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Abstract

This qualitative systematic review focuses on the effectiveness and limitations of skill-based education for enhancing women's rights in Pakistan with an understanding that the solution lies in addressing organizational, economic, and structural constraints that hamper the enforcement of such policies. These include gender norms, poverty, and inadequate technical and vocational education and training that do not empower women's education. However, possibilities are opening, such as government and non-government skill-building initiatives and e-learning and e-business business and education portals for rural women. Skill-based education is characteristic because it economically impacts women's social rights and empowers them. The review underscores the need for policies, institutional support, and sector desegregation to minimize educational gender differences. These include social connectedness, advanced digital learning, and government policies supporting training. All the above steps are essential for GM, WEE, and improving Pakistan's socio-economic fabric.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Skill-Based Education, Socio-Cultural Barriers, Vocational Training, Gender Equality

Authors:

Muhammad Rafiq-uz-Zaman: (Corresponding Author)

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

(Email: mrzmuslah@gmail.com)

Muhammad Asif Nadeem: Associate Professor, Department of Education, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

Iqra Rasheed: Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

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Authors:

Muhammad Rafiq-uz-Zaman: (Corresponding Author)

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

(Email: mrzmuslah@gmail.com)

Muhammad Asif Nadeem: Associate Professor, Department of Education, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

Iqra Rasheed: Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

Abstract

This qualitative systematic review focuses on the effectiveness and limitations of skill-based education for enhancing women's rights in Pakistan with an understanding that the solution lies in addressing organizational, economic, and structural constraints that hamper the enforcement of such policies. These include gender norms, poverty, and inadequate technical and vocational education and training that do not empower women's education. However, possibilities are opening, such as government and non-government skill-building initiatives and e-learning and e-business business and education portals for rural women. Skill-based education is characteristic because it economically impacts women's social rights and empowers them. The review underscores the need for policies, institutional support, and sector desegregation to minimize educational gender differences. These include social connectedness, advanced digital learning, and government policies supporting training. All the above steps are essential for GM, WEE, and improving Pakistan's socio-economic fabric.

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Introduction

Background: Pakistan's women's rights heavily depend on education and employment. Education empowers women in decision-making, control of resources, and voice. It also enhances their likelihood of landing formal employment, financial freedom, and economic stability (Habib et al., 2019). However, despite legal reforms for women in Pakistan, society still presents an environment that slows women's

empowerment down (Adil et al., 2021). The gender parity issue is best addressed by higher education, especially in the rural and suburban regions. However, unfortunately, women experience significant socio-cultural barriers in their quest to get an education and get a job. However, women in Pakistan are not idle; they practice different ways to fight for their rights and make changes to achieve success without aggression (Noreen & Khalid, 2012).



Therefore, it becomes even more critical to gender education and economic progress and adjust the cultural and societal understanding of women in Pakistan, as Adil et al. (2021) noted.

Skill-Based Education: Skill-based education plays a crucial role in enhancing employability and economic independence for women, differing from traditional academic education by focusing on practical, industry-relevant skills. This approach addresses the gap between education and employability, as employers find only 25% of graduates employable in India (Mathews & Chheda, 2020). Integrating skill-based education in higher education helps develop work-ready graduates and aligns with industrial market demands (Sharma & Sharma, 2021). Education and skill-building programs empower women by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary for economic, social, and political participation (Lata & Dahiya, 2024). For women entrepreneurs, skill and knowledge-based education enables them to transition from homemakers to job creators, contributing to economic development and shared prosperity (Shetty & Hans, 2019). However, challenges remain in implementing skill-based education, necessitating targeted interventions and inclusive policies to ensure effectiveness and sustainability (Lata & Dahiya, 2024).

Purpose and Significance

This systematic review analyses the prospects and shortcomings of promoting women's empowerment through skill-based education in Pakistan. By synthesizing existing literature on gender, education, and socioeconomic development, this review aims to:

Identify Barriers: Emphasize the main barriers, social, cultural, economic, and institutional, that deter women from attaining and benefiting from skill-based education in Pakistan.

Examine Opportunities: Examine the feasibility and nature of investments that could be useful to improve women's engagement and need skill-based programs already existing mechanisms.

Provide Recommendations: This review is not just about analysis but about action. It aims to produce

policy and practical suggestions that can be immediately implemented by policymakers, educators, and community leaders. These recommendations are designed to advance the enhanced design and delivery of skill-based educational programs for women in Pakistan.

Therefore, this review aims to increase awareness of the practical applications of SBE in general and in the context of empowering women, reducing gender disparities, and enhancing the country's socioeconomic development in Pakistan in particular. The review provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that women face in this regard, which is crucial for the country's progress.

Literature Selection: This review is guided by a literature review using journal articles, policy papers, and cases on women's empowerment and skill-based education in Pakistan. This paper reviewed what was available in the literature through search tools such as Google Scholar, SCOPUS, and JSTOR, and only articles and papers published within the last 15 years were used. The search terms applied were skill-based education, women empowerment in Pakistan, and women vocational training. Literature was reviewed concerning the general challenges and opportunities affecting women's access to skill-based education.

Challenges to Women's Empowerment through Skill-Based Education in Pakistan

Cultural and Social Barriers: Cultural and social constraints in developing nations greatly compromise a woman's access to skill-based education and employment. Women have been predestined to perform roles deemed culturally acceptable as women, and these roles do not include education or working but rather taking care of the home (Alniaçık et al., 2018; Jayachandran, 2020). In Northern Nigeria, for example, poverty, gender apartheid, and patriarchy all work in concert to understandably deny the girl child her right to education (Yewande & Olawunmi, 2023). Likewise, in Turkey, gendered vocational education perpetuates such traits, limiting education for vocation and making many women leave school and go directly home instead of the workplace (Alniaçık

et al., 2018). There are also still prejudices, and the established stereotype of patriarchal culture negatively affects women's opportunities in the labor market today (Jayachandran, 2020). Nevertheless, as some policies regarding gender stereotypes, gender-sensitive practices, and opposition to economic barriers are reported, women's education and employment rates will likely improve (Yewande & Olawunmi, 2023; Jayachandran, 2020).

Economic and Financial Constraints: Several studies show that low income and insufficient monetary means prevent women from engaging in skill development courses, particularly among rural and vulnerable groups. Constraints are time poverty constraints, gender inequalities limiting women's employment chances due to rural-urban differences, and patriarchal attitudes (Pomerai & Mangwende, 2024). The lack of due economic opportunities and the inability to gain control of productive assets like land and education widen the girl child's poverty (Khan et al., 2023; Nandal, 2005). Therefore, this paper seeks to identify and analyze the factors that hinder female enrolment in vocational training in rural India despite their training being either subsidized or offered free in most cases (Sheshadri et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2024). Likewise, women in rural Pakistan also experience problems and barriers in attending the skill development programs that are important to advancing living standards and business prospects. Regarding these problems, suggestions are as follows: to educate people about savings, a better transport system, mainstreaming gender in financial services, and gender-sensitive training (Pomerai & Mangwende, 2024; Luftu Hasnaen et al., 2023). Furthermore, using technology and indigenous assets can help improve access to training programs in rural women's regions (Hasnaen et al., 2023).

Institutional and Policy Gaps: Analyzing the nature of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Pakistan, one must mention that it has many difficulties providing skill-based education for women. This system needs more infrastructure, low funding, and no linkages with industries in the country (Bano et al., 2022). Even after the formation of provincial TEVTAs and the

realization of national skill policies, there are problems with administration and law, a lack of adequate technical colleges, and a lack of inter-institutional cooperation amongst the TVET institutions (Ahmed & Khan, 2018). Current education policies still need to be more effective in controlling the gap in technical education, besides correspondingly low skill formation, particularly in rural sectors and among female candidates (Ahmed & Khan, 2018; Majoka & Ilyas Khan, 2017). The TVET system struggles to supply the country's requirements for trained manpower, with 60% of young labor emerging from informal and non-formal sectors (Bano et al., 2022). Additionally, there is a lack of accurate and up-to-date information on TVET, hindering effective policy-making and implementation (Janjua & Mohammad, 2008).

Opportunities for Advancing Skill-Based Education for Women

Government and Policy Initiatives: The Pakistani government has implemented various initiatives to promote skill-based education for women. The Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF) offers training schemes focused on rural areas, small towns, and the formal sector. Vocational training or skill development programs are a concurrent responsibility of federal and provincial governments (Sánchez-Triana et al., 2014). This means that the Ministry of Labor and Employment offers training for trainers and vocational training for girls through the Advanced Training Institutes and the Regional Vocational Training Institutes. All these efforts seek to enhance productivity, employment, and opportunities for income generation among women (Ahamad et al., 2016). A literature review found that education, proactive technology enabling, and skill building positively correlate with women's empowerment in Pakistan (Sharif et al., 2021). Furthermore, ICT training and education play a massive role in increasing employment and entrepreneurial capabilities for women (Shakir et al., 2020). USAID Pakistan has made these efforts to support the cause of sustainable rural development and to work on the issues of gender differences in the country.

The Potential for Socio-Economic Status Improvement: It is particularly important to note that NGOs effectively contribute to supporting women in developing countries through skill development training. For female farmers in Pakistan, Karavan Crafts Foundation provides digital literacy training that includes anything from smartphone usage to electronic commerce (Irfan & Salam, 2020). A study in the Barna District of Pakistan showed that Chitral, through the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP), increased the income of participants after training in agriculture, livestock, and enterprise development (Khan, 2006). Women-only stimulus in entrepreneurship training has influenced Pakistan's opportunities for women entrepreneurs by decreasing the constraints and creating competencies among women entrepreneurs (Roomi & Harrison, 2010). Such endeavors in India also indicate that NGOs can foster women's rights through micro-employment, venture creation, and entrepreneurship (Gupta, 2021). The results of these programs indicate the potential for enhancing the quality of women's socio-economic status, offering a promising outlook for the future of women in vocational training. However, the continuation of these conditions still depends upon future control and reinforcement (Khan, 2006; Gupta, 2021).

Technological Advancements: In the context of Asia, technology has come in handy to facilitate skill-based education to be provided to women through digital learning platforms and mobile technology in both rural and affluent settings. Forces for women's Empowerment, especially in rural areas where the internet and digital technology literacy are often challenging, highlight that digital technology is key (Dhanamalar et al., 2020). E-learning opportunities have revealed pro-feminine benefits for women's education and social and economic enhancement in developing nations (Hakimi et al., 2024). However, there are differences by gender in the way young people access technologies and skills, making it essential to design interventions that address them. Using synchronous and asynchronous tools, women's participation and accomplishments can be enhanced in digital learning (Nyangara, 2022). Despite the

trends and women's engagement rates increasing on digital platforms, there is still a question of getting proper representation and being memorable (Srivastava, 2021). Hakimi et al. (2024) find that doubling digital literacy efforts and strengthening institutional support is the key to maximizing the effectiveness of e-learning and gender equality in education.

Pathways to Overcoming Challenges

Policy Recommendations: Recent research emphasizes the issue of skills gaps in education for employability improvement. The National Education Policy in India has put efforts into this by embracing balanced human development, skill development, and the need for relevant courses across all communities (Sodi, 2024). Consequently, higher learning institutions are useful in filling skills deficiencies by moving away from theoretical lessons toward applied forms of training (Mishra et al., 2019). However, issues are with mainstreaming 'level politics to local plans and policy literacy in and across different sectors (Al Laban et al., 2022). To these effects, skill-based education is required in higher learning institutions as an improvement aspect. The dual system format, where students attend class and get placement simultaneously in Switzerland and Germany, is productive. India has started programs to create skills in higher education, such as Skill Universities. Despite progress, challenges remain in the skill development system, necessitating continued efforts to align education with industry needs and enhance employability (Sharma & Sharma, 2021).

Community Involvement: Education and skill development are crucial for women's empowerment and societal progress (Lata & Dahiya, 2024). However, gender discrimination persists in educational systems, often due to a lack of awareness among community leaders about the importance of female education. Engaging communities, local leaders, and families is essential for promoting women's education and challenging traditional gender norms. Awareness campaigns and community-based strategies can help combat violence against women and promote their

rights. Life Skills Based Education through national health works programs has been proposed as an innovative approach to reduce violence and empower women (Ali et al., 2020). Finally, women's education and skill development are crucial to the future and improving developmental social power (Joshi, 2022).

Collaboration between Sectors: The papers that have been reviewed reveal that education and skill acquisition are major determinants of women's empowerment, especially in the developing world. While education remains a key factor, it is not sufficient to perceive, let alone overcome, the numerous challenges that women encounter. A collective effort of governments, private agencies, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions is crucial. This collaboration is not just a suggestion, but a call to action for all of us to inform and design adequate measures that would target both educational and socio-economic dimensions. These programs should aim to cultivate the capability to think critically, resist gendered expectations, and self- and collectively act. However, even today, females face numerous barriers in pursuing education, such as social culture, financial difficulties, and prejudices. Empowerment measures must have the capacity to address gender across the domains of the private/public divide and macro/micro strategies with respect to changing gender social relations and forging themes of women's transformative agency.

Conclusion

This review discussed several significant issues and prospects of women's empowerment through the SBTE in Pakistan. The main difficulties include cultural and social factors that remain rather pressing: masculine and paternalist attitudes toward women hinder them from getting an education and further careers. The problem is worsened by limited economic and financial resources, especially in rural settings, limiting women's chances to attend skill-

based programs. Furthermore, institutional and policy voids in the technical and vocational educational training (TVET) system of Pakistan adversely affect the training aimed at meeting the needs of women.

However, it is possible through various activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as by the use of technologies. Efforts are being made through government schemes like the Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF), which are helping to provide skill education to the country's rural women. In gender empowerment, NGOs have been instrumental; their efforts in providing vocational training for women targeting business ventures and income-earning activities are commendable. Technology and mobile tools enhance women's education, especially those with limited access to education in remote areas, but technology and related facilities are still a challenge.

Skills education is especially empowering for women as it provides direction to economic self-sufficiency, social promotion, and increased labor market participation. The steps to remove the barriers in this review will bring women into the formal employment stream, thus improving gender parity and advancing Pakistan's socio-economic growth (McCosker, 2018).

Call to Action

There is a need to involve policymakers, educators, and the community to enhance the availability of skill-based education. Cultural, financial, and institutional challenges mean a multi-sectoral approach must be taken with national government, private sector, and civil society. It confirms that expanding existing education programs and promoting females' use of information technology are the major ways of eradicating gender inequalities and ensuring sustainable development in Pakistan.

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