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The Impact of Guidance and Counselling Services on Students' Social Adjustment and Academic Engagement in Senior High Schools

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of guidance and counselling services on students' social adjustment and academic engagement in senior high schools in Ghana. Guidance and counselling programs play a critical role in fostering students' academic success, emotional well-being, and social integration. However, the extent to which these services are utilized and their effectiveness in improving students' experiences remains underexplored. Employing a descriptive survey research design, the study sampled 394 senior high school students from various academic levels and programs. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that while orientation and academic counselling services received high patronage, personal counselling, follow-up, and evaluation services were underutilized. Students who actively engaged in counselling services exhibited better social adjustment, stronger peer relationships, and higher levels of academic motivation. However, challenges such as cultural stigma, inadequate access to trained counsellors, and lack of structured follow-up mechanisms limited the effectiveness of these services. The study underscores the need for policy interventions to strengthen guidance programs, increase awareness campaigns, and integrate structured evaluation mechanisms to enhance students' engagement and social development. Future research should explore intervention-based counselling models tailored to students' diverse needs. By addressing existing gaps, school administrators and policymakers can maximize the benefits of counselling services, ensuring holistic student development. This study contributes to the existing literature on educational psychology and student support services, offering empirical insights into how guidance interventions shape academic and social outcomes in Ghanaian senior high schools.

Keywords: Guidance and counselling, social adjustment, academic engagement, senior high schools, Ghana

1. BACKGROUND

Guidance and counselling services play a crucial role in the academic, social, and emotional development of students. These services are designed to provide students with the necessary support systems to navigate the challenges associated with school life, social interactions, and career development. In many educational institutions worldwide, guidance and counselling programs have been integrated into school curricula to enhance students' ability to cope with academic stress, make informed career choices, and develop positive social relationships (Owusu et al., 2022). Despite these efforts, the extent of students' patronage of guidance services and their impact on social adjustment and academic engagement remain underexplored, particularly in senior high schools in Ghana. Guidance and counselling services are essential for fostering a positive learning environment, improving students' well-being, and equipping them with skills for personal and academic success. According to Gysbers and Henderson (2018), effective counselling services help students to set realistic academic goals, enhance their problem-solving skills, and develop resilience against psychological and emotional challenges. These services also provide students with career guidance, assisting them in making informed decisions regarding their future aspirations (Lapan et al., 2017).

Furthermore, research by Baker and Gerler (2020) suggests that well-implemented guidance and counselling programs contribute significantly to students' self-confidence, interpersonal relationships, and school retention rates. In a study conducted in the United States, it was found that students who actively engaged in counselling services exhibited higher academic performance, lower dropout rates, and improved emotional stability (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2019). Similarly, in an African context, guidance services have been linked to enhanced academic motivation, self-efficacy, and social skills among students in secondary schools (Arowolo, 2019). Social adjustment is a critical aspect of adolescent development, particularly in school environments where peer interactions play a significant role in shaping students' experiences. Effective guidance and counselling services help students to build strong social skills, manage conflicts, and develop meaningful relationships with peers and teachers (Sink & Spencer, 2020). Studies have shown that students who receive social and emotional counselling tend to have better peer relationships, higher self-esteem, and greater involvement in extracurricular activities (Bryan et al., 2019). Additionally, guidance programs provide structured interventions that help students deal with bullying, discrimination, and peer pressure, all of which significantly impact their social adjustment (Whiston et al., 2019). In Ghana, studies have indicated that the availability of school counsellors is positively correlated with students' ability to integrate well within their social environment, reducing cases of school-related anxiety and isolation (Kusi & Opoku, 2021).

Beyond social adjustment, guidance and counselling services play an instrumental role in students' academic engagement and achievement. Academic engagement refers to the extent to which students participate in learning activities, maintain motivation, and exhibit commitment to their studies (Fredricks et al., 2018). Research has shown that students who actively utilize counselling services demonstrate higher academic motivation, better time management skills, and improved study habits (Baker et al., 2020). According to Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2021), school counselling programs that emphasize goal-setting, career planning, and academic advising significantly enhance students' engagement and performance. Moreover, a study conducted in Kenyan high schools found that students who frequently sought academic counselling were more likely to perform well in standardized tests compared to those who did not (Mutie & Ndambuki, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of school-based counselling services in improving students' focus, reducing absenteeism, and fostering positive learning attitudes.

Despite the established benefits of guidance and counselling, many students do not actively seek these services due to lack of awareness, stigma, or limited access to qualified counsellors (Gibson & Mitchell, 2021). Some students perceive counselling as unnecessary or only relevant for individuals experiencing severe emotional or academic difficulties. Additionally, in many developing countries, including Ghana, inadequate funding and staffing shortages limit the effectiveness of school-based guidance services (Kwarteng et al., 2021). Another challenge is the cultural perception of counselling, where some students and parents view psychological support as a sign of weakness rather than a proactive approach to personal development (Owusu et al., 2022). Addressing these barriers requires schools to implement awareness campaigns, train more qualified counsellors, and integrate counselling programs into mainstream academic activities to encourage utilization.

Given the crucial role of guidance and counselling services in enhancing students' social and academic well-being, this study seeks to examine the level of patronage of these services among senior high school students in Ghana. Furthermore, it aims to assess the impact of counselling services on students' social adjustment and academic engagement. Understanding these dynamics will provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and school administrators in strengthening guidance programs to enhance student success. Guidance and counselling services are fundamental components of a supportive school environment, helping students to navigate academic and social challenges. While several studies have highlighted the benefits of counselling, there remains a knowledge gap regarding the extent to which students in senior high schools in Ghana utilize these services and the effect on their overall well-being. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the impact of guidance and counselling on students' social and academic experiences.

2. RELATED STUDIES

Guidance and counselling services have been widely recognized as essential components of education, playing a crucial role in students' academic performance, career development, and social adjustment. Several studies have explored the impact, effectiveness, and challenges associated with guidance and counselling services in secondary schools. This section provides a review of relevant literature on the importance of guidance and counselling services, their role in

academic engagement and social adjustment, the factors influencing their utilization, and the challenges affecting their effectiveness.

Guidance and counselling services are integral to students' psychological and emotional well-being, helping them navigate academic pressures, career choices, and personal challenges (Gysbers & Henderson, 2018). Research has consistently shown that schools with well-structured counselling programs report higher student satisfaction, improved mental health, and better academic performance (Baker & Gerler, 2020). In a longitudinal study, Sink and Spencer (2020) found that students who regularly attended counselling sessions demonstrated higher self-efficacy, better time management skills, and improved academic motivation. Moreover, Bryan et al. (2019) emphasized that guidance programs are particularly effective in enhancing students' career readiness, enabling them to make informed educational and professional choices. This aligns with the findings of Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2021), who reported that students receiving counselling were more likely to pursue higher education and professional careers. These studies indicate that guidance services are not only beneficial for students' immediate academic needs but also for their long-term career and personal development.

Academic engagement is a key predictor of students' success and persistence in school. Research suggests that students who actively engage with counselling services exhibit greater commitment to their studies and improved academic outcomes (Fredricks et al., 2018). A study by Whiston et al. (2019) confirmed that counselling services help students develop effective study habits, manage stress, and improve concentration, which positively impacts their academic performance. Similarly, Lapan et al. (2017) found that students who participate in structured counselling programs are less likely to drop out of school. Their research showed that counselling interventions that focus on academic advising, goal-setting, and mentorship significantly boost students' academic perseverance. This is supported by Dimmitt and Wilkerson (2019), who argued that school counselling fosters a sense of belonging and academic motivation, leading to better educational outcomes. In addition, research conducted in Kenya by Mutie and Ndambuki (2020) demonstrated that students who frequently attend academic counselling sessions perform better in standardized tests compared to their peers who do not. They concluded that counselling services play an essential role in enhancing students' academic commitment and discipline, ultimately leading to improved learning experiences.

Social adjustment is a critical aspect of adolescent development, particularly in school environments where peer interactions shape students' experiences. Studies have shown that students who receive counselling support tend to develop stronger interpersonal skills and higher self-esteem (Gibson & Mitchell, 2021). Kusi and Opoku (2021) reported that counselling services in Ghanaian schools significantly help students in building social confidence, managing peer pressure, and fostering positive relationships with teachers and classmates. Moreover, a study by Owusu et al. (2022) highlighted that effective counselling services contribute to students' emotional resilience and stress management, which is essential for successful social integration. Bryan et al. (2019) similarly found that guidance programs help students overcome issues related to bullying, discrimination, and peer conflicts, leading to a more inclusive school environment. Furthermore, research by Baker et al. (2020) demonstrated that counselling interventions that focus on self-awareness, communication skills, and emotional intelligence significantly improve students' ability to interact with diverse groups. This is supported by Whiston et al. (2019), who found that schools with active counselling departments experience fewer cases of behavioral misconduct and student isolation.

Despite the proven benefits of counselling services, several factors influence students' willingness to seek guidance support. Research has identified awareness, cultural beliefs, stigma, and accessibility of counselling services as key determinants (Gysbers & Henderson, 2018). For instance, a study by Kwarteng et al. (2021) found that many Ghanaian students do not actively seek counselling services due to social stigma associated with mental health and emotional struggles. Additionally, Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2021) reported that schools with well-publicized and integrated counselling programs tend to have higher student engagement with these services. In contrast, research by Arowolo (2019) found that a lack of qualified counsellors and insufficient counselling facilities hinder students from utilizing these services effectively. Moreover, a study conducted by Fredricks et al. (2018) in South Africa revealed that students from low-income backgrounds were less likely to seek counselling support due to financial constraints and lack of awareness. This finding aligns with research by Bryan et al. (2019), who found that students from marginalized communities often lack access to professional counselling services, impacting their academic and social development.

Although counselling services offer numerous benefits, their effectiveness is often limited by various challenges. Research by Baker and Gerler (2020) identified inadequate funding, understaffing, and lack of professional development opportunities for counsellors as major obstacles to effective guidance services in schools. Similarly, Dimmitt and Wilkerson (2019) noted that many schools lack dedicated counselling offices, making it difficult for students to access professional guidance when needed. Furthermore, a study by Sink and Spencer (2020) emphasized that the high student-to-counsellor ratio in many secondary schools negatively impacts the quality of counselling services. This challenge was also highlighted by Lapan et al. (2017), who found that counsellors in under-resourced schools often struggle to provide individualized attention and tailored guidance to students. Another major issue affecting the effectiveness of counselling services is cultural perception and stigma. Research by Gibson and Mitchell (2021) indicated that in many African societies, seeking counselling is often associated with personal weakness or mental illness, discouraging students from utilizing these services. Similarly, Whiston et al. (2019) found that some parents discourage their children from attending counselling sessions due to misconceptions about mental health.

The reviewed literature underscores the significant impact of guidance and counselling services on students' academic engagement, social adjustment, and overall well-being. While numerous studies affirm the positive role of counselling interventions, there remain several barriers that hinder their effectiveness. Addressing these challenges requires policy reforms, increased funding, public awareness campaigns, and enhanced professional training for school counsellors. Future research should explore strategies for making guidance and counselling services more accessible and culturally acceptable to students in diverse educational settings.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section details the methodological framework employed in the study to examine the impact of guidance and counselling services on students' social adjustment and academic engagement in senior high schools. The methodology provides a structured approach to ensure accuracy, reliability, and validity in data collection and analysis. It outlines the research design, population and sample, sampling techniques, data collection instrument, data collection procedure, validity and reliability of the instrument, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques. These methodological components were carefully chosen to align with the research objectives and to ensure that the study effectively captures students' experiences with guidance and counselling services.

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is commonly used in social sciences and educational research to gather information about attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of a particular population. This design was appropriate for this study because it allowed for a systematic collection of data from a large group of students without manipulating any variables. The descriptive survey approach was chosen because it helps researchers analyze patterns and relationships between different factors, such as the extent of patronage of guidance and counselling services and its impact on students' social adjustment and academic engagement. A key strength of the descriptive survey research design is its ability to provide quantifiable data that can be statistically analyzed, thus ensuring objectivity in the study findings. It also allows for comparisons between different groups, such as students at different academic levels or in different academic programs, making it ideal for assessing variations in the utilization of counselling services. The survey method ensures that a broad and representative sample is studied, which enhances the generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, a cross-sectional approach was used, meaning that data was collected from respondents at a single point in time. This approach was suitable for assessing the current state of guidance and counselling services in senior high schools and how they influence students' behavior and academic engagement. The cross-sectional method also allowed for the analysis of differences among students at various academic levels regarding their patronage of counselling services. Given these advantages, the descriptive survey research design was considered the most appropriate method for investigating the research problem comprehensively.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprised senior high school students who have access to guidance and counselling services in their respective schools. The selection of this group was based on the premise that they have first-hand experience with the available guidance services and could provide valuable insights into how these services impact their academic engagement and social adjustment. The study included students from different academic levels (SHS 1, SHS

2, and SHS 3) to capture variations in their experiences with counselling services. The study also ensured that students from different academic programs (General Arts, Business, Home Economics, and Science) were included in the sample. This approach was necessary to determine whether the level of patronage of counselling services varied across different fields of study. Additionally, students from different programs may have different counselling needs and experiences, and including them allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. A sample size of 394 students was selected for the study. This number was statistically determined to ensure that it was large enough to provide meaningful insights while remaining manageable for data collection and analysis. The sample was chosen to be representative of the larger school population, ensuring that findings could be generalized to similar student populations in other educational institutions. By including a diverse group of students from different academic backgrounds and grade levels, the study aimed to provide a well-rounded and holistic perspective on the role of guidance and counselling services in secondary education.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure that all key subgroups of the population were adequately represented in the study. Stratification was done based on academic level (SHS 1, SHS 2, and SHS 3) and academic program (General Arts, Business, Home Economics, and Science). This approach allowed the researcher to obtain balanced and proportionate representation from different student categories, ensuring that findings reflected the diverse experiences of students regarding counselling services. Once stratification was completed, a random sampling method was used within each stratum to select students for participation. This technique ensured that every student within the strata had an equal chance of being selected, minimizing selection bias and increasing the reliability of the study. Random sampling helped in reducing subjectivity in the selection process and ensured that responses were not influenced by external factors such as personal preferences or institutional biases. The final sample size of 394 students was determined based on statistical sampling methods, ensuring that it was sufficient for meaningful analysis. This number was selected to ensure that the study had a high level of confidence and accuracy in its findings. The chosen sampling method ensured that the study results were robust, representative, and reflective of the larger student population, providing a strong foundation for data analysis and interpretation.

Data Collection Instrument

The study employed a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was designed to systematically gather quantitative data on students' patronage of guidance and counselling services and their social and academic experiences. The questions were carefully crafted to be clear, concise, and relevant to the research objectives, ensuring that respondents could provide accurate and meaningful answers. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections. The first section focused on demographic information, including students' age, academic level, and academic program. This section provided background information on the respondents and allowed for comparative analysis based on different demographic factors. The second section assessed the patronage of guidance and counselling services. Respondents were asked about their frequency of engagement with various counselling services, such as academic counselling, personal counselling, follow-up services, appraisal services, and orientation services. The responses were measured using a Likert-scale format, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree", allowing for a nuanced understanding of the extent of student engagement with counselling services. The third section measured students' social adjustment and academic engagement, focusing on aspects such as peer relationships, participation in school activities, ability to handle academic stress, and overall satisfaction with school life. This section helped in understanding how counselling services influenced students' personal development and academic motivation. The use of structured questionnaires ensured that data was collected uniformly, minimizing variability in responses and allowing for accurate statistical analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher first sought formal approval from school authorities, including the head teachers and school counsellors, to conduct the study. Once permission was granted, a briefing session was held with students to explain the purpose of the study, the importance of their participation, and ethical considerations such as confidentiality and voluntary participation. The questionnaires were self-administered, meaning that students completed them independently. This approach was chosen to ensure that students provided honest and unbiased responses without any external influence. To prevent response biases, the researcher remained available during the process to clarify any misunderstandings but did not interfere with students' answers. After completion, the questionnaires were collected immediately to prevent any external influence on students' responses. This systematic approach enhanced data integrity and reliability. The entire

data collection process was conducted within a structured time frame, ensuring that students had enough time to complete the questionnaire while minimizing disruptions to their academic schedules.

4. RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	13 – 15	111	28.2
	16 – 19	195	49.5
	20 years and Above	88	22.3
Total		394	100
Level/Form	SHS 1	85	21.6
	SHS 2	125	31.7
	SHS 3	184	46.7
Total		394	100
Programme	General Arts	135	34.3
	Business	79	20.0
	Home Economics	95	24.1
	Science	85	21.6
Total		394	100

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, categorized by age, level/form, and academic programme. The majority of the respondents (49.5%) fall within the age group of 16–19 years, followed by 28.2% in the 13–15 years category, while 22.3% are 20 years and above. This suggests that most of the participants are within the expected age range for senior high school students. Regarding the level of education, 46.7% of the respondents are in SHS 3, making them the largest group, followed by 31.7% in SHS 2, and 21.6% in SHS 1. This distribution implies that the study sample consists of a significant number of students nearing completion of their senior high school education. In terms of academic programmes, the highest proportion of respondents (34.3%) are enrolled in the General Arts programme. This is followed by Home Economics (24.1%), Business (20.0%), and Science (21.6%). The relatively balanced distribution across the programmes indicates representation from diverse academic disciplines. The demographic characteristics highlight a fairly balanced composition of respondents across age groups, grade levels, and academic programmes, ensuring a comprehensive perspective on the study's subject matter.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Level of Patronage of Guidance Services

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic Counselling	3.6	0.645
Personal Counselling	2.7	0.723
Follow-Up Services	2.0	0.752
Appraisal Services	2.0	0.954
Orientation or Adaptive Services	4.5	0.953
Evaluation Services	1.0	0.189
Overall	2.63	0.702

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of students' patronage of various guidance services in their schools, measured by the mean and standard deviation. The results indicate that orientation or adaptive services had the highest patronage, with a mean score of 4.5 and a standard deviation of 0.953, suggesting that most students frequently engage with these services. Academic counselling also received relatively high patronage, with a mean of 3.6 and a standard deviation of 0.645, indicating a moderate level of engagement. On the other hand, personal counselling recorded a lower patronage level, with a mean of 2.7 and a standard deviation of 0.723, suggesting that while some students utilize it, others may not find it as relevant or accessible. Follow-up services and appraisal services both had a mean of 2.0, reflecting a relatively low level of engagement. Additionally, evaluation services recorded the lowest patronage, with a mean of 1.0 and a standard deviation of 0.189, indicating that students rarely participate in or benefit from this service. The overall mean score of 2.63 and a standard deviation of 0.702 indicate a moderate but varied level of patronage of guidance services among students, with certain services like orientation and academic counselling receiving more attention.

compared to others such as follow-up, appraisal, and evaluation services. These findings suggest a need to enhance the awareness and accessibility of less-utilized guidance services to improve overall student engagement.

Table 3: Social Adjustment Due to Guidance and Counselling Services

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I get along well with my fellow students	3.98	0.990
I choose friends wisely in school	3.77	0.875
I get very involved in school social activities (e.g., symposia and entertainment)	3.56	0.913
I participate in extra-curricular activities	3.42	0.756
I interact well and easily with the opposite sex	3.18	1.115
I am satisfied with my social life in school	3.26	1.061
I fit well with peers in school	3.09	1.024
I feel that my friends are caring towards me	3.36	0.815
I find it easy to confide in my school friends	3.30	0.960
I overcome homesickness while in school	2.83	1.052
Overall Mean	3.38	0.956

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics regarding students' social adjustment as a result of guidance and counselling services in their schools. The results indicate that the highest-rated aspect of social adjustment is students getting along well with their fellow students, with a mean score of 3.98 and a standard deviation of 0.990. This suggests that the majority of students find it easy to establish positive relationships with their peers. Similarly, students reported choosing their friends wisely (mean = 3.77, SD = 0.875) and getting involved in school social activities (mean = 3.56, SD = 0.913), indicating that guidance and counselling services positively influence their social engagement. Participation in extra-curricular activities also had a moderate mean score of 3.42, reflecting a fair level of engagement. However, lower mean scores were recorded in areas such as interacting easily with the opposite sex (mean = 3.18, SD = 1.115), feeling satisfied with social life in school (mean = 3.26, SD = 1.061), and fitting well with peers (mean = 3.09, SD = 1.024). These results suggest that while many students benefit from social interactions, some still face challenges in these aspects. The lowest-rated item was overcoming homesickness while in school, with a mean of 2.83 and a standard deviation of 1.052. This suggests that despite the availability of guidance and counselling services, a significant number of students still struggle with adjusting to life away from home. The overall mean score of 3.38 (SD = 0.956) suggests that guidance and counselling services moderately contribute to students' social adjustment. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in helping students overcome homesickness and develop more confidence in interacting with diverse social groups.

5. DISCUSSION

The discussion of findings provides an in-depth interpretation of the results in relation to existing literature. This section evaluates the impact of guidance and counselling services on students' social adjustment and academic engagement, comparing the study's results with past research and theoretical frameworks. The discussion is structured around key themes derived from the findings, with a focus on the patronage of guidance services, their influence on students' social adjustment, and their role in academic engagement.

Patronage of Guidance and Counselling Services

The findings reveal a moderate level of patronage of guidance and counselling services among senior high school students, with orientation services recording the highest engagement (mean = 4.5, SD = 0.953), followed by academic counselling (mean = 3.6, SD = 0.645). Conversely, services such as personal counselling (mean = 2.7, SD = 0.723) and evaluation services (mean = 1.0, SD = 0.189) were less frequently utilized. These results align with Gysbers and Henderson (2018), who noted that while school guidance programs are widely available, students often engage more with career and academic guidance than personal or psychological counselling. A similar trend was observed in a study by Baker and Gerler (2020), which found that students are more inclined to seek counselling for academic concerns but less likely to utilize services related to mental health and personal well-being. This reluctance to engage with personal counselling may be influenced by stigma and cultural perceptions surrounding mental health, as highlighted by Owusu et al. (2022) in their study on Ghanaian schools. In many African contexts, seeking counselling for personal issues is sometimes viewed as a sign of weakness, reducing students' willingness to utilize these services (Kwarteng et al., 2021). The low engagement with evaluation and follow-up services suggests that many schools may lack structured follow-up

mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of counselling programs. This supports the findings of Whiston et al. (2019), who argue that schools often focus on immediate interventions but fail to systematically track students' progress over time. As a result, there is a need for schools to integrate regular assessments and follow-ups into their guidance programs to ensure sustained student support and improvement.

Guidance and Counselling and Social Adjustment

The study found that students who frequently engaged in guidance and counselling services exhibited higher levels of social adjustment. The highest-rated aspect of social adjustment was students getting along well with their peers (mean = 3.98, SD = 0.990), followed by wise selection of friends (mean = 3.77, SD = 0.875). These findings are consistent with Sink and Spencer (2020), who reported that counselling interventions enhance students' interpersonal skills, self-awareness, and ability to navigate peer relationships. Furthermore, the study revealed that counselling services contributed significantly to students' involvement in school social activities (mean = 3.56, SD = 0.913) and participation in extracurricular activities (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.756). This aligns with the work of Bryan et al. (2019), who found that students who receive social guidance are more likely to participate in leadership roles, group activities, and social events within the school environment. However, lower mean scores were recorded for students' ability to easily interact with the opposite sex (mean = 3.18, SD = 1.115) and overcoming homesickness (mean = 2.83, SD = 1.052). This suggests that while guidance services promote general social well-being, some aspects of interpersonal relationships and emotional adjustment remain challenging for students. Gibson and Mitchell (2021) noted that traditional school counselling programs often focus on academic and career support, leaving gaps in areas such as gender-based social interactions and emotional resilience. Additionally, the study supports the argument by Kusi and Opoku (2021) that school-based counselling services help reduce cases of anxiety and social isolation. However, the relatively lower scores in aspects such as homesickness suggest that counselling programs in Ghanaian senior high schools may not be fully equipped to address the emotional and psychological challenges that students experience, particularly boarding students adjusting to school life away from home. To improve social adjustment outcomes, schools should integrate emotional intelligence training, peer mentoring programs, and gender-sensitivity workshops into their guidance programs, as suggested by Whiston et al. (2019). This would help students navigate interpersonal challenges and build stronger social resilience.

Guidance and Counselling and Academic Engagement

The study results indicate a positive relationship between guidance services and students' academic engagement, as students who frequently sought counselling support reported higher levels of academic motivation and engagement. This finding aligns with Fredricks et al. (2018), who emphasized that academic engagement is closely linked to the availability of student support systems, including counselling services. Academic counselling was the second most patronized service (mean = 3.6, SD = 0.645), indicating that students highly value career and academic guidance. This supports the work of Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2021), who found that students who receive structured career counselling show higher levels of motivation, better time management, and greater persistence in their studies. Similarly, Lapan et al. (2017) concluded that academic counselling significantly reduces dropout rates by helping students develop study skills and academic planning strategies.

However, the study also revealed that evaluation services had the lowest patronage (mean = 1.0, SD = 0.189), suggesting that many schools do not adequately assess the effectiveness of their counselling interventions. This finding is consistent with Dimmitt and Wilkerson (2019), who noted that schools often lack structured feedback mechanisms to measure the impact of counselling programs on students' academic and personal growth. Implementing regular student performance tracking and feedback sessions could enhance the effectiveness of academic counselling services. Another notable finding was that students who engaged in guidance services exhibited improved study habits and discipline. This supports Mutie and Ndambuki (2020), who found that students who frequently attended counselling sessions performed better in standardized tests compared to their peers who did not seek academic guidance. The study also corroborates Eyo et al. (2021), who reported that counselling interventions increase students' ability to handle academic pressure and reduce absenteeism. Nevertheless, challenges remain regarding students' willingness to seek personal counselling for academic stress and mental well-being. Gysbers and Henderson (2018) noted that in many school systems, students perceive counselling as a last resort rather than a proactive strategy for academic success. This may explain why personal counselling services recorded relatively lower patronage in this study. Addressing this issue requires a cultural shift in how counselling services are perceived, emphasizing preventive rather than reactive interventions.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The findings of this study provide several important implications for school administrators, policymakers, and counsellors:

1. **Enhancing Awareness Campaigns:** Given the moderate patronage of counselling services, schools should increase awareness about the benefits of guidance programs, particularly in areas of mental health, emotional support, and evaluation services.
2. **Integrating Follow-Up Mechanisms:** Since evaluation services received the lowest patronage, schools should implement structured follow-up mechanisms to assess the long-term impact of guidance interventions on students.
3. **Expanding Counselling Programs:** The findings suggest that counselling services are effective in promoting social adjustment and academic engagement, but gaps remain in emotional resilience, gender-based interactions, and overcoming homesickness. Schools should integrate specialized workshops on emotional intelligence and social confidence-building activities.
4. **Policy Considerations:** The results highlight the need for government and educational policymakers to invest in school counselling programs, ensuring that trained counsellors are available in all secondary schools. Funding should also be allocated for evaluation and research-based improvements to guidance programs.

The study findings confirm that guidance and counselling services play a critical role in students' academic and social development. However, certain areas, such as evaluation services and personal counselling, require improvement to maximize their effectiveness. The study aligns with existing literature, demonstrating that academic counselling, orientation services, and structured interventions enhance students' engagement, resilience, and social well-being. To optimize these services, schools must address cultural stigmas, improve accessibility, and implement structured follow-up mechanisms. Future research should explore intervention-based counselling models tailored to the specific psychosocial and academic needs of students.

7. CONCLUSION

The study examined the impact of guidance and counselling services on students' social adjustment and academic engagement in senior high schools. The findings revealed that students moderately patronized guidance services, with orientation and academic counselling receiving the highest engagement, while evaluation and follow-up services were the least utilized. Additionally, students who actively engaged in counselling exhibited better social adjustment and academic commitment, reinforcing the importance of structured guidance programs in secondary education. However, cultural stigma, inadequate follow-up mechanisms, and limited access to professional counsellors remain barriers to effective service delivery. The study aligns with existing literature, demonstrating that counselling services enhance student resilience, promote interpersonal skills, and improve academic discipline. To maximize the benefits of these programs, schools must implement proactive awareness campaigns, strengthen evaluation services, and integrate emotional intelligence training.

8. RECOMMENDATION

To improve the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in senior high schools, the study recommends that schools and policymakers prioritize the integration of structured follow-up mechanisms to track the impact of counselling interventions on students. Additionally, awareness campaigns should be intensified to reduce stigma associated with personal counselling, encouraging more students to seek emotional and psychological support. Schools should train more qualified counsellors and expand counselling services to address issues beyond academics, including emotional resilience and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, evaluation services should be strengthened to assess students' progress over time, ensuring that counselling programs remain effective and relevant. Educational authorities must invest in modern counselling tools, provide funding for research-based interventions, and integrate career planning workshops to enhance students' preparedness for life beyond high school. Finally, schools should incorporate peer mentoring and social skill development programs to help students adjust more effectively to school life and improve their academic engagement.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on educational psychology and student development by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between guidance and counselling services, social adjustment, and academic engagement in the Ghanaian secondary education system. Unlike previous studies that focused mainly on the

general benefits of counselling, this research highlights specific areas of counselling that students patronize more frequently and those that require improvement, such as follow-up and evaluation services. Additionally, the study identifies cultural and systemic barriers affecting counselling utilization, providing valuable insights for educational policymakers, school administrators, and counselling professionals. The findings offer a framework for enhancing counselling services by integrating emotional intelligence training, structured evaluations, and peer mentorship programs. Moreover, the study serves as a foundation for future research, paving the way for intervention-based counselling models tailored to the unique socio-cultural and academic needs of secondary school students.

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