

# From Theory to Practice: The Perspective of Ghanaian Counselling Students

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**Abstract:-** Counselling practicum is a vital component of counseling programs, as it provides counseling students with an opportunity to gain hands-on experience working with clients under the supervision of a licensed or experienced counselor. Therefore, this study sought to explore challenges and prospects of counseling practicum among students pursuing postgraduate degree programs in University of Education, Winneba (UEW) in the Central Region of Ghana. Exploratory case study design within qualitative research approach was adopted in this study. Seven (7) students were sampled using purposive (maximum variation) sampling technique. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants. Data were analyzed in themes. It was established that limited availability of practicum sites, inadequate supervision, limited exposure to diverse populations, time management, difficulty in balancing academic coursework and practicum, inadequate resources and limited practical experience were some of the challenges faced by students. Also, to develop counseling skills, gain hands-on experience, network with professionals, and contribution to the field through research and professional development activities were key opportunities for these students. It was concluded that counseling practicum can be a challenging experience for university students, as it requires them to navigate complex ethical, personal, and professional issues into practice, it also contributes to the enrichment of the students' counselling practices and experiences. Recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusion drawn.

**Keywords:-** Challenges, Counselling Practicum, Opportunities, Experiences.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Counseling practicum is an essential component of counseling programs in universities, as it provides students with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings under the supervision of experienced professionals. However, counseling practicum can be a challenging experience for students, as it requires them to navigate complex ethical, personal, and professional issues (Briggs, 2019; McLeod, 2013; Perry, 2018; Okech, 2018). This implies that university students may face difficulties during their counseling practicum, as they are tasked with addressing intricate ethical, personal, and professional matters within a real-world context. To successfully complete counselling practicum, students must develop effective coping strategies to manage these challenges and ensure the safety and well-being of their clients. Counseling

programs must provide adequate support and supervision to help students overcome these challenges and develop the necessary skills to become competent and ethical practitioners.

The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) developed by Kolb (1984) was used to underpin the study. The theory suggests that learning is a cyclical process that involves four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In the context of counseling practicum, this means that students may learn from their direct experiences with clients, reflect on those experiences, and then use that reflection to develop their conceptual understanding and inform their future practice. Research has supported the use of ELT in counseling practicum (Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2017; Henriksen et al., 2020). For example, a recent study found that counseling students who engaged in reflective writing as part of their practicum reported increased self-awareness, improved counseling skills, and a greater sense of professional identity (Henriksen et al., 2020). The Experiential Learning Theory provides a useful framework for exploring the challenges and prospects of counseling practicum, as it emphasizes the importance of reflection and active experimentation in the learning process.

Hanover and Smith (2020) found that the quality of supervision and feedback significantly influenced students' learning outcomes in the counseling practicum. Their study further revealed that inadequate supervision and feedback led to decreased confidence and competence in students' counseling skills. Many counseling students struggle with the application of theoretical knowledge in real-life counselling situations and often experience anxiety, self-doubt, and emotional exhaustion during their practicum (Wilson and Binks 2021; Neill et al. 2019; Osuji & Ojeme, 2018). These challenges further compounded by the fact that counseling practicum settings are often complex and unpredictable, requiring students to think on their feet and adapt quickly to changing situations. These emotional challenges can also impact students' ability to perform effectively in their practicum and can also affect their personal well-being. Findings of the study would contribute to the improvement of counseling practicum experiences for postgraduate students, enhance the quality of counselor training, and increase awareness of the importance of practicum supervision and support.

## II. CHALLENGES OF COUNSELING PRACTICUM FACING COUNSELING STUDENTS

One of the main challenges of counseling practicum among university students is the difficulty of transferring theoretical knowledge to practical skills (Doran, 2018; Dorvlo, 2017). University students may struggle to apply what they have learned in the classroom to real-life counseling situations, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Besides, managing emotions and dealing with the emotional demands of counseling can be a challenge to student-counselors. Students in counseling practicum are often faced with clients who are struggling with complex emotional issues such as high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout, and these can take a toll on the students' emotional well-being (Liu et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2021).

A lack of supervision and support can also be a significant challenge for university students in counseling practicum (Gazzola et al., 2020). Without adequate supervision and support from experienced professionals, students may struggle to navigate complex counseling situations and make decisions that are in the best interest of their clients. This lack of support can also lead to feelings of isolation and frustration among students. Further, navigating ethical dilemmas and maintaining professional boundaries can be a significant challenge for university students in counseling practicum (Lum et al., 2020). Students must be aware of ethical codes and standards, and ensure that they are providing counseling services that are consistent with these guidelines. Additionally, students must maintain appropriate boundaries with clients to avoid any ethical violations. Again, counseling practicum experiences can also be challenging for counseling students. Students may experience anxiety, self-doubt, and a lack of confidence when working with clients (Williams & Vechten, 2021). In addition, students may struggle to balance the demands of their academic coursework with the demands of their practicum experiences (Williams & Vechten, 2021). In furtherance, counseling practicum can be emotionally demanding, particularly when dealing with clients who have complex mental health issues (Sharf, 2018). Moreover, counseling practicum may pose ethical dilemmas and boundary issues for counseling students (Whitson & Weatherspoon, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to have a supportive and structured environment for counseling practicum to ensure the safety and well-being of both students and clients.

Research has identified other challenges that students face during counseling practicum, including limited opportunities for practicum placements, difficulty in securing quality supervision, time constraints, insufficient preparation for the demands of practicum, and the emotional impact of client cases (Kulakowska & Mitchell, 2020; Laney, 2020; Adomako & Obiri-Yeboah, 2017). These challenges can negatively impact students' confidence, competence, and professional identity, ultimately affecting their future career success (Laney, 2020; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Furthermore, the COVID-19

pandemic has added an additional layer of challenges to counseling practicum, with students facing difficulties in adapting to virtual counseling, maintaining ethical standards in online practice, and managing the emotional impact of the pandemic on themselves and their clients (Doraiswamy & Goel, 2021). Additionally, a study conducted in Nigeria found that counseling students faced a variety of challenges during their practicum experiences, including difficulties with clinical supervision, time management, and balancing academic and practicum responsibilities (Osuji & Ojeme, 2018). Similarly, a study conducted in Ghana found that counseling students faced challenges related to communication, supervision, and access to resources during their practicum experiences (Baiden, 2019). Cultural differences can also pose a challenge for counseling students in Ghana, particularly in terms of understanding and addressing the unique needs and perspectives of diverse populations (Boafo & Nsiah, 2021).

However, Osuji and Ojeme (2018) examined factors that contribute to successful practicum experiences for counseling students and found that social support, a positive supervisory relationship, and effective communication were important factors in promoting positive practicum experiences. This implies that there are mixed findings regarding the experiences of counseling students in the university. Despite these challenges, there are also several prospects for counseling practicum for students.

### A. Prospects of Counseling Practicum for Students

Counseling practicum offers counseling students the opportunity to gain practical experience, which is essential for their development as counselors (Brott & Myers, 2019; Kim & Kimm, 2016; Whitson & Weatherspoon, 2018). Through practicum, students can apply their theoretical knowledge to real-life counseling situations, develop counseling skills, and gain confidence in their counseling abilities. This hands-on experience can help students build confidence and competence in their future careers as counselors. Theoretical knowledge is essential in counseling, but it is not enough. Students need to apply their knowledge to real-life situations, and counseling practicum provides an ideal environment for this integration. Similarly, Kleiner and Ford (2017) argue that counseling practicum is an essential component of counselor education programs. It provides students with an opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in a supervised clinical setting, thereby developing their practical skills and competencies (Kleiner & Ford, 2017).

Furthermore, counseling practicum is essential for the professional development of counseling students. It helps them develop professional competencies, including communication skills, cultural competence, ethical and legal issues, and self-awareness (Whitson & Weatherspoon, 2018). These competencies are crucial for success in the counseling profession. Additionally, counseling practicum plays a crucial role in the career development of counseling students. It provides students with the opportunity to network with experienced counselors, receive feedback on their counseling skills, and develop their personal counseling style (Brott & Myers, 2019). Moreover,

counseling practicum provides students with the opportunity to explore different counseling settings and client populations, which can help them determine their career interests. Again, counseling practicum is an important aspect of counselor education as it provides students with the opportunity to develop their counseling skills and apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained in their academic studies (Doyle et al., 2021; Kim & Kimm, 2016). This provides students with an opportunity to work with diverse populations and gain experience in a variety of counseling settings. This can also expose counseling students to a diverse range of clients and issues, which can help them develop cultural competence and awareness of the unique needs of different populations

Hatchett (2020) argue that counseling practicum experiences have a positive impact on students' personal and professional development. In a study conducted by Hatchett (2020), counseling students reported that their practicum experiences helped them to develop their counseling skills, increase their self-awareness, and gain confidence in their abilities as counselors. Supervision is a critical component of counseling practicum experiences. Effective supervision can help students to develop their counseling skills, increase their self-awareness, and address any challenges they may face during their practicum experiences (Herlihy & Corey 2021; Gillam, 2013). Effective supervision helps to ensure that students provide ethical and competent counseling services to their clients. This experience typically involves regular feedback and evaluation from supervisors, which can help students identify areas for improvement and work towards professional growth and development. Overall, counseling practicum offers many prospects for students to enhance their skills, develop professionally, and gain valuable experience in the field of counseling.

However, there is paucity of research on the challenges and prospects of counseling practicum in Ghana. As a result, there is limited understanding of the experiences of counseling students and supervisors in the Ghanaian context, and the factors that influence the effectiveness of counseling practicum. This study aims to address this gap in the literature by exploring the challenges and opportunities of counseling practicum among students pursuing postgraduate degree programs in University of Education, Winneba in the Central Region of Ghana with a focus on the experiences of students. Based on the aim of the study, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

- What are the challenges students pursuing postgraduate degree programs face during their practicum?
- What are the opportunities students pursuing postgraduate degree programs enjoy during their practicum?

### III. METHODS

#### A. Research Design

A qualitative study was adopted since it helped in providing insights into the experiences and perspectives of postgraduate students in relation to counseling practicum. An exploratory case study which involved in selecting a small sample of students and conducting in-depth interviews to gather rich data on their experiences and perspectives was adopted (Creswell, 2018). The exploratory case study design was particularly useful in this study since little was known about the phenomenon. In this sense, it provided a detailed understanding of the issue at hand (Creswell, 2018). Further, the use of this research design helped to identify the challenges faced by students during their counselling practicum and explore potential solutions to address these challenges.

#### B. Participants

Students pursuing postgraduate degree programs in the University of Education, Winneba for the 2021/2022 academic year were used for the study. Seven (7) students consisting of three (3) males and four (4) females were sampled using maximum variation type of purposive sampling technique. This sample size was arrived at based on data saturation. To ensure rigor and credibility in the study, it is important to follow established qualitative research methods such as purposive sampling and data saturation (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling in this study involved selecting participants based on their relevance and potential to provide rich data on the research topic (Creswell, 2013). In this study, data saturation involved collecting data until no new themes or insights emerge (Yin, 2014).

#### C. Data collection and Analysis

Data collection in this study was made up of gathering non-numerical data through semi-structured interviews to elicit in-depth information from participants (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gray et al., 2017). Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted with postgraduate students who were enrolled in counseling practicum courses at the University of Education, Winneba. The interviews were semi-structured which allowed for flexibility in exploring the experiences of these students. Also, it helped in focusing on topics such as the challenges encountered during counseling practicum and opportunities enjoyed by these students. Participation in the study was voluntary, and a consent form was signed by the participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Furthermore, participants received assurances that if they were unsure about moving on, they should let the researcher know so that they would not have to divulge any sensitive information with which they might not be comfortable. The interview was run in a private yet roomy office, MPhil students were interviewed one on one. The participants were checked by the researcher by probing, clarifying, and controlling to make sure they were on track. When the data saturation point was achieved, the interview was over. The information from the interview was recorded while taking footnotes as well. I thoroughly transcribed the recorded

material by listening to it several times. The data were transcribed and a thematic analysis approach was employed.

Data analysis comprised interpreting and making sense of the data collected (Patton, 2015). In this study, a thematic analysis approach was used to identify patterns and themes in the data related to the challenges of counselling practicum among postgraduate students at the University of Education, Winneba. The analysis helped in identifying common themes across different interviews, coding the data to identify patterns and relationships, and developing a narrative that summarizes the experiences of the students (Creswell, 2014). The reliability of the data was ensured by using peer debriefing and member checking. To protect the participants' privacy, the data were analyzed using codes. Because of this, I evaluated the themes using the following codes for the verbatim transcription of participant data: P 1, P 2, P3....and P 7.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data were analyzed in light of the highlighted study goals and in response to the research questions.

##### A. Challenges faced by students pursuing postgraduate degree programs in counseling practicum

Seven themes were taken from the narrative and presented to address the first research question. Limited availability of practicum sites, inadequate supervision, limited exposure to diverse populations, time management, difficulty in balancing academic coursework and practicum, inadequate resources and limited practical experience. Next are some verbatim quotations to support the claims.

##### ➤ Limited availability of practicum sites

In responding to this theme, a participant said: *"When we were asked to select a site for our practicum session, I wanted to choose a place close to my place of work, but I was told that I cannot select that site since it was too far from the campus and that it will be difficult for me to get a supervisor if I choose that site. For this reason, I have to choose a site within Winneba township"* [P3]. Likewise, another participant added: *"I had made arrangement long ago to do the practicum at the place I am working. But, when it was time for us to choose the site for our practicum, I presented my site and I was told that I have to change that site since it is too far from campus. The reason, had been that it will be a challenge for me to get a supervisor if I choose that same place I am working"* [P 2].

From the participants comments, it could be realized that these students perceived that they were limited in selecting their practicum sites. It could also be deduced from their comments that this limitation came as a result of insufficient supervisors for their practicum.

##### ➤ Inadequate supervision

In commenting on this theme, a participant echoed: *"I have realized that one supervisor is to about six student-counselors and this is too much for the supervisors to handle. Sometimes, you will send one practicum report and it will take long period before your supervisor responses to*

*it"* [P 5]. This comment was similar to what participant 1 echoed: *"I think the university needs more hands when it comes to supervisors. I later realized that as a result of insufficient supervisors, some of us were not allowed to select practicum sites far away from the Winneba, Accra and Cape Coast"* [P1].

It could be inferred from these explanations that the ratio of student-counselor to supervisor was perceived to be high by the student-counselors. This connotes that there were more student-counselors as compared to supervisors to handle them. This comment also signifies that student-counselors struggling with inadequate supervision may lead to a lack of feedback on their performance and a lack of guidance on how to improve their counseling skills and techniques. Meanwhile, hands-on experience is crucial for developing the necessary skills and techniques of these student-counselors.

##### ➤ Limited exposure to diverse populations

Participant 1 said: *"As you can see, this is a basic school and pupils in this school are basically living in this vicinity. This suggests that they have almost the same features. However, if I had done my practicum in SHS, I believe strongly that I will encounter students with diverse populations"* [P 1]. Similarly, another participant had this to say: *"I have been here for some months now. What I have discovered is that pupils in this school have almost the same characteristics. This can serve as a barrier for me to have more experience when it comes to dealing with diverse population"* [P7].

From these comments, it could be deduced that student-counselors practicing in basic schools are likely to have diverse population to deal with.

##### ➤ Time management

In relation to this theme, a participant said: *"Pursuing a postgraduate degree program in counseling practicum requires a significant amount of time and dedication, which to me is a challenge since I have other commitments such as work or family responsibilities. This sometimes led to stress and burnout"* [P 2]. Again, participant 4 emphatically said: *"As you can see, I am a nursing mother, a worker and at the same time doing this practicum. So, managing my time for these three roles had become a challenge to me since we started this practicum session"* [P 4].

It could be inferred from the comments that student-counselors had issues when it comes to time management. The comments also signify that these student-counselors that multiple roles to play at the same time; hence, making it more difficult for them to manage their time.

##### ➤ Difficulty in balancing academic coursework and practicum

This theme was evident when participant 7 said: *"I face a challenge related to balancing my academic coursework and practicum requirements. While we are doing our practicum, we are expected to write our thesis and see our supervisors for vetting. Sometimes, the time you will book to engage your client, my supervisor may also wish to book another appointment with me on same day. When this*

*happens, I become confuse and I have to forgo one of them which probability will be meeting my client. If this practice continuous, it may get to a time my clients may lose trust in me” [P7]. This comment was not different from what participant 3 shared: “I have lots of responsibilities to handle at the same time. I am a married man, a worker and also doing my postgraduate degree course in Counseling Psychology. Sometimes, I will be having responsibilities to attend to in all these areas. When that happens, it puts me in a stressful situation and if extra care is not taken, it will adversely affect my day’s activities” [P3].*

It could be inferred from these comments that some of the students pursuing counseling practicum at the postgraduate degree level have a challenge with it comes to drawing a balance between academic work and counseling practicum. This signifies that student-counselors often have to balance coursework, research, and counseling practicum, which may be overwhelming and may lead to stress and burnout. The comment suggests that this requires effective time management and organizational skills.

➤ *Inadequate resources*

Concerning inadequate resources, participant 5 had this to share: *“Sometimes, I have to make reference to some of the theories we were thought, but because I am doing my practicum away from the Winneba campus, I find it very difficult to get access to the university library to do so. This sometimes affect my practices negatively” [P5]. Similarly, another participant said: “There are certain topics we were not taken through thoroughly. Meanwhile, during the practicum session, we meet cases that calls for application of such knowledge and skills. The other alternative is to read around those topics but most of the time, I find it very difficult to get the needed materials to read on” [P 3].*

It is evident from these comments that some of the student-counselors had it a challenge to get adequate resources on the counseling practicum. This comment denotes that these student-counselors lacked of resources, including textbooks, journals, and other learning materials. This situation may hinder student-counselors’ ability to gain a thorough understanding of the subject matter and develop practical skills.

➤ *Limited practical experience*

With regard to limited practical experience, a participant expressed his opinion as: *“I think the time frame given to us for the counseling practicum is too short. All that we have learnt in the lecture halls will be relevant if we are able to apply them during practicum session. However, the duration given to counseling practicum, to me, is too short and something should be done about it” [P 1]. Likewise, another participant established that: “I have observed that it will be difficult for me and my other colleagues to put into practice what we have learned in the lecture halls since the time period for the counseling practicum is too short. For example, I cannot fully put the counseling theories, skills and techniques into use because of the short period dedicated to the counseling practicum” [P6].*

It was realized that, the duration for the counseling practicum seems to be short for the student-counselors. The comments further infer that these student-counselors wished that the duration for the counseling practicum for students pursuing postgraduate degree course in counseling should be extended. Again, the comments suggest that without adequate opportunities to practice counseling skills in real-world settings, student-counselors may struggle to develop the practical skills necessary to succeed in their careers.

From these results, it was concluded that students pursuing postgraduate degree programs in counseling practicum at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) face several challenges. They included: limited availability of practicum sites, inadequate supervision, limited exposure to diverse populations, time management, difficulty in balancing academic coursework and practicum, inadequate resources and limited practical experience. This finding affirms that of Gazzola et al. (2020) who found that lack of supervision and support is a significant challenge for university students in counseling practicum. They further explained that without adequate supervision and support from experienced professionals, students may struggle to navigate complex counseling situations and make decisions that are in the best interest of their clients. This lack of support can also lead to feelings of isolation and frustration among students (Gazzola et al., 2020).

Also, Williams and Vechten (2021) found that students may struggle to balance the demands of their academic coursework with the demands of their practicum experiences. Research has identified other challenges that students face during counseling practicum, including limited opportunities for practicum placements, difficulty in securing quality supervision, time constraints, insufficient preparation for the demands of practicum, and the emotional impact of client cases (Kulakowska& Mitchell, 2020; Laney, 2020). These challenges can negatively impact students’ confidence, competence, and professional identity, ultimately affecting their future career success (Laney, 2020; Rønnestad&Skovholt, 2013).

*B. Prospects students pursuing postgraduate degree programs enjoy during their practicum*

From the interviews, opportunities for students pursuing postgraduate degree programs in counseling practicum also came out with Seven (7) themes which include: Hands-on counseling experience, networking, research opportunities, professional development, supervision and feedback, peer support systems, and leadership opportunities.

➤ *Hands-on counseling experience*

For this theme, a participant commented: *“In fact, I have been able to build on my counseling skills and techniques with the help of the counseling practicum we went through” [P 2]. In furtherance another participant 6 revealed that: “Hmm in reality, this counseling practicum I underwent, have been able to improve my counseling skills.*

The comments suggest that some of the student-counselors gain practical experience through practicum experiences at the counseling centers, schools, hospitals, and other institutions they worked at.

➤ *Networking*

Under networking, a participant indicated that: *"I have built strong network with the school counselor, girl-child coordinator and the district guidance and counseling coordinator through the counseling practicum I did"* [P5]. Similarly, participant 3 exclaimed that: *"I can say that the counseling practicum had helped me to build strong relationship with the school head, some teachers, district girl-child coordinator and district guidance and counseling coordinator"* [P 3].

The comments infer that student-counselors may have had network with professionals and experts in the counseling field via conferences and seminars they attended. Also, the comments could mean that perhaps these student-counselors have joined some professional organizations to build connections and learn about new developments and opportunities in the field.

➤ *Research opportunities*

Concerning research opportunities, a participant expressed that: *"Frankly speaking, I have been able to publish one article out of the cases I handled during the practicum session. Therefore, I can confidently say that this exercise (counseling practicum) had helped me to build my knowledge in research"* [P 4]. In furtherance, another participant established that: *I have got a lot of information through this practicum to shape the background to the study for my thesis"*. [P 7].

The comment suggests that student-counselors may have engaged in research projects and contributed to the body of knowledge in counseling by conducting studies, publishing papers, and presenting at conferences.

➤ *Professional development*

Under this theme, a participant said: *"At times we receive letters from the municipal guidance and counseling coordinator for counseling workshops and seminars. This had helped me to build my capacity as a student-counselor"* [P 7]. Likewise, participant 2 affirmed by saying: *"The district guidance and counseling coordinator sometimes run in-service training for counselors within the Municipality and we were not left out. Those programs had helped sharpen my counseling skills and techniques"* [P 2].

The comment denotes that student-counselors may have participated in continuing education courses, workshops, and training programs to develop new skills and knowledge and stay up-to-date with the latest trends and best practices in the field.

➤ *Supervision and feedback*

Regarding this theme, this was what a participant had to say: *"The feedbacks I have received so far from my practicum supervisor had equipped me to handle most of the cases I encountered during the practicum session"* [P 6].

Similarly, participant 1 said: *"Consistent feedbacks from my practicum supervisor had helped me in assisting clients with difficult issues. I believe these feedbacks will help me when I fully enter into the world of practice after I have completed my course successfully"* [P 1].

The comments connote that student-counselors had received supervision and feedback from qualified counseling supervisors during their practicum placements, which may help them develop their counseling skills and receive guidance on best practices.

➤ *Peer support systems*

With this theme, participant 2 said: *"At a point in time, I became confused on how to apply the knowledge I gained from the classroom situation. I was able to resolve this issue by contacting one of my colleagues who took me through how to go about the whole counseling practicum"* [P2]. Likewise, another participant added: *"As for me, I did not do counseling at the first-degree level. So, anytime I face a challenge, I easily consult some of my colleagues who did counseling at the first-degree level. This practice had sustained me till now"* [P3].

The comment suggests that perhaps student-counselors may have formed peer support groups to share experiences and support each other's personal and academic growth.

➤ *Leadership opportunities*

Under this theme, a participant had this to share: *"As being a student-counselor, I was also tasked to assist the girl-child coordinator in the counseling club. I saw this as an added responsibility but it helped in building my capacity as a student-counselor"* [P 5]. Similarly, another participant affirmed the assertion and exclaimed that: *"I was made the staff secretary immediately we had our first staff meeting when I got to the school. I enjoyed doing that job though it was stressful at a point in time"* [P 4].

It could be realized from these comments that student-counselors took on leadership roles in student organizations, such as staff secretary and counseling associations or clubs. This is likely to provide opportunities for networking, professional development, and community outreach.

From the discussions so far, it was concluded that pursuing a postgraduate degree program in counseling practicum provided UEW student-counselors with a range of opportunities: to develop their skills, gain hands-on experience, network with professionals, and contribute to the field through research and professional development activities. This finding concurs that of Brott and Myers (2019) who found that counseling practicum offers counseling students the opportunity to gain practical experience, which is essential for their development as counselors. Also, the findings support that of Whitson and Weatherspoon (2018) who established that through practicum, students can apply their theoretical knowledge to real-life counseling situations, develop counseling skills, and gain confidence in their counseling abilities. Moreover, a study found that counseling practicum provides counseling students with the opportunity to integrate theoretical

knowledge into their counseling practice (Kleiner & Ford, 2017).

Furthermore, counseling practicum is essential for the professional development of counseling students. It helps them develop professional competencies, including communication skills, cultural competence, ethical and legal issues, and self-awareness (Whitson & Weatherspoon, 2018). Additionally, counseling practicum plays a crucial role in the career development of counseling students since it provides them with the opportunity to network with experienced counselors, receive feedback on their counseling skills, and develop their personal counseling style (Brott & Myers, 2019).

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, counseling practicum can be a challenging experience for university students, as it requires them to navigate complex ethical, personal, and professional issues. To successfully complete counseling practicum, students must develop effective coping strategies to manage these challenges and ensure the safety and well-being of their clients. Counseling programs must provide adequate support and supervision to help students overcome these challenges and develop the necessary skills to become competent and ethical practitioners.

In view of the findings, the study recommends that the Management Team of University of Education, Winneba, should provide more of electronic-resources such as counselling-books, counseling materials, and facilities that students can easily access to support their learning and practice. The Counselling Psychology Department should provide more opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience in counseling practicum. This can be achieved through partnerships with counseling centers and clinics, or through simulated counseling sessions. UEW management team should increase the number of senior members to guide and provide feedback to students during counseling practicum. The Counselling Psychology Department should provide mental health support and counseling services to help students cope with challenges that may affect their practicum experiences negatively. The Department should provide flexible scheduling options that allow students to balance their academic demands with other responsibilities such as work, family, and social commitments. Also, the Counselling Psychology Department should facilitate peer support groups among students to provide emotional and academic support. The Counselling Psychology Department should continuously review and improve the postgraduate degree programs in counseling practicum to ensure that they are relevant and meet the changing needs of the counseling profession.

## VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING PRACTICE

The limited availability of qualified supervisors means that counselors need to be more intentional about seeking out supervision and feedback to ensure that they are providing effective counseling services. The limited opportunities for hands-on experience mean that counseling programs need to prioritize providing opportunities for practical experience, such as simulated counseling sessions or partnerships with counseling centers and clinics. Addressing personal issues: Counselors need to be aware that students may face personal challenges that may affect their academic performance and provide mental health support and counseling services when needed.

Peer support groups can be a valuable resource for students pursuing postgraduate degree programs in counseling practicum. Counseling programs in UEW can incorporate peer support groups into their programs to provide emotional and academic support. Counseling programs can promote the importance of self-care and stress management to help students balance academic demands with other responsibilities such as work, family, and social commitments.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was limited to only one public university in Ghana. Future researchers who will study the phenomena should use more than one university.

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