

Provision of Support Services for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in Ghanaian Unit Schools

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study was to investigate the type of support services teachers provide for learners with intellectual disabilities in unit schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The cross-sectional survey was employed for the study. The sample size was 57, and the sampling technique was a census survey. A questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection, and Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS 21.0) was used for the analysis. Findings of the study revealed that teachers in the unit schools provide counselling services, academic support services, social support services, self-help skills support, and transport support services to learners with intellectual disabilities. The findings again revealed that there was no significant difference in the support services provided for learners with intellectual disabilities. It was recommended that the Ministry of Education should make a policy for the provision of guidance and counselling services to the various unit schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana and across the whole country.*

Keywords: Inclusive education, Intellectual disabilities, support services, Unit schools

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) outlined the fundamental right to education for all children. Nevertheless, many children, especially those with disabilities, continue to experience segregation inside and outside educational institutions worldwide (Limaye,2016). Children with intellectual disabilities recorded a higher frequency of absenteeism compared to their peers with other disabilities (Melvin et al., 2023). Learners with intellectual disabilities have deficits in adaptive behaviour and functional life activities, including difficulties with problem-solving, logical thinking, and memory (Oranga et al., 2022). Mills (2019) confirmed that the efforts to include children with intellectual disabilities in regular community schools encounter specific obstacles and requirements, based on the socioeconomic constraints and diverse sociocultural characteristics of the Ghanaian population

Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) study on issues affecting the implementation of inclusive education practices revealed various problems, such as poorly designed policies, negative

teacher mindsets, insufficient teacher preparation, inadequate access to support services, and limited resources. Nalevska (2020) revealed that most children with disabilities do not sufficiently exercise their rights in education because they lack appropriate support services. Support services cover a range of interventions or assistance in the form of education, which include advocacy, communication support, and other non-therapeutic interventions (Asante, 2019).

Again, Manitsa and Doikor (2020) studied support services for students with disabilities in educational institutions and found positive academic learning and social inclusion among learners. On the other hand, Datta (2015) concluded that support services had a negligible impact on students' problem-solving abilities and their social and family relationships, with some learners not even recognising any beneficial effects. Yet, Tk and Daisy (2021) investigated the level of social support perceived by parents of children with intellectual disabilities. The study showed that most participants reported experiencing a greater sense of social support. Ndungu's (2021) study was another piece of evidence that showed that support services played a crucial role in improving learners' participation, socialisation, academic performance, access, and attendance, highlighting their importance to learners with disabilities.

However, all these studies were silent on the types of support services teachers in unit schools provide for learners with intellectual disabilities and the role of gender in support for learners with intellectual disabilities. Lazarus (2019) study revealed a favourable outlook of female in terms of support compared to their male counterparts; Triviño-Amigo et al. (2022) study revealed otherwise. This, therefore, informed the researcher to investigate the type of support services teachers provide for learners with intellectual disabilities in unit schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana

Research Questions

The following research question and hypothesis were raised to guide the study

1. What type of support services do teachers provide for learners with intellectual disabilities in unit schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana?
 - 1a. H0 There is no statistically significant gender difference concerning the following support services provided by teachers for learners with intellectual disabilities:
 - a. counselling support services
 - b. academic support services
 - c. social support services
 - d. health support services
 - e. transport support services
 - 1b. H1 There is a statistically significant gender difference concerning the following support services provided by teachers for learners with intellectual disabilities:
 - a. counselling support services
 - b. academic support services
 - c. social support services
 - d. health support services
 - e. transport support services

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Review

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was used to guide the study. The theory was developed by Rose & Meyer (1980) at the Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that ensures all learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN), can access, participate, and progress in the general curriculum (CAST, 2018). UDL is based on three core principles, which include the use of multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of expression. The principles aim to provide inclusive and accessible learning experiences for all learners regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

The Universal Design for Learning applies to the study because, when the core principles are achieved in an institution, it will create the opportunity for learners with intellectual disabilities to have access and improve attendance. For instance, utilising multimedia resources, like videos and audio recording to engage learners. Also, using alternative assessments, such as project-based evaluations to accommodate different learning styles, and finally, creating a supportive environment that encourages social interaction and builds relationships for effective academic activities.

Types of Support Services for Learners with Disabilities

Support services cover a range of interventions or assistance in the form of education, which includes advocacy, communication support, and other non-healing interventions (Asante, 2019). The types of support services that I will recommend for learners with intellectual disabilities according to AAIDD (2020) are; academic support services (individualized education programme, adaptive technology, special education teachers), support staff (paraprofessionals, special education assistants), and related services (occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy). Other types of support services that will be appropriate for individuals with disabilities according to Asante (2019), are informational support, counselling services, financial assistance, emotional support, and social support services.

Social Support

Social support means getting help and comfort from relationships with others to stay healthy and happy, encompassing emotional, esteem, information, and tangible assistance (Kent de Grey et al., 2018). It also involves the perception of being valued, respected, and loved, facilitating everyday life challenges (Msangi, 2017). The primary motivation for providing social support is to alleviate the burden on parents caring for children with disabilities, who often feel overwhelmed by the stress and responsibilities of taking care of family members and handling other family tasks (Msangi, 2017). Raising children with disabilities can be overwhelming for parents, as it requires significant responsibility and adds to their existing social obligations (Msangi, 2017).

In the context of inclusive education, social support services can be sourced from a range of providers (Desombre et al., 2021) such as parents, teachers, peers, or administrators. Receiving social support from many sources, including family, friends, and the academic environment, is linked to positive results. Such provision can meaningfully enhance students' educational experiences, leading to improved well-being and academic achievement (Brailovskaia et al., 2018). Social support comes in various forms, including esteem support, which boosts self-esteem through positive feedback and close relationships, informational support, which offers guidance to address problems, instrumental support, which provides practical help to overcome challenges, and companionship, which fosters close relationships and shared enjoyable activities (Manitsa & Doikou, 2020). These forms of support can be categorised into formal and informal support (Msangi, 2017). Informal support, provided by personal networks like family, friends, and community organisations, offers emotional, practical, and informational help for daily life routines. In contrast, formal support, delivered by professionals and experts, is designed to satisfy unique needs, for example, supporting parents of children with disabilities. Ultimately, the support provided should enhance the emotional and mental health of parents about their child's special needs. (Msangi, 2017). Additionally, Desombre et al. (2021) showed that emphasising support for teachers improves their attitudes toward inclusive education. These studies underline the crucial role of social support in creating an inclusive learning location, highlighting the need for a supportive environment that promotes academic learning, social inclusion, and acceptance for learners with disabilities.

Guidance Services

In Ghana, guidance in schools is deemed essential for academic success and overall well-being (Agyeiku, 2020). As a result, governments made guidance and counselling as part of the school system which has been confirmed by Fofie et al. (2020), that schools offer various support services, including specialised teaching, guidance counselling, vision testing, and hearing assessments. Agyeiku's (2020) showed that teacher-trainees primarily seek guidance during orientation and utilise counselling services to address personal and academic concerns. However, the provision of guidance services faces challenges such as inadequate resources, limited office space for counsellors, insufficient time allocation, and lack of support from teachers and administration.

Alale (2019) investigated the provision of guidance services in colleges of education and found that these services have a positive impact on learners, leading to improved behaviour and discipline, as well as fostering a positive mindset towards learning. However, the study also identified significant challenges, including insufficient resources, funding, technology, and internet connectivity, which impeded the successful implementation of the guidance programme. To address these issues, the study recommended that counsellors raise awareness among learners about the availability of consultation, referral, and follow-up services. Furthermore.

Odame et al. (2023) conducted a study on the state of public transport services for people with disabilities in Ghana, focusing on the Accra Metropolitan Assembly. The research revealed a concerning lack of awareness among public transport operators about Ghana's Disability Act of 2006 and its provisions related to transportation. As a result, initiatives aimed at supporting

the disability population were based on intuition rather than informed by the law, and operators were reluctant to get accessible vehicles. The study recommends that the Ministry of Transport should intensify sensitisation efforts about transport arrangements of the Disability Act to improve public transport services for people with disabilities.

Edwards (2022) investigated the impact of school transportation on student outcomes in Michigan, revealing that having reliable transportation greatly boosts student attendance and reduces chronic absenteeism. The study found that economically disadvantaged students benefit the most, with a 0.5 to 1 percentage increase in attendance rates and a 2 to 4 percentage point decrease in chronic absenteeism. These findings suggest that school-provided transportation is crucial for students at risk of missing school. However, the study found no correlation between how school transportation impacts student achievement. Given the high costs of transportation, the researcher suggests targeting additional services to chronically absent students as a more efficient attendance intervention, rather than expanding bus services for all students. I think the government should make provision for transport services, especially for the inclusive unit schools as indicated in the inclusive education policy, to help facilitate the access and attendance of learners with intellectual disabilities.

Academic Support

Walelign (2018) found that teachers rarely provided personalised academic assistance to students with disabilities, neglecting to offer adapted curricula, no distinct tutorials or modified instructional activities, no adapted textbooks or notes, no exam accommodations and no flexible class scheduling. Conversely, research by Troiano et al. (2014) revealed a positive correlation between academic support and student success. Specifically, students who frequently utilised academic support centres achieved higher GPAs and graduation rates. In essence, students with learning disabilities who regularly visited support centres had a higher chance to excel academically and completing their degrees compared to those who did not access these resources. Academic support is very crucial for learners with disabilities and all other learners in every educational setting per the discussion above. I think more special education teachers for learners with intellectual disabilities need to be trained to support learners academically in the unit schools.

Self-Help Skills Support

Ndungu'u (2021) indicated that self-help skills are needed by the child for personal management. Dressing skills by learners with physical disabilities mostly involve the assistance given by teachers and the occupational therapist who is specialised in training individual development and physical skills that aid in daily activities. Parents should be educated on the dressing needs of their children and be informed of the adaptations to clothing, such as zip, elastic, and big buttons. This is necessary because some of these children experience fine motor problems such as grasping and manipulation of materials that may affect their ability to dress with ease (Kaiser, 2019). Hygiene skills can maintain health, promote socialisation, and increase acceptability to others. Teachers and occupational therapists can apply target techniques and task analysis while teaching face and body washing for the learners to master the skills easily due to their cognitive and physical limitations.

In summary, from the above discussion, it was clear that there are types of support services provided to learners with disabilities to take care of their academic, social, psychological, emotional, health, transport, and other needs. In the context of this study, there seemed to be a gap in the type of support services given to learners with intellectual disabilities to facilitate their access and attendance in the unit schools. The present study addresses this gap.

Gender Differences in Teachers' Support to Learners with Disabilities

Inclusive education faces several challenges, including providing personalised attention and support to learners with special needs, facilitating their social participation, and maximising their learning potential (Moberg et al., 2020). Additionally, investigations have demonstrated that female teachers' teaching styles have a positive impact on both male and female learners' achievement levels (Lee et al., 2017).

However, Al Hamawi (2018) found that government policies and curriculum changes have influenced teachers' perceptions of inclusion, with both male and female teachers sharing similar views despite differing understandings of the issue. The analysis highlights that teachers' views on inclusion impact the effectiveness of its execution, emphasising the importance of understanding and addressing these perspectives. Lazarus (2019) conducted a study to examine gender differences in teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward supporting learners with learning disabilities. The findings showed no significant gender difference in knowledge, but a noticeable change in perspective with women teachers, including those in regular and special education, showing a more favourable outlook compared to their male counterparts. In contrast, Triviño-Amigo et al. (2022) discovered no significant difference in perceived readiness to address diversity between male and female teachers. However, women teachers exhibited a higher level of self-assurance in their capabilities to support learners with disabilities and promote inclusive education, corroborating previous findings. Building on these studies, the current research aims to investigate whether teachers of both genders working in unit schools in Ghana's Eastern Region differ in the support services they provide to learners with intellectual disabilities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Trochim et al. (2015) describe research design as a comprehensive framework that integrates all aspects of a research project, while Amedahe and Asamoah-Gyimah (2015) define it as the overarching strategy employed by researchers to address research questions or test hypotheses. A cross-sectional survey was used for the study and according to Creswell (2014), a cross-sectional survey is a research method that involves collecting data from a sample of participants at a single point in time. The design provides a picture of the characteristics and opinions of a population at a specific moment.

Population

The targeted population of the study comprised, teachers from the six public unit schools that educate individuals with intellectual disabilities in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The targeted

population was made up of 57 and the accessible population was also 57 which according to Bryman (2016), targeted and accessible population in some cases may be the same depending on the size of the population. It comprised GCD Basic School, Education of Intellectual Disability (EID) Unit, Akwatia 9, Yilo State Basic School EID Unit, Somanya, 8, Nana Akuamoah B. Basic EID Unit Nkawkaw 11, Methodist Basic EID Unit Adukrom, 9, School for the Deaf and IDD's-Nsukwao, 10 and OPASS Basic School EID Unit Kukurantumi, 10.

Table 1 Distribution of the Population

School	Teachers
GCD Basic School EID Unit, Akwatia	9
Yilo State Basic School EID Unit, Somanya,	8
Nana Akuamoah A Basic EID Unit Nkawkaw	11
Methodist Basic EID Unit Adukrom,	9
School for the Deaf and IDD's-Nsukwao	10
OPASS Basic School EID Unit Kukurantumi	10
Total	57

Sampling Procedure

There are only six public unit basic schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana that educate children with intellectual disabilities. I therefore employed the census survey to select all the teachers who educate learners with intellectual disabilities. Census sampling was used because of the small number of special education teachers in the unit schools. According to Farooq (cited in Amoah, 2018), data collection through the census survey method is advantageous because even when the population is small, it allows the researcher to undertake an in-depth examination of the issue, yielding more precise data. According to Amedahe et al. (2015), a sample size ranging from 5% to 20% of the population is generally sufficient to yield reliable data for a study. However, the ideal sample size ultimately depends on the research objectives and the specific characteristics of the population being investigated, such as its size, diversity, and complexity. The study's sample size was 57 participants, comprising 31 males and 26 female teachers.

Table 2. The Breakdown of the Sample Size That was Used in the Study.

Schools	Teachers.
GCD Basic School EID Unit, Akwatia	9
Yilo State Basic School EID Unit, Somanya,	8
Nana Akuamoah A Basic EID unit Nkawkaw	11
Methodist Basic EID Unit Adukrom,	9
School for Deaf the and IDD's-Nsukwao	10
OPASS Basic School EID Unit Kukurantumi	10
Total	57

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection. The questionnaire used a closed-ended format, utilising a Likert-type scale, which presented statements tailored for teachers to answer. The questionnaire's contents were constructed around the one primary variable that aligned with the main theme and research question, allowing teachers to provide specific, quantifiable feedback. The questionnaire was structured into two parts, Section A and B. Section A collected data on the respondents' background characteristics, including their sex, age, and years of teaching experience and qualifications. B focused on the theme raised in the research question, which elicited information on the types of support services teachers provided for learners with intellectual disabilities in the unit schools, and it consists of 12 items. Section B was on a four-point scale. The options on the scale were strongly agree (SA), agree (agree), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). According to Orij and Idoghor (2024), closed-ended questions are advantageous as they are easily developed, simple to analyse, and do not unfairly disadvantage respondents who struggle to express themselves. They are also widely used and well-liked due to their ease of construction, administration, and scoring

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Content validity was established with the assistance of two experts in the field. The items went through expert judgment to consider whether the items align with the research objectives, the appropriateness of the items, the proper usage of language, and the proper arrangement.

Pilot-Testing of the Questionnaire

A pilot test was conducted at Presby. Basic School EID Unit at Agona Swedru and Father John IED Unit School at Winneba, all in the Central Region of Ghana. These schools were chosen because the characteristics of the learners in these schools were similar to those in other

inclusive unit schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Examples of these characteristics are, low enrolment, few number of teachers and most of the learners fall within the category of mild intellectual disabilities

Table 3. Reliability Estimate for the Sub-Dimensions

No	Sub-scales	Original Number of Items	Original Alpha (reliability)	Items Deleted	Final Refined Items	Final Alpha (reliability)
1	Counselling support services	4	0.646	1	3	0.767
2	Academic support services	4	0.516	2	2	0.860
3	Social support services	5	0.525	2	3	0.795
4	Self-help/health support services	4	0.497	2	2	0.675
5	Transport support services	3	0.591	1	2	0.745
Total		20	0.541	8	12	0.768

Table 3 presents the reliability analysis of the pilot test. With the pilot test, a Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of at least 0.7 for a new instrument is acceptable (Devon et al., 2017). The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for the items measuring the sub-scales on types of support services was more than 0.7. This is an indication that the questionnaire is of high content validity because, according to DeVellis (2017), a reliability estimate of at least 0.7 for a new instrument is acceptable.

Table 4. Distribution of the Gender by Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	31	57.1
Female	26	42.9
Total	57	100

Table 4 shows that 31 (57.1%) of the respondents were males and 26 (42.9 %) were females. The results indicated that there were more males than females for the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in research because they provide a framework for ensuring that researchers treat participants with respect and dignity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a result, the researcher, before the commencement of the data collection, sought approval through letters explaining the purpose of the study from District Directors of Education, head teachers, and personally visited participants and assured them of the needed confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Processing and Analysis

The raw information gathered from the respondents was coded and processed using Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS 21.0). The information was examined using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, means, and standard deviation).

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What type of support services do teachers provide for learners with intellectual disabilities in the unit schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana?

This research question was to ascertain the type of support services teachers provide for learners with intellectual disabilities in unit schools. Items 1 to 14 of the questionnaire were used to elicit information to address the research question. The quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages. Respondents were selected from a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). For analysis, responses were grouped as follows: "Agree" (combining Strongly Agree and Agree) and "Disagree" (combining Strongly Disagree and Disagree). The combination helps to improve the reliability of scale by reducing the impact of individual item variability (DeVellis, 2017). The results, presented in Table 5 display the number of responses (frequencies) and their corresponding percentage on the type of support services teachers provide for learners with intellectual disabilities in unit schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

Table 5. Frequencies and Percentages on Types of Support Services Teachers Provide for Learners with IDs.

Items	Agree		Disagree	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
<u>Counselling Support</u>				
I give orientation to learners on how to behave in the school	57	100	0	0
I give compliments to boost self-esteem of learners	57	100	0	0
I provide counselling to learners to help them to learn	57	100	0	0
<u>Academic Support</u>				

I show a positive attitude towards learners with IDs during lessons.	57	100	0	0
I adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of learners with IDs	57	100	0	0
I provide appropriate instructional materials to support my lesson delivery	55	94.5	2	5.7
<u>Social Support</u>				
I support learners with IDs to play games during sport festivals	54	91.4	3	8.6
I encourage learners with IDs to play together	57	100	0	0
I encourage learners with IDs to sit together with peers during weekly worship	50	85.7	5	14.3
<u>Health/self -help skills Support</u>				
I teach learners with IDs how to wash their hands before and after eating	57	100	0	0
I teach learners how to wear their dress	57	100	0	0
I teach learners with IDs how to brush the teeth	54	85.7	5	14.3
<u>Transport support</u>				
I sometimes assist learners to commute to and from school	57	100	0	0
I teach learners road safety skills	57	100	0	0

N=57

Analysis of Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis is outlined in Table 5. An independent sample t-test was employed to investigate the single hypothesis formulated in this study, providing a statistical analysis to help answer the research question. The results for the hypothesis tested are presented in Table 5a, b, c, d, and e.

H0 There is no statistically significant gender difference concerning the following support services provided by teachers for learners with intellectual disabilities:

- a. Counselling b. academic c. social d. health e. transport

H1 There is a statistically significant gender difference concerning the following support services provided by teachers for learners with intellectual disabilities:

- a. Counselling b. academic c. social d. health e. transport

Table 5 a. Counselling Support Services

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	p-value
Male	31	3.55	.51	.607	33	.556
Female	26	3.44	.51			

Table 5a shows that there was no statistically significant difference $t(33) = .607$, $P = .556$ between male and female teachers concerning the counselling support services they provide for learners with intellectual disabilities. The null hypothesis (H_0) was hence not rejected. Therefore, the results showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the means of male teachers ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .51$) and female teachers ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .51$) regarding counselling support services they provided for learners with intellectual disabilities.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the academic support services that male and female teachers provide for learners with intellectual disabilities. The result is presented in Table 5b.

Table 5 b. Academic Support Services

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	p-value
Male	31	3.78	.46	.529	33	.516
Female	26	3.71	.44			

Table 5 b shows that there was no statistically significant difference $t(33) = .529$, $P = .516$ between male and female teachers concerning the support services they provide for learners with intellectual disabilities. The null hypothesis (H_0) was hence not rejected. Therefore, the results showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the means of male teachers ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .46$) and female teachers ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .44$) regarding the academic support services they provided for learners with intellectual disabilities.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the social support services that male and female teachers provide for learners with intellectual disabilities. The result is presented in Table 5c.

Table 5 c. Social Support Services

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	p-value
Male	31	3.36	.67	.299	33	.648
Female	26	3.46	.55			

Table 5c shows that there was no statistically significant difference $t(33) = .299$, $P = .648$ between male and female teachers concerning the social support services they provide for learners with intellectual disabilities. The null hypothesis (H_0) was hence not rejected. Therefore, the results showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the means of male teachers ($M = 3.36$, $SD = .67$) and female teachers ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .55$) regarding social support services they provided for learners with intellectual disabilities.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare male and female teachers health/Self-health skills support services they provide for learners with intellectual disabilities. The result is presented in Table 5 d

Table 5d. Health/Self-help Skills Support Services

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	p-value
Male	31	3.86	.35	-.252	33	.623
Female	26	3.88	.31			

Table 5 d shows that the t-value $t(33) = -.252$, $P = .623$ between male and female teachers concerning health/self-help skills support services they provide for learners with intellectual disabilities. The magnitude of the negative t-value is relatively small, indicating a small difference between male and female teachers. However, the p-value of .623 is greater than the typical significant level of 0.05, indicating that the null hypothesis (H_0) was hence not rejected. Therefore, the results showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the means of male teachers ($M = 3.86$, $SD = .35$) and female teachers ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .31$) regarding health/self-help skills support services they provided for learners with intellectual disabilities. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare male and female teachers' transport support services they provide for learners with intellectual disabilities. The result is presented in Table 5e.

Table 5e Transport Support Services

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	p-value
Male	31	3.35	.85	-.622	33	.550
Female	26	3.51	.51			

Table 5 e shows that the t-value $t(33) = -.622$, $P = .550$ between male and female teachers concerning social support services they provide for learners with intellectual disabilities. The magnitude of the negative t-value is relatively small, indicating a small difference between male and female teachers. However, the p-value 0.550 is greater than the typical significant level of 0.05, indicating that the null hypothesis (H_0) was hence not rejected. Therefore, the results showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the means of male teachers ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .85$) and female teachers ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .82$) regarding social support services they provided for learners with intellectual disabilities.

In summary, it has been established that all the p-values were above the 0.05 level, which showed that the null hypotheses (H_0) were hence not rejected. Therefore, there was no significant difference in the support services provided for learners with intellectual disabilities in unit schools between male and female teachers, indicating that both genders provided similar levels of support.

DISCUSSION

This research question was elicited from respondents, the kind of support services they provide for learners with intellectual disabilities in unit schools. From the analysis, the findings revealed that teachers in the unit schools provide counselling services, academic support services, social

support services, health/self-help skills support and transport support services to learners with intellectual disabilities, with overall responses ranging between 85.7% to 100% of all the 14 items in the questionnaire. This may be a result of the majority of the participants being special education teachers, allow them to understand the questionnaire items better

In all the items on counselling support services, the respondents agreed that they provide counselling support services for learners with intellectual disabilities. This supports the view of Kimathi (2012) that, without the provision of effective guidance and counselling services, many students will lose direction and involve themselves in bad acts such as drug abuse, missing classes, and dropout which will eventually affect their academic performance. To link this with the current study, one of the items on the questionnaire dealt with giving orientation to learners. Almost all the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, with a 100% score. On the contrary, Agyeiku's (2020) research on the provisions and utilisation of guidance services found that teacher-trainees primarily request information about these services during orientation periods, and they typically utilise guidance and counselling services for support with personal and academic challenges. I see the current study's finding contrary to the previous study because while the teachers in the current study provide support in the form of counselling to the learners, in the previous study, it was the learners who sought guidance services from the teachers to improve their personal and academic life.

On academic support services, more than 95% responded that they provide academic support services to learners with intellectual disabilities in unit schools. These findings support that of Troiano et al. (2014) in their study, which showed that learners were provided with academic support services which resulted in higher levels of attendance in an academic support center, excelled academically and achieved higher graduation rates. However, Walelign (2018) revealed that most learners with disabilities did not obtain disability-specific academic support from teachers. Such as special tutorials, changes were made to various instructional strategies, textbooks and study materials, assessment methods, and class timetables to accommodate diverse learning needs.

On social support services, more than 90% of all the respondents reported that they provide social support for learners with intellectual disabilities in the unit schools by either strongly agree or agree to the statements on that section of the questionnaire. Support from teachers and staff fosters a positive learning environment and promotes social integration, while encouragement from peers' boosts students' confidence and helps them feel more accepted and valued. (Manitsa & Doikou, 2020). This is in disagreement with the findings of the study by Hombrados-Mendieta (2012) on types of social support provided by parents, teachers and classmates during adolescence. The results suggest that parents provide emotional in contrast, teachers primarily provide informational support, serving as a source of knowledge and guidance. Social support services in the form of allowing and assisting learners to play together, participating in sporting activities and music and dance are very important to learners with intellectual disabilities success in school because of their short attention span. These activities motivate them to come to school regularly as well as participate in academic activities.

Pertaining to health/self-help skills support, more than 95% of the respondents indicated that they provide health/self-help skills support for learners with intellectual disabilities in the unit schools. They either strongly agreed or agreed to all the items on that section of the questionnaire. School health support services play a crucial role in enhancing academic achievement by preventing illnesses and addressing health concerns, resulting in improved school attendance and reduced dropout rates (Ogundele & Oshopene, 2014). By implication, it necessitates social and health support services for learners with intellectual disabilities in the unit schools to help improve their health condition to avoid always being at health care centres. This is because Abodey (2018) studied access to healthcare services among learners with disabilities in Ghana, and he revealed that the physical structures of healthcare facilities and financial accessibility were problematic to SWDs in accessing healthcare services in Ghana.

On transport support services, all the respondents indicated that they provide transport support to learners with intellectual disabilities occasionally. They either strongly agreed or agreed to all the statements. Mugoro's (2014) study on transport problems for students and their effects on attendance in community secondary schools indicated that, the schools' transportation system has significant effects on students' school attendance. On another aspect of the findings, students indicated that, occasions where they skip the bus, they missed the first periods in the morning and escape afternoon sessions due to lack of bus fare. In such situations, they beg for money and private car assistance which put them into temptations and the traps of evil people as well as harassment from bus operators. The current study corroborates the first aspect of Mugoro's study and is misaligned with the second aspect since the current study was not on transport problems for learners.

Shaaban, and Reda (2021) revealed that there is a positive impact of providing a college transportation service to engineering students in the form of better attendance and higher GPA. Though the current study did not look at the effect of transport services on learners' academic performance, Shaabaa and Reda's study did. Nevertheless, both revealed that the provision of transport services has a positive impact on learners' school attendance. The current study again agrees with Edwards (2022), who studied the impact of school transportation on student outcomes in Michigan. The study revealed that transportation admissibility increases attendance rates and lowers the probability of chronic absence. This showed that teachers in unit schools provided some type of support services for learners with intellectual disabilities.

Concerning the hypothesis, Lazaru's (2019) study, revealed that there was no significant gender difference in the knowledge of the roles of regular and special education teachers in the education of learners with disabilities. With male ($M = 36.63, 5.20$) and female ($M = 36.63, 4.99$). The current study was in agreement with Lazaru's study, which indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between male teachers with regard to the support services they provided for learners with intellectual disabilities. It was supported by Triviño-Amigo et al. (2022) that, there were no significant differences between men and women regarding their perceived readiness to support and deal with diversity. Though women seem to be more confident in their competence as they show less need for preparation in addressing the diversity of needs in their learners with disabilities. Again, Lee et al. (2017) revealed that in terms of

teaching style, female teachers achieved higher than male teachers. This high level of achievement among female teachers exerted considerable influence on the achievement of male and female students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that teachers provide some types of support services for learners with intellectual disabilities in the unit schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana that afford them the opportunity to participate in academic and social activities in and out of the classrooms.

Again, it has been established that gender does not play any significant role, so far as support services for learners with intellectual disabilities are concerned. It was recommended that the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service should make a policy for the provision of guidance and counselling services to the various unit schools across the country, since guidance services have emerged as the most influential support services for learners with intellectual disabilities. Again, school authorities should regularly organise continuous professional development sessions on types of support services and their importance so that teachers who are not ready to provide some kind of support services to learners will appreciate their essence.

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