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Attitudes of Students towards Seeking Counselling Services, the Case of University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa, Ghana

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Abstract:

This study examined the attitude of students towards seeking counselling services in the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa (UMaT), Ghana. The behavioral theory of B.F. Skinner was adopted. Ex post facto research design was used for this study. The study population comprised 401 students from second to final year. Simple random sampling technique was used to obtain the participants for the study. Descriptive statistics in frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the data generated by questionnaires and documents. The validity and reliability of the questionnaires were enhanced through pilot study. Validity of the instruments was done by experts in the field of guidance and counselling Unit. The findings showed that students had positive attitude towards counselling services in UMaT; there is no significant difference in counselling seeking attitudes in both male and female students; and students' attitudes were influenced by easy accessibility to the Counsellor; confidence in the Counsellor; the Counsellor's accessibility; among others. Based on these findings, it was recommended that, there should be provision of regular guidance and counselling programmes in the university since students have shown positive attitudes towards counselling services; and more Counsellors should be employed in the university since students are ready to take advantage of the counselling services.

Keywords: Attitude, guidance, counselling services, client, students

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

This chapter unfolds the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose, objectives, research questions, significance, delimitations and the outline of the study.

1.2. Background to the Study

Guidance and counseling services are very important tools in human development especially, during late adolescent to early adulthood stage. It is a helping relationship which operates in and outside the University setting. Buku & Taylor (2006) asserted that almost everyone at a point in time or the other has been in need of help from friends and other people. Because when people feel distressed, bewildered, anxious, disturbed or uninformed about themselves and their world, they are more likely to turn to others for help and university students are of no exception. Effective counselling, especially in institutions of higher learning, has now become important. Counselling services hope to empower students to participate fully in, and benefit from the academic and social development of the institution and the nation as a whole. In university, students are advised to seek help from the Counselling Unit for a professional counselling mostly because University life is a new challenging experience which mostly corresponds to the early adulthood of individuals.

In Ghana, university students are in the early adulthood stages of life which comprises of the years (18-25) in which more new roles (partner, parent, and worker) are learnt and more life changes occur as compared to the other stages of life. Although, this period is the best time of physical strengths, it is the worst time of mental health due to the demanding tasks (Bee, 1994). Being a university student is a milestone of early adulthood. University education is the period in which most students live apart from their families and on their own, meets new people, try to find new friends and take critical career and academic decisions. In addition to these, university life demands that individuals more closely define their own career interests, social life and demonstrate high academic performance (Vaez & Laflamme, 2002). Unfortunately, this new life may be a source of new stressors. The student is therefore in danger of forming maladaptive

behaviour if he fails to achieve the desired social and academic goals. It is therefore expected that students will develop positive attitudes towards seeking counselling services provided in the university.

In spite of the aforementioned challenges, not much research has been done on the subject of students' attitude towards counselling services in Ghana, despite the fact that its importance for individual and national development has long been recognized. This study seeks to assess the attitudes of students towards counselling services in universities in Ghana.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Attitudes of students towards seeking counselling services have increasingly generated a great deal of concern among university Counsellors in many parts of the world. The effectiveness of any counselling service has been attributed largely to the prevailing factors or opinion towards such a service. Students' attitudes among other factors which reflect this opinion are indicative of their willingness or otherwise to accept, patronise or utilise counselling service. Evidence from related literature reveals two basic attitudinal response patterns, those students whose attitudes are positive (Cepeda-Benito and Short, 1998) and those whose attitudes are negative (Ubana, 2008; Komiya, Good, and Sherrod, 2000). Vogel and Webster (2003) cited Fischer and Turner (1970), and indicated that a person will have the perception and belief that getting a professional help is a sign that he or she is weak and also as a sign of failure. A decision to get some professional help therefore becomes the last resort for most individuals. Contrarily, an individual may voluntarily seek for professional help when he or she is facing a little problem.

In this era of student vandalism, extremism, activism and occultism in some universities, there is increasing pressure on Counsellors to justify their relevance by designing appropriate and proven programmes to meet the challenges posed by these negative tendencies as students seek help. However, the effectiveness of the programmes depends so much on the help seeking attitudes of the students.

It must be acknowledged that counselling as a strategy for moderating students' behaviour, depends largely on the attitudes of students towards it. That is to say, counselling in itself cannot effect any positive change without being accepted, patronised and utilised by students. This perspective has greatly influenced the motivation to conduct this study. In spite of these, there is limited research about help-seeking attitudes of university students in Ghana. This study therefore, aimed to determine the attitudes of students toward seeking counselling services through the responses of UMaT students to questions relating to University counselling services.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of university students towards seeking counselling services while on campus.

1.5. Objective of Study

The study sought to pursue the following three specific objectives:

- To identify the key factors that accounts for the counselling seeking attitudes of students.
- To assess the attitudes of university students towards seeking counselling services in UMaT.
- To establish whether male and female students have different attitudes towards seeking counseling services in the University;

1.6. Research Questions

Specifically, this study is focused on finding answers to the following questions:

- What major factors influence the counselling seeking attitudes of university students?
- What are the counselling seeking attitudes of students in University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa?
- To what extent do the attitudes of students toward seeking counselling services distributed across sex?

1.7. Significance of the Study

The results of the study would be significant and beneficial to the following individuals and agencies in general:

- The results of the study may be used for the development of appropriate counselling services and effective intervention strategies to increase the number of students seeking counselling services in the university students,
- The results of the study will also be significant for Counsellors working with university students. Being aware of the factors influencing attitudes may assist them in finding appropriate help for students.
- The study will contribute to the existing limited knowledge about counselling-seeking behavior of university students in Ghana.
- It will also inform the University authorities in taking appropriate decisions towards university counselling services.

2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

Attitude is the relatively enduring predisposition to respond to a given object in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner. It is a complex mental state involving beliefs, feelings, values and dispositions to act in certain ways (Jones, 1989). Attitude could be acquired through interaction with others in an environment and can be explained through various theories.

According to Jones (1989), the fact that a person's attitude could vary from situation to situation may not necessarily mean that it is controlled by situations but rather the person construing the situation differently. This suggests that attitudes towards any object could be behavioural as a result of the interaction between the person and their environment. The interaction between people and their environment involves human beliefs and cognitive competencies that are developed and modified by social influences and structures within the school environment. Hence, the framework of this study is provided by the behaviouristic approach to human attitudes.

Therefore, originating from the aforementioned concepts, discussions and preliminary findings from the review of related literature, this study is mainly conceived within the Operant conditioning theory of B.F Skinner (1989) as the framework for understanding the factors influencing the attitude of students towards seeking counselling services to guide the research design and most importantly the identification of the study's variables. The theory describes and explains the attitude of students towards seeking counselling services in UMaT.

This theory implies that, attitude is greatly influenced by environmental factors rather than individuals' internal factors. School environment influences students' attitude hence attitude of students towards seeking counselling services becomes a crucial issue in this study. The key assumption of Skinner's Theory is that students' attitude or behaviour is controlled by its outcome. The interaction between the Counselling Unit and students as well as other factors in the University environment determines the attitude of students towards seeking Counselling services. Several factors in the University environment may also act as stimuli to influence attitude of students towards seeking counselling services. The variables considered include sex, students' attitudes to counselling, and year of study.

3. Methodology

3.1. Overview

The main purpose of the study was to examine the attitudes of students toward seeking counselling services in UMaT. This section considered the methodology of the study.

3.2. Choice and Justification of Research Approach

This study adopted both ex-post facto and correlation research designs. The ex-post facto design was used to pursue the first and the last objectives which involved determining the attitudes of students towards seeking counselling services in UMaT as well as to assess the key factors influencing the counselling seeking attitudes of students.

Ex-post facto literally means "after the fact". Kerlinger (2000) defined ex-post facto research as: that research in which the independent variable or variables have already occurred and in which the researcher starts with the observation of a dependent variable or variables. By its very nature, ex-post facto design can provide support for any number of different and perhaps contradictory hypotheses; it is so completely flexible that it is largely a matter of postulating hypotheses according to one's personal preference. The point is that the evidence simply illustrates a hypothesis; it does not test the hypothesis since hypotheses cannot be tested on the same data from which they were derived. The relationship noted may actually exist but it is not necessarily the only relationship, or perhaps even the crucial relationship (Tuckman, 1994).

Secondly, a correlation research approach was employed for the study to examine the relationship between sexes on counselling seeking attitudes among the participants of this study. A correlation research is a research approach which analyses the relationship between data, between variables and some results in such a way that the underlying pattern of relationships becomes clear. A correlation research represents a general approach to research that focuses on assessing the co-variation among naturally occurring variables (Kumekpor, 2002).

3.3. Population

The population of the study comprised all 2nd to 4th year undergraduate students in the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT). The total population was 1,604. The 2nd to 4th years were chosen because they have been in the University for more than two semesters and hence, might have experienced counselling services offered by the Counselling Unit.

3.4. Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample for the study was 25% of the sampled population which was 401. To obtain a representative sample, the simple random sampling technique was used for the study.

3.5. Data Sources

The sample consisted of 401 (281 males and 120 females) undergraduate students from ten (10) Departments of the three Faculties of the University. Participants were aged between 17 and 25 years ($M = 21.47$; $SD = 1.76$).

3.6. Research Instruments and Data Collection Procedure

The instrument for data collection used was Self-designed Students' Attitude Questionnaire (SSAQ) and Documents Analysis. The questionnaire was made up of twenty-six items and comprised two sections. Section "A" had six questions and was designed to elicit demographic data on age, sex, and year of study. Section "B" which was made up of twenty items (10 positive and 10 negative) concerned students attitudes toward seeking counselling services in UMaT.

The questionnaire items which were rated on a five (5) point Likert's scale type which ranged from "strongly agree to strongly disagree were administered personally by the researchers and through the help of lecturers within an interval of one month. Scoring for sub-scales "B" were done by awarding 5 points for strongly agree and 1 point for strongly disagree. Scores on agree and strongly agree were merged to give a single positive score for each student while the rest were merged to give a negative score. Thus the minimum score for a student for the subscale was 10 points while the maximum score was 40 points. Students who scored 20 or below were considered as being negative with regards to attitudes. While any student who obtained more than 20 was regarded as having positive attitudes.

The final stage was the stage of documents analysis. After the questionnaire administration, the researchers met with the Head of the Guidance and Counselling Unit. They were assisted by the Counsellor to assess the clients' interview forms at random. As a matter of ethical consideration, the confidentiality of the forms was highly considered. These were grouped according to male and female students' forms from 2014 to 2018. These were analysed with the help of frequencies to determine the relationship between the male and female students in seeking counselling services as well as the average number of students who sought counselling services in each semester.

3.7. Validity of the Instrument

Validity of a research instrument is the degree to which it measures what is intended by the researcher (Ofori & Dampson, 2011). To enhance validity, a pilot study was carried out. The pilot study helped the researchers to identify items in the research instruments that might have been ambiguous in eliciting the relevant information. These items were discarded or modified with a view to improving the quality of instruments and its validity.

3.8. Reliability Analysis

To Ofori & Dampson (2011), reliability of research instrument is its level of internal consistency or stability overtime. Therefore, a reliable instrument is the one that consistently produces the expected results when used more than once to collect data from two samples randomly drawn from the same population. The reliability of a standardized test is usually expressed as a correlation coefficient, which measures the strength of association between variables. In assessing the reliability of the instruments, Cronbach's coefficient alpha reliability was run for students' attitude towards seeking counselling questionnaires separately. The results indicated that the questionnaires were highly reliable. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha reliability test for the questionnaire was 0.918. According to Ofori and Dampson (2011), Cronbach's alpha of .90 and above are indicative that the instrument is highly reliable.

3.9. Data Analysis and Presentation

Data for the study was obtained from questionnaires and documents analysis. Data collected using questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are measures of central tendency, graphs and tables (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Responses from questionnaires were tallied and converted to percentages. The researchers started by sorting, editing, coding, and classifying according to various categories. Thereafter, tallied, and changed them into percentages which were analysed according to the degree of responses. The data from the documents analysis were equally analysed using frequencies and percentages and correlated against sexes.

3.10. Ethical Consideration

Ethical issues in research in general relate to the consequence of the research, the obtaining of informed consent, the protection of confidentiality of the participants, and the effect of both the participants and researcher's role in the research study (Punch, 2005). In the first instance, the researchers explained the objectives of the study to the Deans of the Faculties involved in the study and to the participants. The participants were informed of their freedom to participate, decline or to withdraw from participating at any time from the study. The respondents were also requested to read and sign an informed consent letter before taking part in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity of their responses were assured as they were not required to write their names on the research instruments for the data collection.

4. Presentation of Results/Findings

4.1. Overview

In pursuance of set objectives of the study, research instruments developed sought answers to research questions. The study population was mainly students out of which 401 respondents were sampled from the population of 1,604. The return rate of completed questionnaires from the students was 100%. The analyses and discussion of results made use of the data given by the students as they answered comprehensive questions based on the study. Descriptive statistics such as the chi-square, frequencies and means were mainly used to present the data so as to answer specific research questions. First, the demographic data outlooks of respondents are presented in statistical tables and figures to enable readers have appreciation of the respondents who otherwise formed the unit of analysis of the study.

4.2. Profile of the Sample

The first section of this chapter 'A', describes the demographic data outlooks of respondents in the study including their sexes, ages, and year (level) of study. The second section 'B', presents tables of the main findings of the study while, the third section, 'C', presents findings from the documents analysis.

4.2.1 Section A

4.2.1.1. Demographic Characteristics Of Respondents

The tables and figure below provide the characteristics of respondents involved in the study. The issues discussed include sexes, ages and year of study of respondents.

4.2.1.2. Sexes of Respondents

Table1 below presents the data on the sex of respondents involved in the study.

Sex	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Male	281	70.1
Female	120	29.9
Total	401	100.0

Table 1: Distribution of Sex of Respondents Rated in Percentages (%)
Source: Field Data, 2019

The data showed that 281 (70.1%) of the respondents were males while 120 (29.9%) were females. This a fair representation as UMa T has only about 25% of students being female.

4.2.1.3. Age of Respondents

Data on the distribution of students by age is presented in Figure 4.1.

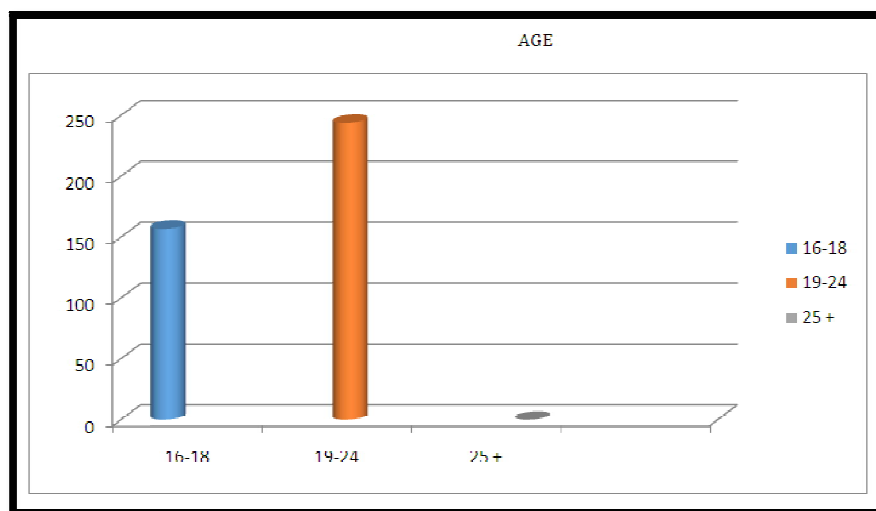


Figure 1: A Bar Chart Showing Age Distribution of Respondents
Source: Field Data, 2019

Figure 1 showed that majority of students, 244 (60.8%) were between 19-25 years. This means most students were in the early ages of adulthood. However, 157 (39.2%) of respondents were below age 19 and these were mostly in the 2nd year of their programme. The average age of a student could be located from the age group 19-24. The sample as a whole was relatively older than 19 ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 0.36$).

Year	Frequency	Percent (%)
Two	118	29.4
Three	128	31.9
Four	155	38.7
Total	401	100.0

Table 2: Distribution of Year (Level) of Study of Respondents
Source: Field Data, 2019

Table 2 showed that 118 (29.4%) were in the second year, 128 (31.9%) of respondents were in the third year, while 155 (38.7%) were in the fourth year (level 400). The first years were strategically excluded from the study.

4.2.2. Section B

4.2.2.1. Presentation of Quantitative Data

This section presents the main findings of the study. The findings are presented in the tables below:

4.2.2.2. Factors Influencing Students' Attitudes towards Counselling Services.

The research question generated for this study was to investigate the factors influencing students' attitudes towards seeking counselling services in UMaT. All the 401 participants used for the study responded to each of the items stated in the Table 3 below. Their responses were scored and means computed.

Factor	Mean	Std. Deviation
I don't feel comfortable discussing personal issues with an adult Counsellor.	2.84	.84
The Counsellor is trustworthy.	2.72	.69
It is difficult to access the Counsellor at times since he is the only Counsellor in the school	1.60	.70
The Counsellor would be able to keep my problems confidential	2.70	.64
I am confident the Counsellor can help me resolve my issues better.	2.85	.94
It is easier to share personal issues with a peer than an adult Counsellor.	2.03	.87
I fear the adult Counsellor can use my secrets to punish me when I discuss with him.	2.71	.76
Individual counselling is for less disciplined students.	2.05	.71
The location of the Counselling Unit is easily accessible.	2.65	.81
I feel shy discussing my problem with a male Counsellor.	1.70	.72
Valid N (listwise)	= 401	

Table 3: Factors Influencing Students' Attitude towards Seeking Counselling Services

Source: Field Data, 2019

The mean scores were computed using SPSS and the estimated mean score was set at a cut-off point of 2.50. This implied that a mean score below 2.50 on a factor is a negative attitude while a score of 2.50 and above shows a positive attitude to counselling service.

Comparing the mean value of 2.50 to the individual mean of each of the factors in Table 3, it is observed that the mean scores above 2.50 of the following factors showed positive influence towards individual counseling service; factor 8 (M=2.65) factor 5 (M=2.85), factor 7 (M = 2.71), factor 4 (M = 2.85), factor 3 (M = 2.72), and factor 1 (M = 2.84). However, the means for factor 10 (M = 1.70), 9 (M = 2.05), and factor 6 (M = 2.03) were lower than 2.5. This suggests that all these factors had negative influence towards seeking counselling services on students.

4.2.2.3. Students' Attitudes towards Seeking Counselling Services

The section investigated students' attitudes towards seeking counselling services in UMaT. The responses were scored and means computed as shown in Table 4.

Attitude	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Negative	118	29.43
Positive	283	70.57
Total	401	100.0

Table 4: Students' Attitude towards Seeking Counselling Services

Source: Field Data, 2019

The second research question sought to determine students' attitude towards counselling services. The attitude was assessed from a series of statements seeking respondents' agreement with various aspects of counselling services. The results in Table 4 indicated that majority of students (70.57%) had positive attitudes towards seeking counselling services while, 29.43% had negative attitudes toward counselling services in UMaT. This indicated that, to a large extent, students in the sample had a positive attitude towards seeking counselling services in UMaT. Most students indicated that they felt more comfortable and confident discussing their problems with the Counsellor. This could be attributed to the students' evaluation and appreciation of the counselling services offered and the ability of the Counsellor to discharge these services effectively.

4.2.3. Section C

4.2.3.1. Documents Analysis

The third research question sought to find the significant difference in attitudes towards seeking counselling services between male and female UMaT students. On this question, documents analyses of the students' confidential interview forms were conducted to assess the differences in the counselling seeking attitudes between male and female students. This was done by analysing the second to fourth year students' counselling forms from 2013/2014 to 2017/2018 academic years. Between these years, 500 counselling cases were recorded. Out of this number, 20% (100) of the counselling forms were randomly selected for analysis. To do this effectively, the forms were segregated according to male and female respondents. Frequencies were used to determine the relationship between the male and female students' responses. The results are illustrated in Table 5.

Respondents	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Male students	52	52.0
Female students	48	48.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 5: Significance Differences in Counselling Seeking Attitudes of Male and Female Students
 $\chi^2 = 0.479$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.489$

Table 5 showed the difference in attitudes towards seeking counselling services by the students in terms of sex. Out of 100 counselling cases randomly selected, 52 (52%) involved were male students while 48 (48%) involved were female students. The chi-square ($\chi^2 = 0.479$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.489$) is not significant at 0.05 level of significance. The findings suggested that sex is not a significant determinant of the counselling seeking attitudes of male and female students towards counselling services in UMaT.

5. Discussion of Findings, Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the reviewed related literature. The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of university students toward seeking counselling services in UMaT. The findings of the study are discussed below:

5.2. Discussion of Findings

5.2.1. Factors influencing the Counselling Seeking Attitudes of University Students

The first research question sought to identify the major factors accounting for the counselling seeking attitudes of university students. The results indicated that the major factors influencing the positive attitudes of students towards seeking counselling services in UMaT included, easy accessibility to the Counsellor; confident that the Counsellor can help resolve issues better; feeling more comfortable discussing issues with the Counsellor; the Counsellor is very understanding; students do not feel shy discussing problems with the Counsellor, among others. However, the easiness in sharing personal issues with a peer than an adult Counsellor, and the perception that counselling is for the less disciplined as well as difficulty in discussing issues with a male counsellor were factors respondents considered to let them develop negative attitudes toward seeking counselling services from the Counselling Unit.

5.2.2. Attitudes towards Seeking Counselling Service

The result of the second finding was to assess the counselling seeking attitude of university students. The finding showed that most students in UMaT had significant positive attitude towards seeking counselling service. It was observed that students feel more comfortable discussing personal issues with the Counsellor, less intimidated to be interviewed by the Counsellor, trust in his level of confidentiality and above all found the Counselling Unit more accessible. The findings contradicted the assertion of Idowu (2004), that though counselling is traditionally a one-to-one activity that encourages clients to talk about the most intimate aspects of their lives; it is not easy or common for students to disclose personal matters that cause pain and discomfort to their adult-Counsellors. Students are also likely to perceive individual sessions as inappropriate, uncomfortable and to some extent intimidating, he added. The finding is also at variance with several researchers when they examined the factors associated with a potential client's decreased likelihood of seeking psychological services (Kelly & Achter, 1995; Komiya, et al., 2000; Vogel & Wester, 2003). This finding might mean that the Counsellor in UMaT has won the trust and confidence of the students for them to disclose their personal problems without fears, hence the positive attitude.

5.2.3. Differences in Attitudes towards Seeking Counselling Across Sex

The third research question sought to find the differences in attitudes towards seeking counselling services by students in terms of sex. The findings suggested that sex is not a significant determinant of the attitudes of male and female students towards seeking counselling services. This finding corroborates with those of Mutinda (2005) and Duncan & Johnson (2007) which revealed that sex was not an important factor in determining students' attitude towards seeking

counselling services. However, it contradicted the reportage of Çebi (2009) that females have more positive attitudes than males in seeking counselling services. This significant difference could be as a result that the UMaT Counselling Unit has been made very accessible to all students.

5.3. Summary of the Study

This study investigated the attitudes of university students towards seeking counselling services in the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa, Ghana. The research analysed three thematic issues, namely: the key factors influencing counselling seeking attitudes of students; attitudes of students towards seeking counselling services; and the difference in attitudes towards seeking counselling service between male and female students. Data were collected from respondents through the use of questionnaires and documents. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics. The Pearson Chi-square statistic was determined to test if there was any significant difference in attitudes towards seeking counselling services between male and female students. Mean of means was used to establish the factors influencing student counselling seeking attitudes. The findings indicated that to a large extent, students in the sample had a positive attitude towards seeking counselling services in UMaT and there was no significant difference in attitude towards counselling services between male and female students.

5.4. Conclusions

Good attitudes towards counselling services are important for university education in Ghana. The implications of the study results are that the attitudes of students towards seeking counselling services were positive. Sex of students was found not to have any significant relationship with attitudes towards seeking counselling service. Students' attitudes were influenced by easy accessibility to the Counsellor; confidence in the Counsellor; feeling more comfortable discussing issues with the Counsellor; the Counsellor is very understandable; students do not feel shy discussing problems with the Counsellor, among others.

5.5. Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Regular guidance and counselling programmes should be organized for university students.
- There should be more Counsellors in the university since students are ready to take advantage of the counselling services in the University.
- Peer counselling programmes could also be encouraged to facilitate effective social and academic achievement among students.

5.6. Suggestions for Further Research

- Further study on attitudes towards counselling services could be extended by examining the attitudes of all public university students in Ghana and compare the findings with those of this study.
- A study should be conducted to find the attitudes of students in the pre-tertiary and other tertiary institutions towards counselling services since the main focus of this study was on university students only.

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