STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT

This study determines the adequacy of counselling in the SHS in Accra. Since a large portion of students in senior high school face a lot of mental issues and most are not able to seek proper help because they have the trust that their counsellors and educators will either relay their secrets told to other teachers or they will be punished when they seek help, this study is to help us find the process of counselling in senior high schools and how adequate they are.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study: In a recent times in Ghana, many cases of suicide have been reported and one wonders what could be the cause of this menace in our society. The blame game continues while fingers are being pointing in the direction of certain professions such as counsellors, clinical psychologists, and social workers to mention but a few. It is evident that, the need for guidance and counsellinghas become paramount in promoting the well- being of an individual as well as groups of people who need to be guided in the relationships in terms of health and the environment, earning skills, knowledge, attitudes, just to mention a few. In everyday life, guidance and counselling goes on at many levels, for instance in a society doctors counsel patients, lawyers counsel clients, parents counsel their children and teachers counsel students in school at all levels of education (Guez and Allen, U.D). From a historical point of view, Herr (2001) reports that the rise in secondary education was initiated by the rise of big businesses and technological advancement in factories during the 1910s. Two gaps were created in the labour market: the gap between the demand for labour in the growing industries and the available labour, as well as the gap between the skills

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required and that which the available labour force possessed. There was therefore the need to institute measures to increase the supply of skilled labour in order to bridge the labour requirement gaps. High schools were created and the curriculum focused on practical skills that would better prepare students for white collar jobs or skilled blue collar jobs (Gybers and Henderson, 2001). In order to avoid problem behaviours, it is prudence to relate vocational interests to curriculum subjects, and develop character. A model of directive counselling, developed by Williamson in the 1940s and 1950s was adopted and widely implemented to use information from students to solve problems (Erford, 2003). Subsequently, in the 1960s, a non-directive model for students' counselling was developed by Carl Ransom Rogers (1902 - 1987) emphasised the focus of student counselling on discovering the real needs and problems of students and using information collected about the students to adjust instruction to meet individual needs. This laid a basis for most contemporary secondary educational systems that sought to inculcate social and morale dimensions in education. According to House and Hayes (2002), this approach encourages a student-personnel point of view in utilising available resources and techniques to solve problems relating to the individual student. It also emphasises developing more understanding attitudes on the part of the teachers towards pupil behaviour and informing the applicability of specialised services, such as orientation of teachers. These emphases are laid in the context of student

guidance and counselling processes. The fundamental thought behind guidance and counselling in general lays in the fact that people often need guidance when faced with the need to make significant decisions that affect both themselves and those around them (Martin, 2002). For post-primary or secondary pupils, these choices are often focused on their personal and social lives, educational choices, and career decisions. Batt, Nic Gabhainn and Falvey (2002) therefore describes 'guidance and counselling' or 'guidance counselling' in second level schools, as the full range of interventions which assist pupils to make choices about their lives.

Effective guidance counselling, as recommended by Urombo (2000), should be such as to ensure that each pupil can, to a meaningful degree, avail of several components inherent in guidance counselling. These components involve counselling, information, assessment, advice, career transition programmes, educational development programmes, and personal and social development programmes. House and Hayes (2002) describe counselling as helping pupils on an individual or group basis to explore their own thoughts and feelings about their present life situation, about the choices open to them, and about the consequences of each choice. It is also emphasised that guidance counselling involves providing pupils with objective and factual data which informs decisions of students. Murdock (2004) adds that effective student guidance counselling would also involve the use of assessments, such as psychological and practical tests to assist pupils to make their own decisions. Student guidance counselling would also require advisors to make suggestions based on the counsellor's own experience and knowledge (Ntare, 2000). Similarly, the student would have to be provided with knowledge and skills relating to studying, examination performance, and choice of subjects and levels (Shoffner and Williamson, 2000). This would be in the effort to provide the necessary concepts, knowledge and skills to enable pupils make the transition to further and higher education, training, and work. It would also be pertinent for student guidance counselling to inculcate the provision of knowledge and skills relating to the pupil's personal and social development, self-awareness, decision-making, and planning (Shoffner and Briggs, 2001). This would be evidenced in personal and social development programmes.

Given the broad range of activities that encompasses student guidance counselling, Murdock (2004) establishes that guidance counselling for students, in addition to being a specialist area in education, should be a function of the entire school enterprise. It would therefore require a comprehensive approach which would involve a paradigm shift from a traditional approach, related to development guidance instruction, individual student planning, responsive services, and school/community support. According to Ponec and Brock (2000), traditional approaches to counselling conform to counsellor centred techniques, which focus on crisis counselling and one-way directional provision of guidance and career information services. Such approaches are manifested in reactive and ad hoc task-oriented activities aimed at maintain the status quo. Traditional approaches to guidance counselling are posited as ancillary, therapeutic, and position-focused model that delivers services to a specific population. Spery, Carlson and Kjos (2003) maintain that significant changes have occurred in education and school guidance and counselling services have evolved into a joint responsibility, goal oriented, and developmental and preventive process, which is focused on using proactive measure to evaluate requisite changes, based upon students' needs. In attestation,

Murdock (2004) adds that student guidance counselling has become part of a comprehensive developmental program that focuses on the educational, personal, social, and career growth and development of students. Shoffner and Williamson (2000) establish that comprehensive school guidance and counselling programme assists students answer these questions related to their identity, that is who they are, as well as questions related to the personality they can develop, that is who they can become as a person. The guidance programme can also provide students with insight into how best they can contribute society. A counselling programme therefore has a major role in helping all students develop adequate and realistic concepts of themselves, awareness of educational and career opportunities, and understanding of themselves and the opportunities in order to make informed decisions (ASCA, 2005).

According to Mancillas (2004), several factors may contribute to the student's reaction and attitudes towards counselling programmes. Among such factors is the student's perception of the counsellor, the processes involved in the counselling programme, and the possible outcomes of the programme. Gybers and Henderson (2007) comment that if the student's perception is known then it can be influenced to encourage participation. The constraining factor however is that perceptions are internalised phenomena and are not readily measureable or objectively verifiable. In a general sense, Van de Ban and Hawkins (1988) conceptualise perception as a process of selecting, organising, and subjectively interpreting sensory data in a way that enables us to make sense of the world. Perception therefore involves the use of the senses to interpret phenomena in the environment. Gamble and Gamble (2002) therefore infers that the perceptions may differ markedly from actual events among different people. It can similarly be expected that perception of guidance counselling for students may differ among pupils. From this perspective, perceptual differences may result from processes involved in individual formation of perception of a phenomenon. In the short-term, perception may change depending on psychological factors including mood and temperament, as well as other physical factors, such as hunger (Morris, 1991). In the long-term the available information and individual experiences with the phenomenon in question, may influence perceptions of the phenomenon. Students' perception of guidance counselling can therefore be expected to be influenced by their cognitive styles and individual experiences with guidance and counselling processes, as well as the available information which may be gained through peers' experience.

In a review of various empirical studies, it was established that some synergies exist among findings of various studies on the relationship between students and school counselling. A pioneering research by Wells and Ritter (1979) discovered that students are more likely to seek school counselling on vocational advice than on personal problems. Studies conducted by Mwagi (2004) also concluded that most students do not find school counselling as an effective source of help except in the area of education-vocational decision making. Adoto (2008) further establishes that students are willing to see their colleagues subject themselves to school counselling but are reluctant to place themselves in a similar situation. This may be a as a result of the failure of student counselling to create general acceptance among students. Urombo (2000) empirically establishes that counsellors are often faced with the difficult decision to breach confidence of students in an effort to help students solve problems. This frequents in issues

bordering on criminality, psychological and physical derangement, and other critical issues identified by counsellors. If students or their colleagues experience breach of confidence, they may develop perceptions and attitudes about school counselling that may motivate them to abstain from voluntary counselling. In our part of the world the first formalised attempt of establishing guidance and counselling dated 1955. This ardent effort was aborted due to the educational level to concentrate and work on. According to Taylor and Buku (2006) in 1973, six Ghanaian experts trained in the United Kingdom, United States of America and Canada arrived in Ghana to contribute to see to the establishment of guidance and counselling but their attempts proved futile because of the political conditions at that time. Finally in 1976, some teachers in the Ghana Education Service (GES) on their own established guidance and counselling at the upper primary and JHS level.This has become what we see and have today (Taylor and Buku, 2006).

Essuman (1999) reports that formalised guidance counselling was established in Ghana in the 1960s. Before this era, there existed forms of guiding people through voluntary and non-formal means. Guidance counselling during this era was voluntary and administered in the school system, notably secondary educational institutions. This was operated widely in boarding schools and administered by the heads of institutions, house-masters and mistresses, teachers, chaplains, and in some cases by school prefects. Dankwa (1981) maintains that such voluntary services were in the form of providing paces and opportunities for youth to socialise and recreate, consulting and advising the youth on moral issues and assisting and advising the youth with their financial problems and issues. They also focused on organising orientation programmes for new pupils or students, assisting the youth to solve their personal problems, and guiding the youth through Sunday school lessons and discussions to develop morally and spiritually. Outside the school, parents, guardians, family elders, and societal institutions such as churches guided students in line with accepted societal beliefs. According to the Ghana Education Service (GES) Guidance and Counselling Units in schools were emphasised to reduce the evils of drugs, occultism, indecent dressing, watching and reading of pornographic materials, sexual deviances (same sex sexual relations) and Internet fraud which have become a new trend and poses more challenge to school authorities and parents. It therefore presupposes that, the focus of guidance and counselling in Ghanaian schools should be well compassing to tackle every other issues confronting the young generation.

In spite of these efforts, the Daily Graphic (July 7, 2009 edition) reported that counsellors in the Junior High Schools (JHS) are conspicuously missing, while just a few Senior High Schools (SHS) have counsellors.

The few counsellors who are left are mostly found in the District Education Offices, but they are unable to visit the schools because they are not adequately resourced for such purposes. The few counsellors available at the DEOs are supposed to be visiting over 7,000 public first cycle and second cycle institutions. This was explained as a result of financial constraints that had left many counselling co-ordinators in schools teaching other subjects. There is a general low practice of school counselling in second cycle institutions in Ghana. This is worsened by the general low patronage of students of guidance counselling in schools. The reasons underlying these constraints to effective school

counselling in high schools can be traced to either inadequacy in training teachers to approach guidance and counselling with the required professionalism or perceptual influences that deter students from voluntarily seeking guidance from school counsellors. The study therefore seeks to explore these fundamental assumptions by drawing on empirical evidence from schools within Accra Metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

Just about everyone will come to a point when they pause to consider how they have been living their life. We could do this considering on our own but it is necessary in most cases to have a professional to guide us to do this astute task. As stated, Herr (2001), the fact that secondary education occurs mainly during adolescence makes guidance counselling a necessary link to the educational system. It was elaborated that adolescence is characterised by several important decisions, but it is also characterised by high social and emotional confusion, peer pressure, and independent desires which need to be monitored and nurtured. Gysbers (2004) recommends the involvement and active participation of stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, administrative heads, and social agencies in the process of school counselling. It would also require the training of teachers as counsellors, or the employment of professionals to tend to counselling programmes. Some constraints have however been identified to have the potential to curtail the effective achievement of counselling goals. The most critical of all, according to Gysbers and Henderson (2006), relates to students' decision to refrain from counselling programmes. Such decisions are most likely as a result of the available information of counselling within the school and students' experiences with counselling programmes that lead to the formation of negative perceptions of the counsellor and the entire counselling programme.

In Ghana guidance and counselling in secondary level institutions may still be in its development phase. The 2007 educational reform lays emphasis on integrating counselling into the educational system through training of teachers as professional counsellors. The challenge associated with guidance counselling within Senior High Schools (SHS) is identified as low patronage by students. A survey by Daily Graphic (July 7, 2009 edition) revealed that no second cycle institution in Accra had a vibrant guidance and counselling unit. It is therefore pertinent to investigate into the processes involved in student guidance counselling and the perceptual factors that influence students' participation and the effectiveness of counselling programmes within SHSs. The study therefore seeks to make factual establishments concerning guidance counselling by drawing on empirical data from SHSs within the Accra metropolis.

Objectives of the study were to

- Examine the processes of guidance counselling in SHSs within Accra Metropolis;
- Explore the perception of students and school staff on the role of guidance counsellors within the schools;
- Evaluate the factors influencing students' utilisation of guidance counselling programmes.

Research questions

The study is to be guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the processes of guidance and counselling in SHSs within Accra Metropolis?
2. How do students and staff of the school perceive guidance and counselling within their school?
3. What factors influence students' participation in guidance and counselling programmes?

Significance of the study

The foremost importance of this study is that it has documented insight into the processes involved in student counselling in SHSs. This can help in the identification of inappropriate approaches to student counselling and their rectification. This can be important for individual schools as well as governmental bodies with interest in education, such as the Ghana Education Service or the Ministry of Education. The findings of the study can serve as important input into educational policies and reforms, especially in the aspects that deal with student counselling. The study can also provide further insight into the perceptual underpinnings that influence the reaction of students to counselling. This can be important role in shaping social psychologists, counsellors, and social workers who are integral part of the field of education. Furthermore, the study would reveal the challenges associated with guidance counselling in SHSs as well as factors buttressing these problems. The study also serves as a body of knowledge for referencing by counsellors and other researchers with respect to educational guidance and counselling in SHSs in Ghana.

Scope of the study

The study was conducted in the Accra Metropolitan Area. It included ten Senior High Schools within the Metropolis. Within the schools, 101 students, 10 counselling and guidance coordinators, and the headmasters were included the study. These are seen as relevant sources of data for profiling the processes of counselling and guidance and also to identify individual perceptions of these processes, as well as the factors that influence their perceptions.

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Framework of counseling: Counselling is one of the terms with many definitions as there are many scholars in the field. Counselling" has been used to indicate a wide range of techniques meantto bring about a progressive change in an individual's behaviour. The techniques may include support in time of trouble or need, suggestion-giving, and inspiration.
This is normally between two persons: one who renders the assistance and the recipient, in a confidential environment (Alude, 2006, as cited in Mensah (2006). Counselling is perceived as a helping relationship between a trained counsellor and an individual who seeks help to gain greater self-understanding, improve decision- making, secure behavioural changing skills for problem solving growth anddevelopment (Plant, 2001). Guez and Allen (Undated) define counselling as a learning- oriented process, usuallyin interactive relationship, with the aim of helping an individual learn about theself, and to use such understanding to enable him or her become an effective memberof the society and the nation at large. Wright and Beynon (1997) also hold the Counselling within this context conforms to an interpersonal learning process which is informed by input factors such as the individual's environment, behaviour, and cognition.

This assessment creates synergies among the input factors and makes meaning out of an individual's cognition and behaviour. Therefore, inherently, counselling provides a better understanding of individuals. From these perspectives, Mitchell (1981) proposes the Theory of Narrative Inquiry. This refers to an interpersonal relationship where counsellors assist individuals to find their identity in their respective environments by drawing inferences from and creating linkages between individuals' narrations. Narrative inquiry acknowledges the centrality of the counsellor's experiences and the fact that the counsellor becomes part of the process. According to Bird (2000), narratives are relational constructs rather than mere reflections of oneself. The counselling process would therefore be seen as an ongoing self reflective process of self-awareness creation through relational process of conversations.

Overview of guidance and counselling in educational systems

Guidance and counselling in schools, according to Hughes (1971), had its origin in vocational issues during the early 1900s in the United States of America, during the industrial revolution. In Herr's (2001) view, the industrial revolution was a period of rapid industrial growth, social protests, social reform, and utopian idealism. Guidance and counselling was introduced to assist individuals to adapt to the rapidly changing vocational environment while pursuing idealised behaviourism. School guidance and counselling was therefore introduced to address the negative social conditions associated with the industrial revolution. Gysbers and Handerson (2001) emphasise that school guidance and counselling (SGC) was to assist students with their educational development and career aspirations. Thus, SGC was focused on assisting individuals to choose and to prepare for an occupation.

Rationale for school counselling: Atodo (2008) assert that students' behaviour to a large extend determiners their performance in academic work. Schools, globally, are increasingly turning from the use of harsh corporal punishment to the use of counselling as a way of controlling behaviour. This grand gesture among schools globally is rooted in some rationalised arguments that counselling is a more effective way to achieve desired behaviour among students. Guez and Allen (2000) maintain that recent developments in education, especially the opportunity for free and universal education, have resulted in a new scale of problems in schools and the nations at large. Many children go to school without knowing what they are supposed to do, and leave school without any idea of what type of jobs or careers they should follow. In addition, they have little understanding of themselves and their socio-economic and political environment.

Ginsberg (2004) further assert that in Africa, many school leavers end up on the streets, and quite a sizeable number keep on moving from job to job trying to explore, within the world of work, which job meets their interests and capabilities. A majority of these school leavers are not aware of their potential. There is, therefore, a need to help young people and children to know their abilities, interests, personalities, values and beliefs, and potential. They should also be assisted to acquire the skills they need in order to cope with the different circumstances they may encounter later on in life. Guidance, therefore, can prepare the youth for adult life, as well as help them acquire appropriate attitudes and values that enable them

to become productive and active members of their communities (UNESCO, 1998). Most importantly, the SGC programmes can help young people and children to develop a positive self-image and a sense of identity, as well as establish a set of beliefs and a value system that will guide their behaviour and actions. Through the engagement of the youth and children in SGC activities and discourses, UNESCO (2000) states that they are empowered to take control of their rights and responsibilities within the family, schools, and other social institutions in society. Their control of their rights and responsibilities can be made a reality through, young people and children power-sharing with adults in decision-making in a variety of forums.

School guidance and counselling is also rationalised by the assertion that is can help young people to pursue the right type of education. In this way, the individual is motivated to maximise his/her contribution to society (Kearney, Draper and Baron, 2003). It also assists individuals to make informed decisions about their education. It makes clearer the choices that have to be made and helps in determining whether the choice is right. SGC also facilitates the smooth transition for children from home to school, from primary to secondary school, from secondary to post-secondary educational institutions, and to the world of work. The final transition from the educational system to the labour force appears to be most important and challenging for students. Shoffner and Williamson (2000) note that there are specific school activities that make school guidance and counselling appealing. For example, it helps students to cope with examination anxiety. Students are assisted to overcome pressure from fear of failure and the craving for the highest grades through counselling. It also helps students to develop effective study habits. The students are assisted to improve their competence in reading, note-taking, and academic achievement. School guidance and counselling also provides students with meaningful educational experiences through relating the curriculum to occupational groups. Adegoke and Culbreth (2000) exemplify that the image of a girl in most African communities is that of a passive, submissive person, who remains in the background. Generally these girls have a negative self-image and a feeling of inferiority. This is increased by the attitudes of parents, teachers and society. In such situations, personal counselling can empower girls and teach them to develop positive attitudes towards themselves, and is marked by an ability to acknowledge areas of expertise and to be free to make positive choices. Counselling is important at the teenage stage, because this is when boys and girls develop positive sexual attitudes and practices (UNESCO, 2000). It is when students begin to understand who they are, and how they can contribute to healthy relationships. They start to develop attitudes of respect toward members of the opposite sex, and see how each community member can contribute to development. Personal and social counselling for example can assist in awakening students to educational and vocational opportunities.

The role of school counsellors in education: Paisley and McMahon (2001) state that school counselling has evolved from an early career and moral development to a comprehensive, developmental and collaborative school counselling services. Erford (2003) reports that, since the 1960s, professional school counsellors have been taught that counselling, coordination, and consultation provide the way to define their role in schools. These were to enable the school counsellor to provide a comprehensive guidance program.

`Borders and Drury (1992) report that SGC interventions have a substantial impact on students' educational and personal development. The roles of the school counsellor in SGC programmes are therefore central to the specific impact that may be made on the student. These roles, although they can be specifically defined, most often go beyond what is expected to include a wide range of roles aimed at the student's academic and personal development (Martin, 2000). Erford (2003) suggests that this requires counsellors to also work as leaders, advocates, collaborators, co-ordinators, and data utilisers. As leaders, school counsellors are engaged in system-wide change to ensure student success. They help all students gain access to rigorous academic preparation that will lead to increased academic achievement, and ultimately, greater opportunities. Additionally, school counsellors work as leaders to close the existing achievement gap between poor or underachieving students, students of colour, and their more advantaged peers (Bowers and Hatch, 2002). School counsellors strive to remove the barriers that may be hindering students from succeeding. For instance, school counsellors teach students how to help themselves by providing students with organisational skills, study skills, and test-taking skills.

In their leadership role, counsellors also work as resource brokers to identify all available resources inside and outside of school (House and Martin, 1998). School counsellors also remove barriers to learning by educating parents and guardians about the importance of enrolling their children in demanding classes that will lead to college. When working in the school system, school counsellors offer staff development training for school personnel and encourage administrators to re-evaluate the existence of low-level and unchallenging courses (Quarto, 1999). In addition to being a leader, school counsellors are also advocates. They advocate for the success of every student by working to ensure that students' needs at every level of education are addressed. They organise community activities to provide support for high standards for all students and advocate for exposing students to experiences that will broaden their career awareness and knowledge (Erford, 2003). Administrators, teachers, and parents are three of the primary stakeholders vital to supporting the school counsellor. These stakeholders influence the roles that school counsellors fulfil. School counsellors have the duty to collaborate the activities of these stakeholders towards the achievement of academic and personal development of the students (Murdock, 2004). For instance, most often the school counsellor is supervised by the principal. If the counsellor's principal does not have a complete understanding of the school counsellor's role, the school counsellor may be expected to perform non-counselling functions. In this case, it is the school counsellor's responsibility to educate the principal.

Likewise, teachers can be hesitant to invite the school counsellor into their classroom for guidance lessons. Sometimes teachers feel as though guidance lessons reduce academic time. Hence, school counsellors need to work collaboratively with teachers to incorporate guidance lessons that relate to the academic topics that are being covered in class. School counsellors need to educate teachers about the positive effects guidance lessons have on academic success (ASCA, 2005). According to Bowers and Hatch (2002), collaboration of stakeholders by school counsellors inside and outside of the school system ensures progress towards equity, access, and academic achievement for every student. By encouraging teaming and collaboration, school counsellors

develop a sense of unity among students, staff, parents, and community members. School counsellors consult with teams to solve problem in order to respond to concerns that may be present in the school, such as equity and cultural diversity issues. Furthermore, school counsellors collaborate with staff in developing staff training, parent/guardian workshops, and community activities in response to the academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs of students (Erford, 2003). Overall, effective working relationships with stakeholders enhance the educational opportunities for students and their families.

Working as a counsellor is another important role for the school counsellor. It is imperative that school counsellors conduct counselling sessions with students individually, in groups, and with their families. In addition to being a counsellor, school counsellors are coordinators. They coordinate resources for students, families, and staff in order to enhance student achievement (Kuhn, 2004). Lastly, school counsellors act as data utilisers. According to Friedman and Petrashek (2009), they assess and interpret student needs in order to identify barriers to learning, recognize differences in culture, and develop goals for the school's comprehensive counselling and guidance program. School counsellors also use data to implement systemic change. Systemic change occurs when policies and procedures are examined and changed in light of new data (ASCA, 2010). This change occurs as a result of the involvement of all critical players in the school system. School counsellors are in a unique position to lead the school in system change, for they have ability to use local, regional, and national data to demonstrate the need for change, such as the existence of an achievement gap.

School counsellor role as data utilisers is facilitated by their access to data about student placement, student course-taking patterns, and students' academic success or failure (House and Hayes, 2002). They use this data to ensure equity and access for every student. School counsellors support, promote, and believe in every student's ability to achieve in school. By minimising barriers and promoting equity, school counsellors will help more students to complete school prepared to choose from a wide range of post-secondary options, including college (Mancillas, 2004). Adoto (2008) adds that school counsellors play preventive and educative roles. In their preventive roles, school counsellors spend much of their time developing and implementing plans and programs which could be categorised as preventative services on three levels. The Primary prevention level focuses on preventing a problem from occurring. The emphasis is on enhancing positive school climate. The Secondary level of prevention focuses on early indicators of problems. The goal is to shorten the duration or lessen the impact of a problem. The Tertiary level focuses on minimising the immediate consequences of an existing severe problem. The emphasis is on regaining control over a situation so remediation and prevention strategies can be developed, implemented and assessed (Kuhn, 2004).

Utilisation of school guidance counselling services: In spite of the optimistic assertion about the positive influences that school guidance counselling services can have on the educational and personal development of students, it is well known that not all students patronise guidance counselling services. The reasons for this vary by and large. According to Mwangi (2004), variances in the patronage of school counselling by students may stem from internal beliefs and

insecurity about counselling to external prior experiences and tell-tales about counselling practices. In a study by Ntare (2000), it was revealed that students often perceive counselling as a mental health service that is unrelated to their educational needs. This is often the case with counselling methods that conform to intrapsychic aetiology models. This revealed that students generally have a misconception about counselling, its purpose, and benefits. In some cases, some students see recommending counselling and guidance as a form of punishment or detention and those who undergo counselling are stigmatised. For example, Mancillas (2004) found out that psychological problems are sometimes seen as marks of weakness, which reflect negatively upon the character of individuals who seek professional mental health services. Such negative attitudes towards counselling can discourage voluntary patronage of SGC services.

Moreover, effective SGC programme will require information sharing about the student. The student would have to open up and sometimes share sensitive information about him/herself. Insecurity about sharing such information and inadequate knowledge of what the disclosed information might be used for can prevent students from utilising guidance and counselling services. The feeling of protecting oneself, dignity, and sometimes status from the fear that sensitive information about themselves may get public may dissuade students from counselling services (Gora *et al.*, 1992). This fear will only be reaffirmed if prior experiences of peers show that data given at counselling sessions do not remain confidential with counsellors. A study by Kearney *et al.* (2003), therefore found out that students are more comfortable with seeking guidance about academic work than on personal issues. It was therefore concluded that counsellors may be incapable of gaining trust and confidentiality of students. Studies also show that the utilisation of school guidance and counselling may also be influenced by several demographic factors. Sometimes counsellors who are not of the same sex, ethnic background, or of the same race are perceived as lacking sensitivity to their specific problem and may not be of adequate help to the help-seeker. Adebimpe (1994) found out that not only do socio-demographic differences influence counselling utilisation, but also in the types and severity of disorders seen among different populations. Race related differences have been found in rates of alcoholism, phobic disorders, general anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and somatisation disorders. Thus, socio-demographic differences among help-seekers may also explain their level of utilisation of counselling (Kearney *et al.*, 2003).

According to Kuhn (2004), the influence of these aforementioned factors of counselling utilisation may operate on three levels. First, the student may book an initial appointment, in order to affirm or renegade fears, beliefs, and speculations about school counselling. The student particularly looks out for signs that may confirm prior assumptions, which if found may discourage the student from subsequent appointments. The second effect is that, the student may keep postponing seeking counselling services and third, the decision of not seeking SGC services entirely may also be reached.
In other cases, the personality of the counsellor, the approaches and methods employed, as well as the counselling environment may influence utilisation of SGC. Most students prefer environments that offer solitude of the student and the counsellor, as well as privacy (Gysbers, 2004). The forwardness and subtlety of the counsellor, as well as his

ability to draw the student out to share his/her problem may also be a contributing factor to gaining the trust of the student. If the resolutions of the sessions are helpful to the student, it is likely that his/her peers will seek counselling when an academic or personal problem arises. Hartman (1999) revealed in a study that peer influence and prior experience influence students' utilisation of counselling and guidance services. According to the study, violation of ethical issues constitutes one major deterrent of future SCG appointments. Students discuss counselling sessions with their trusted peers mostly to reaffirm decisions reached and advice given during counselling. The violation or otherwise of ethical codes, for example inexplicit sexual advances or relaying information about the student to other stakeholders without the consent of the student, thus breaching confidentiality may come up in these discussions and deter students from seeking SGC.

Ethical processes of effective school counselling

According to Urumbo (2000), ethics are codes of conducts that ensure best practices of any profession. In school counselling, ethics are important to encourage utilisation of counselling and guidance services, especially when the utilisation of these services is based on voluntary participation. Ethics, according to UNESCO (2000), are important aspect of the counselling process that ensures trust of the counsellor and a major contributor to finding the right solutions for the problem. They must therefore be adhered to in order to gain trust and patronage of the service. Josselson (1996) maintains that the counsellor has a primary obligation to the students, who are to be treated with dignity and respect as unique individuals. The counsellor should therefore be genuinely concerned with the educational, academic, career, personal, and social needs of the student. Moreover, the counsellor should respect students' values, beliefs and cultural background and not impose his personal values on students or their families. Concerning student-counsellor relationship, the counsellor must understand that professional distance with students is appropriate, and any sexual or romantic relationship with students whether illegal in the state of practice is considered a grievous breach of ethics and is prohibited regardless of a student's age (Urumbo, 2000). The counsellor should consider the potential for harm before entering into a relationship with former students or one of their family members. In any case, the counsellor should avoid dual relationships that might impair their objectivity and increase the risk of harm to students, for example counselling one's family members or the children of close friends or associates. ASCA (2010) adds that if a dual relationship is unavoidable, the school counsellor is responsible for taking action to eliminate or reduce the potential for harm to the student through use of safeguards, which might include informed consent, consultation, supervision and documentation.

One important component of the entire counselling process is the factor of confidentiality. Confidentiality borders on many fronts including informing individual students of the purposes, goals, techniques and rules of procedure under which they may receive counselling (Okuma, 2005). Confidentiality also includes issues of disclosure and informed consent of the student. Disclosure includes the limits of confidentiality in a developmentally appropriate manner. Informed consent requires competence on the part of students to understand the limits of confidentiality and therefore, can be difficult to obtain from students of a certain developmental level. However, attempts to obtain informed consent are not always possible

and when needed, counsellors will have to make counselling decisions on students' behalf. ACSA (2010) also advices for counsellors to keep information confidential unless legal requirements demand that confidential information be revealed or a breach is required to prevent serious and foreseeable harm to the student. It must be recognised that the primary obligation for confidentiality is to the students but that obligation must be balanced with an understanding of parents'/guardians' legal and inherent rights to be the guiding voice in their children's lives, especially in value-laden issues. However, the autonomy and independence of students must be promoted to the extent possible and the most appropriate and least intrusive method of breach must be employed. Counsellors also have the responsibility to make reasonable efforts to honour the wishes of parents/guardians concerning information regarding the student unless a court order expressly forbids the involvement of a parent(s). In cases of divorce or separation, school counsellors exercise a good-faith effort to keep both parents informed, maintaining focus on the student and avoiding supporting one parent over another in divorce proceedings (Okuma, 2005).

Perception of school counselling and guidance programmes

The perceptions that stakeholders have of the school counsellor's role are important to the counselling process. Fitch, Newby, Ballestero and Marshall (2001) examined the perceptions of administrators regarding the role of the school counsellor and found that in most schools, the school counsellor's role is determined by administrators. In Fitch *et al.*'s study, administrators rated the five non-counselling tasks, namely; registration, testing, record keeping, discipline, and special education assistance, as the five least important duties of the school counsellor. Nevertheless, the administrators viewed these tasks as important aspects of the school counselling program. On the other hand, administrators rated direct crisis response, providing a safe setting for students to talk, communicating empathy, helping teachers respond to crisis, and helping students with transitions, as the most important tasks of the school counsellor. The study concluded that many misperceptions of the role of the school counsellor still exist. Wagner (1998) expresses that students' needs are better able to be met as a result of collaboration and support among school personnel. This will require school counsellors to be aware of how their supervisors view the school counsellor's role so that they can work collaboratively with school principals to provide the best services to students. Shoffner and Williamson (2000) however, note that administrators and school counsellors often do not agree on the school counsellor's roles. This stems from the perspective that administrators view the school as an organised whole, whereas counsellors view the school as student-centred.

In a study by Beale (1995), it was identified that non-intellective variables, such as personal interview, character references, recommendations, and personal experience, are valued more highly by principals when selecting school counsellors as compared to intellective variables, such as grade point average and reputation of graduate school attended. However, principals still believed that counsellors should have teaching experience. This may be due to the fact that principals regard counsellors as "upgraded teachers" rather than specialists in counselling. Ponec and Brock (2000) identified components conducive to building relationships between school counsellors and administrators to include clearly

defining the role of the school counsellor, developing mutual trust and clear communication, and constant maintenance of support strategies for working with teachers and administrators. These interrelated components served to promote guidance and counselling programs deemed beneficial and valuable to students, parents, and school communities. It is not only important for administrators to have an understanding of the school counsellor's roles, it is necessary for teachers to understand them as well. Davis and Garrett (1998) stated that teachers' perceptions of the school counsellor's role are barriers that prevent school counsellors from successfully providing services. Many teachers view the school counsellor as someone who sits in his or her office all day drinking coffee, interrupts their class with a note to see a student with little or no explanation, or is another administrator. Consequently, teachers are hesitant to send their students to the counsellor for fear of losing valuable instruction time. Zeedyk et al. (2003) emphasise that their reluctance is a legitimate concern for teacher accountability is measured by grades and test scores.

According to Adoto (2008), teachers sometimes displace negative feelings towards counsellors, because they view the counsellor as a safer scapegoat to displace their frustration as compared to a principal. Additionally, some teachers envy counsellors, because they work with individuals and small groups, whereas teachers must manage a large classroom. Lastly, teachers sometimes see the counsellor's role as simple and easy. In this situation, school counsellors need to help teachers understand that problems are often multifaceted and complex. Findings by Kuhn (2004) suggest that teachers view school counsellors as fulfilling the dual role of a helper and a consultant. As a helper, the school counsellor identifies and resolves problems through individual and group counselling, interprets test results, assesses children's concerns, makes referrals, and conducts classroom guidance activities. In the consultant role, the school counsellor provides professional advice and expertise through classroom assessment, home visits, curriculum planning, and role-playing techniques. Overall, the relationships between school counsellors and teachers are just as important as the relationships between school counsellors and administrators. Gysbers and Henderson (2006) found in their study that teachers perceive school counsellors as both helpers and consultants. Effective strategies for bridging the gap between school counsellors and teachers have been emphasised along with areas of conflict and tension that may arise. Understanding these factors will assist in developing collaborative relationships between school counsellors and teachers, ultimately helping school counsellors and teachers gain a better understanding of each other's roles.

Like administrators and teachers, parents serve as important stakeholders. Zeedyk et al. (2003) found out in a study that some parents want to end school counselling and other student-focused programs because they are non-academic, detract from subject instruction, and invade family privacy. Many parents have negative associations with regards to school counselling due to past contact with educators of their children as well as their own school experience. In 1994, Orfield and Paul conducted a study and found that only 17 percent of parents meet with their student's high school counsellor. They found that in general, parents give school counsellors low ratings on overall effectiveness. In addition, most parents use school advising services offered by the school counsellor, but they rated the information that they received from the counsellor as moderate. Parents stated that they were somewhat or not at all satisfied with the school counsellor's work with their children. However, they were more positive about the school counsellor's overall contribution to the school's educational program. In another study, Chiresche (2006) found that parents perceived other areas of counsellor functions to include assisting in course selection, acting as an ombudsman in cases of student-teacher conflict, assisting in selections of institutions of higher education, and providing financial aid and scholarship information. Additionally, the parents considered the counsellor's attitude toward the student to be crucial. Parents expected the counsellor to be caring, encouraging, and positive to the students. Gysbers and Handerson (2007) added in a study that the business community and parents stated that counsellors should provide career counselling and placement services for non-college bound students. Members in the business community also stated that counsellors should be aware of job market trends and job opportunities, and counsellors should encourage students to develop a realistic perspective toward life and the world of work. Similar to the importance of collaboration between school counsellors, administrators, and teachers, collaboration between school counsellors and parents is imperative. In general, parents do not have a thorough understanding of the school counsellor's roles. Chapman and DeMasi (1991) demonstrate that parents' perception of school counsellor effectiveness may be based on an inaccurate assessment of student and counsellor contact. As a result, it is important for school counsellors to be proactive using tools, such as technology and parent education programs, in order to provide parents with a better understanding of school counsellor roles and functions.

Students' perception of school guidance and counselling programmes: Kuhn (2004) conducted a study that examined high school students' perceptions of the roles of school counsellors and the functions associated with those roles. A 20 item questionnaire was administered to students at two urban high schools. The questionnaire instructed the students to rate the importance of 15 school counsellor functions based on the school counsellors' roles. Furthermore, the students rated the importance of non-counselling functions, such as test administration, registration that school counsellors often perform. Overall, the students rated the school counsellors' advocacy, collaborative counselling and co-ordinating roles as important. This indicated that students perceived the transformed roles as significant. However, the students also rated a few non-counselling functions as important, demonstrating that misperceptions of the school counsellor's role still exist. A study to investigate the secondary students' attitude and utilisation of guidance and counselling services was conducted by Eyo et al. (2007). The study was a descriptive research that covered a total of 400 secondary school students selected from ten (10) schools through stratified random sampling technique. The study revealed that students' attitude towards guidance and counselling services were significantly positive. Gender and school location significantly influenced students' utilisation of guidance services. The results further revealed that there are significant differences between attitude of male and female students in rural and urban schools towards guidance and counselling services. Atodo (2008) also researched into students' perception of effectiveness of guidance and counselling in secondary schools. The study was a causal comparative research, which was based on client-centred theory by Rogers

(1940). Eight schools from Eldoret Municipality were selected using stratified sampling technique. From the selected secondary schools, 198 students were selected using systematic sampling to respond to the questionnaire. It was found that students' perception of the effectiveness of guidance and counselling did not affect their academic performance. Also, the type of school and gender of the students had no significant influence on the students' perception of effectiveness of guidance and counselling. However, age of the students had a significant influence on the way students perceive the effectiveness of guidance and counselling. Junior students were found to be more positive to guidance and counselling than senior students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Introduction: This describes the phenomenal issues in the study, which are relevant to the proposed study area. It also elaborates on the proposed study design, target population, sample size and sampling procedure, as well as the proposed methods of survey instruments and data analysis methods.

Study area: AMA has a total land size of 200 square kilometres and is made up of six sub metros namely Okaikoi, Ashiedu Keteke, Ayawaso, Kpeshie, Osu Klotey, and Ablekuma (AMA, 2006). The metropolis hosts some of the largest and most populated central business within the country. This has called for the establishment of several public and private educational institutions to cater for the educational needs of the growing urban population. Out of the estimated total of 474 Senior High Schools within the country, 35 are estimated to be habited by Accra Metropolitan Area. According to Accra Metro Education office (2002), there are an estimated 18,325 pupils enrolled in SHSs within AMA. Females form about 47.8 percent of this number, while males comprise approximately 52.2 percent. In further analysis, it is estimated that the average annual increase in enrolment in SHSs within the metropolis is approximately 979 students. Employing these projections, the SHSs student population for the year 2011 would estimated at 26,157. The approximated number of female SHS students would be 12,500 and 13,657 for males.

Study design: This exploratory study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design. According to Grimes (2002), a descriptive study is concerned with and designed only to describe the existing distribution of variables, without regard to causal or other hypotheses. A descriptive research therefore answers five basic questions of who, what, why, when, and where and an implicit sixth question, so what?

Often the data for a descriptive study are readily available and thus inexpensive and efficient to use (Grimes and Shulz, 2002). However, descriptive studies have important limitations. Temporal associations between putative causes and effects might be unclear and investigators might draw causal inferences when none is possible. A descriptive design is therefore adopted because the study seeks to ultimately describe the pertaining situation of school guidance and counselling programmes within SHSs in AMA as well as the pertaining student and staff perception about the programmes. According to Levin (2006) cross-sectional studies are carried out at one time point or over a short period. They are usually conducted to estimate the prevalence of the outcome of interest for a given population. Data can also be collected on individual characteristics alongside information about the outcome. In this way cross-sectional studies provide a snapshot of the outcome and the characteristics associated with it, at a specific point in time. They are limited, however, by the fact that they are carried out at one time point and give no indication of the sequence of events. The study therefore adopted a cross-sectional design based on the relatively short period that the survey hadcovered. The study also aims to provide a one-point-in-time snapshot of the perceptual issues relating to school counselling in the study area. It does not seek to infer into the trends of perceptual change about school counselling.

Target population: The target population of the study included students, administrative heads of schools and counselling co-ordinators of public and private SHSs in the Accra Metropolitan Area. There are a total of 35 SHSs within Accra Metropolis. From projected estimates of Accra Metro Education Service (2002), there are about 26,157 students enrolled in SHSs within the metropolitan area. The Headmaster of each is school was targeted along with the counselling co-ordinator from each school. A total of 35 Headmasters and 35 counselling coordinators were therefore included in the target population. The study also targeted the Director of the Accra Metro Education Service and the Metro's educational counsellor from the District Counselling Unit. The target population of the study therefore constituted 26,157 students, 35 Headmasters, 35 counselling co-ordinators, the Director of the Accra Metro Education Service and the Metro's educational counsellor from the District Counselling Unit. This brings the target population to a total of 26,229.

Sample size and sampling procedure: The sample size for the students was determined using the Cochran's (1977) formula sample estimation formula given as:

$$n_0 = \frac{t^2 \times (p)(q)}{d^2}$$

Where, n_o is the required sample size
   t is the t-value for the selected margin of error
   p is the population proportion
   q is $1 - p$
   d is the acceptable margin of error for the sample size being estimated

The study adopted a margin of error (*d*) of 0.05, which indicates the level of risk the study is willing to take that true margin of error may exceed the acceptable margin of error. The chosen (*d*) corresponds to a t-value (*t*) 1.96. The proportion of SHS students as a proportion of all secondary cycle institutions is estimated at 15.3 percent (AMES, 2002). The study hence adopted a *p* of 0.153 and a '*q*' of 0.847. An approximated figure of 102 is calculated for *n0*.

However, the populations for each stratum must be corrected for the 0.05 or 5% margin of error using Cochran's (1977) correction formula, which is given as:

$$n_1 = \frac{n_0}{1 + \left(\frac{n_0}{P}\right)}$$

Where, n_1 is the required corrected return sample size
n_o is 102
P is the population size

The formula generates a corrected sample size of 101. A total of 101 students will therefore be sampled for the study.

The study purposively sampled 10 schools for the survey. The student sample was therefore proportionately divided among these schools. Students were sampled purposively from the schools. Purposive sampling was used in order to ensure a proportionate mix of students from all forms and sexes in the study. The Headmasters and counselling co-ordinators of these schools, as well as the school counsellor at the counselling unit were also purposively sampled. The total sample size was therefore 124.

Source of data: The study employed the use of primary and secondary data. Primary data was sought from students on their experiences and perception of the counselling services in their respective schools. Primary data was also solicited from Headmasters and counselling co-ordinators on the specific practices, processes, and challenges of counselling services within their respective schools. Primary data sources also included the Director of the Metropolitan Education Service and the school counsellor at the counselling unit, who were asked to provide data on the processes adopted for ensuring effective counselling in SHSs within the district. Secondary data for the study comprised extract from literature concerning counselling and statistics about the study population.

Instruments for data collection: The study used questionnaire to collect data from students. The questionnaire solicited data on the demographic characteristics of students, the motivation for students to participate or refrain from school counselling, students' perception of school counselling programmes, their attitudes towards counselling and the common challenges they face in guidance and counselling programmes. Interview guides were used to collect data from Headmasters and counselling co-ordinators. These instruments covered data on the common practices of guidance counselling with the schools, the uses of guidance proceedings, and the common challenges involved in school guidance and counselling programmes. Interview guides were also used to solicit data from the Director of the Metropolitan Education Service and the school counsellor at the counselling unit. These instruments covered data on guidance and counselling policies and planning, implementation strategies for schools within the metropolitan area. It also sought data on the challenges confronting the Education Service in its effort to inculcate guidance counselling in the educational system.

Methods of data analysis: Descriptive statistical tools from Statistical Package for Service Solutions (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel were used to describe the practices and processes concerning counselling in the respective schools. Relationships between demographic data and other perception and attitudes towards guidance and counselling programmes were established using appropriate tools, cross-tabs and statistical significance of these associations were tested at 0.01 and 0.05 alpha levels using chi-square and Phi-statistic. The results from analysis of questionnaires were presented in tables, charts and figures. The responses from interview guides were transcribed and edited. Similarities and disparities between responses were discussed along with quantities analysis of students' responses. The discussions of key informants' responses were used to triangulate the responses of students where applicable. They were presented in quotes and transcriptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the study in relation to the perception of student guidance counselling in SHSs within the Accra Metropolis. The results of statistical significance and practical implications are presented and discussed in relation to the specific objectives. The study made an effort to capture all the 101 students from ten schools within the Accra Metropolitan Area. The headmaster from each of the schools was also involved in the study, as well as three counselling coordinators were included in the study. The first section of the analysis dwelt on the demographic characteristics of respondents, while the subsequent sections focused on the specific objectives of the study.

Demographic characteristics of staff: The study sought to provide background information of respondents by examining their gender distribution, age, form, subject of study, and career goals. These variables were also studied in order to provide a basis for differentiating between responses, since aggregated responses may exclude some pertinent isolated concerns. The study showed that there were more (60%) female students in the sample than males (40%). Given the uneven gender distribution, the study inferred that the aggregated responses about guidance counselling were more representative of female perspective. In order to determine the averages age for male and female students within the sample, the skewness principle, according to Curran, West and Finch (1996) and Pallant (2005) was employed. According to them, normality can be assumed when a skewness of +0.5 is calculated for the distribution.

Thus, it can be asserted that the age distribution of the sampled students was not normally distributed, given a skewness of 0.142 (Table 1). According to Pallant (2005), the medians are therefore more representative of the distribution and non-parametric analysis must therefore be used to analyse such type of data. The average age for male students was 17 years and also 17 years for female students, but the spread around the average age was wider for females (std. deviation = 1.236) than males (std. deviation = 0.950). The Mann-Whitney U test was therefore used to analyse the differences between the age distribution for males and females, in order to inform the study on how differences ages can influence the differences in responses regarding guidance counselling in the schools. The results showed a Mann-Whitney statistic of 0.0012 with an associated p-value of 0.588. This indicated that the average ages for the sampled male and female students were not statistically significant at an alpha of 0.05. The ages of male and female student were generally the same. The implication for the study was that age differentials for male and female students could not be a statistically significant basis for the differences in responses regarding guidance counselling in the schools.

Perception of students on the role of guidance counselors: According to Mancillas (2004), perceptions are impression formations individuals have of certain objects, events, or concepts. In the case of counselling, student perception can influence participation or utilisation of counselling programmes.

Table 1. Age and gender distribution of students

Gender	f(%)	Mean	Median	Mode	s.d	Skewness	
						Stat.	Std. error
Male	44(43.6)	17.07	17.00	17.00	0.950	-0.823	0.357
Female	57(56.4)	17.28	17.00	18.00	1.236	0.380	0.316
Total	101	17.18	17.00	18.00	1.120	0.142	0.240

Mann-Whitney U = 0.0012; z = -0.588; p-value = 0.557
Source: Field survey

Table 2. Perceived roles of counsellors

Roles	Frequency	Percent
Coordinating learning and academic achievement	54	32.3
Counselling on emotional and behavioural adjustment	54	32.3
Guidance in academic and social choices	35	21.0
Advocate for students' interests	17	10.2
Coordinating teaching and administrative duties	7	4.2
Total	167	100.0

Multiple response; n = 67
Source: *Field survey*

Table 3. Students' satisfaction with counsellors' roles

	Roles			
Responses	Coordination n=67	Advocacy n=67	Counselling n=67	Guidance n=67
Undecided	33(49.3)	48(71.6)	-	2(3.0)
Very satisfied	8(11.9)	6(9.0)	8(11.9)	12(17.9)
Satisfied	26(38.8)	8(11.9)	57(85.1)	51(76.1)
Dissatisfied	-	5(7.5)	2(3.0)	2(3.0)
Very dissatisfied	-	-	-	-

Percentages are in parentheses
Source: Field survey

In view of this, the perception of students about the roles of the school counselling programmes were assessed based on their expressed impressions of the programme. The perceived roles of the counsellor was first assess by the study and the results, as shown in Table 2, indicated that students had multiple perceptions about the role of the counsellor. The students' responses showed that students held perceptions that the counsellor played coordinating, counselling, guidance and advocacy roles. These roles of the counsellor are affirmed by McMahon (2001). A little over 32 percent of the responses showed students' perception that the counsellors' primary role was to coordinate learning and academic achievement of the student. A parallel view held by students was that the counsellor had the role of counselling students on emotional and behavioural adjustment. However, aggregating the responses showed that 36.5 percent of the responses pointed to the coordinating roles of the counsellor, which depicted the counsellors' coordinating roles as most commonly referred role. The differences in perspectives about the counsellor's role is emphasised by several studies (Martin, 2000; Erford, 2003). According to Bowers and Hatch (2002), it may be as a result of differences in individual experience and expectations of counselling. The perception of students about their counsellors' roles was also expressed in their satisfaction with those roles. This was important for ascertaining the counsellors' role that met students' perception of effectiveness. As shown in Table 3, a significant section of students were not certain about their satisfaction with the coordination (49.3%) and advocacy roles of their counsellors (47.5%). This may be explained by the fact that students may not be aware of how the counsellor coordinates their learning with the teachers' teaching approaches or how that factors in the counselling proves. Thus students may not ne the direct benefactors of the counsellors' coordination activities. Similarly, advocacies made by the counsellors on behalf of students may not be

easily noticed by students. This may also explain their uncertainty and indecisiveness about their satisfaction with the counsellors' advocacy roles. However, the results indicated that the majority of the students were satisfied with the counselling (85.1%) and the guidance (76.1%) roles of the counsellor. Students may have been able to express their concerns about the counselling and guidance roles of their counsellors because they are direct observers and recipients of these roles. Students' expressed satisfaction with the counselling and guidance roles of counsellors, according to House and Martin (1998), may be a factor for the sustenance of counselling programme. It is also an indication of the effectiveness of role performance of counsellors. Thus, the study inferred from the results that counsellors were effective in their counselling and guidance roles but the results on the coordinating and advocacy roles were inconclusive. Mancillas (2004) maintains that students have diverse perceptions about school counselling programmes, some of which may be positive and reinforce the counselling process, while other may discourage participation and threaten the sustainability of the counselling programme. According to the results, the majority (71.3%) of students disagreed with the assertion that only people with mental problems seek counselling (Table 4). This was true for most females and males, and the association of responses was found to not to be statistically significant at an alpha of 0.05. The results indicated that there were not statistically significant differences between the perception of male and female students regarding the idea that only people with mental problems seek counselling. This also meant that most students were not negatively stereotyping counselling as a therapy for mentally challenged people. According to Ntare (2000), this stigma to counselling has often been found in many second cycle institutions, however this study suggests that such discouraging stereotypes was not very popular among the students surveyed.

Table 4. Students' perception of school counselling

	Gender			
Responses	Male	Female	Total	Chi-square *p-value*
Only people with mental problems seek counselling				
Agree	11(25.0)	18(25.8)	29(28.7)	8.053
Disagree	33(75.0)	39(74.2)	72(71.3)	*0.045**
Only people with learning difficulties seek counselling				
Agree	24(54.6)	26(45.6)	50(45.6)	3.857
Disagree	20(45.4)	31(54.3)	51(47.8)	*0.277*
Counselling is for delinquents				
Undecided	10(22.7)	5(8.8)	15(14.9)	7.578
Agree	20(45.4)	26(45.6)	46 (45.6)	*0.108*
Disagree	14(31.8)	26(45.6)	42(39.7)	

Percentages are in parentheses; *significant at an alpha of 0.05
Source: Field survey

Table 5. Students' perception of counsellors' practices

	Gender			
Responses	Male	Female	Total	Phi *p-value*
Counsellors are not confidential				
Undecided	10(22.7)	8(14.0)	18(17.8)	0.384
Agree	18(40.9)	24(42.1)	42(41.6)	*0.005**
Disagree	16(36.3)	25(43.9)	41(40.6)	
Counsellors are unethical				
Undecided	15(34.1)	10(17.5)	25(24.8)	0.307
Agree	14(31.8)	20(35.1)	34(33.7)	*0.023***
Disagree	15(34.0)	27(47.4)	42(41.5)	
School counsellors cannot help				
Undecided	10(22.7)	5(8.8)	15(14.9)	0.404
Agree	14(31.8)	17(29.8)	31(30.7)	*0.005**
Disagree	20(45.4)	35(61.4)	55(54.5)	

Percentages are in parentheses;
*significant at an alpha of 0.01; **significant at alpha of 0.05
Source: Field survey

Further examination of the results indicated that 45.6 percent of the student population were of the view that only people with learning difficulties sought counselling services. This may be an indication that some students may absent themselves from counselling based on their belief that they do not have learning difficulties. The disaggregated data however, indicated that while majority (54.6%) of males agreed that only people with learning difficulties sought counselling, most (54.3%) females held the opposite view. The distribution was however found not to be statistically significant at an alpha of 0.05, indicating that statistically there was no difference between the percentage of male and females that held the view that counselling was only for students with learning difficulties. According to Batt *et al.* (2002), such perceptions about counselling can discourage students' participation in counselling programmes. This is because students may not risk being labelled as dumb or inept due to their participation in counselling. Gysbers and Anderson (2007) add that such negative perceptions are influenced by inadequate understanding of counselling and the benefits that students may derive from their participation. Herr (2001b) also found that a common perception of counselling held by students is that counselling is recommended for only delinquents. Thus, students may avoid counselling as an effort to avoid being labelled as delinquents. In the case of SHS student in the Accra Metropolis, the study established that 45.6 percent of the sampled students agreed that only delinquent students were referred to counsellors, while almost 40 percent disagreed with the statement. This showed that a greater section of the student populace stigmatised students who sought counselling as delinquents. In Kuhn's (2004) study such perceptions challenge voluntary participation in counselling programmes and also threaten the sustainability of the entire programme.

The conceptual framework emphasises that perceptions held about the counsellors, including their trustworthiness and confidentiality influences decisions to participate in counselling programmes. Thus, it is important for students to have positive perceptions about the counsellors' traits as well as the confidentiality of the programme. This is because private issues may be directly or indirectly expressed during counselling, under the desperation of seeking help from the counsellor. The study therefore explored the perceptions that students hold about their counsellors' traits and the confidentiality of the counselling programme. Table 5 revealed that a greater percentage of the sampled male (40.9%) and female (42.1%) students agreed that their counsellors were not confidential. Given a Phi of 0.384, and based on Rea and Parker's (1992) classifications, it was asserted that there was a moderately strong association between gender and their perceptions on their counsellors' confidentiality. The Phi-statistic is used because the test variables were measured on a nominal scale. A p-value of 0.005 also indicated that the association was statistically significant at 99 percent confidence level. The perceived un-confidentiality of counsellors, according to Urombo (2000), often impedes voluntary solicitation of counselling services and in compulsory counselling the student does not fully corporate or disclose salient issues that might help solve the problem at hand.

The study also showed that 33.7 percent of the sampled students agreed that their counsellors were unethical. According to Okuma (2005) these ethical issues concern practices, such as counsellor-student relationship and codes of conduct about disclosing private information about the student. These codes of conduct, according to 41.5 percent of the students were being practiced by their counsellors.

Table 6. Student factors affecting counseling

Preamble: I will go for counselling if	Gender			Phi-statistic
	Male	Female	Total	*p-value*
I realise that I need it				
Undecided	1(2.3)	3(5.3)	4(4.0)	0.258
Agree	32(72.7)	35(61.4)	67(66.3)	*0.151*
Disagree	11(25.0)	19(33.3)	30(29.7)	
I would be stigmatised				
Agree	22(50.0)	22(38.6)	44(33.7)	0.419
Disagree	22(50.0)	35(61.4)	67(66.3)	*0.001**
I did not like my first experience				
Undecided	3(6.8)	9(15.8)	12(11.9)	0.349
Agree	19(43.2)	19(33.3)	38(37.6)	*0.015***
Disagree	22(50.0)	29(50.9)	51(50.5)	

Percentages are in parentheses;
*significant at an alpha of 0.01; **significant at alpha of 0.05
Source: Field survey

Table 7. External influence on counselling utilization

Preamble: I will go for counselling if	Gender			Phi-statistic *p-value*
	Male	Female	Total	
My parents insisted				
Undecided	3(6.8)	11(19.3)	14(13.9)	0.287
Agree	10(22.8)	15(16.3)	25(24.7)	*0.080*
Disagree	31(60.4)	31(54.1)	62(61.4)	
A teacher recommended it				
Undecided	-	6(10.5)	6(5.9)	0.288
Agree	24(54.5)	19(33.3)	43(42.5)	*0.079*
Disagree	20(45.5)	32(56.1)	52(51.5)	
My peers encouraged me				
Undecided	5(11.4)	1(1.8)	6(5.9)	0.432
Agree	17(38.6)	10(17.6)	27(26.7)	*0.001**
Disagree	22(50.0)	46(80.7)	68(67.3)	

Percentages are in parentheses;
*significant at an alpha of 0.01;
Source: Field survey

A greater section of males and females thus, disagreed that their counsellors were unethical, and a Phi of 0.307 with a p-value of 0.023 testified that the association between the gender perceptions of the ethics of their counsellors were moderately strong. According to Adoto (2008), this may be an impetus for further participation in counselling programmes. At an alpha level of 0.01, further examination revealed that statistically significant section of males (45.4%) and females (61.4%) were of the view that counsellors could help them overcome their challenges. Based on Rea and Parker's (1992) classification, the strength of the association between students' gender and their perception about the ability of their counsellors to help them to overcome their problems was relatively strong. This association was found to be statistically significant at an alpha of 0.01.This meant that the perceptions that male and female students form about the counsellors' abilities can strongly determine their participation in the counselling programmes. This is emphasised by the conceptual framework, which maintains that perceptions formed about the counsellor influences utilisation of the counselling service.

Factors influencing students' utilisation of guidance counselling programmes: Several factors relating to demography, beliefs, experience and peers may influence the utilisation of counselling services. For example, Adebimpe (1994) found out that not only do socio-demographic differences influence counselling utilisation, but also in the types and severity of disorders seen among different populations. Mwangi (2004) adds that variances in the patronage of school counselling by students may stem from internal beliefs and insecurity about counselling to external

prior experiences and tell-tales about counselling practices. This study therefore examined the factors that influence students' utilisation of counselling services for the understanding of the driving forces behind students' participation in school guidance counselling services. The factors influencing the utilisation of guidance counselling services on a personal level were examined by the study, as shown in Table 6. According to the study, 66.3 percent of the sampled students agreed that personal realisation of the need for counselling would influence them to seek counselling services. This meant that awareness creation about the need for counselling and making students understand the reasons for counselling could boost participation in counselling programmes, as emphasised by Kuhn (2004). The response was true for most male (72.7%) and female (61.4%) students. The differences in responses for males and females was found not to be statistically significant at an alpha of 0.05, indicating that the influence of self-realisation on the utilisation of counselling for male sand females was statistically the same.

Further examination showed that 50 percent of males and 61.4 percent of females maintained that they would not seek counselling services if they would be stigmatised as a result. Given a p-value of 0.001, the results indicated that the association between counselling utilisation and the possibility of stigma was statistically significant. Moreover, a Phi-statistic of 0.419 showed that the relationship was strong. Thus, based on the responses, it was inferred that the possibility of stigmatisation significantly hindered students from seeking counselling services. This is emphasised by Ponec and Brock (2000), who also found similar results in their studies. Other studies emphasise that students' impression of their initial

experience with counselling services can be a defining factor for subsequent participation (Ntare, 2000). Thus, the importance of the initial impression, as emphasised by the continuum model for impression formation, cannot be overemphasised. Table 7 showed that a little over half of the sampled students (50.5%) indicated that they would not seek further counselling services if they did not like their first experience with the counsellor. Based on Rea and Parker's (1992) classification, a Phi-statistic of 0.349 showed a moderately strong association between students' decision to utilise counselling services and their first experience with counselling. This confirms findings by Friedman and Petrashek (2009), which established that students would often discontinue counselling if their initial experience is undesirable or does not meet their expectations.

Some studies have also established that students often seek the approval of their peers, teachers or guardians before embarking on counselling services, because students often accord considerable importance to the opinions of guardians, teachers and peers. These opinions are therefore important in students' decisions to participate in counselling. The study there explored the possibility that such opinions influence students' utilisation of counselling services. According to Table 7, 61.4 percent of the students, their parents' insistence on counselling would not influence them to go for counselling. This response was common among most males (60.4%) and females (61.4%), and the strength of the association between the responses, given a Phi-statistic of 0.287, was moderately strong (Rea and Parker, 1992). However, the association was found not to be statistically significant, indicating that the influence of parental influence on counselling was not significant for both male and female students. These results contradict earlier finds that students are keener to counselling upon parental recommendation and influence (House and Hayes, 2002). Further examination of the results also indicated that more than half (51.5%) of the student population noted that their teachers' recommendation for counselling would not influence them to go for counselling. Thus, however the disaggregated data showed that the majority (54.5%) of male students sought counselling based on their teachers' recommendations, while most (56.1%) females were not influenced by their teachers' recommendations for counseling. The association between the responses for males and females regarding their response to counselling based on their teachers' was found to be moderately strong (Phi-statistic = 0.288). This meant that there was a moderate likelihood that teachers' recommendations would influence males to seek counselling but not girls. However, the association was found not to be statistically significant at an alpha of 0.05. Thus, the general response that students are not influenced by their teachers' recommendations to go for counselling, holds true. These findings also contradict studies that suggested that teachers' recommendations could improve students' participation in counselling (Denga, 2001). The results could also be a lack of creditworthiness among teachers and insecurities felt by students, as expressed by Edet (2008) that students may feel that counselling may be used as an alternative to inquire of personal issues that may be relayed to a disciplinary committee. It was also established that 67.3 percent of the sampled students would consider counselling if their peers encouraged them to do so. This confirmed findings that peer influence and prior experience of peers is very practical in the decision to seek counselling (Hartman, 1999). This was emphasised by half of the male population and four-fifths of the female population, indicating that female-students may be more sensitive to peer influence than males. A Phi-statistic of 0.432 indicated that the association between peer influence and students' counselling utilisation was relatively strong, as shown by Rea and Parker's (1992) categorisation of Phi-values. The derived association was also found to be statistically significant at an alpha of 0.01, indicating that significant section male and female students would seek counselling upon their peers' encouragement. Several traits of the counsellor have also been found to have significant influence on students' participation in counselling programmes (Ubana, 2008). For example it has been asserted that the counsellors' appearance, ethics and appeal to students often play important parts in the utilisation of counselling.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendation

Introduction: This section presents summary of objectives and the findings for the study. Conclusions from the results and discussions are drawn and presented. Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of counselling programmes in schools are also made.

Summary: This section provides the summary of the study and its major findings. The study sought to examine students' perception of guidance school counselling within senior high schools in the Accra Metropolis. Descriptive and cross-sectional research designs were adopted for the study. The study covered 101 students, ten headmasters and three counselling coordinators from ten schools in the Accra Metropolis. Questionnaires were used to gather data from students, while interview guides were used to collect data from headmasters and counselling co-ordinators. Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the data. Other statistical tools, such as chi-square, Phi-statistic and Pearson's correlation were used to draw inferences and to test for statistical significance of differences and associations between the study variables.

The study examined the processes of guidance counselling in SHSs within Accra Metropolis and the following were revealed:

1. Majority of the schools had formal counselling programmes for students and this involved appointing teachers, chaplains, headmasters and housemasters and mistresses as school counsellors.
2. Students mostly preferred being counselled by their teachers through verbal questioning because it allowed them to learn from the counsellors' experience and also gave them the opportunity to better express themselves. Other methods used for counselling included questionnaires for privacy and narratives for discussions.
3. The counselling process generally encouraged coordinated decision-making between the counsellor and the client, however, headmasters were found not to encourage coordination in decision making. Similarly, the counsellors generally allowed for free expression by students, but this was not encouraged by headmasters.
4. A positive relationship was found between counselling services that accepted the students' personalities on the one hand and helping them overcome disturbing emotions or exploring hidden feelings, on the other hand. Similarly, a positive relationship was found between programmes that allowed for coordination of

the client and counsellor and helping students overcome their emotions.

With respect to the perception of students on the role of guidance counsellors, the following major findings were revealed:

1. Students' perceived roles of the counsellor included coordinating, counselling, guidance and advocating. Students generally expressed satisfaction with the counselling and guidance roles of the counsellor.
2. Majority of the students were of the perception that counselling was not only for students with mental problems or those with learning difficulties. The majority of male students were of the perception that counselling was only for delinquents, but most females did not share the same view.
3. Students were also of the perception that counsellors were not confidential, but others were of the perception that the counsellors were ethical and their efforts were perceived by the majority of the students as helpful.

The major findings, with respect to the factors influencing students' utilisation of guidance counselling programmes were:

1. The majority of students indicated that their self-realisation of the need for counselling would influence them to seek counselling. Most students also expressed that they would not utilise school counselling services if they would be stigmatised as a result or if they did not like their initial experience with the counsellor.
2. According to most students, their parents' or teachers' insistence on counselling would not influence them to utilise counselling. However, the majority of students expressed that they would consider utilising counselling if their peers encouraged them to do so.
3. Most students also expressed that an appealing personality of the counsellor would encourage them to go for counselling. Moreover, the counsellor's ability to uphold ethics would also encourage them to undertake counselling services.

The final objective of the study was to examine the challenges students encounter in counselling and the major findings were:

1. The most common challenge identified was the poor confidentiality of the counsellors. Other challenges identified were the lack of personal interest, fear of stigma, and disapproval of parents.
2. The major effect of these challenges was the loss of confidence in the counselling process. Other effects were the loss of trust in the counsellor, loss of interest in the counselling process, and indifference to counselling services. Other challenges identified were inadequate time for counsellors to attend to students.
3. In order to overcome these challenges, students suggested that teachers should maintain confidentiality, headmasters to cease punishing students who came forth, and counsellors to maintain confidentiality.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from the major findings of the study. With respect to the process of guidance counselling, the study concludes that the use of school teaching and non-teaching staff as counsellors was common to all the schools. The counselling process was mostly a coordinated effort between students and their counsellors to determine a solution to students' problems. Generally, students were of the perception that counsellors were effective in their counselling and guidance roles as against their coordinating and advocacy roles. Some perceptions of students could discourage them from seeking counselling and these included the perceptions that counselling was for only delinquents. However, other students were open up to the idea of counselling because they were of the perception that counselling was neither for students with learning difficulties nor for students with mental problems. The factors influencing students' counselling utilisation covered issues about their personal believes and other externalities such as the encouragement of their parents, teachers and peers. There were other counsellor factors, such as his/her personality and ethics that were found to also influence the utilisation of counselling services by students. The major challenging issue for students was the poor confidentiality of counsellors. The challenges identified led to loss of trust in the counsellor, loss of confidence in the counselling process and indifference to the counselling services.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusions of the study. Students are advised to advocate for their concerns including keeping their issues expressed during counselling strictly confidential and independent of disciplinary action through their counsellors. This is aimed to providing security for students who would then be encouraged to seek counselling services for much needed guidance. Counsellors are advised to maintain mutual respect and trust between themselves and their student-clients during counselling. This can help eliminate any threat of insecurity that may lead to the student closing in on issues and emotions that should be expressed for a proper diagnosis of the students' condition and the application of the suitable help. The counsellors should also protect students' interest by disallowing the use of counselling proceedings for purposes not intended in the initial counselling objectives that were reached between the counsellor and the student. This could help solidify the trust between the student and the counsellor and thus make the student more comfortable with sharing their experiences. The counsellors and teachers should make efforts to correct students' negative perceptions about counselling, either during counselling sessions or in classrooms. This could help provide a better understanding of the reasons for counselling and benefits that students stand to gain from participation. Headmasters should desist from making request about counselling proceedings for disciplinary action. An appropriate term of reference and the conditions under which the counsellor must report disturbing behaviour to a third party should be well established and followed. It should also be made aware to the student during counselling when such reports are to be made to reduce the element of surprise which may lead to students' termination of counselling sessions.

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