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The Journey to Empowerment: Women Higher Education and Its Barriers

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Abstract

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Keywords: Higher Education, Women, Empowerment, Challenges

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Title

The Journey to Empowerment: Women Higher Education and Its Barriers

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Abstract

The main purpose of the current research was to examine students' perspectives on the role of higher education in women's empowerment and development, as well as the issues and barriers associated with this role in public sector universities. A descriptive research design was employed to achieve the study targets. The study population consisted of total 4647 students. The study sample consisted of 300 female students selected through a simple random sampling technique from public sector universities in district Multan, Punjab, Pakistan. The descriptive statistics mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics (ANOVA) were utilized to analyze all data provided by the students. The results revealed that higher education institutions are playing an effective role in women's empowerment, but barriers such as economic, social and cultural impede their access and success. The study recommended giving women equal opportunities to pursue higher education, as this can significantly contribute to a nation's progress.

Keywords:

[Higher Education](#),
[Women](#), [Empowerment](#),
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Introduction

The term empowerment can be described as enhancing women's feeling of personal worth, capacity to make their own decisions, and the right to make changes within society individually and with the help of others. It involves the elevation of their status through education, awareness, literature, and training once they are willing and ready to take opportunities in certain sorts of fields like education, professional lifestyle, etc. without any barriers and restrictions, pussy empowerment is a very broad term. It also involves the decision-making power The

specific decision-making power that is included usually affects several areas such as the kinds of strategic decisions that can be made or the control of the decision-making models that can be employed in the implementation of various methods of project management. For more information, when a woman makes a major decision, she also experiences the feeling of liberation (Babbar, [2022](#)).

In the same respect, women's civil liberties provide provisions for women's emancipation by increasing women's education, literacy, and training as well as providing awareness (Lopez, [2013](#)). In



addition, women's empowerment as a concept is defined as women's capacity to make decisions on imperative matters in life that would hitherto be unavailable to them.

Apart from women empowerment is a condition whereby women are allowed to go and exercise their rights in the social, political, and economic sectors of the society. Women's empowerment can thus be defined as the process whereby women are given additional chances in education so that they are in a position to make rational choices regarding themselves and their families (Manuere & Neria, [2018](#)).

In addition to vocational and traditional secondary schools, "higher education" can refer to institutions that accept students with a high school diploma or equivalent and train them to become experts in areas such as economics, science, technology, and culture (Sharma & Afroz, [2014](#)).

Furthermore, education can enhance the social status of women. It is a powerful tool for a country's economic and social progress, and it's one of the best ways to alleviate poverty, ignorance, and marginalization all at once. We must value education as a tool for social change and democratic achievement, recognizing it as a foundation for a professional, research-based, and career-oriented future (Singh, [2017](#)).

Nonetheless, both conventional and innovative approaches may bolster the essential function of universities. An educated woman is always supportive in society as female education is more essential than male education. Therefore, women may develop personal and unique identities and solutions to their difficulties through education (Choudhary, [2022](#)).

Similarly, the pervasive gender inequality and confinement of women to the home, where they shoulder the majority of household responsibilities but have little say in the country's economic affairs, make women's empowerment a challenging issue for developing nations. The gender difference in Pakistan's basic education and literacy rates is striking. This research investigation intends to the threats to women's education in Pakistan, as well as possible solutions to these problems. Pakistani politics has

increasingly revolved around the topic of women's education in recent decades (Askari, [2023](#)). However, there is a lack of seriousness in expanding educational opportunities for women is a cause for worry. It is pertinent to mention that at 25%, Pakistan's female literacy rate is lower than the worldwide average of 24% and is among the lowest of all Asian nations. According to Saeed ur Rahman ([2018](#)), women's education may not be the whole solution, but it might be a crucial one.

Given Askari et al ([2023](#)), the contemporary state of women's education in Pakistan is both alarming and a source of disenchantment. The advancement of higher education and women's involvement in education can reciprocally support one another, leading to progress and success for the female population. Women's access to education, at all levels, is limited. The government has made significant and commendable efforts to expand educational opportunities for girls and women; nonetheless, the factors that continue to impede progress remain strong.

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a Muslim-majority, male-dominated society and women face hindrances because of discrimination that exists within the fabric of society. Women are considered weak, less, dependent on men and their role in society is just a homemaker. Due to strict, religious, or tribal family backgrounds, they are prohibited from going to universities with boys. This is the main obstacle to girl's access to higher education. (Malik, [2021](#)).

Patriarchy in Pakistani culture denies women equal access to education, healthcare, and career opportunities, as well as decision-making power. Popular culture stereotypes men and women as fundamentally different due to their distinct traits and dispositions. There are a lot of ways in which women vary from men, both physically and culturally. However, traditional gender roles expect young girls to clean the house and wash the laundry and dishes. Within this context, Ali et al. ([2010](#)), highlighted that women do not get the proper opportunities to complete their education in Pakistan.

Pakistan, on the other hand, has unique cultural norms that make it very difficult, if not impossible, for

the vast majority of women to pursue higher education. In patriarchal households, males still hold the traditional roles of breadwinner and household decision-maker, which are prevalent in Pakistani culture. The biological word "sex," which signifies the difference between the sexes, ubiquitously refers to the building blocks of society, whether male or female. According to Mujahid et al. (2015), men's contributions to society have been and will be substantial for as long as civilization exists. Education is one of the most powerful tools for empowering women, enabling them to solve problems, challenge traditional roles, and ultimately lead better lives overall. Women's employment and salaries are more favorable to those with advanced degrees. They are better able to support themselves financially after completing their education. Women with degrees are more likely to start and run their businesses, which boosts the economy and gives them independence. Women with higher levels of education have a greater chance of improving the health of their families and themselves via the decisions they make about personal care. Higher education challenges traditional gender roles and encourages shared duties in homes and communities, thereby fostering gender equality.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the perspectives of female students regarding how higher education contributes to their empowerment.
2. To examine the perspectives about the obstacles faced by female students in higher education.

Research Questions

1. What are female students' perspectives on how higher education contributes to their empowerment?
2. What are the barriers faced by female students in pursuit of their higher education?

Literature Review

Women's empowerment is a rich, diverse, and socially evolving concept within the spectrum of recent research studies. Now, it has a financial component, political component, social component, social

component, severe component, individual component, mental component, and a significant component. Moreover, women's empowerment seems to have several factors and many antecedents. (Mahsud, 2021). Women empowering alludes to the most profound sense of how ladies are equipped with the rudimentary methods and opportunities to exercise their privileges, engage themselves in constructive processes, and be in charge of their lives (Reshi, 2022).

However, women's empowerment strengthens what is going on with women by offering them tutoring, care, capacity, and preparation. Furthermore, it strengthens prepares, and enables women to make life-choosing decisions. Women could have had the expected chance to rename direction occupations, which in turn provides more openings to chase after the essential goals (Mahbub, 2021). We are a complex of thoughts that assists women in gaining power, ready to act for decisions in their everyday lives (Reddy, 2019). Furthermore, strengthening women enables and prepares them to tackle diverse issues (Bayeh, 2016).

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a Muslim larger part, male overwhelmed, and moderate society, and ladies face burdens in light of segregation that exists inside the structure holding the system together. Ladies are viewed as feeble, less, subject to men and their part in the public eye is only a house-creator. In Pakistan, countless advanced education foundations are co-training and laid out by private or military areas. This restricts the entrance of ladies in colleges as most young ladies are from moderate and conventional families. Because of a severe, strict, or ancestral family foundation, they are denied to go to college with young men. This is the principal hindrance to young lady's admittance to advanced education. The absence of college transportation, nearby lodgings, legitimate and isolated washrooms for ladies, all-young ladies' grounds, and night timings of classes make it hard for ladies to sign up for colleges (Malik, 2021).

Similarly, in the male-centric structure of Pakistani society, the ladies are denied their fundamental privileges of schooling, and they are not

given work, well-being, and dynamic specialists as men have. The two genders male and female are considered to have various attributes and characters and are, accordingly assumed unexpectedly. The ladies have different physical and social highlights that make them not quite the same as men. However, the little kids should do conventional undertakings, for example, housekeeping, and dish/garment washing. The ladies are not given due regard at their workplaces (Ali et al, [2010](#)).

As per Ahmad et al ([2014](#)), dealing with a youngster, cleaning the house, doing clothing, facilitating guests, and cooking are only a portion of the obligations that tumble to ladies in the home. More youthful young ladies will generally shape close bonds with their mothers since a lady can't satisfy every one of the obligations at home. In like manner, this affects the young ladies' schooling. Each part of life in Pakistan is overwhelmed by guys. Since males settle on every one of the choices, especially after marriage, and because they don't pay attention to ladies' viewpoints, ladies are restricted and incapable of carrying on with their lives as completely as they would some way or another be capable. This is just because of the way that they can't deal with their family and their instructive obligations simultaneously, they can't proceed with their schooling (Yousaf & Schmiede, [2016](#)).

In addition to this, educated women are fit for partaking in governmental issues and starting to lead the pack in regions where ladies are expected to run. Women's political contribution alludes to their capacity to take part in governmental issues on fair terms with guys, at all levels and in all pieces of the political system (Turan et al, [2022](#)).

Similarly, the political hindrance ladies face generally. The male members generally overwhelm each side of political life and they form and come to conclusions about the principles of the political game. The political field is coordinated by male qualities and standards which ladies track down troublesome in working in such a climate. The issue of schooling and preparing continues to be a barricade in ladies' support in politics. Comparably Jahan ([2016](#)) likewise made sense of that female support in governmental issues

implies the capacity of the female to add to the male at all levels in all choices that influence them correspondingly. In any nation, female interest is viewed as a fundamental essential for orientation equity and honest majority rule government (Alexander et al., [2016](#)).

The lack of educational facilities is additionally a major obstruction to women's education in Pakistan. Numerous universities do not often have appropriate frameworks and qualified instructors. This makes it troublesome for women to get to education (Askar, et al.,2023). There is inadequate access to basic facilities like sanitation, power, and water but on the side, numerous necessities are moreover lacking for example infrastructure, and need of furniture. Moreover, remoteness and marginalization can be compensated with adequate facilities of infrastructure (LONE [2020](#)).

Material and Methods

The current research pursuit employed a quantitative and descriptive research methodology. The study's population consisted of 4647 students from the faculty of social sciences at three public sector institutions in district Multasouth Punjab, Pakistan, including Emerson University Multan, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, and Women's University Multan. The study utilized a sample of 300 students drawn through random sampling from departments including education, psychology, mass communication, and political science, among other fields. The investigation utilized a simple random sampling strategy to obtain a sample from the targeted population. An extensive review of relevant literature and consultation with educational experts led to the design of the questionnaire. The researchers consulted two education experts to go over the questionnaire and provide feedback to make sure it was suitable in terms of its content. With the help of experts' feedback, the researchers refined the items in the questionnaire. Ultimately, the researchers refined the instrument in a way that students could easily understand. The study used a questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire covered a wide range of aspects, including the demographics of

the investigation participants, items related to the role of higher education in women's empowerment, and statements about various barriers such as economic, physical, security, and transport barriers. The researchers conducted a pilot study to test the effectiveness of the research instrument, using a different sample of female students from the University of Education, Multan campus. Following the pilot study, the researchers imported the data into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to confirm the reliability of the instrument. The researchers gathered data from 300 BS students in the

selected departments of the universities. The researchers strictly adhered to all research ethics throughout the process of carrying out the study.

Data Analysis

Using descriptive and inferential statistics, the researcher examined the provided data in SPSS, (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). In descriptive statistics, the researcher calculated means and standard deviations. The researchers used ANOVA to analyze several variables in the inferential statistics chi-square tests.

Table 1

University wise analysis

University	Frequency	Percent
Women university	100	33.3%
BZU	10	33.3%
Emerson university	100	33.4%
Total	300	100.0%

Table 1 displays the university-wise spread of 300 individuals. Among them, 33.3% (100) individuals are from women's universities, while 33.3% (100) are from 'Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), and

33.3% (100) are from Emerson University Multan. The entire respondents are female students getting the higher education degree.

Table 2

Department wise analysis

Department	Frequency	Percent
Education	75	250.0%
Mass communication	75	25.0%
Political science	75	25.0%
Psychology	75	25.0%
Total	300	100.0%

The table illustrates the calculation of individuals across different departments. Four different departments have been selected for the response to our

questionnaire. We distribute the questionnaire among four departments equally.

Table 3

Family Status analysis

Family Status	Frequency	Percent
Joint family	140	46.7
Separate family	157	52.3

Family Status	Frequency	Percent
Broken family	3	1.0
Total	300	100.0%

The above Table 3 shows the family status of the respondents, we can observe that there are 140 (46.7%) respondents living in the joint family system. While there are 157 (52.3%) respondents live separate family system while there are only 3 (1%) belong to a broken family system.

Table 4

Descriptive Analysis for Students Perspectives on the Role of Higher Education for Women

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I feel higher education is essential for empowering women.	4.11	0.974
2	I believe that access to higher education is an important component in fostering women’s empowerment.	4.04	0.962
3	Higher education helps women to achieve leadership positions in society.	4.00	0.975
4	Higher education empowers women to successfully campaign for equality and their rights.	4.11	0.890
5	Women's empowerment is vital for societal progress.	4.12	0.920
6	The main goal of women’s empowerment is to provide them equal chances.	4.21	0.770
7	Women’s higher education provides long-term societal benefits.	3.92	0.982
8	Higher education promotes women's leadership skills.	4.14	0.867
9	Higher education empowers women to promote gender equality.	4.29	0.822
10	Higher education gives women the ability to lead as a role model for future generations.	4.30	0.851

Table 4 above displays descriptive statistics on the importance of education for women. The inferred results reveal that the fact that providing women's empowerment is vital for societal progress has a mean of 4.12 with a standard deviation of 0.920, while the fact that women's higher education provides long-term societal benefits has a mean of 3.92 with a 0.982 standard deviation. Higher education fosters women's leadership, with a mean score of 4.14 and a variation of 0.867. A woman's higher education promotes gender equality, with a mean of 4.29 and a standard deviation of 0.822. The factor women's education gives the ability to lead as a role model has a mean of 4.30 with a variation of 0.851.

Table 5

Descriptive Analysis of Societal Barriers for Women in Higher Education

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Men-controlled society creates a hurdle for women in attaining education.	3.89	1.019
2	I believe that the lack of parental support for females is a social obstacle in rural society for seeking education.	3.79	0.956
3	Insufficient political will of leaders affects women's education.	3.83	1.013
4	I believe there is a commitment gap between lawmakers	3.95	0.952

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
5	toward female education. Culture plays an adverse role for women to get education.	3.82	1.019

Table 5 above illustrates the descriptive analysis of the barriers to higher education for women. The observed findings highlight a lack of parental support for females, with a mean score of 3.79 and a variation of 0.956. Ineffective political leadership also has an impact on women's education, with a mean score of 3.83 and a standard deviation of 1.013. Culture also has an adverse effect on women's ability to get an education, with a mean of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 1.019.

Table 6

Descriptive Analysis of Economic, Security, and Physical barriers to getting Higher Education for women

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I feel that poverty is a barrier for women to get an education.	3.81	1.060
2	Insufficient resources prevent women from pursuing higher education in rural communities.	3.81	1.060
3	I feel parents do not feel prefer to invest financially to pursue their dreams in academic life.	3.76	1.169
4	Parents do not believe that their girls would be safe in a university setting; thus, they discourage their daughters from pursuing higher education.	3.73	1.027
5	Parents discourage their daughters from pursuing higher education because it would lead them to associate with unethical people.	3.98	1.079
6	I feel that insufficient infrastructure of educational Institutions is a barrier to female education	3.98	1.025

The descriptive analysis of the economic, security, and physical barriers to higher education for women is illustrated in Table 6. The observed findings indicate that poverty is a major issue for females, with a mean score of 3.81 and a variation of 1.060. Women's education is also significantly impacted by insufficient resources, with a mean score of 3.81 and a standard

deviation of 1.060. Assurance of security poses a significant obstacle for women seeking higher education, with a mean score of 3.76 and a maximum standard deviation of 1.169. The mean score for females who lack parental encouragement is 3.73. The mean score for unethical activities is 3.98, with a standard deviation of 1.025.

Table 7

Descriptive Analysis of Transport barriers to getting Higher Education for women

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	You are satisfied with the transportation system of your university	3.78	1.158
2	Bus drivers behave in fair manners when handling issues with students on their bus.	3.83	1.069
3	Bus drivers handle the bus in a safe manner	4.11	0.839

The descriptive analysis of the transport barriers to higher education for women is illustrated in Table 7,

where the observed results show a mean satisfaction with the transport system for females of 3.78, with a

variation of 1.158. Driver behavior is also a major issue for females, with a mean of 3.83 and a standard deviation of 1.069. Safe driving is also a significant issue for women, with a maximum mean of 4.11 and a standard deviation of 0.839.

Table 8

ANOVA for Economic, Security, and Physical barriers to getting Higher Education for women

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Major issue poverty	Between Groups	10.980	2	5.490	5.014	.007
	Within Groups	325.190	297	1.095		
	Total	336.170	299			
Insufficient resources	Between Groups	10.980	2	5.490	5.014	.007
	Within Groups	325.190	297	1.095		
	Total	336.170	299			
Don't feel secure and safe	Between Groups	.860	2	.430	.313	.731
	Within Groups	407.860	297	1.373		
	Total	408.720	299			
Don't encourage	Between Groups	6.260	2	3.130	3.010	.051
	Within Groups	308.870	297	1.040		
	Total	315.130	299			
Social evils threads	Between Groups	13.740	2	6.870	6.106	.003
	Within Groups	334.140	297	1.125		
	Total	347.880	299			
Infrastructure	Between Groups	6.000	2	3.000	2.892	.057
	Within Groups	308.080	297	1.037		
	Total	314.080	299			

The ANOVA Table 10 assesses current teaching knowledge and skills. The F-value indicates there is a significant difference among the group means. The p-value indicates the likelihood of achieving those outcomes. The ANOVA test shows significant results because the p-value is less than 0.05, which indicates

there is a significant difference between at least two group means for all the factors except “do not feel secure and safe,” as the p-value is 0.73, which is greater than 0.05 and indicates there is no difference of opinion among them.

Table 9*ANOVA for Transport barriers in getting Higher Education for women*

ANOVA		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Satisfaction transport	Between Groups	14.187	2	7.093	5.448	.005
	Within Groups	386.730	297	1.302		
	Total	400.917	299			
Driver behaves	Between Groups	.247	2	.123	.107	.898
	Within Groups	341.420	297	1.150		
	Total	341.667	299			
Safe driving	Between Groups	1.647	2	.823	1.170	.312
	Within Groups	208.940	297	.704		
	Total	210.587	299			

The ANOVA Table 11 illustrates the transportation barriers that women face when pursuing higher education. The F-value indicates there is a significant difference among the group means. The p-value indicates the likelihood of achieving those outcomes. The results show a lack of satisfaction with the transport system because the p-value is less than 0.05.

Discussion

The statistical results about female empowerment in Pakistan illustrate the substantial obstacles that women face in their pursuit of higher educational opportunities. The challenges, stemming from cultural, sociological, and economic constraints, are substantial impediments that must be tackled to promote women's academic achievement and, consequently, their autonomy. Pakistani society is predominantly governed by patriarchal customs, which restrict women's freedom of movement. According to study findings, there is a lack of physical and academic resources, such as suitable transport facilities for women, and economic barrier worsens this issue, which in turn deters female students from enrolling in institutions. This pattern is supported by data from multiple studies, which link these sociocultural obstacles to the low levels of female education in Pakistan. The investigation outcomes

correspond to Malik (2021) highlights that the absence of women-friendly infrastructure, such as transit systems or secure campuses, hinders female involvement in higher education. These issues are worsened by long-standing cultural customs that promote the education of males over females, leading to a consistent gender gap in literacy and educational achievement. Similarly, the numerical data patterns corroborate the findings of Saba Wali Lone (2020) with comparable difficulties. Lone's research validates that women's low participation rates in higher education are mostly influenced by restricted educational opportunities and the obstacles presented by socio-cultural variables. These barriers not only limit women's ability to obtain an education but also hinder their overall progress in society and the professional sphere. Overall, the quantitative data demonstrates that social barriers pose substantial challenges to the progress of women in Pakistan. To advance women's empowerment, it is imperative to address these barriers through the enactment of comprehensive laws and the cultivation of cultural shifts that enhance women's admittance to edification.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, of the study it is very clear that higher education is valuable to women in the

economic, social, and political aspects of life. However, the study reveals that the following factors act as barriers to women's enrolment and completion of higher education. These barriers include; socio-cultural barriers including parents' support and culture, and resources including financial support and secure means of transportation. The successful completion of these obstacles is very necessary in order to accomplish the goal of completing the gradual transformation of educational programs in the sphere of higher education for women.

Recommendations

- Providing equal access to higher education for women by implementing policies that eliminate barriers such as financial constraints, cultural biases, social and political, etc.
- Mentorship programs should be initiated where successful women in leadership positions mentor and guide female students, providing them with valuable insights and support to navigate challenges in their academic and professional journeys.
- Organize facilitating networking events, conferences, and seminars where female

students can connect with professionals and leaders in various industries, fostering opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and career advancement.

- Offering scholarships, grants, and financial aid specifically targeted toward women pursuing higher education, particularly in fields where they are underrepresented, alleviates financial burdens and encourages academic pursuits.

Suggestions for Future Research

For future research, it is recommended to explore the following areas:

- In the current investigation only economic, physical, and transport barriers were focused, however, future researchers can look into how ethnicity, social class, and region can enhance or temper the effects of gender on women's chances of enrolling in higher education institutions.
- This pursuit explored the phenomena in the current scenario however, future investigations can undertake exploratory studies with a view of determining the long-term outcomes of higher education on women's social- in the long run.

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