THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Front-line Counselling Staff Attitudes, and Their Effects on Students' Service Participation in Ghanaian Universities

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Abstract:
Counselling promotes university students' educational and lifelong goal-achievement, though poor service-staffs' attitude often deters student-clients from increased counselling service participation in many institutional facilities. The researcher used in-depth interviews and a single focus group session, to mobilize research data from thirteen purposively sampled participants, regarding staffs' service-delivery attitudes in Ghanaian public university facilities. Thematic analysis, coupled with the interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) were used to draw meaningful results from gathered data. Poor client-reception and a domineering service-staff attitude, reduced students' enthusiastic service participation, following which consistent staff training and the emulation of best-service practices from sister institutions were proposed to improve staffs' overall attitudes on duty.

Keywords: Staff attitudes, academic counselling, higher education students

1. Introduction

Effective counselling adds significant value to the higher education endeavor. The service's educational benefits are extremely diverse, though equally indispensable to students' improved study outcomes. Among Ghanaian higher education students for instance, Aidoo (2011) stresses the value of counselling in teaching students reliable study habits. Academic counselling remains the most famous and well-patronised tool that engenders profound favourable results, when applied to students' personal and academic problems in Ghana (Aidoo, 2011). Students' social problems, poor-time management skills and use of poor study strategies often leaves much to-be-desired in many situations (Aidoo, 2011). McKenzie, Murray, Murray and Richelieu (2015) also emphasize the psychological relief students often enjoy, from seeking professional assistance, regarding their educational endeavour. It is common knowledge that students' mental and psychological states deeply influence their academic outcomes. This simply emphasises the fact that the entire academic discourse firmly hinges on sound mental processes that encourage deeper concentration, clear analytic and logical reasoning. By implication, successful university education only emerges as a result of positive mental health. The counselling facility's role in promoting students' mental health is firmly confirmed by Badger, Segrin, Figueredo, Harrington, Sheppard, Passalacqua, ... and Bishop (2013), who itemise service benefits like reducing depression, controlling anxiety and stress among diverse groups of people and students alike.It is thus not surprising that Ugur (2015) attributed the counselling facility's principal aim to redressing students' deep-seated self-concept concerns. Ugur (2015) contended that the self-concept is a key factor in determining students' self-confidence and the magnitude of life-goals eventually achieved. Like Bandura's self-efficacy theory, self-efficacious students' high confidence levels in their personal abilities, often catapults them into laudable goal-achievement acts, many of which they would normally feel reluctant to tackle (Bandura, 1983). From this backdrop, Ugur (2015) suggests that promoting students' favourable self-concept, remains a singular means to ensuring their social and academic success.

Related to the above is the notion that counselling equally promotes students' college retention (Pearson, 2012; Olivas & Li, 2006). It is common knowledge that first year students' arrival to their institutional campuses is often plagued with adjustment problems, many of which reflect dire consequences on their psychological states and mental health. Reports of confusion, increased anxiety, low self-confidence and feelings of intimidation, among others, often hamper new students' commendable academic performance(Bitsika, Sharpley, & Holmes, 2010;Morton, Mergler & Boman, 2014).The effects of stress, anxiety and fear of the failure in their new terrain often leaves many fresh university students in a quagmire, making it necessary for these students to be assisted regarding the mentioned issues, for their enhanced adjusted to their novel institutions of study. Fresh students' early adjustment to their new institutions assures them of a greater and deeper academic confidence, and therefore their improved study outcomes (Bitsika et al., 2010; Morton et al., 2014).

Counselling simply comprises a confidential discussion with a professional, to insight a student regarding his severe personal hindrances to achieving his diverse life goals. The insight student-clients gain from holding frank and intimate interactions with their professionals, usually enables them to charta worthwhile life path to overcome their limitations (Zhumabaeva, Botalova, Ossipova, ... & Zhaparova, 2018; De Silva, 2012).Counselling thus demands a trustworthy relationship between the professional and client, to culminate in a thorough discussion of relevant issues,

regarding a client's existing challenges(Muola & Mwania, 2013; Oyegoke, Makgoba, Adedovin, 2015). Years of endless and remarkable service benefits continue to motivate many higher education institutional authorities, to establish counselling facilities for their students' use. Not only do these authorities contract experienced professional counsellors for their use, but they also ensure the service facilities are endowed with trained staff in order to offer students with high quality service. Incidentally however, some unprofessional staff from various backgrounds, on few occasions, gain employment to assist with diverse administrative activities within the service facilities. A number of such staff, occasionally find themselves at the facilities' front-desks, to receive and usher in student-clients, on arrival at the facilities for service. The front-desk tasks incidentally demand specific attitudes and conduct that many of the mentioned unprofessional staffs severely lack. According to Baumann, Timming and Gollan (2016) front-line staffs' attitudes profoundly impact their customers, by virtue of their unique positions, as the first point of call at the various service facilities. From their dressing, demeanour at work, choice of words while communicating to visitors, among other activities, front-line employees often send dissimilar messages that do not only speak volumes to customers, but equally engender rippling effects on customers' future decisions, regarding service-demand(Baumann et al., 2016). Nasr, Burton, Gruber and Kitshoff (2014) also intimate that front-line staffs' daily direct link with customers, remains a critical source of positive customer feedback that gravely impacts staffs' well-being. Poor client-reception and treatment at various service facilities therefore reflects dire health implications for both staff and clients. The eventual result of this situation is that the counselling service that is expected to provide a haven for students with personal concerns, and also act as a catalyst for students' success in the various universities, end up being less patronized by many. Compounding the problem are the diverse related issues, such as low service awareness, poor service structures, student-centered variables, front-line service staffs' attitudes and many others that easily mar and also serve as clear barriers to students' enthusiastic counselling service patronage, in many Ghanaian higher education institutions. In effect, front-line-staffs' daily interactions with student-clients cannot in anyway be trivialized, given their importance to the health and success of both parties (Nasr et al., 2014).

The researcher's interaction with student-participants in her institution of study thus set the pace for student-clients' evaluation of counselling service-providers' attitudes in the various Ghanaian institutional facilities. To quote a participant's surprising revelation in the current research, *'My first visit was terrible! She was so rude, I felt scorned'.*This may just be the tip of the iceberg, as countless students' experiences, regarding front-line service staffs' poor attitude at the various institutional facilities often leave so much to be desired. The daily demeanor and attitudes front-line staffs display on duty, as service-providers, thus deeply makes or unmakes the facility in the sense that they determine the facility's clientele strength in most cases. Even though such staffs' attitude, largely affect the quality of rendered service and its subsequent patronage extent by student-clients, there are limited studies that provide strong evidence on how varied counselling staffs' displayed attitudes on duty, influence their relationship with student-clients and their future service demand, in the different institutional facilities. The current research thus explored the types of front-line staffs' attitudes usually displayed at the various institutional facilities, and their effect on student-clients' future service demand, using evidence from Ghanaian universities.

1.1. Research Questions
The research was thus guided by the following research questions:-
- What are the behaviours and attitudes non-professional counselling staff displaytowards student-clients during service-delivery, at the various institutional service facilities in Ghana?
- What influence does poor service-staffs' attitudes engender **o**n student-clients' future service use at the studied institutional facilities in Ghana?

The study accordingly explores the influence of front line staffs' attitude towards student-clients within the various university counselling units, in order to suggest possible solutions to remedy the existing low service patronage situation in Ghanaian higher education. Also, the study serves as a guide for policy-makers to improve counselling service quality in public universities in Ghana.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Importance of Counselling Service Staffs' Roles in Institutional Facilities
Service staffs often serve as major determinants of greater student-client numbers in many higher education counselling facilities. In several such facilities, service staffs' displayed level of professionalism, in receiving and attending to clients, determines the number of student-clients that patronizes the specified facility's services daily. Staffs' daily demeanor, facial expressions, readiness to serve clients and choice of words, at such initial meetings, usually speaks volumes to clients. According to Leach (2005), staffs' use of acceptable behaviours like warm hand-shakes, broad and cheerful smiles, maintaining healthy eye-contact, and using polite words to communicate with clients, among many others, reflect an unreserved staffs' readiness to serve clients. Such favourable staff behaviours, Leach (2005) asserts, often end up reassuring and attracting clients into greater service use (Leach, 2005). Duff and Bedi (2010)also concur with the afore, by stressing the relieving effect of a staff's broad smile on an emotionally burdened client. In line with Maheshwar and Rathore's (2018) emphasis on staffs' empathy use, the authors describe staffs' warmth as a key ingredient to the client's emotional relief. Manthei (2005) and Chernus (2013) likewise share similar opinions regarding the issue. Indeed, Manthei (2005) aptly captures the scenario in the words, '… people respond better to counselling when they feel some degree of warmth and acceptance towards them' (p. 3). Chernus (2013) similarly observes that the staffs' 'sense of connecting to the patient, … to promote deep empathetic resonance with the moment-to-moment internal experience of the analyst …'

(Chernus, 2013; p. 180). It is thus critical, as the usual first point of call in many counselling facilities that administrative staffs' voice tone, comportment and overall client-reception, sends a heartfelt and welcoming message to all visitors (Duff & Bedi, 2010). By implication, the staffs' exclusive position at the facilities' entrances, transforms them into treasured assets in the help-seeking process that offers them the singular opportunity to either make or unmake their places of work. Most-important is the immense stress and anxiety, first-time clients usually report at counselling with, that demands immediate calming-effect for the clients' relief. Indeed, Cormack (2009), Baruch, Vrouva and Fearon, (2009) and Martin and Hodgson (2006) intimate that prevalent anxiety among first-time patients at a service-providing facility underscores the urgent need for a thorough front-line staff training. In a number of United States colleges for instance, many fresh international students, reportedly grapple with high anxiety levels that usually deters them from seeking counselling services in their initial year of study (Olivas & Li, 2006). Such client discomfort are often attributed to their prevailing counselling concerns, and its subsequent feelings of uncertainty about service processes and ultimate outcomes. In the event of poor-staff attitudes and rudeness towards first-time visitors in particular, so much is usually left to be-desired regarding clients' service commitment and future service demand. Yet little emphasis has been placed on front-line service staffs' attitudes towards student-clients in Ghanaian higher education settings, where empirical research is concerned.

2.2. Effects of Service-Staffs' behaviours on Student-Clients' Immediate Lives and Future Service Use

Service-staffs' behaviours, no matter how insignificant, often impacts clients' lives remarkably. While warm staff behaviours usually releases service attraction, comfort and reassurance to clients, contrary staff behaviours like poor client-reception, inattention, stern looks and uncheerful attitudes, only increase clients' fears, anxiety and reservations about counselling (Halkett, Merchant, Jiwa, Short, Arnet, Richardson, … and Kristjanson (2010). According to Dapaah (2016), quality counselling service most often commences with staffs' firm reassurances to clients of reliable service, through their display of professionally acceptable behaviours. Good listening, respect to clients, conveying understanding and appreciating clients' experiences, simply endow clients with unimaginable service value (Duff, 2008). Effective communication, building trust and a genuine show of care towards clients similarly provide greater service confidence that ultimately ushers clients into deeper service enjoyment and commitment (Dapaah, 2016). Halkett et al., (2010) also stress the fact that burdened clients benefit from the reassuring and kind words staffs convey to them during service delivery. While maintaining healthy eye-contact and using positive reinforcement severely connects both parties early in the therapeutic relationship (Duff, 2008), Nasr, Burton, Gruber and Kitshoff (2014) also assert that positive feedback simply urges clients further on to better performance. According to Martin and Hodgson (2006), the need for staff to demonstrate 'a compassionate and genuine nature' in receiving their patients, on their maiden visit to helping facilities is critical to beneficial helping outcomes (p. 157). 'Good communication' and 'counselling skills' (p. 157) the authors note, do not only attract and maintain clients' service commitment, but they also promote quality service to both parties. The therapeutic effect of warm staff attitudes on fruitful counselling goal-achievement cannot be trivialised (Duff & Bedi, 2010). To quote Leach (2005), respect and cordiality between service staffs and clients, establishes a 'conscious and active collaboration between the patient and therapist' into a 'harmonious relationship' (p. 262). For this reason, Al Ali and Elzubair (2016) describe a well-established rapport between service-provider and recipient, as a key ingredient to attaining fruitful service outcomes. Rapport in fact, remains the strongest underpinning element that sparks off, and sustains the in-depth, spontaneous counselling discourse, to profound extents in many helping encounters (Al Ali & Elzubair, 2016). Rapport thus conveniently 'improves client assessment and expected treatment outcomes' (Leach 2005, p. 262). Satisfying counselling outcomes for that matter often fill clients with relief, joy, excitement and hope for a brighter future. Clients' overflow of gratitude towards their helpers often times results in their deeper service commitment, even into the future (Al Ali & Elzubair, 2016). It is however important to stress that gratifying service outcomes may not singularly result from staffs' acceptable behaviours, though the element remains key in enhancing clients' service commitment.

Yet the disappointment clients experience, as result of their unhelpful service outcomes, often leads to regretful feelings (Duff & Bedi, 2008; Halkett et al., 2010).Poor rapport, falsified information and a domineering staff attitude, among many others, largely limit clients' service demand in several ways (Halkett et al., 2010).Similarly, staffs' wrong choice of words, impolite and unappealing service behaviours also often add more pain to the client's already difficult situation. Not only do unfulfilling services engender extreme fear, anger and resentment over their unfulfilled service experiences, but they also establish poor clients' perception, increased service misconceptions and therefore, deeper inhibitions towards the counselling service that ultimately result in low service use.

The need for more current literature, with firm empirical backing regarding front-line service staffs' on-duty attitudes, and their effects on student-clients 'future service participation, sanctions the current study's relevance. The research thus explored the behaviors of front-line service staffs during service delivery, and its effects on student-clients' future service participation in Ghanaian higher education institutions.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

The study was firmly underpinned by Carl Rogers' client-centered theory of 1951 (Neukrung, 2011). Rogers' theory essentially stresses a non-directive counselling approach, where the counsellor only acts as a facilitator, by offering the clientkey therapeutic elements comprising, unconditional positive-regard, empathy and genuineness during the helping process (Neukrung, 2011). According to Rogers, empathy largely promotes communication, and such reliably shared rapport is most essential to an enhanced helping interaction that thrusts fruitful service-delivery. Aside offering clients immense comfort and reassurance in counselling, Kankam and Onivehu (2000) further add that relationship

building (rapport) assists in the expression of client feelings, reduces emotional tension and enhances the problem clarification process in counselling. Unconditional positive regard on the other hand ushers the client into that secure milieu, where he widely opens up to the professional, regarding his personal life concerns for quality service delivery. Such vital counsellor attitudes often come with the advantage of establishing the most essential therapeutic relationship that promotes the client's understanding of his exclusive situation, to promote his personal change process. Csillik (2013) likewise draws a similarity between Rogers' Client-centered theory and motivational interviewing, both of which strongly align with the current study's focus on service staffs' attitudes towards clients during service delivery. Csillik's (2013) emphasis on significant therapy attitudes like empathy, acceptance, autonomy support and collaborative style in Roger's theory, simply confirms the need for service staffs' encouraging attitudes towards their clients. The therapist's satisfactory attitudes ably dispels clients' fears, uncertainty and doubts, to make way for a rather firm bond between the parties, for better quality service. In effect, the client's success largely thrives on the professional's displayed attitudes (Kensit, 2010), just as required in the current research. From the Humanistic point of view therefore, Rogers' Client-Centred theory assumes that all humans are born with healthy, positive drives to realize their full potentials (Neukrung, 2011). Each client can thus reach 'self-actualization' in his unique world, by simply acting responsibly (Bolt, 2001), though with the unflinching support of the counsellor's facilitative attitudes.

3. Research Methods

Krauss (2005) describes a research methodology as the specific practices, methods and paths an inquirer adopts in a research process to derive meaningful findings. The interpretive paradigm I adopted in the current study aligned evocatively with my study focus to unearth study participants' individual experiences of staffs' attitudes regarding service delivery at the various study sites.

The study was set in three southern-based public universities in Ghana. A sample of thirteen counselled students, comprising eight females and five males, mobilized via a combination of the purposive, convenience and snowball sampling techniques were engaged in this research. The theoretical interpretive phenomenological approach, adopted in this study correlated effectively with the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion methods that were used to gather relevant data in this study. I likewise accomplished fruitful data-reduction and meaning-making in the current study, with the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA). Interpretivism embraces a relativist and constructivist knowledge-creation process, where participants are actively involved in the knowledge-creation process through an intimate researcher-participant discourse (Nieuwenhuis, 2007), and ably accompanied with an interactive researcher-participant mode.

Participation in the current study was essentially voluntary and all qualitative ethical requirements were duly followed,to accomplish this study. Aside conducting all fieldwork in participants' familiar terrains and further using the most familiar official medium of communication, the English Language, to interact intimately on the field with study participants, I equally laid emphasis on participants' need for confidentiality, both regarding their personal identities and provided information in the study, as required by qualitative research ethics (Scot, Brent, Wolfe, Trenton, Gould, & Piland, 2011). Additionally, I took time to thoroughly brief study participants regarding the study focus and their expected roles, prior to their engagement in this inquiry (Scot et al., 2011). Data collection in the study thus progressed smoothly, as participants enjoyed the appropriate conditions and methods under which qualitative data was efficiently mobilised.

3.1. Significant Study Participant Characteristics

The study essentially engaged thirteen counselled university students, selected from three public institutions in Ghana. They comprised eight females and five males from varied social backgrounds with only one, being a matured student, and the remaining twelve, being direct university entrants from various Senior High schools within the nation. The direct-entry participants also ranged between ages 21 and 26 but the only matured-student was aged 32. Participants were likewise registered on Bachelor's academic degree courses in Education and Science, though all of them were Ghanaians by birth and also belonged to the Christian religion.

3.2. Research Instruments

The researcher used two pre-constructed research instruments, an in-depth interview and a focus group discussion guide, to collect data for this study. Rosenthal (2016) opine that interviews flawlessly match focus group sessions to deeply explore participants' views and perceptions of a natural lived experience. In view of their relaxing and intimate discourse processes also, both methods efficiently generate in-depth details regarding research participants' thoughts and perceptions of an under-studied phenomenon (Rosenthal, 2016). Another key benefit the researcher derived from engaging the mentioned methods together was the efficient clarification of participants' raised concerns regarding key research issues that eventually propelled the study's ability to reach data holism and meaningfulness. For that matter, the researcher carefully couched the mentioned study instruments' items via a predominantly open-ended questioning method, to allow participants' free expression regarding the study's research questions, in a conversational and interactive mode (Taylor, Bogdan& DeVault, 2015).The inquiry's unhurried and flexible data collection manner further increased participants' engagement in the subject of discussion for reliable data-generation. To enhance data and research credibility, the researcher also relied heavily on an audio-recorder to capture participants' unique expressions concerning key research issues, and finally added colour to the final research report, by adding notes on some important and memorable field events to the final research report.

3.3. Data-collection Procedure

Data-collection spanned a total of eight weeks, with two and half weeks each, being spent in a research site. Subsequent to receiving ethical and official research permission, the researcher sampled study participants, in line with available conditions encountered at the different study sites. In the first place, the warm reception, service professionals and staff offered the researcher at institution B, remarkably eased participant selection at the initially-visited research site. In institutions A and C however, poor reception compelled the researcher to adopt a combination of the snowball and convenience sampling procedures to mobilize counselled students for the study. On the whole, applying the mentioned approaches in the study, emerged time-consuming and challenging, with efforts at institution A being less stressful, as a result of the staffs' remarkable assistance in the participant selection process. According to Scot, Brent, Wolfe, Trenton, Gould, and Piland (*2011*), the researcher's ability to meaningfully interact with study participants, often generated thoroughly desirable data to establish the study's credibility and overall success. The researcher's use of an audio-recorder for each field-work equally ensured efficient data condensation that facilitated future report-writing. Each field-work day for that matter ended with a personal and verbatim personal data transcription, to ensure data comprehension and familiarity. Ten out of the thirteen engaged study participants were involved in two interviews each, leaving only two participants engaging only one session each.

4. Data Analysis

The researcher engaged two main methods - Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) and thematic analysis, to explore gathered data in this research. Thematic analysis implies searching for important emergent themes that describe a view-point regarding a phenomenon of interest. According to Vaismoradi, Jones, Turumen and Snelgrove (2016) thematic analysis appropriately illuminates participants' reported content in phenomenological research. Kafle (2011) likewise endorses the key elements of intentionality, real personal encounters and profound meanings, as significant to phenomenological studies like the current one. The researcher thus settled on the mentioned method due to its flexibility and efficiency in promoting the research's qualitative research focus - to derive hidden meanings of social actors, regarding service staffs' attitudes at the various institutional facilities (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The in-depth and comprehensive focus of qualitative research, reflects participants' genuine accounts regarding the understudied phenomenon. Contrarily, the researcher applied the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA), to usher her deeper into participants' thoughts and perceptions, for a thorough exploration of their exclusive understandings of counselling staffs' service-delivery attitudes at the various facilities. IPA assumes an exclusively idiographic worldview, where participants actively interpret their subjective worlds, rather than just remaining passive recipients in the knowledge-creation process (Larkin et al., 2006; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). For this singular reason, the researcher preferred the IPA's use in this particular case.

In consonance with the above-mentioned methods of meaning-making, the researcher equally engaged an early personal and one-by-one data transcription, to achieve both data comprehensiveness and familiarity. Hersey-Bieber (2010) intimates that an early personal data transcription satisfies three critical IPA meaning-making requirements - data familiarity, data completeness and building theoretical sensitivity in the study. At the entire end of data transcription, the researcher followed up with several transcript re-readings in search of codes, categories and themes, in line with the IPA process. She consciously picked on the most recurring themes, while carefully selecting key words and phrases that explicitly reflected the ideas of keen interest to her from the data. By this means, the researcher derived truthful study results that confirmed actual participants' lived experiences regarding staffs' attitudes from the study. She relied on bracketing (Husserl, 1999), during this process, to focus more on participants' actual field presentations during this data reduction process, rather than her private researcher presuppositions and judgments in this mission. The importance of bracketing in phenomenological research, both as a data mobilisation and meaning-making process (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013), is a useful means of promoting research rigour (Tufford & Newmann, 2010). Rigour in qualitative research represents the three key elements of credibility, namely dependability, confirmability and transferability. Together, the elements consistently confirm diverse data details from varied sources, thereby stressing the reality of the incidence in actual life (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013). The researcher found bracketing most essential in this particular data-reduction process, as a result of the in-depth and intimate discourses that took place between the inquirer and the 'knowledgeable' in this research, necessitated the use of bracketing to mitigate the likely damaging effects of researcher preconceptions on the study's credibility (Tufford & Newmann, 2010). The strategy facilitated the process of deriving thick description of the under-studied phenomenon (Houghton et al., 2013; Tufford & Newmann, 2010). The researcher derived three significant themes, namely, poor client-reception, a domineering staff attitude and poor client-cooperation as major research findings from the study.

4.1. Results

The research explored counselling staffs' attitudes during service delivery in three public institutional facilities in Ghana. Results presented in this section thus highlight participants' accounts regarding non-professional staffs' attitudes during service delivery and their corresponding effects on student-clients' future counselling service participation.

It was succinct from the data that some student-clients' unwelcoming reception experiences at the institutional service facilities were deeply regrettable. The participant with a pseudo name, Nhyira for instance, described her unpleasant experience with a service staff on her maiden visit to the counselling center. She claimed the front-desk staff treated her with such contempt on that day. In her own words, Nhyira observed that:

"But when I entered the facility, her reception was so bad... I was talking to her … telling her that I want to see a counsellor and it took her like 5 minutes before she even looked at my face... Meanwhile she wasn't doing anything in particular. She was just sitting down looking on her phone .... I'm not sure if she was whatsapping or not ....She just didn't look in my face for a while ...' (interview script from a 21 year-old female participant).

Nhyira, found this experience to be so disappointing, unexpected and above all sufficient enough to deter her from seeking future service at the facility. She expressed the mentioned thoughts in the excerpt below:

'some support staff are not welcoming at all... her behaviour made me feel very bad the first time I went to the center... It actually made me regret going to the center. The first time I got there, before I saw the counsellor, I thought the staff would be welcoming. That was how I perceived them...

In another development, Nelson, a male participant behaved strangely on reaching the facility's entrance. He reported taking to his heels just at the facility's entrance, as a result of feelings of fear and uncertainty. His exact words were as follows:-

'...you know it's a strange thing... the first time, it will be a strange thing... before I went there … you know I haven't gone to counselling centre before. I haven't been counselled before. I was wondering, who will meet me first? what will the person say? … I was asking myself what are the questions this man is going to ask me? … When I got to the gate, I was contemplating whether I should go or not...So I got back and refused to go …'(interview script from a 25 year-old male participant).

The above scenario however conflicted with Kwame's case, where his warm reception from a front line staff deeply calmed his nerves and whet his appetite to meet the counsellor. Kwame's experience was captured as follows:

'the receptionist received us warmly and she was cool. She even offered us a seat to wait for the counsellor and this put me at ease early enough. It also made me more eager to see the counsellor ...'(interview script from 22 year-old male participant).

All three experiences above primarily convey two polar results of acceptable and unpleasant front-line staffs' attitudes towards student-clients that could remarkably influence their future service patronage. While poor service-staff'sattitudes meted out to clients easily leads to regret, disappointment and inhibitions towards future service demand at the concerned facilities, acceptable front-line worker attitudes easily triggers the all-important therapeutic process that efficiently prepares and makes student-clients feel more at home regarding help-seeking.

Evidence from the data also revealed issues of staff unavailability that presents unprofessionalism on the part ofservice staff. Staffs' absence at post during business hours also presented counselling as a pure waste of time to student-clients. It was profoundly disappointing for student-clients to book appointment with a professional and arrive on the set date and time, only to find no one to attend to them. Clearly, it seems service providers are not mindful of the needs of student-clients and the inconvenience their absence creates can be devastating on the facility's image. Gordee (another participant) recounted his experience thus:-

'Yes, there was once I-I went there but there was no one …, not even the receptionist to tell me anything. So I waited a little but ... a woman later came to ask me, … I don't know whether she was the secretary or not.... she told me it was better for me to go home … that saved me a lot of time and inconvenience.'

At the second instance, Gordee severely lamented the experience of staffs' unavailability thus:-

'You will draw a meeting with the counsellor and then when you go there, you won't even find anybody to receive you.... That is very … very … very sad. You will move all the way from your far away hostel to the old site but you won't find a staff or the counsellor … then it will be like a waste of time …'

The above reports of service staffs' unprofessional behavior could have severe devastating effects on student-clients' future service patronage, given that they fundamentally described it as a sad experience, a waste of time and an inconvenience.

Another unprofessional staff behaviours the study highlighted related to imposition of counsellors on student-clients. Nhyirafor instance presented it as a regrettable case of staff-dominance since she felt clients should rather have the liberty and opportunity to choose their counsellors. She perceived her case as regrettable in the sense that the staff's choice of a male counsellor for her, resulted in an undesirable service outcome at the end of the day. She noted the following:-

' … she gave me a form to fill and after that she directed me to a particular counsellor. I didn't have any option to choose... the staff chose a male counsellor for me, even though I would have preferred a female... I didn't know I could ask for a change and it didn't even occur to me to ask for it because she was not that welcoming to me in the first place … '

From a different institution however, Esi and Pee opposed Nhyira's report. Esi for instance stressed the liberty student-clients had to choose their preferred counsellor in her institution. The staff on duty's responsibility was to simply direct clients to their preferred counsellor. Her report was as follows:-

'... when you eermm tell her the counsellor you want to see, then she will direct you to the room you have to go to. … Yes, we get to choose the counsellor we want to see. She doesn't choose for us, … except the one we choose is not available at the time.'

In another instance Esi remarked regarding the same issue that:-

' … she asked me why I was there. I told her.... She actually asked me to choose from the rooms so I chose where I wanted to. She then directed me to the place …'

Pee on the other hand took advantage of her institutional facility's flexibility regarding counsellor-choice and ended up enjoying her session.

'Well,... I-I during my orientation I-I had a counsellor we had eer one of the counsellors talking to us. So I was-I was ... should I say motivated or... I was eerm I don't know the word to use. I wanted to meet that particular person. So my choosing was my problem because I didn't know his name ... and I didn't know where he was. So fortunately for me, one of the-the rooms was 24 ... so and... my birthday was also 24th so I chose that room and I met him there. So I was excited...'

It is thus not surprising that Pee came to the following views about counselling.

'Yes, counselling was useful to me.... the short term benefit I derived from counselling is that I've become more ... self ... - ex... pressive ... yeah self-expressive (laughs) ... and open minded also ....'
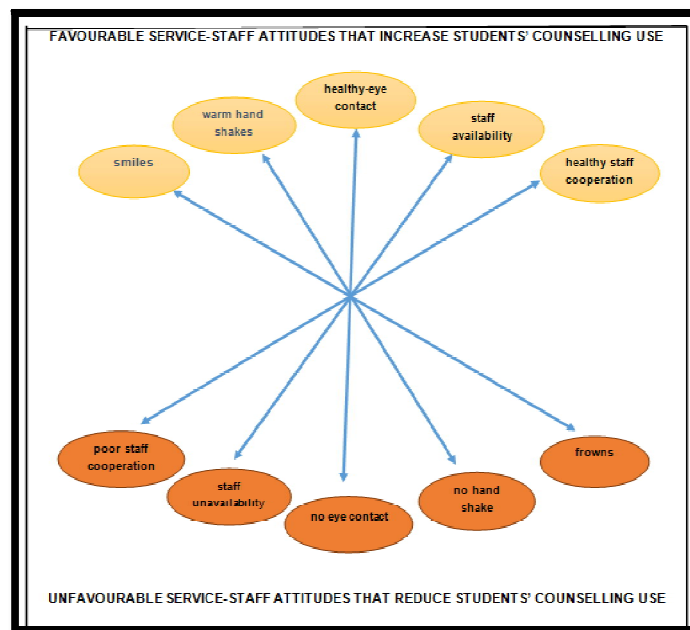

Figure 1: A Bi-Polar View of Various Staff Attitudes and Effects on Student-Clients' Counselling Use

If counselling is this useful to student-clients, then front-line service staffs have no other option that to adopt more professional attitudes in order to attract more clients to their facilities for greater benefits.

5. Discussion

The interpretive-phenomenological emphasis of this qualitative study, integrated meaningfully with the appropriate research methods I adopted in the study, to generate exclusive findings, regarding student-clients' expressed staff attitudes, at the studied institutional counselling facilities. The mixed staff-attitudes participants reportedly encountered at the various studied sites, therefore engendered diverse influences on student-clients generally.

Service staffs' pleasant and reassuring attitudes reported in the study were clearly in direct alignment with the attainment of overall favourable counselling service goals. As earlier established, the need for clients to feel welcomed, unthreatened and relaxed, even at the entry points of the various service facilities, sanctions the staffs' pleasant attitudes on duty. Leach (2005), Martin and Hodgson (2006), Manthei (2005) and Duff and Bedi (2010), among many others confirm the importance of such forthcoming staff attitudes, for effective bonding between professional and clients, with its associated intimate interaction, both for therapeutic benefits and quality service delivery. The mentioned authors' reports equally endorsed favourable non-verbal communication and gestures, like broad smiles, warm hand-shakes and a generally respectful staffs' attitudes towards clients, to have immediate positive effect on clients' psychological state (Bolton, 2017). The incredible value satisfied student-clients like Kwame, Esi and Pee in the current study bring to increased service delivery at the various institutional facilities cannot be in the least way be sidelined. Aside tremendously increasing the future reputation and clientele numbers of their engaged service facilities, the emotional relief the three participants enjoyed from their fruitful services was enough toinsight them into diverse essential advertising agents. Kwame's open confession regarding the eagerness he felt to encounter his counsellor, as a result of his warm-reception evidenced the profound psychological effect of the staff's positive attitude on him. Similarly, Esi and Pee could not hide their joy in being allowed to choose the counsellors they wanted to experience. In effect, the incredible power gratified student-clients hold regarding future service-provision in their institutions, can therefore seriously make or unmake their various institutional facilities. In the case of dissatisfied clients like Nhyira, Gordee and Nelson, whose poor-reception, coupled with experiences of staff unavailability at the facilities' entrances, despite their officially scheduled counselling appointments, left much to be desired. The hard and stern staff looks, mean facial expression and the lackadaisical attitudes of staffs do not only take the determination for seeking assistance away but they immediately scare clients away as well. It was such a situation that sent Nelson fleeing from the counselling facility, on his first visit in the study. To say the least, the staff's apathetic attitude towards Nhyira was certainly 'disappointing', to quote her own words, likewise Gordee's description of the staff's unavailability he experienced at the facility, as 'a very sad' incident. Both latter reported

experiences unarguably left the clients deeply hurt. Not only do such adverse experiences reflect severe dire consequences on the already burdened clients, but they also immensely refutedMaheshwar and Rathore's (2018)emphasis on immense empathy use, both by staff and professionals at the various facilities. Staffs' absenteeism at work, especially without cogent reasons isalso severely intolerable and unprofessional, and all administrative heads must endeavor to eradicate such attitudes completely from their confines. At least service staff could have saved their clientsthe ordeal, by planning a duty roaster, or calling clients ahead of time to re-schedule their booked appointments.It is to forestall such experiences that Price and Dalgleish (2013) and Stotland, Gilbert, Bogetz, Harper, Abrams and Gerbert (2010) confirm the prevalence of service barriers among student groups and members of the general populace in many facilities worldwide. By implication, it is mandatory that both professionals and non-professional counselling staff display sociable and accommodative attitudes to their clients, generally.

Nhyira's expressed interest in a same sex counsellor for example equally speaks volumes about her initial perception and intents for seeking counselling. The situation also confirms Furnham and Swami (2008)'s assertions regarding gender similarity and its comforting effect on both counselling parties. Self-disclosure and deeper counsellor-empathy factors likewise significantly align with flexibility in counsellor choice to promote client's counselling compliance (Furnham & Swami, 2008). It was thus unfortunate that service staffs' behaviours reflected such severe ignorance and unprofessionalism in the current study.

6. Conclusion

Findings from the study have immense implication for improved-future counselling services, particularly in relation to staff and administrative bodies at the various institutional facilities. It is expected that immediate remedies will be put in place to eradicate poor staff attitudes for better quality service delivery at the various facilities. The following recommendations will ensure an early streamlining of the identified service drawbacks in this research.

7. Recommendations

In view of the highlighted poor counselling staff behaviours, it is recommended that occasional re-fresher courses and quarterly training programmes are held by various institutional heads to rid service staff of their inappropriate attitudes at work.

The University administration in collaboration with Regional and District Guidance and counselling officers should equally undertake occasional staff monitoring and supervision in order to shape counselling staffs' professional behaviours at the various service facilities.

Finally, a hotline phone number and suggestion boxes could be placed on the facility's notice boards and physical settings to receive student-clients reports regarding any unacceptable staff behaviours for redress.

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