



# **Exploring Students' Assessment of Psychological Services in Technical Universities in Ghana for Improved Quality Education**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author SNA designed the study, put together first draft of the manuscript and the protocol. Author IKB performed the statistical analysis, managed the discussion section. Author GMK managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The importance of psychological services in tertiary institutions cannot be overemphasized. These services are provided in many forms to mitigate the impacts of difficulties faced by students such as relationship problems, addictions and substance abuse, depression, anxiety, stress and self-esteem issues; critical incident and trauma responses, seminars and training are organised for students to arm them against things that impact negatively on their stay on campus. Using a sample drawn from Technical Universities in Ghana, the paper investigated the availability of psychological services, logistics that enhance service delivery, and the modes of assessing these services. The study revealed that deficiencies exist regarding availability and efficiency of these psychological services. The results further showed that many students were not aware of the existence of the Counseling

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services. The paper recommends the need to start and intensify awareness campaigns of Counseling and psychological services and encourage students to seek counselling when they face challenges while on campus.

*Keywords: Assessing; counseling; psychological; services; students.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to [1], the counselling centres of tertiary institutions have as their mission to assist students to define and accomplish personal, academic, and career goals by providing developmental, preventive, and remedial counselling. These services aim at providing counselling and clinical services to students experiencing psycho-sociological problems that could be potentially disruptive to their successful academic, interpersonal and campus adjustment. They also aim at assisting students in acquiring more effective skills to deal with stress and disappointment, in managing their lives; in dealing with specific problems or habits and in resolving conflicts.

A recent study carried out by [2,3] concluded that the need for counselling centres has never been greater in the wake of the fact that tertiary institutions are dealing with substantial challenges posed by the changing mental health needs of today's college students. The study recommended that it is important for administrators, faculty, and staff to understand the profound impact that mental health problems can have on all aspects of campus life, and to treat mental health issues as an institutional responsibility and priority. The researcher advocates that Counseling centres can respond effectively to the current challenges if they have the support and commitment of the administration; and if they take steps to balance the demand for services with existing resources by reviewing priorities, establishing appropriate limits, employing innovative strategies, and practising good self-care to minimize stress and burnout. She contends that Counseling centres will continue to play an important role in supporting the mission of higher education institutions by providing counselling for students who are experiencing problems and assisting them in achieving their educational and personal goals.

## 2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Clause C of Section 3 of the Polytechnic Acts stipulates that a Polytechnic (now Technical Universities) shall have the power to make

provision for the general welfare, recreational and social needs of staff and students. In the past, the Technical Universities in fulfilling this mandate have concentrated on providing and championing the general welfare and recreational needs of both students and staff. However, in recent years, attention has also been drawn to the psycho-social needs of the members of the Technical University community. So as for a better tool in grooming the students of technical universities are building up after judging the theoretical and practical learning process. Its brief overview helps to identify the process which can be influential to increase the source of study [4]. We consider the advantages and limitations of the approach and suggest that a wider debate is called for about the role of the scoping study in relation to other types of literature reviews [5]. Further more newer frontiers like showing some moderating effects, in developing the three one individual-related factor (a type of respondents), one technology-related factor (a type of technology), and one contingent factor (culture) [6]. This new interest has led to the establishment of counselling centres in the various Technical Universities across Ghana. Some Technical Universities also went steps further in recruiting qualified personnel to take charge of these centres. A quick check by the researchers revealed that on most campuses, the centres and the services provided are not well-known and accessed by the students as one would have thought. The study aims at assessing the overall availability and usefulness of these centres and the range of psychological services they purport to be provided in the various Technical Universities.

### 2.1 Objectives of the Study

- To assess the availability of psychological services available on Technical University campuses across Ghana.
- To investigate the quality of psychological service delivery with regards to logistics, personnel and modes of assessing these services.
- To evaluate the perceptions the Technical University communities hold about the

psychological services delivery on their various campuses.

## **2.2 Availability of Psychological or Counseling services**

Many countries have come to accept the relative importance of providing psychological and counselling services in institutions of learning [7]. Believe that guidance and counselling are important in schools because it increases behaviors related to achievement such as studying effectively. Unfortunately, however, the available literature on guidance and counseling in schools in Ghana appear to be bleak. The Ghana Education Service (GES) observed that “the current Guidance and Counseling programs in schools and colleges in Ghana leave much to be desired. In most schools, there are no systematic Guidance and counseling services” [8]. Empirical research findings actually corroborate the GES’s observations [9]. Studied the effectiveness of guidance and counselling in selected Senior High Schools in the Tano North District of Brong Ahafo. The study revealed that most of the schools studied did not, as of that time, run guidance services for students. In a study to evaluate how counseling services could be used as an intervention for indiscipline in schools in the Ho Municipality, [10] found among other things, that none of the schools studied had a counseling centre that was well equipped for effective counseling and that most of the schools lacked trained or professional counselors. In a similar study, [11] assessed guidance and counselling services in Senior High Schools in the Tamale Metropolis and found that the information, appraisal, placement, evaluation, consultation and referral services were inadequately provided. Research findings on guidance and counselling services at Technical University/Polytechnic level appear to be scanty as of now, maybe due to the fact that guidance itself is relatively new in Ghana [12].

## **2.3 Quality of Psychological or Counselling Services**

School counselling programs support the standards of Learning by providing guidance to students in their academic, career, and personal and social development. Guidance and counselling services play an integral part in the overall student services department of any educational institution. The aims of guidance and counselling programs in schools are to assist individuals to develop the ability to understand

themselves, to solve their own problems, and to make appropriate adjustments to their environment.

According to [13], even though counselling units are established in most schools in Ghana, these units are not apt to provide quality psychological services. This is because the units are beset with a lot of problems such as logistics, inadequately trained service providers leading to poor counselor-student ratio.

## **2.4 Perception of Psychological Service Delivery by Receiving Communities**

School counsellors collaborate with parents, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders to promote learning and help students establish and achieve their education, career, and personal goals. Much research has therefore been conducted to ascertain people’s perception of the provision of counselling services.

In March 2010, Public Agenda released a research report on school counselling effectiveness, funded by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation [14]. This report documents widespread dissatisfaction of students and parents with the availability, quality and comprehensiveness of school counselling services.

[15] Reported in a national guidance forum report that a vast majority of people who participated in the focus groups were very positive and enthusiastic about the provision of psychological services in schools. While some people’s comments were critical of the type of guidance received, nobody expressed the view that guidance practitioners are not required. On the contrary, many people were very clear about the benefits and role of guidance in helping them access lifelong learning. Guidance was recognized as having a broader role than helping people with career choice and several respondents specifically referred to guidance practitioners as having a role in providing support, promoting positive mental health and thus helping to prevent suicide.

## **2.5 Research Design**

A descriptive survey design was used for the study. Survey design refers to the collection of standardized information from a specific population. The reason for selecting this option is because it provides a quantitative picture of the

individuals or units under investigation. This is in line with [16] who indicated that in descriptive research, accurate description of activities, objects, processes and persons is objective. The design was thus deemed appropriate as it also sample units which are of varying characteristics.

## 2.6 Sampling Size and Sampling Technique

The population for the study was students of Technical Universities in Ghana. The sample consisted of 291 students and 33 executives of Students' Representative Council and leaders of various societies in the Technical Universities were selected using guidelines described by [17]. The specific Technical Universities from which the sample was drawn were randomly selected from a sampling frame of Technical Universities in Ghana using a Simple Random Sampling technique. However, in selecting the participants Purposive sampling technique was used because the potential participants had to indicate he/she is a student of the selected Technical University by showing his/her Students' identity card and willingly consenting to participate. The selection of the Students Representative Council (SRC) executive and leaders of societies and clubs were also purposively done. Table 1

presents the demographic characteristics of the sample.

## 2.7 Instruments

Two main research instruments were used to collect data. The questionnaire for the general student body was in two parts. Part 1 with closed-ended items requested data on the demographic variables of the students, availability or otherwise of psychological services and the mode of assessing the services. The second part measures the perception of students regarding the provision of psychological services in the Technical Universities. It was measured with 10 – items on a 5 – point Likert scale from disagreeing (0) to agree (4). The perception instrument reported a good reliability coefficient value of 0.77. The second questionnaire, which was in three parts, collected data from SRC executive and leaders of Clubs and Societies. Part 1 dealt with the demographic variables of the leaders, part 2 sought information on the availability and provision of counselling services and the last session a 10 – item Likert scale from disagree (0) to agree (4) measured the perception (with reliability coefficient of 0.69) of the leaders about psychological services feeding on the reports they received from the general student body.

**Table 1a. Demographic characteristics of the general student body**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Name of technical university</b>		
Ho Technical university	119	40.9
Accra Technical University	70	24.1
Koforidua Technical University	102	35.1
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	164	56.4
Female	127	43.6
<b>Age</b>		
18 - 22 years	151	41.6
23 - 27 years	137	47.1
28 - 32 years	31	10.7
33 -37 years	1	.3
38 - 42 years	1	.3
<b>The programme being offered at the University</b>		
HND	196	67.4
DBS	62	21.3
Degree	8	2.7
ICCA / CA / CMA	5	1.7
Pre HND	20	6.9
Total	291	100.0

**Table 1b. Demographic characteristics of students' leadership**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Name of polytechnic</b>		
Ho Technical University	10	30.3
Accra Technical University	8	24.2
Koforidua Technical University	15	45.5
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	20	60.6
Female	13	39.4
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 22 years	9	27.3
23 – 27 years	20	60.6
28 – 32 years	2	6.1
33 – 37 years	1	3.0
38 – 42 years	1	3.0
<b>Status / Position</b>		
SRC Executive	15	45.5
Clubs Executive	18	54.5
<b>The programme at T. University</b>		
HND	28	84.8
Part II	2	6.1
DBS	3	9.1
Total	33	100.0

## 2.8 Data Collection Procedure

Attention was paid to ethics in the conduct of this study. Appropriate clearance was received from the Deans offices of all the institutions and the participants were adequately briefed and consent received before taking part in the study. In collecting the data, the researchers were on all the selected campuses to administer the questionnaire. Adequate instructions were provided to help participants complete the items correctly after which it was returned.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Availability of Psychological Services

The general student body, SRC executives and leaders of various clubs and societies on the campuses of the Technical Universities responded to the items investigating the availability of psychological services on the campuses. On the part of the general student body, the result revealed that out of the 291 sampled, 189 representing 64.9 percent confirmed the availability of psychological services in the institution. The rest mentioned 19.9 percent are not aware of such services while 15.1 percent emphatically said the services are not available in the school. The analysis of the responses provided by SRC executives and leaders of clubs and societies, the result showed

that 66.7 percent mentioned psychological services are available while 33.3 percent are either not aware or claim the services are not available in their institutions. See Table 2 for the details.

### 3.2 The Quality of Psychological Services Delivery with Regard to Personnel

Next, the quality of the psychology service delivery was examined. Quality of service delivery was operationalised as the highest level of education of the service provider. In the first instance, the respondents were asked whether they know of the highest qualification of the counsellor. Almost all the students (90.5%) do not know of the qualification of the psychological service provider. Regarding the SRC executives and leaders of clubs and societies, on 15.1 percent indicated they know the highest level of education of the counsellor. The result is presented in Table 3.

Secondly, the respondent who mentioned they know of the highest qualification of the psychological service providers were requested to state the specific qualification of the service providers. The result showed that the service providers hold a Second degree, some are Physiological Nurse and HCIM. A sizable number (61.1%) did not respond to the item. Some of the

Student leaders specifically mentioned Second degree in Clinical Psychology while other could not tell the specific degree the service providers hold. See Table 4.

### 3.3 Assessing and the Mode of Assessing Psychological Services

Further, the students were asked to indicate whether they have ever assessed psychological services being provided at their institution. The result revealed that majority (85.2%) of the students do not assess the services being

provided by the Counsellor. On the part of the SRC Executives/Clubs/Society leaders, a sizable proportion (48.5%) has ever assessed the services while the rest (51.5%) have not. The Table 5 presents the result.

Next, the mode of assessing the services was also examined. The modes of assessing the services identified were: walking-in, by appointment and through the telephone. The majority (55.8%) of the students who assess the services do so by just walking – in, 32.6% assess the services through appointment while the rest

**Table 2. Availability of counselling centre (or a designated office for counselling) in your institution?**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>General student body</b>		
Yes	189	64.9
No	44	15.1
I don't know	58	19.9
Total	291	100.0
<b>SRC / clubs/societies executive</b>		
Yes	22	66.7
No	8	24.2
I don't Know	3	9.1
Total	33	100.0

**Table 3. Knowledge of the highest level of education of the Psychological Service provider**

	Number	Percent
<b>General student body</b>		
Yes	18	9.5
No	169	89.4
I don't know	2	1.1
Total	189	100.0
<b>SRC executive/ clubs / societies leaders</b>		
Yes	5	15.1
No	19	57.6
I don't Know	9	27.3
Total	33	100.0

**Table 4. The qualification of psychological service providers**

	Number	Percent
<b>General students</b>		
Don't Know / No response	11	61.1
Masters	5	27.8
Physiological Nurse	1	5.6
HCIM	1	5.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>SRC executives/clubs/ society leaders</b>		
Don't Know	21	63.6
Second Degree (Clinical Psychologist)	10	30.3
Second Degree (not specified)	2	6.1
Total	33	100.0

**Table 5. Assessing psychological services**

	Number	Percent
<b>General student body</b>		
Yes	43	14.8
No	248	85.2
Total	291	100.0
<b>SRC executive/clubs/society leaders</b>		
Yes	16	48.5
No	17	51.5
Total	33	100.0

(11.6%) use the telephone to research the service provider. The majority (45.5%) of the executives, however, mentioned walking – in as the means of assessing psychological services in the institution. Refer to Table 6 for the result.

**Table 6. How do the students/others assess the services?**

	Number	Percent
<b>General student body</b>		
Walking – in	24	55.8
By appointment	14	32.6
By telephone	5	11.6
Total	43	100.0
<b>SRC executives / clubs/society leaders</b>		
No response	14	42.4
Walking – in	15	45.5
By Appointment	4	12.1
Total	33	100.0

### 3.4 Evaluating the Perception of the Polytechnic Community about the Psychological Service Delivery

In investigating the perception of the Technical University community about the psychological service delivery in the Technical Universities, the student leadership were requested to assess the services provided by the Counsellor given the reports/comments received or heard from their colleagues. The responses indicate that 51.6 percent evaluated the services as useful with 15.2 percent qualifying it as very useful. Interestingly, 21.2 percent mentioned the services are not useful while 27.2 percent could not tell whether the services are useful or not useful. The result is presented in Table 7.

### 3.5 Perception of Polytechnic Community Regarding Psychological Services

The perception of the Technical University community regarding the provision of

psychological services in the Technical Universities was measured by a 10 – item on a 5 – point Likert scale from disagreeing (0) to agree (4). The items for the general student body reported an alpha coefficient of 0.77 while that for the Student leadership report alpha value of 0.69. In scoring both scales, high scores reflect low/negative perception while low scores reflect high/positive perception about psychological services in the Technical Universities. The result presented in Table 8 revealed that majority (89.3%) of the general student body hold a positive perception about psychological services in the Technical Universities while on the part of the student leadership 87.9 percent reported measured high on the scale indicating high positive regard for the provision of psychological services in the institution.

**Table 7. Evaluating services provided by counsellors**

	Number	Percent
Useful	12	36.4
Very useful	5	15.2
Not useful	7	21.2
Cannot tell	9	27.2
Total	33	100.0

**Table 8. Perception level**

	Number	Percent
<b>General student body</b>		
High Perception level	260	89.3
Low Perception level	31	10.7
Total	291	100.0
<b>SRC executive / clubs/society leaders</b>		
High Perception level	29	87.9
Low Perception level	4	12.1
Total	33	100.0

## 4. DISCUSSION

The study was designed to achieve three main goals: assess the availability of psychological

services on technical universities campuses, investigate the quality of services provided and the measurement of perception of students regarding the service delivery. On the availability of psychological services, the majority of the respondents indicated that Technical Universities have the service available. This result contradicts [8,9,10]; that schools do not have Counseling services to students. It could, however, be explained that the services were available because the Institutions desire to meet the requirement of the Polytechnic Act Section 3 Clause c which enjoins all tertiary institutions to provide welfare services to students.

Next, is the score of quality of service delivery and mode of assessing the services. Majority of the respondents were unable to indicate the academic qualification of the service providers. The few who were able to mention, indicated second degree in Physiological Nursing, Clinical Psychology and others. It was also found that most students just 'walk-in' to access the service with a fewer number doing so by appointment and through the telephone. This result partially confirmed the study by [9] that most educational institutions lack the quality counselling service providers which leads to the poor patronage of the centres. Students at the tertiary level are most likely to patronize the services of a qualified practitioner than one whose background is unknown.

Lastly, the evaluation of the Technical University community of the provision of psychological services was positive. The result showed that majority of the respondents rated the services as useful and thus have a high positive perception of it. The results confirm a study by [11] in which majority of the participants were very positive and happy about the provision of psychological services. However, did not support [10] which reported dissatisfaction of participants with the availability, quality and comprehensiveness of psychological counselling services in schools.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study arrived at some conclusions. First, it was realized that all the institutions have the have designated offices as Psychological services centre but the majority of students do not patronize the service. Secondly, the service providers do not have the appropriate qualification to function as psychological service providers. Lastly, the study reported that

students have a positive perception of the provision of psychological services.

## 6. RECOMMENDATION

In line with the findings of this study, the following are recommended: one, that efforts be made to recruit qualified personnel to function as counsellors. Individuals with qualification in Clinical Psychology and Guidance and Counselling at least at the second-degree level are recommended. Two, there should be awareness creation campaign on all campuses to highlight the services provided by the Psychological Services centre. Lastly, the service providers must exhibit the highest professional conduct in their practice. This would build the confidence of students in the service provider and the centre.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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