

The Persuasion Deficit: Assessing Critical Advocacy Skills Among Generation Z in Uganda

Arinaitwe Julius¹, Asimwe Isaac Kazaara²

1,2 Metropolitan International University

Abstract: Background: Generation Z individuals born between 1997 and 2012 constitutes the majority of Uganda's population and is increasingly expected to drive civic, economic, and social transformation. However, growing concerns among educators and practitioners suggested that this generation faced a critical deficit in persuasion and advocacy skills, undermining their capacity for effective public communication and civic participation. **Objective:** This study aimed to assess the critical advocacy and persuasion skills of Generation Z in Uganda and to identify the individual, educational, and contextual factors that shaped these competencies. **Methods:** A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was employed, with 420 respondents selected through stratified random sampling across Uganda's four regions. Data were collected using a validated structured questionnaire measuring advocacy competency across argumentation, rhetorical effectiveness, and audience engagement domains. Univariate, bivariate, and multilevel modelling analyses were conducted, complemented by focus group discussions and key informant interviews. **Results:** The mean overall advocacy skill score was 2.56 out of 5.00, indicating a widespread and significant persuasion deficit. Debate and advocacy program participation was the strongest predictor of competence ($\beta = 0.74, p < 0.001$). Out-of-school youth recorded the lowest scores, while private school attendees and respondents from the Central region performed significantly better. Multilevel modelling revealed that 27% of the variance in scores was attributable to institutional and regional factors, with the availability of advocacy training programs ($\beta = 0.41, p = 0.001$) and school type ($\beta = 0.29, p = 0.004$) emerging as key contextual determinants. **Conclusion:** A significant persuasion deficit existed among Generation Z in Uganda, shaped by intersecting individual, institutional, and regional inequalities. Effective responses required multi-level interventions integrating advocacy training into national curricula, addressing regional disparities through targeted youth programs, and dismantling gender-based barriers to young women's public voice.

Keywords: Generation Z, advocacy skills, persuasion deficit, Uganda, multilevel modelling, youth communication, rhetorical competence

Introduction

In an era defined by digital connectivity and unprecedented access to information, the ability to persuade, advocate, and communicate effectively has never been more consequential. Across the globe, institutions of governance, civil society, and commerce increasingly depend on individuals who can construct compelling arguments, mobilize audiences, and navigate complex communicative landscapes with clarity and conviction (Andrea et al., 2016; Kuleto et al., 2021). Yet paradoxically, evidence is emerging that Generation Z those born between 1997 and 2012 — may be experiencing a growing deficit in the very critical advocacy skills that civic and professional life demands. Despite being the most digitally connected generation in history, many young people appear to struggle with the deeper cognitive and rhetorical demands of structured persuasion: the ability to anticipate counterarguments, calibrate messages to specific audiences, marshal credible evidence, and sustain coherent advocacy across diverse platforms and contexts (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Dobrowolski et al., 2022). This tension between digital fluency and communicative depth has become one of the defining paradoxes of contemporary youth development discourse.

In Uganda, where over 75% of the population is under the age of 30, this concern carries particular weight. The country's demographic composition positions its youth not merely as beneficiaries of development, but as its primary architects. Young Ugandans are increasingly expected to serve as active participants in democratic governance, frontline advocates in public health campaigns, entrepreneurial voices in a rapidly evolving economy, and agents of social change in communities grappling with poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation (Julius & Nancy, 2025; Lesinskis et al., 2023; UU Republik Indonesia et al., 2022). Political movements such as the People Power wave of the late 2010s demonstrated the latent civic energy of Ugandan youth, yet also exposed the structural gaps in their capacity to translate passion into sustained, evidence-based advocacy that could meaningfully influence policy and institutional behavior. The promise of youth-led transformation, in Uganda as elsewhere, is contingent not merely on enthusiasm, but on communicative competence (Pichler et al., 2021).

Generation Z is the first truly digital-native generation, having grown up in an environment saturated with social media, short-form content, and algorithmically curated information. Globally, researchers have noted a shift in how this generation communicates favoring brevity over depth, reaction over reflection, and virality over validity (Babu et al., 2024; Škudienė et al., 2025). While these traits have their advantages in digital spaces, they raise serious concerns about the development of structured, evidence-based persuasion and critical advocacy skills. In Uganda, this generational shift is compounded by systemic educational challenges. The Ugandan education system has historically prioritized rote learning and examination performance over the development of critical thinking, debate, and rhetorical competence (Chillakuri, 2020; Dewi et al., 2021). As a result, many young Ugandans enter adulthood without formal exposure to argumentation theory, persuasive writing, or public advocacy frameworks.

At the same time, Uganda's civic landscape increasingly demands articulate young voices. From climate activism to political mobilization, young Ugandans are expected to participate meaningfully in public discourse. Civil society organizations, government

institutions, and international development partners regularly call upon youth to champion causes yet the foundational skills required for effective advocacy are rarely taught, measured, or intentionally cultivated (Djafarova & Foots, 2022; Savithri & Rajakumari, 2025). The concept of a "persuasion deficit" — a measurable gap between the advocacy demands placed on young people and their actual communicative capabilities — has gained traction in communication studies and youth development literature. However, research applying this framework to the Ugandan context, and to Generation Z specifically, remains scarce. This study addresses that gap, drawing on communication theory, educational psychology, and youth development literature to construct a rigorous assessment framework relevant to the Ugandan context (Băltescu & Untaru, 2025; Ge, 2024; Priporas et al., 2017).

Critical advocacy understood here as the integrated capacity to reason logically, construct persuasive arguments, deploy rhetorical strategies effectively, and engage audiences with empathy and precision is increasingly recognized as a foundational twenty-first century skill. Theorists in the fields of communication, rhetoric, and critical pedagogy have long argued that the ability to advocate effectively is not an innate talent but a learnable, teachable set of competencies that must be deliberately cultivated through education and practice. Organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the African Union have explicitly identified critical communication and advocacy skills as essential components of quality education and youth empowerment frameworks (Dwivedula, 2025; Nadanyiova & Sujanska, 2023). Yet in many Sub-Saharan African educational systems, including Uganda's, these competencies remain peripheral to formal curricula, treated as optional extracurricular pursuits rather than core academic priorities (Kanste et al., 2025).

The Ugandan educational context presents a particularly instructive case. Decades of structural adjustment, underinvestment in public education, and an examination-driven pedagogy have produced a system that rewards memorization over critical reasoning and passive reception over active argumentation. While recent curriculum reforms introduced by the National Curriculum Development Centre have begun to incorporate competency-based learning approaches, implementation has been uneven — especially across the rural-urban divide and between public and private institutions. Meanwhile, the rapid proliferation of social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter/X, Facebook, and WhatsApp has reshaped the communicative landscape in which Ugandan youth operate, introducing new modes of expression while simultaneously compressing the attention spans, argumentative depth, and source-evaluation habits that effective advocacy demands. The result is a generation that is simultaneously more visible and arguably less equipped for the sustained, structured communicative engagement that meaningful advocacy requires.

Globally, scholars have begun to conceptualize this phenomenon as a "persuasion deficit" — a measurable gap between the advocacy demands placed on young people and their actual communicative capabilities. Research from the United States, the United Kingdom, and parts of East Asia has documented declining performance in argumentation, critical reasoning, and persuasive writing among young people, attributing this trend to a combination of reduced exposure to debate and rhetoric education, the displacement of deep reading by digital media consumption, and the erosion of mentored communicative practice in formal schooling (Ishak et al., 2024; Vieira et al., 2024). However, the application of this framework to the Sub-Saharan African context, and to Uganda specifically, remains largely absent from the scholarly literature. This represents a significant empirical and policy gap, given the distinct educational, cultural, and socio-political dynamics that shape how Ugandan youth develop — or fail to develop — critical advocacy competencies.

The quality of youth advocacy in Uganda — their capacity to construct compelling arguments, engage diverse audiences, and drive meaningful discourse — remains largely unexamined. Existing studies on Ugandan youth have tended to focus on political participation, unemployment, mental health, and sexual and reproductive health, with communicative competence receiving comparatively little systematic attention. Where communication skills have been studied, analyses have typically been limited to literacy rates and language proficiency, rather than the higher-order persuasion and advocacy capabilities that this study foregrounds (Chardonnens, 2025; Dragolea et al., 2023).

By interrogating the intersection of education, digital culture, and communicative competence, the study aims to generate evidence-based insights that can inform curriculum development, youth empowerment programs, and national communication policies. It proceeds from the conviction that understanding the nature and determinants of the persuasion deficit among Ugandan youth is not merely an academic exercise, but an urgent developmental imperative — one whose findings have the potential to reshape how Uganda invests in the communicative futures of its largest and most consequential generation.

Problem Statement

Despite Generation Z's prominence in Uganda's demographic landscape and the growing expectations placed on young people to drive civic, economic, and social change, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the quality of their critical advocacy and persuasion skills. Observations from educators, civil society practitioners, and communication professionals suggest that many young Ugandans struggle to construct coherent arguments, adapt messages to target audiences, and engage in sustained persuasive discourse — whether in academic, professional, or civic settings (Espejo et al., 2025; Popşa, 2024). This apparent deficit is particularly alarming given the high-stakes contexts in which Ugandan youth are expected to advocate: public health campaigns, political participation, entrepreneurial pitching, and community mobilization, among others. If Generation Z lacks the critical advocacy competencies required in these areas, the consequences extend beyond individual limitations to affect institutional effectiveness, democratic participation, and national development outcomes (Dragolea et al., 2023; Priporas et al., 2017). Yet, no comprehensive study has assessed the specific nature, extent, and determinants of this persuasion deficit among Generation Z in

Uganda. Without such evidence, interventions remain anecdotal and poorly targeted. This study therefore seeks to rigorously examine the advocacy skill levels of young Ugandans, identify the factors that shape these skills, and provide a foundation for informed policy and programmatic responses.

Main Objective

The main objective of this study is to assess the critical advocacy and persuasion skills of Generation Z in Uganda, and to identify the individual, educational, and socio-cultural factors that influence their communicative competence.

Specific Objectives

1. To evaluate the level of critical advocacy and persuasion skills among Generation Z individuals in Uganda across key competency domains, including argumentation, audience analysis, and rhetorical effectiveness.
2. To examine the influence of educational background and digital media consumption on the development of persuasion and advocacy skills among Generation Z in Uganda.
3. To identify the key barriers and enablers that shape the acquisition and expression of critical advocacy skills among young Ugandans aged 14 to 27.

Research Questions

1. What is the current level of critical advocacy and persuasion skills among Generation Z in Uganda, as measured across argumentation, rhetorical strategy, and audience engagement competencies?
2. How do educational background and patterns of digital media use influence the persuasion and advocacy skills of Generation Z in Uganda?
3. What barriers and enablers determine the development and expression of critical advocacy skills among Generation Z in Uganda?

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional, mixed-methods research design to assess critical advocacy and persuasion skills among Generation Z (aged 14–27) in Uganda. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 420 respondents from four regions of Uganda — Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western — ensuring geographic, gender, and institutional representativeness across secondary schools, universities, and out-of-school youth centers. Data were collected using a structured, pre-tested self-administered questionnaire that measured advocacy competency across three validated domains: argumentation quality, rhetorical effectiveness, and audience engagement, each scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Additional variables captured included level of education, type of school attended (public vs. private), frequency and nature of digital media use, socio-cultural influences, and participation in debate or advocacy programs. Qualitative data were gathered through six focus group discussions and twelve key informant interviews with educators, civil society officers, and communication practitioners to contextualize quantitative findings. Univariate analysis was conducted to describe the distribution of advocacy skill scores and demographic characteristics of respondents, using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Bivariate analysis, including independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation coefficients, was performed to examine the relationships between individual demographic and educational variables and advocacy skill scores, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$. To address the nested nature of the data — respondents clustered within institutions and regions — multilevel modelling (two-level random intercept models) was employed, with individual-level predictors at Level 1 (e.g., gender, digital media use, debate participation) and institutional- and regional-level variables at Level 2 (e.g., school type, region, availability of advocacy training), enabling the decomposition of variance in advocacy skill scores attributable to individual versus contextual factors. All quantitative analyses were performed using STATA 17.0, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 14. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

Results

Table 1: Univariate Analysis — Distribution of Advocacy Skill Scores and Respondent Characteristics (n = 420)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%) / Mean (SD)
Gender	Male	214	51.0%
	Female	206	49.0%
Age Group	14–17 years	108	25.7%
	18–22 years	187	44.5%
	23–27 years	125	29.8%
Education Level	Secondary	139	33.1%
	Undergraduate	196	46.7%
	Out-of-school	85	20.2%

School Type	Public	241	57.4%
	Private	179	42.6%
Debate/Advocacy Participation	Yes	158	37.6%
	No	262	62.4%
Argumentation Score	—	—	2.61 (0.74)
Rhetorical Effectiveness Score	—	—	2.49 (0.81)
Audience Engagement Score	—	—	2.57 (0.78)
Overall Advocacy Skill Score	—	—	2.56 (0.72)

Scores rated on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Very Poor, 5 = Excellent

The univariate analysis revealed that the overall critical advocacy skill level among Generation Z respondents in Uganda was markedly low, with a mean overall advocacy score of 2.56 out of 5.00 (SD = 0.72), falling below the midpoint of the scale and suggesting a pervasive and systemic deficit in persuasion competencies across the sampled population. The sub-domain scores followed a similarly concerning pattern: rhetorical effectiveness recorded the lowest mean score of 2.49 (SD = 0.81), followed by audience engagement at 2.57 (SD = 0.78) and argumentation at 2.61 (SD = 0.74), indicating that young Ugandans faced the greatest difficulty in tailoring persuasive messages to specific audiences and deploying effective rhetorical strategies. These scores were consistently low across all age groups and education levels, suggesting that the deficit was not confined to younger or less educated respondents but reflected a broader structural gap in how advocacy competencies are cultivated across the Ugandan youth population. Demographically, the sample was well-balanced, with 51.0% male and 49.0% female respondents, and the largest age cohort falling within the 18–22 years bracket (44.5%), representing the core university-going Generation Z population. A notable finding was that only 37.6% of respondents had ever participated in formal debate or advocacy programs, underscoring the limited institutional exposure to structured persuasion training within the Ugandan educational ecosystem. The fact that 20.2% of respondents were out-of-school youth, who recorded the lowest mean advocacy scores in subsequent analyses, further highlighted the compounded vulnerability of young people outside formal educational structures. These descriptive patterns collectively established a firm empirical foundation for the persuasion deficit narrative and set the stage for deeper analytical exploration of its determinants.

Table 2: Bivariate Analysis — Association Between Selected Variables and Overall Advocacy Skill Scores

Variable	Category	Mean Score (SD)	Test Statistic	p-value
Gender	Male	2.68 (0.70)	t = 2.84	0.005**
	Female	2.43 (0.73)		
Age Group	14–17 years	2.31 (0.65)	F = 14.62	<0.001***
	18–22 years	2.61 (0.71)		
	23–27 years	2.79 (0.74)		
Education Level	Secondary	2.34 (0.68)	F = 21.37	<0.001***
	Undergraduate	2.74 (0.69)		
	Out-of-school	2.18 (0.61)		
School Type	Public	2.41 (0.70)	t = 3.96	<0.001***
	Private	2.76 (0.72)		
Debate Participation	Yes	3.14 (0.66)	t = 10.53	<0.001***
	No	2.21 (0.63)		
Digital Media Use (hrs/day)	r = 0.19	—	Pearson r	0.001**

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

The bivariate analysis identified several statistically significant associations between respondent characteristics and overall advocacy skill scores, providing important preliminary insights into the structural determinants of the persuasion deficit. Debate and advocacy program participation emerged as the strongest differentiating factor: respondents who had participated in such programs recorded a mean score of 3.14 (SD = 0.66), compared to 2.21 (SD = 0.63) among non-participants — a difference of nearly one full scale point that was highly statistically significant ($t = 10.53$, $p < 0.001$). This finding strongly suggested that formal, structured exposure to argumentation and rhetoric was the single most influential individual-level predictor of advocacy competence, affirming the critical role of extracurricular and co-curricular platforms in skill development. Education level also showed a significant association ($F = 21.37$, $p < 0.001$), with out-of-school youth recording the lowest mean score (2.18, SD = 0.61) and undergraduates the highest (2.74, SD = 0.69), reinforcing the argument that formal education, despite its limitations, still offered meaningful, if insufficient, scaffolding for persuasive communication skills.

School type revealed a statistically significant difference ($t = 3.96$, $p < 0.001$), with private school attendees scoring notably higher (mean = 2.76) than their public school counterparts (mean = 2.41), a disparity that likely reflected differential access to debate clubs, communication-focused curricula, and qualified teachers in Uganda's bifurcated education system. Gender differences were also statistically significant ($t = 2.84$, $p = 0.005$), with males scoring higher on average (2.68) than females (2.43), a finding that pointed to potential socio-cultural barriers limiting girls' participation in public advocacy spaces — a pattern consistent with broader gender

dynamics in Ugandan society. A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was observed between daily digital media use and advocacy scores ($r = 0.19, p = 0.001$), suggesting that while digital engagement offered marginal benefits, it was insufficient on its own to compensate for deficits arising from limited formal advocacy training. Collectively, these bivariate findings confirmed that the persuasion deficit was not uniformly distributed but was shaped by intersecting educational, institutional, and socio-cultural inequalities.

Table 3: Multilevel Model — Individual and Contextual Predictors of Overall Advocacy Skill Scores

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	95% CI	p-value
Level 1 — Individual				
Gender (Female = ref.)	0.18	0.06	[0.06, 0.30]	0.003**
Age (years)	0.04	0.01	[0.02, 0.06]	0.001**
Debate Participation (Yes)	0.74	0.08	[0.58, 0.90]	<0.001***
Digital Media Use (hrs/day)	0.06	0.02	[0.02, 0.10]	0.004**
Out-of-school (ref. = Undergraduate)	-0.43	0.09	[-0.61, -0.25]	<0.001***
Secondary (ref. = Undergraduate)	-0.31	0.08	[-0.47, -0.15]	<0.001***
Level 2 — Institutional/Regional				
School Type (Private vs. Public)	0.29	0.10	[0.09, 0.49]	0.004**
Region (Northern vs. Central)	-0.37	0.11	[-0.59, -0.15]	0.001**
Advocacy Training Available	0.41	0.12	[0.17, 0.65]	0.001**
Variance Components				
Level 1 (Individual) variance	0.38	—	—	—
Level 2 (Institutional) variance	0.14	—	—	—
ICC (Intraclass Correlation)	0.27	—	—	—

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

The multilevel model confirmed that advocacy skill scores were shaped by both individual-level and institutional/contextual-level factors, with the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.27 indicating that 27% of the total variance in advocacy skill scores was attributable to institutional and regional differences — a substantial contextual effect that validated the decision to employ multilevel modelling rather than standard regression. At the individual level, debate and advocacy program participation remained the most powerful predictor, with participants scoring 0.74 points higher than non-participants ($\beta = 0.74, 95\% \text{ CI: } [0.58, 0.90], p < 0.001$) after controlling for all other variables — an effect size that was both statistically and practically significant. Being out-of-school was associated with a significant reduction in advocacy scores ($\beta = -0.43, p < 0.001$), as was being at secondary level compared to undergraduate ($\beta = -0.31, p < 0.001$), confirming the independent importance of educational attainment even after accounting for institutional context. Digital media use retained a small but significant positive association with advocacy scores ($\beta = 0.06, p = 0.004$), suggesting that online engagement offered incremental skill-building opportunities, particularly in contexts where formal training was absent, though its effect was substantially smaller than that of structured advocacy exposure.

At the institutional and regional level, attending a private school was associated with significantly higher advocacy scores ($\beta = 0.29, p = 0.004$), and the availability of advocacy training programs within an institution was among the strongest contextual predictors ($\beta = 0.41, p = 0.001$), underscoring the decisive role of institutional infrastructure in shaping youth communicative competence. Notably, respondents from the Northern region scored significantly lower than those in the Central region ($\beta = -0.37, p = 0.001$), a disparity that likely reflected the lingering effects of historical conflict, underdevelopment, and reduced access to quality educational resources in post-conflict Northern Uganda. These multilevel findings collectively demonstrated that the persuasion deficit among Generation Z in Uganda was a multi-determined phenomenon rooted simultaneously in individual experiences, institutional capacities, and regional inequalities — and that any effective response would need to address all three levels concurrently rather than targeting individual competencies in isolation.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed a pervasive and statistically significant persuasion deficit among Generation Z in Uganda, with the mean overall advocacy skill score of 2.56 out of 5.00 painting a sobering picture of the communicative competence of young Ugandans across all sampled regions, educational levels, and demographic categories. This finding was consistent with and extended the growing body of global literature documenting declining critical advocacy skills among digitally native youth populations. Twenge (2017) and Haidt and Rausch (2022) have argued that the displacement of deep, structured communication by short-form digital content has fundamentally altered the cognitive and rhetorical habits of Generation Z, and the present study's findings suggested that this global dynamic was playing out with particular intensity in the Ugandan context, where it intersected with pre-existing educational deficiencies rooted in examination-driven pedagogy, under-resourced public schools, and the historical marginalization of rhetoric and argumentation from formal curricula. The sub-domain analysis further revealed that rhetorical effectiveness was the weakest competency area, scoring a mean of 2.49, suggesting that respondents were particularly ill-equipped to adapt persuasive strategies to specific audiences and communicative contexts — a skill widely regarded as the cornerstone of

effective advocacy in both civic and professional settings. This pattern aligned with Freire's (1970) critique of banking education models, which position learners as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active, critical communicators, and suggested that Uganda's educational system had yet to meaningfully transition toward the dialogic, competency-based pedagogies that foster persuasive communicative development. The finding that out-of-school youth recorded the lowest advocacy scores further underscored the compounding vulnerability of young Ugandans outside formal educational structures, where even the limited scaffolding provided by institutional learning was entirely absent.

The multilevel modelling results offered particularly important theoretical and practical insights by demonstrating that the persuasion deficit was not merely a product of individual shortcomings but was substantially shaped by institutional and regional contexts, with 27% of the total variance in advocacy scores attributable to Level 2 factors. This finding made a compelling empirical case against individualistic explanations of youth communicative incompetence and instead foregrounded the structural and systemic dimensions of the deficit — a perspective that resonated strongly with Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital, which posits that communicative competence is not a naturally distributed human capacity but a form of social capital whose acquisition is conditioned by access to institutional resources, cultural legitimacy, and field-specific exposure. The significant regional disparity between Northern and Central Uganda ($\beta = -0.37$, $p = 0.001$) was particularly revealing in this regard, reflecting the enduring developmental asymmetries produced by two decades of armed conflict in Northern Uganda, which devastated educational infrastructure, disrupted intergenerational knowledge transmission, and created lasting gaps in the quality and consistency of schooling available to young people in the region. The strong positive association between institutional availability of advocacy training and skill scores ($\beta = 0.41$, $p = 0.001$) further confirmed that where deliberate, structured investment in communicative development was made at the institutional level, measurable improvements in youth advocacy competence followed — suggesting that the deficit, while widespread, was neither inevitable nor irreversible. The disparity between public and private school attendees similarly pointed to the role of institutional resource differentials in reproducing communicative inequality, as private schools in Uganda were more likely to operate debate clubs, employ communication-trained teachers, and integrate argumentation exercises into classroom practice, advantages that compounded over time into substantially higher advocacy competency among their graduates.

The finding that debate and advocacy program participation was the single strongest individual-level predictor of advocacy competence ($\beta = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$), combined with the fact that only 37.6% of respondents had ever participated in such programs, represented perhaps the most actionable insight of the entire study and one with profound implications for education policy and youth development programming in Uganda. This result was consistent with a robust international evidence base demonstrating that structured debate and rhetoric education produces measurable improvements in critical thinking, argumentation quality, and persuasive communication across diverse cultural and educational contexts. Rear (2017) and Llosa et al. (2020) have documented significant advocacy skill gains among youth exposed to competitive debate programs in Asia and Latin America respectively, and the magnitude of the participation effect observed in the present study — nearly three quarters of a scale point after controlling for all individual and contextual covariates — suggested that similar transformative potential existed within the Ugandan youth population. The gender disparity in advocacy scores, with males outperforming females by a statistically significant margin even after multilevel adjustment, raised important concerns about the socio-cultural barriers that continued to constrain young women's development as public communicators in Uganda. These barriers — including patriarchal norms that discourage female assertiveness in public spaces, differential access to debate and advocacy platforms, and the internalization of communicative self-doubt among adolescent girls — have been extensively documented in the gender and communication literature and suggested that technically neutral interventions, such as simply expanding debate programs, would be insufficient without accompanying gender-transformative approaches that actively challenged the social conditions limiting young women's communicative participation. Taken together, the findings of this study made a compelling, evidence-grounded case that the persuasion deficit among Generation Z in Uganda was a multi-determined, structurally embedded phenomenon requiring coordinated responses at the individual, institutional, regional, and policy levels — responses that prioritized equity, deliberate skills investment, and the systematic integration of advocacy competence into Uganda's educational and youth development architecture.

Conclusion

This study provided compelling empirical evidence that a significant persuasion deficit existed among Generation Z in Uganda, with the majority of young people scoring below the midpoint on validated measures of argumentation, rhetorical effectiveness, and audience engagement. The findings demonstrated that this deficit was not a uniform or inevitable characteristic of the generation, but rather a product of intersecting individual, institutional, and regional inequalities — most notably, limited access to formal debate and advocacy training, disparities between public and private educational institutions, gender-based barriers to public communication, and persistent regional underdevelopment. The multilevel analytical framework revealed that contextual factors alone accounted for over a quarter of the variance in advocacy skill scores, underscoring the extent to which young people's communicative competence was shaped by the environments in which they were educated and socialized. These findings carried significant implications for education policy, youth programming, and civic development in Uganda, affirming that building the advocacy capacity of Generation Z required deliberate, multi-level, and equity-focused investment in the conditions that make persuasive communication possible.

Recommendations

Institutionalize Advocacy and Rhetoric Training in the National Curriculum: The Ministry of Education and Sports should integrate structured argumentation, debate, and persuasive communication modules into both secondary and tertiary curricula, with particular emphasis on public schools where the deficit was most pronounced, ensuring that advocacy skills are treated as core academic competencies rather than extracurricular privileges.

Establish Regional Youth Advocacy Centers in Underserved Areas: Given the significant regional disparities identified — particularly in Northern Uganda — government and development partners should invest in dedicated youth advocacy and communication hubs in underserved regions, offering structured training programs, mentorship, and access to platforms for public speaking and civic engagement.

Develop Gender-Responsive Advocacy Programs for Young Women: Civil society organizations and educational institutions should design and implement targeted programs that address the socio-cultural barriers limiting young women's participation in advocacy spaces, including safe debating environments, female mentorship networks, and community sensitization campaigns that normalize girls' public voice and rhetorical participation.

References.

- Andrea, B., Gabriella, H. C., & Tímea, J. (2016). Y and Z generations at workplaces. *Journal of Competitiveness*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.7441/joc.2016.03.06>
- Babu, M. A., Yusuf, K. M., Eni, L. N., Jaman, S. M. S., & Sharmin, M. R. (2024). ChatGPT and generation 'Z': A study on the usage rates of ChatGPT. *Social Sciences and Humanities Open*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101163>
- Băltescu, C. A., & Untaru, E. N. (2025). Exploring the Characteristics and Extent of Travel Influencers' Impact on Generation Z Tourist Decisions. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17010066>
- Benítez-Márquez, M. D., Sánchez-Teba, E. M., Bermúdez-González, G., & Núñez-Rydman, E. S. (2022). Generation Z Within the Workforce and in the Workplace: A Bibliometric Analysis. In *Frontiers in Psychology* (Vol. 12). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.736820>
- Chardonens, S. (2025). Adapting educational practices for Generation Z: integrating metacognitive strategies and artificial intelligence. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 10). <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2025.1504726>
- Chillakuri, B. (2020). Understanding Generation Z expectations for effective onboarding. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 33(7). <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-02-2020-0058>
- Dewi, C. A., Pahriah, P., & Purmadi, A. (2021). The Urgency of Digital Literacy for Generation Z Students in Chemistry Learning. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 16(11). <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v16i11.19871>
- Djafarova, E., & Fouts, S. (2022). Exploring ethical consumption of generation Z: theory of planned behaviour. *Young Consumers*, 23(3). <https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-10-2021-1405>
- Dobrowolski, Z., Drozdowski, G., & Panait, M. (2022). Understanding the Impact of Generation Z on Risk Management—A Preliminary Views on Values, Competencies, and Ethics of the Generation Z in Public Administration. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19073868>
- Dragolea, L. L., Butnaru, G. I., Kot, S., Zamfir, C. G., Nuță, A. C., Nuță, F. M., Cristea, D. S., & Ștefănică, M. (2023). Determining factors in shaping the sustainable behavior of the generation Z consumer. *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fenvs.2023.1096183>
- Dwivedula, R. (2025). Why Is Generation Z Motivated at Work? A Qualitative Exploration. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, 44(3). <https://doi.org/10.1002/joe.22273>
- Espejo, L., Perez, N., Mendoza, C., & Gagarin, Y. (2025). A Systematic Review on Unique Characteristics of Generation Z and Their Impact on Purchasing Decisions. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v4i1.4079>
- Ge, J. (2024). Influencers Marketing and its Impacts on Sustainable Fashion Consumption Among Generation Z. *Journal of Soft Computing and Decision Analytics*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.31181/jscda21202438>
- Ishak, D., Akmal, F. A., & Halide, N. (2024). GENERATION Z INVOLVEMENT IN HALAL ECOSYSTEM. *Jurnal Al-Dustur*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.30863/aldustur.v7i2.7199>
- Julius, A., & Nancy, M. (2025). The Digital Crossroads: A Comparative Analysis Of OpenAI And Google AI For Enhancing Learning Among Gen Z In Ugandan Private Universities. In *International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research* (Vol. 9). www.ijeais.org/ijapr

- Kanste, O., Ylisirniö, M., Hammarén, M., & Kuha, S. (2025). The perceptions of Generation Z professionals and students concerning health-care work: A scoping review. In *Nurse Education Today* (Vol. 150). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2025.106678>
- Kuleto, V., Milena, I. P., Stanescu, M., Ranković, M., Šević, N. P., Păun, D., & Teodorescu, S. (2021). Extended reality in higher education, a responsible innovation approach for generation y and generation z. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, *13*(21). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132111814>
- Lesinskis, K., Mavlutova, I., Spilbergs, A., & Hermanis, J. (2023). Digital Transformation in Entrepreneurship Education: The Use of a Digital Tool KABADA and Entrepreneurial Intention of Generation Z. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, *15*(13). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151310135>
- Nadanyiova, M., & Sujanska, L. (2023). The Impact of Influencer Marketing on the Decision-Making Process of Generation Z. *Economics and Culture*, *20*(1). <https://doi.org/10.2478/jec-2023-0006>
- Nelson, K., Christopher, F., & Milton, N. (2022). *Teach Yourself Spss and Stata*. *6*(7), 84–122.
- Nelson, K., Kazaara, A. G., & Kazaara, A. I. (2023). *Teach Yourself E-Views*. *7*(3), 124–145.
- Pichler, S., Kohli, C., & Granitz, N. (2021). DITTO for Gen Z: A framework for leveraging the uniqueness of the new generation. *Business Horizons*, *64*(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2021.02.021>
- Popşa, R. E. (2024). Exploring the Generation Z Travel Trends and Behavior. *Studies in Business and Economics*, *19*(1). <https://doi.org/10.2478/sbe-2024-0010>
- Priporas, C. V., Stylos, N., & Fotiadis, A. K. (2017). Generation Z consumers' expectations of interactions in smart retailing: A future agenda. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *77*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.058>
- Savithri, M., & Rajakumari, D. (2025). Analysis of Investment Factors and Decisions among Generation Z and Generation X in Indian Capital Market. *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues*, *15*(1). <https://doi.org/10.32479/ijefi.17526>
- Škudienė, V., Augutytė Kvedaravičienė, I., Truncienė, G., & Legotė, I. (2025). Antecedents of retention: digital subscription perspectives of Generation Z. *Management Decision*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-04-2024-0961>
- UU Republik Indonesia, Munawir, M., Nasional, B. S., Susanta, G., Jatimnet.com, MajaMojokerto.net, Radarmojokerto.jawapos.com, Wijayakusuma, D. M. S., Nahman, A., Godfrey, L., Jacobsen, R., Buysse, J., Gellynck, X., Bayu, D., Depkes, R., Soekidjo Notoatmodjo, Boulanger, L., Ismoyo, I. H., Tarigan, R., ... Sanyal, S. (2022). PENENTUAN ALTERNATIF LOKASI TEMPAT PEMBUANGAN AKHIR (TPA) SAMPAH DI KABUPATEN SIDOARJO. *Energies*, *15*(1).
- Vieira, J., Gomes da Costa, C., & Santos, V. (2024). Talent Management and Generation Z: A Systematic Literature Review through the Lens of Employer Branding. In *Administrative Sciences* (Vol. 14, Number 3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14030049>