Original Research Article

CAREER GUIDANCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS' CAREER CHOICES: THE CASE OF PUBLIC SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE AGONA EAST DISTRICT OF CENTRAL REGION, GHANA

ABSTRACT

As individual goes through the Senior High School education, he/she encounters, situations which require him/her to take appropriate educational, vocational and social decisions. Therefore, the need for guidance and counselling services in learning institutions cannot be overstated. Research shows that young people think about careers within the context of life more than qualifications and training. This study explored the knowledge of students about career counselling and how career guidance benefited Senior High School students in the Agona East district. Descriptive survey method using the qualitative approach was adopted, together with purposive and convenience sampling techniques. The data gathered were analysed using two main themes consisting of several sub-themes. The study recommended that schools able to assist students to identify their interests and make them aware of importance of academic qualification in career selection. The study further recommends to policy makers that the government of Ghana resource Guidance and Counselling programmes in the SHSs. It emerged from the study that for each occupation, different interests, abilities, personality traits and professional values are required. The study also revealed that career guidance service help students to link what they learned to their interests, capacities, aspirations, and matching it about the existing opportunities.

Key Words: Career Choice, Career Guidance, Career Services, Counselling

1. Introduction

Guidance and Counselling started in the period between 1900-1909 in the United States of America where Frank Parson, called the "father of guidance" founded the Boston's Bureau in 1908 (Essuman, 1999) (1). The work of Frank Parson, Clifford Beers, Jesse Davis, Eli Weaver, and a host of other pioneers created momentum for the development of a school counseling profession (Essuman, 1999) (1). According to Essuman (2001) (2), serious work in establishing guidance and counseling in schools began in the late 1960s when the CRDU (Curriculum Research Development Unit) was instituted to cater for programmes in school welfare services, education for the handicapped, and guidance and counselling. In 1975, the Ghana Education Service (GES) organized its first guidance and counselling course in 1975 for 37 secondary school tutors and officers from regional directorates of the GES at the University of Cape Coast. Between 1976 and 1986, the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, in conjunction with the GES, trained 296 Guidance and Counselling coordinators. In August 1979 and March 1984, the GES organized national conferences for guidance

coordinators leading to the formation of the Ghana Association of Guidance coordinators (Essuman, 1999) (1).

2. Literature Review

As individual goes through the Senior High School level of education, he/she encounters, at times, situations which require him/her to take correct and appropriate educational, vocational and social decisions. Given that learners spend more time in learning institution than at their homes, it is vital that Schools have well established and maintained guidance and counselling departments (Owino, 2005) (3). Therefore, the need for guidance and counselling services in all learning institutions cannot be overstated. Globally, it is evident that learners at all levels of learning have needs that call for guidance and counselling services, which if unattended could lead to numerous disciplinary issues and wastage, (Owino, 2005) (3). Counselling in the educational system should aim at helping the human being; men and women alike, to develop their capacities to the fullest which include intellectual, social, physical and capacities (Essuman, 1999) (1).

Career Guidance offers an important connection between education and the labour market. Career Guidance is defined as, "services and activities proposed to assist individuals, of any age and at any point through their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices, and also to manage their careers", (Mariam & Tinatin, 2017) (4). This definition comprises making information about the labour market available and about educational and employment openings more available by organising it, systematizing it and having it accessible when and where people need it. It also comprises supporting people to reflect on their objectives, interests, competencies, personal attributes, qualifications and capabilities and to match these with available training and employment opportunities (Mariam & Tinatin, 2017) (4). It appears Career Guidance within Senior High Schools (SHS) has historically been given low priority and funding when compared to other curriculum areas (Mariam & Tinatin, 2017) (4). Often there is

Comment [X1]: Before this review, it is necessary for the reader to know what exactly the problem was that led to the research. The problem statement and the argument leading up to that statement are lacking so far.

Comment [X2]: Consider replacing this Literature Review with a Conceptual and Theoretical Framework. The literature review is the work behind such a Theoretical Framework.

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only one Counsellor in a Senior High School (SHS) who is tasked with delivering school-wide and timely careers guidance to all year levels. Traditionally the school Counsellor has moved from a classroom teaching role into careers education with no specific training or background. The Ministry of Education mandated compulsory Guidance and Counselling for all students from Basic through secondary to tertiary level (Ansah, 2015) (5).

Research has shown that young people think about careers within the context of life more broadly than qualifications and training, considering lifestyle, relationships, living arrangements, identity and personal circumstance, yet these things are not well covered in current careers education guidelines (Levin, 2008) (6).

In the normal school structure, the eventual aim of teaching, and Guidance and Counselling are to formulate and direct students into a healthier future. Though Guidance and Counseling might not be a planned activity like teaching, Ansah (2015) (5) states that it carries an educational function. This means its place in the school structure is no less significant. The failure to excellently deliver guidance services has mostly led to incorrect career path decisions that have unpleasantly affected the victims and Ghana at large. Absence of interest in a selected field, emotive depression, low productivity at work, and absence of concentration in life are some of the costs of bad career decisions that were made by students (Fox & Butler, 2007) (7). The need to make the best use of the profits of school-based facilities like guidance and counselling therefore, becomes important. However, convincing students to talk to counsellors remains impractical given the changing insights students to hold about counsellors which deter the normal human discussion process among both parties (Fox & Butler, 2007) (7). Short of such a discussion, good career decisions, which are a product of this conversational method, will not be likely. And since counsellors hold great secrets and information in stock, these resources are misplaced continually to the students.

> **Comment [X3]:** Do you mean in Ghana, or worldwide?

> **Comment [X4]:** Ghanaian?

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This study was inspired by our work as lecturers of Guidance and Counselling who frequently visit SHSs that our students under training choose and go for their Counselling Practicum with; and recognizing how poorly controlled the profession is and what little importance various school boards who oversee the school and Head Teachers who run the day-to-day operation of the schools attach to this vital curriculum area, causing huge changes in what is being brought to students across SHSs in Ghana. This research also examined whether current career guidance being brought to SHS students is effective, appropriate and applicable to students' lives today.

It appears a little empirical study have been conducted to find out the Career Guidance in students' career choice in Ghana. It is this gap in knowledge that has prompted this study.

Based on the arguments raised, the following questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the knowledge of students about career counselling?
2. How has career guidance benefited Senior High School students in the Agona East district?

3. Methodology

The descriptive survey method using the qualitative approach was adopted for the study. According to Creswell (2005) (8) qualitative research design is a systematic subjective approach used to define life experiences and give them meaning. To Creswell, qualitative research design is used to gain insight; and explore the depth, richness, and complexity inherent in the phenomenon.

Qualitative research is a holistic approach that involves discovery. Qualitative research is also described as an unfolding model that occurs in a natural setting that enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences (Creswell, 2005) (8). One identifier of a qualitative research is the social phenomenon being investigated from the participant's viewpoint. There are different

Comment [X6]: Ideally, a study such as this should be imbedded in some or other deeper and wider theory, such as social action theory or cultural-historical activity theory. This helps the theory to provide depth of understanding to the research.

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types of research designs that use qualitative research techniques to frame the research approach. As a result, the different techniques have a dramatic effect on the research strategies explored.

Qualitative research focuses on understandings and meanings through verbal narratives, observation and artefacts (Adentwi&Amartei, 2009) (9). The study therefore, sought to describethe role of Career Guidance for students in senior high schools and its implications for students' career choices.

The population of the study comprised Presbyterian Senior High School at Agona Nsaba and Kwanyako Senior High Technical School at Agona Kwanyako. The population for the study consisted of all SHS students, all SHS school counsellors in the Agona East District.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select Presbyterian Senior High School and Kwanyako Senior High/Technical School for the study. The schools were used because they were the only SHSs in the district. Twelve students from the schools were sampled using Convenience sampling method. Based on this, seven students were sampled from each of the schools. Purposive sampling method was also used to select the school counsellors because they were the only SHS counsellors in the selected schools. In all, there were fifteen (15) participants (13 students and 2 school counsellors) for the study. This number was used due to the fact that qualitative studies do not focus on generalization (Creswell, 2005) (8). Two sets of interviews guides (one for students and the other for the school counsellors) were developed to gather data for the research. Face and content validity of the instruments were done by colleague lecturers in the Department of Psychology and Education, University of Education, Winneba.

Face-to-face interviews using a recording device was conducted for students and counsellors. The two schools were represented with alphabets 'A' (for Agona Nsaba Presbyterian Senior High School) and 'B' (for Agona Kwanyako Senior High/Technical School) while the student-participants were represented with numbers 1, 2, 3, up to 13. Five students were chosen from School 'A' and seven students from school 'B'. The two school counsellors were also interviewed. While the interview for the school Counsellor 'A' was

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done through a mobile phone call because of his absence from school for about two weeks due to ill-health, the interview for school Counsellor 'B' was done face-to-face.

As one of the researchers asked participants questions the two others also took down notes of the discussion between the interviewer and the interviewee. At the end of each interview, the interviewer played the recorded voice for the interviewee to be aware of what has been recorded.

4. Result AND DISCUSSIONS

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The thematic method of data analysis was employed. Thematic Analysis is an approach used to dealing with data that involves the creation and application of 'codes' to data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, &Snelgrove, 2016) (10).

The data gathered during the interview were analysed using two main themes which also consisted of several sub-themes. This was done after the researchers had studied the content of the responses in depth. Pseudonyms names were used to represent the research participants. A summary of the
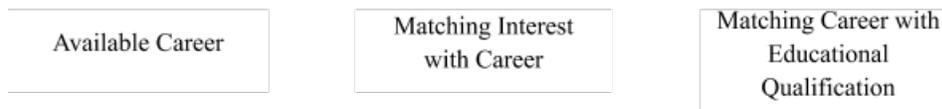
qualitative data is represented below:

4.1 Research question 1: What career information is disseminated to students in the Agona

East District?

Theme 1: Dissemination of Career information

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| Available Career | Matching Interest with Career | Matching Career with Educational Qualification |

4.1.1. Available Career

All of the student-participants provided similar meanings and definitions for the term "career". The student-participants also identified the types of careers as based on work environments. They

identified Realistic, Investigative,Artistic, Social, Enterprising,Conventional. This is in line with Holland's theory of 1959that emphasized an examination of the different aspects of person-environment fit. The school counsellor of school (Madam Joyce) 'A' said that she organises Career Guidance for the students in the form of teaching in the classroom situation like any other subject. She said that she tries to let the students identify the types of work environments that exist.

> **Comment [X12]:** This theory should have been discussed in some detail already in the Conceptual and Theoretical Framework. That would have given greater insight into what is being said here.

In School 'B', Mansah said:

> I now know that some people like to work with animals, tools, or machines. These people generally avoid social activities like teaching, healing, and informing others. Also, while others like to study and solve mathematics or science problems and avoid leading, selling, or persuading people, others like to lead and persuade people, and to sell things and ideas; and generally, avoid activities that need careful reflection and scientific, analytical thinking.

Another participant in the same School said:

> We discussed the types of people that we have; our education and job conditions of the various types of jobs. For instance, whether the job that I will do will promote me to the

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highest level of the institution or whether the job has some benefits for my family members to enjoy from. I had actually wanted to be a nurse because I know that their salary is good, but upon this rarer guidance sessions I have decided to be a teacher (Agyir).

4.1.2 Matching Interest with Career

John Holland states that, "Career choice is an expression of, or an extension of, personality into the world of work, followed by subsequent identification with specific occupational stereotypes (Osipow, 1998) (11). The data collected show that students' desire to take up certain jobs upon completion of school has urged them to tilt to the study of certain or particular programmes so that they can qualify to apply for the said jobs in the future. Ipiin, participant in School 'A' said:

> "I changed from Visual Arts to General Arts programme because I like to do things to help people - like, teaching, nursing, or giving first aid, providing information. I do not like using machines, tools, or animals while working. So, knowing that my interest is in the area of helping people, I studied to become the Social type of personality".

In his own words, the School Counsellor in School 'B' (Mr. Seshie) said:

> "Upon relating the various job types to the students, most of them applied to change their programmes of study. When I ask them why, they explained that they wished they had these pieces of information at the Junior High School level before choosing their various programmes. One of them even told me that he thought finishing SHS was the only problem. He said he did not know that one needed to know his interest and relate it to his future job".

Comment [X13]: Another reference to the relevant theory that should have been unpacked in some detail in the Conceptual and Theoretical Framework.

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4.1.3 Matching Career with Educational Qualification

It is possible to match the traits of persons with the trait requirements of occupations on a rational and actuarial basis. Klein & Weiner (1977) (12) puts it this way, "the closer the fit between a person's traits and the trait requirements of that person's occupation, the greater the likelihood for successful job performance and personal satisfaction". It emerged from the interviews that it is not only the interest and the availability of jobs that gives on a dream job. They explained that they are now aware that they need educational attainment to a certain degree to be able to pick up a particular job. Kofi from School 'B' corroborated this by saying:

> "I had all along dreamt of becoming a journalist. I did not know that I needed to read a particular course at SHS that will lead me to apply and go and Journalism at the Ghana Institute of Journalism and have at least a Diploma certificate that will lead me to get this job. Thank God I chose General Arts; and my electives are Government, Christian Religious Studies, Literature and French. During the orientation upon arrival here, we were taken through Career Guidance and lo and behold, my courses fell within those that can actually lead me to become the journalist that I wanted to be".
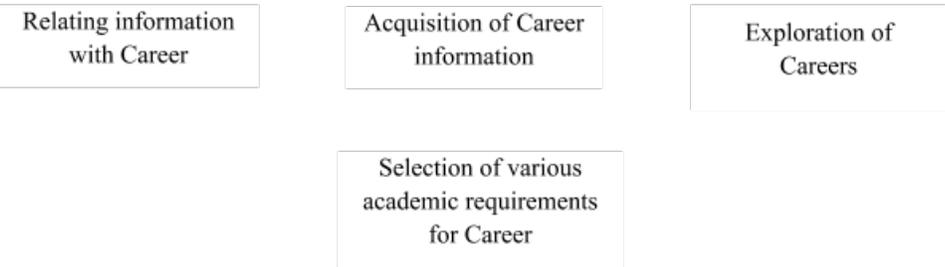
Nancy recounted the knowledge she gained from Career Guidance by narrating that she has now seen that a combination of recognition of one's self and gathering information on jobs and vocations is not complete. She explained that contains the matching of the information that the individual recognized about own interests, abilities and career values and the information she gathered on the jobs and occupations. For each occupation, different interests, abilities, personality traits and professional values are required. For the individual to make a healthy matching, it is necessary for the individual to have an interest and be fit into the career chosen so that when the educational qualification adds up, success will be accomplished.

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Comment [X14]: Language editing required throughout.

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4.2 Research question 2: How has Career Guidance benefited Senior High School students in the Agona East District?

Theme 2: Students' benefits from Career Guidance

Relating information with Career	Acquisition of Career information	Exploration of Careers

Selection of various academic requirements for Career

4.2.1 Relating information with Career

It emerged from the data that students are able to relate the information that they gained during Career Guidance sessions with the types of careers available and known to them. Agnes from school A said:

"Now I know that most people can be categorized as one of six types of careers. I also know that there are six kinds of environments; and people search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles. I know too that a person's behavior is determined by an interaction between his personality and the characteristics of his environment".

Mohammed also said Career Guidance has helped him to know more about how congruence of one's view of self with occupational preference.

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4.2.2 Selection of various academic requirements for Career

Career guidance service helps the individual to know the available educational and training options and the requirements for admission to assist him or her to select an appropriate field of study (Super, 1957) (13). This assertion by Donald Super was seen during the interviews. Akosua, participant in School 'A' said:

> "Skills, abilities and talents and how they may fit a particular career is considered when one is taking on a career. In this case, you need to educate yourself in a particular field; and also, up to a particular level before you are qualified for that career. He said that career profiles for specific jobs as well as identifying individual differences, matching individuals to occupations based on these differences are higher qualifications that the employer is looking for."

Madam Joyce who is the School Counsellor for school 'A' corroborated Akosua's narration by saying that the students are now fully aware of the various jobs in the field and the qualifications that they demand to offer jobs to employees.

4.2.3 Acquisition of Career information

With career information acquired, the students are able to link what they learned to their interests, capacities, aspirations, and matching it about the existing opportunities. They explained that they are able to think through and foresee their dream jobs coming to fulfill their dreams in the near future He said that the information they received during the Career Guidance session was so good and important to them. Mr. Seshie confirmed what the responded said by saying:

> "Career information should include relevant information about education and training opportunities, occupations and their characteristics and job demand. Similarly, career

Comment [X16]: This probably another theoretical insight that should have been discussed in the Conceptual and Theoretical Framework.

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information we gave our students covers career implications of educational decisions, and on the learning pathways that lead to particular career destinations. Once a while, you will see one or two of them (students) coming around my office to enquire and clarify issues that baffle them concerning their future careers".

4.2.4 Exploration of Careers

In School 'B', Madam Joyce (the School Counsellor) said that she realised that the population of the school is large, and since there is no assembly hall, she appealed for the teaching of Guidance and Counselling to be taught in the classroom. She said that she has used the opportunity to give the student adequate information on the various types of careers.

This was evidenced in the words of Adjoa (a participant from school A) who narrated that:

"Our School Counsellor taught us that there are six kinds of job types. These are Realistic type who likes to work with animals, tools, or machines and generally avoid social activities like teaching, healing, and informing others. The second one is the investigative type who likes to study and solve mathematics or science problems and usually will not like to lead or sell. The Artistic type of career will like to do creative activities like art, music, crafts, drama, dance, or creative writing and may avoid highly ordered or repetitive activities. Social type of careers like to do things to help people and sees themselves as helpful, friendly, and trustworthy. The enterprising type of career will see people who like to lead and persuade people, and to sell things and ideas and will avoid activities that require scientific and analytical thinking. The sixth type of career is the conventional type. This career type will see people who like to work with records, numbers, or machines in a set, orderly manner. The job does not like unstructured way of doing things".

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5. Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations for School Level

    i.   Schools should be able to assist students to identify their interests so that they will be able to select their careers without many difficulties.

    ii.   Schools should make students aware of how important academic qualification is for career selection.

5.2 Recommendations for Policy makers

    i.   The study recommends that the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education should resource Guidance and Counselling programmes in the SHSs to enable students realise their interests for career selection.

    ii.   Ghana Education Service should give more study leave quota to teachers who want to pursue Guidance and Counselling in higher education so as to boost the number of School Counsellors.

iii. Also, it is recommended that the Ghana Education Service should introduce Guidance and Counselling at the basic school level to help shape pupils from that level before they get to the Senior High School level.

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> **Comment [X17]:** Consider inserting a final conclusion, based on the key insight that flowed from the study.

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