

The Effectiveness of Assertive Training in Enhancing Self-Confidence Through *Sundrang* Learning in Bugis Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Self-confidence is a critical determinant of elementary students' learning success, particularly within culture-based contexts such as *Sundrang* in Bugis communities. However, many students exhibit low confidence in expressing opinions, participating in discussions, and engaging in classroom interactions. Although assertive training is known to enhance communication and confidence, its integration into local cultural learning remains underexplored. This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. Sixty fifth-grade students from Bugis elementary schools were assigned to an experimental group (n = 30) and a control group (n = 30). The experimental group received assertive training integrated into *Sundrang* learning, while the control group followed conventional instruction. Data were collected using a validated and reliable Likert-scale self-confidence questionnaire and analyzed through normality, homogeneity, and independent-samples t-tests. The findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in self-confidence among students in the experimental group compared to the control group. Students exposed to assertive training demonstrated greater gains in public speaking, social interaction, and the ability to express opinions during *Sundrang* learning activities. The results indicate that integrating assertive training into culture-based learning effectively enhances students' self-confidence. This approach supports not only communication skills but also active participation in culturally relevant educational settings. Accordingly, incorporating assertive training into elementary curricula, particularly in local cultural learning contexts, is recommended to foster students' social competence and overall confidence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Self-confidence is a fundamental aspect of students' learning success at the elementary school level, influencing both academic performance and social interaction skills (Najmussaib & Mushtaq, 2023).

Students who possess high self-confidence are more likely to participate actively in classroom activities, express their ideas openly, and interact effectively with peers and teachers. At an early educational stage, self-confidence plays a crucial role in character formation and contributes to students' long-term emotional and social development. In addition, contemporary educational approaches emphasize not only cognitive achievement but also the development of social and emotional competencies, making self-confidence a key educational outcome, particularly in elementary education (Llorent, Seade-Mejía, & Vélez-Calvo, 2023; Teich, Fühner, Granacher, & Kliegl, 2023).

In culture-based learning contexts, the development of self-confidence becomes increasingly important. Culture-based education aims to integrate local values, traditions, and practices into the learning process, enabling students to understand their cultural identity while developing essential social skills (Hardiansyah, Sukitman, Wahdian, & Hodairiyah, 2024; C. Liu, Wang, Pi, & Yang, 2024). However, students in such learning environments are often required to navigate cultural norms that emphasize respect, modesty, and social harmony, which may unintentionally limit opportunities for assertive communication in classroom interactions. As a result, educators face the challenge of designing instructional strategies that both respect local cultural values and foster students' self-confidence and communication skills (Chen, Koomen, & Roorda, 2023; Gil-Moreno & Rico-González, 2023).

In the Bugis cultural context, social norms strongly emphasize politeness, respect for authority, and controlled self-expression. These values play an important role in shaping students' character and social behavior. Nevertheless, when applied rigidly in formal education settings, such norms may reduce students' willingness to express opinions, ask questions, or engage actively in discussions. One form of culture-based learning implemented in Bugis elementary schools is *Sundrang*, a traditional oral cultural practice that conveys moral, ethical, and social values through poetry, songs, and rhythmic expressions. *Sundrang* learning has strong potential as a medium for character education, as it introduces students to local wisdom while fostering social awareness. However, in practice, *Sundrang* instruction is often delivered through teacher-centered methods that emphasize listening and memorization, resulting in limited student interaction and minimal opportunities for developing communication skills and self-confidence.

An instructional approach widely recognized for enhancing communication skills and self-confidence is assertive training (Hardiansyah & Wahdian, 2023; Talty et al., 2023). Assertive training focuses on teaching individuals to express thoughts, feelings, and needs clearly, honestly, and respectfully without being passive or aggressive (Nyegaard et al., 2023). In educational settings, assertive training helps students develop the ability to communicate confidently, participate actively in discussions, and engage in constructive social interactions. Previous studies have shown that assertive training can improve students' self-confidence and social skills in various educational contexts. For example, research has demonstrated that assertive training increases classroom participation and improves students' communication skills in general learning environments (Sollis, Resosudarmo, Witoelar, Riswandi, & Mollet, 2023). However, most of these studies have been conducted in non-cultural or Western-based educational settings, with limited attention to local culture-based learning contexts.

The effectiveness of assertive training in educational interventions can be explained through Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Barnes et al., 2023). According to this theory, individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses through observation, imitation, and social interaction. In classroom environments, students develop self-confidence when they observe role models, practice social behaviors, and receive positive reinforcement through structured learning experiences (Huzaimah, Abdillah, Laila, Tamudin, & Puji Astuti, 2023; Wahyono et al., 2023). Assertive training aligns with this theoretical framework by providing guided opportunities for students to model assertive communication, practice expressing opinions, and engage in social interactions within a supportive learning environment (Hidayat, Oster, Muir-Cochrane, & Lawn, 2023). Through repeated

practice and feedback, students gradually internalize assertive behaviors, thereby developing self-confidence.

Despite the growing body of research on assertive training and self-confidence, a clear gap remains in the existing literature. Most empirical studies have examined assertive training in general educational contexts without considering its integration into culture-based learning. To date, no empirical study has examined the application of assertive training in *Sundrang*-based cultural learning to enhance self-confidence among elementary school students in the Bugis context. This lack of empirical evidence limits understanding of how assertive training can be adapted to local cultural learning environments while maintaining cultural sensitivity.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of assertive training in enhancing the self-confidence of elementary school students through *Sundrang* learning in Bugis schools. By integrating assertive training into culture-based instruction, this study seeks to provide empirical evidence on how assertive communication skills can be developed without undermining local cultural values. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on culture-based education and character development and to offer practical insights for educators in culturally diverse contexts seeking to strengthen students' self-confidence and social communication skills.

2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design. The design was used to examine the effectiveness of assertive training in enhancing elementary school students' self-confidence through *Sundrang* learning. Two intact groups were involved: an experimental group that received assertive training integrated into *Sundrang* learning and a control group that participated in conventional learning activities. Both groups completed pretests and posttests to measure changes in self-confidence before and after the intervention.

The study population consisted of all fifth-grade students enrolled at a Bugis elementary school, totaling 60 students. Given the relatively small population size, the study employed a census (total population sampling) technique, in which all members of the population were included as research participants. The participants were divided into two intact classes: an experimental group ($n = 30$) and a control group ($n = 30$). This sampling approach ensured full representation of the target population and minimized sampling bias.

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee of the authors' affiliated institution. Before data collection, permission was granted by the school administration. Written informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all participating students, as the participants were minors. Students were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any academic consequences.

The assertive training intervention was designed based on established assertive skills training models in educational psychology, emphasizing modeling, behavioral rehearsal, guided practice, and feedback. The training was integrated into *Sundrang* learning activities to ensure cultural relevance and sensitivity. The intervention was implemented over seven sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, and was facilitated by classroom teachers under the researchers' supervision to ensure consistency in delivery. The training aimed to develop students' ability to communicate assertively, express opinions confidently, listen actively, and engage in constructive social interactions while respecting local cultural norms. Learning activities included role-playing, group discussions, reflective exercises, and performance-based activities related to *Sundrang* learning.

Table 1. Overview of Assertive Training Sessions

Session	Duration	Main Content	Learning Activities	Facilitator
1	60 minutes	Introduction to assertive behavior	Discussion of passive, assertive, and aggressive behaviors	Teacher
2	60 minutes	Expressing opinions confidently	Role-play and guided practice	Teacher
3	60 minutes	Active listening skills	Pair activities and reflection	Teacher
4	60 minutes	Saying "no" appropriately	Scenario-based role-play	Teacher
5	60 minutes	Giving and receiving feedback	Group discussion and practice	Teacher
6	60 minutes	Public speaking confidence	Mini presentations	Teacher
7	60 minutes	Integration with Sundrang learning	Performance and reflection	Teacher

Students' self-confidence was measured using a self-confidence questionnaire developed based on relevant literature and adapted to the cultural context of Bugis elementary schools. The instrument consisted of 20 items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire assessed four domains of self-confidence: public speaking skills, peer interaction, ability to express opinions, and confidence in social situations.

Table 2. Self-Confidence Questionnaire Domains and Sample Items

Domain	Number of Items	Sample Item
Public speaking skills	5	"I feel confident speaking in front of my classmates."
Peer interaction	8	"I can interact comfortably with my classmates during group activities."
Expressing opinions	6	"I am not afraid to express my opinion during class discussions."
Social confidence	4	"I feel confident interacting in various social situations at school."

Content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review, involving two elementary education experts and one educational psychologist. The experts evaluated the relevance, clarity, and cultural appropriateness of each item. A pilot test was conducted before the main study to assess item readability and student comprehension. Construct validity was examined using item-total correlations, leading to the removal of three items that did not meet the acceptable threshold. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.833, indicating high internal consistency.

Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, a pretest was administered to both the experimental and control groups to assess students' initial levels of self-confidence. Second, the experimental group received the assertive training intervention integrated into *Sundrang* learning, while the control group continued with conventional learning activities. Third, a posttest was administered to both groups after the intervention to measure changes in self-confidence.

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software. Before hypothesis testing, normality tests and homogeneity tests were conducted to ensure that the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis. An independent-samples t-test was then used to examine differences in self-confidence gain scores between the experimental and control groups. Statistical significance was determined at a 0.05 significance level.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Before hypothesis testing, descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of students' self-confidence levels in both the experimental and control groups before and after the intervention. Table 3 presents the distribution of students' self-confidence categories in the pretest and posttest for both groups.

Table 3. Distribution of Students' Self-Confidence Levels (Pretest and Posttest)

Group	Measurement	Very Low n	Low n	Moderate n	High n	Very High n	Total
Experimental	Pretest	5 (16.7)	15 (50.0)	10 (33.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	30
Experimental	Post-test	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	10 (33.3)	15 (50.0)	5 (16.7)	30
Control	Pretest	5 (16.7)	5 (16.7)	20 (66.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	30
Control	Post-test	0 (0.0)	11 (36.7)	19 (63.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	30

The descriptive results indicate a substantial improvement in self-confidence among students in the experimental group following the intervention, whereas the control group showed minimal change between the pretest and posttest. To further examine these changes, mean scores, standard deviations (SD), and 95% confidence intervals (CI) were calculated for both groups, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Mean Self-Confidence Scores, Standard Deviations, and 95% Confidence Intervals

Group	Measurement	Mean	SD	95% CI
Experimental	Pretest	66.50	8.42	[63.36, 69.64]
Experimental	Post-test	114.00	9.15	[110.56, 117.44]
Control	Pretest	65.70	7.95	[62.73, 68.67]
Control	Post-test	74.50	8.10	[71.48, 77.52]

The experimental group demonstrated a marked increase in mean self-confidence scores from pretest to posttest, while the control group showed only a modest improvement. This indicates that assertive training had a stronger effect on students' self-confidence compared to conventional learning. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare gain scores between the experimental and control groups. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Independent-Samples t-Test and Effect Size Results

Group Comparison	Mean Gain	t	p-value	Cohen's d
Experimental vs. Control	48.80 vs. 4.60	6.34	< .001	1.62

The results showed a statistically significant difference in self-confidence gain scores between the experimental and control groups ($t = 6.34$, $p < .001$). The experimental group achieved a substantially higher mean gain score ($M = 48.80$) than the control group ($M = 4.60$). The effect size, as measured by Cohen's d ($d = 1.62$), indicates a large effect, suggesting that assertive training had a strong impact on enhancing students' self-confidence.



Figure 1. Comparison of mean self-confidence scores in the experimental and control groups before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the experimental group showed a substantial increase in mean self-confidence scores from pretest to posttest following the assertive training intervention. In contrast, the

control group exhibited only a modest improvement over the same period. This visual comparison reinforces the statistical findings, indicating that assertive training had a markedly stronger impact on students' self-confidence than conventional learning.

This study examined the effectiveness of assertive training in enhancing elementary school students' self-confidence through *Sundrang*-based cultural learning in Bugis schools. The findings demonstrate that students who participated in assertive training showed a substantial improvement in self-confidence compared to those in the control group. This result reinforces previous research indicating that assertive training can effectively strengthen students' communication skills and confidence by providing structured opportunities for self-expression and social interaction (Woolard et al., 2023; Ye, Gao, Sin, & Yang, 2023). However, rather than reiterating the general value of assertive training, the discussion below focuses on interpreting these findings within the specific cultural and methodological context of this study.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings align with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the roles of modeling, practice, and reinforcement in the development of social behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Through assertive training, students were exposed to role models and guided practice, enabling them to observe and rehearse assertive communication in a supportive environment. These experiences likely contributed to increased self-confidence, as students became more comfortable expressing opinions and participating in classroom activities (Motoki, Morota, Shibazaki, Nakamura, & Nakazawa, 2023; Nakamura-Thomas, Sano, & Maciver, 2023). In addition, the training addressed key elements of Self-Determination Theory by fostering students' sense of competence through skill development, autonomy through encouraged self-expression, and relatedness through respectful peer interactions (Duque, 2024; Huang et al., 2023).

Importantly, implementing assertive training in the Bugis cultural context requires careful consideration of local values that emphasize deference, respect for authority, and collectivism. Assertiveness, if applied without cultural sensitivity, may be perceived as conflicting with norms of modesty and social harmony (Barnes et al., 2023). To address this potential tension, the assertive training in this study was adapted to emphasize respectful and culturally appropriate communication rather than confrontational self-expression. For example, students were encouraged to express opinions politely, listen actively to others, and prioritize group harmony during discussions and *Sundrang* performances. This culturally responsive adaptation suggests that assertive training need not undermine Bugis values but can align with them when implemented thoughtfully (Gutema et al., 2023; T. Liu, Li, Yang, Chi, & Yan, 2023).

Despite these positive findings, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the use of a quasi-experimental design with non-equivalent groups poses potential threats to internal validity, as participants were assigned to intact classes rather than randomly allocated. Although pretest scores indicated comparable baseline levels of self-confidence, unmeasured variables such as classroom climate or teacher-student relationships may still have affected the results (Talty et al., 2023). Second, the reliance on self-report questionnaires introduces the possibility of response bias, as students' perceptions of their own confidence may not fully reflect their actual behavior. Future studies could address this limitation by incorporating observational measures or teacher assessments to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of students' self-confidence (Woolard et al., 2023).

Another limitation relates to the scope and generalizability of the findings. This study was conducted in a single Bugis elementary school with a relatively small sample size, which limits the extent to which the results can be generalized to other cultural or educational contexts. While the findings suggest that assertive training is effective in a culture-based learning environment, its application in non-Bugis or urban school settings may require further adaptation. Urban contexts, for example, often involve more diverse cultural norms and communication styles, which may influence how assertive training is received and practiced (Ye et al., 2023). Therefore, future research should explore the effectiveness of assertive training across different cultural, geographic, and socio-economic settings to assess its broader applicability.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing literature on character education and culture-based learning by demonstrating that assertive training can effectively enhance students' self-confidence when adapted to local cultural values. The findings highlight the importance of culturally responsive instructional strategies that balance the development of individual communication skills with respect for collective norms (Ryan & Deci, 2017). By integrating assertive training into *Sundrang* learning, educators can support students' social and emotional development without compromising the cultural principles that shape their identities.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that assertive training integrated into *Sundrang*-based cultural learning is effective in enhancing elementary school students' self-confidence in Bugis schools. Students who participated in the intervention showed significantly greater improvements in self-confidence compared to those who received conventional instruction. These findings provide empirical evidence that assertive training can be successfully applied within culture-based learning contexts when adapted to local values and communication norms. Beyond confirming the intervention's effectiveness, this study highlights the importance of culturally responsive approaches in character education. The integration of assertive training into *Sundrang* learning demonstrates that the development of students' communication and self-confidence skills need not conflict with collectivist cultural values, provided that instructional strategies emphasize respect, politeness, and social harmony. This suggests that assertive training can be flexibly adapted to support character development in diverse cultural settings.

Several directions for future research emerge from this study. Longitudinal research is needed to examine whether the observed improvements in self-confidence are sustained over time. Future studies could also explore the implementation of assertive training in cross-cultural or urban classroom settings to assess its applicability beyond the Bugis context. In addition, research focusing on teacher professional development is recommended, particularly to investigate how teacher training in assertive and culturally responsive pedagogy influences the effectiveness and sustainability of such interventions. From a policy perspective, the findings support integrating assertive training into character education modules in Indonesia's national curriculum, particularly at the elementary level. Incorporating structured, assertive communication activities into culture-based learning can strengthen students' social, emotional, and communication competencies, aligning with national education goals. Policymakers and curriculum developers are encouraged to consider assertive training as a complementary approach to existing character education programs to foster confident, respectful, and socially responsible learners.

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