

Self-Reported Assertiveness of Child Parliament Participants and Non-Participants in Primary Schools, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The study compared assertiveness of 42 adolescents participating in the child parliament (P) and 42 nonparticipants (NP), aged 14-16 years selected using purposive sampling. Quantitative research method a descriptive survey design was used to compare the assertiveness of two naturally occurring independent groups. A two-way ANOVA was used to examine the difference in the mean assertiveness scores of P and NP. The relationship between age and years of participation in the child parliament and their assertive behaviour was computed using Pearson correlation. The results of a 2 x 2 (participation by sex) Analysis of Variance on the assertiveness scale showed that the mean difference in assertiveness scores for participation (the first main effect) and pairwise comparisons of the mean assertiveness scores of the two groups were found to be significant. However, the mean difference in assertiveness of males and females (the second main effect-sex factor) and interaction (participation and sex) was not statistically significant. There was statistically significant correlation between adolescents' years of participation in the child parliament and assertiveness. However, the correlation between age and assertiveness for P group was very weak, and not statistically significant. To conclude, adolescents participating in the parliament are more assertive than non-participants.

Keywords

Adolescence, Assertiveness, Child Parliament Participants, Nonparticipants

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Introduction

Assertiveness is an important social skill which promotes personal social wellbeing of adolescents. Most definitions of assertiveness emphasize direct expression of feelings, desires and thoughts in interpersonal contexts. For instance, [1] indicated that assertive behavior promotes equality in human relationships, enabling us to act in our own best interests, to stand up for ourselves, to express honest feelings comfortably, to exercise personal rights without denying the rights of others. For [2], assertion is the direct and appropriate communication of a person's needs, wants and opinions without punishing, threatening, putting down others, and doing this without fear during the process. [3] stated that assertiveness is a form of behavior characterized by a confident declaration or affirmation of a statement without need of proof; this affirms the person's rights or point of view without either aggressively threatening the rights of another assuming a position of dominance or submissively permitting another to ignore or deny one's rights or point of view. Assertive adolescents are able to express themselves effectively and stand up for their point of view, while also respecting the rights and beliefs of others. Assertive behavior also helps adolescents boost their self-esteem and earn others' respect and finally culminating in mutual respect [4]. [5] indicated the multidimensional nature of assertiveness, indicating as comprising four main components: the ability to refuse unnecessary requests, ask for favors and make requests, express positive and negative feelings, and initiate, continue and terminate general conversations.

Culture is an important variable which influences and shapes social behavior. Each culture considers certain behaviors are more desirable than others. Assertiveness emphasizes an

individualistic interpersonal style which is valued in some cultural contexts but not so much in others. [6] indicated the cultural conceptual differences in terms of what constitutes assertiveness and how children and adolescents develop assertive or nonassertive behaviors. In Ethiopia, families, schools and other institutions often seem to prefer and reward the obedient and cooperative child, rather than an assertive child. According to a Study on Local Perceptions of Children's Needs and Rights in North Wollo Zone in Ethiopia, some of the good behaviors expected for children and adolescents especially for girls include: obeying parental orders respecting parents; not challenging their parents; willing to be passively punished; being silent when insulted; and do not demand their parents to fulfill their rights [7].

Gender is often thought to be associated with assertiveness. Most studies indicate that males score higher on assertiveness than females. Women are more compassionate than men, more easily moved to tears, at the same time are more jealous, more querulous, and more prone to feeling of disheartened. To the contrary, males are expected to be objective, independent, assertive, and competitive [8]. Traditional gender role stereotypes are more prevalent within Ethiopian cultures. In Ethiopia, there is a huge problem of calling assertive women and girls authoritarian. If a man does the same, he is called strong. [9] in his study of 140 subjects (82 females) found that the male mean of assertiveness was significantly higher than the female mean of assertiveness. Some studies indicate that the overall generalization of the differences between males and females in personal assertion is unwarranted. [10] in their study of college students found out males to be less assertive than female students. [11] also found female students to be more assertive when expressing and dealing with personal

limitations and male students to be more assertive when displaying negative feelings. In Ethiopia, a study on the Role of Parenting Styles and Gender on Assertiveness among 100 second and third year students (42 females) found that sex main effect was not statistically significant. This was justified by the more or less equal participation of male and female students in activities such as attending classes, accomplishing group assignments, presentation, and taking tutorial together; participating in one-five network and in different extracurricular activities [12].

Age is also related to assertiveness. [13] taking sample of college students found out that older adolescents were more assertive than younger ones. It is possible that, with increasing age, adolescents learn social skills which in turn increase their feelings of confidence in interpersonal situations.

As a developmental period, adolescence is considered to be a transition from childhood to adulthood. The balance of influence on social development during adolescence shifts progressively from parents to peers [14]. Given the developmental character of this life period, one can better appreciate the importance of assertiveness. Assertive social skills are instrumental in initiating and maintaining socially supportive interpersonal relationships and hence enjoying a better emotional well-being. Deficits in assertive social skills have been shown to be related to depression [15] and loneliness [16,17].

Evidence from research works in different socio-cultural contexts show that adolescents' participation in child and youth-led groups has positive contribution in enhancing adolescents' social skills. From both developmental and social learning theory perspective [18], participation in child led groups during childhood and adolescence facilitates social interaction with peers; their exposure to world views; and enabling adolescents to develop cooperation skills and taking different perspectives. Official reports in Ethiopia show that there are more than 700 children's parliaments established at district, Zone, City or Regional levels, each having more than 100 adolescent members [19]. Members of children's parliaments receive trainings on child rights and protection, child participation, life skills, decision making and advocacy skills; participate in peer group and public discussions with government officials [20]. However, the contribution of adolescents' participation in child parliaments in enhancing their assertive social skills has not been well documented in Ethiopia.

So far, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Save the Children implementing these projects have conducted evaluation studies to assess the contribution of the project interventions in improving the situation of children and adolescents. For example, outcome of the End-Term Evaluation of the Project implemented in Kolfe Keranio Sub-City of Addis Ababa revealed that adolescents who were members of the children's parliaments have developed confidence, communication, and leadership skills. Out of the 378 (223 female) adolescents, 76% reported that they expressed their views to adults in different platforms without fear [21].

In addition, results from evaluation of a Project titled 'Promote Child Friendly Environment in Guraghe Zone' revealed that out of 527 (254 female) members of children's parliaments, 96.6% of adolescents reported that they have

developed confidence and skills to communicate their concerns to adults in the family and community settings; and participated in community and district level meetings [20]. However, these research works did not explicitly measure the contribution of adolescents' participation in the children's parliaments in enhancing their assertiveness and whether there was a difference in assertiveness of male and female adolescents. In addition, none of these research works included adolescents who have not been participating in the children's parliaments to compare assertiveness of child parliament participants and non-participants. This study was conducted to fill this research gap.

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. From the Social Learning Theory perspective, it attests how adolescents develop assertiveness as a social skill through observation, peer education, and direct trainings facilitated through the child parliaments. It is expected that assertive adolescents in the child parliament can serve as models for non-assertive adolescents, support nonassertive ones to develop confidence and practice assertive behaviors by giving them with opportunities to raise their issues; present ideas in front of other adolescents and adults; and understanding perspectives of others. From practical implication point of view, the study provides evidence on the importance of using children's parliaments as cost effective ways of reaching adolescents and facilitate their participation in activities that enhance their assertive behaviors. It also implies the importance of strengthening collaboration among parents, school community, Civil Society Organizations, education planners and sector government offices to strengthen and sustain children's parliaments as key entry points to initiate social skills development programs targeting adolescents.

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the assertiveness of adolescents participating in the child parliaments and nonparticipants. Specifically, it addressed the following basic research questions: (1) Is there statistically significant difference in the mean assertiveness scores of child parliament participants and non-participants? (2) Is there statistically significant difference in the mean assertiveness scores of male and female adolescents? (3) Is there statistically significant relationship between adolescents' age and years of participation in the child parliament and their assertive behavior?

Material and Methods

The research employed quantitative research method a descriptive survey design to compare the assertiveness of two naturally occurring groups of adolescents (one group participating in the Children's Parliament-P and the other group of adolescents who were not participating in the Children's Parliament and different project activities-NP). This design helped to have a better understanding of the research problem by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, but complementary data. To control potential differences and ensure equivalence of participants in the two independent groups (P and NP), participants were matched based on sex and age.

The independent variables of interest are participation in the children's parliament and sex of the research participants. Age was also considered as a variable and

correlated with assertiveness. The dependent variable measured was assertiveness scores of child parliament participants and non-participants. Grade level was not considered as a factor because the participants were selected from grade seven and eight. Communication skill of adolescents was used as a control variable. This is because, most adolescents were selected to be members of the child parliament based on their communication skills and those do not fear to express their feelings and opinions. To see if the difference in assertiveness of P and NP is due to their participation in the child parliament and project activities, the presumed pre-existing difference i.e., communication skills of participants from P and NP group was controlled. Hence, adolescents whose communication scores ranged from 80-92 were selected from the two groups to fill the assertiveness questionnaire.

The population of interest was adolescents (students) within the age group of 14-16 years attending grade seven and eight in Besirat primary school. This school was selected using purposive sampling because this is one of the schools where the child focused project intervention has been implemented. First, adolescents who were members of the child parliament from grade seven and eight were identified based on the data from the school administration. Of the total 50 students participating in the child parliament, using sex and age as strata, equal number of participants (21 male and 21 female, 14 adolescents from each age group 14, 15, and 16 years, $M=15$ and $SD=.83$) were selected using purposive sampling. The mean and standard deviation of assertiveness scores for P group was $M=88.33$ and $SD=9.30$. The participants from NP group were used as a match for each of those in the P group.

The selection of adolescents from nonparticipants group (NP) also followed similar sampling procedure. A total of 87 students were attending their education in grade seven and eight and all of them were not member of the child parliament. From these, a total of 42 adolescents (14 students from each age group 14, 15, and 16 years, $M=15$ and $SD=.83$) were selected using purposive sampling technique. The mean and standard deviation of assertiveness score for NP group was $M=54.10$, $SD=10.56$. In total, 84 adolescents between the ages of 14-16 years ($M=15$, $SD=.82$) from P and NP participated for the quantitative data collection. The mean and standard deviation of assertiveness scores for all participants was $M=71.21$, $SD=19.86$.

A communication scale having 23 items on a 5-point, Likert scale developed by Barkman and Machtmes [22] for adolescents aged 12-18 years was used to measure the communication skills of adolescents in the P and NP group. The scale assesses adolescents' ability to communicate by examining the frequency of use of the essential skills that are needed to use effective communication practices. Internal consistency measure of items is 0.79. The communication scale was administered to 100 adolescents (50 child parliament participants and 50 nonparticipants) to measure their communication skills prior to administering the assertiveness questionnaire. This was intended to select adolescents having more or less similar communication skills, and this would help to control pre-existing differences between the two groups. Accordingly, adolescents with a total communication score of 80-92 were selected and filled the assertiveness questionnaire.

An assertiveness questionnaire having 20 items, developed by Erickson and his colleagues [23] was used both for pilot testing and main study. The questionnaire is currently being beta-tested with students of grades 7-9. The Assertiveness Questionnaire has self-reporting items on a 5-point scale, Likert-type of scale ranging from 1 (Not very like me) to 5 (Very like me). The questionnaire is designed to measure students' proficiency in the two essential components of assertiveness, which are:

- Even when it's difficult, express their wants, needs, and thoughts.
- Even when it's difficult, respect what others want, need, and think.

The Assertiveness Questionnaire was pilot tested with 30 adolescents (15 males and 15 females) whose age ranges from 14-16 years. The participants for the pilot test were selected from among grade 7 and 8 students. Adolescents who participated in the pilot test did not participate during the main study. The data gathered from the pilot test were analyzed using SPSS and Cronbach alpha was computed to assess the reliability of the items. Many methodologists recommend a minimum of α coefficient between 0.65 and 0.8 (or higher in many cases). The computed Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the pilot study was found to be 0.72 and for the main study 0.77, which is within acceptable range. In addition, the assertiveness questionnaire was given to two psychology instructors with years of experience in teaching psychology in different government universities to review the items. Based on experts' feedback and results of pilot test, 6 items were modified to make them more clear for the respondents to fill without any ambiguity. The questionnaire was translated to Amharic language before pilot tested and final administration.

Information has been gathered regarding when adolescents joined the children's parliament; major project activities and functions of the children's parliament; and whether participation in the child parliament and project activities contributed to differences in assertiveness of child parliament participants and nonparticipants.

In this study, first, the researchers contacted the Head of Partner Organization (Mary Joy Development Association) and director of Besirat primary school. This is one of the target schools where the project activities have been implemented. This has helped the researcher to get permission from the school administration to access participants for the data collection. The school director was briefed about the purpose of the research, and requested to get the necessary permission to collect primary data from students. After permission from the school director was secured, it was agreed that the data collection should not conflict with the students' class schedule. Hence, data collection was conducted during the weekend.

In consultation with the school director, free rooms, tables, chairs, and pens were availed to students to fill the assertiveness questionnaire. Following this, a fifteen minutes' orientation on the purpose of the study was given to participants. The researcher clearly informed the participants that participation was voluntary and students were assured full confidentiality (i.e., they were not required to write either their name or their address). These were indicated in written form at the beginning of the

questionnaire and explained by the investigator during the study.

The data collection tools (assertiveness questionnaire and communication scale) were translated into local language (Amharic) by a professional translator before pilot tested. The investigator made assure that all the participants can read and write Amharic language before they start filling the questionnaire. Participants from the two groups were assigned in different rooms and made to fill the assertiveness questionnaire simultaneously. This helped the researcher to make sure that child parliament participants and nonparticipants did not share information, which helped to overcome the effect of diffusion. The students filled the questionnaire individually. It took approximately 40–60 minutes for each respondent to fill in the assertiveness questionnaire. All the questionnaires were filled by the respondents from child parliament participants and nonparticipants. The response rate from both groups was 100%.

Results

This section presents the results of descriptive and inferential statistics; and the qualitative data analyzed and used to complement the quantitative finding.

TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=84)

Characteristics	Frequency (N=84)	Percent
Age	14	33.33
	15	33.33
	16	33.33
Sex	Male	50
	Female	40

Table 1 shows a total of 84 adolescents (42 child parliament participants and 42 non-participants) participated as informants for this study. Looking into the sex of the respondents, equal proportion (50 % of the respondents from each sex category) were males and females. The age range of the respondents was from 14-16 years. Accordingly, equal proportion (33.3% in each age category) participated in filling the assertiveness questionnaire. In addition, 15 adolescents (10 from child parliament participants and 5 from non-participants) participated as key informants to obtain qualitative data.

TABLE 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Assertiveness Scores of Child Parliament Participants and Nonparticipants (N=84)

Groups	Frequency (N=84)	M	SD
Participants	Male	86.9	12.60
	Female	89.76	3.73
Nonparticipants	Male	55.71	14.37
	Female	52.48	4.11

As shown in Table 2, the mean assertiveness score for male child parliament participants was 86.9 and the standard deviation was 12.60. This shows that the dispersion of individual scores from the male mean for participants is unusually high. The mean score for female child parliament participants is 89.76 and the standard deviation is 3.73. The mean for females in the P group is slightly higher than the male mean. For nonparticipants, the mean assertiveness score for male adolescents is 55.71 and the standard deviation is 14.37, which is relatively high. The mean assertiveness score for females is 52.48 and standard deviation is 4.11. From the descriptive statistics, one can observe that the dispersion of individual scores from the mean is higher for male adolescents both for the child parliament participants and nonparticipants.

TABLE 3

Mean and Standard Deviation of Assertiveness Sub-Scales (Express Own Rights and Respect Others' Rights) for Male and Female Adolescents (N=84)

Groups	Frequency (N=84)	M	SD
Male	Expressing their Rights	31.86	8.92
	Respecting Others' Rights	39.45	12.44
Female	Expressing their Rights	32.12	8.27
	Respecting Others' Rights	39	11.73

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of adolescents' assertiveness scores for the two subscales. These are two components of the assertiveness i.e. expressing their opinions/rights even if others disagree with them (expressing their rights), and listening to other people's opinions even if they disagree with them (respecting others' rights). The results of descriptive statistics show that, for expressing subscale, the male mean is 31.86 and the standard deviation is 8.92. For respecting subscale, the mean score for males is 39.45 and the standard deviation is 12.44, which is unusually high. The mean score and standard deviation for respecting subscale is relatively higher than the expressing subscale. For females, the mean score for respecting others' rights subscale (39) and the standard deviation (11.73) was higher than the mean score for expressing subscale (32.12) and standard deviation (8.27). Overall, the mean and standard deviation scores for males and females for each subscale (e.g. for expressing subscale for males and females; and respecting subscale for males and females) was almost similar. Both groups have relatively higher mean and standard deviation score for the respecting subscale than expressing subscale.

Before deciding to use a two-way ANOVA, basic assumptions were checked. The dependent variable (assertiveness score is measured on a scale; there are two independent variables (participation and sex, each having two levels); and each sample has been drawn independently of the other sample. However, homogeneity of variance of

the two samples was violated. Accordingly, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (equal variance not assumed), was found to be statistically significant both at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels. This shows that variances of the two sample groups are not equal. Due to this, instead of using the conventional alpha level(0.05), the researcher used 0.01 significance level.

TABLE 4

ANOVA Summary Table Showing Difference in Mean Assertiveness Scores of the Two Groups (Tests of Between-Subjects Effects)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Sex	.762	1	.762	.008	.93
Participation	24617.19	1	24617.19	248.75	.00
Sex	195.05	1	195.05	1.97	.164
*Participation					
Total	458,734	84			

The above table shows the output of a two-way ANOVA used to check whether there is a statistically significant difference in the mean assertiveness scores of child parliament participants and nonparticipants. The result shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of two groups for Participation (main effect) determined by ANOVA [F (1,83) =248.75, p < .01]. For the second main effect (sex), the result was found to be not significant, [F (1, 83) =.008, p >.01]. There was no statistically significant interaction between the effects of sex and participation in the child parliament, [F (1, 83) =1.97, p>.01].

Since participation as a main effect is significant, effect size, R Squared is found to be= .758, which means 75.8% of the variance in assertiveness score between the two groups is accounted for adolescents' participation in the child parliament and related project activities.

TABLE 5

Pairwise Comparisons of the Mean Assertiveness Scores of Child Parliament Participants and Nonparticipants(N=84)

Participation	Participatio n	Mean Differ ence	Sig.
Participants	Nonpartici pants	34.24	.00
Nonparticipants	Participants	-34.24	.00

Table 5 shows pairwise comparisons of the mean assertiveness scores of the two groups. Accordingly, the mean difference in assertiveness scores between child parliament participants and nonparticipants was found to be statistically significant (M=34.24, P<0.05). The result of key informant interview with executive committee members of child parliament also revealed that adolescent's participation in the child parliament and related project activities has positively contributed for increased assertiveness skills. The following excerpts of the views of interviewed adolescents could be good examples on how their participation has helped them acquire assertiveness skills.

The result of a two-way ANOVA which showed the effect of sex factor not significant has been supported with qualitative data obtained from key informants. Interviewed members of the child parliament confirmed that both male

and female adolescents are encouraged to participate in the child parliament and different training programs that contributes to enhancing their assertiveness skills.

TABLE 6

Correlation between Age of Adolescents and Years of Participation in the Children's Parliament and Assertive Behaviour (N=42)

		Assertiveness Score
Age	Pearson Correlation	.04
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.81
	N	42
Years of Participation	Pearson Correlation	.79**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	42

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 6, in order to see the correlation between years of participation in the child parliament and age, and assertive behavior of adolescents in the child parliament, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was computed. A strong positive and statistically significant correlation (r=.79, p<0.01) was found between adolescents' years' of participation and assertiveness scores. The result also shows that very weak but positive relationship exists between age and assertive behavior of adolescents; and the relationship was not statistically significant (r= 0.04, p>.01).

Discussion

The study was conducted to investigate the assertiveness of adolescents who were participating in the child parliament and those who were not participating in the child parliament. One of the research questions investigated was: Is there a statistically significant difference in the mean assertiveness scores of child parliament participants and nonparticipants? The result of a two-way ANOVA showed there was statistically significant difference in the mean assertiveness scores of child parliament participants and nonparticipants for participation (main effect), [F (1, 83) =248.75, p < .01]. Pairwise comparisons of the mean assertiveness scores of child parliament participants and nonparticipants was also found to be statistically significant (M=34.24, P<0.05).

This means adolescents who have been participating in the child parliament have higher assertiveness scores compared to adolescents who are not participating in the child parliament structure. This was supported by qualitative data obtained through key information interviews. The researcher's observation during the key informant interview with member of child parliaments also indicated that the assertiveness skills and competences of the interviewed adolescents were so high as that one could observe it from the way they express their ideas; the way they organize their thoughts, and the confidence they had during the interviews. One possible explanation that adolescents who are members of child parliament are more assertive than their counterparts (nonparticipants), could be justified by their easy access to different trainings and participation in various discussion forums. The project intervention targeted strengthening children's parliaments and building capacity of children and adolescents who are members of the child

parliaments through various trainings on issues such as life skills; communication and assertiveness skills; problem solving; decision making and advocacy skills. During such trainings, child and adult led discussions, and peer education sessions, adolescents are given opportunities to present their views and concerns to teachers, Wereda government authorities; share experiences with others; observe and practice assertive behaviors; and acquire and develop assertive behaviors. This is consistent with the recent empirical findings. For example, the findings of End-Term Project Evaluations conducted by Save the Children [20,21] showed that adolescents participating in the child parliament have acquired important skills essential for their development. UNICEF [24] documented the impact of the child and youth focused project intervention (including their participation in child and youth led initiatives) on children's and adolescents' capacity to protect their own rights and the rights of other adolescents; and ability to actively engage with adults (teachers, community groups, and government officials) on issues that impact their lives. In addition, [25] supported the assertion that adolescents' participation in child parliaments has facilitated peer interaction and support, and joint learning, which further enhanced their assertiveness behaviors. Peer education tend to facilitate reciprocal interaction among children and adolescents and this further facilitates the development of basic social skills including assertiveness skills. Two key informants (adolescents) were of the view that being a member of child parliaments increases access to regular peer education programs.

The research presumed that there could be pre-existing differences between child parliament participants and nonparticipants. This was confirmed by most adolescents who participated as key informants. They mentioned that one of the criteria used to select children and adolescents for membership in the child parliament was their ability to communicate with other children and adults with confidence and ability to facilitate group discussions. Indeed, communication and assertiveness skills are related. Adolescents who have better assertiveness skills can easily communicate their feelings, wishes, wants and desires appropriately and is an important interpersonal communication skill [26]. The communication skills of adolescents who filled the assertiveness questionnaire, was controlled as an important variable to avoid the preexisting differences between child parliament participants and nonparticipants. The fact that first main effect (participation) is statistically significant implies that participation in the child parliament and related project activities has contributed to enhanced assertiveness of adolescents in the child parliament.

The second basic research question explored was: Is there statistically significant difference in the mean assertiveness scores of male and female adolescents? Most literatures indicate that gender is often associated with assertiveness and males are more assertive than females. For example, [9] in his study of 140 participants found out that the male mean of assertiveness was significantly higher than the female average assertiveness. Similarly, [27] in their study of 450 participants (200 female) found that males scored significantly higher than females in their assertiveness skills.

Result of descriptive statistics shows that the mean and standard deviation scores for males and females for each subscale (e.g. for expressing subscale for males and females; and respecting subscale for males and females) was almost similar. Both groups have relatively higher mean and standard deviation score for the respecting subscale than expressing subscale.

Contrary to the view that male adolescents are more assertive than females, the result of a two-way ANOVA showed that the second main effect (sex factor) was not statistically significant, $[F(1, 83) = .008, p > .01]$, showing that there was no difference in assertiveness mean scores between male and female adolescents. Supporting this finding, some studies indicate that the overall generalization of the differences between males and females in personal assertion is unwarranted. For example, a study by [12] on the Role of Parenting Styles and Gender on Assertiveness among second- and third-year students found out that there was no statistically significant mean difference in assertiveness scores of males and females. The presence of social interaction between male and female students through formal means (i.e. attending all classroom sessions, accomplishing group assignments and classroom presentation, taking tutorial classroom session together); and informally participating in extracurricular activities (youth, gender clubs and associations) have contributed to this finding. Similarly, a cross-cultural study on self-reported assertiveness in Swedish and Turkish adolescents found out that, in contrast to the traditional gender role stereotypes, adolescent girls from two culturally disparate groups were not less assertive than boys [28].

In this study, the existence of no difference in assertiveness of male and female adolescents can be explained by a number of factors. Existing institutions (schools and government structures) encourage school girls to participate in different trainings, discussion forums, peer education, extra-curricular activities and child and youth led clubs and parliaments. Equal representation of female and male adolescents is also one of the main criteria used in selecting members and leaders in the child parliament, and related project activities. All these are assumed to have contributed to enhanced assertiveness skills of both male and female adolescents in the child parliament.

It is expected that with increased number of years of their participation in the child parliament and related project activities, adolescents will get more opportunities to participate in various activities that enhance their assertive behavior as a social skill. The result from this study showed the existence of a strong positive and statistically significant correlation ($r = .79, p < .01$) between adolescents' years' of participation and assertiveness scores. Consistent with this finding, empirical studies by Save the [20,21] and UNICEF [24] documented the impact of adolescents' participation in the child and youth led parliaments in developing communication, assertiveness and other social skills.

The result also shows that very weak but positive relationship exists between age and assertive behavior of adolescents; and the relationship was not statistically significant ($r = -0.04, p > 0.01$). Previous studies such as [28] and existing literature [13] showed that older adolescents were more assertive than the younger ones. It is possible that, with increasing age, adolescents learn social skills. In

this study, the existence of very weak positive correlation between age and assertive behavior of adolescents could possibly be due to limited age gap between participants (all were within the middle adolescence period). In addition, adolescents who are members of the child parliament had participated in various project activities that enhanced their assertive behaviors.

Conclusions

A self-reported measure of assertiveness of adolescents in child parliament and nonparticipants, showed that the difference in the mean scores of the two groups was statistically significant for Participation (main effect). This was supported by qualitative data obtained through key informant interview with male and female adolescents selected from child parliament participants and nonparticipants. Adolescents' easy access to different trainings on issues such as child rights and protection, communication, assertiveness, decision making and advocacy skills; peer education and public discussions are expected to have contributed to enhanced assertiveness of child parliament participants. The existing literatures also supported the assertion that participation in child and youth led parliaments have important contribution in enhancing adolescents' communication and assertiveness skills.

The researcher tried to create equivalent groups (P and NP) by controlling their communication skills (through design control) and matching participants based on their age and sex to avoid the preexisting differences between the two groups. The finding also shows that participation in the child parliament as a main effect is significant. However, although statistically, 75.8% of the variance in assertiveness score is accounted for adolescents' participation in the child parliament and related project activities, it is difficult to arrive at this conclusion. This is because, there could be other factors such as parental education and parental income that may have contributed to increased assertiveness of adolescents in the child parliament group.

This study also explored if there is a difference in assertiveness of male and female adolescents. Although most literatures indicate male adolescents are more assertive than female adolescents, the result from this study showed that there is no statistically significant mean difference in assertiveness of male and female adolescents. This implies that both male and female adolescents were more or less given equal opportunities to participate in trainings, discussions and extracurricular activities. Both male and female adolescents have more or less equally benefited from participating in the child parliament and the different project activities. Thus, the overall generalization of the differences in assertiveness between male and female adolescents is unwarranted.

There was a strong positive and statistically significant correlation between adolescents' years of participation and assertiveness scores at 0.01 significance level. With increased number of years of their participation in the child parliament, male and female adolescents may have gotten more opportunities to participate in various activities that enhance their assertive behavior. There is very weak positive but not statistically significant relationship between age and assertive behavior of adolescents. The limited age gap

among adolescents ($SD=.82$) and more or less equal participation in different extra-curricular activities, and activities initiated by the child parliament (especially for the P group) might have contributed to the existence of very weak correlation.

Author Contribution

Conceptualization, Azmeraw Bogale; methodology, Azmeraw Bogale, & Ephrem Shikuro.; validation, Azmeraw Bogale & Ephrem Shikuro. ; formal analysis, Azmeraw Bogale & Ephrem Shikuro; investigation, Azmeraw Bogale & Ephrem Shikuro; resources, Azmeraw Bogale data curation, Azmeraw Bogale.; writing—original draft preparation, Azmeraw Bogale; writing—review and editing, Ephrem Shikuro.; supervision, Azmeraw Bogale.; project administration, Azmeraw Bogale.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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