



## Students' counselling service dimensions and their effects on the lives of Public University Students in Ghana

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### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2582-7138

**Volume:** 04

**Issue:** 01

**January-February 2023**

**Received:** 25-12-2022;

**Accepted:** 12-01-2023

**Page No:** 230-237

### Abstract

Students' in-depth knowledge about the counselling service often increases their confidence in the facility. The more service insight students have, the greater their chances of benefitting tremendously from high service commitment that culminates in enhanced service use. The research aimed at exploring students expressed counselling service dimensions, to reveal their awareness and commitment levels to their institutional counselling services. The interpretive phenomenological multiple case study research design, embedded in the qualitative approach guided the study. Data were mobilized from thirteen well-informed participants, purposively and conveniently selected from three southern-based public universities in Ghana. In-depth interviews and a focus group discussion facilitated data-collection, but the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach was employed to reduce and make meaning from the gathered data. The study foremost portrayed counselling as a unique student facility. Further sub-themes projected counselling as a profession with an ethical code that also offers tremendous academic and social life benefits to students. University authorities and counsellors were encouraged to adopt innovative and student-friendly strategies to consistently promote counselling service use among students on the various university campuses. The research essentially confirmed students' profound counselling service awareness, in agreement with significant professional counselling features though consistent awareness-creation will promote service use among students.

**Keywords:** counselling, higher education, students, service

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### Introduction

Literature is replete with the numerous benefits students draw from engaging counselling services worldwide. Improved academic performance, increased college retention, better career planning and the construction of robust study skills are among the key counselling service benefits that endorse the facility as the most essential students' assistive service at various levels of education (Abdulmalik, Ajuwon, Ekore & Bella-Awusah, 2016; Sontag-Padilla, Woodbridge, Mendelsohn, D'Amico, Osilla, Jaycox,... & Stein, 2016; Newa, Kathungu & Wasanga, 2021). Particularly at the higher education level where students' academic attainment is critical to their successful and timely graduation, the counselling facility serves as an efficient tool, both in enhancing students' academic attainment and further creating a generally satisfying university life experience (Nor, 2020; Ahimie, Ikuburuju-Orola & Oizimende, 2020) <sup>[19, 1]</sup>. In agreement with the afore-mentioned, Abdulmalik *et al.*, (2016) confirms peer counselling as exceptional in promoting students' mental health, given that many students first ran to their peers when psychologically disturbed. Students' consistent engagement with the counselling service thus equips them with astute study habits and skills, like efficient time-management, academic resilience and improved mental health states, all of which ensure their successful graduation (Auerbach, Alonso, Axinn & Cuijpers, 2016; Essuman, 2015; Nor, 2020) <sup>[19]</sup>.

The sharp research and academic resilience skills among higher education students promotes their ability to confront the rather challenging higher education endeavour. Even in the face of health pandemics, where many severely rely on emotional support, counselling remarkably erodes their worst fears and strengthens them to overcome their hindrances (Sharp, 2016; Van Rijn, Cooper, & Chrissyafidou, 2018; Dhesi, 2019; Supriyanto, Hartini, Irdasari, Miftahul, Oktapiana & Mumpuni, 2020; Busher & James, 2020) <sup>[28, 25, 6]</sup>.

Yet students' deep counselling service awareness remains a primary means to their increased service appreciation. It is for instance generally acknowledged that students' profound awareness about institutional counselling requirement and processes, service location and even operation times on campus augments their service use, more especially when their service expectations also align with counselling service goals (Chiesa, Petruzzello, Mariani, & Guglielmi, 2020). The reassuring effect of such a realization, Chiesa *et al.*, (2020) note, increases student-clients' intrinsic service interest to incredible extents. By implication, knowledge is power and the more conscious efforts students make to gain awareness about their institutional counselling services, the more aware they will become regarding their individual counselling needs, and thus seek more service assistance for their personal gains (Abd-Elrahman, 2018; Newa *et al.*, 2021). Ryan and Deci (2020) for that matter underscore the importance of the core intrinsic motivation elements, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness to propel their counselling service utilization for personal gains. Autonomy in relation to counselling services offers student-clients the liberty to explore available service requirements both within and outside their confines for their immediate gain (Ryan & Deci, 2020). To this end counsellors' acceptance and friendliness attracts favourable testimonies from satisfied clients (Amin, Yahya, Ismayatim, Nasharuddin & Kassim, 2013; Ali & Amin, 2014) <sup>[3, 2]</sup>. The warm smiles, reassuring welcome messages and counsellors' show of care so gratifies clients who usually are unable to conceal their satisfaction with their counselling experiences (Amin *et al.*, 2013; Ali & Amin, 2014) <sup>[3, 2]</sup>. It is thus interesting the simile study participants draw between counsellors' acceptance and show of care to clients and parental love. It thus behooves on Professional counsellors, to establish early rapport with clients, not only to bridge the gap between the partners, but to further maintain and sustain the long-term counselling relationship. Clients' service satisfaction in effect plays a critical role in augmenting service use while drawing ultimate service rewards (Osborn & Obermeyer, 2016; Chiesa *et al.*, 2020).

Nonetheless, external service features like attractive and comfortable counselling room arrangement, soothing ambience and reassuring wall-hanging messages, equally impart considerable emotional relief on many burdened clients (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The uplifting and comforting effect of the counselling ambience on clients cannot in anyway be trivialized (Sanders Lehmann, 2019) <sup>[23]</sup>. In effect increased students' service awareness regarding both internal and external counselling conditions positively impact students' lives but low counselling service awareness leaves much more to be desired given its role in promoting poor service use with an immense waste of professional time, effort and resource. It is equally most probable that low service use also augments students' academic and social life problems, in the midst of prevalent professional service that

comes with absolutely no cost (Ahimie, Ikuburuju-Orola & Oizimende, 2020; Getachew & Tekle, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020) <sup>[1, 11]</sup>. Stakeholders need to urgently seek appropriate strategies to beef up students' counselling service utilization on their various institutional campuses, given the damaging and wasteful effects of low counselling service awareness. The main purpose of this research therefore is to outline university students' counselling service dimensions, in order to determine their service awareness and levels of commitment, to predict their service use levels, for the successful and timely graduation of higher education students in Ghana.

### **Critical counselling service dimensions and their effects on student-clients' lives**

Basic counselling principles unarguably define and justify the entire counselling service concept. The principles anchoring the counselling service equally underscore the key service dimensions that endow the service with its value. Vescovelli *et al.*, (2017) <sup>[29]</sup> describe counselling service dimensions as encompassing a host of significant service features that define the professional helping interaction in its entirety. According to Nor (2020) <sup>[19]</sup>, counselling simply refers to a professional relationship, aimed at assisting clients to explore, discover and clarify more acceptable means of reaching a satisfying and resourceful life (Nor, 2020) <sup>[19]</sup>. The overall assistive focus of the counselling service likewise draws from the confidentiality ethical code that also hinges strongly both on the private and professional nature of the facility (Mitchels & Bond, 2021) <sup>[18]</sup>. As an invaluable service dimension, the remarkable protection both clients and counsellors enjoy from the confidentiality ethic are critical to the entire counselling interaction, as well as the ultimate achievement of counselling service outcomes (Harwood, Turnock & Ashleigh, 2014; Lamont-Mills, Lamont-Mills, Christensen and Moses, 2018) <sup>[14, 16]</sup>. The professional counselling service dimension in effect aligns with approved professional service conditions, including the need for trust, acceptance, privacy and rapport between the professional and client to achieve worthwhile service outcomes (Getachew & Tekle, 2020; Ahimie, *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[11, 1]</sup>. Counselling comprises both internal and external conditions (Getachew & Tekle, 2020; Ahimie, *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[11, 1]</sup>. While the internal counselling conditions comprise, the unseen intangible features including exclusive counsellor knowledge, skills and expertise from relevant training, work experience, specified service goals and many others, the contrary external service aspect comprises concrete essential elements like unique physical service settings, including counselling room location, room size and space, physical furnishings and arrangement, painting, and others (Sanders & Lehmann, 2019; Maurici, Arigliani, Dugo, Leo, Pettinicchio, Arigliani & Franco, 2019) <sup>[23, 17]</sup>. It is noteworthy that internal service conditions like the all-important rapport-establishment and counsellor expertise, play as critical a role not only in maintaining and promoting the entire counselling interaction, but equally upholds the high service standards till the ultimate counselling goal is achieved. Diverse service features and conditions of efficient service-provision integrate to generate worthwhile service outcomes worldwide (Nor, 2020; Getachew & Tekle, 2020; Ahimie, *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[11, 19, 1]</sup>. Mention can be made of the explicit emotional and psychological benefits soothing counselling rooms reflect on heavily burdened and emotionally broken clients (Ali & Amin, 2014; Sanders &

Lehmann, 2019)<sup>[2]</sup>. For this reason, Maurici *et al.*, (2019)<sup>[17]</sup> describe counsellors as robust client allies and also authentic communicators of acceptance and friendliness. It is equally important to stress the role played by building comforting relationships as a result of relevant counsellor training.

### Purpose of the study

The study thus sought to identify the various counselling service dimensions expressed by public university students in Ghana. Specifically, the research sought to:-

Unearth the key counselling service dimensions expressed by Ghanaian public university students

Explore the benefits Ghanaian public university students derive from their expressed counselling service dimensions

### Theoretical framework

Michel Foucault's theory about knowledge and power, firmly anchors the current research. In this theory, Foucault perceived knowledge as deeply intertwined with power since each produced the other. The theory specifically holds that the productive power of knowledge is also restrictive as well as severely able to open new avenues for thinking and acting. Knowledge thus serves as a key predictor of all human goals, endeavours, resilience levels on their tasks and eventual achievement. All human thoughts and deeds are thus controlled by what and how much they know about life and this remains the sole means by which humans grow and attain diverse life attainment. Students' counselling service awareness in this research for that matter does not only facilitate their overall life advancement, but it further propels their service use and ultimately facilitates their academic mastery. By implication, the more students understand the value and requirement procedures for accessing and engaging the service within their institutions, the greater the chances of their increased service use to benefit them, both academically and socially. Students' increased service awareness therefore eventually resonates diverse benefits, hence the power of knowledge in this case, as proposed by Micheal Foucault. With their enhanced counselling service engagement, students should be poised, not only to excel tremendously in their academics, but to also achieve greater future exploits.

### Statement of the problem

Compelling evidence confirm the favourable effects of the counselling service on students' academic performance and overall lives (Van Rijn *et al.*, 2018; Getachew, 2019; Getachew & Tekle, 2020)<sup>[12, 11]</sup>. This implies that many students, if not all, require counselling support not only to facilitate their timely and successful university graduation, but to also couch a useful social life outlook (Biasi, Patrizi, Mosca & De Vincenzo, 2017; Getachew & Tekle, 2020)<sup>[11]</sup>. Yet since students' increased service use only comes as a result of their deeper service insight and increased service interest, educational stakeholders can only be assured of students' high counselling service commitment, when they are strongly convinced about students' in-depth counselling service knowledge and its effects on the diverse aspects of their entire lives. Precisely, students' awareness about the counselling service importance, mode of utilization, location of service facilities and operation times on their various campuses for instance, serve as critical antecedents to their consistent willingness to seek counselling assistance. Students' increased service knowledge additionally highlights their individual counselling service needs, and ultimately drives

them into seeking counselling service, but the contrary occurs with students' limited-service knowledge. In line with the afore situation, well-informed male participants regarding the digital avatar counselling process were found to be more interested and thus willingly engaged the digital system to draw more tremendous benefits than their less aware contemporaries (Van Rijn *et al.*, 2018)<sup>[28]</sup>. By implication, students' low counselling service awareness simply comes at such high cost to various institutions as it decreases their service interest levels and thus repels greater student numbers from appropriate service use, thereby culminating in a high waste of professional time, funds and resource (Sontag-Padilla *et al.*, 2016)<sup>[26]</sup>. Meanwhile many higher education stakeholders are deeply perturbed about students' yearly high university attrition rates, as a result of poor academic performance and failure, a primary reason for institutionalizing guidance and counselling facilities in Ghanaian establishments (Essuman, 2015). The situation thus underscores the dangers of university students' limited-counselling service insight, more especially regarding their academic skills and attitudes, their overall life-goals and devising relevant strategies to reach self-actualisation. This research thus unearths the various service dimensions Ghanaian public university students express, to highlight their service awareness, commitment and utilization for their greater ultimate counselling service gain.

The researcher thus proposed the following questions to guide the inquiry.

### Research questions

1. What are the key counselling service dimensions held by public university students in Ghana?
2. What benefits do students derive from the counselling service dimensions they express?

### Research methods

The research adopted an interpretive phenomenological multiple case study design embedded in the qualitative research approach. The researcher found the interpretive paradigm most appropriate in unearthing the multiple realities of students' personally expressed service dimensions in this research, since research paradigms essentially determine how the research problem should be constructed and the questions that guide the study, among other research methods to be employed to ultimately generate credible findings for the study (Khaldi, 2017)<sup>[15]</sup>. By implication, phenomenological studies embrace the relativist and constructivist stand point where social actors are efficiently involved in creating new knowledge just as they experience it (Khaldi, 2017)<sup>[15]</sup>. To this end, qualitative research data was gathered from three southern-based public universities in Ghana, through in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion, held with thirteen well-informed participants, carefully selected via a combination of the purposive, snowball and convenient sampling techniques. The eight females and five male research participants equally engaged in the research within their familiar physical settings and provided data with the commonly accepted formal medium of communication, the English Language (Ryen, 2016)<sup>[22]</sup>. The researcher subsequently achieved data-reduction and meaning-making with the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) that embraces a relativist and constructivist knowledge creation process. In this regard, research participants were actively involved in the knowledge-

creation process through an intimate researcher-participant discourse and ably accompanied with an interactive researcher-participant mode (LaVallie & Sasakamoose, 2021). Participation in the current study was essentially voluntary and all qualitative ethical requirements were duly observed in seeking to accomplish this research mission (Ryen, 2016) [22]. Accordingly, the researcher thoroughly briefed study participants regarding the study focus and their expected roles, prior to their engagement in this inquiry. This suggests that ‘trust is the classic key to good field relations’ (Ryen, 2016; p 33) [22] in phenomenological research. Additionally, she ensured that all fieldwork was conducted in the participants’ familiar educational terrains while simultaneously employing English Language, the most familiar and approved official medium of communication in Ghanaian Universities to mobilize research data. It was her conviction that the chosen language integrated with the context-specific elements of the physical university settings to endorse the interpretive phenomenological focus of the inquiry (Øye, Sørensen & Glasdam, 2016). During the briefing sessions equally, the researcher laid firm emphasis on the issue of confidentiality, especially regarding participants’ personal identities in consonance with approved qualitative research ethics (Øye *et al.*, 2016; Ryen, 2016) [22]. Data collection in the study thus progressed smoothly, as participants enjoyed the appropriate research conditions and methods under which qualitative data was efficiently mobilised.

### Significant study participant characteristics

The earlier-mentioned thirteen knowledgeable research participants were also from varied social backgrounds though all of them belonged to the Christian religion. Out of the lot, only one was a matured female married student with a child. The remaining twelve were direct university entrants from various Senior High schools within the nation. The age range of the research participants was between ages 21 and 26. Essentially also, participants were Ghanaians, reading Bachelor degree courses in Education and Science.

### Research instruments

As already mentioned, the two pre-constructed research instruments, namely an in-depth interview and a focus group discussion guide came in handy during data-collection in this research. An audio-recorder and a camera were also used to capture participants’ unique expressions concerning the discussed research issues, with apt images in this research to enrich the report. The combined use of interviews with focus group discussion efficiently explored participants’ lived experiences regarding the university academic counselling service (Rosenthal, 2016). In view of their relaxing and intimate discourse processes additionally, both methods effortlessly mobilized participants’ direct accounts, thoughts and perceptions about their institutional counselling services (Rosenthal, 2016). The use of both instruments in this research equally came with the added advantage of generating holistic and meaningful data, as a result of an efficient clarification of study participants’ raised concerns regarding key research issues. To achieve this goal, the researcher carefully combined both open and close-ended questions to design the research instruments for the purpose of enriching gathered data through participants’ frank, open and free expressions in a conversational and interactive mode (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015).

### Ethical considerations

Entwined in the complex ethic fabric of qualitative research are embedded a number of significant research elements, including confidentiality assurance, voluntary participation, informed consent, right to quit without any penalty and safety from hurt for all research participants (Ryen, 2016; Roth & Von Unger, 2018) [22, 21]. In this phenomenological research, ethical clearance from the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board provided a license for data collection. All relevant qualitative research ethics were thus religiously adhered to, in order to elicit appropriate responses from research participants. At the end of the study, collected data were also securely kept in the institutional archives, from public eyes for five years.

### Results

The research unearthed a number of significant service dimensions expressed by Ghanaian public university students. The primary theme expressed by study participants simply portrayed counselling as a unique service with numerous benefits, both to student groups and the entire human population. Other sub-themes that emerged from the primary one in this inquiry are equally discussed below.

### Counselling is unique

Emmanuel, a research participant who once faced dismissal from university as a result of poor academic performance was emphatic about the importance of the counselling service to him. Emmanuel described counselling as an exclusively versatile student support service. He said the following:- *‘I noticed that not even my parents or the lecturer could help when I was having problems ... they didn’t even know what to do and only suggested that I see the counsellor...’*

Another participant by name ‘Seerious’, similarly stressed the exclusiveness of the counsellors’ roles in meeting students’ specific needs within their institutions. He conclusively opined that only professionally trained and therefore endowed counsellors were couched for the counsellor’s roles. Seerious also observed that:- *‘That’s why I’m saying that not everybody can counsel... we need people who are qualified, people who have the heart to listen, understand and lead others and to help them take better decisions.... A counsellor can’t just be anybody at all.’*

Yet another participant shared similar views about the exclusiveness of the counsellors’ position as helping professionals. Yaa stressed the importance of the counsellors’ training as a helping professional. She observed at the focus group discussion that:- *‘... counsellors are qualified people ... they can understand and know what clients are going through emotionally, psychologically ... so that they can identify how they can settle the issue. Sometimes if you get qualified people,... people who really understand and are sensitive to what you’re really after, it helps a lot.’*

### Counselling serves diverse purposes

Research participants additionally described the counselling service as versatile in addressing multiple life concerns. Aside addressing students’ academic problems counselling also addresses personal issues related to self-confidence, religion, sexual abuse and psychological problems. The following accounts reflect some of the reasons for which participants sought counselling. One participant for instance confessed that:- *‘... I realised that I wasn’t doing well in my quizzes and since I didn’t want to flop in my final*

examination, I sought counselling assistance... In another instance, a participant reported seeking counselling because *'I was very shy and I lacked personal initiatives.. I simply lacked skills to do something on my own. I also I had problems with my Christian life. ... I was confused at a point because the Bible made me believe that there is no God so I approached a Christian counsellor and later a Moslem counsellor for assistance. I also know that counselling also addresses marital, spiritual, personal issues ...'*

Twenty-two year old Nelson on the other hand was referred to counselling by a panel of church elders. Nelson reported that; *'the panel thought I had a psy-psychological problem because they were so sure I knew the answers to their questions but then I just couldn't remember them at the time.'* Moreso, twenty-three year-old Yaa *'... went for counselling because her guardian was abusing me, sexually. He often insisted I come home only for him to do all sorts of things that were not pleasing to me. ... yes, his behaviour created fear in me ... at times when I-I-I reflect about it, I just couldn't study.'* Thirty-two-year-old Bigails' counselling problem on the other hand was different. She remarked thus at her interview, *'hmmm, my case was about my marriage. ... We had this traditional marriage ceremony and I later felt we missed some things... I needed information to keep the home and my husband also did so I suggested we go for counselling....'*

### **Counselling is a profession**

Participants did not also lose sight of the professional nature of the counselling facility in this research. As a profession, counselling engaged specially trained counsellors to perform their exclusive roles. The counsellors' training and well-laid down procedures often yielded productive outcomes. In line with the afore, thirty-two year-old Bigails observed that; *'Ummm. You see, you must be sure to speak to the right person to make a good impact. In fact, speaking to an ordinary man about your concerns only attracts specific pieces of advice but the professional usually gives you the opportunity to discuss your issue thoroughly and also helps you to raise valid points that lead you to discover a useful way out the problem...'* The same participant later said that :- *'as professionals, counsellors often come out well-organised and end up the best in handling our personal concerns'*.

Pee and Mawutor equally perceived counsellors as professionals. Pee's words were that :- *'I always go for counselling because I perceive the counsellor as a professional who knows what he is about. He is well-trained and has unique skills to assist me.... he will surely benefit me.'*

Mawutor similarly reported that; *'Actually I wanted a professional proof about my thoughts so I sought counselling. It right for me to do this.'* She subsequently noted that; *'... so when you have a problem, you can seek professional advice.'*

Finally, Emma said; *'... in fact counsellors have the fore knowledge, they have studied, ... they can give the relevant advises, in fact, they're good to follow and where you must be.'*

### **Confidentiality attracts a wider counselling service clientele**

The ethical role of confidentiality in the counselling service was also not in any way trivialized by research participants. They valued service ethics' role in assuring them of useful outcomes and also enabled them to build confidence in their respective counsellors. At her interview for instance, Bigails,

confidently remarked that; *'There are some issues I have discussed with my counsellor and I know she is very close to reverend but am very sure, trust me, my counsellor has never disclosed, not even a single word from me to him. .... Myself, my husband and Reverend once sat to have a discussion one day and I observed to see if my counsellor will behave funny or will do something for me to suspect that she has told this man what we first discussed... Never! ...'* It was thus not surprising that Bigails later confessed that; *'... urmmm... talking about what I like about counselling, hhhmmmm I think the aspect of confidentiality, it is hundred percent and I love it.'*

Yaa also subsequently identified confidentiality as a singular reason why she confidently sought counselling when necessary. She remarked that; *'No, it never occurred to me that my counselling problem will be made public by the counsellor. Not at all! .... because I know counsellors have that sense of confidentiality. So I was not at all bothered. It frankly never occurred to me.'* Finally, Baby reported that; *'I was very happy and relaxed when the counsellor asked me to tell him everything about my problem Based on my confidence in confidentiality, I poured out all my pains to him.'*

### **Counselling is for everyone**

Participants were equally certain of the counselling need by all. They opined that everyone, whether young or old, rich or poor, a high-ranking officer or labourer desired counselling services at a point in time. In this regard, Mawutor concluded at her interview that :- *'In fact, I think everybody needs counseling ... even the pastors who counsel people also get problems.'* In agreement with her assertion, the dark-complexioned accounting student by name 'Seerious' subsequently opined that; *'That's why I said that it will be better for everybody to do the counselling course.'* Further on at the focus group discussion, Seerious emphatically added that; *'... In fact, every human being, even the president needs advice. You see, ... so I believe that in fact, counselling is for everybody even if you are a pastor, an evangelist, a teacher, an accountant, everybody needs counselling. Even the Bible says that two heads are better than one.....'*

### **Counselling attracts parental love, warmth and friendliness**

Research participants in another account attributed their enjoyment of their counselling experiences to the care and pleasantries their counsellors shared with them during service-delivery. To the majority of them counsellor friendliness contributed immensely to their relaxation and subsequent opening up to their counsellors for detailed discussions about their concerns. At her interview for instance, Nhyira reported that :- *'... the counsellor smiled a lot.... and laughed a lot... He looked like he was feeling what I was feeling ...'* Another aligning report by Nelson was in the following words; *'Yeah, he really spoke like he was ready to listen to me... He wasn't interrupting me while I was talking and...he allowed me to flow my mind... Yeah, it made me feel comfortable'*. Esi's comment about her entire counselling experience was that; *'For me I enjoyed counselling and now the Reverend Minister is my friend. I go there to borrow books to read.'*

In the case of Nelson the counsellor's reception was good; *'oh he welcomed me nicely and picked a seat for me to sit. He then offered me water and said, oh feel comfortable, feel free ... at home. All these made me feel good... he in fact treated*

*me like his child and I enjoyed it all.'*

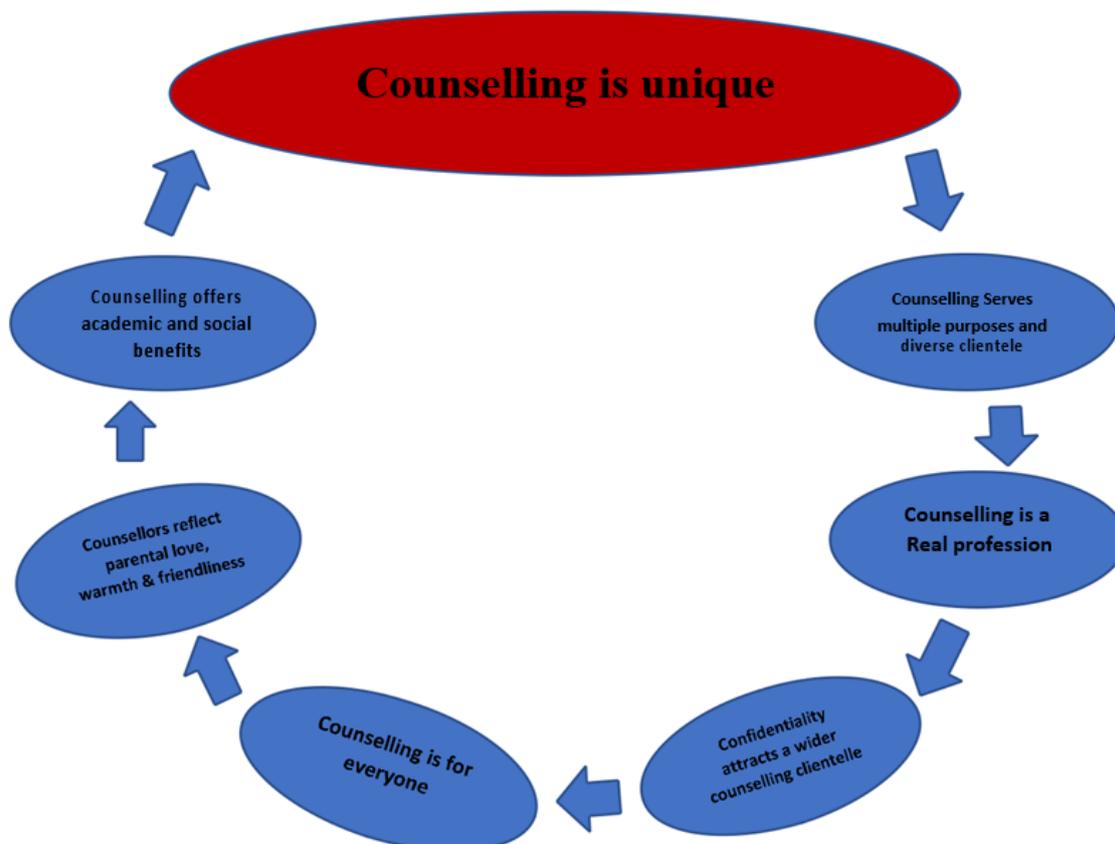
In a related incident, a study participant observed that:- *'... the one who counselled me... advised me like he would advise his own daughter... he gave me reasonable counselling...'* Another participant also said:- *'Yes, the counsellor was just like a daddy to me... he was very caring'*. Understandably, the amiable counsellor attitude reflected a comforting effect on clients.

### **Counselling offers profound academic and social life benefits**

Participants like Mawutor, Emmanuel, Yaa, Bigails and Kwame ultimately gathered diverse academic and social life benefits from their counselling service experiences. Mawutor for example confessed making clear physical academic gains as her test scores improved consistently from 12 out of 20, to 14, 16 and finally to the highest mark of 20 out of 20. She confidently reported making such improvements not only in one subject, but all her areas of study and simply attributed the changes to the useful study habits her counsellor taught her. She reported that her counsellor :- *'... taught me how to study and that has helped a lot....'* *'... at first I used to lie on my bed and simply read my notes... sometimes I even had my ear -piece on, and will be playing music and I thought I was learning.'* *But he told me to stop all that... He asked me to always move to a quiet place like the library anytime I wanted to study and also get a jotter to make notes from what*

*I study...'* He further advised me to revise my notes frequently, and sit behind a table and chair when studying..' Emmanuel similarly reaped timely academic benefits from his counselling sessions that enabled him not only to be retained in school, but also offered him promotion to a higher level in the following year. His account was as follows:- *'counselling was really helpful ..... It took away all my fears of expulsion from University... today, my grades improved and I am at ease to concentrate more on my studies'* On the social front, Bigails and Yaa equally had lots to share regarding marital reunion and immense relief from sexual abuse respectively, as a result of counselling. Specifically, Bigails was further able to restore her family, home and also learnt about the dire consequences of child abuse and child neglect from her counselling studies at university. At her interview, she reported that:- *'But counselling has taught me never to take a decision when through a problem because the moment you panic, fear, pressure comes in and only negative thoughts will follow but when you are calm you gain self-control and useful thoughts begin to flow. Today, my husband and I are happily married and our son is fine, thanks to counselling.'*

Figure 1 reflects an image of the counselling service dimensions expressed by research participants. It displays the broad theme that portrays counselling as a unique service and the subsequent sub-themes engendered from the broad one.



**Fig 1:** The uniqueness of the counselling service

### **Discussion**

Based on the phenomenological multiple case study research design, coupled with Foucault's theory of knowledge and power employed in this research, the study unearthed a number of useful counselling service dimensions that equally

align with approved service conditions and features. The interpretive phenomenological focus of the research, blended meaningfully with the exclusively created multiple ontologies displayed in Figure one. More important was the fact that the practical counselling-related findings also spoke

volumes about students' in-depth counselling knowledge to confirm the theoretical assumption that knowledge yields power.

Key among the service dimensions unearthed by research participants was the uniqueness of the counselling service. Exclusive services are usually perceived as special and therefore hardly get abandoned, in view of their marked usefulness, even at their slightest use. In fact, the high cost that comes with abandoning the counselling service leaves much to be desired among service professionals. The uniqueness of the counselling service, as suggested by participants reflect a double meaning. First that counselling goals are uniquely indispensable and secondly that service-provider or counsellor roles are exclusively couched for counsellors and no other. The adage that 'life is not a bed of roses' simply stresses the fact that problems are part of life and hence everyone all at a point in time will require counselling assistance. The presented counselling imagery here simply highlights the indispensable nature of the service to humanity. By implication, whether young or old, rich or poor, student or unenrolled, employed or unemployed, grieving, hurt, celebrating one event or the other, everyone needs counselling (Abd-Elrahman, 2018). The credibility of this initial service dimension speaks volumes about participants' service insight and interest in utilizing their institutional counselling services for positive rewards (Nor, 2020) <sup>[19]</sup>.

Related to the exclusivity of counselling services is the focus on key service elements like the professionalism associated with the counselling service. Counselling is indisputably a profession, guided by an ethical code that hinges firmly on the element of trust and confidentiality (Mitchels Bond, 2021) <sup>[18]</sup>. Confidentiality stresses the obligation of counselling professionals to conceal not only clients' provided information both during and after service delivery, but also their personal identities (Lamont-Mills *et al.*, 2018; Mitchels & Bond, 2021) <sup>[18]</sup>. Interestingly, the benefits of counselling confidentiality, both to the counsellor and client cannot be under-estimated (Nor, 2020; Ahimie, Ikuburuju-Orola & Oizimende, 2020) <sup>[19, 1]</sup>. According to Lamont-Mills *et al.*, (2018) confidentiality drives all the counselling service aspects though it most importantly provides clients with such immense service confidence. Similarly, the professionalism associated with the counselling service equally brings to the fore, the counsellors' prior immense training in human behaviour and also the element of maintaining high operational standards during service-delivery. Many are those who for that matter value the approved counsellor attitudes like rapport establishment and counsellor friendliness (Lamont-Mills *et al.*, 2018). Like confidentiality, the counsellors' efficient rapport with clients reserves the power to motivate clients to overcome their life's hindrances (to Lamont-Mills *et al.*, 2018). It is for this reason that many authors define counselling as a relationship. As already mentioned, the deep emotional support clients draw, both from the acceptance displayed by counsellors to clients and the cool physical counselling room ambience (Sanders & Lehmann, 2019; Maurici *et al.*, 2019 <sup>[17]</sup>; Sanders and Lehmann (2019) <sup>[23]</sup> deserve mention in this counselling service discourse. The reflected service dimension in this particular case further brings to mind the interesting simile research participants drew between the approved counsellor warmth and 'parental love and care'. Indeed, the counsellor's attitude during service-delivery is as critical to the client, as

the ultimately reached counselling outcome (Donati, 2016; Barragán & Saran, 2017). One can for that matter easily conclude that certain personality traits align better with counselling than others do.

### Conclusion

Summarily, the practicality and credible findings of the research stress the useful multiple counselling service realities enjoyed by many university students in recent times. Indeed, the significance of the unearthed research findings deeply enunciate the relevance of this research, particularly in this modern day turbulence where students are often burdened with numerous socio-personal concerns. That students require consistent counselling assistance at diverse stages of their academic endeavour is an undeniable reality. In fact, the reality about students' counselling needs only comes with their increased appreciation of the value counselling assistance adds to their lives. Expressed counselling service dimensions in this research therefore reflect immense service usefulness to all and sundry, including students from all walks of life.

### Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following

A collaboration among university authorities and governmental agencies to organize bi-annual refresher training programmes for the up-grading of practicing counsellors in universities countrywide.

Institutional Administrators should also liaise with Professional Counsellors operating within their confines to hold quarterly awareness-creation programmes, on the importance of Guidance and Counselling services to all students and also consistently advertise up-coming counselling programmes on the various university campuses for the consistent education of students regarding counselling service benefits.

During hall week and faculty week celebrations, institutional authorities and counsellors should collaborate with Deans of Students and Hall Executives to organize debates, seminars and floats, on the usefulness of Guidance services to university students. Winners of such events should be rewarded to motivate other students and further sensitize them on counselling service importance for greater clientele on the various campuses.

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