



## **THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR AND MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS IN THE VOLTA REGION OF GHANA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

School counselors are ideally suited to implement multicultural education in their schools, considering the fact that they are experts on mental health, interpersonal relations, conflict resolution, behavior and attitude change, and human development. This study set out to find out the relationship between school counselors' multicultural knowledge and awareness and their self-reported demographic information (Gender, educational degree, number of years of counseling experience, practice setting, counseling experience with culturally diverse clients). Using a cross-sectional survey design the study investigated 60 counselors' multicultural diversity knowledge and awareness in the domains of self-awareness, knowledge, skills, and their self-reported demographic characteristics using a standardized questionnaire. Both the simple random sampling and the purposive sampling techniques we used and the data were analyzed using SPSS. Though gender and age did not show any significant relationship with the counselors' multicultural diversity knowledge and awareness, the number of years of working experience and the number of multicultural counseling courses a counselor took reported some relationship. The results and their implications are reported below for further consideration.

### **ARTICLE INFO**

#### **Article History:**

*Submitted/Received 05 Jun 22*

*First Revised 08 Oct 22*

*Accepted 23 Aug 23*

*First Available online 09 Sep 23*

*Publication Date 30 Sep 23*

#### **Keywords:**

Multicultural diversity,  
Multicultural awareness,  
School counselor.

JOMSIGN: Journal of Multicultural Studies in Guidance and Counseling  
Website: <http://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/JOMSIGN>

Permalink: <https://doi.org/10.17509/jomsign.v7i2.46879>

How to cite (APA): Amedome, S. N. (2023). The School Counselor and Multicultural Diversity Awareness in The Volta Region of Ghana. *JOMSIGN: Journal of Multicultural Studies in Guidance and Counseling*, 7(2), 175-194.



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## INTRODUCTION

According to Lin (2020) cultural diversity refers to the coexistence of different knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, religions, languages, abilities and disabilities, genders, ethnicities, races, nationalities, sexual orientations, and other aspects of human existence. It also refers to the way in which individuals react to this reality and the method in which they choose to live in harmony with this reality. Similarly, Dietz, (2007) explains that cultural diversity is increasingly employed and defined in relation to social and cultural variation and it is used in the same way as "biodiversity" is used when referring to biological and ecological variations, habitats and ecosystems.

Further, as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for human existence as it is for our physical existence and defines cultural diversity as "the common heritage of humanity".

Diversity is defined as the number of workers who show differences depending on a number of criteria, these include race, ethnicity, gender, age, functional or cognitive capability, language, lifestyles, beliefs, economic category, tenure with the organization and sexual preference (Seymen, 2006). Cultural differences can have a positive effect through promoting the concept of collaboration, and in the opposite case they may lead to the cultural misunderstanding that leads to serious consequences (Setoutah & Jeljeli, (2020). According to Seymen, (2006), culture is defined as the whole of moral features of society, emotions and thread of mind, of all kinds of life, thought and art in the state of tradition. Some theorists have conceptualized culture as a common meaning its members place on objects, facts and people. Others assert that culture entails not just shared interpretations of behaviours but also actual differences in attitudes. Culture is a way of life and a form of communication for resolution for people

In Ghana, a school counselor is a vital member of the educational team responsible for ensuring that students receive a holistic education. As a guide and support through thick and thin, the counselor's responsibility cannot be overstated in ensuring that each child accomplishes their ambitions of assuming their due position in society, regardless of their circumstances. School counselors are at the forefront of working with students suffering from mental health issues and since mental illness or psychological disturbances do not know color or race or culture or tradition, counselor ought to be in the position to provide care and support with full understanding of different cultural issues. Their sensitivity is borne out of a good understanding of cultural diversity and sensitivity.

It is the duty of the Ghana Education Service (GES) under the "Safe School" Program to promote a safe, secure, and supportive learning environment for the people of Ghana. To date, some parents are reluctant to send their children to school because of concerns about their children's safety. In order to ensure that all kids can learn in schools without fear of harm, the guidance and counseling was established

in schools (Guidance and Counseling Unit, 2019).

According to Bain, (2012) the role of the school counselor has evolved over the years. School counselors are often the first ones to see a problem with a student and their responsibilities include helping students in the areas of academic, personal/social development and career development and are on the leading edge of knowing what is happening with and to their students. Gregg, (2000) indicated that school counselors must constantly analyze students' needs and assist them in achieving academic success in order to be effective in their job. The reason is that, school counselors are taught to look for warning signs of mental, emotional, social, and academic issues.

Discussing the role of school counselors in multicultural education, Merlin, (2017) contends that school counselors are ideally suited to implement multicultural education in their schools, considering the fact that they are experts on mental health, interpersonal relations, social skills, conflict resolution, behavior and attitude change, and human development, they can help improve multicultural sensitivity among students.

Salm & Falola (2002), in their book *The Cultures and Customs of Ghana*, argue that the culture and customs of Ghana today are a product of diversity in traditional forms, influenced by a long history of Islamic and European contact. Though Ghanaians seek to cultivate the philosophy of the African personality, to revive, maintain, and promote Ghanaian ways of life and integrate them into political and social institutions, they also recognize their relationship to the rest of the world and continue to develop with the forces of globalization. The picture is one of a nation saddled in a struggle for cultural identity while trying to maintain an outlook of a nation accepting diversity in all forms. The implications of this struggle is readily seen in schools across the nation especially in urban communities that are mostly cosmopolitan in nature.

Like the communities, Ghanaian schools are made of people from different cultures and backgrounds. The ethnic diversity of Ghana, according to Langer & Ukiwo (2008), is represented by 60 different ethnic groups, each with its own culture and traditions. There is also a significant foreign born population in Ghana. As in other African countries, Boateng (2019) argue that migration in Ghana is mostly informal and undocumented, making precise data scarce. Despite the lack of statistics, the literature indicates that population mobility has a long history, with migration playing an important part in rural and urban communities' livelihood and progress plans.

Apart from expatriates and their families living in Ghana, Ghanaians themselves can be divided into over 40 main tribes and cultures with very clear and distinct ways of doing things. What is the knowledge level of school counselors of these distinctions that exist in cultures in our schools? Do their training and preparation include intentional reflections of the various cultural diversity issues? How are they

planning and executing culturally sensitive programs in their various schools? These are but a few questions on the minds of the researcher.

In counseling, multicultural competency refers to the capacity of a counselor to work effectively with patients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Counselors and their clients may face cross-cultural discrepancies in terms of ethnicity and other social variables but when that happens, the culturally competent counselor does not perceive clients from other cultures in a negative way otherwise, clients might be led to believe that the counselor is superior to them (Ahmed, et al., 2011). Educating counselors to work with a diverse range of clients is becoming increasingly necessary as the country's population gets more ethnically diverse. Cultural diversity awareness aids cultural sensitivity in the practice of counseling in our schools.

According to Ahmed, et al., (2011) professional ethics enjoins counselors to ensure that their cultural values and biases do not override those of the client and a culturally competent counselor does not see his or her group's cultural heritage, history, values, language, traditions, arts/crafts, as superior to that of others. A skilled counselor therefore utilizes the interventions that are client-based and which serve clients' needs and wants.

This can affect how a student responds to the various counseling interventions introduced in our schools. This can also affect how a student adjusts to the school environment. The mental health and wellbeing of both teachers and students can be largely affected by diverse cultural issues resulting from the clash of cultures in the school setting. How are school counselors responding to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all in the school environment? There is a local adage that says, one cannot give what they do not have. Unless school counselors are trained and equipped in multicultural diversity skills, they are unable to effectively address the issues that come up within the school environment. According to Taylor (2019) for more than three decades, counseling theory, training, and practice have all emphasized the need of multicultural counseling methods. To be really multiculturally competent, a counselor must be willing to examine and address their own and others' cultural biases and values on a personal and professional level.

It is not enough to have cosmopolitan schools, the minds that manage these schools must be cosmopolitan too (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Otherwise, discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping can eat up the beauty of co-existence with all its benefits, breeding tribal tensions and cultural intolerance with their attendant problems of tribal wars, etc.

Ahmed, et al., (2011) explored what it takes to be a culturally-competent counselor. They presented specific examples of their individual cultures and how these impacted their personal and professional lives, including their professional self-awareness, knowledge, and skills. They also embodied various variables of prejudice. For example, one of the presenters, who is an immigrant from India, highlighted the personal experiences of sexism as a woman. The second presenter,

an African American boy, raised in the United States, represented racism, as it continues to affect how society views persons of color. The third presenter, a lady of several heritages, represented a population that receives less attention from counselors and offered a self-assessment tool to identify their unique ability as a socially fair multicultural counselor. She also provided a theory to help unlink one's personal ego from operating in the role of intercultural counselor. Participants were also asked to remain optimistic by swapping and for but in dialogues. The final presenter, a male with multiple heritages, contributed written materials for the attendees centering the conversation on the creation of multiculturally-competent leaders. It was found that counselors' awareness of personal culture will benefit their clients and aid them with the process of obtaining awareness of cultures that are different from their own. Ahmed, et al., (2011) concluded therefore that the most crucial effort for every counselor and mental health practitioner is to become more culturally attentive and respectful.

Hotifah and Hamidah (2019) conducted a systematic literature review of multicultural counseling competence's concept, dimension, and antecedent. According to them, multicultural counseling competency is a theoretical and applied trend concerning racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in the counseling process. Using science-direct, IPI/Garuda Portal, Emerald, and specifically the Multicultural Development and Counseling Journal (JMCD) with the keywords "multicultural counseling", "cross-cultural counseling", and "cultural awareness", a systematic literature review was conducted to review the literature of concepts, dimensions, and factors that influence the competency of multicultural counseling and its measurement instruments. The study indicate that a counselor is an expert in the field of guidance and counseling within the school's education unit and Counselors require particular skills to do their duties effectively. One of them is multicultural experience or cultural experience comprehension. Citing Baruth & Manning, (2000); Holcomb McCoy, (2000); Weil, (2001), they contend that intercultural understanding is crucial to the effectiveness of counselee cultural diversity in counseling services. Also, counselors must equip themselves with knowledge about various cultures and kinds of racism, adjust their perspectives, and act as agents of social change. However, counselors still lack cultural knowledge of the difficulties posed by counsees of other cultures. Hotifah and Hamidah (2019) concluded, Counselors with intercultural competence are aware of their own cultural background, their possible prejudice, the client's cultural background, and how it influences counseling relationships. Counselors with intercultural counseling competencies understand other cultures and are able and motivated to acquire the necessary knowledge. In addition, counselors with multicultural counseling abilities are able to combine their awareness and knowledge with the skills necessary to deal effectively with clients from other cultural backgrounds than their own.

The implication is that, the distinction between multicultural and diversity has narrowed the definition of multiculturalism to relate primarily to racial and ethnic

differences. This definition also considers broader aspects of diversity, including gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, and ability or disability. Regardless of these disparities, scholars now investigating multicultural counseling are moving toward a definition of multicultural that encompasses all dimensions of diversity (e.g. age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability or disability, spoken language).

When Airen (2009) did an investigation into school counselors and their multicultural counseling competency, he found that individuals who had taken a Master's level or specialty course on multicultural counseling were more likely to have a higher multicultural competence than those who had not done so. School counselors who are adept at multicultural counseling are becoming increasingly relevant as the achievement gap between minorities and their white peers widens. Licensed school counselors must thoroughly examine their existing counseling and treatment methods, as well as the assumptions and views they hold about the world. Teachers that are receptive to learning about their students' cultures are more likely to have the training, expertise, and skills to work with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. They would know how to best help and support their pupils from a wide range of backgrounds. In the course of working with students, school counselors will learn about the cultural challenges and concerns that may cause a lack of connection between counselors and students.

Santos (2012) Evaluated perceptions of multicultural knowledge and multicultural awareness between graduating counselor education students with beginning counselor education students who have recently completed a course in multicultural issues and strategies in counseling. Multiculturalism in the United States means more than ethnicity and race. "Indicators also point to an increasing older population in the United States as well. Older adults are the fastest growing group within the African American community. About one-tenth of African Americans are over 65 years old, approximately 3 million citizens (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). The lower socioeconomic community should also be considered with ethnicity and race. For instance, about 21-24 % of Hispanic/Latino and African American families were below the poverty level in 2002 in comparison to 9.6 % for the total population. Santos gathered that there was no significant difference between beginning counseling students' perception of multicultural counseling knowledge after completing the Multicultural Issues and Strategies in Counseling course when compared to graduating counseling students who took the course early in the counseling program, he also found out that there was no significant difference between beginning counseling students' perception of multicultural counseling awareness after completing the Multicultural Issues and Strategies in Counseling course when compared with graduating counseling students who took the course early in the counseling program, his final findings was that there was no significant interaction of gender among beginning counseling students' perception of multicultural counseling knowledge after completing the Multicultural Issues and Strategies in counseling course when compared to graduating counseling students

who took the course early in the counseling program. There were few males in both populations, there were only four males in the beginning group and three males in the graduating group. After observing that there was such a little difference between the groups' main effects, it was decided to conduct the interaction analyses anyway to see if there would be some indication that differences may exist. Santos then concluded that students retain multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness after completing the multicultural counseling class at the beginning of the counseling program and at the time of graduation. This conclusion was based on the scores of the multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness scale which determined no significant difference between beginning counseling students when compared with graduating students who have both completed the main effect of the multicultural counseling class.

Koc (2015) Studied multicultural counseling competency of counselors in turkey. According to (Hays, 2008) Multicultural counseling has a very special place within counseling, and it is becoming more and more important since the culture we live in becomes more diverse everyday with people from culturally different backgrounds. The percentage of the population from minority groups increases and this urges professionals to adapt services that are more suitable for such a diverse population, which requires them to be proficient in multicultural competency in counseling. Furthermore, According to (Mays & Albee, 1992) individuals within minority groups are in greater need for counseling services. Minorities face higher proportions of poverty and situations that create social stressors which affect their psychological stance negatively. Nevertheless, they do not generally get the necessary psychological or counseling services due to their socio-economic status, and when they get such services, they are usually underserved. Therefore, being aware of multicultural counseling and having the knowledge about multicultural counseling is not just an option but more of a moral commitment for counselors to pursue. First of all, it may be concluded that the majority demographic groups in Turkey like Turkish or Sunni-Muslim are majority among the counseling professionals compared to the minorities based on the frequencies and percent of them among the participants in this study. Furthermore, in general, the majority demographic groups (Turkish, Sunni-Muslim) averaged lower MCI scores compared to minority groups (Kurdish, Muslim-Alewit). Koc gathered that participants who had completed a multicultural counseling course had higher scores on the overall Multicultural Counseling Inventory, Multicultural Counseling Skills subscale, Multicultural Counseling Awareness subscale, and Multicultural Counseling Knowledge than participants who had not completed a multicultural 70 counseling course. Therefore, the results indicate that a multicultural counseling course enhances the multicultural counseling competency of counselors. Lastly, Koc's study revealed that correlation between extent of contact with culturally different clients and the overall Multicultural Counseling Inventory scores of participants was positive and statistically significant. Previous research studies focused primarily on the experience of counselors or counselors in training in an environment that is culturally different from their own,

especially through cultural emersion projects.

Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) studied the multicultural counseling competencies of Canadian counselors, they investigated 181 counselors' multicultural competencies in the domains of self-awareness, knowledge, skills, and the counseling relationship. Counselors recognized value conflicts with clients but reported difficulties resolving differences. Experience working with multicultural clients and attending professional development seminars were the strongest predictors of higher levels of multicultural competencies, followed by prior multicultural course work and case consultation. According to (Arthur, 1998; Hall, 1997) the diversity of Canada's population poses challenges for the delivery of culturally responsive counseling services. As consumers of professional services become increasingly diverse, counselors need to consider how well their practices meet client needs. However, multicultural counseling requires more than a focus on clients who are deemed "culturally diverse." Without also attending to the influence of counselors' cultural backgrounds, cultural encapsulation may unintentionally impact assessment and intervention practices in adverse ways (Dana, 1998; Pedersen, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1999; Sue et al., 1998). Concerns about cultural encapsulation have led to the articulation of multicultural counseling competencies in three domains: awareness, knowledge, and skills (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Counselor self-awareness is defined as developing an understanding of the ways that cultural conditioning impacts a personal worldview and influences counseling relationships. Many counselors felt that their abilities to use basic counseling skills in culturally appropriate ways led to positive working relationships. For example, the majority of counselors named "basic counseling skills" as the essence of their work with clients, while others named factors such as empathy, the therapeutic alliance, and support given by the counselor as factors that led to sessions going well. The results from the study underscore the importance of adequate education and training for counselors who work with culturally diverse clientele. Counselling curriculum that includes generic counseling skills and interventions needs to be infused with material on how culture may influence counseling process and outcome. Notwithstanding the importance of knowledge about the values of practices of specific cultural groups, counselors must be mindful of the ways in which culture shapes their own values and beliefs. The results suggest that practitioner experiences after graduation are influential for the development of multicultural counseling competencies. Whereas less than half of the counselors in this study attended professional seminars, accessed supervision or consultation regarding culturally diverse clients, participation in these professional activities was associated with higher levels of multicultural counseling competencies.

Mensah (2019) assessed multicultural competence of counselors in public universities in Ghana. He says that a person's cognition defines the cultural mindset, religious beliefs and way of life. Culture supplies its believers with a theoretical basis for the comprehension of disease and affective misery. This suggests strategies of



therapeutic interventions which bode well in that cultural environment. He found that counselors lack multicultural skills with regards to the cultural beliefs of the different ethnic groups in Ghana which makes them incapable to mediate in a way that is ethnically subtle and applicable, also that counselors sampled perceived their cultural competency to be low as measured on all sections (Knowledge, Skills and Awareness) (Knowledge, Skills and Awareness). He finished by advocating for an examination of the intercultural capabilities of counseling professionals. His findings of the study have showed that counselors' intercultural competences were poor for all parts; Awareness (Attitude-Beliefs), Skills and Knowledge. Multiculturalism has been considered as a platform for professional development which can finally lead to counseling revolution in Ghana. By integrating multicultural theoretical framework (awareness, skills and knowledge) into the training of counselors in Ghana, the diverse ethnic, tribal and cultural makeup of our country will benefit more from counseling, a subject field brought close to the people.

Gonzalez-Voller, et al., (2020) investigated a preliminary longitudinal study of multicultural competence in counselor education in America. Drawing upon Sue et al.'s 1992 MCC, Barden and Greene (2015) defined multicultural counseling competence as "a counselor's knowledge of different racial and cultural groups, awareness of personal attitudes/beliefs, and ability to use appropriate counseling skills when working with a diverse range of cultural groups. According to them, counselors who operate from multicultural, feminist, and social justice counseling lenses attempt to mitigate the negative impact of social injustices incurred by individuals in marginalized groups, addressing the multiple facets of culture, power dynamics, sociopolitical influences, social injustices, and cultural oppression. They emphasize that a cornerstone of multicultural counseling is the prioritizing of both awareness and knowledge of the deleterious effects of social injustice, cultural oppression, discrimination, marginalization, and privilege. Their study therefore, examined counselor trainees' self-perceptions of their multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills based on the concepts that overlap in the earlier and later multicultural counseling competencies. Participants included 78 master's-level graduate students enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counselor education program located in the southeastern United States. No demographic data were missing from the responses, and less than 2.7% of data were missing from survey responses; thus, all participants were retained in the sample. They found that that the growth rate of counseling students' perceptions of their multicultural competence increased over the course of their program. The results gathered were consistent with Barden and Greene's (2015) investigation, which indicated counselor education students who had been in their graduate education no longer had higher self-reported multicultural competence scores.

Arredondo et al., (1996) conducted a research on operationalization of the multicultural counseling competencies. It was gathered that counselor awareness of own cultural values and biases had attitudes and beliefs which headed the culturally

skilled counselors believe that cultural self-awareness and sensitivity to one's own cultural heritage is essential. Going further, culturally skilled counselors have specific knowledge about their own racial and cultural heritage and how it personally and professionally affects their definitions and biases of normality/abnormality and the process of counseling. Culturally skilled counselors possess knowledge and understanding about how oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping affect them personally and in their work. This allows individuals to acknowledge their own racist attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. Although this standard applies to all groups, for White counselors it may mean that they understand how they may have directly or indirectly benefited from individual, institutional, and cultural racism as outlined in White identity development models.

Tomlinson-Clarke (2013) conducted a research on multicultural counseling competencies: extending multicultural training paradigms toward globalization. She gathered that in a diverse nation and in advancing global counseling initiatives, there is a demand for helping professionals who are culturally aware, culturally sensitive, and have specific cultural knowledge about individuals representing cultural groups who may live in the United States and abroad. Also advancing counselor competencies toward an increased level of awareness and knowledge that extends across cultures requires a complex understanding of the dynamics of culture and the impact of cultural practices from a sociopolitical context. Tomlinson-Clarke therefore concluded that counselor training programs should provide multicultural training that expands worldviews, providing cultural lenses by which counselors are better able to see and to understand a client's worldview. Multicultural training must extend counselors' competencies beyond pre-requisite levels for meeting client concerns in a culturally diverse world. Again, multicultural training must provide continuing opportunities to use self-reflective skills to confront bias assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

In a study by Chao (2005) on counselors' multicultural competencies: from gender and ethnicity perspectives, to investigate how counselor's gender and race identities influence their multicultural counseling competence, as measured by both multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness scale and multicultural counseling inventory. In addition to factors of demographic gender and race, as measured by multiple regression analysis, the study also examined a number of possible contributors to multicultural counseling competence. More specifically, after controlling for social desirable responding, this study examined how the following factors influence multicultural counseling competence, counselors' multicultural training experiences (e.g., courses, research, workshops, and number of sessions working with cultural different clients), ethnic identity, attitudes toward equality between men and women, and color-blind racial attitudes. Despite the finding that demographic gender and race did not significantly influence multicultural counseling competence, counselors' multicultural training experience, ethnic identity, attitudes toward the equality between men and women, and color-

blind racial attitudes were found to have significantly contributed to the variance of multicultural counseling competence.

Shi and Carey (2021) undertook a comprehensive analysis of how multicultural counseling competence is handled in school counselor state licensure examinations. They sought to determine how multicultural counseling competency is assessed on state licensure examinations for school counselors. They discovered that multicultural counseling competency is vital for the success of professional school counselors and for ensuring that all children have access to comprehensive school counseling programs that address their academic, social/emotional, and career development in a culturally sensitive and successful manner. However, the literature has very little information about school counselors' state licensing examinations. The study provided preliminary evidence for the idea that state licensure examinations do, in fact, assess certain crucial features of multicultural counseling competency, as outlined by Holcomb-McCoy (2004). However, there is considerable variation between examinations in the proportion of substance allocated to these topics. A quantitative content analysis reveals that state assessments do not assess a number of essential school counselor multicultural counseling competency components. To advance the school counseling profession, it is necessary to clarify state program evaluation requirements for school counseling licensing and to develop graduate program curricula for both masters and doctoral students. It is necessary to equip school counselors and counselor educators with continuing education.

Pedersen (2002) examined how a culturally competent counselor is formed. The first stage in creating multicultural competency in counseling, according to his findings, is to analyze the individual's requirements in the areas of awareness, knowledge, and skill. Accurate awareness is the capacity to accurately describe a problem from the counselor's own perspective and from the perspectives of people from other cultures. Counselors can determine a client's degree of accurate awareness by assessing the following characteristics: (1) ability to interpret direct and indirect communication styles; (2) sensitivity to nonverbal cues; (3) ability to recognize cultural and linguistic differences; (4) sensitivity to the myths and stereotypes of other cultures; (5) concern for the welfare of persons from other cultures; (6) ability to articulate elements of one's own culture; (7) appreciation for multicultural education; (8) ability to recognize relationships between and among cultural gr In addition, a multiculturally competent counselor must have an understanding of standard textbook counseling, which is a necessary but insufficient criterion. In addition to psychological knowledge, multilingualism necessitates an interdisciplinary skill set that encompasses political, economic, and social comprehension. While much of this information is available in textbooks, a great deal of knowledge is also available in the counselor's own community through contact with resource persons who are both authentic to one or more particular cultures and articulate in their ability to describe those cultures in terms of how they are similar to and different from the counselor trainee's own culture. Immersion in

other cultures is a valuable learning experience for both students and professors when the conditions are favorable. This encounter may occur either by sending students into the community or by inviting community resource individuals into the classroom. He found that culturally competent counselors understand the facts and information describing the cultural background of each client. Culturally competent counselors are able to assist clients in achieving positive outcomes by acting appropriately. Counselors have been inclined to dismiss or minimize a client's cultural environment due to the complexity of culture. There is no easy method for a counselor with cultural competence to perform a tough task.

In conclusion, Multicultural counseling competency is a theoretical and applied trend in the counseling process, and counselors' awareness of personal culture helps clients gain awareness of other cultures. However, some counselors lack cultural knowledge of other cultures' challenges. As the attainment gap between minorities and whites increases, multicultural school counselors are in demand. Multiculturalism can lead to a counseling revolution in Ghana by integrating multicultural theoretical framework (awareness, skills, and knowledge) into counselor training.

After controlling for socially desirable responses several studies, the following factors influence multicultural counseling competence, counselors' multicultural training experiences (e.g., courses, research, workshops, and number of sessions working with culturally diverse clients), ethnic identity, attitudes toward gender equality, and color-blind racial attitudes. The implication is that, training must expand counselors' skills to fulfill client needs in a diverse world. For White counselors, it may involve understanding how they've profited from cultural racism. In a varied nation and for worldwide counseling projects, counselors must be culturally aware, sympathetic, and knowledgeable about cultural groups. Working with multicultural clientele and attending professional development courses predicted stronger multicultural competence.

## **METHOD**

The population used for the study were Senior High School Counselors in the Volta Region of Ghana. The region was selected for consideration, as a matter of convenience to the researcher who also resides in the region and has interacted extensively with schools in the region.

In selecting participants for the study, both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were adopted. The Simple random method of sampling was adopted to select 60 respondents from a total population of 75 Senior High School Counselors in the region. Purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents from the various schools in the Region. Though the sample size is considerably small in absolute term, in relation to the available population, it is significant. According to

Kovacs, et al., (2022), in an ideal world, the choice for the number of participants would be solely determined by scientific considerations. In practice, researchers are limited by time (collecting data is quite demanding), money (participating or people collecting the data may be paid) and availability (the population may be relatively small). In this particular study, the constraint is in the relatively small population under consideration for an important research. Kovacs, et al., (2022) advocate that by admitting a study's shortcomings, researchers improve future readers' understanding of the article's procedure and respond to readers who think the sample size is too little or too large.

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. The design was considered appropriate in that the sample elements are of varying characteristics (age, sex, occupation etc). Also, questionnaires were used to gather evidence on the variable investigated in the study.

Participants completed a survey packet that included a demographic questionnaire and instruments measuring Multicultural Diversity Awareness and Cultural Diversity. A description of the various instruments and their reliability coefficients are presented below:

#### ***The Multicultural Counseling Knowledge and Awareness Scale***

The Multicultural Counseling Knowledge and Awareness Scale (MCKAS) is a 32-item questionnaire designed to evaluate self-reported multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness by. Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Riger, and Austin (Ponterotto, et al., 2002). There are 10 items on the Awareness Scale that are written backwards, so that a low score means a high level of awareness. These items need to be rescored before the data can be analyzed. The numbers for these things are 1, 4, 7, 10, 11, 18, 20, 24, 25, and 30. The following conversion table is used to turn these scores around: 1 = 7, 2 = 6, 3 = 5, 4 = 4, 5 = 3, 6 = 2, 7 = 1. The MCKAS gives you two scores that are only slightly related to each other ( $r = 0.36$ ), which supports the idea that each subscale can be interpreted on its own. The answers to the 20 questions on the Knowledge Scale are 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 31, and 32. All of these questions are written in a positive way, and high scores mean that people think you know more about multicultural counseling issues. The Knowledge scale has a score range of 20 to 140 for the total score or 1 to 7 for the mean score. The mean subscale score is found by dividing the total aggregate score by the number of subscale items, which is 20. Awareness Scale has 12 questions: 1, 4, 7, 10, 11, 18, 20, 24, 25, 26, 29, and 31. (30). There are ten things in parentheses that need to be scored backwards. After reverse scoring, the total score range for the Awareness Scale is from 12 to 84 (or 1 to 7 for the mean score, which is the total score divided by the number of subscale items, which is 12), with higher scores indicating more knowledge of multicultural counseling issues. The content, construct, and criterion-related validity of the MCKAS appear to be good. According to Ponterotto et al. (2002), the inter-correlation between the two subscales was .04.

An investigation of the correlation between MCI and MEIM was used to investigate the convergent and criterion-related validity of MCKAS (Chao, 2006).

### *Cultural Diversity Awareness Questionnaire*

The Cultural Diversity Awareness Questionnaire was adapted for the study. The questionnaire was developed to identify the attitudes and perspectives regarding cultural diversity, to help one become aware of and understand their prejudices and biases and to help one understand the potential consequences of their approach to diversity in the workplace. It has 32 items that are responded to on a 5-point Likert scale. The Cultural Diversity Awareness Questionnaire (CDAQ) was developed, validated for content, analyzed for reliability, and field and pilot tested. The CDAQ was thought to have an internal consistency reliability of 0.81 for knowledge and 0.77 for attitude (Ocegeda, 2022). The CDAQ had a 5-point Likert scale with answers like "never," "almost never," "sometimes," "almost always," and "always". The scores range from very low (0–39) to low (40–69), moderate (70–99), high (100–129), and very high (130–160), with higher scores showing that people are more aware of their biases and prejudices.

### *Demographic Questionnaire*

The demographic questionnaire requested information on the participant's gender, age, level of education, years of work experience, number of multicultural courses taken, and self-rated level of experience with handling multicultural clients.

The researcher sought the informed consent of each individual counselor apart from the permission of various school heads to enter the school. Informed consent was sort from the authorities of the various secondary schools as well as directly from respondents (individual school counselors) to the survey before issuing out questionnaires. The respondents to whom the hypotheses were not disclosed were entreated to complete the questionnaire for immediate collection, in order to ensure 100% turn in of all questionnaires. The completed questionnaire responses were then cleaned, coded, scored and inputted in SPSS for analysis. After this, the interpretations and discussions of the results from the study were carried out. Finally results from the data analysis and literature review were used for the discussion and to make recommendations for school counseling practice and future research.

The study used a questionnaire to obtain demographic information and data on multicultural diversity awareness. As result, in line with the American Psychological Association (APA 2002) certain ethical considerations were observed regarding the use of human subjects for research. Specifically, Standard 3.10 of APA which stipulates that informed consent must be sought from the participants and that the participants should be well briefed on the consequences of taking part in the study and the right to withdraw at any point in time was observed strictly.

Finally, participants were assured of utmost confidentiality of information and this

was demonstrated with the questionnaire not having any identifiable label. Participants were also informed that the information provided was meant for academic work only.

### Demographic Data Respondent

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Respondent by Gender**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	31	51.7
Male	29	48.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>

A total of sixty respondents were selected to participate in the study. Thirty-one (31) which represents (51.7%) were females and twenty-nine (29) which represents (48.3%) were males.

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of Respondents by Age**

Age	Frequency	Percent
18 to 24	1	1.7
25 to 34	6	10.0
35 to 44	21	35.0
45 to 54	19	31.7
55 to 64	12	20.0
65 or older	1	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>

According to the findings of this research, one (1) representing (1.7) % of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24 years. Six (6) representing (10.0) % were between 25 and 34 years, twenty one (21) representing (35.0) % were the highest respondents between 35 and 44 years, nineteen (19) representing (31.7) % were between 45 and 54 years, 55 to 64 years were 12 respondents which represented (20.0) %. There was only one respondent who was above 65years which represents (1.7) %.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of Respondents by Education**

Education	Frequency	Percent
Diploma	1	1.7
Bachelors	36	60.0
Masters	21	35.0
PhD	1	1.7
Others	1	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>

One (1) representing (1.7) % of the respondent had diploma in Education. Thirty-six (36) representing (60.0) % respondents have attained a Bachelor's degree, twenty-one (21) representing (35.0%) of the respondents had Mastersdegree in education. One (1) representing (1.7) % of the respondent had PhD and other education respectively.

**Table 4**  
**Distribution of Respondents by Years of Experience**

<b>Years of Experience</b>		
Less than 1oneyear	1	1.7
1-3	11	18.3
4-6	17	28.3
7-10	16	26.7
11+	15	25.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>

One (1) representing (1.7) % of the respondent had less than one year work experience. Eleven (11) representing (18.3) % of the respondents had one to three years work experience. 4 to 6 years work experience had eleven (11) representing (18.3) % of the respondents. Sixteen (16) representing (26.7) % of the respondents had 7 to 10 years work experience. Fifteen (15) representing (25.0) % of the respondents had 11+ years work of experience in all, we had a total of 60 respondents.

**Table 5**  
**Regression Table Showing the Relationship**

	<b>Multicultural Counselling Knowledge and Awareness <math>\beta</math></b>	<b>Cultural Diversity Awareness <math>\beta</math></b>
Gender	-.027	.125
Age	-.277	-.328
Number of MCC	-.121	.058
Education	.065	-.207
Years of experience	.145	.226

The findings of the study revealed that, there is no significant relationship between multicultural counselling knowledge and awareness of -0.027 and cultural diversity awareness in relation to gender. There was however no positive relationship established between multicultural counselling knowledge and awareness and cultural diversity awareness in relation to age. It also revealed that, number of MCC -0.121 and 0.058 had no significant values as compared with cultural diversity awareness 0.058. Multicultural counselling knowledge and awareness had positive value in relation to education as compared to cultural diversity awareness which had a negative value of -0.207. Nevertheless, years of work experience had a positive values of 0.145 and 0.226 respectively between multicultural counselling knowledge and awareness and cultural diversity awareness.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The findings of the study revealed that, there is no significant relationship between gender of respondents and their multicultural counselling knowledge and awareness.



This finding is consistent with the findings of Lam, Tracz & Lucey, (2013) who explored the counselling self-efficacy of students in a counsellor education programme, in regard to age, gender, and ethnicity characteristics. Also, there was no positive relationship established between multicultural counselling knowledge and awareness and the age of respondents. Mensah (2019); Lam, Tracz&Lucey, (2013). These results might suggest that multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness may not necessarily be increased dependent on a person's age and gender.

Multicultural counselling knowledge and awareness had positive value in relation to education. Although school counseling hasnot put much emphasis on multicultural education in Ghana, the field of counseling has traditionally considered multicultural competence as important (Merlin, 2017). The implication of this finding is that the number of years of multicultural education and specific courses directed at multicultural competence and skills building of the counselor while in training can significantly impact their knowledge, awareness and sensitivity towards culturally diverse clients. Though the current study is in line with some earlier researches (Holcomb-McCoy& Myers, 1999; Robles-Piña & McPherson, 2002; Sodowsky et al., 1998) which imply multicultural courses boost counselor multicultural awareness and competency, the outcomes are ambiguous. However, Aga MohdJaladin, (2017) are of the view that multicultural counseling competencies should make culture and context integral to all counseling courses through experiential or in-vivo exposure and case-studies. There should be more hours set aside for the practical parts of counselor education and training where more attention should be paid to the cultural and social parts of multicultural counseling courses because the fact that counselor training include cultural and social elements are not enough to make counselors more culturally competent.

Also, the number of years of working experience had a positive relationship with multicultural counselling knowledge and awareness. This finding is consistent with Arthur & Januszkowski, (2001) who also reports the significant relationship between years of professional experience and multicultural knowledge and awareness. They reported experience workingwith multicultural clients and attending professional development seminars were thestrongest predictors of higher levels of multicultural competencies. This result suggests that multicultural knowledge, awareness and competence may be increased through experience with diverse clients.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Multicultural counseling knowledge, awareness and practice are important parts of multicultural counseling that must be cherished in a culturally diverse country like Ghana. Educational policymakers in Ghana need to look at how counselors are educated and trained. This study submits that Multicultural courses taken in the current counselor training programs donot meet the standards for making counselors who are good at working with people from different cultural backgrounds. According to research on multicultural counseling, working with a

diverse range of clients is associated with an understanding of other cultures. It has been shown that a counselor's knowledge of multiculturalism is tied to their experience working with clients from various cultural backgrounds. This calls for more concerted efforts beyond the training to sensitively work through exposure to attain considerable levels of competence as a school counselor.

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