

Guidance Counsellors' Competences, Skills and the Effectiveness of the Services in Cameroon State Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at assessing the extent to which competences and skills of guidance counselors (GCs) can foster the effectiveness of the guidance counseling services in Cameroon State universities. The research was carried out in four state universities in Cameroon notably University of Buea, University of Bamenda, University of Douala and University of Yaounde II using a sample of 577 students, 26 guidance counselors and 21 university administrators and lecturers. The study employed a survey design considering triangulation whereby qualitative and quantitative approaches supported each other to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to sample four State Universities while participants were involved in the study conveniently. Two sets of questionnaire, one for students and another one for GCs were used while an interview guide helped to gather data from the administrators. Data were digitalized with the support of EpiData version 3.1, and were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using SPSS 21.0. As for the textual data (qualitative data), their abstraction was reduced following the process of thematic analysis. The findings revealed that Guidance counselors generally perceived that they were not often exercising the activities for which they were assigned. The most highlighted activity though with poor rate of execution (15.4%) were mobilizing stakeholders to provide inputs, feedbacks and suggestions to improve service delivery; providing data that serve as a basis to solve students' problems; and maintaining current information on study and job opportunities. This was concordant with students' perceptions as they generally complained that guidance counselors were not often carrying out their dedicated activities. University administrators and lecturers stressed that knowledge and skills in guidance and counseling services were very important for counselors to partake in their profession. Both the students and guidance counselors equally acknowledged that guidance counselors' competences are important for the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services. Some administrators objectively acknowledged that they could not assess guidance counselors since they have never participated in any of their counseling services. In fact, administrators and lecturers acknowledged their weak involvement or collaboration with guidance counselors. This collaboration was narrowed to giving them floor to talk during orientation days. Lack of career profile for counselors was a major concern, and moreover, guidance counselors were mostly trained for secondary schools and did not have a terminal degree, which makes them to be under looked upon. The leading consequence was the fact that GCs now tend to focus more in furthering their study in the University to which they are attached, thus neglecting the job for which they were employed. The chain effect is that, after achieving their terminal degrees, which might not even be in counseling, they now seek opportunities to teach in the amphitheatres where they now spend most of their time, to the detriment of the counseling of students they were employed for. It was advocated that there is a need to have a plan of action for service evaluation, visit to the counseling units to assess output directly or indirectly. It was equally recommended that real experts in counseling to follow up and implement counseling programs as well as Guidance Counselling Services should be posted to the institutions. Adequate finances, facilities and equipment, improving collaboration between administrators, lecturers and Guidance Counsellors, and also providing a career profile for Guidance Counsellors were also recommended.

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KEYWORDS: Guidance counselor, competence, skills, effectiveness, services

INTRODUCTION

The history of guidance and counselling can be traced back to times when people used to informally sit together in groups and share their experiences on various phenomenal problems and dreams. Years immemorial, human beings have always been faced with incessant problems which have equally always needed solutions. Prominent among these problems are personal, social, health, economic, religious, political, dreams interpretation, making choices and taking decisions about issues concerning their welfare and life expectations. In the past, people of different societies found it very interesting and rewarding sharing their problems and narrating their life histories to significant persons to whom new ideas and suggestions could help them in finding lasting solutions to their problems, hence the need for formal guidance and counselling.

Guidance and counselling actually took off in many countries after the Second World War (WW2). Whatever the situation, the movement began in reaction to societal changes which necessitated greater attention to individual needs. These societal changes were brought about by different events at different times with each country experiencing them differently. As such, different countries introduced guidance and counselling in their educational systems at different times and for different reasons. According to Gibson (2008), school counselling profession in the United States began as a vocational guidance movement at the beginning of the twentieth century to assist students with their educational development and career aspiration. The emphasis was to build career interest, develop character and avoid behavioural problems. Coleman (2001) states that guidance and counselling was introduced in British schools in reaction to societal changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and the World Wars. Those events which brought changes in the society, family life and in schools also created turbulence among students. Coleman further noted that students studied under higher anxiety levels during this period as competition levels had become stiffer, putting pressures on students to choose careers. There was therefore need for vocational guidance to help students take their decisions and make appropriate choices. Also, the wars created social crises like traumatic war experiences which students had undergone with their families and friends. All these events necessitated greater attention to individual needs hence the need for counselling to help them overcome certain experiences.

Guidance counsellors are professionally trained and certificated individuals who provide guidance and

counselling services in schools and other parastatals needing their services (Shertzer and Stone, 1980). In the context of Cameroon, MINESUP (2000) states that professionally trained guidance counsellors posted to work in Cameroon's State Universities are by Ministerial Circular No: 00/0003/MINESUP/DAO/SDOA of 31/03/2000 assigned specific counselling missions. In the same document, their roles and activities are also outlined and their documented services also stated. Documented Services according to this study are the standard guidance and counselling services that guidance counsellors are expected to render to students in order to guide and help them in solving their personal, social, vocational and educational problems. These services include; counselling, information, referral, appraisal, selection, placement, follow-up, evaluation and orientation. These components are benchmarks or criteria against which guidance and counselling services can be measured. Other criteria that can be used for the evaluation of guidance and counselling services include; resources and physical facilities, cooperation, outcomes, balance, stability, flexibility, competences of guidance counsellors, strategies of guidance counsellors, records and counsellor-student ratio (Cobia, 2007; Dimitt, Carey and Hatch, 2007; Gysbers, 2006). For the purpose of this study, four of these variables were used as criteria to measure the extent of effectiveness of guidance and counselling services offered by Guidance Counsellors to students in Cameroon State Universities. They were; Resources, Guidance Counsellors' competences, Guidance Counsellors' Strategies and Peer Counselling. Resources: According to this study, resources are inputs put in place to enable guidance counsellors to provide effective guidance and counselling services to students. These include human resources like qualified counsellors and other support staff, physical resources or physical facilities like equipped counselling centres with rooms and other conference rooms for individual and group counselling sessions and financial resources like a budget to run the centre and procure and install material resources like communication gadgets, computers for data storage and other office materials and facilities. The effective and efficient implementation of the school guidance and counselling program will remain a mirage without a realistic consideration of the infrastructural necessities for the counsellors to play their roles effectively (Adana, 2004). Guidance Counsellors' Competences: These according to this study, refer to the abilities of guidance counsellors to organize, implement and manage guidance programs to

effectively perform their roles of providing the expected services. These services are counselling, orientation, information, appraisal, referral, selection, placement, follow-up and evaluation. Strategies used by guidance counsellors: According to Chireshe (2006), these are activities and procedures that guidance counsellors undertake to ensure that guidance and counselling services are effectively implemented and managed. These strategies include: Sensitization (of students and other stakeholders of the existence and importance of guidance and counselling services), planning of guidance and counselling services, assessing students' needs and evaluating guidance and counselling services. Peer Counselling: This refers to a situation where students are trained to offer counselling services to other students (their peers) (Arudo, 2006). They are trained in basic skills like listening, helping, problem-solving and decision-making. Where guidance counsellors maximize the use of peer counsellors, especially where counsellor-student ratio is high, it helps a wider audience and gives guidance counsellors more time to provide effective guidance and counselling services to students (Myrick, 1991; Lapan, 2001). Peer counsellors are also called Peer Helpers (Chireshe, 2006).

Theories greatly influence the strategies and techniques that guidance counsellors use in helping their clients. A theory helps to guide the counsellor in a counselling relationship; it also assists the counsellor in predicting, evaluation and improving results (Corey, 1990). More importantly, a theory serves as a working tool that helps to explain what clients may be like and what may be helpful to them. In this study, the following theories are considered; Psychoanalytic Theory by Sigmund Freud, Trait and Factor Theory by E.G Williamson, Rational Emotive Theory by Albert Ellis, Self-Theory by Carl Rogers and Eclectic Theory by Frederick C. Thorne. These theories are examined in chapter two under Theoretical Review.

Contextually, State Universities in Cameroon are meeting grounds where students from different social, cultural, economic, religious and educational backgrounds converge to study. Students therefore have problems created by these diversities. As they come to study in the universities, they encounter additional problems. These problems which are personal, social, educational, vocational and psychological include: poor sexual behaviours, smoking, alcoholism, violence, unrests, poor study habits, poor time management, fear, anxiety, choice of companions, decisions on careers and selection of courses, adaptation to university life, stress,

frustration, depression, discouragement, poor self-concept, vandalism, disrespect for constituted authority, etc.

Aware of these problems, the government of Cameroon decided to establish guidance and counselling services in higher institutions in Cameroon in 1989. To emphasize the importance of these services in Cameroon State Universities, the government has come out with important texts like the Ministerial Circular Letter No. 00/0003/MINESUP/DAO/SDOA of 31/03/2000 and the 2001 law on higher education where the specific missions and activities of Guidance Counsellors have been outlined. In those same documents, their roles and the services they are expected to render are given. Guidance Counsellors in Cameroon state Universities are expected to provide effective guidance and counselling services to help students find solutions to their problems. This standpoint is backed up by MINESUP (2000) which states: *"It should be noted that in the university environment, the guidance counsellor is called upon to contribute to the success of the students by identifying the difficulties they encounter and guiding them in the search and identification of solutions to these difficulties through appropriate activities"*. The importance of guidance and counselling services in Cameroon State Universities is further highlighted in MINESUP (2000), in its declaration as follows: *"Considering the importance of guidance and counselling in the process of improving on higher education training system, services and officials in charge of guidance and counselling should be provided as much as possible with adequate working means (consultation rooms, offices, basic equipment, access to statistics, scientific reviews, computers and internet site) by the competent officials of the universities"*

From the above excerpt, it is clear that the government of Cameroon is confident that provided with adequate working means, guidance counsellors who are professionally trained and competent are able to effectively develop methods and strategies to guide and help students solve their personal, social, vocational and educational problems. These problems are manifested in the negative behaviours and attitudes of students. With effective guidance and counselling, this situation can improve with positive outcomes like improved behavioural attitudes, improved academic achievements, improved use of time, good study habits, positive self-concept, encouragement etc. On the contrary, this researcher has observed that deviant behaviours, poor study habits, poor time management etc. are on the increase. Unfortunately, in Cameroon State

Universities especially in the University of Buea where this researcher has been a student for many years, he observed with keen interest that Guidance Counsellors (who are the providers of guidance and counselling services) are assigned administrative duties which conflict their normal duty as counsellors. He also observed that guidance counsellors share the same offices with other administrative and academic officials. This does not only make the place of privacy and confidentiality which is central to counselling complicated, but discourages students from presenting themselves for counselling. This is more so because specialized physical facilities like consultation rooms, test rooms for psychological consultations and interviews, as well as information centres and equipment are lacking.

Statement of the problem

As mentioned earlier, the duty of the guidance counsellor is very demanding. Assigning them with additional duties which conflict their normal work as counsellors might make it difficult for them to have enough time to provide all the guidance services as expected and to carry out all the activities they need to, in order to render effective guidance services. The inadequacy of their services is glaring as from concrete observations, which could stem from competence problems, thus prompting the need for an empirical study as to come out with appropriate and contextualized resort measures.

Objective

This study is to find out the the extent to which competences and skills of guidance counselors (GCs) can foster the effectiveness of the guidance counseling services in Cameroon State universities.

Significance of the Study

This study is important in that the findings will provide vital information that will help not only the students but also guidance counsellors, researchers, university authorities and policy makers. Students will, through the study, gain from the increased awareness of the available guidance and counselling services that guidance counsellors in Cameroon State Universities can offer. They will also not only be able to have needed information to rate the value of guidance and counselling services offered to them but also have the opportunity to make suggestions for the improvement of the services offered and how they are implemented.

From the study, guidance counsellors will be able to have a set of criteria with which to evaluate their services. They will also need information from the study to make some decisions as regards what services to provide, how and when to provide them depending on the needs assessment of the students.

Such information will also help guidance counsellors to be more effective in service delivery.

Policy makers in the Ministry of Higher Education and the University authorities can also use the results of the study to base their future policy on guidance counselling activities in other universities. This study will add to the literature on the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in Cameroon, especially in state universities.

Justifications for the Study

Guidance and counselling was introduced in Cameroon State Universities in 1989. Since then, different legal instruments such as the circular letter No.00/003/MINESUP/ DAO/ SDOA of 31/03/2000 and the law of 2001 on education have come up to strengthen the activities or the roles guidance counsellors in State Universities have to play in order to meet students' concerns. Despite this effort by the government, it is observed that students in Cameroon State Universities are increasingly involved in problems such as smoking, alcoholism, poor sexual behaviours, poor dressing, violence, vandalism, thefts, unrests etc. The universities should through the activities of guidance counsellors help students to solve these problems. It is for this reason that this investigator deemed it important to evaluate the extent of effectiveness of guidance counsellors' activities vis-à-vis the services they render to students. Also, this investigator is not aware of any study carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance counsellors' activities vis-à-vis their documented service in Cameroon State Universities since the inception of guidance and counselling in these institutions. It was therefore important to attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance services to see whether they are meeting their intended objectives of helping students solve their problems or whether there are needs for adjustments or improvement on service delivery.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study was expected to be carried out in the eight Cameroon State Universities. For proper control and management, four of them were sampled to represent the eight. The four selected for the study were the Universities of Buea, Bamenda, Douala and Yaounde II. All guidance counsellors posted to work as counsellors in these universities were involved in the study. Third year students from departments of faculties and schools of the universities concerned were also involved in the study. Contextually, the study was limited to the evaluation of the effectiveness of guidance counsellors' activities vis-à-vis their services in Cameroon State Universities.

The focus of the study was limited to the following concepts: Guidance and Counselling, Guidance and Counselling Services, Activities or Roles of Guidance Counsellors, Guidance Counsellors' Competences. Lastly, the study limited itself to the three study variables which were: Resources, Guidance Counsellors' Competences and Effectiveness of Services.

Research Design

The study employed a survey design considering triangulation whereby qualitative and quantitative approaches supported each other to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings.

Area of study

This study was carried out in four selected state universities in Cameroon. The universities included: the University of Buea, the University of Bamenda, the University of Douala and the University of Yaounde II. States universities in Cameroon have been observed to have structural and functional inadequacy as far as GCSs are concerned. In the University of Buea, GCSs offices are located in areas that are not conducive for counselling. For instant, GCs' offices are found in the Vice Dean's secretariat (Faculty of Social and Management Sciences), GCs share offices with non-professionals (Faculty of Education), GCs are assigned different functions etc. Some faculties/schools do not even have counsellors. Two of these universities, the University of Buea and the University of Bamenda are in the English

speaking regions of Cameroon while the other two; the University of Douala and the University of Yaounde II are in the French speaking regions of Cameroon. The reason for this was that it was judged by the researcher that these state universities were representative in terms of the bi-cultural and linguistic nature of our country. Selected students from all the departments of faculties and schools of the universities concerned were involved in the study. All the guidance counsellors in these universities and one administrator who could either be an HOD, a Vice Dean, a Dean, a Deputy Director or a Director. from each faculty/school were also targeted for the study.

Population of the Study Sites

The population of interest to this study was 53570 in the four selected state universities distributed as follows; 53506 third year students, 37 guidance counsellors and 27 administrators. This is the target (parent) population of the study. Guidance counsellors are those who provide guidance and counselling services while students are the intended beneficiaries. University administrators are major stakeholders whose involvement is that guidance and counselling services should be successful. They are therefore better placed to give the relevant information needed on the effectiveness of guidance counsellors' activities as regards their services in the State Universities. The breakdown of the target population can be seen on the tables below.

Table 2: Distribution of students' population by universities

Universities	Population		Total
	Male	female	
University of Bamenda	7844	7591	15435
University of yaounde II	3796	3385	7181
University of Buea	2234	1903	4137
University of Douala	13874	12879	26753
Total	27748	25758	53506

Source: University of Bamenda, Yaounde II, Buea and Douala.

Table 3: Distribution of Guidance Counsellors by Universities.

Universities	Population		Total
	Male	Female	
University of Bamenda	7	3	10
University of Yaounde II	6	4	10
University of Buea	3	2	5
University of Douala	5	7	12
Total	20	17	37

Source: University of Bamenda, Yaounde II, Buea and Douala.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Simple random sampling was used to sample the two francophone universities. To do this, the names of all the francophone universities were written on pieces of paper, folded and mixed in a cup and two universities were then drawn. The two francophone universities were universities of Douala and Yaounde II. For the Anglophone universities, the two state universities were involved.

Administrators

Twenty seven (27) administrators (the Dean, vice Dean, Director, Deputy Director or Head of department) were targeted for convenient sampling from twenty seven Faculties/ schools from the four selected Universities. That is to say any administrator that was available and willing to accept us was used in the study.

Guidance Counsellors

There were 37 Guidance counsellors in the four selected universities but only 26 were effectively involved in the study, 6 refused for personal reasons and 5 were absent from work.

Students

Students were sampled conveniently, that is, the researcher went to the universities and visited all the faculties and departments and whenever a student was available, he or she was included in the study provided he or she was a third year student. The number of students was proportionately distributed based on the population of the third year students of the respective universities.

Sample size

Sample size was calculated using sample calculation for one proportion with the support of EpiInfo 6.04d (CDC, 2001) as explained by Nana (2012).

$$n = \frac{NZ^2P(1-P)}{d^2(N-1)+Z^2P(1-P)}$$

Where N=total population, Z= Z value corresponding to the confidence level, d= absolute precision, P=expected proportion in the population, n effective=n*design effect.

The prospected prevalence will be 50% for an optimal sample size. The precision will be 5%, a design effect (marginal error) of 1.5 that is greater than 1, given that we are applying convenience sampling for the selection of students and not simple random sampling. By increasing the design effect, we increase the sample size and so far the variability of the sample.

For a total students population, of 53506, the sample size at 95% CI estimated as explained above is 577. This sample size is shared to the school proportionately to their population.

Table 5: Distribution of sample of third year students by Universities

Universities	Sample		
	Male	Female	Total
University of Bamenda	88	85	173
University of Yaounde II	53	49	102
University of Buea	51	50	101
University of Douala	98	103	201
Total	290	287	577

Source: University of Buea, University of Douala, University of Yaounde II, University of Bamenda.

Table 6: Sample flow table

Specification	Expected	Effectively sampled	Coverage rate
Students	577	577	100%
Guidance counsellors	37	26	70.3%
Administrators	27	21	77.77%

The overall coverage was perfect for students and satisfactory for administrators and guidance counsellors with a return rate of 77.77% and 70.3% respectively.

Instrument and Measurement

Instruments are what the researcher uses to collect information for any investigation. The instruments used for this study included students' questionnaire, guidance counsellors' questionnaire and an interview guide for university administrators. The items for the instruments were adapted from the roles that GCs are expected to carry out and from literature reviews. The questionnaires were self-administered.

Validity and reliability

Validity as a concept is the ability to produce findings that are in agreement with theoretical or conceptual values (Amin, 2005). Validity can therefore be referred to as the accuracy of an instrument in measuring what the researcher intends to measure. Validity goes with reliability. Reliability is the degree of consistency that the

instrument(s) show(s) (Amin, 2005). The research instruments underwent content, construct and face validity. As for content and construct validity, they were validated by supervisor, the statistician and a guidance counsellor not involved in the study based on the relevance, adequacy and comprehensiveness of the items of the tests.

Pilot study

The data collection instruments were trial-tested in a University not involved in the study. It was an opportunity to check for face validity and reliability. It also helped to perfect the instruments by testing them, eliminating ambiguous items, anticipating and amending difficulties regarding the study and establishing feasibility of the study. The instruments were administered to 30 students, 4 Guidance Counsellors and 5 University Administrators. The internal consistency was not violated for any of the conceptual components with Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient ranging from 0.507 to 0.956. Generally above 0.5, Alpha is considered satisfactory (Nana, 2018).

Table 7: Reliability analysis for the pre-testing of research instrument

Conceptual components	Cronbach's Alpha	Ncases	Nitem
Guidance counsellor competence	0.945	30	15
Human resources	0.762	30	4

As for the final study, the internal consistency assumption was not violated for any of the conceptual components as in all instances; Alpha was greater than 0.05. The results of the reliability tests showed that the instruments were highly reliable, and to the other sense, that the questions were well understood and answered objectively.

Table 8: Reliability Analysis for the Study

Conceptual components	Cronbach's Alpha	Variance	Ncases	Nitens
People involvement in the planning of guidance and counselling services	0.872	0.00	125	4
Areas giving attention to during guidance and counselling services	0.909	0.13	118	9
Assessment of students needs	0.630	0.04	44	4
Techniques used in assessing students' needs	0.834	0.08	51	7
People involvement in the evaluation of guidance and counselling services	0.388	0.161	34	4
Handling of issues when evaluating guidance and counselling service	0.908	0.16	29	7
Techniques used in evaluating the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services	0.912	0.08	53	10
Provision of guidance and counselling services	0.891	0.12	324	9
Level of satisfaction with guidance and counselling services	0.885	0.13	563	9
Guidance counsellors competences	0.946	0.15	375	14
Human resources	0.732	0.56	438	4
Financial resources	0.896	0.00	507	3
Material and physical facilities	0.958	0.01	561	11
Peer counselling	0.905	0.11	20	7

Data management and analysis

All survey questionnaires were entered into a pre-designed EpiData Version 3.1 (EpiData Association, Odense Denmark, 2008) database which had in-built consistency and validation checks. Further, consistency data range and validation checks were also performed in SPSS version 21.0 (IBM Inc., 2012) to identify invalid codes. They were now analyzed descriptively and inferentially using SPSS 21.0. As for the textual data (qualitative data), they were transcribed verbatim their abstraction was reduced following the process of thematic analysis whereby concepts or ideas were grouped under umbrella terms or key words.

Ethical Considerations

Several researchers have articulated the need to address ethical issues in conducting research in education (Amin, 2005; Johnson and Turner, 2003). It is therefore ethical that this researcher ensures that the research is

conducted in a way that is in the best interest of the respondents. Ethical issues concern aspects such as identification, informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation. It is argued that if such issues are addressed adequately, it increases the chances of getting honest responses from respondents and consequently more reliable data. In this study, ethical considerations pervaded each phase of data collection.

Findings

Socio-demographic characteristics

Administrators as well were sampled from the four sampled universities namely University of Buea 28.6%(6), University of Bamenda 38.1% (8), University of Douala 23.8% (5) and University of Yaounde II 9.5% (2). They were from 19 different faculties.

Table 10: Description of institution for administrators

Institutions	University of Buea	6	28.6
	University of Bamenda	8	38.1
	University of Douala	5	23.8
	University of yaounde II	2	9.5
Faculties	Arts	2	9.5
	Science	3	14.3
	SMS	1	4.8
	HICM	1	4.8
	FSJP	2	9.5
	COLTEC	2	9.5
	Education	2	9.5
	FSEGA	1	4.8
	ENSET/ HTTTC	3	14.3
	ENS/ HTTC	1	4.8
	Faculty of Engineering	1	4.8

Age

The mode age was 46-55 years with proportion of 42.9% (9), followed by 36-45 years with a proportion of 33.3% (7) while the least represented was 56 years and above with proportion of 28.6% (6).

Highest certificate

Most of the administrators had PhD with proportion of 90.5% (19) as against 9.5% (2) for those who had masters.

Specialties

Administrators were of 20 different specialties.

Posts of responsibility

Among the administrators, 80.95% (17) were heads of department and 19.5% (4) were vice deans.

Academic ranks

They were 12(57.14%) lecturers,8(38.1%) associate professors and 1(4.8%) professor.

Gender

Administrators were dominantly male with a proportion of 86.0% (18) as against 14.0% (3) for the female.

Sample description for administrators

Table 11: Personal information of administrators

Indicators	Categories	N	%
Age	36-45	7	33.3
	46-55	9	42.9
	56 and above	6	28.6
Highest certificate	PhD	19	90.5
	Masters	2	9.5
Specialty	Literature	2	9.5
	Petroleum geology	1	4.8
	Anthropology	1	4.8

	Corporate financing	1	4.8
	Private law	1	4.8
	Political and economic history	1	4.8
	Political science	2	9.5
	Creation and management of tourism	1	4.8
	Crop production	1	4.8
	Agric. Financing	1	4.8
	Biologiemoleculaire et cellulaire	1	4.8
	Electro technique	1	4.8
	M Ed in counselling	1	4.8
	Marketing	1	4.8
	Geotechnical Engineering	1	4.8
	Applied Zoology	1	4.8
	Electronics	1	4.8
	Special Education	1	4.8
	Fisheries and hydrology	1	4.8
	Agric and Vet Med	1	4.8
Current post of responsibility	Head of department	17	81.0
	Vice Dean	5	23.8
Rank	Lecturer	12	57.1
	Associate professor	8	38.1
	Professor	1	4.8

Sample Description for Guidance Counsellors

Table 12: Sample description for guidance counsellors

Background indicators	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	14	53.8
	Female	12	46.2
Highest academic qualification	Bachelor degree	18	69.2
	Masters	6	23.1
	PhD	2	7.7
Highest professional qualification	DIPCO	22	84.6
	DIPCO II	4	15.4
University	Douala	7	26.9
	Buea	5	19.2
	Bamenda	7	26.9
	Yaounde II	7	26.9

N=26

Guidance counsellors were sampled from the University of Buea 19.2% (5), University of Bamenda 26.9% (7), University of Douala 26.9% (7) and then University of Yaounde II 26.9% (7)

Gender

Though the majority of guidance counsellors were male with proportion of 53.8% (14), this proportion was not too far from the 46.2% (12) of the female.

Highest academic qualifications

As far as highest qualification for guidance counsellors was concerned, the mode was Bachelor degree with a proportion of 69.2% (18) followed by master's degree 23.1% (6) and the least represented was PhD with a proportion of 7.7% (2). All of them had DIPCO.

Sample Description for Students

Gender

The ages of the students were distributed as follows: 1.7% (10) were aged 16-17 years, 19.8% (114) 18-20 years and 78.5% (453) were aged 20 years and above.

Level

Only third year students were sampled for the study

University

Students were sampled from four different universities among which were university of Buea with a proportion of 17.5% (101), University of Bamenda 30.0% (173), University of Douala 34.8% (201) and University of Yaounde II 17.7% (102) and from 89 different departments (appendix).

Duration of schooling

The average duration of stay in the institution was 3.3 years (Median=3.00; Min=3; Max=5).

Table 13: Sample description

Background indicator	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	239	41.4
	Female	338	58.6
Age	16-17	10	1.7
	18-20	114	19.8
	20+	453	78.5
Level	300/400 (third year)	557	100
University	University of Buea	101	17.5
	University of Bamenda	173	30.0
	University of Douala	201	34.8
	University of Yaounde II	102	17.7
Duration of schooling in the institution	Mean=3.3; Median=3.00; Min=3; Max=5		

N=577

Research Question: What is the relationship between guidance counsellors' competencies and skills and the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in Cameroon State Universities?

Guidance Counsellors' Competences**Guidance counsellors' perspective**

All the guidance counsellors agreed that guidance counsellors' competences are important.

Table29: Guidance counsellors' characterization of their activities

Skills and competencies	Often	Seldom	Never	N
Mobilizing stakeholders to provide inputs, feedbacks and suggestions for improved service delivery	15.4%(4)	57.7%(15)	26.9%(7)	26
Providing data that serve as a basis to solve students' problems	15.4%(4)	34.6%(9)	50.0%(13)	26
Publicizing, promoting and selling guidance services to all concerned.	11.5%(3)	38.5%(10)	50.0%(13)	26
Effectively organizing and implementing guidance and counselling services.	7.7%(2)	50.0%(13)	42.3%(11)	26
Practicing balanced allocation of time between services	3.8%(1)	57.7%(15)	38.5%(10)	26
Defining strategies to establish and develop guidance services	7.7%(2)	30.8%(8)	61.5%(16)	26
Maintaining current information on study and job opportunities	15.4%(4)	65.4%(17)	19.2%(5)	26
Appropriate training in psychological assessment, theories of personality, human development and learning theories	7.7%(2)	19.2%(5)	73.1%(19)	26
Personal attributes that facilitate effective interpersonal relationships and enhance the ability to communicate with a wide range of students.	7.7%(2)	19.2%(5)	73.1%(19)	26
Identifying, analysing and providing appropriate solutions to students' problems	7.7%(2)	15.4%(4)	76.9%(20)	26
Engaging in research and networking to improve on service delivery	3.8%(1)	19.2%(5)	76.9%(20)	26
Providing parental guidance and participating as mentors and advisors to students	3.8%(1)	26.9%(7)	69.2%(18)	26
Identifying community resources that can be used for referrals	3.8%(1)	23.1%(6)	73.1%(19)	26
Relating well with students and other stakeholders	3.8%(1)	69.2%(18)	26.9%(7)	26

Guidance counsellors generally perceived that they were not often exercising the activities in any of the appraisal indicators. The highest graded indicators were mobilizing stakeholders to provide inputs, feedbacks and suggestions for improved service delivery, providing data that serve as a basis to solve students' problems and maintaining current information on study and job opportunities with proportion of 15.4% (4) for those who agreed they were often performed.

Students' perspective

All the students acknowledged that guidance counsellors' competences are important for the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services. From students' perspective, guidance counsellors were not often in carrying out the activities in any of the appraisal indicators as the highest graded were mobilizing stakeholders to provide inputs, feedbacks and suggestions for improved service delivery, providing data that serve as a basis to solve students' problems and maintaining current information on study and job opportunities with proportion of 35.8% (19) for those who agreed they were often performed and the rest indicators had weights ranging from 0% to 11.3 (table 30)

Table30: Students' perception of the extent to which guidance counsellors demonstrate their skills and competences in providing their services

Skills and competencies	Often	Seldom	Never	N
Mobilizing stakeholders to provide inputs, feedbacks and suggestions for improved service delivery	35.8% (19)	24.5% (13)	39.6% (21)	53
Providing data that serve as a basis to solve students' problems	1.9% (1)	52.8% (28)	45.3% (24)	53
Publicizing, promoting and selling guidance services to all concerned.	0.0% (0)	50.9% (27)	49.1% (26)	53
Effectively organizing and implementing guidance and counselling services.	0.0% (0)	52.8% (28)	47.2% (25)	53
Practicing balanced allocation of time between services	0.0% (0)	49.1% (26)	50.9% (27)	53
Defining strategies to establish and develop guidance services	0.0% (0)	54.7% (29)	45.3% (24)	53
Maintaining current information on study and job opportunities	0.0% (0)	50.9% (27)	48.1% (26)	53
Appropriate training in psychological assessment, theories of personality, human development and learning theories	0.0% (0)	50.9% (27)	49.1% (26)	53
Personal attribute that facilitate effective interpersonal relationships and enhance the ability to communicate with a wide range of students.	11.3% (6)	50.9% (27)	37.7% (20)	53
Identifying, analyzing and providing appropriate solutions to students' problems	11.3% (6)	47.2% (25)	41.5% (22)	53
Engaging in research and networking to improve on service delivery	0.0% (0)	49.1% (26)	50.9% (27)	53
Providing parental guidance and participating as mentors and advisors to students	0.0% (0)	49.1% (26)	50.9% (27)	53
Identifying community resources that can be used for referrals	0.0% (0)	49.1% (26)	50.9% (27)	53
Relating well with students and other stakeholders	0.0% (0)	49.1% (26)	50.9% (27)	53

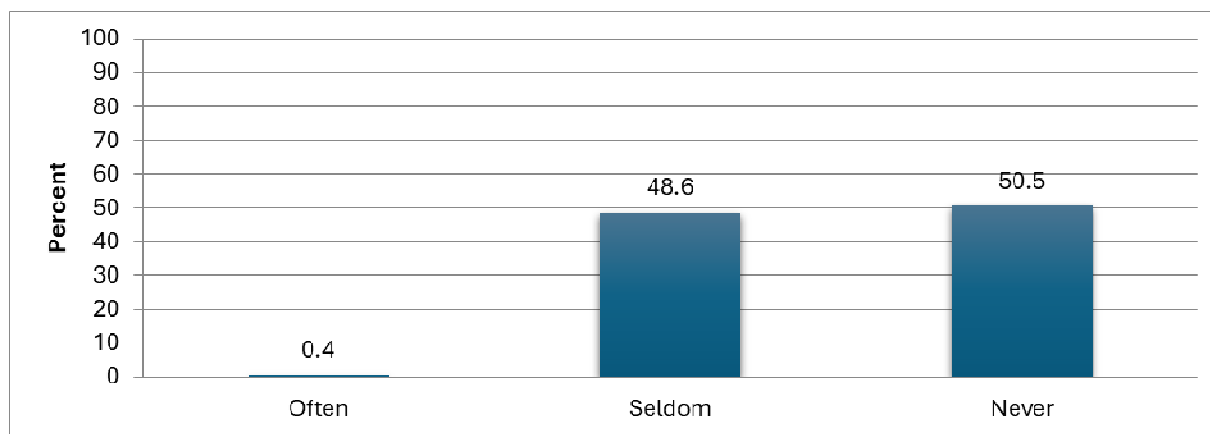


Figure 12: Students’ perception of the extent to which guidance counsellors in their institution demonstrate their skills and competences

Students generally perceived that guidance counsellors in their institution demonstrate their skills and competences seldom with a proportion of 48.6% and never 50.5%.

Administrators’ perspective

Knowledge of and skills in guidance and counselling services was highly emphasized by administrators as very important for counsellors to portray in their profession (*Very important because without competences they can do nothing* ‘*They bring success because through these, awareness is increased, and the level of usage of the services also rises*’ ‘*They are important because they can only do all the above if they are well trained to acquire these skills &competences*’).

Table 31: Thematic analysis depicting the importance of guidance counsellor’s competencies in publicizing, mobilizing, organizing and implementing guidance counselling services

Code	Code description	Groundings	Quotations
Knowledge of and skills in guidance and counselling services	Skills, competences & knowledge are pre requisites to success	14	‘Very important because without competences they can do nothing’ ‘They bring success because through these, awareness is increased, and the level of usage of the services also rises’ ‘They are important because they can only do all the above if they are well trained to acquire these skills &competences’ ‘Their skills and competences are important because professional counsellors cannot succeed without these’ ‘Without these they cannot effectively do what they are expected to do’ ‘Tres important parce que c’est un passage oblige pour la reussiteprofessionelle’
Importance without comments or explanations	It was generally accepted that skills & competences are very important in carrying out all the above without further explanations	5	‘Very important’ ‘Tres important’
Inability to comment for lack of observation	A few administrators indicated that their comments will be subjective since they have not seen counsellors at work with students	2	‘I cannot assess their competences since I have not seen them working with students’ ‘Je ne peux pas reellement me prononcersurces points pour absence d’observation

Despite the fact that majority of administrators and lecturers do not play their roles at acceptable level (*Le contact n'existe pas entre les deux* 'Nothing' 'No idea' 'Aucune' 'Rien'), others to some extent play their roles during orientation and registration (*'Cooperate with them, involve them during registration and orientations' Administrators involve counsellors during registration and orientations'*), referral (*'Nothing so far that I know apart from telling students about guidance counsellors and referring students to them' 'I refer students to them during lectures'*) and lending administrative support (*Administrators are ready to listen and carry out necessary innovations'*).

Table 32: Thematic analysis depicting the roles administrators and lecturers play in organizing and implementing guidance counselling services

Code	Code description	Groundings	Quotations
No role	Administrators indicated that they play no role in organizing & implementing guidance & counselling services	9	'Le contact n'existe pas entre les deux' 'Nothing' 'No idea' 'Aucune' 'Rien'
Referral role	Administrators indicated that together with lecturers they refer students to guidance counsellors	4	'Nothing so far that I know apart from telling students about guidance counsellors and referring students to them' 'I refer students to them during lectures' ;'Lecturers are encouraged to send students who need psychological help to counsellors'
Orientations and &Registration	Administrators indicated that they really work together with counsellors during registration and orientations	6	'Cooperate with them, involve them during registration and orientations' Administrators involve counsellors during registration and orientations' 'Administrators are expected to be involved in organizing and implementing guidance and counselling services especially registration and orientations'
Lending administrative support	It was indicated that administrators cooperate with and support guidance counsellors in organizing and implementing guidance and counselling programs	2	'They are ready to listen and carry out necessary innovations'

Contrasting students and guidance counsellors perspectives

Both the students and guidance counsellors acknowledged that guidance counsellors' competences are important for the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services.

From students' perspective, guidance counsellors were not frequently exercising their activities in any of the appraisal indicators as the highest graded was mobilizing stakeholders to provide inputs, feedbacks and suggestions for improved service delivery, providing data that serve as a basis to solve students' problems and maintaining current information on study and job opportunities with proportion of 35.8% (19) for those who agreed they were often performed and the rest indicators had weight ranging from 0% to 11.3. This trend was not too far from that of the guidance counsellors; in fact, Guidance counsellors generally perceived that they were not frequent in any of the appraisal indicators as the highest graded were mobilizing stakeholders to provide inputs, feedbacks and suggestions for improved service delivery, providing data that serve as a basis to solve students' problems and maintaining current information on study and job opportunities with proportion of 15.4% (4) for those who agreed they were often performed.

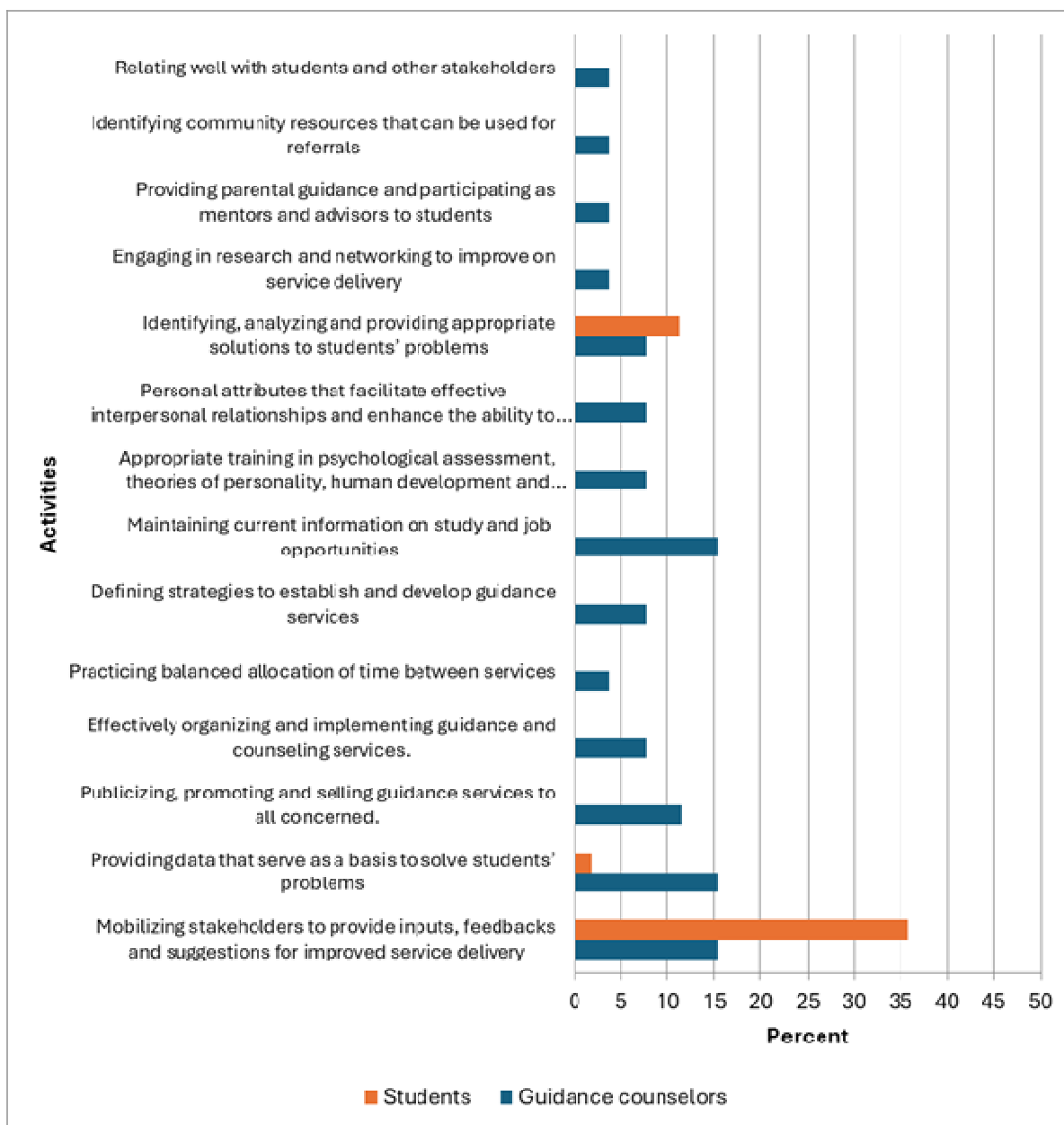


Figure 13: Comparing guidance counsellors and students' characterization of guidance counsellor's activities.

Discussion

The main item of interest here were to find out how respondents perceive guidance counsellors' competencies and skills in handling key issues like to effectively organize and implement guidance and counselling services etc.

All respondents generally agreed that guidance counsellors' competencies and skills are important for effective GCSs.

The findings emerging from this study dimension revealed that students, administrators and guidance counsellors themselves all perceived that guidance counsellors were not frequently exercising their competences and skills in any of the appraisal indicators. Both the counsellors and students negatively viewed the frequency of the extent to

which guidance counsellors demonstrated their skills and competencies to effectively provide GCSs to students. The frequency to which GCSs often demonstrate their skills and competencies for effective services were as low as 4.3% and 8.22% for students and counsellors respectively. Other important dimensions that are worth noting were those that had to do with GCs, personal stakeholders. The finding emerging from this study revealed that guidance counsellors seldom or never demonstrate their competencies and skills in these dimensions. This finding contradicts Gibson (2008), who upheld that the effectiveness of GCSs will depend more on the relationship existing between students and counsellors themselves than the methods they choose and how well they perform within the method they employ. This view is further supported by Coleman

(2009) and Gysbers (2006) who maintain that the primary responsibility of guidance counsellors is to respect the integrity and promote the welfare of students as well as maintain confidentiality and privacy of students. This means that the qualities that guidance counsellors possess are important. This will cause students to gain their confidence and trust and to believe in them. The inability of the counsellors to do this might also be a contributing factor for the low level of usage of guidance and counselling services in Cameroon State Universities.

The low perceptions on the competencies and skills of guidance counsellors in organizing and implementing effective GCSs could also be attributed to a number of workplace conditions/challenges as mentioned by guidance counsellors themselves and confirmed by some administrators.

GCs expressed the need for the following to make their work effective; a complete guidance and counselling centre with conducive offices, more counsellors, purchase or importation of psychological tests, budgetary allocation for guidance and counselling services, career profile for GCs, same allowances to counsellors as those given to lecturers, acceptance and recognition of the importance of guidance and counselling in the academic lives of students in the university milieu, collaboration, support and involvement of lecturers and administrators etc.

Another problem that GCs mentioned is that they are forced by some lecturers to accept inferiority complex because they are looked low on. Some administrators indicated during an interview concerning support for and involvement in GCSs, that they involved GCs in orientations and registration. The big question is during orientation who should involve who? Who is the expert in orientation? These are just some few questions that show how difficult it is for counsellors in Cameroon state universities to really exercise their skills and competences to the fullest not to talk of effectively organizing and implementing guidance and counselling programs.

The implication here is that there is therefore an urgent need for a blue print from the Ministry of Higher Education to provide a common ground on how stakeholders should work together as a team though spelling out their notes.

This falls in line with the research literature. Gysbers and Henderson (2001) cautioned that though GCs are the main providers of GCSs, the cooperation and continuing support of teachers, administrators and parents are necessary for its successful implementations.

Conclusion

The main purpose for which guidance counselling was instituted in state universities was to help students to solve their numerous problems (social personal, vocational, educational and psychological). If it was instituted to help students, then students must take advantage of that.

Based on the findings of the study it can be concluded that students have not been sufficiently sensitized on the importance of GCSs. This is why out of 577 students sampled for the study, only 53 of them benefited from GCSs. Furthermore, as many as 290 (50.3%) out of 577 students acknowledged that they were not aware of the existence of GCSs in their institutions.

It can also be concluded that since students are not actually taking advantage of these services, GCSs in Cameroon state universities are largely ineffective. Guidance and counselling services are most effective when students voluntarily seek them (Gibson, 2008).

It can be further concluded based on the findings of this study that, the absence of counselling centers, conducive offices and other career motivations for GCs, all work against GCs competencies. This eventually has negative effects on the effectiveness of GCSs in Cameroon state universities.

From the findings, it can also be concluded that there is high need for more qualified GCs to be posted to state universities. As the universities are expanding, the counsellor – student ratio is also leaping.

Findings show that guidance counsellor either seldom or very seldom go to students.

These findings have revealed challenges that can be converted into opportunities. This can be done implementing the recommendations given here under

Guidance counsellors should make themselves known to students instead of waiting only for students to come to them.

Recommendations

The purpose of introducing GCSs in the university system was to increase students' academic achievement by helping students develop positive self – concept, make wise selection of courses and careers, improve their behavioural patterns, proper adaptation to university life, acquire job searching techniques, effective study habits, effective goals setting and time management etc. Above all, the services should assist students to understand themselves, their situation, their environment, discover their potentials and opportunities in life and learn how best to effectively utilize their assets as

well as minimize their weaknesses to live a maximum productive life (Nwachuku, 2007).

The findings of this study revealed that out of the 577 students sampled for the study, slightly below half of this number acknowledged that they were aware of the existence of GCSs in their institutions and only 53 students out of the sampled number acknowledged they have ever benefited from GCSs in their institutions. It is clear that students are not making use of these services because they are not aware of their importance in their education. The effectiveness of GCSs is affected by how publicized they are and the role guidance counsellors play in sensitizing students and other stakeholders about their services. Therefore the low level of usage of these services by students may not be unconnected with the challenges or hindering factors which guidance counsellors said they are faced with in discharging their duties. These challenges were also confirmed by the administrators. All these findings emerged from the study. Based on these, the following recommendations are made:

- Massive and consistent sensitisation by all stakeholders through every available means to boost awareness of the importance of GCSs in the education of students.
- An equipped modern counselling centre could be constructed in each State university headed by an expert who could be a holder of a terminal degree in counselling. Such a person could have the rank of a director in the central administration and coordinate and oversee the activities of all the guidance counsellors in the university.
- The presently high student-counsellor ratio in all the State universities might be cut down by training and deploying more counsellors. There could be at least a counsellor in every department.
- GCs in State universities could be accorded a career profile. They could also be given allowances equivalent to that of the rank of university lecturers.
- Guidance and counselling in each State university could have its own budgetary allocation to run its activities and for which it is accountable.
- GCs might be given opportunities to undergo more training in guidance and counselling of students especially at tertiary level. This will help them improve on their competences and skills.
- GCs could have regular meetings with students to identify their needs.

- GCs could have constant planning and evaluation of GCs to improve on service delivery.
- Peer counselling could be implemented in the State universities to reduce work load on guidance counsellors and also to help them reach a wider audience.

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