



THE CONTENTS, METHODS AND EFFECT OF FEMALE STUDENTS' LIFE SKILLS TRAINING ON ASSERTIVENESS OF THE STUDENTS AT ARBA MINCH UNIVERSITY, ETHIOPIA

Damtew Darza Sozoⁱ

Associate Professor,
Department of Psychology,
School of Pedagogical and Behavioural Sciences,
Arba Minch University,
Ethiopia

Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to examine the content, methods and effect of female students' life skills training on assertiveness of the students at Arba Minch University. Qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in the study. Data for the study were collected through document analysis, interview, observation, and assertiveness scale. The information collected through document analysis, interview, and observation were analyzed qualitatively using text and percentage. Analysis of the training modules has shown that the contents and methods identified for the training were relevant and adequate. However, interview with trainers and observation in the training sessions have disclosed that due to inadequate time allocation for the training by the university, the contents and methods presented in the training materials were not properly treated and used respectively. Assertiveness scale has been administered before and after the life skills training to 82 female students of two sections which selected randomly from six sections of the training. Paired t-test was employed and has shown that life skills training significantly increases the students' assertiveness level. Though t-test indicated significant difference, the mean differences of pretest and posttest scores were very small, especially negligible in the case of academic assertiveness. The small mean differences could be attributed to inadequate treatment and use of the identified training contents and methods respectively due to time constraint. It was recommended that the university has to rethink over and make some improvement on time planning for the training.

Keywords: life skills, female students, training, assertiveness

ⁱ Correspondence: email damtew25@yahoo.com, damtewdarza@rocketmail.com

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of The Study

Life skills are termed as psychosocial competencies, which are instrumental for the well-being of individuals and enable them to become active and productive in a community (Bandura, 1991a). Accordingly, they are instrumental for the success of individuals in all aspects of life, including education (World Health Organization (WHO), 1993). More specifically, life skills enable individuals to be adaptive in an environment and foster self-management, which leads to better intellectual, social, personal and emotional competencies that are necessary for deep and life-long learning (Reza, 2011; Nair & Fahimirad, 2019).

Life skills training (LST) for undergraduate female students in higher education, especially at the beginning of their higher education life, seems important to enable them to adapt the new school environment and be successful in learning (Nair & Fahimirad, 2019; Ministry of Women, Children, & Youth Affairs – MoWCYA & Ministry of Education - MoE, 2012). In line with this, Benn, Harvey, Gilbert and Irons (2005) indicated that transition to university is a time when students face new interpersonal, social, and academic demands. Another study, (Pettersson & Arnetz, 2001), pointed out that a time of transition to university is stressful for many students, so adjustments needed to be made for students to cope with that stress. This further likely has an influence on academic motivation and performance (Verschuur, Eurlings-Bonteko, Spinhoven & Duijsens, 2003). Therefore, formulating and implementing LST seems beneficial to enable students to cope with such problems.

Girls' involvement in higher education has become a significant issue all over the world. Low academic achievement and high attrition rate of female students were common in Ethiopian higher education due to being away from home, unable to handle new environment, lack of assertiveness, fear of failure and so on (MoWCYA & MoE, 2012). Based on the focus of the current Ethiopian education system to improve female students' participation and success in higher education, LST for first-year female students in universities has been in practice for more than a decade and still continues with attention. As information obtained from the Gender Directorate Office (GDO) of Arba Minch University (AMU), this training began in AMU in the year 2012 and has been offered yearly for sixteen hours to all first-year female students.

The training mainly aims to enhance the students' various aspects of assertive behaviors, and accordingly, it is sometimes called assertiveness training as information detected from document analysis of the training modules and from the Gender Directorate director and experts at AMU, the purpose of the training was mainly to develop female students' level of assertiveness in order to make them successful in their higher education learning. In line with this, Huurre, Aro, Rahkonen, and Komulainen (2006) described that assertiveness can help students to improve communication skills, which in turn enables them to study better and achieve good performance in their learning. Assertiveness is closely associated with self-confidence, self-esteem and anxiety

and thereby leads to success in learning (Ghodrati, Tavakoli, Heydari, and Akbarzadeh, 2006). It was in cognisance of this fact that LST for female students has been designed and implemented in Ethiopian higher institutions. Observation made by the current researcher at the modules of the training indicates that enhancing the students' assertiveness is one of its major objectives. However, the effect of this training on the students' assertiveness has not been studied. For any kind of training to be effective, it is obvious that the contents and methods used in the training have an important role (Mangal & Mangal, 2007). Therefore, in studying the effect of LST on students' assertiveness, it is reasonable to examine the kinds of content and methods used in the training.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

The LST program, designed for first-year female students in higher education institutions in Ethiopia, has been in practice at AMU for more than a decade with the aim of enabling the students to succeed in their learning via enhancing their assertiveness level, other psychosocial and academic skills. However, various recent years' yearly plan performance evaluation reports of AMU disclose that the attrition rate of students in the university, which is more prevalent in the first year of study, was commonly higher for female students in comparison to males. As mentioned so far in the background of this study, assertiveness plays an important role in the success of an individual in education as well as in other aspects of life. It was commonly assumed that assertive behaviors are acquired through training and experience, with the notion that LST, which is sometimes called an assertiveness training program, has been designed and implemented for female students in Ethiopian higher institutions. As to the knowledge of this researcher, the effect of LST on the assertiveness of female students who took the training has not been studied in the case of AMU in particular and other public universities in Ethiopia in general. Therefore, it seems useful to conduct research to examine the effect of LST on female students' assertiveness level in the university, including the relevance and appropriateness of the content and methods, respectively, identified and used for the training.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions have been formulated to be answered by this study:

- 1) Does the content of female students' LST comprise relevant and adequate topics to address assertiveness?
- 2) Are the methods employed in female students' LST appropriate to enhance assertive behaviors?
- 3) Does the LST at AMU contribute to increasing the assertiveness level of the female students?
- 4) Does the contribution of LST in increasing the assertiveness level of students vary for non-academic and academic affairs?

1.4 Objectives of The Study

1.4.1 General Objectives

The main objective of this study was to assess the relevance and appropriateness of content methods used in female students' LST and the effect on the assertiveness level of the students at AMU.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

This research has the following specific objectives

- 1) To assess the relevance and adequacy of the contents identified and treated for female students' LST.
- 2) To examine the appropriateness of methods identified and employed for female students' LST.
- 3) To assess whether the female students' LST at AMU has a significant contribution to the gain in the assertiveness level of the students.
- 4) To recommend actions to be taken to improve the effectiveness of female students' LST at AMU.

1.5 Significance of The Study

This study will:

- 1) enhance awareness of university management bodies about the importance of LST for female students, which in turn initiates them to give attention to improve its implementation.
- 2) initiate the School of Pedagogy and Behavioral Sciences in AMU to visit and improve the practice of LST for female students.
- 3) initiate instructors who offer LST to improve the methods they employ in the training.
- 4) serve as a reference in further research works on the effectiveness of female students' supportive actions in higher education institutions.

1.6 Definition of Concepts

Academic assertiveness: Assertiveness in affairs related to teaching and learning activities.

Non-academic assertiveness: Assertiveness in affairs related to basic life necessities and sexual harassment or abuse.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept and Role of Life Skills

Life skills in general referred as a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others,

and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and successful manner (Smith cited in Tahereh, Shahram, and Mohammad, 2011).

Regarding the role of life skills in education, Baloch et al. (2014) described that life skills are important in enhancing both the academic development and general life efficacy of the students in their conduct in the environment.

2.2 Characteristics of Life Skills Training

The relevance and adequacy of content and appropriateness of methods of training are the basics that determine the success of the training (Mangal & Mangal, 2007). The content of LST for students should include and focus on the core psychosocial and personal competencies and skills, such as assertiveness, self-awareness, stress management, problem solving, decision making, effective communication, and creative and critical thinking (WHO, 2013). To achieve its objective, in addition to relevant content, LST requires the use of interactive methods of training (Goleman, 1995; Parker, Saklofske, Wood, & Collin, 2009; Harmin, 1994).

Regarding the characteristics of LST, WHO (1996) pointed out that life skills education differs from country to country and from one locality to another in its objectives and contents. However, it is similar across the culture in three important ways, such as enable learning abilities to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, enable the learner to learn to acquire and practice skills based on learner centered methods and on the philosophy that the learner should be empowered to take more responsibility for their actions. Further in its document about "Life Skills Education Planning for Research", WHO has indicated that the effectiveness of life skills education programs is influenced by the contents and methods used for the training. Here, it was pointed out that generic life skills content and active student involvement methods of teaching should be used to make it effective for its purpose. Other sources (e.g. Bandura, 1977), also revealed that for LST to be effective in enabling the learner to learn and actively practice the skills, it should include modeling of the use of skills, which is one of the important techniques of learner-centred methodology. Group discussion, brainstorming, debate and role play are the relevant methods for the training to be effective (WHO, 1996).

Willingham, cited in Nair and Fahimirad (2019), suggested that basically life skills are intertwined with domain knowledge, that is, they are highly discipline-specific and, as a consequence, different skills set for different disciplines with different life skills. Here, it could be understood that in designing the LST program, the content of the training material should be relevant to the trainees' work environment and situation. From the research conducted on the effectiveness of LST for students, Kawalekar (2017) described that the content and methodology of the training have an influence on the level of effectiveness.

2.3 The Concept and Role of Assertiveness in Human Life and Learning

Assertiveness refers to the ability to communicate opinions, needs, and feelings in a direct, honest and appropriate manner. It is an interpersonal behavior that allows the direct expression of one's feelings or the defence of one's rights, while respecting others (Turner, 1992). As described in Rathus (1998), assertiveness behavior involves the expression of one's genuine feelings, standing up for one's legitimate rights and refusing unreasonable requests. That is, despite undue social influences and disobeying arbitrary group standards. The assertiveness level of a person can be influenced by the culture of the community, the parenting style received, peers and training (Rathus, 1978). Assertiveness behavior is not an individual's stable and general traits; a person may be sufficiently assertive in some situation and behave accordingly in one's social interactions, such as assertive or socially skilled behavior, passive behavior, and at the other extreme, aggressive behavior (Carrobbles cited in Ghodrati et al, 2006). Assertive behavior helps a person adapt to social situations and reduces social anxiety (Hajihassani, Shafi, Pirsaghi & Kiyanipour cited in Ebrahim et al., 2022)

Galata (2018), in his study on assertiveness and academic achievement motivation of students in secondary schools in Ethiopia, indicated that assertiveness can improve students' communication skills, self-esteem and decision making, and also helps them to overcome shyness and anger and thereby positively impact their school performance. Similarly, Oladipo, Arigbabu and Rufai (2012), in their study conducted in Nigeria on high school students, indicated that need-achievement correlated significantly with assertiveness. Moon (2009) indicated that assertive students are superior to non-assertive ones in academic performance.

2.4 The Relation of Life Skills Training with Assertiveness

Empirical research conducted by Ebrahim et al (2022) on addiction patients in Egypt showed that LST significantly improved the assertiveness level of the study participants. A study conducted by Ahmad, Fariba, Faramarz and Ellahe (2018) on high school students in Iran regarding the effect of LST on various psychosocial traits has demonstrated that the training has increased the assertiveness level of the students. Sadat and Piri (2021) from their study about the effectiveness of LST on assertiveness and work engagement of staff in welfare vocational centers in Iran have indicated that the training has a significant contribution to increasing the assertiveness level of the participants.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

According to the science of pedagogy, in teaching, learning or training, the relevance of the contents and methods used for the training is vital to the effectiveness of the training as per its purpose. Trainers must ensure the training method is appropriate and practical to the trainees. This can be done using real-life scenarios, case studies, discussions, role plays, and examples specific to the trainees. The content used should be relevant to the trainees' role and presented engagingly and interactively through employing active training methods. In general, in training delivery, relevant content, trainees' engagement

and experiences are critical to achieve the expected outcome and impact (Mangal & Manal, 2007). In line with this, the following conceptual framework was established.

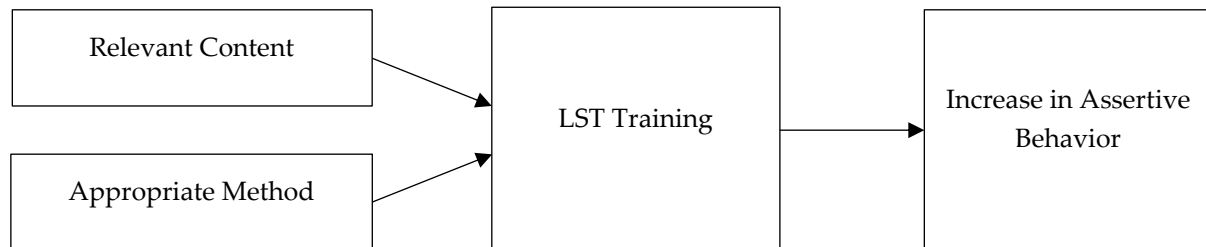


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Relation of The Study Variables

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Design of The Study

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data and analysis were used in this study. A qualitative approach was employed in the investigation of the contents and methods used in the LST. The quantitative one was used in the investigation of the effect of LST on the assertiveness of female students. Quasi-experimental design was employed to assess the effect of LST on the assertiveness level of students. The independent and dependent variables of this study were LST and assertiveness, respectively. At the same time, the content and methods of the training were intervening variables.

3.2 Population and Sample of The Study

The population of this study was all undergraduate regular first-year female students in AMU. In the 2022/23 academic year, 1498 students joined AMU as a regular undergraduate first-year students. Among these, 404 were females (346 and 114 Natural and Social science students, respectively). LST has been offered to all these female students. For the training, the natural science and social science female students were assigned to six and two sections, respectively. To collect necessary information for this research, two sections of students, one from natural and the other from social science, were selected separately using a simple random sampling technique.

In the two selected sections, there were 53 and 50 natural and social science students, respectively. Accordingly, a total of 103 students were initially present and filled out the pre-assessment scale of assertiveness. Among these students of the two sections, 9 students from the natural and 6 from the social science were absent at the final training session when the post assertiveness assessment scale was administered. Moreover, 4 students from natural and 2 from social science were not filled properly on either the pre-assessment or post-assessment scale of assertiveness. Thus, analysis of the study was conducted on 82 (40 natural and 42 social science) students.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Four different instruments, such as document analysis, observation checklist, interview and assertiveness scale, were employed to collect necessary data for this study. Document analysis was employed to identify the relevance and adequacy of the contents and the appropriateness of the methods of the LST modules, specifically on assertiveness training content and methods. An observation checklist has been used to collect information about the methods used by the trainers in the LST sessions. The assertiveness scale measure has been employed to measure the assertiveness level of students before and after the LST.

The check list for observing methods used by the trainers in the training sessions and the interview items to conduct interview with trainers, head of Psychology Department and dean of School of Pedagogical and Behavioral Sciences have been constructed by the researcher and commented before administration for the appropriateness by two senior instructors from the Department of Psychology. The interview schedule contained seven items: six closed and one open-ended regarding the overall information about the situation of running the training, the use of various training methods, and challenges commonly faced in the training process.

An assertiveness measure, which contains 60 items (no.1 to 30 address non-academic affairs, while no. 31 to 60 address academic-related affairs) of a four-point scale, was used to measure the trainees' pre- and post-training level of assertiveness. Among these, 30 items were adapted from Rathus (1973) and the remaining 30 were constructed by the researcher based on literature ideas about the trait of assertiveness in a manner related to Ethiopian and the study area context. The items' four scales give values 0 to 3, representing; 0 = No or Never, 1 = Somewhat or Sometimes, 2 = Usually or a Good deal, 3 = Always or Entirely. The minimum and maximum possible scores for each respondent on the overall items are 0 and 180, respectively, while on non-academic and academic items separately are 0 and 90 for each. Among the 60 items, 12 items were negatively stated items; thus, in scoring, the respondents' ratings were reversed.

To check the clarity and relevance of each item and instruction of the assertiveness scale, it was provided to three instructors; two and one from the Psychology and Pedagogy departments, respectively, in AMU. Comments forwarded by these assessors have been incorporated into the scale. To test the validity and reliability of the scale, it has been administered by the researcher to 20 second-year female students who joined the university in the 2020/21 academic year. The reliability level of the scale was tested using the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test, and found to be 0.79, which is a reasonably strong reliability level, and thus the scale was printed and used for the main study to measure the students' level of assertiveness.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Eight modules of LST have been collected from the GDO of AMU, and their contents have been thoroughly assessed by the researcher, with a focus on the assertiveness topic regarding the content relevance and adequacy, plus appropriateness of the training methods and time allocated for the training. Using the checklist designed by the

researcher, four experts from the GOD, two for each section selected for this study, have made observations during the training sessions and have collected information about the training methods used by the trainers. Short training has been offered by the researcher to these observers before they went for the observation and administered the scale to the students.

Before distributing the scale, the administrators provided orientation to the students about the purpose of collecting the data and how they should respond to the items of the scale. The scales were provided to the students at the first session before the training began and at the end of the session after completion of that session's training. In both the pre- and post-administrations of the scale, about fifty minutes of additional time were used before and after the training began and completed, respectively.

To collect overall information about the LST situation, an interview was conducted with the Gender Directorate director, the head of the Psychology Department, the dean of the School of Pedagogical and Behavioral Sciences and with four trainers from the Department of Psychology. These interviews were conducted at their convenient time; for some at their offices and for some others at their working campuses during breaktimes of the working days.

3.5 Data Analysis Method

The information collected through document analysis to examine the contents and methods of LST has been analyzed qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The information collected through observation about the methods used in training has been summarized in a table and analyzed using percentages. At the same time, the information collected through interviews has been analyzed qualitatively.

The data collected about the level of students' assertiveness to examine the effect of LST on assertiveness have been analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. A paired t-test was employed to test the significance of the effect. The existence of variation in the effect of LST among non-academic and academic assertiveness was examined through close observation of the mean differences of pretest and posttest for the non-academic and academic affairs, and then described qualitatively in text.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

A letter of consent from the School of Pedagogical and Behavioral Sciences at AMU was provided to trainers for their cooperation during data collection for this study. Participants were informed that their responses would be analyzed using numbers and anonymously. During orientation about the purpose and how to respond to the items, the respondents were informed that they can resign from filling out and returning the questionnaire and responding to the interviews if they have any feeling of inconvenience in providing information for this study.

4. Results

4.1 Characteristics of Life Skills Training for Female Students at AMU

The first basic research question of this study focuses on the relevance and appropriateness of training content used for the LST. To answer this question, data were collected and have been presented and analyzed as follows. There was nationally prepared material which contained eight modules for the training. The eighth module was a guideline for trainers about how to conduct the training. As observed on the acknowledgement page of the first module, the modules were prepared by professionals from WoWCYA, MoE, and three public universities with financial and technical support from UNESCO. The titles, number of topics under each title, and time allocated for training each module were observed by the researcher from the modules and have been summarized and presented in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1: The Topics, Main Contents and Time Allocated for The Training Modules

Module No.	Module title	No. of sub-topics/ main contents	Size of content (in page)	Time allocated (in hours)
1	Psychosocial factors	8	67	19:30
2	Academic skill	9	45	23:00
3	Stress and Stress management	5	18	2:30
4	Risk behaviour	5	9	2:00
5	Leaders and Leadership	3	5	1:25
6	Gender based violence, HIV/AIDS and Productive health	5	37	8:15
7	Problem solving and Decision making	5	9	4:00
8	Mentorship	6	28	8:10
Total		46	218	68:50

As indicated in Table 1, the time allocated for the mentorship module is 8:10 hours, which does not consume the time for training sessions, because it is the time allocated for trainers to prepare themselves on their own time. Therefore, the total time allocated for the training sessions was 60:40 hours. Table 1 indicates that the broadest module in content with regard to page number occupied was the psychosocial module (67 pages), which is 35.26% of the sum of pages of all seven modules, other than the mentorship module. The time allocated for this module was 19:30, which is 31.95% of the total time allocated for all the modules. This shows that the broadest content and largest time proportion were allocated for psychosocial factors, in which assertiveness was one of the various subtitles designed for the training.

As observed from the modules, the assertiveness topic was one of the eight subtopics in the module for “Psychosocial factors”. With these eight subtopics, the psychosocial module contains 67 pages, among which 14 pages were occupied by the assertiveness topic contents. Assertiveness topic contains eleven sub-topics such as; meaning and importance of assertiveness, features of assertive and non-assertive

behaviors, aggressive behavior and its features, the way how to be assertive, challenges to assertive behaviors, assertiveness in relation to university campus life, influence of non-assertiveness, and how being assertive improve the students' study. By examining the nature of these contents, one can understand that they are relevant to achieving the goal of assertiveness training.

As observed in the module, the training time allocated for assertiveness was 6:00 hours out of the total 19:30 hours for the "psychosocial factors" module. Here, the time allocated in the module for the assertiveness training seems adequate. However, since only 16 hours were used for the overall LST in AMU, it was practically impossible to use the full 6:00 hours. Observation of the schedule practiced in the university has shown that only 1:30 hours was used for assertiveness training.

The second research question of this study addresses the appropriateness of the methods used in the training. A close look at the modules has shown that methods identified to be used in the training with the various modules include role play, brainstorming, scenarios, group discussion, debate, case study, interactive lecture and presentation, and other innovative training techniques. This shows that almost all the methods identified were active methods. The methods specifically identified for the assertiveness topic include brainstorming, scenario, discussion, interactive lecture and presentation. Though most of these methods for assertiveness are active types, some of the strong active methods, such as role play, debate and case study, which could give more opportunity for the trainees' engagement in the training process, were missing in the list.

Trainers who offered the assertiveness training were teachers from the Department of Psychology who have a master's degree and have more than five years of experience in teaching and offering LST at the university. Observations made in the two training sections have identified the extent of the trainers' use of each of the training methods indicated in the module for assertiveness training, and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Proportion of Time Used in Application of Each Training Method by the Trainers

Methods	Time used (From 90 Minutes)			
	Natural science section		Social science section	
	Time used	%	Time used	%
Brain storming	5	5.56	4	4.44
Scenario	6	6.67	8	8.89
Discussion	11	12.22	12	13.33
Lecture and presentation	68	75.55	66	73.34
Total	90	100	90	100

As indicated in Table 2, trainers in the two sections of training on assertiveness contents have widely used the lecture method; 77.55% and 73.34% of time in natural and social science sections, respectively. On the other hand, the extent of the use of active learning methods was found to be very small, demonstrating the highest time proportion in the

discussion method; 12.22% and 13.33% for natural and social science sections, respectively.

The training modules were written in English. However, information obtained through observation in the two training sections indicated that the trainers use more of the Amharic language in their oral presentations and discussions. This shows that there was a mismatch in language between the training material prepared and the training activities practiced in the sessions.

In the interview with four trainers, all of them expressed that they mainly use the lecture method and rarely use active methods due to the insufficient time schedule provided by the university in comparison to the breadth of content included for the training. They pointed out that employing active methods naturally requires more time in comparison to the lecture method, and therefore, they have been forced to use the lecture method in order to cover the contents identified for the training. Some of the trainers further pointed out that even by using more of a lecture method, it remains challenging to treat properly all the content identified for the training. These responses of the trainers supplement the information obtained through observation in the training sessions, which disclosed that active training methods have been used to a very low extent.

During the interview, trainers disclosed that students do not have an interest in attending the training. Some of the students attended the first day of training and were absent on the second day. For the students' lack of interest in attending the training, the trainers have attributed it to improper planning of the training time by the university, that is, conducting the training while students' engagement in the semester coursework had started. Thus, in this situation, students prefer to be engaged in their coursework activities rather than attending LST. This saying of the trainers was also seconded by the Gender Directorate director, as well as three experts in the directorate. In their response to interview about the situations that influence the practice of LST in the university, the head of Psychology Department and the dean of the School of Pedagogical and behavioral sciences have also support the responses of the trainers, describing that students want to use their time for course work activities rather than to attend LST. They further pointed out that to avoid this problem, LST has to be conducted before the semester class begins.

4.2 The Effect of Life Skills Training on Students' Assertiveness

The third basic research question of this study addresses the contribution of female students' LST to increasing the assertiveness level of the students. Data were collected from 82 students using the assertiveness scale measure before and after training in the quasi-experiment. The ranges and means of scores for participants in the pretest and posttest in the overall, non-academic and academic assertiveness are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Means and Ranges of Participants' Assertiveness Scores in Pretest and Posttest

Category	Pretest		Post-test	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Overall assertiveness	113.82	52 – 161 (109)	116.99	56 – 166 (110)
Non-academic assertiveness	53.35	22 – 86 (64)	56.12	23 – 87 (64)
Academic assertiveness	60.46	27 – 88 (61)	60.99	27 – 88 (61)

Table 3 shows that the mean scores of assertiveness in all three cases, overall, non-academic and academic, are higher for the posttest in comparison to the pretest. The difference is found to be negligible for the academic assertiveness. Table 3 indicates that the ranges for pretest and posttest scores are equal for academic assertiveness, and very small for the cases of overall assertiveness and non-academic assertiveness. For further statistical analysis, the assertiveness scores have been summarized, and the descriptive data are presented in Table 4 as follows.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of the Pretest and Posttest Scores of Assertiveness

Source of Variation	N	Mean	SD	SE
Pre-training overall assertiveness test	82	113.82	25.254	2.789
Post-training overall assertiveness test	82	116.99	25.295	2.793
Pre-training non-academic assertiveness test	82	53.35	13.508	1.492
Post-training non-academic assertiveness test	82	56.12	13.578	1.499
Pre-training academic assertiveness test	82	60.46	14.011	1.547
Post-training academic assertiveness test	82	60.99	13.840	1.528

Table 4 shows that in all three comparisons (overall, non-academic, and academic assertiveness), the mean scores of the posttest are higher than the mean scores of the pretest. A close look at the mean differences of the three comparisons indicates that the mean differences for overall and non-academic assertiveness scores are similar and small. While the mean difference for the academic assertiveness is very small, almost negligible (0.53), (that is, 60.46 with 14.011 SD and 60.99 with 13.840 SD for pretest and posttest academic assertiveness, respectively).

To test the significance of the mean differences observed between the scores of pretest and posttest for each of the three cases of comparisons, a paired t-test was employed, and the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: T-test for the Differences of Pretest and Posttest Scores of Assertiveness

Source of variation	M	SD	SE	t	df	Sig (2 tailed)
Pre-training total assertiveness test	-3.171	2.647	.292	-10.846	81	.000
Post-training total assertiveness test						
Pre-training non-academic assertiveness test	-2.768	2.374	.262	-10.558	81	.000
Post-training non-academic assertiveness test						
Pre-training academic assertiveness test	-.524	1.381	.152	-3.439	81	.001
Post-training academic assertiveness test						

Table 5 shows that in all three comparisons, the differences between posttest and pretest scores of assertiveness are statistically significant, with a higher mean score of posttest in comparison to pretest. That is, $t(81) = -10.846$, $p = .000$, $t(81) = -10.558$, $p = .000$, and $t(81) = -3.439$, $p = .000$, respectively, for the overall, non-academic, and academic assertiveness scores. Though the t-test shows a significant increase in posttest as a result of the training, a close look at the raw scores of the participants shows that the differences in pretest score and posttest score for most students are very small, in the case of the overall and non-academic assertiveness. The increase for the majority of the participants was not more than a score of five. While for academic assertiveness, the increase for each participant was only a score of one or two points, and for some, there was no difference at all. In general, the increase in the assertiveness level as a result of training for many of the individual scores was small, and it was negligible in the case of academic assertiveness.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Content of Life Skills Training

The first basic research question of this study focuses on the relevance of the contents used for training assertiveness in the LST for female students. Information obtained through analysis of the training modules indicated that the contents included in the “psychosocial factors” module for the assertiveness training align with contents indicated in various literatures (MoWCYA & MoE, 2012; WHO, 2013) about the subject matter of assertiveness in life skills education. The contents indicated in literature and presented in the training module were concerned with the concepts of assertiveness and non-assertiveness, importance of assertiveness, features of assertive and non-assertive behaviors, how to be assertive, challenges to assertive behaviors, assertiveness in relation to university campus life, how can non-assertive behavior affect one's study, and how can being assertive improve my study. As information collected from trainers through interviews, though the contents presented in the training module were relevant and adequate, due to the inadequate time allocated for the training in the university, trainers were unable to properly treat and sufficiently cover the contents identified and designed for the training. That is, out of the 6:00 hours allocated in the training module for the assertiveness training, only 1:30 hours have been used. This seems to have a negative influence on the effectiveness of the training. Thus, it implies that the existing practice of time allocation for the female students' LST in the university shall be reviewed and revised to allocate sufficient time for the training.

5.2 The Methods Used in The Life Skills Training

The second research question of this study addresses the appropriateness of the methods used for the training. Information obtained through analysis of the training module indicated that a variety of active training methods to be used were identified and presented in the module. However, some important active training methods like role play and debate were missing in the content for assertiveness training (MoWCYA & MoE, 2012).

Except this, the approach of active learning methods presented in the training module aligns with the methods indicated in various literatures (WHO, 1996; Bandura, 1977; Goleman, 1995; Parker, Saklofske, Wood, & Collin, 2009) about life skills education in particular and attitude and skill acquisition learning or training in general.

As information obtained from trainers through interview and from observation in the training sessions, though appropriate training methods were presented in the module, in the training process, out of 6:00 hours allocated in the module for assertiveness training, only 1:30 hours have been used due to inadequate time allocated by the university for LST training as a whole. As a result, trainers were unable to use such a variety of active training methods as required. They were forced to use more of a lecture method, which is inappropriate for skill and attitude development in trainees. From this finding, it can be considered that the insufficient use of active training methods would have a negative influence on the contribution of LST training to increasing the students' assertiveness level. It is well known in pedagogy that active learning methods are effective in developing attitude and other social traits and skills in learners or trainees. Thus, the misuse of appropriate active training methods in the training might lower the effectiveness of the training. This implies that AMU shall rethink and allocate adequate time for LST training.

5.3 Effect of Life Skills Training on Assertiveness

The third basic research question, which guided this study, concerned about the contribution of the LST offered to the female students to enhance their assertiveness level. Analysis of the data indicated that the training has a significant contribution to increasing the assertiveness level of students. This finding is in line with the findings of various studies in which assertiveness training has increased the assertiveness level of learners (Ebrahim et al, 2022; Ahmad, Fariba, Faramarz & Ellahe, 2018; Sadat & Piri, 2021). Close observation of the results disclosed that though the increase in assertiveness level of the students due to the training was found to be statistically significant, the data shows that the extent of increase in the mean scores was very small. Especially, the increase in academic assertiveness is negligible.

The mean scores have shown a small increase in assertiveness level as a result of LST. But, close observation on the raw scores of each participant discloses that for some (4) students, there is no change, for some (6) only one point score increase, and even for some (3) students, a decrease of the score by one point in the case of overall assertiveness. In general, the small extent of the increase in the assertiveness level is not surprising, for it seems accounted for the inadequate time allocation for the training by the university which in turn resulted in trainers' unuse of active training methods and unable to treat and cover the contents of the training properly as designed in the modules.

This lower extent of effect could be explained by the inadequate extent of content coverage coupled with insufficient practice of active methods of training, as indicated in Kawalekar (2017). Here, attention has to be given to improve the situation of misuse of time and methods and the inadequate treatment of content identified by the professionals

who designed the LST material at the national level. Such misuses of the nationally set standard likely lead to losing the extent of advantage that could be gained from the LST. This implies that the mismatch of the training methods employed and content coverage accomplished in the training process in the university with the nationally planned methods and contents of the LST could jeopardize the proper attainment of the purpose of the training. This seems to pinpoint that the university has to look for a mechanism to improve the situation of the training provision through proper and adequate allocation of the training time.

The contribution of the training to increase academic affairs assertiveness was found to be negligible (mean difference of 0.53). While in the cases of the overall and non-academic assertiveness, the mean differences, which show the effect of training, are higher in comparison to the difference in academic assertiveness. The idea described by Willingham cited in Nair and Fahimirad (2009) and Carrobbles cited in Ghodrati et al. (2006) as assertiveness behavior is not an individual's stable and general traits, rather a person may be sufficiently assertive in some situation and passive in some other situation, could explain the variation observed in the effect in the case of academic assertiveness in compare to overall and non-academic affairs. This seems to indicate that a further, more systematic and detailed assessment of the content relevance and adequacy in the practice of the training needs to be carried out regarding the academic affairs assertiveness.

In conducting the quasi-experiment of this study, there was no control group to make a comparison with the assertiveness score increase in the posttest as a result of the training. Therefore, in conducting further studies on the effectiveness of LST, researchers have to consider and avoid this limitation.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The contents and methods identified in the training modules were found to be relevant and appropriate for the students' LST as per ideas in the literatures. However, due to inadequate time allocated for the training by the university, it seems to be challenging for trainers to treat the contents adequately and properly by using the identified appropriate active training methods.

The female students' LST offered in the university seems to have contributed to increasing the assertiveness level of the students in general. However, the extent of the contribution seems to be small. The extent of the contribution varies for non-academic and academic affairs assertiveness, that is, a higher contribution for non-academic affairs in comparison to academic affairs, which was observed to be very small.

6.2 Recommendations

AMU administration has to increase the number of female students' LST training time to enable trainers to accomplish the training adequately through proper treatment of the contents identified for LST by using a variety of active training methods.

To increase the students' interest in being engaged in LST sessions, the training should be offered before the commencement of the semester class, by admitting first-year female students one week in advance of admitting all first-year students.

Further research should be conducted by making a detailed analysis of the academic affairs-related contents of assertiveness in the module, plus a control group included in the experiment to assess the effect of LST on the assertiveness level of female students.

Acknowledgements

My gratitude goes to the female students at AMU who participated in responding to the assertiveness rating scale. I am grateful to all the trainers of LST, the dean of the Pedagogical and Behavioral Sciences School, and the head of the Department of Psychology at AMU, who willingly participated in the interviews to collect necessary information for this study. My heartfelt thanks go to the director and experts at the Gender Directorate Office of AMU for carrying out observation in the training sessions to collect data about methods used in the training, as well as for administering the assertiveness scale to the students before and after the training.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest. He confirms that this research paper submitted for publication which entitled as "The Contents, Methods, and Effect of Female Students' Life Skills Training on Assertiveness of the Students at Arba Minch University, Ethiopia" is his original work and has not been published, nor currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

About the Author

Dr. Damtew Darza is Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the Department of Psychology in Arba Minch University. He received his BA degree in Pedagogy from Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia, MA degree in Educational Psychology from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, and PhD in Educational Psychology from Andhra University, India. His research interest focuses on educational psychology, measurement and evaluation in education and psychology, developmental psychology, teacher professional development and special needs education. He has participation in reviewing research articles for publication on national and international reputable journals. His links to academic networks:

Institutional webpage: www.amu.edu.et;

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9019-1783>.

References

- Ahmad, A., Fariba, Y., Faramarz, H., & Ellahe, H. (2018). Investigation of the Effect of Life Skills Training on Self-esteem, Expression and Aggression in High School Students in Fereydan City. *Estudios Culturales y Sociales* 5(16), 829-854. Retrieved from <https://revistapublicando.org/revista/index.php/crv/article/view/1550>.
- Andrews, J. & Higson, H. (2008). Graduate employability, soft skills versus hard business knowledge: An European Study. *Higher Education in Europe*, 33(4), 411-422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03797720802522627>.
- Baloch, B.Q., Saleem, M., Zaman, G. & Fida, A. (2014). The impact of emotional intelligence on employees' performance. *Journal of Managerial Sciences*, 8(2), 208-227. Retrieved from <https://businessleadershiptoday.com/what-is-the-role-of-emotional-intelligence-in-employee-performance/>.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. Retrieved from https://www.asecib.ase.ro/mps/Bandura_SocialLearningTheory.pdf.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social Cognitive Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1985-98423-000>.
- Bandura, A. (1991a). *Self-efficacy mechanism in physiological activation and health-promoting behavior*. In J. Madden, IV (Ed.), *Neurobiology of learning, emotion and affect* (pp. 229-270). New York: Raven. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/25013297_Neurobiology_of_Learning_Emotion_and_Affect.
- Benn, L., Harvey J. E., Gilbert, P., & Irons, C. (2005). Social rank, interpersonal trust and recall of parental rearing in relation to homesickness. *Personal Individual Difference* 38: 1813-1822. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2004.11.010>.
- Ebrahim, S.M., Radwan, H.A., & El-Amrosy, S.H. (2022). The effectiveness of life skills training on assertiveness, self-esteem and aggressive behavior among patients with substance use disorders. *International Egyptian Journal of Nursing Sciences and Research*, 2 (2), 413-431. <https://doi.org/10.21608/ejnsr.2022.212482>.
- El Sayed, H., Ali, R.M., Ahmed, F. Mohy, H. (2019). The Effect of Life Skills Intervention on Social Self-Efficacy for Prevention of Drug Abuse Among Young Adolescent Students at Benha City. *American Journal of Nursing Science*, 8(5), 263-273. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajns.20190805.19>.
- Galata S. (2018). Assertiveness and academic achievement motivation of adolescent students in selected secondary schools of Harari Peoples Regional State, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.6n.4p.40>.
- Ghodrati, F., Tavakoli, P., Heydari, M., Akbarzadeh, N. (2006). Investigating the relationship between self-esteem, assertiveness and academic achievement in female high school students. *Health Science Journal*, 10(4), 1-5. Retrieved from https://www.ijcmaas.com/images/archieve/IJCMAAS_JUNE_2016_VOL11_ISS1_14.pdf.
- Goleman, D. D. (1995). Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ for character, health and lifelong achievement. Retrieved from <https://learnsteer.sasnaka.org/wp>

- content/uploads/2022/07/Emotional%20Intelligence%20Why%20it%20Can%20Matter%20More%20Than%20IQ%20%28Daniel%20Goleman%29%20%28z-lib.org%29.pdf.
- Harmin, M. (1994). Inspiring active learning: A handbook for teachers. *Association for Supervisors and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia, USA*. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED368709>.
- Huurre, T., Aro, H., Rahkonen, O., and Komulainen, E. (2006). Health, lifestyle, family and school factors in adolescence: Predicting adult educational level. *Educational Research*, 48(1), 41-53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880500498438>.
- Kawalekar, D. (2017). The value of life skills in higher education. *IOSR Journal of Research and Method in Education (IOSRJRME)*, 07(03), 43-46. Retrieved from <https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jrme/papers/Vol-7%20Issue-3/Version-5/H0703054346.pdf>.
- Mangal, S.K and Mangal, S. (2007). *Development of learner and teaching learning process*. International Publishing House. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/LEARNING_AND_TEACHING.html?id=AcmlDwAAQBAI&redir_esc=y.
- Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs and Ministry of Education (2012). *Life Skills Manual for University Students*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Unpublished.
- Moon, J. (2009). *Academic assertiveness real life strategies for today's higher education students*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Nair, P.K. and Fahimirad, M. (2019). A qualitative study on the importance of life skills on undergraduate students' personal and social competencies. *International Journal of Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v8n5p71>
- Oladipo, A., Arigbabu, A., & Rufai, K. (2012). Gender, need-achievement and assertiveness as factors of conceptions about maths among secondary school students in Ogun State, Nigeria. *Review of European Studies*, 4(4), 141-147. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/res.v4n4p141>.
- Parker, J.D.A., Saklofske, D.H., Wood, L.M. & Collin, T. (2009). The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Education. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-88370-13>
- Petterson, T., Arnetz, D. (2001). Factor Analysis and Predictors of Student Stressors. *Psychotherapy Psychosomatic*, 70(3), 39-94.
- Rathus, S. (1978). *Assertive training: Rationales, procedures, and controversies*. In Whiteley, J. M., and Flowers, J. V. (eds), *Approaches to Assertion Training*, Brooks-Cole, Monterey, Calif; 48-83. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0272-7358\(87\)90006-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0272-7358(87)90006-7).
- Rathus, S. A. (1973). A simple version of the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule for Assessing Assertiveness Behavior. *Behavior Therapy*, 4, 398-406.
- Rathus, S.A. (1998). An experimental investigation of assertive training in a group setting. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 3(2), 81-86. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7916\(72\)90003-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7916(72)90003-1).
- Reza, F. (2011). Effectiveness of academic and life skills instruction on the freshmen academic achievement. *Journal of Science and Biomedicine*, 2(4), 137-141. Retrieved from <https://jlsb.science-line.com/attachments/article/16/JLSB-%202012-%20B28,%20137-141.pdf>.

- Sadat, A. N. and Piri, L. (2001). The Effectiveness of Life Skills Training on Assertiveness and Work Engagement among Staff of Shemiranat Welfare Vocational Centers. *International Journal of Occupational Hygiene*, 13(3). Retrieved from <https://ijoh.tums.ac.ir/index.php/ijoh/article/view/511>.
- Tahereh M. H., Shahram M., and Mohammad H. (2011). The effectiveness of life skills training on happiness, quality of life and emotion regulation. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 407-411. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.10.080>.
- Turner, B. (1992). Gender Difference in old age in rating of aggressiveness/assertiveness. *Current Psychology*, 11(2), 122-127. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02686834>.
- Verschuur M., Eurlings-Bonteko E. H. M., Spinhoven, P., Duijsens I. N. (2003). Homesickness, temperament and character. *Personal Individual Difference*; 35: 757-770. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869\(02\)00281-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(02)00281-7).
- World Health Organization (1997). Life Skills Education in Schools. Geneva: World Health Organization – Program on Mental Health.
- World Health Organization. (1993). Life skills education in schools (WHO/MNH/PSF/93. A Rev. 1). Retrieved from <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/338491/MNH-PSF-96.2.Rev.1-eng.pdf>.
- World Health Organization. (1996). Life skills education: Planning for research as an integral part of life skills education development, implementation, and maintenance. Retrieved from <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/338491>.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).