An examination of youth developmental assets in Ethiopian universities and their influence with students’ academic achievement

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ABSTRACT
This study was carried out using strength-based approach to examine the interwoven influences of youth developmental assets in thriving students’ academic achievement. Data were collected from 375 (146 females & 229 males) students in three universities using multi-stage and stratified sampling. College asset measurement profile for undergraduate students and academic record of students were used to collect data. Students scored statistically significant higher mean than the expected mean in their internal developmental assets while they scored significantly below the expected mean in their external developmental assets. The MANOVA result indicated that males scored a statistically significant higher mean in accessing external developmental assets than females. The standard regression result showed that components of developmental assets explained 28.9% of the variation in students’ academic achievement. Creating supportive university environment, enhancing students’ commitment of learning and strategies to empower females in accessing developmental assets were recommended to promote students’ academic achievement.

Introduction
The success of future generation is highly determined by the contribution of the present youth. Thus, to create a better society, stimulating youth’s development is crucial. To make them better adults, the youth’s cognitive, social, and physical components of development should be developed and nurtured. These developments are the outcome of different factors, which include the interaction of youth with the external context in which they live. The focus of this study was to examine youth developmental assets and its relationship with their academic achievement.

Accordingly, this study was designed using strength-based approach because this approach assumes that if youth are nourished within a favourable environment, they will have potential to thrive, to promote their development, and they will also be successful in achieving different outcomes including academic achievement. Therefore, the present study examines developmental assets of youth in Ethiopian Universities and its influence on their academic achievement.

Earlier studies targeting youth (Qi et al., 2022; Search Institute, 2013; Wright et al., 2013), theoretical assumptions of youth (Arnett, 2006; Lerner et al., 2008), policies and interventions targeting youth (Lerner, Alberts et al., 2006) indicate that youth were treated using deficit approach,
and the aim of different intervention programs were fixing youth problems and preventing them from risky conditions than promoting youths’ strengths and fostering their competencies (Lerner, Alberts et al., 2006; Lerner, Lerner et al., 2006; Qi et al., 2022; Search Institute, 2013).

Interventions and programs using deficit approach focused on fixing young people’s problems, planning programs doing something to youth (Search Institute, 2016), protecting factors which lead youth negative outcomes (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009), treating youth problems before they brought serious harm to youth and the society (Damon, 2004), treating mental illnesses, repairing damages, and abnormalities (Carr, 2004). Practitioners followed a disease-oriented biomedical model to understand and treat pathology as a result, their approach attributed the source of illness to the individual (Wright et al., 2013).

Scholars on developmental science gradually identified the drawbacks of this approach. These drawbacks include magnifying youth’s weaknesses and limitations without considering their strengths, resources, capacities, potentials and needs (Qi et al., 2022; Search Institute, 2016; Shek et al., 2012). The approach also leads youth to invest little effort to bring positive effect in their life (Lerner, Lerner et al., 2006). The approach was also criticized due to its incapability of addressing goals of psychology such as promoting life satisfactions and fulfilment in all people and identifying and stimulating above average talents (Sligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and the diverse aspects of life such as vocational career, academic achievement, creativity and development (Hefferton & Boniwell, 2011).

In reaction to deficit approach studies, a new way of approaching youth was developed 1990s onwards. The approach focused on the strength of youth, plasticity of human development and resilience (J.V. Lerner et al., 2009). This optimistic and strength-based approach is termed as positive youth development perspective (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009; Qi et al., 2022). Since then, different concepts that assured the strength of youth emerged. These strengths include asset (Scales et al., 2016), promotive and protective factors, competence, developmental tasks (Wright et al., 2013), noble purpose (Qi et al., 2022), moral development, civic participation, community youth development, wellbeing and thriving (Qi et al., 2022). All these concepts signify that every younger person has the potential for success, health development and youth’s possession of capacity for positive development (Search Institute, 2016). Generally, the positive youth development perspective mainly focused on the strength of human beings, opportunities, their potentials, resources, assets and thrive than on limitations, weaknesses, deficits and abnormalities (Barcelona & Quinn, 2011; Lerner et al., 2005; Qi et al., 2022; Scales et al., 2016).

Positive youth development focuses on the developmental characteristics which lead to positive outcomes and behaviours among young people (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009). Positive youth development gives attention to child’s talent, strengths, interests, future potential, educating and engaging youth in productive activities (Qi et al., 2022). The aim of positive youth development perspective is providing comprehensive services that provide support for all youth based on their needs and competencies (Barcelona & Quinn, 2011). The positive youth development perspective also gives priority to equipping youth with the necessary competencies and skills to productively engage in society (Lerner, Alberts et al., 2006), and to mastery and skills building that can promote academic and career success of youth (Campbell et al., 2013).

On the other hand, the ‘Asset model’ according to the Search Institute (2016) focuses on identifying good practices, supports or developmental assets that would help youth to thrive and succeed rather than fail (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009). The Search Institute classified developmental assets in to external and internal (Scales et al., 2016). External assets include organizations, connections and practices that can make good environment for development, while internal assets are values, skills, and beliefs that are necessary to fully engage with other people and function well in the world.

The Search Institute grouped external assets into support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations and constructive use of time while commitment to learning, positive values, social competence and positive identity were grouped under internal assets (Search Institute, 2016). Many studies have been conducted using developmental asset model (Scales et al., 2003, 2016)
Developmental assets of youth mean resources (nutrients) that exist within the given context or the developing person that can facilitate positive youth development. Lerner et al. (2008) define developmental assets as contexts in which youth live, learn and play that facilitate positive youth development. They also underlined the need of mobilizing and investing of these assets on families, schools, peers and neighbourhoods to enhance youth development.

The sources for nutrients to positive youth development can be formed by the context that embedded the developing youth (External assets) and developmental resources inside the developing youth (internal assets). Each main group has four subgroups (Search Institute, 2016). External assets include family assets, community assets, school assets, peer assets and assets from other institutions and programs (Scales et al., 2016).

The external assets include support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time while internal assets include commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Search Institute, 2016).

Supportive assets imply the assistance and acceptance given to young people. Empowerment implies giving value to the young generation and creates an opportunity to the youth contributions to the society. Boundaries and expectations mean clarifying desirable goals to young generation in time of empowerment and support, and constructive use of time deals with different activities, structures, opportunities arranged for the youth to facilitate their positive development in their leisure time (Search Institute, 2016).

Commitment to learning implies the developing person’s actions, intellectual creativity and strategy to possess new knowledge to cope up with the alarmingly changing world (Search Institute, 2013). Positive values imply youth’s belief in themselves to accomplish desirable behaviours, caring for others and preventing risk behaviours, Social competencies means interpersonal skills that young people should have to make connections with adults and decision-making process and positive identity implies giving positive value to oneself such as a sense of power, purpose, value and hope (Search Institute, 2016).

The strength-based approach of youth got many supports in the areas of education, counselling and business world. Strength-based intervention can buffer youth from risky behaviours and also facilitate the social, cognitive and moral development of youth (Qi et al., 2022). Among the different competencies, academic preparation is given priority during this stage (Arnett, 2000) to smoothly transfer into a competent adult. Despite these benefits, the amount of research done using positive youth development perspective is globally very small (Lerner et al., 2008). Most studies targeting youth in Ethiopia also reflect deficit approach both in selecting research ideas and research settings (Belay & Yekoyealem, 2015). Furthermore, the majority of youth intervention programs in Ethiopia were built on deficit model (Abebe, 2011; Belay & Yekoyealem, 2015).

Even though education and employment are the prioritized needs of youth, equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes and empowering them to be competitive in the labour market is a challenging issue in many countries especially in West Asia, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations, 2014).

Even though the Ethiopian youth policy recognizes the strength (asset) of youth and the need for conducive environment that can give services to youth according to their needs, studies indicate that deficit model is dominating in the study of youth and interventions targeting them (Abebe, 2011; Belay & Yekoyealem, 2015). Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) pinpointed that most studies conducted on youth reflect deficit approach both in selecting research ideas and settings.

Gender is a socio-cultural constructed phenomenon in which females and males are expected to play a different role in the given social environment. Accordingly, the social system may provide different constructive inputs (developmental assets) to facilitate the roles expected of each gender. Different studies conducted in Ethiopia showed that females are deprived from enabling social and physical environment to nurture their potential at optimum level and they are at risk in both academic and employment opportunities (Abraha, 2012; Lemesa, 2013; Mulatu, 2016).
Contrary to the above research findings, a study conducted by Yekoyealem (2020) in Addis Ababa showed that female participants scored significantly higher on general developmental assets than males. The finding also confirmed that significantly higher mean was scored by female participants both in the external assets (M = 18.40, SD = 4.18) and internal (M = 21.20, SD = 3.18) than male participants in the external assets (M = 16.23, SD = 4.71) and internal assets (19.85, SD = 3.99). The study also indicates that youth have better internal assets (M = 20.51, SD, 3.67) than external assets (M = 17.29, SD = 4.58). The majority (68.1%) of the participants have internal assets in the adequate range and 24.5% and 39.3% of the participants were belong to highly vulnerable and vulnerable ranges, respectively, in accessing external developmental assets. The study also indicates that 89.9% of the participants were highly vulnerable in accessing community and peer assets.

Many studies found that the more developmental assets youth have, the more likely they are involved in thriving behaviours and less likely to be involved in risky behaviours (Search Institute, 2016). Studies indicate that there was a strong positive correlation between developmental assets and students' academic achievement (Scales et al., 2016). Another study conducted by Campbell et al. (2013) also found a strong correlation between positive youth development and academic achievement, graduation rate, sense of efficacy and negative correlation between positive youth development with risk behaviours.

A study conducted in Addis ababa by Yekoyealem (2020) showed that both external and internal developmental assets brought a variation in students’ academic achievement by 7.2% and 32.8%, respectively, and this contribution was found statistically significant. Another study conducted in Swahili (Africa) also indicated that school attendance was positively correlated with developmental asset scores (Drescher et al., 2017).

Studies conducted in Ethiopia showed that gender inequality is observed in education (Abraha, 2012; Lemesa, 2013). Gender either facilitates or inhibits the educational opportunities of individuals by facilitating or depriving enabling environment.

The interplay between contextual factors along with individual factors influences educational opportunity in general and academic achievement in particular. Studies indicate that females have been largely excluded for long since the introduction of modern education in the country (Lemesa, 2013). Though, the number of female students joining higher education in Ethiopia increased recently, they faced different problems than their male counter parts. Studies indicate that a large number of females’ dropout from higher education institutions due to academic dismissal and lower achieving than males (Abraha, 2012; Lemesa, 2013). Different treatment by the socio-cultural environment, patriarchal culture, unfavourable academic environment, sexual harassment, misconception about girls’ academic ability and gender bias against females contributed to females’ academic dismissal and lower achievement (Abraha, 2012; Lemesa, 2013).

Even though, many scholars pinpointed that quality education is poor in Ethiopia, they approach the problem from the deficit perspective than considering facilitating factors contributed for student’s academic success. Furthermore, despite large segment of the studies done in Ethiopia showed that gender variation exists in student’s academic achievement little effort is invested on factors contributed to this gender variation especially from the perspectives of strength-based approach.

Based on the gaps identified earlier the following research questions were entertained in this study.

1. What is the status of students’ developmental asset in Ethiopian Universities?
2. Is there any difference between male and female participants in their developmental assets?
3. Do students’ developmental assets significantly predict their academic achievement?
Methods

Participants
The participants of this study were 375 (146 females & 229 males) prospective university graduates selected in three universities using multi stage and stratified sampling techniques in the 2021 academic year.

Measures
The study utilized self-administer questionnaire and students' academic record to collect data.

Developmental asset measure
78 items measuring youth developmental assets were adapted from College Assets Measurement Profile for Undergraduate Students (CAMPUS). The instrument was developed based on a sample of undergraduate college students whose age ranges 18 to 25 years (Pashak et al., 2016). Different methods were applied to assure validity and reliability of the instruments like translating the English version into Amharic (the official language of Ethiopia) using forward and backward translation methods and expert analysis along with pilot testing of the instruments.

Academic record
Data on students' academic status were collected from the registrars' office of the concerned universities. The cumulative grade point average (CGPA) was taken as an indicator of students' academic achievement.

Ethical considerations
Ethics is the central issue of psychological research. Accordingly, the following ethical measures have been taken to protect the dignity and safety of the participants. The purpose of the study, the possible advantages and disadvantages in participating in the study were explained. Oral consent was maintained. Voluntary-based participation was used. Confidentiality of data was maintained. Participant interests and dignity were respected in the entire data collection process.

Data analysis
Prior to conducting the data analysis, the scores were examined to check incomplete or invalid data. Then, the assumptions of the data analysis techniques (normal distribution, collinearity diagnosis and homogeneity of variance) one sample t-test, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and hierarchical regressions were checked and met prior to the analysis. One sample t-test was employed to determine the status of participants' developmental asset by comparing with the expected mean. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was implemented to investigate developmental assets difference between male and female participants. Standard regression was employed to find out the predictive power of developmental asset components on students' academic achievement.
Results

The status of Youth developmental assets

One sample t-test was employed to compare and contrast the observed score of developmental asset components and the developmental asset as a whole with the expected mean score. The result is summarized in Table 1.

The status of prospective graduates’ developmental asset presented in Table 1 indicates that participants scored above the test value only in the case of support from the external developmental assets and the result was statistically significant at $t(374) = 39.63, p < .01$. The participants scored significantly below the test value in the rest of the components of external developmental asset (empowerment, setting boundaries and expectations & constructive use of time) and external developmental asset in general ($p < .01$).

From the internal developmental asset components, the participants scored statistically higher than the test value with regard to positive values ($t(374) = 8.33, p < .01$), and social competence ($t(374) = 27.89, p < .01$). On the contrary, the result indicated that participants’ commitment to learning was below the test value at ($t(374) = −9.65, p < .01$). The overall internal developmental asset score indicated that the participants scored significantly higher than the test value in their internal developmental assets ($t(374) = 13.80, p < .01$).

Gender difference in developmental assets

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine gender differences in developmental assets. The result is shown below.

The MANOVA result shown in Table 2 indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between female and male students on their overall developmental assets $F(8, 366) = 2.42, p < .05$, Pillai’s trace $= .050$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Only 5% of the variance in developmental asset was associated with the group factor, i.e. gender. Univariate analysis was carried out to identify to which developmental asset components gender difference exists. The result is presented in Table 3.

A univariate analysis result depicted in Table 3 using a Bronferroni adjusted alpha level ($\alpha = .006$), indicates that a significant statistical mean difference was observed only in empowerment and setting boundaries and expectation developmental assets in favour of males. In the rest of the components of developmental assets, both males and females had similar scores.

The Contribution of Developmental Assets in Predicting Students’ Academic Achievement

The study examined if developmental assets that embedded youth influence students’ academic achievement. It was thought that resources and ideas provided by developmental assets can facilitate academic success and buffer youth from academic failure. This may help youth to develop

Table 1. The status of prospective graduate's developmental asset.

| Variable                        | Observed mean | Std. deviation | test value | t   | Mean difference | Std.error mean |
|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------|-----|----------------|----------------|
| Support                         | 49.96         | 5.35           | 39         | 39.63** | 10.96           | .27            |
| Empowerment                     | 22.24         | 3.97           | 27         | −23.20** | −4.76           | .20            |
| Setting boundaries & expectations| 24.4          | 4.58           | 33         | −27.86** | −6.59           | .23            |
| Constructive use of time        | 19.85         | 2.16           | 24         | −37.06** | −4.15           | .11            |
| External Assets                 | 118.45        | 10.26          | 123        | −8.58** | −4.55           | .43            |
| Commitment to learning          | 25.55         | 2.89           | 27         | −9.65** | −1.44           | .14            |
| Positive values                 | 28.7          | 3.96           | 27         | 8.33** | 1.70            | .20            |
| Social competence               | 33.39         | 4.40           | 27         | 27.89** | 6.39            | .23            |
| Positive identity               | 29.87         | 4.35           | 30         | −5.4   | −1.3            | .22            |
| Internal Assets                 | 117.5         | 9.13           | 111        | 13.80** | 6.5             | .47            |

N = 375 df = 374

** significant at alpha .01
Table 2. Developmental asset difference between males and females.

| Gender | Support | Empowerment | Setting Boundaries & expectation | Constructive use of time | Commitment to learning | Positive values | Social competence | Positive identity | Pillai's trace | F | η² |
|--------|---------|-------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|----|----|
|        | Mean    | Std.        | Mean    | Std.        | Mean    | Std.        | Mean    | Std.        | Mean    | Std.        | Mean    | Std.        | Mean    | Std.        |
| Female | 49.53   | 5.45        | 21.38   | 3.98        | 25.45   | 4.55        | 19.79   | 2.25        | 25.30   | 2.93        | 28.79   | 4.03        | 33.55   | 4.43        |
| Male   | 50.23   | 5.28        | 22.78   | 3.87        | 27.01   | 4.5         | 19.88   | 2.12        | 25.71   | 2.8         | 28.65   | 3.92        | 33.29   | 4.45        |

* significant at alpha .05
basic competencies and to be functional in their life academically and in other ways. On this base, the effect of developmental asset components on academic achievement of students was analysed using standard regression. The result is presented in Table 4.

As shown in Table 4, the multiple correlation (R) between components of developmental asset of students (support, empowerment, setting boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity) and academic achievement of students was .538. The multiple correlation was found to be statistically significant $F(8, 366) = 18.6, P < .01$. The total coefficient of determination ($R^2$) indicates that the components of developmental assets explained 28.9% of the variation in students’ academic achievement. From developmental asset components giving support ($β = .117, p < .05$), setting boundaries and expectations ($β = .143, p < .05$), commitment to learning ($β = .31, p < .01$) and positive identity ($β = .14, p < .05$) were found statistically significant predictors of students’ academic achievement in the regression model. The contributions of the rest components of developmental assets were statistically insignificant in predicting students’ academic achievement.

**Discussion**

**The status of students’ developmental asset**

Development does not occur in a vacuum. As Lerner et al. (2008) indicate that developmental assets that embedded youth are important in facilitating positive youth development. Therefore, this study assessed both the context (external assets) that embedded the youth and the developmental resources that exist in the youth (internal assets). The results of this study indicate that students’ get above the test value only in support components of external developmental assets. They scored below the test value in empowerment, setting boundaries and expectations and constructive use of time and external developmental asset in general. This implies that the external environment frequently gives only assistance and care. The external developmental assets which

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**Table 3. Univaraithe result on the association of gender and components of developmental assets.**

| Developmental asset components | Mean square | dfb | dfw | Sig. | F    | Partial eta squared |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----|-----|------|------|---------------------|
| Support                       | 43.34      | 1   | 373 | .219 | 1.51 | .004                |
| Empowerment                   | 174.27     | 1   | 373 | .001 | 11.34*| .029               |
| Setting boundaries & expectations | 215.36   | 1   | 373 | .001 | 10.51*| .027               |
| Constructive use of time      | .684       | 1   | 373 | .704 | .145 | .000               |
| Commitment to learning        | 15.34      | 1   | 373 | .177 | 1.83 | .005               |
| Positive values               | 1.57       | 1   | 373 | .753 | .10  | .000               |
| Social competencies           | 5.93       | 1   | 373 | .584 | .3   | .001               |
| Positive identity             | 97.2       | 1   | 373 | .023 | 5.17 | .014               |

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**Table 4. Developmental asset and positive youth development as predictors of academic achievement of students.**

| Predictor variables | Academic achievement (β) |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Support             | .117*                     |
| Empowerment         | .089                      |
| Setting boundaries & expectations | .143*                  |
| Constructive use of time | −.021                  |
| Commitment to learning | .31**                    |
| Positive values     | −.007                     |
| Social competencies | −.023                     |
| Positive identity   | .14*                      |
| R                   | .538**                    |
| $R^2$               | .289**                    |

**Significant at alpha .01**

**Significant at alpha .05**
embedded youth are very much limited in involving and encouraging independence of youth, developing autonomy, valuing youth potential and giving room to play their own role in the general community. The external developmental assets were insufficient in setting boundaries and clarifying desirable goals that are expected from youth to develop positively. Moreover, these assets were also inadequate in arranging leisure time activities that helps youth to thrive and to buffer them from risky behaviours. Giving only support may lead youth to become more dependent and obedient to others. With regard to internal developmental assets, the participants scored significantly above the test value in positive values and social competence as well as in their overall internal developmental assets. However, their commitment to learning was found significantly below the expected mean.

Consistent with the present finding, Yekoyealem (2020) also indicated that majority of youth in Addis Ababa were highly vulnerable in accessing external developmental assets from neighbours and peers, i.e. the majority of youth belong to the ‘vulnerable’ range in accessing those resources. The study also pointed out that the participants were in the adequate range in their internal assets than the external assets. Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) also found that the majority of the participants experienced constructive use of time and empowerment at poor level. Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) further indicated that youth were better in the level of support they gain from the external developmental assets. Contrary to the findings of the current study, Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) indicated that the external developmental assets were better in setting boundaries and expectations for youth. Different reasons like family background difference and contextual differences between urban dwellers and rural people could be the reasons for this difference.

The problem of accessing external developmental assets may be severe to the participants of this study due to different factors. As indicated in the background information, the majority of the participants came from rural areas. Hence, they may not get appropriate external developmental assets due to socio-cultural factors. Neighbours, parents, peers and other social institutions in rural areas may not give adequate and quality developmental assets that can help youth to thrive. Caring, competent and committed mentors are crucial to facilitate positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2011) and to prevent youth from engaging in risky behaviour. Moreover, the majority of the students may come from non-literate parents. This may affect the quality of parenting such as giving care, positive disciplining, respecting the youth, scaffolding and setting boundaries and expectations for youth. All these family developmental assets are vital to enhance positive youth development (Chapman, 2007; Peterson, 2005; Pittman, 2011). Moreover, peers are important in facilitating positive youth development. However, youth in rural areas may not have peers who are competent, rich in information and good role models. Access of entertainment and other leisure activities may be limited in rural areas. All the above factors might have contributed a lower score in external developmental assets by the participants of this study.

Students scored better in their internal developmental assets than the external ones. Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) have also found that the participants were better in their internal developmental assets in comparison with their external developmental assets. In contrast to their findings, the present study found that students’ commitment of learning was below the expected mean even though the overall internal developmental assets are above the expected mean. The difference might be due to differences in the background of research participants. Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) involved secondary school students in Addis Ababa who may get close family supervision and the urban context give more value to commitment of learning and to become academically successful, but the participants of this study may not get frequent support and guidance from their families. Hence, this may hinder their commitment to learning.

This result indicates that the participants may have resilience capacity to cope up challenges they face in their life. Different factors like the need for high individual effort in the university context, infrequent of family and neighbourhood support and guidance and the challenges they may face in university context may require students to use their internal asset at optimum level.
Gender differences in developmental assets

Gender is a socially constructed phenomena and it determines the goals, tasks, and attributions expected of men and women in a given society. Therefore, gender may affect the selection of individual goals and efforts to achieve them. Moreover, the social system may influence the achievement of goals set for men and women by providing different developmental assets based on the socially desirable goals. The different opportunities given to gender can lead to variation in individual assets.

The findings of this study show that there was a statistically significant gender difference in the overall developmental asset levels of students. Specifically, the result confirmed that males score higher in their level of empowerment and setting boundaries and expectations. The implication is that the external developmental assets (parents, peers, schools & neighbourhoods) were in favour of males over females. External developmental assets give more value to thoughts, ideas, opinions, and create different opportunities for independence and self-reliance for males than females. Similarly, the external environment provides clear boundaries, goals, roles and expectations for males than for females.

Consistent with the results of this study, previous studies conducted in Ethiopia show that the social expectation for male is to be self-reliant, independent and source of economy whereas the society expect females to be conformer, obedient and dependent, and to engage in household activities. Abraha (2012) also indicated the existence of undermining girls’ ability and gender bias exists in Ethiopia.

Unlike the results of this study, Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) found that females scored higher levels both in external and internal developmental assets than males. They also reported that females scored significantly higher mean in their level of support, empowerment, setting boundaries and expectations, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity than males; however, insignificant gender difference was observed in the constructive use of time.

Gender is context sensitive and person–context relationships between males and females create gender variation (Geldof et al., 2014). The quality of developmental assets and the nature of interaction shape the development of youth (Andriani, 2013; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Lin, 1999).

Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) conducted their study in Addis Ababa and their participants were students from urban background. The majority of the participants of this study came from rural areas. So, masculine thinking may be higher in rural areas than urban areas. As Pines et al. (2010) indicate masculine thinking is responsible for gender variation. Access to information, creating better opportunities to exploit ones’ potential, availability of leisure time activities, parenting style, parental awareness of gender issue, quality of neighbours and mentors and the like contribute to the result difference. Different studies indicate that level of responsibility, care, support, positive disciplining (Chapman, 2007), the goals, values and priorities of parents (Peterson, 2005), availability of competent adult mentors in the neighbourhood (Rhodes et al., 2006), neighbourhood safety, services, quality of life, setting of appropriate limits (Browne, 2014; Kegler et al., 2005) are determinant factors in youth development. The result difference between the present study and Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) findings may be due to differences in accessibility and utilization of developmental assets by males and females in urban and rural settings.

The contribution of Youth Developmental Assets in Predicting Students’ Academic Achievement

The standard regression result showed that both developmental asset components were statistically significant in predicting students’ academic achievement. All the components of developmental asset (support, empowerment, setting boundaries and expectations, constructive youth of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, positive identity) were entered the model. The overall result showed that the developmental asset components were statistically significant in predicting students’ academic achievement. However, only the level of support, setting boundaries and expectations, commitment to learning and positive identity were statistically significant in predicting students’ academic achievement independently.
Consistent with the present finding, several studies indicate that availability and utilization of developmental asset enhance youth development in different developmental tasks (Lerner, Alberts et al., 2006). Others also reported that developmental assets have a significant impact on youth skill building and knowledge acquisition (Lerner et al., 2011), promote success (Scales et al., 2016), facilitate youth academic achievement and buffer them from risky behaviours including academic failure (Qi et al., 2022). The findings of this study are also similar to the findings of previous studies conducted in Ethiopia and Africa. For example, a study conducted in Ethiopia showed that both internal and external developmental assets were statistically significant in predicting students’ academic achievement (Yekoyealem, 2020). Another study conducted in Swahili (Africa) also reported that school attendance was positively correlated with developmental asset scores (Drescher et al., 2017).

Variables which were statistically significant in predicting students’ academic achievement may affect students’ academic achievement through different mechanisms. Different studies underlined the crucial role of giving assistance such as high-level responsibility, care and assistance, scaffolding (Chapman, 2007; Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2005) by families, giving challenging tasks with appropriate guidance, support and experience sharing by neighbourhood (Rhodes et al., 2006), peer relationships balanced between autonomy and support (Browne, 2014; Pittman, 2011) and school environments with respect, value and support (Morrison & Peterson, 2013) facilitates youth academic motivation, achievement and adjustment to learning. Moreover, appropriate goals, boundaries and expectations set by families, neighbourhood, peers and schools can facilitate students’ academic achievement by buffering them from role confusion and exerting efforts to achieve clear goals or developmental tasks expected from them (Search Institute, 2013).

Commitment to learning which indicates individual actions and intellectual activity to acquire new knowledge (Search Institute, 2016). Academic achievement of students is determined by the interaction of enabling learning environment with individual qualities such as motivation, curiosity, effort and interest to learn (Scales et al., 2006) and self-regulation capacity (Browne, 2014) of youth is critical in determining success of students’ academic achievement. The other variable which was significant in predicting academic achievement of students was positive identity. Positive identity refers to the value given for one self – such as sense of power, purpose, and hope (Search Institute, 2016). Positive identity may influence both the goal setting of an individual and efforts exerted to realize those goals. The level of positive identity of students may affect their academic achievement by influencing the academic goal they set, their motivational levels, help seeking behaviour by balancing autonomy and scaffolding, and their efforts to achieve their academic goals.

**Disclosure statement**

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