

# Assessment of the Counselling Needs of Distance Education Students in a Ghanaian Public University

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## Abstract

Needs assessment is a prerequisite for developing comprehensive and relevant counselling services for students. This study investigated the counselling needs of distance students, focusing on the diploma students of the College of Distance Education of the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. The descriptive design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 36,798 with a sample size of 1110. Purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. The instrument used for the data collection was the questionnaire. The data were analysed, using descriptive (means and standard deviations) and inferential (independent samples t-test and ANOVA) statistics. The study revealed that the most important counselling needs of students were related to how to meet deadlines, how to prepare and attend job interviews and how to relate well with lecturers. The study also showed that the marital status and programme of study were significant determinants of the counselling needs of students. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that the Management of the College of Distance Education at the University of Cape Coast should ensure that counselling services be based on the most prevalent counselling needs of the students.

## Keywords

Counselling, Educational Needs, Personal-Social Needs, Practical Needs, Career Needs, Distance Education Students

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## 1. Introduction

Counselling as a support service strengthens students' abilities to solve their problems and to make informed choices and decisions. According to [Kauchak \(2011\)](#), counselling prepares students to assume increasing responsibility for their decisions and grow in their ability to understand and accept the results of their choices. [Akinade \(2012\)](#) considers counselling as a developmental process by which individuals are assisted to understand, accept and use their abilities, aptitudes, interests and attitudinal patterns in relation to their aspirations. Counselling services must be based on the identified needs of the target beneficiaries.

However, [Awabil and Akande \(2013\)](#) posit that in many parts of the developing world such as Ghana, many school counsellors offer counselling services based on assumed needs of students without conducting needs assessment. They tend to rely on reports from adults regarding students' needs instead of allowing students to report their own needs. [Awabil and Akande \(2013\)](#) are of the view that adults may not always be able to accurately perceive the counselling needs of students. Before any counselling service is rendered to students, there is the need to conduct needs assessment to find out their most prevalent needs so as to make counselling services relevant and effective ([Awabil & Akande, 2013](#)). The accurate assessment of potential client needs is critical in establishing and maintaining programme relevance and as a basis for programme accountability and evaluation ([Gibson & Mitchell, 2008](#)). Thus, the identification of students' counselling needs by school counsellors is crucial in the provision of relevant counselling services to students. Generally, students' counselling needs are in four broad categories, namely personal-social, career/vocational, educational/academic and practical needs ([Apreko, 2010; Awabil & Akande, 2013](#)).

The study, therefore, investigated the personal-social, career, educational and practical counselling needs of students in the College based on their own perspectives with a view to making counselling services relevant and effective. The counselling services rendered to students of College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast, are not effective ([Dankyi & Awabil, 2020; Dankyi, 2019](#)). This is partly due to the fact that counselling services do not accurately reflect actual needs of the students.

## 2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the counselling needs of diploma students in the College of Distance Education in the University of Cape Coast.

Four research questions were formulated to guide the study.

- 1) What are the most prevalent educational counselling needs of students?
- 2) What are the priority personal-social counselling needs of students?
- 3) What are the most important career/vocational counselling needs of students?
- 4) What are the most prevalent practical counselling needs of students?

### 3. Hypotheses

Two hypotheses on the bases of marital status and programme of study were formulated to guide the study.

H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no statistically significant difference in the counselling needs of students with regard to their marital status.

H<sub>A</sub>1: There is a statistically significant difference in the counselling needs of students with regard to their marital status.

H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no statistically significant difference in the counselling needs of students in terms of programme of study.

H<sub>A</sub>2: There is a statistically significant difference in the counselling needs of students in terms of programme of study.

### 4. Significance of the Study

The findings of the study will be beneficial to institutions that are involved in distance education programmes, counselling units, distance education instructors and the distance education students themselves. The study is important because, in spite of the various efforts made by the various stakeholders in distance education as an alternative to traditional residential education, the problem of poor academic performance by distance education students seems to be rising in the country's universities. In this connection, the dissemination of the research findings on the assessment of the counselling needs of distance education students could lead to a wider adoption of appropriate counselling strategies and in the long-run student learning would improve through effective counselling services.

In practice, the findings may serve as the basis upon which effective and comprehensive counselling services could be designed. It would help counsellors in the various study centres to be more proactive and innovative to design very comprehensive educational programmes for students to enhance their learning adaptability to the system in order to yield better academic results.

### 5. Literature Review

#### 5.1. Students and their Counselling Needs in Terms of Specific Category of Needs

This study focused on four broad categories of needs, namely, practical needs, personal-social, vocational/career and educational/academic needs. However, there are specific needs of students under each broad category. [Awabil and Akande \(2013\)](#) in their study on the assessment of the counselling needs of polytechnic students in Nigeria, sought to find out the most prevalent counselling needs of students with regard to each of the four broad categories of student needs. It was revealed that under practical needs students were worried about school fees, inadequate transport facilities, poor facilities for persons with disability and inadequate medical facilities.

With regard to the vocational/career needs, the study found that students

needed information on how to prepare and attend job interviews as well as information about occupations or careers. They also needed to visit an industry. With respect to personal-social needs, self-understanding was the most significant because students wanted to know more about their interests and potentialities in order to make a realistic career and educational decisions and choices. Their study also revealed that students' specific educational needs were difficulty in discussing problems with lecturers, difficulty coping with coursework loads and difficulty coping with style of teaching in the polytechnic (Awabil & Akande, 2013). The needs of distance students are likely to defer from these findings because of their characteristics. Students with families often experience difficulties in balancing their academic demands with their family and social commitments (Brigman & Campbell, 2017). The stressors among distance students are occupational, family responsibility, academic activities, financial, cultural roles, and religious roles stress (Anyan & Pryor, 2012; Sumaila, Ankoma-Sey, Asamoah, & Quansah, 2020). Rivera and Pellitteri (2012) are also of the view that distance education students must be assisted to choose an occupation, prepare for it, enter it and progress in it.

Another study by Okyere, Awabil and Nyarko-Sampson (2015) on the assessment of the counselling needs of students in the University of Energy and Natural Resources in the then Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana also found out the specific needs of students under the four broad categories. The study revealed that specific practical needs that were of great concern to students were inadequate lecture room space and high user fee charged by the university. This need may not be different from that of students of the College of Distance Education in the University of Cape Coast. This is because most of the study centres are senior high school rented premises and so there is the likelihood that the lecture halls may be inadequate and uncomfortable with higher user fee as well.

With regard to career needs, students expressed interest on the need for more information on occupations or careers, need for information about how to prepare and attend interviews and the need to find placement for industrial attachment. The results of their study also showed that under the personal/social category, students greatly desired self-understanding, and how to resolve interpersonal conflict. The study further revealed that student did not desire any specific educational needs (Okyere et al., 2015).

The results of the research by Yakubu, Awabil and Forde (2017) on the counselling needs of students in the University of Health and Allied Sciences in Ghana, showed that students' specific needs under the educational category were study skills, examination taking skills, time management and memory retrieval strategies. With regard to personal-social category, students' needs were difficulty in making new friends, problem coping with disappointment, problem with dating and lack of freedom at home. Under vocational/career needs, choosing programme and confusion about kind of job placement were the most significant needs. Students had no specific practical needs.

## 5.2. Marital Status and Counselling Needs

In the study conducted by [Ogunsanmi \(2014\)](#) on the levels of stress experienced by married female sandwich undergraduates in Ekiti State University, Nigeria. Stressors of interest were occupational stress, family responsibility stress, academic activities stress, financial stress, cultural roles stress, religious roles stress and programme generated stress. The influences of age, years in marriage and level on academic programme on stress experienced among the women were examined. The findings revealed significant differences in the level of stress experienced by married female undergraduates in Ekiti State University. Stress was experienced differently among the women. However, a great number (79.5%) experienced it. The number that experienced it is highly (9.5%) and is a matter of concern as it affected homes. Generally, the results imply that women had high and positive expectations of benefits after the programme, like the attainment of higher educational degrees and improved social status as they went through the stressful conditions of receiving education. Based on the findings, it was recommended that young married women should delay participation in the rigorous sandwich programme. Since the years in marriage and level on the programme were significant, interested newly married women should wait for some years into their marriage before embarking on the programme. Also, married female undergraduates should be counselled to develop coping methods to care for their various roles as married women on the programme ([Ogunsanmi, 2014](#)). This is where it is prudent to identify the needs of these students and provide effective counselling on how well to combine their marital duties as African women with their academic work as students as well as career, as career women. Counselling should be intensified and structured along the needs of students and not on the perceived needs of students. Counselling when organized according to the needs of students will definitely address the needs of students and also becomes motivational. Wong and Kwok, as cited in [Apreko \(2010\)](#), revealed that a higher percentage of married students with children experience difficulties in specific areas, particularly in relation to time constraints and study difficulties than single students and those married with no children. The results of the study further showed that mature full-time students experience more difficulties in the area of finance and a variety of circumstances related to study, work, family and social life. It was also found that married students had more educational/academic problems than students who were single.

## 5.3. Programme of Study and Counselling Needs

There are different programmes of study so far as education and distance education is concerned. Some of the programmes in distance education of University of Cape Coast include Diploma in Basic Education, Diploma in Management Studies, Diploma in Commerce, Diploma in Science and Mathematics Education, and Diploma in Psychological Foundations of Education. [Dankyi \(2016\)](#) examined the study habits of University of Cape Coast distance education students, focusing on students at the Cape Coast study centre. One of the specific

objectives of the study was to establish whether or not differences exist in the study habits of distance business and education students of the university. The results of the study revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between distance education students with regard to those reading business and education programmes. Also, with regard to study skills, the needs of students in terms of programme were the same.

Webster and Hackley (2017) also assessed distance education students' counselling needs and their effect on their academic performance in Mathematics, comparing Science and Arts students. The counselling needs examined were attitudes towards Mathematics, study methods and test taking skills related to Mathematics performance. The study found out whether a statistically significant difference existed between psychological intervention requirements and Mathematics counselling needs among the secondary school students. The findings that emerged from the study showed that secondary school students had counselling needs in relation to attitude towards Mathematics, study methods and test taking skills for which psychological intervention was necessary. The finding further showed that there was a statistically significant difference between Science and Arts students with regard to their performance in Mathematics and counselling needs. This gives the indication that counselling needs of students may defer in terms of programme of study.

## **6. Research Methods**

### **6.1. Research Design**

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey. This type of design was appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data to assess current practices for improvement. The design gives a more accurate and meaningful picture of events and seeks to explain people's perceptions and behaviour on the basis of data gathered at any particular time (Creswell, 2014).

### **6.2. Population**

The population for the study was all diploma students of College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast, as at the end of 2016/2017 academic year. Diploma students were used because of their poor academic performance for three consecutive years. The total number of students was 36,798 (College of Distance Education, 2017). The breakdown of the population, according to the programmes of study and marital status were, Diploma in Basic Education (DBE), 25586 Diploma in Psychological Foundations of Education (DPF), 7062, Diploma in Mathematics and Science Education (DMSE), 364, Diploma in Commerce (DCO), 1558, and Diploma in Management Studies (DMS), 2228. Married students constituted 45.4% while 54.6% of the students indicated that they were single.

### **6.3. Sample and Sampling Procedure**

The sample size for the study was 1110. Kumar (2014) recommended that in a

descriptive study, it is appropriate to use a sample size of 2 to 5 percent of the study's population. The sample size selected represents 3.016 percent of the study's population which is consistent with the recommendation. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select one region from each of the three Zones. The regional capitals (Greater Accra, Ashanti and Northern Regions) of each of the zones were purposively sampled because not all regions under the various zones offered all the diploma programmes. The stratified sampling procedure was used to select respondents from each of the study centres of the three regions selected based on programme of study. Simple random sampling was used to select 1110 respondents. Sampling frames were designed for each of the regions.

#### **6.4. Research Instrument**

The questionnaire developed by Apreko (2010) was adapted and used for data collection. The questionnaire was in two parts. The first part focused on the biographical data of the respondents' and the second part of the questionnaire covered the educational/academic, career/vocational, personal-social problems and practical needs of students. The items in the questionnaire were close-ended. Responses to the closed-ended items used in sourcing for data on the issues regarding the concepts were measured on a four-point unilinear scale ranging from 1 to 4 where 1 represented the strongest disagreement to the issues while 4 represented the strongest agreement to the issues. The cut-off point for determining a priority need is a mean of 2.5.

The instrument was pre-tested at the Oyoko Study Centre in the Eastern Region of Ghana. These students share similar characteristics with the target population. Fifty students were used for the pre-test taking into consideration their marital status and programme of study. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient obtained for the questionnaire was 0.895 which was deemed acceptable (Yates, 2014). Out of the 1110 questionnaires administered for the main study, 1075 were retrieved, representing 96.8 percent response rate.

#### **6.5. Data Collection Procedure and Analysis**

The questionnaire was administered by the researchers personally to the 1110 respondents with the support of four regional resident tutors of the College. The researchers are all PhD holders with expertise in data collection. The resident tutors who assisted in administering the questionnaire had adequate experience regarding data collection process; therefore, it was appropriate for us to use them as field assistants. The data on the four research questions of the study were analysed, using descriptive statistical tools, namely, means and standard deviations. Inferential statistics, with respect to independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the research hypotheses 1 and 2 respectively.

### **7. Results and Discussion**

The study assessed the counselling needs of students under each of the four

broad categories of student needs. The first to consider was educational/academic needs. In assessing the specific needs of students with regard to educational/academic, 10 items were constructed. The results are presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1** shows the means and standard deviations of the educational/academic needs of students. Using the cut-off point of a mean score of 2.5 and above, the students had a need for all the items with exception of difficulty retrieving from memory during examination and problems attending lectures regularly. However, the three topmost needs of the students were problems meeting deadlines for submission of assignments, lack of confidence in ability to succeed academically and problem with time allocation. The results of the study indicate that students have a need for time management. The results on educational/academic needs of students are in agreement with the report of **Yakubu, Awabil and Forde (2017)** who found out that regular university students had those same needs.

The next to be considered were career/vocational counselling needs. Again, 10 items were constructed to elicit data on these issues. The results are presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2** shows the means and standard deviations of the career/vocational counselling needs of students. Using the cut-off point of a mean score of 2.5, students had a need for all the items with the exception of the needs for industrial attachment and visits.

The priority needs were counselling about how to prepare and attend job interviews, worried about job placement and how to start their own business.

**Table 1.** Respondents' views on specific educational/academic needs of students (n = 1075).

Statements on educational/academic problems	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
I have problems meeting deadlines for submission of assignments.	3.183	0.838	1 <sup>st</sup>
I lack confidence in my ability to succeed academically.	3.160	0.754	2 <sup>nd</sup>
I have problems allocating time for my studies.	3.091	0.828	3 <sup>rd</sup>
I find it difficult to discuss my academic problems with my course tutors.	2.861	0.816	4 <sup>th</sup>
I have difficulty coping with course workload in my study centre.	2.853	0.834	5 <sup>th</sup>
I have difficulty preparing for examinations.	2.839	0.881	6 <sup>th</sup>
I have poor study skills/habits.	2.732	0.737	7 <sup>th</sup>
I have difficulty with the style of teaching in the study centre.	2.560	0.903	8 <sup>th</sup>
I have difficulty retrieving from memory during examinations.	2.301	0.926	9 <sup>th</sup>
I have problems attending lecturers regularly.	2.147	0.871	10 <sup>th</sup>

**Table 2.** Respondents' views on specific career/vocational needs of students (N = 1075).

Statements on career/vocational problems	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
I need counselling about how to prepare and attend job interviews.	3.146	0.709	1 <sup>st</sup>
I am worried about job placement after leaving school.	3.061	0.757	2 <sup>nd</sup>
I have difficulty getting information about how to start my own business after leaving school.	2.951	0.927	3 <sup>rd</sup>
I regret choosing my current programme of study/career.	2.948	0.756	4 <sup>th</sup>
I need more information about occupations or careers or jobs in my area of specialisation.	2.858	0.685	5 <sup>th</sup>
I am confused about the kind of job I will do in future.	2.769	0.889	6 <sup>th</sup>
I have difficulty preparing good curriculum vitae.	2.679	0.877	7 <sup>th</sup>
I lack adequate information on job requirements.	2.626	0.797	8 <sup>th</sup>
I need help to find placement for industrial attachment.	2.462	0.978	9 <sup>th</sup>
I am worried about not visiting any industrial while in school to get acquainted to the industrial environment.	2.217	0.974	10 <sup>th</sup>

These results may mean that students do not have permanent jobs or are not in their preferred jobs or may even not be working at all.

The finding supports the comments that students under the distance education system must be assisted to choose an occupation, prepare for it, and enter upon it and progress in it (Rivera & Pellitteri, 2012).

The next counselling needs of students to be considered are personal-social needs. The results are presented in **Table 3**.

Using the cut-off point of a mean score of 2.5, students had a great need for all the items with the exception of having difficulty in testing for HIV test. The topmost needs were, problem relating with lecturers/instructors, problem with dating, self-understanding and lack of freedom at home.

This may mean most students have family commitments that may negatively affect their studies. Students with families often experience difficulties in balancing their academic demands with their family and social commitments (Brigman & Campbell, 2017).

The next most prevalent specific counselling needs of students to be considered were practical needs. The results are presented in **Table 4**.

Using the cut-off point of a mean score of 2.5, students had a great need for all the items with the exception of the need to have adequate information about the College, and worrying about the poor facilities in the study centre.

The most important needs of students were inadequate lecture room space in the study centre, financial problems in school, inadequate medical and poor facilities for persons with disability at the study centre. The finding supports the comments (Anyan & Pryor, 2012) that stressors among distance students were occupational stress, family responsibility stress, academic activities stress, financial stress, cultural roles stress, and religious roles.

**Table 3.** Respondents' views on their personal-social counselling needs (N = 1075).

Statements on personal/social problems	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
I have problem relating well with my lecturers/instructors.	3.402	0.594	1 <sup>st</sup>
I have problem with dating.	3.131	0.753	2 <sup>nd</sup>
I need to understand more of myself.	3.058	0.971	3 <sup>rd</sup>
I lack freedom at home.	3.038	0.728	4 <sup>th</sup>
I have problem making new friends.	2.886	0.632	5 <sup>th</sup>
I have difficulty relating well with other students.	2.778	0.911	6 <sup>th</sup>
I need to know how to solve interpersonal conflicts.	2.714	0.956	7 <sup>th</sup>
I have problem meeting family demands.	2.674	0.906	8 <sup>th</sup>
I have problem dealing with disappointment.	2.627	0.939	9 <sup>th</sup>
I find it difficult to go for an HIV test.	2.249	0.954	10 <sup>th</sup>

**Table 4.** Respondents' views on their practical counselling needs (N = 1075).

Statements on practical problems	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
I am worried about the inadequate lecture room space in the study centre.	3.181	0.690	1 <sup>st</sup>
I face financial problems in school.	3.179	0.638	2 <sup>nd</sup>
I feel the medical services offered near my study centre are not adequate.	3.164	0.529	3 <sup>rd</sup>
I am worried about the poor facilities for the disabled persons in my study centre.	3.086	0.612	4 <sup>th</sup>
I get emotionally disturbed when I fail to meet my financial demands.	2.968	0.721	5 <sup>th</sup>
I am disturbed about the high cost of cooked food in and around my study centre.	2.850	0.623	6 <sup>th</sup>
I am worried about the high user fees charged by the College.	2.765	0.902	7 <sup>th</sup>
I am worried about the inadequate transport facilities in the study centre.	2.626	0.816	8 <sup>th</sup>
I do not have adequate information about the College.	2.443	0.806	9 <sup>th</sup>
I am worried about the poor facilities in my study centre.	2.123	0.934	10 <sup>th</sup>

The result that financial need is one of the specific practical needs facing distance education students of the College is not surprising due to the fact that most of them are adults with other financial commitments and the relatively low wages in the country.

**Table 5** presents the results relating to the second hypothesis.

As presented in **Table 5**, there was no statistically significant difference between married and single respondents with respect to their educational/academic counselling needs. However, in relation to career/vocational, personal-social and

**Table 5.** Independent samples t-test for marital differences in counselling needs.

Needs	Marital status	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	$\eta^2$
Educational/ academic needs	Single	587	2.792	0.311	1.765	0.078	
	Married	488	2.750	0.437			
Career/ vocational needs	Single	587	2.738	0.282	-3.322**	0.001	0.010
	Married	488	2.812	0.421			
Persona-social needs	Single	587	2.833	0.361	-2.243*	0.025	0.005
	Married	488	2.883	0.362			
Practical needs	Single	587	2.820	0.234	-2.913**	0.004	0.008
	Married	488	2.860	0.211			
Counselling needs	Single	587	2.796	0.230	-1.944*	0.042	0.004
	Married	488	2.826	0.277			

practical counselling needs, there were statistically significant differences between married respondents and those who were single. To a large extent, students' counselling needs are related to their marital status.

In all, the results that emerged in **Table 5** show that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students who were married (Mean = 2.826, Std. Dev. = 0.277) and those who were single (Mean = 2.796, Std. Dev. = 0.230), with regard to their counselling needs [ $t = -1.944$ ,  $df = 1073$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ]. This shows that married students had greater needs than students who were single. This means that, married students require more counselling and assistance than students who are single. This result is expected because culturally married women have much a higher task at home and so combining work with education may need counselling. [Ogunsanmi \(2014\)](#) reported on a similar finding when he investigated the level of stress experienced by married female sandwich undergraduates at the Ekiti State University.

The next issue to consider was the differences in the counselling needs of respondents with respect to their programmes of study. In dealing with this the second research hypothesis was tested.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no statistically significant difference in the counselling needs of students in terms of programme of study.

H<sub>A2</sub>: There is a statistically significant difference in the counselling needs of students in terms of programme of study.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the differences that occur in the counselling needs of students as a result of their programmes of study. The respondents were categorised into five groups based on their programmes of study. These were: DBE; DPFE; DSME; DCO; and DMS. The results are depicted in **Table 6**.

There were significant differences at the  $p < 0.01$  level in the educational/academic [ $F(4, 1074) = 4.642$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ], career/vocational [ $F(4, 1074) = 16.150$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ], personal-social [ $F(4, 1074) = 7.713$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ], and practical [ $F(4, 1074) = 9.821$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ] needs for the five groups.

**Table 6.** One-way ANOVA for differences in the counselling needs of the students in terms of programme.

Needs	Programmes	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	Sig.	$\eta^2$
Educational/ academic needs	DBE	461	2.727	0.451	4.642**	0.001	0.017
	DPFE	276	2.815	0.242			
	DSME	76	2.878	0.359			
	DCO	101	2.819	0.338			
	DMS	161	2.753	0.325			
	Total	1075	2.773	0.374			
Career/vocational needs	DBE	461	2.696	0.395	16.150**	0.000	0.057
	DPFE	276	2.838	0.274			
	DSME	76	2.953	0.214			
	DCO	101	2.871	0.353			
	DMS	161	2.725	0.339			
	Total	1075	2.772	0.354			
Personal-social needs	DBE	461	2.791	0.403	7.713**	0.000	0.028
	DPFE	276	2.906	0.331			
	DSME	76	2.905	0.187			
	DCO	101	2.961	0.278			
	DMS	161	2.865	0.370			
	Total	1075	2.855	0.362			
Practical needs	DBE	461	2.852	0.222	9.821**	0.000	0.035
	DPFE	276	2.788	0.205			
	DSME	76	2.880	0.203			
	DCO	101	2.780	0.252			
	DMS	161	2.902	0.231			
	Total	1075	2.838	0.225			
Counselling needs	DBE	461	2.766	0.291	7.889**	0.000	0.029
	DPFE	276	2.836	0.207			
	DSME	76	2.903	0.175			
	DCO	101	2.857	0.210			
	DMS	161	2.811	0.240			
	Total	1075	2.809	0.252			

\*\* $p < 0.01$  (df = 1073) (N = 1075); Where  $\eta^2$  = Eta square.

The actual differences in the mean scores between the groups with respect to educational/academic ( $\eta^2 = 0.017$ ), personal-social ( $\eta^2 = 0.028$ ) and practical needs ( $\eta^2 = 0.035$ ) were small while that of career/vocational ( $\eta^2 = 0.057$ ) was moderate.

The effect size was calculated, using eta square and the result was 0.119. Results from **Table 6** further show that there were significant differences in the counselling needs of students in terms of programme [ $F(4, 1074) = 7.889, p = 0.000$ ]. The margin of the difference in the counselling needs of students in terms of the groups was 2.9 percent, representing an eta square of 0.029. Based on the findings, the hypothesis that stated there is no significant difference in the counselling needs of the students in terms of programme of study was rejected. This means, the counselling needs of the students differ from one programme to another.

Specifically, as indicated in **Table 6**, students offering DSME (Mean = 2.903, Std. Dev. = 0.175) had higher needs than those offering other programmes. This was followed by those offering DCO (Mean = 2.857, Std. Dev. = 0.210), DPFE (Mean = 2.836, Std. Dev. = 0.207) and DMS (Mean = 2.811, Std. Dev. = 0.240). Students offering DBE (Mean = 2.766, Std. Dev. = 0.291) were a group of students with least needs. The study further examined the post-hoc comparisons of respondents' programme of study using the Tukey HSD test in order to know exactly where the differences are coming from with regard to the needs that were statistically significant.

The results are presented in **Table 7**.

**Table 7.** Post-hoc comparisons of respondents' programmes of study in terms of the four broad categories of counselling needs.

Tukey HSD Dependent Variable	(I) Programme of Study	(J) Programme of Study	MD (I-J)	Sig.	
Educational/academic needs	DPFE	DBE	0.088*	0.017	
		DMS	0.062	0.444	
	DSME	DBE	0.151*	0.011	
		DPFE	0.063	0.689	
		DCO	0.059	0.836	
	DMS	DMS	0.125	0.112	
		DBE	0.092	0.164	
		DPFE	0.004	0.990	
	Career/vocational needs	DCO	DMS	0.066	0.628
			DBE	0.026	0.943
DSME		DPFE	0.142**	0.000	
		DMS	0.114**	0.008	
		DBE	0.256**	0.000	
DMS		DPFE	0.114	0.079	
	DCO	0.081	0.527		
	DMS	0.228**	0.000		
DMS	DBE	0.175**	0.000		
	DPFE	0.033	0.924		
	DMS	0.146**	0.008		
DMS	DBE	0.028	0.898		

## Continued

		DBE	0.115**	0.000
	DPFE	DSME	0.001	0.990
		DMS	0.041	0.784
Personal-social needs	DSME	DBE	0.114	0.075
		DMS	0.040	0.930
	DCO	DBE	0.171**	0.000
		DPFE	0.056	0.670
		DSME	0.056	0.841
		DMS	0.096	0.214
DMS	DBE	0.074	0.157	
Practical needs	DBE	DPFE	0.064**	0.001
		DCO	0.072*	0.026
	DPFE	DCO	0.008	0.998
	DSME	DBE	0.028	0.842
		DPFE	0.092*	0.012
		DCO	0.100*	0.025
	DMS	DBE	0.050	0.094
		DPFE	0.114**	0.000
		DSME	0.022	0.952
		DCO	0.122**	0.000
Counselling needs	DPFE	DBE	0.070**	0.002
		DMS	0.025	0.843
	DSME	DBE	0.137**	0.000
		DPFE	0.067	0.231
		DCO	0.046	0.743
		DMS	0.093	0.060
	DCO	DBE	0.091**	0.008
		DPFE	0.021	0.950
		DMS	0.047	0.582
		DMS	DBE	0.045

MD = Mean Difference; \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

In all, the post-hoc results that emerged from **Table 7** show that DPFE students' counselling needs were more than DBE students (MD = 0.070,  $p < 0.01$ ). Also, DSME students' counselling needs are lesser than DBE students (MD = 0.137,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, DCO students' counselling needs are lesser than DBE students (MD = 0.091,  $p < 0.01$ ). The results show that DBE students have a greater counselling need as compared to other students offering diploma programmes. The study's findings are in line with the study's findings of Dankyi

(2016) which indicated that there exist differences in students study habits with regard to programme of study. Based on the findings, the hypothesis that stated that there is no significant difference in the counselling needs of the students in terms of their study programme was rejected.

## 8. Conclusion

The most pressing needs of students were related to counselling on how to meet deadlines, how to prepare and attend job interviews, how to relate well with lecturers and inadequate lecture rooms. Marital status and programme of study are significant determinants of distance education students' counselling needs.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the Management of the College of Distance Education at the University of Cape Coast should ensure that counselling services reflect the most prevalent counselling needs of students. Again, Distance Education institutions should take marital status and programme of study into consideration when providing counselling services to students.

## Limitations of the Study

The use of purposive sampling procedure may affect the generalisation of the findings of the study to all distance education students since only diploma students were considered. Therefore, the results of the study can best be generalised to the target population of the study only. The study was carried out using the quantitative approach. A mixed-method approach would have yielded better results. These limitations notwithstanding, the resultant findings of the study would facilitate the provision of relevant counselling services to distance education students in Ghana. Future researchers could adopt the mixed-method approach to gather rich data.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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