

Guidance and Counselling in Early Childhood Teacher Training

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Abstract This paper examines the place of Guidance and Counselling in Early Childhood teacher training. A 20-item questionnaire was administered to 486 students drawn from University of Education, Winneba (UEW) and University for Development Studies (UDS); both public universities engaged in teacher education. A descriptive survey was adopted for the study. The main instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire for Early Childhood Education students. The data gathered was coded and analysed with the aid of computer software, Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS) version 17. The statistical tools used in the analysis consisted of both descriptive and inferential statistics. The open-ended data was also categorised and recorded according to themes for emergent patterns. It is evident from research data that teacher trainees are aware of the availability of guidance and counselling services in their respective schools, which is mostly through the school counsellor. Furthermore, this study presents viewpoints in relation to the needs of the student, how they are addressed, and how well these services are available. The current study has added to existing knowledge on student's perception about the place of guidance and counselling services between UEW and UDS. The paper draws on the findings and recommends that sourcing of guidance and counselling services should be mandatory on the part of students and that such services should not be limited to academic issues but should also address personal and social needs of recipients.

Keywords: *teacher-trainees, supervision, guidance, counselling, direction, Ghana*

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1. Introduction

The place and role of guidance and counselling in effective educational practices have received a lot of attention and attraction in recent times especially in Ghana. Such interest regarding the importance of counselling in efficient educational development of the learner is evidenced in the attention placed on counselling services at most public tertiary institutions in Ghana. In this study, attempt is made to elicit the views of teacher-trainees (students) pursuing early childhood education (ECE) program at two public universities in Ghana; namely, the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), and University for Development Studies (UDS) on their knowledge of the existence of counselling services at their respective institutions, the frequency of sourcing such services, and the quality of such services.

Guidance and counselling is seen as a process of help through the facilitation of growth and positive adjustment for the one receiving the service [6]. It is generally viewed as a helping relationship between the counsellor and the counsellee. This notwithstanding existing literature on the subject, guidance and counselling reveals differences in the two concepts. For example, the *Webster's Student Dictionary* [17] defines guidance as an *advice* or *counsel* or *the act of directing*. With this definition, guidance

becomes the act of guiding, help, show, assist, or to direct. A number of scholarly definitions on guidance have centred on some of the terms listed. For example, Yuen [16] refers to guidance as a process of helping the whole-person development of the student. Schmidt [14] describes guidance as assistance shaped in direction and prescription. For Pecku [11], guidance is a comprehensive system of services and programmes in schools designed to enhance the psychological and personal development of students.

Counselling on the other hand, is viewed as an emotional problem solving exercise where the counsellor plays the role of a helper who based on the acquired knowledge in that field and possessing the right attitudes is in a position to assist the person counselled to function in a given situation. Indeed, counselling is viewed as a problem solving enterprise. For example, Rao [12] defines counselling as the process by which an individual with problems is helped by a professional counsellor to change an unwanted behaviour or attitude. Bulus [2] regards counselling as an open ended, face to face problem solving encounter where a professional counsellor focuses and attempts to solve problems. For Makinde [7], counselling is an enlightened process whereby help is offered to others aimed at the facilitation of growth. Thus, based on the different definitions offered regarding guidance and counselling, it will be convenient to conclude that whiles guidance is described as preventive

and developmental in nature, counselling on the other hand is a supportive and remedial exercise.

In Ghana, Taylor & Buku [15] opine that historically guidance and counselling has been shaped as “advice giving”. The authors argue that formal main stream guidance and counselling programmes is on record to have emerged in Ghana in 1976 by the Ghana Education Service. At UEW, there is a legal provision for guidance and counselling, thus a department manned by a coordinator has oversight responsibility of guidance and counselling programmes at the university. Again, faculty members in addition to their core mandate of teaching, also engage in counselling of students on request. The situation as described is not different from that of UDS. These two institutions are among three public universities (including University of Cape Coast) in Ghana that offers early childhood education programmes. Indeed, at the two institutions, guidance and counselling as a subject is mandatory, but as a service it is not.

When it comes to early childhood educational practices in Ghana, it entails the totality of the development of the child. Thus, early childhood education in Ghana relative to other forms of educational practices can be described as being in the embryonic stage. Hence, with UEW and UDS being institutions tasked with the mandate of training educators in the early childhood sector, and with the relevance of guidance and counselling in such an enterprise (teacher-training) noted, it is necessary for an investigation into the effectiveness of guidance and counselling in the educational development of the learner in these two institutions. Such a study is timely especially in light of the little or no studies conducted that field when it comes to Ghana. In fact, this problem begs enquiry especially when guidance and counselling in all intent and purposes is a helping tool in the educational development of the learner. Hence, the problem necessitating this study specifically, is the lack of information on the effectiveness of guidance and counselling in early childhood teacher-training in Ghana. As a result, an investigation into the place of guidance and counselling in early childhood teacher training emanating from the perspectives of teacher-trainees has derived impetus on the assumption that teacher trainees are the major recipients of guidance and counselling services such that they are better positioned to make a determination as to how efficient and effective these services are to their educational development. Based on this, the below objectives are addressed in the study:

- To determine the level of awareness of early childhood teacher-trainees of UEW and UDS of the existence of guidance and counselling services in their respective institutions.
- To determine ways in which UEW and UDS early childhood programmes address guidance and counselling issues at their respective institutions.
- To determine based on the perspectives of students of early childhood education of UEW and UDS the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in their respective institutions

2. Literature Review

Guidance and counselling as discussed in this study is conceptualized as a helping relationship geared towards

providing an avenue for individuals to achieve greater awareness not only of the situation in which they find themselves but most importantly of what they intend to become. It is seen as a critical service in every educational enterprise since learners naturally will require support in all aspects of their educational development manifesting in academic, social, interpersonal and emotional development. In this direction, the literature reviewed looked at what constitutes guidance and counselling as a reiterating of the different definitions already provided in this study. In addition, the literature also looked at the uniqueness of each of the concepts and most importantly their benefits to the educational development of the learner.

Guidance as defined in this study is viewed as a helping process [14,16]. For others such as [9], guidance is described as a mental process aimed at providing useful information, experiences, and resources to facilitate decision making during personal and social development. Bulus [2] describes guidance as an assistance made available to an individual by personally qualified and adequately trained men and women to help the individual manage his/her own life and activities such that the individual will be in a position to make decisions for him/herself. Kankam and Onivehu (2000) argues that it is a service, and a unique one in the educational system. According to the authors, this service; guidance, is one that aims at assisting teachers, students, and parents to navigate the educational waters.

Counselling on the other hand is represented as an affective (emotional) process where the counsellor plays the important role of being a helper based on his/her knowledge, skills, and right attitudes to enable the counselled function properly. This positioning of counselling is reflected in the definition provided by the American Psychological Association Division of Counselling Psychology Committee (1956, p.283) which states; “counselling as a process designed to help individuals overcoming obstacles to their personal growth, wherever these may be encountered and towards achieving optimum development of their personal resources”. Counselling as revealed in the definition provided and other related literature is viewed as a helping program to overcome challenges or problems. Within the ambit of the school setup, Ivey [5] regards counselling as a helping relationship between the trained counsellor and an individual who seeks help to gain a greater self-understanding through an improvement in the behaviour of the one counselled. For Corey, Corey, & Callanan (1988), counselling is a process which occurs based on a relationship between an individual troubled by problems and one offering assistance as a solution to such problems.

The above differences notwithstanding, some literature turns to view counselling as a subset of guidance. Indeed, [8] presents counselling as a major service incorporated in the guidance program. The author argues that in counselling the individual with a problem is helped through a relationship with a professionally prepared counsellor aimed at a positive behavioural change. Thus guidance is presented to connote a wider representation of complex services aimed at prevention of which counselling is a subset.

The literature on the benefits of guidance and counselling especially relative to education turns to be presented as one. For example, Eyo, Joshua, & Esuong [3]

argues that guidance and counselling services aim at providing each learner the opportunity of maximizing his/her potential. Again, Patton [10] describes educational guidance and counselling as necessary ingredients in assisting people to explore and understand themselves such that they will be better positioned to become self-directing individuals. According to Gysbers and Henderson [4], every learner should have access to guidance and counselling services, and that there should be measures to ensure that students and staff alike are kept informed about the services available and who is responsible for each given type of service.

Stemming from the literature reviewed and the objectives set, this study aimed at an evaluation of educational guidance and counselling services offered to teacher trainees of early childhood education of two public universities in Ghana; University of Education, Winneba, and University for Development Studies. Thus, the study presents how guidance and counselling appears from the viewpoint of the individual teacher-trainee, how it meets his/her needs, how it has been organized, and how well such counselling services are available.

3. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are early childhood students' awareness level about the existence of counselling services at the

University of Education, Winneba, and the University for Development Studies?

2. In what ways does the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program at UEW and UDS address counselling issues?

3. How often do students of ECE at UEW and UDS avail themselves for counselling on their program of study?

4. What is the relevance of counselling to ECE students of UEW and UDS?

4. Research Methodology

The study was a descriptive research of the survey type design, where 486 early childhood students from two institutions; University of Education Winneba (UEW), and University for Development Studies (UDS) participated. Of the total number of participants, 376 were students from UEW, while 110 were students from UDS. Of these, 306 were female, while 180 were male. All participants were first, second, and third year students. The final year students of UEW did not participate in the study because they were on field practical (teaching practice) hence could not be reached, while UDS did not have final year students in the early childhood program because the program is just in the third year. Purposive sampling approach was used because the study targeted a specific group of participants who would help achieve the objectives of the study.

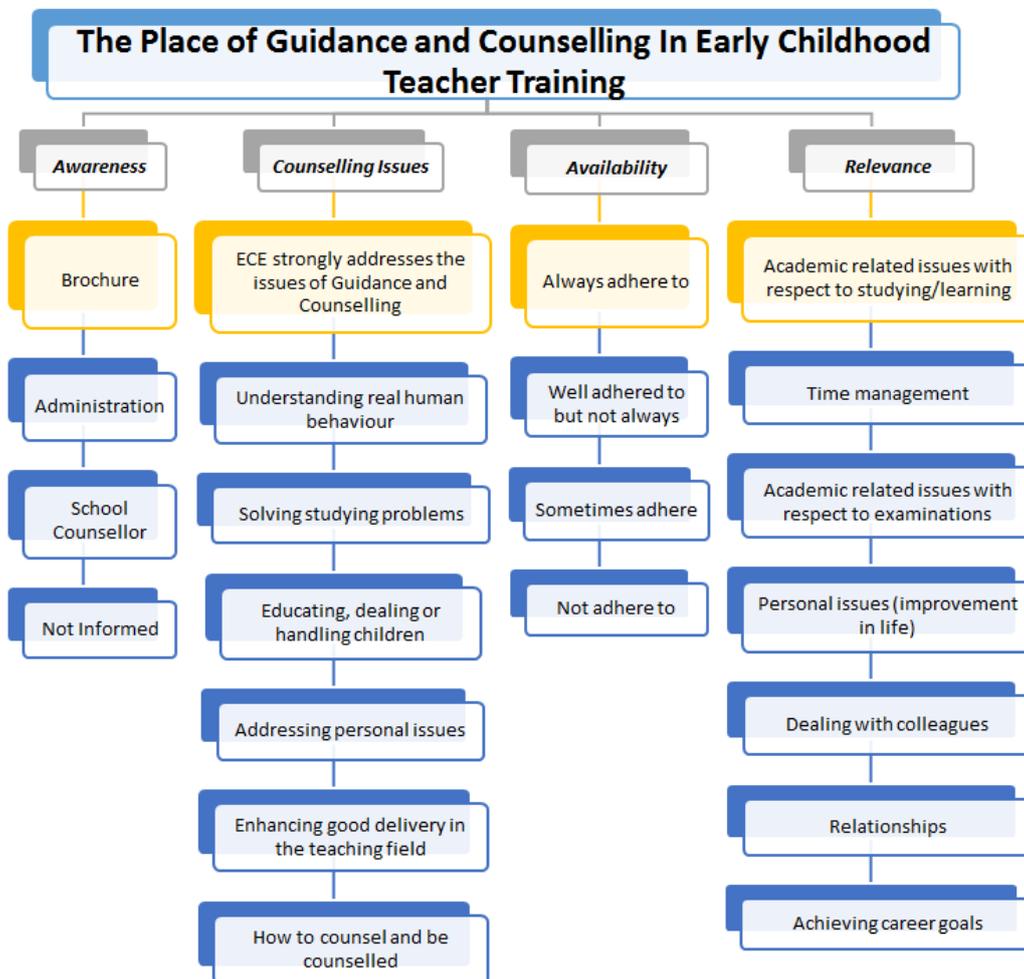


Figure 1. Model

A researcher developed questionnaire served as the tool for data collection. In all the questionnaire was divided into five sections (A-E). Section A which aimed at eliciting participants Bio-data information consisted of five questions; Institution, Year in program, Gender, Age, and persons' students live with. Section B addressed the awareness of participants on the availability of guidance and counselling services in their respective institutions. In this direction, students were asked to respond to how they got information on the availability of guidance and counselling services in their institutions. Questions on Section C addressed ways by which the early childhood program offered guidance and counselling services. This section consisted of seven questions. Section D looked at how often participants availed themselves to guidance and counselling services at their respective institutions. And finally, Section E centred on participants' responses on the relevance of guidance and counselling services to their educational development. These questions are presented in a Model (Figure 1).

Questionnaires were administered by the researchers who undertook the study. Each being a faculty member of each of the two institutions involved in the study, questionnaires were administered to participants during class hours and they were to be filled and returned to the researchers within a week. In all 789 questionnaires were

administered thus being the total population of students pursuing early childhood regular programs at the two institutions, with 486 returned representing 61.5% response rate.

Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics because it was deemed to be well placed in accurately providing responses of participants relative to the research questions posed. The statistical tools used in the analysis consisted of both descriptive and inferential statistics. The open-ended data was also categorised and recorded according to themes for emergent patterns. In other to ensure objectivity and validity of the questions presented in the questionnaires, two senior faculty members of the University of Education, Winneba, and the University for Development Studies scrutinized the questions to ensure that they were in line with the objectives and research questions.

5. Results and Findings

Table 1 below presents Bio-data information of participants. Information on the number of participants represented in institutional affiliation, year of study (Level), gender, age, as well as person with whom the participant resides are all presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Bio-Data of Participants

| BIO DATA STATISTICS | | | | |
|---|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Institution of Student: UDS or UEW | | | | |
| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| UDS | 110 | 22.6 | 22.6 | 22.6 |
| UEW | 376 | 77.4 | 77.4 | 100 |
| Total | 486 | 100 | 100 | |
| Level of Student: 100, 200, 300 or 400 | | | | |
| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| 100 | 169 | 34.8 | 34.8 | 34.8 |
| 200 | 175 | 36 | 36 | 70.8 |
| 300 | 142 | 29.2 | 29.2 | 100 |
| Total | 486 | 100 | 100 | |
| Gender: Male or Female | | | | |
| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| No response | 23 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 4.7 |
| Male | 157 | 32.3 | 32.3 | 37 |
| Female | 306 | 63 | 63 | 100 |
| Total | 486 | 100 | 100 | |
| Age: 15-25, 25-30 or 30 Above | | | | |
| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| No response | 9 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.9 |
| 15-20 | 325 | 66.9 | 66.9 | 68.7 |
| 25-30 | 113 | 23.3 | 23.3 | 92 |
| 30 above | 39 | 8 | 8 | 100 |
| Total | 486 | 100 | 100 | |
| Living With: Mother Only, Father Only, Both Parents or Other Relatives | | | | |
| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| No response | 46 | 9.5 | 9.5 | 9.5 |
| Mother only | 112 | 23 | 23 | 32.5 |
| Father only | 23 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 37.2 |
| Both parents | 240 | 49.4 | 49.4 | 86.6 |
| Other relatives | 65 | 13.4 | 13.4 | 100 |
| Total | 486 | 100 | 100 | |

Research question 1 of the study centred on participants' level of awareness regarding the existence of guidance and counselling services at their respective

institutions. Responses as shown in Figure 2 indicate that 332 early childhood teacher trainees representing 88.2% of the UEW population indicated their awareness of

guidance and counselling programs at their institution, 87.2% responded in the affirmative, while 96 teacher-trainees from UDS also representing

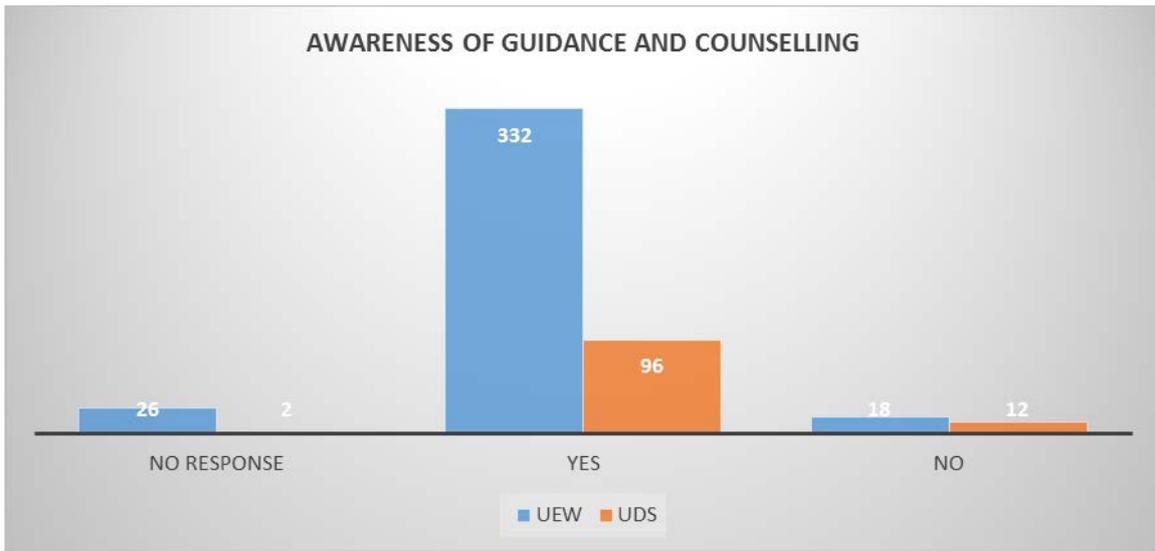


Figure 2. Participants Awareness of Guidance and Counselling Services

Still on research question 1 when participants were probed further as to how they got hint of guidance and counselling services in their respective institutions, results as provided in Figure 3 indicate that in both schools the school counsellor was the main source of that information. For example, close to half in the case of UEW; 48% (N=181) and 50% (N=55) of UDS participants indicated

the school counsellor as the main source of being aware of the availability of counselling services in their respective institutions. This notwithstanding, it is also clear that quite a sizeable number of participants (UEW; N= 48, UDS; N= 27) indicated not being informed of guidance and counselling services at their institution. These results are shown in Figure 3 below.

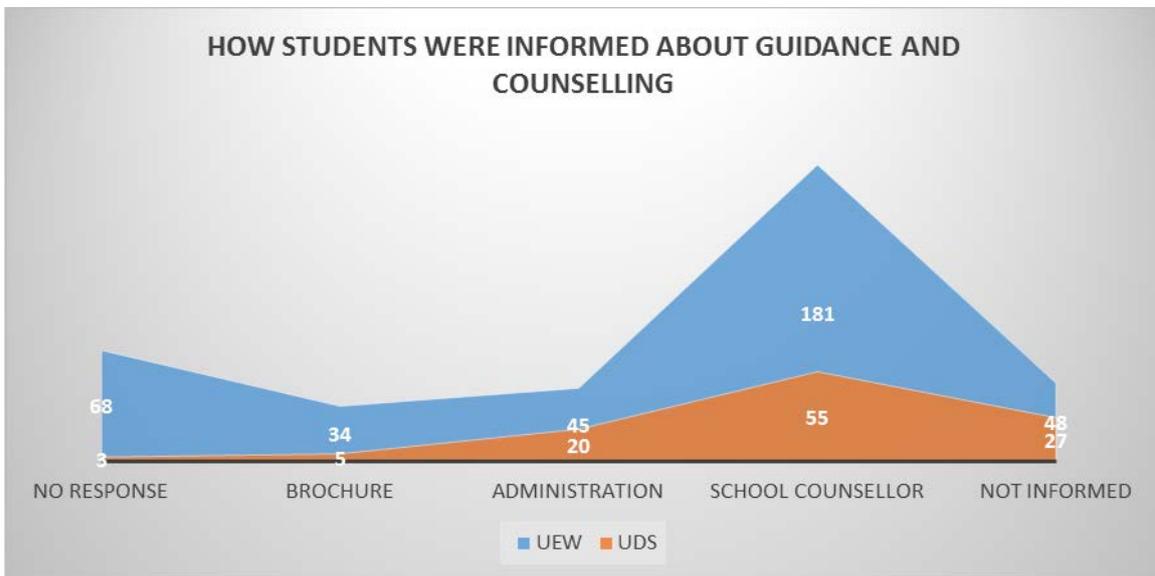


Figure 3. How Participants Heard of Guidance and Counselling Services

Research question 2 of the study sought to determine how guidance and counselling services were addressed. Responses by participants as revealed in Figure 4 shows clearly that in terms of emphasis, differences exist between the two institutions. For example, while most (10%) respondents to this question of the UEW participants rated knowledge in educating and handling children as high compared to other variables, students of UDS (24%) responding to the same question, rated early childhood education addressing guidance and counselling as a subject to be high. Also revealing in this regard are responses of participants on the place of guidance and

counselling in addressing personal issues. Indeed, when it comes to UEW participants there was not a single response in this direction, however, in the case of UDS only 2.7% (N=3) indicated that guidance and counselling services addressed their personal issues.

On the question of how often teacher-trainees availed themselves to guidance and counselling services as captured in the third research question of this study, responses as indicated in Figure 5 indicates that 36% (N=136) of UEW participants did not respond to the question. Even where there was a response, a whopping 22.8% (N=86) still of UEW participants indicated they

never adhered to. In the case of UDS a look at responses on this question as provided in Figure 5 shows an impressive patronage to guidance and counselling services (Always adhere to: N=28; Well adhered to but not always:

N=22), yet quiet a sizeable number (N= 30) indicated sometimes adhered to, and (N=25) never adhered to guidance and counselling services.

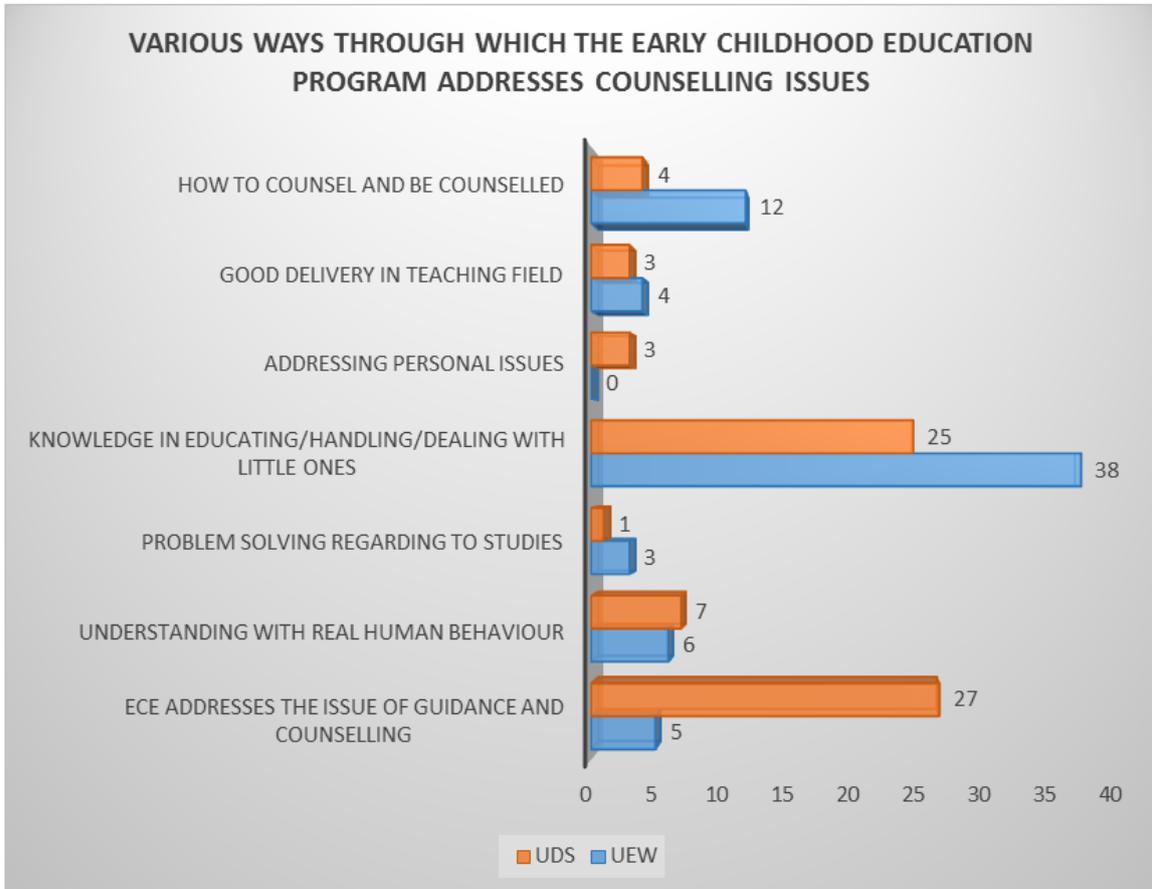


Figure 4. How Early Childhood Education Addresses Counselling

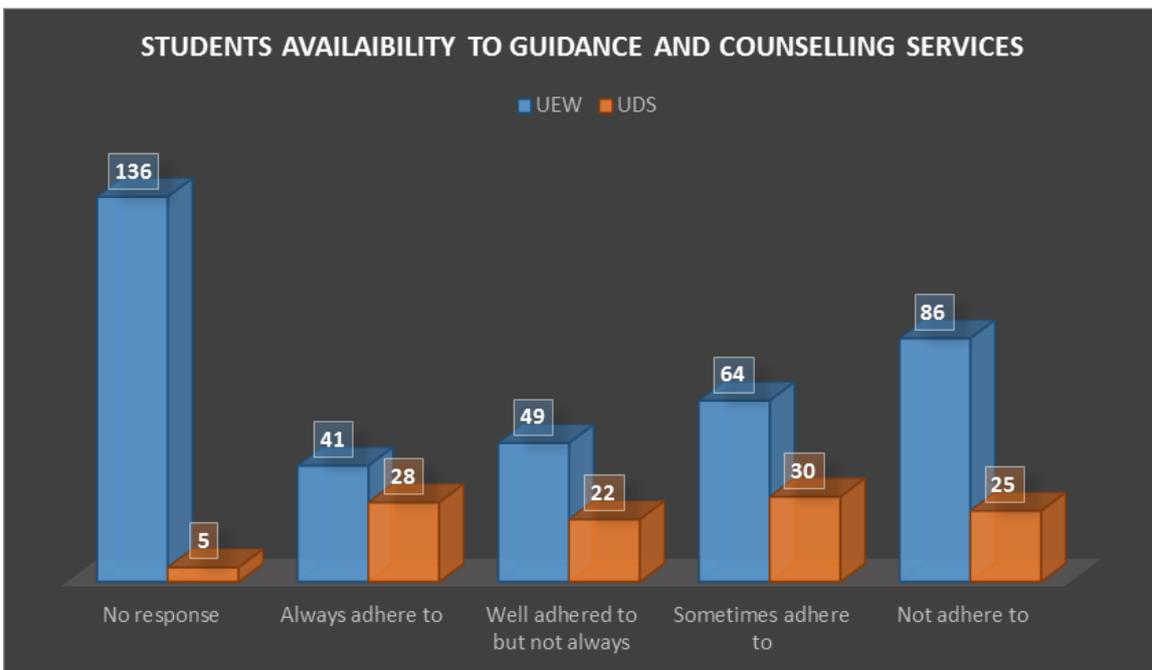


Figure 5. Teacher-trainees' adherence to guidance and counselling services

Lastly, research question 4 looked at areas where based on the perspectives of participants' guidance and counselling should be relevant. The results as provided in

Figure 6 indicate that, academic issues were ranked high, followed by personal issues and examination related

issues. Relationships as revealed in the responses lagged behind. These results are provided in Figure 6 of the study.

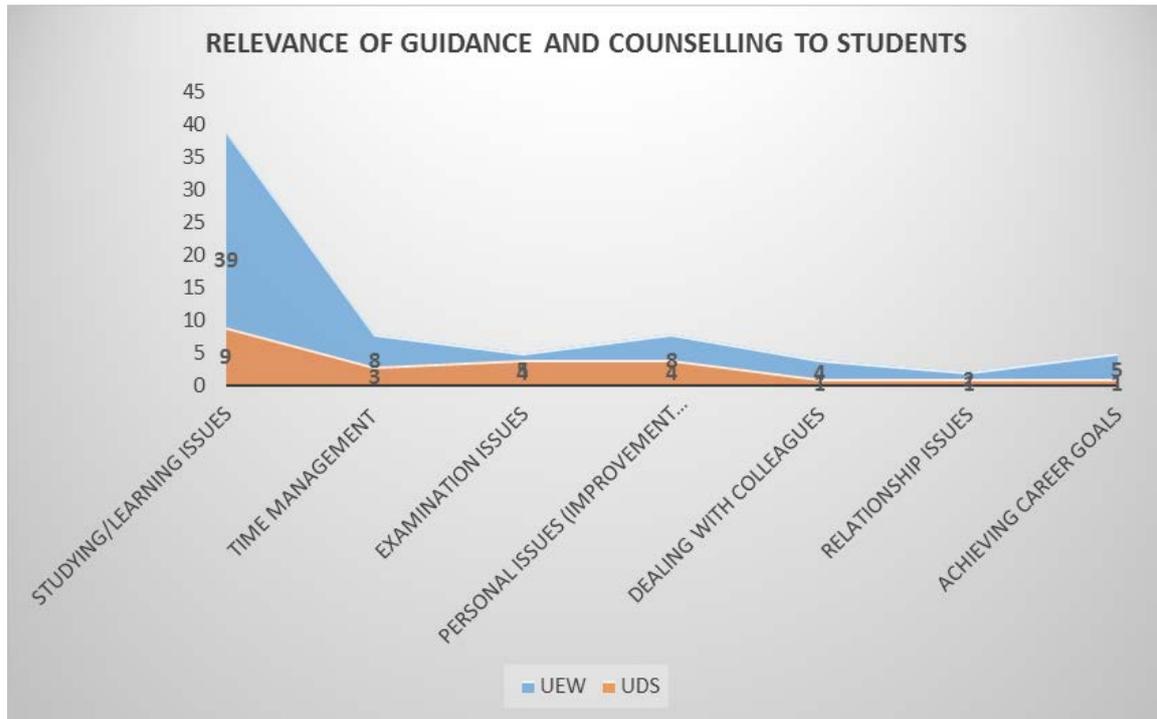


Figure 6. Relevance of Guidance and Counselling

6. Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

This study describes how educational guidance and counselling at the departments of early childhood education at the University of Education, Winneba, and the University for Development Studies appears from the viewpoint of the student, how it addresses the needs of the student, how it is organized, and how well these services are available. The findings reveal that most students are aware of the availability of guidance and counselling services in their respective schools which is mostly through the school counsellor.

Additionally, while it is informing to note that guidance and counselling services addressed most areas of need in terms of the educational development of the student, it is unfortunate that personal issues, an important ingredient in the educational development of the learner is sidestepped. Indeed, with the fourth research question of this study presented as where students will like guidance and counselling services to address, personal issues were ranked as one of the areas of need. In fact, the need for guidance and counselling in addressing the educational needs of recipients is well echoed by Shertzer, B. and Stone, S.C. [13] who stated that there is a close relationship between guidance and counselling activities and instructional processes such that each contributes to each other.

Lastly, on the question of how often students frequent counselling services, the findings as provided by the study is a reflection of not a well patronized program especially by students of the University of Education, Winneba. Factors that contribute to this attitude is worth investigating in future studies.

Based on the above findings, it is the recommendation of this study that the following steps need to be adhered to in order to ensure the efficient role and place of guidance services in the two institutions especially at the early childhood levels.

- Even though a greater number of participants indicated awareness of guidance and counselling services at their respective institutions, initiatives should be taken in awareness creation of the existence of such programmes at the two institutions.
- Again, guidance and counselling services should be tailored to address specific needs of students which will mean counsellors should be conversant of the profile of the students and what their needs are.
- As much as possible steps should be taken in making guidance and counselling services mandatory by first making it part of the school time table.
- Making counselling an integral part of teaching and learning through a process of positing the class teacher as a counsellor is very necessary in the student-teacher relationship, hence the need for basic counselling training for all teachers.

Aside the above recommendations, it is the suggestion of this study for future studies to look specifically at the place and relevance of guidance and counselling in early childhood teacher-training. Again, a study of the nature of counselling services conducted in the two institutions is also worth pursuing, and finally the background of counsellors of the two institutions and their conditions of work are also worth investigating.

In summary even though this study is limited by virtue of the sampled population and area, the findings are informing and provides an overview of how students

perceive guidance and counselling relative to how it aids their educational development. Undoubtedly, the study does contribute to the discussion on the place and role of an important and necessary ingredient in the educational development of the learner; guidance and counselling, in an important educational sector; early childhood education, and in a region, Ghana where early childhood education undisputedly is still taking shape. The lessons drawn though limited to the study area are applicable to other educational sectors.

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