

An Empirical Study of Assertiveness Among Business Students: A Case Study of Nizwa College of Technology, Sultanate of Oman

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Abstract

Increasing assertive behavior becomes an expression of person's feelings. Learning assertive techniques are considered as tools for coping skills with a variety of life stressors. The aim of this study is to assess the types of assertiveness and to measure the degree among the higher education students. A sample of 102 advanced diploma students in business department from Nizwa College of Technology, Sultanate of Oman is taken for the study. The analysis revealed that 52% of the advanced diploma students exhibit assertive behavior and 19.6% are in the aggressive level. HR specialization students show more of assertive behavior than others. There is no significant relationship or association between stages of assertiveness behavior across specialization of students and gender. Marketing specialization students have high level of assertiveness than other specialization students. Male students also have high level of assertiveness than female students.

Keywords: Aggressiveness, assertive behavior, level of assertiveness

1. Introduction

Assertive behavior involves expressing our legitimate rights as an individual. Everyone has the right to express our own wants, needs, feelings and ideas. Other individuals have a right too to respond to our assertiveness with their own ideas and feelings. Therefore, an assertive behavior involves a negotiating agreeable compromise. By assertive behavior we open the way for honest relationships with others. Assertive behavior accompanied by appropriate assertive body language makes the message clear and impactful. It is a skill that can be learned by frequent practice. Assertiveness is one of the essential skills in the modern working environment. It is helpful wherever people work in groups. Being assertive increases self-confidence, better time management, helps in being direct, expressive, spontaneous, honest and self - enhancing. A brief description about the assertiveness behavior is explained below;

1.1 Assertive Behavior: Assertive persons make their own choices and usually achieve their goals, be truthful to self and straight forward. Behaving assertively creates free, honest and open relationship with others. Assertiveness has been defined as "the expression of one's feelings, needs, preference, or opinions in a non-threatening, non-punitive manner" (Hollandsworth, 1977).

1.2 Non Assertive Behavior: Nonassertive behavior implies being passive without expressing one's feelings, needs and ideas; ignoring personal rights and allowing others to infringe upon. Nonassertive behavior is usually emotionally dishonest, indirect, inhibited and self-denying. People often chooses nonassertive behavior to avoid unpleasant situations, tension, conflicts and confrontation.

1.3 Aggressive behavior: Aggressive behavior includes expressing one's feelings, needs and ideas at the expense of others. Aggressive persons stand up for their rights but ignore the rights of others and may dominate or humiliate other people. Even though this behavior is expressive, it is also defensive, hostile and self-defeating. Such behavior can cause physical or emotional harm to others. It may range from verbal abuse to physical abuse. Aggressive behavior can lead to breakdowns in relationships. Aggression refers to an action with the intent to be destructive or control others through force (Averill 1983; Carlson et al. 1989).

2. Literature Review

Assertiveness is a substantial communication style that enhances successful relationships with families and colleagues (Mahmoud et al. 2013). Assertiveness is an expression of self-esteem. There are many benefits of being assertive such as better time management, increased self-esteem and the ability to negotiate more effectively (Abed et al. 2015). Studies have shown that individuals who have assertive behaviors generally have higher self-worth and are more successful in life. Assertive persons maintain self-respect and respect others. Assertive behavior directly expresses one's true basic feelings, needs, desires, opinions and personal rights in a positive, productive way without denying the rights of others. It enables one to act in her or his interests without undue anxiety. Assertive individuals claim their own rights, make requests of others, can say no to things they do not want, accept praise and can easily verbalizes their feelings. All of these make individuals' lives easier and experience positive responses from others. This in turn can decrease anxiety and increase confidence in

interpersonal relations (Shimizu, 2004); Deltsidou (2008). Assertive training program is a systemic approach to more assertive self-expression, based on a balance between achieving one's own goals and respecting the needs of others. It is a psychological intervention which helps participants learn to integrate assertive behavior skills into their daily lives. It deals with attitudes, beliefs, and cognitions about assertiveness as well as specific, overt assertive behaviors (Lin et al. 2004).

3. Statement of the problem

There are three major departments in Nizwa College of Technology namely, Engineering, Information Technology and Business departments. Whereas Engineering and Information Technology departments are more oriented towards laboratory experiments and practical training, business students require more of interpersonal, personality and communication skills. Further these skills are more required for Marketing, Human Resource and Accounting students. Students after completion of advanced diploma level prefer to go for job or for Bachelors. This is the ideal stage where they should be aware of and can be groomed on assertiveness. Thus this study is conducted among Advanced diploma students so that assertiveness can be identified and improved for their career development. This study is focused on developing a model or a strategy for improving assertiveness among business students.

4. Significance of the study

The current trend in the educational sector is inclined towards team working with a multidisciplinary approach. It is observed that conflicts in teams and poor team work results from a non-assertive group culture. Good team culture can be developed if the team members learn to be assertive. The students can play a pivotal role in providing quality to the stakeholders. Non-assertiveness can lead to stress, low self-esteem, helplessness and poor job satisfaction leading to poor job retention and high staff turnover. Students from higher education institutes aim for the job after completion of their course. It is therefore very crucial that students are taught and encouraged to be assertive in their practice (Macaden, 2005). Students who have poor self-esteem and poor interpersonal skills exhibit negative attitudes and behaviours. In order to be more comfortable in their communication within society and more effective in their professional knowledge and skills, it is necessary for them to be more assertive and have high self-esteem (McCabe & Timmins, 2003). Accordingly, it is significantly important to enhance assertiveness and self-esteem of students through implementing an assertiveness skills training (Abed et al. 2015).

5. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are;

1. To identify the types of assertive behavior of higher education students.
2. To analyse the assertiveness behavior of students based on gender and specialization.
3. To identify the association of assertiveness between gender and specialization.
4. To determine the levels of assertiveness and the association between gender and specialization.

6. Research Methodology

The sample frame for the study is Advanced Diploma students from Business Studies Department of Nizwa College of Technology, Sultanate of Oman. A sample of 102 participants from three specializations were included for the study namely; Human Resource, Accounting and Marketing. The sampling method adopted is purposive sampling method. Primary data is collected using a structured questionnaire. Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) is used and instrument is developed based on this model. Of all the assertiveness instruments, the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS; Rathus 1973) is the most widely referenced more often than any other assertiveness instrument (Renee & Howard, 2011). The study period was during October 2016 to December 2016.

7. Analysis and Discussions

Table 1. Assertiveness behavior of students

Behaviour types	No of students
Aggressive	20 (19.6)
Assertive	53 (52)
Somewhat Assertive	27 (26.4)
Situationally non- assertive	1 (1)
Very non-assertive	1 (1)
Total	102

(Values in parenthesis represent percentage)

Table 1 shows behavior of students with the corresponding number and percentages. Out of the 102

students selected for the study, 20 students (19.6%) exhibit aggressive behaviour. There are 53 students (52%) who belong to assertive stage and 27 students (26.4%) are somewhat assertive in their behavior. A very small percentage (1%) of students belong to situationally non – assertive and very non- assertive behaviour respectively. Majority of students are found to exhibit assertive behavior. Somewhat assertive, situationally non – assertive and very non – assertive students are found to exhibit submissive/passive behavior.

Table 2 Assertiveness behaviour specialization wise

Behaviour types	Accounting	Marketing	Human Resource
Aggressive	4 (9.5)	11 (37)	5 (17)
Assertive	20 (47.5)	12 (40)	21 (70)
Somewhat Assertive	18 (43)	6 (20)	3 (10)
Situationally non- assertive	0	0	1 (3)
Very non-assertive	0	1 (3)	0
Total	42	30	30

(Values in parenthesis represent percentage)

Table 2 shows assertiveness behaviour based on the specialization of advanced diploma students. Out of 42 students from accounting specialization 4 students (9.5%) shows aggressive behaviour. There are 20 students (47.5%) who exhibit assertive behaviour. Among the Accounting specialization students, 18 students (43%) belong to somewhat assertive category. Thus majority of accounting specialization students are assertive.

In case of Marketing specialization, 11 students (37%) out of 30 students are aggressive. Students who exhibit assertive behavior constitutes 12 (40%) and 6 students (20%) show somewhat assertive behavior. Only 3% of students are very non- assertive. Thus majority of the marketing specialization students are assertive.

Out of 30 students from Human Resource specialization, 5 students (17%) shows aggressive behaviour, 21 students (70%) are assertive, 3 students (10%) are somewhat assertive and 1 student (3%) is situationally non – assertive. Thus majority of students from Human Resource specialization are assertive.

Thus, comparing the students from three specializations, assertiveness is more for HR specialization students (70%) followed by accounting specialization (47.5%) and marketing specialization (40%). Accounting specialization has least percentage of aggressive students (9.5%) followed by HR specialization (17%). Marketing students exhibit more aggressive behavior than others.

Thus the following hypothesis is proposed and tested.

H0: *There is no association between the assertiveness behavior and student's specialization.*

H1: *There is an association between the assertiveness behaviour and student's specialization.*

Table 3 ANOVA (Assertiveness behavior and specialization)

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit.
Between Groups	19.2	2	9.6	0.14307	0.86815	3.885294
Within Groups	805.2	12	67.1			
Total	824.4	14				

The p value is greater than 0.05 and hence and therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. It is concluded that there is no significant relationship or association between assertiveness behavior across specialization of students.

Table 4 Assertiveness behaviour gender wise

Behaviour types	Males	Females
Aggressive	6 (28.5)	14 (17)
Assertive	10 (47.5)	43 (53)
Somewhat Assertive	5 (24)	22 (27)
Situationally non- assertive	0	1 (1.5)
Very non-assertive	0	1 (1.5)
Total	21	81

(Values in parenthesis represent percentage)

Table 4 shows assertiveness behavior gender wise. Out of the 102 students selected for the study, 6 male students (28.5%) are aggressive and 14 female students (17%) students are aggressive. The assertive male students are 10 (47.5%) and assertive female students are 43 (53%). Out of the male students, 5 students (24%) are somewhat assertive in their behavior and 22 female students (27%) are also somewhat assertive. Female students who belong to the category of situationally non- assertive and very non – assertive behavior constitute 3%.

From the table 4 it is clear that assertiveness for female students (53%) is higher than that of male students (47.5%). It is also clear that the percentage of aggressive male students (28.5%) is more than that of aggressive female students (17%). Compared to women, however, men reported higher levels of aggressive assertiveness. This is consistent with past research that found men reporting higher levels of hostility and

physical aggression than did women (Buss and Perry, 1992). Although not all research finds gender differences in assertiveness (Kogan et al. 1995), some research found gender differences in assertiveness with men having higher levels of assertiveness than women (Costa et al. 2001; Feingold, 1994).

Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward and tested.

H0: *There is no association between assertiveness behaviour and gender.*

H1: *There is an association between assertiveness behavior and gender.*

	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	4.2	16.2
Variance	18.2	304.7
Observations	5	5
Pearson Correlation	0.95	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	4	
t Stat	-1.99	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.11	
t Critical two-tail	2.77	

The p value is greater than 0.05 and hence and therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. It is concluded that there is no significant relationship or association between assertiveness stages and gender.

Levels of Assertiveness

The average value of assertiveness is calculated as 27.84 and the standard deviation is 15.20. According to Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (1973), score between + 20 to +40 is assertive. In order to find the level of assertiveness based on specialization, Mean + or – standard deviation is applied.

Table 6 Assertiveness levels specialization wise

Specialization	Low	Medium	High	Total
Human Resource	2 (7)	26 (86)	2 (7)	30
Accounting	7 (17)	33 (78)	2 (5)	42
Marketing	5 (17)	17 (57)	8 (26)	30
Total	14 (14)	76 (74.5)	12 (11.5)	102

(Values in parenthesis represent percentage)

Table 6 shows that 17% of the Accounting and Marketing students have low level of assertiveness level which is greater than the average (14%). Human Resource specialization students have medium level of assertiveness (86%) which is greater than the average (74.5%). For Marketing students, the medium assertiveness level is less than the average of 74.5%. It is found that 26% of the Marketing students have high level of assertiveness which is greater than the average of 11.5%. Only 7% of the Human Resource and 5% of Accounting specialization students have high level of assertiveness which is less than the average (11.5%). *Ho: There is no significant relationship between specialization and levels of assertiveness.* The calculated value of χ^2 (11.58) is greater than the table value (9.48) at 5% confidence level with 4 degrees of freedom. The p value is 0.020 which is less than 0.5. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between specialization of students and assertiveness levels.

Table 7 Assertiveness levels gender wise

Gender	Low	Medium	High	Total
Males	2 (10)	15 (71)	4 (19)	21
Females	12 (15)	61 (75)	8 (10)	81
Total	14 (14)	76 (74.5)	12 (11.5)	102

(Values in parenthesis represent percentage)

It is clear from table 7 that 19% of the males have high level of assertiveness which is greater than the average (11.5%) while only 10% of the females have assertiveness which is less than the average. Female students have medium level of assertiveness (75%) and the medium level of assertiveness for males is 71%. Similarly, 15% of the females have low level of assertiveness compared to males (10%). The following hypothesis is thus framed and tested. *Ho: There is no significant relationship between gender and the level of assertiveness.* The calculated value of χ^2 (60.80) is greater than the table value (5.99) at 5% confidence level with 2 degrees of freedom. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence it is concluded that there is a significant difference between gender and assertiveness. Thus it is proved that male students have more assertiveness than the female students.

7.1 Coefficient of Variation

Coefficient of variation is the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean expressed as a percentage. It allows

meaningful comparisons between two or more magnitudes of variations, even if they have different means. It measures the relative variability of the data. Hence to get a better idea coefficient of variation is used. ($CV = \sigma/\mu \times 100$).

Table 8 Coefficient of variation

Specialization	Mean (μ)	SD (σ)	CV
Human Resource	29.9	11	36.78%
Accounting	22.6	11.89	52.61%
Marketing	33.13	20.28	61.21%
Gender			
Males	31.95	18.1	56.65%
Females	26.78	14.3	53.39%

The mean assertiveness for Marketing students is high with 33.13. The standard deviation is high for marketing specialization with 20.28. But when compared with other specializations it is found that the variation from the mean is less for human resource and is less spread out from the mean with coefficient of variation of 36.78%. There is more spread and variability from the mean for marketing specialization. Compared between the gender, there is greater dispersion from the mean for males. Even though there is slightly greater dispersion of female students from the mean, it is less spread out as the coefficient of variation is 53.39%.

8. Findings of the study

1. Among the advanced diploma students, 20 students (19.6%) exhibit aggressive behaviour. There are 53 students (52%) who exhibit assertive behaviour and 27 students (26.4%) are somewhat assertive in their behavior.
2. Assertive behavior is high for HR specialization students (70%) followed by accounting specialization (47.5%) and marketing specialization (40%). The assertiveness behavior of male students is 47.5% and assertive female students constitute 53%.
3. It is proved that there is no significant relationship or association between assertiveness behavior across specialization of students. Also it is proved that there is no significant relationship between assertiveness behavior and gender.
4. Human Resource specialization students have medium level of assertiveness (86%). For Accounting and Marketing students the medium assertiveness level is 78% and 57% respectively. It is found that 26% of the Marketing students have high level of assertiveness, Human Resource (7%) and Accounting specialization students (5%). There is a significant relationship between specialization of students and assertiveness levels. Thus it is concluded that Marketing specialization students have more assertiveness than other specialization students.
5. 19% of the males have high level of assertiveness, which is greater than the average (11.5%) while only 10% of the females have assertiveness. Female students have medium level of assertiveness (75%) and the medium level of assertiveness for males is 71%. It is proved that male students have more assertiveness than the female students.

9. Conclusion

Proper training on assertive teamwork helps to develop assertive behavior and respectful relationships among students. The present study results concluded that there is no significant relationship between the assertiveness stages of behavior with specialization of students and gender of students. Considering the degree or levels of assertiveness, it is found that there is a significant relationship between assertiveness and marketing specialization students. There is also a significant relationship between males and assertiveness. Assertiveness can be developed through proper training and experience over a course of time. It is concluded from the study that with effective implementation of assertiveness skills training programs, the levels of assertiveness of students can be improved. The study is useful particularly in higher education scenario as it recommends ways to improve assertiveness in students so that they become equipped and employable, productive citizens. Thus this study can be considered as a base for further longitudinal studies to improve the level of assertiveness. By education we mean the all-round development of an individual. Training helps them in their overall personality development so as to be successful in future. Assertive behavior is a learned skill. Future studies would be helpful to improve the assertiveness of students in higher educational institutes.

10. Recommendations

1. Being assertive is something that can be learned and developed over a course of time. Hence implementing communication skills and personality development training programs can help to increase the level of assertiveness.
2. Including and practicing the techniques of developing assertiveness in the curriculum is helpful in improving

assertiveness levels.

3. Assertiveness training programs can also be included as a part of the off-the-job training given to students in college. This helps the students to effect transfer of learning (i.e. applying previous learning experiences, skills, knowledge, attitudes etc. to real life situation.). The students can put these previous learning experiences into practice in real life or work situations. Hence it is recommended to include assertiveness development as a part of off-the-job training methods.

4. Assertiveness can be trained by encouraging group activities as part of academic evaluation methods.

5. Corporate environment demands team work. Assertive people can make a successful team by providing training on developing assertive listening and non-verbal assertiveness.

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