

Correlates of the School-Based Guidance Program to Freshman Students in Guangdong Province, China: Basis for Enhanced Guidance Program

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Abstract: Guidance programs have significant roles in preparing students for the future. The study recognizes that guidance and counseling programs are a transformative process of helping students strengthen their career planning, education, and preparation for employment. The guidance programs of first-year college students from Guangdong Peizheng College (GPC) in Guangdong Province, China was investigated, with 357 freshman students currently enrolled in the participating school involved in this study. Moreover, 12 guidance counselors were interviewed through focused-group discussions, including the school director, for the qualitative component of the study. Utilizing the convergent parallel design mixed method, the study was able to elucidate the quantitative and qualitative relevance of the data gathered from the selected participants. The emerging results found that Chinese freshman students were satisfied with all of the parameters of the guidance programs of the school. The school counselors are able to provide students with a rich reservoir of academic and guidance support, career mentoring, and career guidance. There were contributing factors that need to be addressed if improvement and innovation of the guidance program is the primary goal. Support and resources should be prioritized in order to enrich the development not only of the students but also of the guidance counselors. The study serves as empirical evidence for proposing an improved school-based guidance program as practical outputs of the study further to innovate the effectiveness of the implementation of guidance services.

Keywords: Guidance program; Career development; Counselors, Freshman students

Online publication: September 22, 2022

1. Introduction

Chinese schools and universities play great importance to the wellbeing and education of its citizenry, highlighting and educating students through quality teaching, performance and outcomes. The Chinese government has issued a series of documents showing their great attention to uplifting education among all levels of institutions and providing quality guidance for the same thrusts. Thus, it has created an enormous challenge for higher education.

The guidance and counseling services offered in most colleges and universities in China is centered on the acquisition of the attitudes, knowledge, mental health, test-taking, and study skills that are commonly offered to first-year students ^[1]. However, it lacks an educational/career plan for the students to become college-and-career-ready ^[2].

Wang *et al.* studied the role of guidance counselors in universities and colleges in China and stated that guidance counselors and teachers played an essential role in channeling students toward guidance and counseling services. However, insufficient research efforts are known whether students in universities of China are using guidance services accurately [3]. A study concluded that a lack of understanding of counseling is prevalent in the Chinese college environment; even the most knowledgeable populations in China, college professors, have limited knowledge of counseling services; as a result, professional counselors still have a long way to go in developing and promoting their mental health services [4].

Sun and Yuen advocated that various forms of counseling services should become more available in universities since such services are beneficial to students as well as society [5]. On the other hand, China's national policy of expanding university enrollments has impacted the job market negatively and created problems for university students. Students who graduated from universities have faced employment difficulties since there are not enough job opportunities for every graduate. The stresses caused by unsuccessful job searches have created personal problems and anxiety for many college graduates leading to an augmented need for guidance and counseling services [6].

It can be said that the offering of such services is thus seen as a means of enabling the students to become aware of the options available to them in the world of work, and they are led to realize the many vital decisions that they have to make. It has been considered that the school counseling and guidance program is an integral part of the total educational process in the school and is accessible to all students. Appropriate orientations, placements, and follow-ups are programs that are particularly pertinent to guidance programs. Guidance among students matters a lot for students' overall development.

A guidance and counseling service aims to impart specific skills and learning opportunities in a proactive and preventive manner, ensuring that all students can achieve school success through academic, career, and personal/social development. As students achieve developmental competencies, their perceptions of themselves and their opportunities would become more significant, and their success would be more ensured.

Currently, Guangdong Peizheng College (GPC) attaches great importance to improving guidance programs and student services for first-year students. GPC has a good community cultural tradition and a colorful community cultural atmosphere. There are more than 40 student organizations in the school. Since 2014, student associations have won 27 collective awards and 123 individual awards, of which 3 student associations have won the honor of "Guangdong Outstanding Student Associations," and Wushu Association has won the "2014 National Top 100 Sports Public Welfare Associations" honor.

Guangdong Peizheng College (GPC) will always adhere to the direction of running a socialist school, continue to cultivate useful talents for society, and actively contribute to Guangdong's economic and social development. It offers tutorial programs led by the faculty from each college, career guidance support and services, and assistance to first-year students.

In China's complex and evolving situation, it is insufficient to address all aspects of career development and guidance program by using only guidance strategies or by dealing only with career planning — both elements are required. The present study will focus on the guidance programs and their impact on first-year students. Their demographic profiles were also included as essential variables of the study and the common challenges encountered by the guidance counselors in the preparation and implementation of the guidance program. Guidance services are significant aspects of the school system. The positive development of individuals through such services facilitates the implementation of educational policy, like the attainment of policy goals and the promotion of effectiveness of the educational system. It is only by making a correlational study that relates to the existence, nature, and service delivery of guidance programs concerning students' wellbeing and guidance counselors' actual experiences and challenges that can be made known other opportunities for curriculum enhancement, flaws that need solutions,

development of programs that are timely and relevant to students' needs, and enhancement of existing guidance program.

Due to the reasons mentioned earlier, the research investigates the influence of the provision of guidance programs to first-year students and explores the in-depth understanding of the challenges encountered by the guidance counselors in the preparation and implementation of the guidance program to first-year students.

2. Research Design

The research design that was utilized in this study was the convergent parallel design mixed method. This design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches as it involves collecting quantitative and qualitative data, and analysis of the data integrates both forms of data.

The purpose is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem by converging or merging quantitative and qualitative evidence. In this design, the researcher typically collects both forms of data at the same time, utilizes the methods equally, keeps the data analysis independent, mixes the results during the overall interpretation, and tries to look for convergence, divergence, contradictions, or relationships of two sources of data ^[7]. Furthermore, this design entails that the researcher concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative elements in the same phase of the research process, weighs the methods equally, analyzes the two components independently, and interprets the results together. With the purpose of corroboration and validation, the researcher aims to triangulate the methods by directly comparing the quantitative statistical results and qualitative findings.

The study aims at investigating the correlates of first-year college students' selected profile variables and the guidance programs being offered to them at the university. Moreover, it explores the guidance counselors' commonly encountered challenges in preparing and implementing the guidance program for first-year students.

In this study, analysis of the correlates will enable the researcher to find out the influence of guidance programs on students' selected profile variables which will provide the basis for the proposition of enhanced guidance programs for the students. The researcher will also analyze the challenges encountered by the guidance counselors of the participating university by conducting in-depth interviews and focused group discussions. In order to form a valid synthesis of participants' responses at the conclusion of this study, the process and interpretation of data collection and analysis will be triangulated in order to arrive at the common synthesis.

All of the above discussions on the mixed method convergent parallel actually suited the nature of this research; hence this method was adopted. One-on-one interviews with selected guidance counselors, including the university director, was also employed relative to the preparation and implementation of the guidance program for first-year students. Challenges in the preparation and implementation of the guidance program was also asked of the guidance counselors.

3. Population and sample

Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample of the students according to their course as well as the total number of population.

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents per course

Courses	Population (N, students)	Sample (n)	Guidance counselors
School of Foreign Languages	753	79	2
School of Economics	453	45	2
School of Management	579	61	2
School of Accounting	481	48	2
School of Law	317	32	1
School of Computer	705	71	2
School of Humanities	212	21	1
Total	3,500	357	12

The study utilized the Raosoft calculator to facilitate the computation of the actual sample size from the participating school. It is the software that primarily calculates or generates a research or survey sample size. Further, this software takes into account the margin of error of 5%, the confidence level of 90%, 95%, or 99%, and response distribution of 50%. It also offers to show viz-a-viz what the margin of error would be like with various sample sizes. Hence, the sample was calculated and determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator.

The results indicated a total population of 3,500 (N). The researcher balanced the number of the total sample for each participating university in order to establish an equal distribution of survey-questionnaire. With a confidence level of 95%, the total computed proportion using the Raosoft calculator was 357 (n).

Twelve guidance counselors, including the university director, will be subjected to a one-on-one interview relative to the preparation and implementation of the guidance program for first-year students as well as the challenges that they encountered in the preparation and implementation of the said program.

4. Research instrument

An adapted survey questionnaire was utilized as the main instrument in gathering data for the quantitative component of the study. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: Part I is the profile form; Part II – Guidance Programs and Services Survey, and Part III – Interview Guide Questions

(1) Part I: Demographic Profile Form

This form consisted of items aimed at drawing the profile of the respondents: sex, age, and degree program.

(2) Part II: Guidance Programs and Services in the School

This adopted questionnaire is consisted of 35 items designed to depict the guidance services being offered to first-year college students in the following areas: orientation, information, counselling, placement, and follow-up

(3) Part III: Interview Guide Questions

This part is divided into two sets of questions to depict the guidance counselors' preparation and implementation of the guidance programs as well as the challenges they encountered on these grounds.

For the participants to have a complete understanding and appreciation of the questions indicated in the survey questionnaire, the research translated the questions from the English language to the Chinese language. This allowed clarity of the questions to gather the exact data intended for this purpose. This questionnaire composed of 5-point rating scales. It consisted of items that cover the guidance programs of the participating school and the emotional, social, and mental intelligences of the freshman college students.

The qualitative component of the study was obtained through the interview guide questions that the researcher will make. The structured questions were constructed to elicit the common challenges

encountered with the supervision and guidance of the research adviser and the shared expertise of the examining committee members.

5. Proposed guidance programs from the findings of the study

As educational advocates, school counselors identify and evaluate factors that affect student success. Developing intensive guidance programs for various educational programs, one-on-one guidance, and personalized strategies will significantly impact student success.

Hao, Sun, and Yuen advocated that various programs of guidance counseling services should become more available in colleges and universities since such services are beneficial to students as well as society [8]. School counselors design and deliver school counseling programs that improve student learning and behavioral outcomes [9].

Any educational intervention and guidance programs should be grounded on the needs and interests of the students. This is to ensure that the changes in the curriculum, policies, and other programs will yield great results and impact students' lives. This is why school counselors may utilize students' progress results, student records, standardized tests, interest inventories, and behavior rating scales as sources of needs assessment, improvement of guidance and counseling services, and upgrading of the entire school system.

The proposed guidance program below is drawn from the current study's findings. It considers the program activities, possible interventions, individual student planning, and system support.

Table 2. Proposed guidance programs from the findings of the study

Proposed guidance program and activities	Prevention, intervention and responsive services	Individual student planning	System support
Student awareness, skill development and application of skills needed to achieve academically and be career and college ready by graduation	Identify students' preferences and problems, introduce the service procedure, guide them in registration, and establish an information archive	Organize seminars for college freshmen for them to develop a sense of belonging, career planning and mentoring	Introduce and teach the principles and methods of career preference analysis
Emphasis on students' career mentoring and exploration as well as understanding the relationship between career success and achievement	Organize small group counseling on study skills and career success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career awareness • Introduce career portfolio 	Guide students in seeking career paths
Classroom guidance lessons focusing on character education, such as getting along with others, manners, being safe, responsible, and respectful	Individual counseling as needed Small group counseling for personal/social issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual counseling for personal/social issues – crisis intervention with student • Parent meetings with student 	Consultation with the teachers Facilitate meetings between parents and/or teachers
Selecting career assessments for students	Provide assessments where students' potentials and other abilities can be measured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sort out individual results of students' career assessment and discuss with the parents • Conduct interviews and other assessments 	Arrange teambuilding activities and provide capability workshops, where students can discover their potentials

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Proposed guidance program and activities	Prevention, intervention and responsive services	Individual student planning	System support
Peer tutoring	Select outstanding senior students to help the freshmen in their studies, life, or interpersonal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer tutoring groups consisting of students of similar ages • Plan a group approach • Involve students who need extra support for academic and personal matters 	New students can take classes as a unit to conduct group tutoring to help each other in solving difficulties and problems
Collaborative partnership with parents	Parents should be made aware of the program to avoid conflict between them and the teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide individual report of their children's assessment • Share with them the portfolio of their children • Allow parents to participate in school programs 	Set up a practical platform when class advisers, parents, and school counselors can communicate
Proper training for guidance and counselling or training in prevention and intervention skills to narrow achievement gaps	Strengthen the capabilities of guidance counselors, teachers, mentors, and school heads in providing guidance services to students	<p>Training should focus on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying the developmental needs of students to meet the diverse needs of students • enhancing leadership and technical skills of school counselors 	The importance of training by stating that psychology and skills are needed in guidance and counselling to be applied to students and that it is only possible through training
Employment guidance	Offer career courses and provide trainings as well as counseling for further studies and entrepreneurship	Mobilize teachers to carry out career guidance in school; prepare career guidance reports for vocational college and vocational school graduates; analyze career development cases; and organize trainings	Establish partnerships and tie-ups from public and private sectors, where students would be able to receive employment guidance
Integration of mental health education course into the education curriculum for freshmen	Improve the mental health awareness of new students, make them have strong interpersonal skills, and improve the self-adjustment ability of college freshmen	Through the psychological education system, each student can receive services focused on mental health needs, education, and assessment	Raise the achievement of students through proper mental health education and provide more equitable services to students; create a broader impact on student development and career decision-making

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Proposed guidance program and activities	Prevention, intervention and responsive services	Individual student planning	System support
Incentives for guidance and counselling personnel	Provide rewards, incentives, and salary increments to school counselors who have satisfactory performance Introduce and include budgetary requirements for salary standardization or adjustments	Include the evaluation and grades of school counselors given by students	Encourage counselors to engage in higher learning and advanced studies, where they can earn units and higher degrees

Colleges and universities must focus on intensive interventions and other programs as these may provide an opportunity for the schools to figure out ways to serve their neediest students. Educational leaders should work to identify and target areas with the most impact on student learning. By understanding students at the individual level, school counselors can recognize more profound what interventions and pathways will best support students' college journey. Moreover, once guidance counselors understand the unique student journey, they can better equip students with a track-record of promoting success.

7. Summary

The study investigated the guidance programs of first-year college students from Guangdong Peizheng College (GPC) in Guangdong Province, China. It likewise explored the common challenges the guidance counselors encountered in preparing and implementing guidance programs, particularly for freshman students, as the basis for enhanced guidance programs. The study involved 357 freshman students currently enrolled in the participating school. Moreover, twelve (12) guidance counselors were interviewed through focused-group discussions, including the school director, for the qualitative component of the study. Utilizing the convergent parallel design mixed method, the study was able to elucidate the quantitative and qualitative relevance of the data gathered from the selected participants.

The survey questionnaire encompassed the school's guidance services in terms of orientation, information counseling, placement, and follow-up. The results of the guidance counselors' preparation and implementation stages of the guidance program for first-year students and their common challenges encountered were taken qualitatively to explore on the same ground.

The summary of findings is hereunder presented as follows:

7.1. Profile of the freshman students

7.1.1. Sex

It was found out that the majority of the freshman students were females, which was 258 or 72.3 %; the number of males were 99 or 27.7%. The results imply that more female students go to college than their male counterparts.

7.1.2. Age

In terms of the respondents' age, the findings showed that the majority of the first-year college students were 18 years old (157 students or 44.0%), followed by 20 years old (69 students or 19.3%), 19 years old, (66 students or 18.5%), and 21 years old (65 students or 18.2%).

7.1.3. Degree

The findings revealed that most of the respondents were pursuing School of Foreign Languages (79 students or 22.1%), followed by School of Computer (71 students or 19.9%), and School of Economics and Trade (61 students or 17.1%). Meanwhile, some students were majoring in Accounting (48 students or 13.4%), Management (45 students or 12.6%), Law (32 students or 9.0%, and School of Humanities 21 or 5.9%.

7.2. Assessment of school's guidance programs

7.2.1. Orientation service (WM = 3.77, satisfied)

The result showed that the freshman college students were satisfied with the orientation services of their school. This implied that they received sufficient knowledge and guidance about their school's policies and are informed about the events to happen for the whole academic year.

7.2.2. Information service (WM = 3.65, satisfied)

Based on the results, the students were satisfied with the curriculum program of the schools, information on the available facilities for students, and other educational and occupational information. It could be inferred from the results that students receive a wide range of information about the description of the course they want to pursue, library facilities, occupational information, and other services available for all the students.

7.2.3. Counselling service (WM = 3.98, satisfied)

The findings implied that the students were satisfied with the kind of counseling services provided to them. It was observed that the school counselors maintain ethical obligations and possess a broad base of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and an understanding of human growth and development.

7.2.4. Placement Service (WM = 3.38, satisfied)

Results indicate that students were provided with opportunities where they can enrich their knowledge about the available work and career opportunities they can pursue. They were found satisfied with the placement service being provided by the school. This implies that they were provided with information about various fields, and it enabled them to choose the one they were passionate about.

7.2.5. Follow-up service (WM = 3.57, satisfied)

The results found that the guidance counselors were able to properly implement the monitoring of the students who graduated and those who were not able to finish their studies. The students were also found **satisfied** with the follow-up services of their school.

7.3. Significant difference in the schools' guidance programs and students' profile variables

7.3.1. Sex

Utilizing the One-Way ANOVA test, the result provided a consistent interpretation of "not significant" in all parameters. The findings implied that the students' need for orientation, information, counseling, placement, and follow-up services is not dependent on their sexes.

7.3.2. Age

The calculated ANOVA test result in this variable obtained, $F(3, 353) = 8.173$, $p < .001$ only in the variable of age that was found to correlate precisely in the follow-up services. It can be inferred from the findings that follow-up services have something to do with consulting services that concern students' prevention of school failure, dropping out from studies, risky behavior, the relationship and personal issues, and targeted

interventions to solve students' problems. It can be claimed that these issues are age-related and triggered by emotional changes, peer pressures, personal struggles, and other concerns.

7.3.3. Degree

Using the One-Way ANOVA test to analyze the significant difference, the study found that this variable was "not significant." This means that degree did not essentially influence the degree program of the Chinese freshman college students in all of the parameters of the guidance program taken in this study.

7.4. School guidance counselors' formulation and implementation of the guidance services for freshman students

7.4.1. Common Problems in the Preparation and Implementation of the School Guidance Programs

From the guidance counselors' statements, it can be deduced that individual needs and characteristics of the students, theory-based counseling rather than a practical approach, and obsolete mentoring programs result to lacking motivation and engagement and not being updated on the current jobs in the market have been found as the common problems of the respondents in the planning and implementation of the guidance programs.

7.4.2. Guidance counselors' experience and observations in the implementation of the school guidance program

Based on the actual experience of the guidance counselors, most of them have testified that there is a need to focus on the students' mental health. Other respondents have expressed that home visitations, social education, and family education should also be expanded as these could be considered solid indicators of successful implementation of guidance programs.

7.4.3. Guidance counselors' suggestions for effective implementation of the school guidance programs

This finding indicates that the school counselors and director should collect anecdotal records and comprehensive personal information of students at the beginning of the semester. It is practically suggested that entry-level college programs could also be assessed to ascertain the types of readiness they demand of students.

7.5. Challenges encountered by the guidance counselors in the preparation and implementation of the guidance program

7.5.1. Challenges encountered by the school counselors in providing guidance program to freshman college students

The respondents' revelation on the challenges encountered by the school counselors and their school director in providing guidance programs to first-year college students shows that most of them have found out that college entrants appeared to be not interested in their major and confused about their future careers. Moreover, the school counselor disclosed the idea that most Chinese college first-year students lack cooperation, causing the failure of the mentoring program.

7.5.2. Contributing factors identified by the school counselors in providing guidance program to freshman college students

The findings disclosed the idea that the primary factors, as attested by the school counselors, are as follows: students' interest in the mentoring program being provided to them, the positive approach of the counselors, and those who are in the position to influence students' social and emotional development, and the harmonious relationship between student and teachers and peers.

7.5.3. Support and resources need to improve the implementation of guidance programs of the school

The study found out the merits, shortcomings, and concerns of salary increase from the school counselors' perspectives gleaned from the interviews. The general findings indicate that significant support, as revealed by the school counselors, is to increase their salaries.

8. Proposed guidance programs from the findings of the study

- (1) Student awareness, skill development and application of skills needed to achieve academically and be career and college ready by graduation.
- (2) Emphasis on students' career mentoring and exploration, and understanding the relationship between achievement and career success.
- (3) Classroom guidance lessons focusing on character education, such as: getting along with others, manners, being safe, responsible, and respectful.
- (4) Selecting career assessments for students
- (5) Establishment of peer tutoring
- (6) Collaborative partnership with parents
- (7) Proper training for guidance and counselling / Training in prevention & intervention skills to close achievement gaps
- (8) Employment guidance
- (9) Integration of the mental health education course into the freshman education curriculum
- (10) Incentives for guidance and counselling personnel

9. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- (1) The majority of the respondents are females. Given females' high levels of participation in higher education, this could mean those female graduates have more significant opportunities when they go into the workplace. It is concluded that the profile variables of the students play an essential role in the development of guidance and counseling programs and services.
- (2) The Chinese freshman students were found satisfied in all of the parameters of the guidance programs of the school. It is concluded that the school counselors are able to provide students with a rich reservoir of academic and guidance support, career mentoring, and career guidance.
- (3) Only the profile variable on age has been found to have a significant influence on the guidance services, specifically in follow-up services. It is concluded that the age of the students could be a crucial element in designing and planning guidance programs and services. Therefore, the school heads and guidance counselors must consider the age-appropriateness of the counseling materials, assessments, and activities they design for the students.
- (4) The guidance counselors are faced with various problems in the preparation and implementation of the school guidance programs. Other observations were drawn from their actual experiences and encounter with the students.
- (5) There were contributing factors that need to be addressed if improvement and innovation of the guidance program is the primary goal. Support and resources should be prioritized in order to enrich the development not only of the students but also of the guidance counselors.
- (6) Proposed coaching programs are offered to enrich and enhance the implementation of the guidance and counseling program and services. The findings inform the educators, leaders, deans, and heads interested in enhancing students' career preparation and development. On this ground, the results can be of value as they could be used to improve the current offering of guidance programs in the school.

10. Recommendations

In view of the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are made: Further study with different profile variables such as students' mental health assessment, aptitude tests, and their academic performance in senior high school may yield more empirical data about the interventions and guidance they need in college.

- (1) School heads and directors may optimize the implementation of guidance functions along with different services such as information service, orientation service, placement service, follow-up service, and support system service by involving the parents, other professionals in the community, and the stakeholders.
- (2) Guidance services should strengthen the information dissemination in the community about the programs offered regarding the consultation of parents, teachers, and community personnel to enhance their relationship with the students.
- (3) Research efforts on exploring the relationships between guidance and counseling competencies of the school counselors and the satisfaction level of the students in the guidance programs may provide a substantial contribution to the field of counseling, mentoring, psychology, and education in general.
- (4) Improving the guidance counselors' salary structure may provide robust motivation for their effectiveness as guidance counselors, mentors, and teachers. Their job satisfaction should be one of the primary goals of strategic planning and financial appropriation.
- (5) Encourage the guidance counselors to pursue graduate studies for career advancement to gain more experience to cater to the needs of the students. Rewards and incentives may be offered to reinforce their desire to study.
- (6) Further study on the correlates of the guidance program with greater number of freshman students from different colleges and universities in the province.
- (7) It may draw an enlightening conclusion if the congruence between the perception of the guidance counselors and the actual experience of the students in attending the counseling program could be explored in a qualitative method. This undertaking may provide a more substantial basis for the development of guidance and counseling curriculum and improvement of other student programs.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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