# Informing the Less Informed: The Information Service of the School Guidance Programme

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## Abstract

*For guidance in the school system to thrive and be effective, certain services must be rendered by the counsellor. One of such services is the information service. Counselling thrives a great deal on information and information regarding the immediate and remote environments of the counselee plays a very significant role in the counsellor's work. Information is very vital for the survival of the human race. Accurate and timely information is needed to take good decisions. But the complex nature of today's world brought about by scientific and technological advancements has rendered decision-making an ever difficult task for both young and old, especially the former. Of course, decision-making becomes difficult when the information that is required to make the right decisions is lacking. This paper throws the spotlight on the information service and how it can be used in the school guidance programme.*

**Keywords**: Information service, educational information, vocational information, personal-social information.

## 1. Nature of the Information Service

The information service of the school guidance programme, according to Bedu-Addo (2014), is designed to provide students with a greater knowledge of educational, vocational and personal-social opportunities so that they make better-informed choices and decisions in an ever increasing complex society. Ekwe (1991) wrote that the information service of the school guidance programme aims at making data on educational opportunities, personal and career issues available to students to enable them to make choices and decisions that are authentic, reliable and responsible. Ekwe added that for the information service to be effective, information provided for students must not only be meaningful and relevant. It must as well be accurate, complete, timeless, and must contain facts that were hitherto unknown to students or unverified by them.

To Schmidt (1999), counsellors are able to disseminate information on educational and career materials to students and parents through the information service. He noted in addition that providing information on a course of study, financial aid, and community resources are some ways in which counsellors can plan and implement the information service.

Form the foregoing, it can be understood that the information service of the school guidance programme is that service in which the counsellor makes available to the client information on anything that the client wants to know more about either for purposes of better understanding the issue or taking a decision on it. Indeed despite the advancements in technology coupled with the unimaginably large amount of information on the

internet alone, the task of getting accurate, timely and usable information has not become any easier. It is for this reason that counsellors must make the right information available to the right person.

## 1.2 The Information and Appraisal Services Are Not the Same

The information service is similar to the appraisal service in that it also deals with gathering, organising, interpreting and disseminating information. But unlike the appraisal service which gathers data about the individual student or students, the information service essentially gathers data about the environment for use by students. Numale (2003) wrote that the information service generates, codes, stores, retrieves and disseminates information from the environment to people. The difference here is that the information service gathers and disseminates data about **the environment/world** whilst the appraisal service gathers and disseminates data about **the student.**

## 2.0 Types of Information

According to Ekwe (1991), the information service should help to provide students with accurate and reliable information on career, educational, and social-personal aspects of their lives. Ocansey, Forde, Awabil, and Otopa (2005), like Ekwe identified three areas in which information can be provided, namely; educational, occupational, and personal-social.

## 2.1 Educational Information

Norris, Zeran, Harch and Engelkes (as cited in Shertzer & Stone, 1976) defined educational information as "valid and usable data about all types of present and probable future educational or training opportunities and requirements, including curriculum and co-curriculum offerings, requirements for entrance, conditions and problems of student life" p. 284). This definition implies that educational information should make it possible for students to choose or decide not to choose a particular educational institution or course of study.

Ocansey et al. (2005) gave the following as some of the data that educational information should include:
1. Available tertiary or post-secondary institutions in the country or region;
2. Curriculum offerings and subjects in these institutions;
3. Admission requirements into tertiary or senior high schools;
4. Subjects required for specific professions or courses in tertiary institutions;
5. Cost of going to a tertiary institution or senior high school (boarding and tuition fees); and
6. Ways of financing tertiary or senior high education: scholarships, grants/bursaries, student loans, self or guardian sponsorship).

## 2.2 Vocational Information

Vocational information is also called career or occupational information by some authors. Norris et al. (cited in Ocansey et al., 2005) defined occupational information as valid and usable data about positions, jobs and occupations, including duties, requirements for entrance and conditions of work, rewards and sources for further information. Occupational information should therefore make it possible for a client to take a concrete decision about a given job. Occupational information should cover the following:
1. The nature of occupations/work
2. Qualifications required for employment

3. Preparations needed for the different types of occupation
4. The structure and major groups within an occupation
5. Procedures for entering and progressing in an occupation
6. Conditions of work
7. Emoluments (salary, wages and other benefits)
8. Occupational hazards (Shertzer & Stone, 1976).

## 2.3 Personal/Social Information

Personal information provides data on people as well as on the social environment. Uba (1983) viewed personal/social information as information about the educational, health, emotional, leisure time, moral and social needs of students as they affect students' preparation for appropriate careers. Personal/social information is information which helps an individual to have a better understanding of him/herself and to make better his/her relationship with other students, parents, teachers and everybody in his or her life (Norris et al. as cited in Ekwe, 1991).

Ocansey et al. (2005) wrote that such information is about human beings and helps the individual to better understand himself and thereby improve upon his relationship with others. It is that information about human beings which help them to understand themselves better to improve their relationships with others (Kankam & Onivehu, 2000). Personal/social information includes the following:

1. An understanding of masculine and feminine roles
2. Opposite sex relationships
3. Manners/etiquette and personal appearance
4. Healthy mental and physical development, including personality
5. An understanding of personal behaviour (self-concept)
6. An understanding of how to adjust
7. Leisure time activities and planning of financial resources and social skills (Norris et al. as cited in Shertzer & Stone, 1976).

## 3.0 Principles of the Information Service

Certain principles undergird the information service. These have been summarised by Bedu-Addo (2014) as follows:

1. The information service is an essential part of the school guidance programme. Through this service, students are better able to plan their lives in the educational, vocational and personal-social areas and have an increased chance of succeeding.
2. The focus of the information service is personal study and future trends and change. Change is an inevitable part of human life albeit human beings find it difficult adjusting to and accepting change. There are new trends and changes in almost every facet of life. The information service of the school guidance programme therefore helps the client to see change as an inherent and meaningful condition in student planning.
3. Group and individual techniques could be used to disseminate information to students. Information may be given to an individual student who requires it or it may be given to a number of students who feel the need for the same information. Whichever way, group or individual, the information service not only gives information to clients.

4. The information service is more than information giving. It is not enough to just give out tonnes and tonnes of information to clients. It is equally important to tailor information to meet the needs of the individual help him/her to interpret and utilise the information for the present and future times. The information service also pays attention to individual's attitudes and emotional reactions to the information.

5. Qualified personnel are needed to handle the information service. As in any other human endeavour, the personnel who deliver educational, vocational and personal-social information must be professionals who have mastered the art since the quality of information given out depends, to a large extent, on the quality of the guidance staff that carry out this task.

6. The information service must be subjected to periodic evaluation. It is important that from time to time the information service is evaluated formatively and summatively. The reactions of students, parents and even counsellors to the information that have been provided in this service over time need to be evaluated. This way, the strengths and weaknesses of the service can be ascertained and the service ultimately improved.

## 4.0 Sources of Information

Both the counsellor and the client have a number of sources of information that they can rely upon. Some of these are discussed here briefly.

**The counsellor's office:** Although throughout the guidance literature no explicit mention has been made of it, the counsellor's office is and should be the number one source of information for anybody who wants information on any matter. By their training, counsellors have information on a wide range of issues ranging from educational and vocational to personal-social domains that can be accessed and utilised by those who need it. Whether they have offices or not the fact remains that accurate, unbiased and timely information can be gotten from counsellors. Sometimes counsellors even provide vital information without anybody actually asking for it.

**The internet:** The internet remains the present age's number one source of information on any issue. Such information is just a click away. One does not necessarily need a computer in this regard. A mobile phone or any other device that can access the internet is as good. Information on difficult subjects, topics and issues which sometimes can never be gotten form any other source are readily available on the internet. But care must be taken when accessing information on the internet because some of the things put out there are substandard. Crosschecking such information from other sources would therefore be a prudent thing for anyone to do.

**Written sources**: A large amount of information on vocational, educational and personal-social areas can be found in newspapers, magazines, journals, brochures, catalogues, booklets, occupational monographs and many such written sources. All it takes is to look for such material and read the relevant portions for the information one needs.

**Radio and television**: Radio and television also provide a nice platform where a lot of good information is disseminated. They usually give announcements and run advertisements about jobs, schools, even personal-social issues such as communication in relationships or how to sustain an intimate relationship. These days there are mobile phones that can have radio or TV or both. With such devices one can get access to a lot of information on different subjects.

**Conferences and conventions**: Sometimes some higher learning institutions organise conferences where they disseminate information on their courses, entry requirements, fees, facilities, job opportunities after studying with them, etc. Some second cycle institutions also usually organise career conferences where students are given

information on certain careers/occupations. These conferences and conventions are very good platforms where educational and vocational information can be disseminated and or assimilated.

**Direct/formal teaching of certain subjects**: Through the direct teaching of certain academic subjects, information on such subjects and the careers that are related to them are disseminated. This helps the teacher to play his/her guidance role more effectively by reaching out to a large number of people at a time, and according to Bedu-Addo (2014), this reduces the time that would have been spent on each individual student during counselling.

**Institutions:** By institutions we mean corporate institutions such as firms and organisations on one hand and academic institutions such as schools, colleges and universities on the other. Vocational and educational information can be gotten from these institutions. All one needs to do is to visit these institutions for information such as entry requirements, progression, pay, fees, etc.

**Other sources of information:** Other sources where educational, vocational and personal-social information can be accessed are parents, teachers, pastors, peers and significant others. There is no doubt that some of these people can provide some of the information we may need. Sometimes they may even have information that the other sources do not have. But due to idiosyncrasies, subjectivity and even bias, any information taken from these sources may have to be crosschecked for accuracy, timeliness and objectivity.

# 5.0 Conclusion

In sum, information is vital for human growth and development, especially in the present age and time. If students can be helped by counsellors to develop to their full potential and take advantage of the opportunities in and around their environment, accurate and timely information can never be left out. Such information may be on educational, vocational or personal/social issues that concern students. The information service of the school guidance programme should therefore be strengthened because all the other guidance services depend largely on it.

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