (2014) and Anagbogu's (2008) contention that untrained counsellors negatively impact students' desire to access counselling is even more true given the quantity of response on this statement.

Also, shyness was shown to inhibit the decision to seek guidance and counselling. A majority (74.8%) disagreed that they did not shy seeking counselling. Thus, shyness is a hindrance to seeking counselling. School counsellors also said that shyness was central in students' access to counselling. They disclosed that other students had to be depended on to fish out students going through emotional, educational, and other life difficulties because these students will normally not seek professional counsellors' help in the school. The location of the counsellor's office is likely to inform this trend because if the office is open to the public eye, then students might fear to access it for fear that they might be stigmatized. The outcome of Anagbogu (2008) and Chan and Quinn (2012) and study has been confirmed in this regard. A school counsellor observed that students might not want to access the counsellor's office if they realize that there are other people like teachers in or around the office. So the location of the office must be done such that those who have nothing to do with the office or the service are kept at bay. Another counsellor said that students are spoken to often so that they come to recognize that counselling is not for only people who are in trouble. This will sensitize them to stop stigmatizing students who seek counsellors' aid.

Respondents also denied that counsellor were available to attend to their needs always. One hundred and fourteen students representing 61.6% disagreed that counsellors were always available to listen to their difficulties. This unavailability of the counsellor inhibited the urge to demand or seek counselling service. The reason can be traced to the duality of role the counsellor plays as a counsellor and teacher in schools in most jurisdictions including Ghana. This finding concurs Menon (2010) who found that counsellors who paid little attention to counselees did not encourage students to seek professional counselling help in schools. McLaughlin (1999) and the US Department of Education (2003) had also reported that students were discouraged to access counsellors once they knew the counsellor will have little time for them. The percentage of response (61.6%) confirms the reports of both McLaughlin and the US Department of Education (2003). The dual role of teaching and counselling was therefore found to inhibit access to counselling by students because counsellors have little time to spend on their core duties of counselling.

Students' Perception of Counsellor's Role in Career Choice Instruction

Table 7 provides understanding into students' perception of the role of a counsellor in the choice of a school career. This table addressed six inquiries.

Table 7: Students' Perception of Counsellor's Role in Career Choice Instruction

Statement	SD N (%)	D N (%)	A N (%)	SA N (%)
My school counsellor can help me make informed choice concerning my future	25(8.3)	62(20.6)	113(37.5)	100(33.3)
My school counsellor is	56(18.5)	121(40.3)	67(22.3)	56(18.6)

helpful because s/he is prompt in providing me information when I request it

My school counsellor is knowledgeable enough to help me make good career choice	78(26.0)	86(28.5)	101(33.6)	35(11.6)
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My school counsellor is trustworthy enough to discuss my career decisions with	67(22.3)	56(18.6)	100(33.3)	67(22.3)
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My school counsellor treats me as a unique person	45(15.0)	38(12.6)	126(42.0)	91(30.3)
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My school counsellor is always available to counsel me on career choices	62(20.6)	58(19.3)	105(35.0)	75(25.0)
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My school counsellor is nice to me when counselling me	51(17.0)	43(14.3)	128(42.6)	78(26.0)
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Source: Field Data, 2015

From the facts captured in Table 7, less than 30% of respondents thought counsellors could not help them make decisions concerning their future. There were 70.8% of students who agreed that that was the case. This means that the faith of students in the ability of their counsellors to help them make intelligent life choice is widely spread among high school students in the study area. But despite this apparent faith in the counsellor to be able to help, students do not see counsellors as helpful when the counsellor is not prompt in responding to their inquiries. There were 40.3% of respondents who disagreed that counsellors were prompt responses to their inquiries when they make them and that lowered the counsellors' impact level in the students' decision-making process. Only 22.3% of students thought otherwise. This finding agrees with Walker et al (2006) study that counsellors who provided prompt responses to inquiries were perceived as having important roles in students' career choice.

More than half of students, that is, 54.5% who disagreed, also held that their counsellors were not knowledgeable enough to aid them. This concurs with the earlier view expressed by respondents that they do not think counsellors are well trained to provide them the care they need. Agi (2014) finding that lack of knowledgeable counsellors lower students' perception of guidance and counselling is true. Also, Ogunlade and Akeredolu (2012) and Eliamani, Richard, and Peter, (2014) view that informed counsellors impact the decisions of students is confirmed. It is therefore imperative that counsellors improve their knowledge through reading and research after training so as to stamp their experiences on the decisions students make about the future.

Many students captured in the study will ideally like to discuss career choice decisions with counsellors. They represent 55.6% of respondents. This view portrays the important role counsellors can play in learners' career choice if they are perceived as trust worthy by student. Though respondents do not think counsellors are knowledgeable enough to aid them, the decision to score them high on involving them in career choice making may be due to the fact that counsellors, aside parents, are the next important adult contacts who students fall on to enquire into details of their career choices. The view by Fox and Butler (2007) and Badu (2011) that good counselling relationship like trust worthiness enhance the students' decision to seek career advice has been confirmed.

Respect for the uniqueness of each individual by the counsellor was taken seriously by students as informing whether they involved counsellors in their career choice or not. There were 72.2% of the students who agreed that counsellors took a unique view of students in the counselling process. The students will therefore feel more comfortable in involving counsellors in their career choice since they know they are important in the eye of the counsellor. Egbo's (2015) contention that respect for the unique individuality of counselees is a catalyst for improving counselees' perception of counsellors has been validated strongly. Patterson and Levy (2007) study that effective counsellors were those who took a genuine interest in students was further given a boost in this study with 72.2% of students agreeing to this fact. Closely tied to this rubric was the revelation that 68.6% of respondents agreed that counsellors were nice to them during counselling. The involvement of counsellors in career choice based on this human aspect of the counsellor is important for students and guidance and counselling profession. School counsellors also realized this characteristic. They asserted that they are 'nice' or genuinely interested in students in their everyday encounters with students so that even if a student finds it psychologically difficult to approach them, they will be able to find a friend who is more emotionally stable to help bring such a student to the counsellor.

The respondents also disclosed that counsellors were available to provide the necessary career guidance when they needed them. Those who agreed formed 60% of total respondents. But the disagreements were substantial, about 40% of the total number of respondents. This means that a significant number of students think otherwise. For these students who responded in the negative, the non-availability of the counsellor inhibits their willingness to involve them in their career choice decision making. But these students who disagreed might also had held availability to mean visibility as opined by Kuhn (2011) and McLaughlin (1993). For students who thought the counsellor was available, such counsellors were involved in students' career decision-making.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes information obtained from the study. It is also used to draw conclusions on the study and proffers recommendations based on the findings of the study.

Summary

The study's aims were to investigate guidance counselling and services available in schools, students' access of counselling services, and the perception students hold about the role of counsellors in the choice of a school career in the Mfantseman Municipality. Descriptive survey was the research design used for the study. Questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. A sample of 351 respondents was employed in the study. Descriptive statistical method was used in analyzing the data making extensive use of frequencies and percentages. The study's summary held that:

1. Guidance and counselling services are available to students in schools and that students have experienced these services. Most of the contacts between the students and the counsellors were one on one contact rather than group or conferential. The meetings between the two players were however not routinized to enable a constant relationship that offers a helping input into students' overall academic, social and career needs for high school students in the Mfantseman Municipality.
2. The guidance and counselling services in schools were accessed by students though not without some difficulties. Issues of confidentiality, the training of the counsellor, the degree of shyness, and the professional availability of the counsellor were said to be inhibiting factors to the urge to frequently access counselling services in schools though such services were readily available in schools in the Mfantseman Municipality.
3. Counsellors are important in the process of making a career choice. The consensus was that though the counsellor is important, their personality and professional bearing determines whether they eventually had a role to play in students' career choice decision-making. The counsellor's knowledgeability, promptness in responding to students' inquiries, and the extent of uniqueness they see in each student formed a bedrock that determined if students came for counselling and whether they involved the counsellor in the making of career decisions.

Conclusion

The study arrived at some conclusions. Firstly, it was realized that guidance and counselling services are available in schools in the Mfantseman Municipality. Students also accessed counselling though the frequency of access was not encouraging. Thirdly, the study showed that students took a positive view of the role counsellor in making career choice especially if the personality

and professional commitment of the counsellor were very attractive and convincing.

Recommendations

From the outcome of the study a number of recommendations were proffered.

1. Guidance and counselling services should not only be available in schools but that counsellors must routinize their activities to benefit students the more. Conferences on career opportunities as well as group counselling should be encouraged.
2. Counsellors and school authorities should create the necessary institutional and psychological foundations that enables students find it easier to access professional counselling. The location of counselling offices should be encouraging to students to want to seek professional advice.
3. Counsellors must do well to improve their personality and professional know-how to woo more students to the counselling centres in schools. The more personal, professional, attentive, and flexible counsellors are, the greater the students will involve them in the making of decisions about the future.

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