

# STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL GUIDANCE PROGRAMME AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS WITHIN TAMALE METROPOLIS

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aimed to investigate students' perceptions of the school guidance program and its implications for counselling patronage among Senior High Schools within the Tamale Metropolis. A descriptive research design was adapted for the study. A proportional stratified sampling technique was used to select four Senior High Schools in the Tamale Metropolis. A total of 400 respondents sampled from the four Senior High Schools took part in the study. A self-developed structured questionnaire was used to gather information from the students. Descriptive statistics was used for the data analysis. The study revealed that orientation service in schools is a major means of creating a high awareness level of guidance and counselling program in educational institutions. The study also revealed that students have a positive attitude towards the school guidance program and considered it effective and beneficial in addressing their academic, career, personal, and anxiety concerns. Based on the findings and conclusions, it was recommended that school authorities and guidance coordinators should provide regular and ongoing information about the school guidance program for students throughout their academic journey. Also, school counsellors should continue to provide high-quality and effective services guidance services that will address the diverse needs of students.

**Keywords:** Counselling, Guidance, Perception, Program, senior high school.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Guidance and counselling services play a crucial role in the educational system, aiming to aid students in their academic, social, and personal growth. In Ghana, the Education Ministry has highlighted the significance of implementing guidance and counselling programs in schools, with a special focus on Senior High Schools. Despite this focus, studies indicate that numerous senior high students in Ghana refrain from utilising counselling services. They often cite a lack of trust, social stigma, and insufficient awareness as significant obstacles to seeking assistance. (Twum-Danso & Anim-Sackey, 2018). For the overall development of students, comprehensive guidance and counselling services must be provided in educational institutions (Haris et al., 2020). Because senior high schools are so important in determining how students will develop in the future, these institutions must have excellent guidance programs. Educational literature generally acknowledges the value of school guidance programs in promoting students' academic success, personal development, and career development (Sink & Stroh, 2003). A study conducted in South Africa indicated that students who utilised guidance and counselling services experienced greater career satisfaction and enhanced life skills (De Vries et

al., 2018). According to Oladele and Oloyede (2017), school guidance programs positively influence students' academic performance and their ability to adjust. Additionally, research by Twum-Danso and Anim-Sackey (2018) revealed that students who accessed guidance and counselling services exhibited improved academic performance and enhanced mental health.

Regarding the awareness level of guidance services in schools Johnson and Abrams (2010) found that students exhibited a high level of awareness regarding the availability of school counselling services. This indicates that students were generally well-informed about the counselling resources available within the school setting, suggesting that efforts to promote these services were effective. The study underscores the importance of continued outreach and communication to ensure that students are aware of and can access the support they need. Agyemang and Ofori-Dankwa (2021) found a relatively high level of awareness among students regarding the availability of school counselling services. However, the scholars noted that the actual utilisation of these services was lower than expected. This indicates that while students knew about the existence of counselling services, various factors such as stigma, misconceptions, and concerns about confidentiality might have hindered them from taking advantage of these resources. Jones et al., (2020) conducted a survey using 500 high school students and found that about 80% of the participants were aware of the school guidance program but many lacked detailed knowledge about the specific types of support available. The study indicated that although students were generally aware that counselling services existed, the students were often unclear about how to access these services, what issues could be addressed through counselling, and the process involved. The researchers emphasised the need for schools to improve communication and education regarding the scope and benefits of counselling services. Biever and McMahon (2012) studied the impact of orientation programs on students' understanding and utilisation of school counselling services. It was found that students who participated in comprehensive orientation programs had a significantly better understanding of the available counselling services than those who did not. This means orientation sessions, were effective in increasing students' awareness not only of the existence of counselling services but also of the specific types of support offered and how to access them. The study highlighted that orientation programs played a crucial role in bridging the knowledge gap, leading to higher utilisation rates of counselling services among students who attended these sessions. The scholars recommended that schools implement or enhance orientation programs to include detailed information about counselling services, ensuring that all students are informed early in their academic journey about how to seek support for various educational, personal, and emotional issues. Chen and Chen (2017) examined the effects of teacher non-involvement in promoting school guidance programs and found that when teachers were not actively involved, the effectiveness and visibility of these programs were significantly diminished. The study revealed that in schools where teachers did not participate in promoting or supporting the guidance programs, students were less likely to be aware of the services available to them. This lack of teacher involvement led to lower utilisation rates of the guidance services, as students often did not receive the encouragement or information needed to engage with the programs. Additionally, the absence of teacher advocacy made guidance services seem less integrated into the overall school environment, contributing to a perception that guidance services were less accessible or relevant. Wang and Chang (2019) found that when teachers were actively involved in promoting the guidance program and collaborated closely with school counsellors, students were significantly more likely to utilise the program's resources. The study highlighted that teacher involvement played a crucial role in raising awareness and encouraging students to engage with the guidance services offered by the school.

By actively promoting the program and working together with counsellors, teachers will be able to, create a supportive environment, where students feel more comfortable seeking help. This collaborative effort between teachers and counsellors helped to demystify the guidance services making them more approachable and relevant to students' needs. As a result, the utilisation of the program's resources increased, leading to more effective support for students. Visual aids such as posters, brochures, and digital displays helped raise awareness about the school guidance program, but they were not as effective as direct communication and personal interactions with students. This revealed that students were more likely to engage with the guidance program when they received information through face-to-face interactions, such as discussions with teachers,

counsellors, or peers, rather than relying solely on visual aids (Kim & Kim, 2020; Park & Kang, 2019). These studies highlighted that direct, personalised interactions with counsellors had a stronger impact on student engagement and participation in the program. The researchers noted that personalised guidance allowed counsellors to address individual student needs, concerns, and questions, more effectively, creating a more supportive and trusting environment. This one-on-one interaction helped to build rapport and make students feel more comfortable seeking help, leading to increased participation in the guidance program. Kofi et al. (2018), found that students perceived the school counsellors' communication style as clear and supportive, which played a significant role in making them feel more comfortable seeking help for mental health issues. The study highlighted that when counsellors communicated in a way that was easy to understand and demonstrated empathy, students were more likely to trust the counsellors and feel at ease in discussing their personal concerns. This perception of clear and supportive communication helped to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health support, leading to increased engagement with counselling services. The study indicated that 85% of the students knew where to access information about the services provided by the school guidance program. It is found that students greatly appreciate clear and concise information provided by school counsellors, which significantly aids them in making informed decisions about their academic choices. This indicates that when counsellors communicate information precisely and understandably, it helps students better grasp their academic options and the implications of their choices. This clarity and conciseness in communication enable students to make more informed decisions regarding their academic paths, leading to greater confidence and satisfaction with their choices. It is noted that about 90%-95% of the students knew where to access information about the services provided by the school counselling program (Adebiyi, 2019; Okebukola, 2017; Okeke et al., 2020). Choi and Kang (2017) found that despite efforts to present information about the school counselling program clearly and concisely, students still encountered difficulties understanding the program's purpose and benefits. The study revealed that although the information was well-organised and straightforward, many students struggled to grasp how the program could specifically address their needs or how to fully utilise the available resources. The researchers identified that while clarity in communication is important, it might not be sufficient to ensure full understanding. The researchers suggested additional strategies, such as interactive presentations, personalised explanations, and ongoing support from counsellors, might be necessary to help students better comprehend the program and its advantages. Similarly, Kim and Lee (2016) found that although the information about the school counselling program was designed to be clear and concise, students still experienced difficulties in understanding the program's purpose and benefits. The study indicated that despite the efforts to simplify the information, many students struggled to fully grasp how the program could address their specific needs or how to effectively use the available resources. The study highlighted that clarity alone might not be sufficient, to ensure comprehensive understanding. The researchers suggested that additional strategies, such as providing more interactive and personalised explanations, offering hands-on experiences, and creating opportunities for direct interaction with counsellors, could enhance students' comprehension of the program. Adjei-Mafo and Owusu (2017), found that despite efforts to improve access to information about school counselling resources, students still faced difficulties in locating and utilising these resources effectively. The study revealed that while there were initiatives to make information more accessible, such as distributing brochures or creating informational websites, many students struggled to find and utilise the counselling services available to them. The researchers identified that mere access to information was not always enough to ensure that students could effectively utilise the resources. The scholars highlighted the need for additional support mechanisms, such as more direct guidance from counsellors, clearer instructions on how to access and use the services, and ongoing outreach efforts to reinforce the availability and benefits of counselling resources available to them. Agyemang and Ofori-Dankwa (2021) noted in their study that most students had a reasonable understanding of the services offered by their schools' guidance program. The study revealed that students were generally aware of the types of support and resources available to them through the program. This understanding included knowledge about the range of services provided, such as academic counselling, career guidance, and personal support. Knowledge could be improved. For instance, some students had a basic awareness but lacked an in-depth understanding of how to access specific services or the full scope

of benefits provided by the guidance program. The researchers found that students who utilised the guidance program demonstrated better academic performance, improved career decision-making, and enhanced emotional well-being. The researchers viewed that students' engagement with the guidance program had positive effects on these key areas, suggesting that the program was effective in supporting students' academic and personal development. However, the researchers also noted that there was room for improvement in the guidance program to benefit majority of the students because not all students were taking full advantage of the guidance services.

It was found that students had a reasonable understanding of the services offered by their school's guidance program. The study revealed that most students were aware of the general types of support and resources available, such as academic counselling, career guidance, and personal counselling (Ogunsanya et al. 2019; Okeke-Ihejirika & Eze 2017; Adu-Gyamfi et al. 2019). These researchers found that although the foundational knowledge was present, there was a need for improved communication and more detailed information to help students fully grasp how to utilise the guidance program effectively. Adjei and Ofori-Dankwa (2018) found that students had limited awareness and utilisation of school guidance programs, which suggested that their understanding of the types of services provided by the guidance program was not strong or effective. The study revealed that despite the availability of guidance services, many students did not fully understand the scope of support offered or how to access these resources. This limited awareness contributed to lower utilisation rates, indicating that students were not making full use of the guidance program's offerings. The researchers concluded that improving students' understanding of the services provided by the school guidance program was crucial for increasing engagement and utilisation. It is noted by (Adekola & Adeyemo, 2020; Mahommed & Olofinbiyi ,2019), that both students and stakeholders expressed a need for more information about the guidance program to enhance its effectiveness. The study revealed that; there was a demand for additional details on various aspects of the program, including its services, benefits, and how to access support. The findings indicated that providing comprehensive and easily accessible information could improve the program's effectiveness by ensuring that students and stakeholders fully understand and utilise the available resources. Adeyemo et al. (2018) and Adeyemi and Adekola (2017) studies examined student awareness of school counselling services and found that while students were generally aware of the existence of these services, their understanding of the specific nature and benefits of the services was often limited. The study highlighted that although awareness of counselling services was present, many students did not fully grasp what issues could be addressed through counselling or how to effectively access these resources. The research indicated that this lack of detailed understanding led to the underutilisation of counselling services. However, students' perceptions of the value and relevance of the school guidance program are important factors that can significantly impact the success of these programs.

Research by Chen et al., (2018) explored college students' perceptions of their institution's guidance services and found that students perceived guidance services as essential for their academic and personal development, but the students were dissatisfied with the quality and availability of these services. In a comparative study on the perceived effectiveness of school counselling programs in Croatia and Serbia, Todorović et al., (2019) noted that students in both countries viewed the counselling programs as vital for their academic and personal development. Students in Ghanaian schools perceived the guidance and counselling services as positive. They believed these services were beneficial in various aspects of their lives, including academic performance, vocational planning, and personal development. Students appreciated the support provided by the guidance and counselling program, as it helped them address academic challenges, make informed career choices, and manage personal issues. The positive perception was linked to the program's perceived effectiveness in assisting students in achieving their goals and improving their overall well-being (Agyei-Mensah & Owusu-Ansah 2018; Owusu-Ansah & Agyei-Mensah, 2019; Agyemang & Owusu-Ansah (2020). However, students felt that the effectiveness was not uniformly high across all areas of development. Adewuya (2018) found that students perceived the guidance and counselling services as moderately effective in addressing their diverse needs. The study indicated, that while students recognised some positive impacts of the services on their academic, career, and personal development, they also felt that the services could be improved to better meet their various needs.

Students acknowledged that the guidance and counseling services provided some level of support and were beneficial in certain areas, but they also noted gaps and limitations in the program's effectiveness. On the other hand, high school students believed that the school guidance services provided valuable support for their social-emotional competencies. The study revealed that students perceived the guidance services as beneficial in several key areas such as emotional support, social skills development, self-awareness, and enhancement in self-esteem, and resilience (Wyatt et al., 2018; Topçu & Erdur-Baker, 2016). In some studies, students expressed skepticism and dissatisfaction with the school guidance programs indicating that they did not find the guidance services valuable for their personal and emotional well-being (Brown & Smothers, 2019; Jackson & Johnson, 2017; Smith & White, 2016). The studies perceived irrelevance, limited impact, quality of interaction, and lack of personalisation as factors contributing to this dissatisfaction. Some researchers also found that students who received guidance and counselling services reported higher levels of satisfaction with their school experience and perceived a more supportive and inclusive school environment. Students who engaged with these services felt more supported and valued within the school community, contributing to students' satisfaction with school life. Additionally, the services positively impacted students' emotional and social well-being, enhancing their overall satisfaction with their school experience (Sink & Akos, 2016; Whiston & Akiyama, 2015). Again, students perceived the school guidance program as effective in supporting their growth and development. Studies revealed that students felt the guidance program significantly contributed to their personal and academic development in various areas, including academic planning, career guidance, and personal growth. The positive perception of the program reflected its impact on helping students navigate their educational and developmental challenges effectively, thereby enhancing their overall school experience and quality of life (Boafo-Arthur, 2019; Sarfo & Agyemang, 2016).

Iponmoye (2019) found that students in selected secondary schools considered academic counselling as the most critical aspect of the guidance program. The study highlighted that students viewed academic counselling as highly significant in supporting their academic development and success. They believed that this component of the guidance program was essential for helping them with course selection, academic planning, and addressing academic challenges. The findings underscored the importance of academic counselling within the guidance program, reflecting its central role in enhancing students' academic performance and overall educational experience. Closely related to this Oladeji et al. (2018) found that students recognised the value of career-related guidance in helping them make informed decisions about their future career paths. The study emphasised that effective career-related guidance was crucial in assisting students with career planning and decision-making, ultimately supporting their future career success. In addition, Harley et al. (2018), found that students placed more emphasis on academic and career guidance compared to personal counselling. The study revealed that students considered academic and career guidance as more critical and beneficial for their overall development and success in academic planning, course selection, and career exploration more highly than personal counselling services. Research studies conducted indicated that students perceived the guidance program as instrumental in enhancing their communication skills, conflict resolution abilities, and overall well-being (Santos et al., 2019; Taylor & Lo, 2017; Brown & Johnson, 2015). The studies indicated that students valued the guidance program role in developing essential interpersonal skills and improving their ability to handle conflicts effectively. Additionally, students felt that the guidance and counselling program contributed positively to their overall well-being, supporting their emotional and social development.

Studies conducted by scholars revealed that students reported that the guidance program significantly contributed to their increased self-confidence, resilience, and empathy. They also noted improvements in their relationships with peers and teachers, in mental health, social skills, and overall happiness highlighting the program's positive impact on their social and mental health development and overall well-being (Thompson & Smith, 2018; Martinez & Adams, 2016). It is noted that students felt comfortable seeking assistance from the guidance program when needed. They perceived the program as accessible, supportive, and non-judgmental which significantly, facilitated students help-seeking behavior. This sense of comfort and trust in the guidance services encouraged students to reach out for help more readily, contributing to their overall well-being and success (Martinez & Brown, 2016; Johnson & Smith, 2018).

According to Kanus (2018), students perceived the impact of guidance and counselling programs on academic needs to be satisfactory. Students in public secondary schools of the South Kinangop division in Nairobi perceived guidance and counselling as significantly beneficial (Wachira, 2004). Around 40% of respondents reported that the counselling services helped them improve their class work. Additionally, 61% indicated that the service improved students' morality and uprightness. Other studies by Karangu and Muola (2011) and Eyo et al. (2010) indicated that students showed positive perceptions towards guidance and counselling services. In the Ghanaian context, a study conducted by Amponsah et al., (2018) revealed that most senior high school students in Accra, Ghana, perceived guidance services as important for their academic and personal development, but were dissatisfied with the quality and availability of these services. Dontoh (2020) revealed in his study that senior high students generally have a positive perception concerning the work of senior high school counsellors. Research conducted by Kagbetor (2019) on students' perception of school guidance and counselling in the Accra Metropolitan area of Ghana indicated that majority of students in senior high schools perceived the efforts of school counsellors as helpful. Additionally, Asamari and Namale (2018) indicated in their study that, students in the Colleges of Education in Northern Ghana perceive guidance and counselling as beneficial. According to Nong (2016), students' participation in school guidance programs is highly influenced by their perceptions of the effectiveness and relevance of these programs. These perceptions directly impact students' willingness to seek assistance and engage in program activities (McCarthy & Kroll, 2016). Students are more likely to participate actively and seek assistance when they perceive guidance programs as helpful and applicable to their academic and personal needs. Positive perceptions of program relevance are linked to increased engagement and participation (Wong et al., 2023). Students who perceived their schools' guidance program positively reported higher levels of satisfaction with their overall school experience (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016).

The accessibility and awareness of guidance programs influence students' perceptions. This may have a significant effect on their psychological well-being and academic success (ASCA, 2019). This means students who are aware of the accessibility of counselling services are more likely to seek help when needed (O'Halloran et al., 2019). If students are unaware of the availability of counselling services or perceive them as difficult to access, they are less likely to seek support (McCarthy & Kroll, 2016). Although a lot of studies have been done about students' perception of school guidance and counselling programs, it seems there is limited study in the specific context of senior high schools within the Tamale Metropolis. Thus, an exploration of students' perceptions towards school guidance programs within the context of the Tamale Metropolis becomes imperative because students' perceptions play a crucial role in determining their willingness to seek and utilise counselling services (Villares et al., 2018). Therefore, this study aims to find out the awareness level and perception of students towards guidance and counselling program within selected Senior High Schools in the Tamale Metropolis.

### **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the awareness level and perception of students toward school guidance programs in Senior High Schools within the Tamale Metropolis.

### **1.3. Specific Objectives**

1. The specific objectives guiding this study are to:
2. Assess students' awareness of the school guidance programs.
3. Explore students' perceptions of the school guidance program.

### **1.4 Research questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the students' awareness level of the school guidance program?
2. What are the perceptions of students towards the school guidance program?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research Design**



The study utilised a descriptive research design, chosen for its ability to gather data at a specific moment. This design is particularly effective for assessing variables such as knowledge, attitudes, practices, beliefs, and perceptions, aligning with the study's objectives (Morales et al., 2018). Additionally, the choice of a descriptive research design stemmed from its ease of implementation, efficiency, time-saving nature, and cost-effectiveness in comparison to a longitudinal study design.

## **2.2 Population and Sample**

The study population consisted of senior high school students within the Tamale Metropolis, located in the Northern Region of Ghana. The total population was 14,453 comprising 6,077 males and 8,376 females from four senior high schools within the Tamale Metropolis namely, Ghana Senior High School with a population of 4571, Vitting Senior High/Tech School made up of 3269, Business Senior High School with a population of 3153 and Tamale Girls Senior High School made up of 3460. Simple random sampling technique specifically the lottery method was employed to choose the four Senior High Schools out of a total of eight schools in the Tamale Metropolis. A proportional stratified sampling technique was utilised to select a sample of 400 senior high school students for the study. The sample size of the study was estimated and ascertained based on Yamane's formula of sample size determination.

## **2.3 Research Instruments**

A self-constructed structured questionnaire was employed to collect data from the students. The questionnaire comprised 56 items arranged into five sections corresponding to the research questions of the study. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions utilising a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". Section A of the questionnaire captures students' gender, age, religion, form, and residential status. Section B gathered information from the students about their awareness of the school guidance program; while Section C focused on their perception of the school guidance program. Section D gathered opinions from students on their patronage of the school counselling service and Section E elicited information on the impact of their perception of counselling patronage. Pre-testing was done to assess the content validity and reliability of the instrument. Test-retest reliability estimates provided information about the instruments' reliability computed using 50 senior high students' pre-test scores from Tamale Senior High School. Regarding the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was determined which reported a value of 0.918 for the instrument. The figure suggests strong internal consistency among the items within each scale. This implies that the items effectively measure the intended constructs, as indicated by the instruments' internal consistency. This supports the view of Haidari and Karakuş (2019) guidelines for interpreting Cronbach's Alpha: "> .9 – Excellent, > .8 – Good, > .7 – Acceptable, > .6 – Questionable, > .5 – Poor, < .5 – Unacceptable". According to these criteria, the high values for Cronbach's Alpha coefficients obtained suggest a good internal consistency of the items. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in guidance and counselling.

## **2.4 Data Collection Procedure**

An introductory letter was acquired from the Department of Educational Foundations of the University for Development Studies and was personally presented to the Metro Education Office as well as the heads of the selected schools to seek permission. Before data collection, the data collectors received training on the study objectives, questionnaire administration, and ethical considerations. Informed consents were obtained from the participants and their privacy and confidentiality were ensured. Data quality control measures, such as double data entry and periodic data checks, were implemented to maintain data accuracy. Informed consent was obtained from the participants and confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was ensured throughout the study.

## **2.5 Data Processing and Analysis**

The data was analysed and presented using descriptive statistical tools. Percentages were employed as a statistical analytic tool to offer a thorough presentation for analysis and interpretation. The collected data underwent editing, encoding, and analysis, and was then presented in the format of statistical tables utilizing Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics specifically; means and standard deviations, were utilised to analyse all research questions.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

For the research questions, a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neutral, 2= Disagree 1= Strongly Disagree was used for the interpretation.

**Table 1:** Interpretation of Likert-Scale scoring

Likert-Scale Description	Likert-Scale	Likert-Scale Interval
Strongly disagree	1	1 – 1.80
Disagree	2	1.81 – 2.60
Neutral/Uncertain	3	2.61 – 3.40
Agree	4	3.41 – 4.20
Strongly agree	5	4.21 – 5.00

**Source:** Pimentel, 2010

For the analysis, the researcher calculated descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for the items on the research instrument. The means were interpreted as follows; strongly disagree in the point range 1.00 – 1.80, Disagree 1.81 – 2.60, Neutral 2.61 – 3.40, Agree 3.41 – 4.20, and Strongly agree 4.21 – 5.00 (Pimentel, 2010).

#### **Research Question One: What is the students' awareness level of the school guidance program?**

This research question, aimed to determine the awareness level of students towards the school guidance program. Participants' responses were examined using a set of 12 statements, and the statements were evaluated on a Five-Point Likert scale, with options ranging from Strongly agree (5) to Strongly disagree (1). Table 2 answers this research question.

**Table 2:** Awareness level of students towards the school guidance program (N=400)

	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I am aware of the existence of the school guidance program	400	4.60	.588
2.	The first time I heard about the school guidance program was during school orientation	400	4.10	1.228
3.	The first time I heard about the school guidance program was through a teacher	400	2.20	1.029
4.	The first time I heard about the school guidance program was by a flyer or a poster	400	1.87	.612
5.	The first time I heard about the school guidance program was through a colleague student	400	1.86	.603
6.	The first time I heard about the school guidance program was through personal enquires	400	1.88	.642



7.	The information provided about the school guidance program is clear and understandable	4.28	.981
8.	I know where to access information about the services provided by the school guidance program	3.71	1.274
9.	I am familiar with the types of services offered by the school guidance program (e.g., academic counselling, career guidance, personal counselling).	3.98	1.183
10.	I am aware of my colleagues who found the school guidance program information to be very helpful	3.84	1.242
11.	I wish I had extra information about the school guidance program	4.17	1.004
12.	I understand the process for accessing counselling or guidance services at our school	3.78	1.187

**Source:** Field Data, 2024

From the results shown in Table 2, Items 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 have mean scores above 3.40, suggesting that respondents generally agreed with the statements, and Items 3, 4, 5 and 6 have the least mean score below 2.61, suggesting that respondents generally disagree with the statements. These statements indicated a high level of awareness among students towards the school guidance program. The results in Table 2, revealed that the majority of participants ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = .588$ ) were aware of the existence of the school guidance program. This suggests that; the school guidance program has a high level of awareness and visibility among the students. This result supports the view of Johnson and Abrams (2010) who reported high levels of awareness among students regarding the availability of school counselling services. Similarly, Agyemang and Ofori-Dankwa (2021) found that most students had some knowledge of their school's guidance program. The finding of high awareness levels among participants is again supported by Jones et al., (2020) who conducted a survey, involving 500 high school students and found that 80% of participants were aware of the school guidance program. This finding emphasises the importance of maintaining and promoting awareness about the school guidance program among students. The awareness of guidance programs influences students' utilisation of counselling services. Students who are aware of the availability of counselling services are more likely to seek help when needed. This view is supported by (O'Halloran et al., 2019). On the contrary, if students are unaware of the existence of counselling services, they are less likely to seek support which is in line with (McCarthy & Kroll, 2016).

Item 2 revealed that the most common way, participants first heard about the school guidance program ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.228$ ) was during school orientation. This finding is supported by Biever and McMahon (2012) that structured orientation sessions positively influenced students' perceptions of the school counselling program. This finding highlights the importance of incorporating effective orientation sessions in introducing students to the school guidance program. It also suggests that the orientation sessions are effective in introducing students to the school guidance program. Item 3 indicated that a relatively smaller proportion of participants ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = 1.029$ ) first heard about the program through a teacher. This finding is consistent with the view of Chen and Chen (2017) who found that although teachers were aware of the school guidance program, their involvement in promoting it was limited. However, this finding is contrary to the views of (Wang & Chang, 2019) who established that when teachers were actively involved in promoting the guidance program and collaborated with school counsellors, students were more likely to utilise the program's resources. Items 4, 5, and 6 showed

that the least common ways participants first heard about the program (mean scores ranging from 1.86 to 1.88) were through flyers, posters, or personal inquiries. This finding suggests that the program's promotion through visual or physical materials is not as effective as other methods such as personalised guidance and direct communication. The current results are also supported by Kim and Kim (2020) that while visual aids helped raise awareness about the program, they were not as effective as direct communication and interactions with students. Furthermore, research conducted by Park and Kang (2019) revealed that students were more likely to participate in the guidance program when they received personalised guidance from school counsellors rather than relying on visual or physical materials alone.

Item 7 demonstrated that participants generally find the information provided about the program to be clear and understandable ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = .981$ ) indicating effective communication of program details. This finding is consistent with the views of (Gyamfi et al., 2020; Kofi et al., 2018) who found that students perceived the school counsellors' communication style as clear and supportive, which helped them feel more comfortable seeking help for mental health issues. Similarly, these results are supported by the findings of (Okebukola, 2017; Adebiji, 2019; Okeke et al., 2020) who indicated that students appreciated the clear and concise information provided by school counsellors, which helped them make informed decisions about their academic choices. The result however contradicts the views of (Choi & Kang, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2016) that although the information was designed to be clear and concise, students still faced difficulties in understanding the program's purpose and benefits. The mean score for knowing where to access information (Mean = 3.71,  $SD = 1.274$ ) indicated that the majority of students know where to access information about the services provided by the school guidance program. The finding suggests that the school guidance program has been effective in communicating its services and availability to students and this implies that the program has been successful in reaching its target audience and making them aware of the resources available. This finding is supported by Kofi et al., (2018) who conducted a study on the awareness of school guidance services among students in Ghanaian senior high schools and found that 85% of the students knew where to access information about the services provided by the school guidance program. The finding is also consistent with the views of (Gyamfi et al., 2020; Adomako, 2019) who found that the majority of the students knew where to access information about the services provided by the school counselling program. Furthermore, this finding aligns with the views of (Okebukola, 2017; Adebiji, 2019; Okeke et al., 2020) who found that over 90% of the students knew where to access information about the services provided by the school counselling program. However, the finding contradicts research conducted by Adjei-Mafo and Owusu (2017) who revealed that despite efforts to improve access to information, students still faced difficulties in locating and utilising the resources available to them.

Item 9, indicated that participants have a reasonable understanding of the types of services provided by the school guidance program ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 1.183$ ). This suggests that students' awareness of the type of services provided by the school guidance program is strong or effective. The finding is supported by Agyemang and Ofori-Dankwa (2021), that most students had a reasonable awareness of the services offered by their school's guidance program. Similarly, the result is supported by the views of (Okeke-Ihejirika & Eze, 2017; Ogunsanya et al., 2019) who found that students had a reasonable understanding of the services offered by their school's guidance program. The finding is however contrary to the finding of Adjei and Ofori-Dankwa (2018) who found in their study that students had limited awareness and utilisation of guidance programs, which may suggest that their understanding of the types of services provided by the school guidance program was not strong or effective.

Item 10 showed that participants know some of their colleagues who found the school guidance program information to be very helpful ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 1.242$ ). This helpful information highlights the positive impact of the program on some students but also indicates that there might be room for improvement to benefit more students. This finding is supported by Agyemang and Ofori-Dankwa (2021) that students who utilised the guidance program had better academic performance, career decision-making, and emotional well-being but there is room for improvement to benefit more students. According to Adu-Gyamfi et al., (2019), the guidance program has positive impacts on students' academic performance, but also acknowledged that there is room for improvement in the guidance program to benefit more students.

Item 11 revealed that majority of participants wished they had extra information about the program ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.004$ ). This indicates that there is a demand for more comprehensive and detailed information about the school guidance program. Researchers and program administrators should consider addressing this by providing additional resources, workshops, or seminars to enhance students' understanding of the program. This finding is consistent with the findings of Adekola and Adeyemo (2020) that students and stakeholders sought more information about the guidance program to enhance its effectiveness. Similarly, Mahommed and Olofinbiyi (2019) found that students, parents, and teachers desired better communication and understanding of the guidance program's offerings to maximise its benefits. Item 12, indicated that participants have a moderate understanding of the process for accessing counselling or guidance services at their school ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.187$ ). This suggests that there is a need for improvement to ensure that students are well-informed about the accessibility of the services provided by the school guidance program. The results are consistent with the views of (Adeyemo, et al., 2018; Adeyemi & Adekola, 2017) that while students were aware of the availability of guidance services, their understanding of the access process was moderate, indicating room for improvement in promoting and explaining the services provided by the school guidance program.

**Research Question Two: What are the perceptions of students towards the school guidance program?**

This research question aimed to determine the perceptions of students toward the school guidance program. Participants' responses were examined using a set of 13 statements, and the statements were evaluated on a Five-Point Likert scale, with options ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The findings are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Perceptions of students towards the school guidance program (N=400)

	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I feel positive about the school guidance programme	400	4.21	1.016
2.	The school guidance program effectively addresses the diverse needs of students	400	3.89	1.113
3.	The school guidance program is beneficial for students' academic success	400	4.35	.886
4.	The school guidance program provides valuable support for personal and emotional well-being	400	4.01	1.101
5.	The school guidance program promotes a positive school environment and culture	400	3.82	1.111
6.	The school guidance program is overall effective	400	3.46	1.190
7.	The most important aspect of the school guidance program is academic counselling	400	4.02	1.128
8.	Career guidance is the most important aspect of the school guidance program	400	3.91	1.033
9.	The most important aspect of the school guidance program is personal counselling	400	3.72	1.201
10.	I am satisfied with the availability of individual counselling sessions	399	3.73	1.168

11.	The school guidance program has created an impact on my personal and social development	3.84	1.162
12.	The school guidance program has created an impact on my student friends	3.85	1.180
13.	I feel comfortable seeking assistance from the school guidance program if needed	3.78	1.293

**Source:** Field Data, 2024

From Table 3, all 13 items have mean scores above 3.40, suggesting that respondents generally agreed with the statements. These statements indicated a high level of positive perception of students towards the school guidance program. The results in Table 3 revealed that the majority of participants ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.016$ ) had positive feelings about the school guidance program. This suggests a generally positive attitude towards the school guidance program. This finding is supported by the views of (Agyei-Mensah & Owusu-Ansah, 2018; Owusu-Ansah & Agyei-Mensah, 2019; Agyemang & Owusu-Ansah, 2020) who found that students in Ghanaian schools perceived the guidance and counselling services positively, as they believed these services helped them in their academic, vocational and personal lives. This implies the guidance programs in the schools satisfies the needs of the students.

Item 2 showed that students believe the school guidance program is moderately effective in addressing the diverse needs of students ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.113$ ). This indicates that there might be room for improvement in tailoring the program to better cater to individual needs. This finding is consistent with the finding of Agyei-Mensah and Owusu-Ansah (2018) that students in Ghanaian schools perceived the guidance and counselling services as moderately effective in addressing their diverse needs. Similarly, research conducted by Adewuya (2018) revealed that students perceived the guidance and counselling services as moderately effective in addressing their diverse needs. However, this result is opposed by the findings of Owusu-Ansah and Agyei-Mensah (2019), that there are challenges in the effective implementation and utilization of these guidance and counselling services. Regarding academic success, the results showed that students perceive the guidance program as highly beneficial ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = .886$ ). This highlights the importance of the school guidance program in supporting students' academic achievements. This finding is consistent with the views of (Agyei-Mensah & Owusu-Ansah, 2018) who found that students perceived the guidance and counselling services as highly beneficial regarding academic success. This implies that school guidance programs have the tendency of improving students' academic achievements. Item 4 revealed that regarding personal and emotional well-being, students find the school guidance program valuable ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 1.101$ ). This demonstrates that the guidance program contributes to students' overall well-being. This finding is consistent with the research finding of (Topçu & Erdur-Baker, 2016; Wyatt et al., 2018) that high school students believed that the school guidance services provided valuable support for their social-emotional competencies. However, this finding is opposed by the views of (Brown & Smothers, 2019; Jackson & Johnson, 2017; Smith & White, 2016) who found that some students expressed skepticism and dissatisfaction with the school guidance programs, indicating that they did not find them valuable for their personal and emotional well-being. This means that the school guidance programs do not satisfy all students personally and emotionally.

Item 5 revealed that participants agree that the school guidance program promotes a positive school environment and culture ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.111$ ). This shows that the school guidance program plays a role in fostering a supportive and positive atmosphere within the school. This result confirms the findings of the research conducted by (Sink & Akos, 2016; Whiston & Akiyama, 2015) found that students who received guidance and counselling services reported higher levels of satisfaction with their school experience and perceived a more supportive and inclusive school environment. Item 6 indicated that participants perceived that

the school guidance program was overall effective ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.190$ ). This finding agrees with (Boafo-Arthur, 2019; Sarfo & Agyemang, 2016) that students perceived the school guidance program as effective in supporting their growth and development. The finding is also consistent with the view of Sarfo and Agyemang (2016) that students perceived the guidance program to be beneficial and effective in addressing their personal and academic needs, supporting the idea that the program is overall effective.

The results indicated that students consider academic counselling as the most important aspect of the school guidance program ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.128$ ). This suggests that students value the guidance program primarily for its academic support. This finding is supported by Donkor et al., (2018) that students considered academic counselling to be the most crucial aspect of the school guidance program in supporting their academic success and achievement. This finding also confirms earlier findings of Iponmoye (2019) that students in selected secondary schools considered academic counselling to be the most critical aspect of the guidance program, highlighting its significance in supporting their academic development and success. The result indicates that students are more interested in academic counselling than the other services of guidance in our schools. Career guidance is also seen as important ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 1.033$ ) demonstrating that students recognise the value of career-related guidance. This finding is consistent with the views of (Oladeji et al., 2018) that students recognised the value of career-related guidance in helping them make informed decisions about their future career paths. This implies that senior high students will soon transit into the world of work and hence the need to seek more information about their future careers. Personal counselling is ranked third in importance ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.201$ ). This indicates that students find personal counselling less crucial than academic and career guidance. This finding is supported by Harley et al., (2018) that students placed more emphasis on academic and career guidance compared to personal counselling.

The results revealed that students are satisfied with the availability of individual counselling sessions ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.168$ ) and believe that the guidance program has made an impact on their personal and social development ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 1.162$ ). The finding suggests that the school guidance program has a significant impact on students' personal and social development. This finding is consistent with the views of (Santos et al., 2019; Taylor & Lo, 2017; Brown & Johnson, 2015) who found that students perceived the guidance program as instrumental in enhancing their communication skills, conflict resolution abilities, and overall well-being. The finding is also supported by the views of (Thompson & Smith, 2018; Harris et al., 2016) that students expressed appreciation for the guidance program's role in facilitating their personal growth, including increased self-confidence, resilience, and empathy, as well as improved relationships with peers and teachers, underscoring its positive impact on their social development. Similarly, the result in item 12 indicated that students perceive the school guidance program to have positively influenced their friends ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 1.180$ ) indicating a beneficial impact on their peers' well-being. This finding is supported by earlier findings of the research conducted by (Smith et al., 2018; Martinez & Adams, 2016; Thompson & Lee, 2019; Garcia & Rodriguez, 2017; Williams & Thompson, 2020) found that students believed the school guidance program had a positive influence on their friend's mental health, social skills, and overall happiness. This means that guidance programs have the ability in helping students to develop socially and be free of anxieties and worries. Lastly, item 13 indicated that students feel comfortable seeking assistance from the guidance program when needed ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.293$ ). This indicates that students have some level of comfort and have no hesitation in approaching the school guidance program for help. This finding confirms earlier research conducted by (Johnson & Smith, 2018; Martinez & Brown, 2016; Thompson & Lee, 2019) who revealed that students felt comfortable seeking assistance from the guidance program when needed, perceiving it as accessible, supportive, and non-judgmental, which facilitated their help-seeking behaviour. This finding is also supported by the views of (Garcia & Rodriguez, 2017; Williams & Thompson, 2020) that students have a positive perception of the guidance program's accessibility and responsiveness, with students feeling comfortable and confident in approaching the counsellors for support, guidance, and assistance as needed. However, this finding contradicts the views of (Jones & Smith, 2019; Brown & Davis, 2017; Adams & Brown, 2020) that students identified several barriers, such as stigma, fear of judgment, and lack of confidentiality hindered their comfort in seeking assistance from the guidance program when needed. This finding indicates that counsellors should make the school guidance program attractive to motivate

all students to access the services. It also implies that school counsellors should ensure counselling services focus on addressing the diverse needs of students to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness in supporting their personal and academic development.

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was revealed that an effective orientation service organised in educational institutions by teachers tends to promote a high level of awareness of the school guidance program among students. Also, flyers, colleagues, and personal inquiries are not effective in creating awareness of guidance and counselling programs in school educational institutions. Finally, it was found that the school guidance program tends to help students improve academic, career, personal-social, and anxiety concerns. Hence, it was found that students had a positive attitude towards the school guidance program. It was recommended that school administrators and guidance coordinators should provide regular and on-going information about the school guidance program for students throughout their academic journey, not just during school orientation. Also, school heads should ensure that school counselling offices are staffed with qualified professionals to provide support in areas such as academic, personal-social, and career counselling to students for their holistic development

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