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Instructors' Commitment towards Improving Self-Advocacy Skills of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education Institutions: Evidence from Hawassa University

Misahun Shumetu^{1*} & Adem Felema¹

¹Hawassa University, P. O. Box 05. Hawassa, Ethiopia.

*Author for Correspondence ORCIDID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4950-5830>; Email: mshnshmt22@gmail.com

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*Self-Advocacy,
Knowledge of Right,
Knowledge of Self,
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Students with
Disabilities.*

Although some students with disabilities (SWDs) have been able to reach higher education institutions (HEIs) in complex situations, they still face significant challenges. Educators posit that the acquisition of self-advocacy skills can be instrumental in facilitating the smooth transition of SWDs to HEIs. Instructors have an important role to play in improving self-advocacy skills. It is also the responsibility of all stakeholders to train, teach, and equip self-advocacy skills. Nonetheless, not all instructors commit to teaching self-advocacy skills to SWDs. The purpose of this study is to examine the level of commitment exhibited by instructors towards improving the self-advocacy skills of SWDs. The research approach was a mixed method with an explanatory sequential design. One hundred fifty instructors were selected from three colleges of Hawassa University through a stratified proportionate random sampling technique. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Kruskal-Wallis statistical test), and the qualitative data obtained through the interview were analysed qualitatively. The quantitative finding of the study showed that respondent instructors were found to have a low commitment toward improving SWDs' knowledge of self, knowledge of their rights, and communication skills. Besides, a qualitative finding of the study indicates that almost all participants did not have the skills and knowledge to teach and improve self-advocacy skills for SWDs. The researchers came to the conclusion that real-life experiences in dealing with SWDs need to be provided, especially to instructors without any counselling background and who have no better understanding of SWDs through training and workshops.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that some students with disabilities (SWDs) have been able to obtain enrolment in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the midst of a complex situation (Johnson et al., 2002; Madaus, 2005; Stodden et al., 2002), the challenges they still face are significant (Tirussew et al., 2014). The transition from primary school to secondary school, as well as from secondary school to HEIs, can prove to be an arduous undertaking for SWDs due to the fact that the responsibility for securing necessary accommodations rests primarily on the students themselves rather than on the parents or the institution, as was the case in high schools (Johnson et al., 2002; Madaus, 2005; Stodden et al., 2002; and Ben & Cindy, 2018). SWDs are nevertheless dealing with troubles in each transition to better training establishments and their retention to complete a degree or certificate (Hilary, 2006; Tedla, 2017). As mentioned in Tirussew et al. (2014), SWDs encounter formidable obstacles stemming from their insufficient self-advocacy skills and the dearth of knowledge and pessimistic outlooks within the university communities, including academic staff, management, peers, and other supportive staff.

Self-advocacy skills, as posited by educators and researchers, are viewed as a crucial solution to the obstacles encountered by SWDs during the transition to postsecondary education (Hilary, 2006; Tedla, 2017; Mat Nuri et al., 2021). Likewise, a study conducted by Barnett (2014) affirmed that the capacity to advocate for oneself is a verifiable forecaster in the transition from secondary education to adulthood, ultimately culminating in enhanced educational and occupational outcomes. According to Kuipers' (2014) portrayal, self-advocacy refers to

individuals possessing their own voice, comprehending their entitlements and duties, advocating for their rights, and possessing the capacity to make decisions and form judgments regarding their existence. The act of self-advocacy is a crucial component of empowerment.

In contrast with the above research findings concerning the importance of self-advocacy skills for SWDs, several research investigations revealed that SWDs are more likely to suffer from a lack of self-advocacy skills; unfortunately, many SWDs enter HEIs without understanding how their disability affects their learning (Brinkerhoff et al., 2002; Getzel & McManus, 2005; Wagner et al., 2005; Getzel & Briel, 2006). These students are therefore, ill-equipped to articulate the help and resources needed to overcome academic challenges in HEIs. Similarly, if others advocate for them, they might never learn when and how to do it themselves (Brinckerhoff, 1993).

According to Tadesse (2017), it is incumbent upon the higher education communities and other stakeholders to ensure the inclusion of SWDs in HEIs; however, SWDs themselves must also take an active role in participating and employing self-advocacy skills to acquire the requisite resources and support, which would enable them to attain academic and psycho-social accomplishments. This, in turn, would equip them with the necessary tools to compete in the employment and social integration markets. By honing their self-advocacy skills, individuals with disabilities can be empowered to exercise their rights, take charge of their lives, and make informed decisions that are in their best interests.

Instructors that have direct or indirect contact with SWDs have an irreplaceable role to play, although

it is the responsibility of all stakeholders to train, teach and equip these important and helpful skills. This is due to academic staff being the closest individuals to students. According to Nor and Rashed's (2018) research, it is essential for instructors to embody authenticity, which is inherent to the teaching profession, in order to facilitate successful personality development and the realization of students' aspirations within educational institutions. As such, instructors must possess the dedication and drive to equip students with requisite skills, including self-advocacy (Nor & Rashed, 2018). Academic staff commitment, as posited by Tsui and Cheng (1999), is an intrinsic motivational force that propels educators towards higher job performance. This commitment inspires academics to invest more time and energy into promoting student achievement (Mustafa, 2017), thereby motivating them to enhance the teaching profession and establish an effective learning environment for students to achieve their goals. The impact of academic staff commitment on student achievement is significant, as devoted educators prioritize their students, institution, and profession.

Nonetheless, not all instructors have the commitment to educate the self-advocacy skills of SWDs. This has been highlighted by various studies, including those conducted by Lan (2007; 2010) and Betinez, Morningstar and Frey (2009), which found that secondary school teachers often lack the required commitment, knowledge, and expertise to effectively teach self-advocacy skills to SWDs. Furthermore, Schelling (2010) has reported that teachers faced with mounting pressure to prioritize academic achievement and assessments, often find themselves with limited time to develop functional skills, such as self-advocacy, in SWDs. This is concerning, as such skills are crucial in enabling SWDs to assert their rights and gain better access to much-needed services and support in academic institutions.

In actuality, it is the responsibility of all stakeholders to train, teach and equip these important and helpful skills (self-advocacy skills); the instructors' commitment who educating SWDs has an irreplaceable part to play. Hence,

this study focuses on the instructors' commitment to improving the self-advocacy skills of SWDs in HEIs in the Country.

Statement of the Problem

The issues surrounding the situation and inclusion of SWDs in HEIs within the country have been thoroughly examined in previous academic studies (Almaz, 2011; Tirussew et al., 2013; Tirussew et al., 2014; Birhanu, 2015). These studies have highlighted the numerous obstacles faced by SWDs, including insufficient facilities and materials, inadequate exam accommodations, inflexible teaching methods, a shortage of qualified human resources, and challenges concerning employment opportunities post-graduation. Furthermore, the HEI community's knowledge regarding disability concerns has been found to be lacking. However, the aforementioned studies have not identified SWDs' self-advocacy skills as a significant issue, be it for specific purposes such as classroom accommodations or for the general purpose of SWD inclusion within HEIs.

The research conducted by Tedla (2017) and Abera and Negassa (2019), with the titles "The Importance of self-advocacy skills for SWDs in HEIs for full inclusion and a glimpse of the Ethiopian Case: a review of related literature" and "Self-advocacy for Inclusion: A Case Study of Blind Students in the University of Gondar, Ethiopia," respectively, have brought to the forefront the significant impact of self-advocacy skills on secondary transition and consequent improvement in post-school outcomes in education and employment, based on empirical evidence. However, the studies suggest that blind students exhibit a lack of self-advocacy skills for their inclusion, primarily due to limitations in their knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership, with the exception of their level of self-knowledge. In view of these findings, the researcher recommends enhancing self-advocacy skills, including knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership.

However, in the above-mentioned two studies, it is not clear how and by whom the self-advocacy skills of SWDs developed, other than to explain the benefits of self-advocacy skills and its contributions to inclusive education in HEI. In addition, the role and commitment of teachers towards improving the self-advocacy skills of SWDs are overlooked in the above studies; therefore, the current research is dedicated to bridging the research gap discussed above. Moreover, this study is intended to be conducted based on the recommendations of the previous study.

To meet the purpose of the study, the subsequent research questions were raised:

- To what extent do instructors commit towards improving the self-advocacy skills of SWDs?
- To what extent do instructors commit towards improving knowledge of self of SWDs?
- To what extent do instructors commit towards improving the knowledge of the rights of SWDs?
- To what extent do instructors commit towards improving the communication skill of SWDs?

Meaning and Concepts of Commitments

The commitment of members determines the effectiveness of any profession. This holds true for the field of education, wherein the effectiveness of the teaching profession is contingent upon the commitment of its practitioners. An educator who exhibits unwavering commitment is one who upholds their pedagogical beliefs (Raymond, 1964). The cornerstone of delivering high-quality education is teacher devotion, which has far-reaching effects on the progress of the teaching profession, job contentment, and academic performance of both schools and students (Billingsley and Cross, 1992). Teachers who are dedicated to their profession are constantly on the lookout for instructional strategies that will help students understand more. The attainment of students is contingent upon the diligent efforts of their

instructors, and the level of commitment demonstrated by teachers significantly affects student success. Educators who are dedicated to their profession strive for excellence in order to positively influence the development of their pupils (Dannetta, 2002). They are conscientious of their own professional growth and are adept at delivering instruction and facilitating learning. It is of paramount importance to have a thorough comprehension of the educational requirements of students. Teacher commitment is a crucial element that directs the attention of educators towards the needs of their students. Simultaneously, these instructors possess the ability to motivate students to actively engage in the learning process. Encouraging participation is likely to serve as a catalyst for student achievement.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

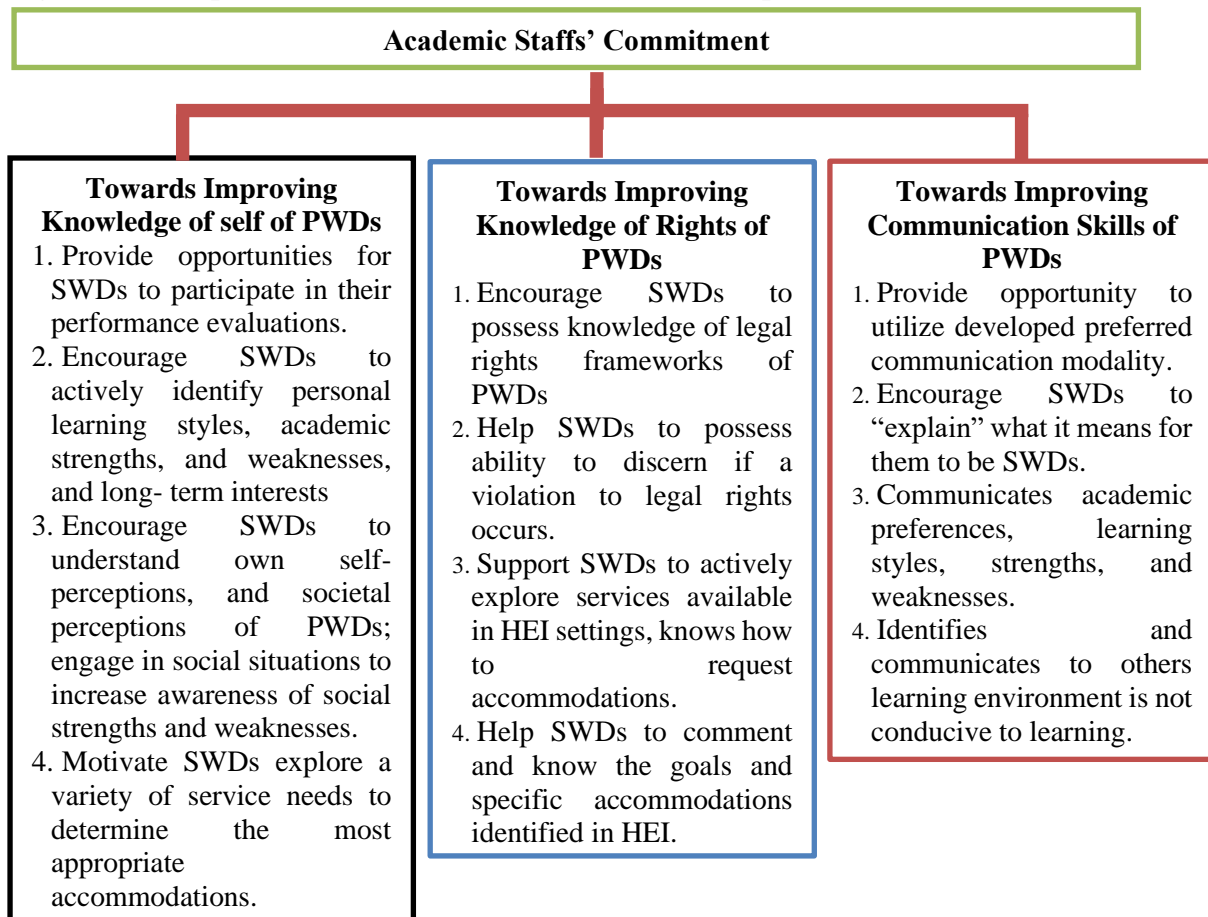
The present study was guided by the conceptual framework formulated by Test et al. (2005). Their conceptual model was the outcome of a thorough examination of 25 self-advocacy intervention studies. By concentrating on intervention articles, these authors centred on programs or instructional strategies that were deliberately developed to enhance students' self-advocacy abilities. Accordingly, following an extensive literature review on individuals with disabilities, Test et al. (2005)'s four components of self-advocacy were singled out by the researchers as particularly pertinent to the investigation: (1) self-knowledge; (2) knowledge of rights; (3) communication; and (4) leadership. Self-knowledge and knowledge of rights were regarded as the foundation of self-advocacy. Communication was deemed significant in negotiation and collaborating with others, while leadership was not considered necessary to achieve self-advocacy, albeit essential to advocate for others. Consequently, this study focused on three components of self-advocacy skills, namely, self-knowledge, knowledge of rights, and communication.

Knowledge of Self

The comprehension of one's unique interests, personal aptitudes and limitations, individual educational requirements or inclinations, methods of learning, and the distinguishing features or aspects of one's disability are commonly recognized as attaining self-awareness (Test et al.,

2005). Self-knowledge is regarded as a fundamental component of self-advocacy, along with an understanding of rights; with self-knowledge, the person is better able to recognise his or her requirements. Without it, a person can find it more difficult to pinpoint the educational resources that will best meet their needs

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of self-advocacy skills, adapted from Test et al. (2005).



Knowledge of Rights

The possession of knowledge concerning one's rights as a citizen and/or an individual with a disability, as stipulated in the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), as cited in the works of DeJong and Batavia (1990), is crucial. This knowledge serves to heighten individuals' awareness of instances where their personal rights are violated and the various avenues that can be explored to seek redress. Unfortunately, a majority of SWDs who enrol in postsecondary institutions possess only a basic knowledge of their legal rights (Cawthon & Cole, 2009). It is imperative that such students receive targeted and

practical guidance on how legal rights are altered and applied across a wide range of postsecondary settings.

Communication Skills

The mastery of proficient communication abilities is of utmost significance for the triumph of self-advocacy. Primarily, the manifestation of educational requisites and preferences constitutes the intersection at which an individual's self-awareness is distinctly and efficiently conveyed to others. This proficiency becomes exceptionally conspicuous in a tertiary educational institution or training milieu where interactions with

established frameworks and regulations for assistance may no longer come to pass. Additional communication proficiencies encompass bargaining, confidence, and the capability to make concessions, especially with influential figures or individuals in commanding positions (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

METHODS

Design and Approach

The major purpose of this study was to assess the commitment instructors have towards improving the self-advocacy skills of SWDs at Hawassa University. In order to meet this purpose, an explanatory sequential mixed method design was used. The explanatory sequential design, a research methodology that aligns with the pragmatic perspective of research paradigms, is a mixed research approach in which both quantitative and qualitative data are gathered and analysed. The qualitative data are collected in the follow-up phase, analysed separately, and then interpreted. In accordance with this approach, Creswell (2009) contended that the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in educational and social research is a superior approach. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods can leverage the strengths of each approach and counterbalance their respective limitations. Furthermore, it can provide more comprehensive and exhaustive answers to the fundamental research questions, surpassing the limitations of a singular approach.

Study Respondents and Their Selection

There are 9 colleges in Hawassa University. The study involved the academic staff of three colleges as the target including the College of Education, Social Science and Humanities, Law, and Governance. The justification is that the three colleges listed in the proceeding among the remaining 6 colleges are believed to have a good track record of admitting SWDs. From the selected three colleges, there were 241 active instructors as target populations. One hundred fifty instructors were selected as the sample population by using Taro's (1967) formula.

Meanwhile, a stratified proportionate random sampling technique (College of Education, Social Science and Humanities, and Law and Governance strata) was used to select the 150 instructors. Then simple random sampling was employed to collect data from 150 academic staff. Five department heads were selected purposively for an interview.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} = \frac{241}{1+241(0.05)^2} = 150$$

The data collection instruments were initially formulated through a comprehensive examination of the related literature. In order to ensure their reliability, a pilot test was conducted in two selected departments of the College of Social Science and Humanities. Following the necessary modifications to the research instruments, they were subsequently retyped and administered. As a result, self-administered questionnaires were utilized for the quantitative data collection, which had the same demographic characteristics as the academic staff, including sex, College, department, work experience, academic rank, and academic qualification. The manner in which items were presented was based on a Likert scale. The Likert scale, in particular, was structured using a system of strongly agreeing (5), agreeing (4), remaining neutral (3), disagreeing (2), and strongly disagreeing (1). Furthermore, in order to procure qualitative data, the researchers developed a semi-structured interview guide. This guide was formulated after conducting a comprehensive literature review. The interview data derived from the semi-structured interviews facilitated the researcher in attaining research information, primarily pertaining to the instructors' knowledge and skill to improve the self-advocacy skills of SWDs.

Analysis

The questionnaire was collected from 145 respondents from three colleges (Education = 28, Social Science and Humanities = 78 and Law and Governance = 39). To answer the research questions raised at the beginning of the research, descriptive statistics was used using IBM SPSS version 20. In the end, the data obtained through a

questionnaire was subjected to analysis by means of descriptive analysis. Moreover, to identify the response of the majority mean of respondents was used. To determine the mean deference of informants of three colleges (education, social science and humanities, and law and governance), a Kruskal Wallis test (p-value) analytical tool was used. Besides, the data collected through the interview guide were qualitatively analysed, organised, and interpreted in line with the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Extent of Instructors' Commitment towards Improving Knowledge of Self of SWDs

Five-point Likert scale questions were utilized, where a rating of 5 indicated strong agreement, 4 indicated agreement, 3 indicated neutrality, 2 indicated disagreement, and 1 indicated strong disagreement. The results obtained from the administered questionnaire are presented in *Table 1* below:

Table 1: Instructors' commitment towards improving knowledge of self of SWDs

Instructors' activity	Colleges	No	Mean	Df	p-value
The instructor provides opportunities for SWDs to participate in their performance evaluations.	CE	28	1.71	2	0.09
	SSH	78	1.63		
	LG	39	1.53		
The instructor encourages SWD to actively identify personal learning styles, academic strengths and weaknesses, and long-term interests.	CE	28	1.5	2	0.356
	SSH	78	1.71		
	LG	39	1.61		
The instructors encourage SWDs to understand their own self-perceptions and societal perceptions of them.	CE	28	1.57	2	0.843
	SSH	78	1.6		
	LG	39	1.57		
The instructor motivates SWDs to explore a variety of service needs to determine the most appropriate accommodations.	CE	28	1.5	2	0.275
	SSH	78	1.54		
	LG	39	1.58		
Overall mean score	CE	6.28/1.57			
	SSH	6.48/1.62			
	LG	6.29/1.57			

The scale of Interpretation <1.49-Strongly Disagree, 1.5-2.49-Disagree, 2.5-3.49-Undecided, 3.5-4.49-Agree, >4.5 strongly Agree. CE: College of Education; LG: Law and Governance; SSH: Social Science and Humanities

The arithmetic average of the responses of instructors hailing from three colleges- Education, Social Science and Humanities as well as Law and Governance, to item number 1, is noted to be 1.71, 1.63 and 1.53, correspondingly. This evidences that the trio of respondent groups had a dissenting viewpoint regarding the notion that instructors facilitate chances for SWDs to participate in performance evaluations, thereby enhancing their self-awareness. In addition, it is noteworthy that the mean of three distinct groups of respondents, namely those in the Education group with values of 1.5, 1.57, and 1.5, those in the Social Science and Humanities group with values of 1.71, 1.6, and 1.54, and those in the Low and Governance group with values of 1.61, 1.57, and 1.58, pertains to item numbers 2, 3, and 4, respectively.

Consequently, it can be inferred that educators demonstrate a minimal degree of encouragement for SWDs to proactively identify their personal learning styles, academic strengths and weaknesses, and long-term interests. Furthermore, it can be deduced that educators present a low level of support for SWDs to comprehend their individual self-perceptions as well as societal perceptions towards them. Lastly, it can also be observed that educators exhibit a low level of effort to motivate SWDs to explore a diverse range of service needs to determine the most fitting accommodations.

Table 1 presents the collective average of instructor participants from three colleges, namely the College of Education, Social Science and Humanities, and Law and Governance, with

regards to the four items disseminated to evaluate their dedication to improving students' knowledge. The recorded values for each college were 1.57, 1.62, and 1.57, respectively. These findings suggest that the three groups of respondents exhibited discordance in their compilation of the enumerated duties in *Table 1* above. By supporting this, one of the participants during the interview said, 'In fact, I did not find any particular exposure to have a better understanding of self-advocacy skills. I know I have been exposed to the issues of self-introduction and related rights, but this is the first time I have heard of self-advocacy. Another participant also said, 'Personally, as a teacher, it is difficult to get used to teaching students with disabilities. I need more professional help to work with them'. Moreover, other participants also reported difficulties in teaching self-advocacy skills to their SWDs.

The preceding discourse suggests that instructors possess a limited level of commitment towards enhancing their knowledge of self with respect to SWDs, primarily due to their inadequate grasp of self-advocacy skills. This discovery resonates with the research by Mat Nuri et al. (2021) which established that educators lack knowledge concerning the self-advocacy abilities of SWDs. Additionally, the computed p-value outcome p (of all 145 participants), $P > 0.05$ for all items in *Table 1* above, indicates that there exists no significant variation in the responses of the three groups of respondents (College of Education, Social Science and Humanities, and Law and Governance). Therefore, it can be inferred that the majority of respondents from these three colleges dissent the notion that instructors undertake the four activities enumerated in *Table 1* to improve their knowledge of self of SWDs.

Extent of Instructors' Commitment towards Improving Knowledge of Rights of SWDs

The data presented in *Table 2* reveals that the aggregate score for the respondents across three colleges on four distinct items, distributed to evaluate educators' commitment to improving the knowledge of SWDs with regards to their rights,

are 1.74, 1.64, and 1.66, respectively. This suggests that there is disagreement amongst the three groups of respondents in relation to the items highlighted in *Table 2*. Specifically, the mean of the three groups of respondents, namely Education (1.71, 1.82, 1.5), Social Science and Humanities (1.58, 1.67, 1.64), and Law and Governance (1.95, 1.64, 1.46) for items 1, 2, and 3, respectively, falls between 1.5 and 2.49. This indicates that the three groups of respondents hold divergent views with regards to their level of involvement in executing the activities outlined in items 1, 2, and 3 of *Table 2*. That means the involvement of instructors in encouraging SWDs to possess knowledge of legal rights frameworks of PWDs, their commitment to helping SWDs develop the ability to protest in case of violation of legal rights, and their support to SWDs in actively exploring services available in HEI is notably low. With regard to item number 4 of *Table 2*, the mean of the three groups of respondents falls between 1.5 and 2.49, indicating that all three groups disagree with the notion that instructors assist SWDs in comprehending and identifying the goals and specific accommodations outlined in HEI. Furthermore, all items in *Table 2* have a p-value result of $p > 0.05$ clearly reveals that there is no significant difference in the response of the three groups of respondents.

Moreover, the qualitative result of the study also supports the above discussion; one of the interviews respondents said,

I am not familiar with national and international legal issues in relation to persons with disabilities, even the university's legislation concerning the rights of persons with disabilities. In the absence of knowledge and awareness regarding the rights of persons with disabilities, how could I be committed towards the improvement of their knowledge of rights?

By supporting the above idea, another respondent said

I have somewhat understood the basic rights of PWDs such as the right to education and employment, but I do not have the skills to be aware of them and to improve their knowledge of rights.

From the above discussion, it is possible to conclude that the instructors' commitment towards improving knowledge of the right of SWDs' is incredibly low. Concerning the knowledge of the rights of SWDs, Abera and

Negassa (2019) found out that SWDs had poor knowledge of rights, almost none at all. In the nonappearance of commitment from academic staff to improve the knowledge of the rights of SWDs, the acquiring of this important component of self-advocacy skill remains unlearned. Therefore, improving the instructors' commitment towards knowledge of the right of SWDs through awareness-raising workshops seems timely action.

Table 2: Instructors' commitment towards improving knowledge of the rights of SWDs

Instructors' activity	Colleges	No	Mean	Df	p-value
The instructor has ways to let know or encourage SWDs to possess knowledge of the legal rights frameworks of PWDs.	CE	28	1.71	2	0.209
	SSH	78	1.58		
	LG	39	1.95		
The instructor helps SWD possess the ability to protest if a violation of legal rights occurs.	CE	28	1.82	2	0.668
	SSH	78	1.67		
	LG	39	1.64		
The instructors support SWD in actively exploring services available at HEI and in requesting accommodations.	CE	28	1.5	2	0.323
	SSH	78	1.64		
	LG	39	1.46		
The instructor assists SWDs in commenting on and knowing the goals and specific accommodations identified in the HEI.	CE	28	1.93	2	0.253
	SSH	78	1.67		
	LG	39	1.59		
Overall mean score	CE	6.96/1.74			
	SSH	6.56/1.64			
	LG	6.64/1.66			

The scale of Interpretation <1.49-Strongly Disagree, 1.5-2.49-Disagree, 2.5-3.49-Undecided, 3.5-4.49-Agree, >4.5 strongly Agree. CE: College of Education; LG: Law and Governance; SSH: Social Science and Humanities

Extent of Instructors' Commitment towards Improving Communication Skills of SWDs

As illustrated in Table 3, the overall mean score of respondents from three colleges regarding instructors' commitment towards their profession is 1.768, 1.626, and 1.654, respectively. This indicates that most respondents from the three colleges disagree as the academic staff carries out a list of activities indicated in Table 3. Furthermore, the computed p-value outcome p (145), P> 0.05 for all items, indicates that there is no significant variance in the response of the three groups of respondents (College of Education, Social Science and Humanities, and Law and Governance).

Supporting the above data, one of the interview respondents said:

'Honestly speaking, it is hard for me to teach SWDs. I do not really know or understand them. I feel pressed not only to teach but also to learn how to teach them.

Besides, although the disclosure of experience holds significant importance in introducing novel concepts to both individuals and educators, the issue of time constraints has hindered their ability to guide and instruct SWDs effectively. For instance, a respondent from the College of Education highlighted the limitation of time when dealing with SWDs. The individual's university time was divided among various insignificant tasks, which resulted in minimal time to spend with SWDs. The respondent acknowledged that "managing mainstream students took up most of my time, leaving little to no time to assist my SWDs." Consequently, from the above

discussion, it is possible to conclude that the instructors' commitment towards improving the communication skills of SWDs is extremely.

Table 3: Instructors' commitment towards improving communication skills of SWDs

Instructors' activity	Colleges	No	Mean	Df	p-value
The instructor devotes his/her time to enhancing the opportunity for SWDs to develop preferred communication modalities.	CE	28	2.43	2	0.19
	SSH	78	1.76		
	LG	39	1.82		
The instructor encourages SWDs to "explain" what it means for them to be exceptional.	CE	28	1.54	2	0.504
	SSH	78	1.62		
	LG	39	1.63		
The instructor was involved in the self-advocacy demonstration, role-play, practices, and evaluation.	CE	28	1.68	2	0.844
	SSH	78	1.62		
	LG	39	1.59		
The instructor helps SWD prepare for meetings, conversations with teachers, or other situations.	CE	28	1.52	2	0.772
	SSH	78	1.45		
	LG	39	1.64		
The instructor provides SWDs with opportunities to meet mentors and staff with disabilities.	CE	28	1.67	2	0.758
	SSH	78	1.68		
	LG	39	1.59		
Overall mean score	CE	8.84/1.768			
	SSH	8.13/1.626			
	LG	8.27/1.654			

The scale of Interpretation <1.49-Strongly Disagree, 1.5-2.49-Disagree, 2.5-3.49-Undecided, 3.5-4.49-Agree, >4.5 strongly Agree. CE: College of Education; LG: Law and Governance; SSH: Social Science and Humanities

CONCLUSION

In general, the quantitative data obtained through the questionnaire indicates that respondents were found to have a low commitment towards improving SWDs' knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, and communication skills. Besides, it can be inferred from qualitative data acquired through interviews that the majority of participants lacked the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively instruct SWDs on self-advocacy skills. It is imperative that individuals without a background in counselling receive real-life experience when dealing with individuals with disabilities. To enhance academic staff's comprehension of self-advocacy skills, it is recommended that appropriate courses and workshops be conducted by relevant parties. However, it must be noted that the interpretation of the current study's findings is limited due to the fact that the data was collected solely from respondents at Hawassa University, thus limiting the generalizability of the conclusions.

Consequently, a nationwide study is essential to determine the commitment of Ethiopian higher institution instructors towards improving the self-advocacy skills of SWDs.

Ethics

Prior to the commencement of this study, ethical clearance was procured from the Research Ethics Internal Council of the College of Education at Hawassa University (Ref. No. HU/CE/SNIE/127/2021). All ethical principles were duly observed throughout the study, and data collection was carried out with the informed consent of the participants.

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