




THE TRANSFORMATIVE INFLUENCE OF VOCATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING ON THE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Women Empowerment, Vocational Skills Trainings, Economic Empowerment, Mingora City, Women's Entrepreneurship	<p>This study examines how the women's economic prospects are affected by vocational training, with main focus on employment, entrepreneurship and income. The study examines 120 respondents' viewpoints of how vocational training affects these vital dimensions of women's economic empowerment. The majority of respondents strongly agreed, according to findings, that vocational training has beneficial impact on income. Likewise, vocational training has a positive effect on women's entrepreneurship, according to respondents, highlighting its significance in advancing gender equality and economic independence. Some participants agree that the vocational training improves the women's career opportunities. The results offered significant information in reaching conclusion. This study highlights the need for specialized vocational training programs that take into account the varied needs and experiences of women, with consequences for both researchers and policymakers. This study advances existing conversation on women's economic empowerment and function of vocational training in creating inclusive communities by tackling these issues and exploring the new research directions.</p> <p> 2023 Journal of Social Research Development</p>
<p>ARTICLE HISTORY</p> <p>Date of Submission: 22-08-2023 Date of Acceptance: 26-09-2023 Date of Publication: 30-09-2023</p>	
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INTRODUCTION

Women have a pivotal role in nurturing families and sustaining society in every part of the world. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of men and women in the human ecology (Richert, 2022). Women's empowerment has long been recognized as the road to gaining full rights for women in social, economic, religious and political realms (Bashir, Rashid & Jabeen, 2023). This empowerment as recognized by United Nations agencies and international organizations that collaborate with the

World Bank, is critical to reducing the infant mortality, altering fertility patterns, improving child welfare, supporting economic growth, and alleviating poverty (Tandon, 2016). According to Bashir et al. (2023) phrase that empowerment conveys reflective strength and confidence that comes with occupying positions of authority. This empowerment take several forms, ranging from institutional and political authority to more subtle, personal sense of empowerment that transcends hierarchical configurations (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002). On other hand, empowerment is management and acquisition of the intellectual and material resources that enable individuals to increase their independence, assert their right to self-determination and confront rooted patriarchal ideologies and gender-based biases.

The individuals gain the capability to organize and establish their authority through these gained competencies, resulting in better decision-making capacity and a reduction in the subordination in many aspects of life (Reshi & Sudha, 2022). Women's empowerment, at its most basic, refers to the process through which women obtain authority over people, resources, expertise, economic assets, and the ability to shape decisions (Sultana, Wahab, Nahid, Iqbal, Shakil & Asad, 2023). Thus, this empowerment extends beyond individual and pervades society, communities, and homes, allowing women the legitimate ownership and control through their lives both within and outside of their households (Bhattacharya & Banerjee, 2012). In this connection, the women's empowerment is a multidimensional phenomenon with diverse interconnected and mutually reinforcing components. Thus, the economic empowerment, for example, refers to women's economic rights, whereas societal empowerment envisions a world in which women have an equal place in the society alongside their male counterparts. Therefore, women can oppose injustice and gender bias through these elements, giving the actual significance to their independence (Bhattacharya & Banerjee, 2012; Chaudhry, Nosheen, & Lodhi, 2012).

This study investigates the transforming potential of the vocational skills training in the context of Mingora City, shedding light on how such efforts empower women by providing them with the means, knowledge, and confidence to assert themselves in a variety of domains of life. Through this investigation, we seek to bring the spotlight on the enormous influence of vocational training on the lives of women, ultimately contributing to an equal and empowered society. In this research study, we conduct a thorough examination of the impact of vocational skills training upon the women's empowerment, with a special emphasis on economic and social growth. In the context of Pakistan, a country where a significant portion of the population suffers from poverty, low per capita income, and high maternal and infant mortality rates, the women's empowerment emerges as a critical imperative (Bushra & Wajaha, 2013). This pursuit is in line with the third goal of the Millennium Development Goals, which emphasizes the importance of gender equality and women's suffrage on the global scale, recognizing that empowering women is critical to combating poverty, improving the child mortality rates, nurturing mental health, and ensuring universal access towards the basic education (Kabeer, 2017).

Despite the initiation of several projects and programs aimed at improving women's status, studies continue to indicate that women's positions in Pakistan are far from ideal (Goheer, 2003). As result,

this study aims to fill a knowledge gap by addressing critical questions about enhancing women's empowerment through vocational skill training. It examines economic dimension of empowerment by examining whether vocational skills training improves economic conditions, income generation, and economic well-being for women. By learning desired skills, women can start their businesses or become self-employed, thereby making income and improving their financial well-being (Reshi & Sudha, 2022). Vocational skills training equips women with knowledge and abilities to participate in the workforce and earn a livelihood. Furthermore, we investigate the potential of occupational skills training to improve women's social standing, giving light on its significance in altering their societal roles and relationships. The research intends to expand our understanding of transformative potential of the vocational skills training in empowering women through the rigorous analysis and empirical data, and so contribute to ongoing efforts to elevate the status of the women in Pakistan and similar contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Empowerment

According to various authors, women's empowerment is comprehensive process that aims to provide women with tools, information, and opportunity essential for active involvement in social, economic, and political realms (Sinaga, 2018). It emphasizes abolition of gender discrimination, questioning of cultural norms, and the promotion of inclusive environments in which women can freely express themselves, make informed choices, and contribute to society (McGinley, 2008). This transformative path also includes giving women authority over their decisions and actions, instilling respect for women's rights, and supporting women's leadership in all aspects of life (Manuja, 2016). Women's empowerment is essential to sustainable development, necessitating a deep shift in power dynamics and the deconstruction of patriarchal structures, all while appreciating women's unique strengths and establishing inclusive places where views are not only heard but respected (Manuja, 2016). Women's empowerment is a complex and ever-changing notion. It has several facets, including economic, social, political, and cultural issues (Bashir, Rashid & Jabeen, 2023). The various authors' opinions contribute to thorough understanding of the complexity involved in empowering women, and need of creating inclusive, equitable society in which women can thrive and contribute to the advancement of humanity.

Vocational Skills Training

The literature on vocational skills training provides full overview of concept as stated by numerous experts. According to Smith (1985), it is an organized educational program that meant to transmit specialized knowledge and abilities required for specific professions or vocations. He highlights its hands-on and practical aspect, emphasizing its role in promoting the employability. Johnson (2015) sees vocational skills training as means of realizing economic growth and individual empowerment via acquisition of the practical skills. Dowling, Rouse, Sibbett, and Farrell (2009) accentuates the program industry-specific focus, preparing students for certain vocations. Likewise, Anderson (1912) underlines its critical role in bridging skill gaps and preparing individuals for meaningful work. Collectively, these perspectives contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Vocational Skills Training as an important educational strategy with far-reaching implications for individuals and

society, bridging the gap between education and employment by imparting the industry-relevant skills and knowledge.

In Pakistan, vocational skills training for women is an important means of fostering gender equality and economic development. Although Pakistan has major gender inequities, projects targeted at providing women with practical skills in areas such as sewing, handicrafts, computer literacy, and others can be transformative. These programs not only improve the women's employability but also challenge traditional gender roles, allowing women to actively contribute to the workforce and the well-being of their families (Abid, Afaq, Atif, Sana, & Saqqa, 2020; Naseem, Nosheen, & Malik, 2021). Skills training programs often have long-term benefits, as women pass on their knowledge and skills to next generation, creating positive cycle of empowerment. The economic independence and increased self-confidence as a result of vocational training enable women to participate more successfully in both economic and societal realms (Ahmed, 2016; Jamil et al., 2012). In line with the Pakistan's broader goals of inclusive growth, these programs have the ability to create economic progress and foster positive social change by utilizing the country underutilized potential of women (World Bank, 2020).

Theoretical Underpinning

According to human capital theory (Blaug, 1976), investments in education and skill development contribute to increased productivity and economic empowerment. This theory proposes, in the context of the women's empowerment through vocational skills training, that by obtaining useful vocational skills, women in the Mingora City can raise their human capital, hence boosting their economic possibilities and decision-making authority within homes. Feminist theories emphasize the importance of resolving gender inequities and questioning established gender norms (Hackett & Kohlhart, 2012). In this linking, vocational skills training is a feminist method to empowerment since it promotes economic independence, self-reliance, and a more equitable distribution of labor within households.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The impact of vocational training upon the women's income, entrepreneurship, and employment is thoroughly investigated in this study using a mixed-methods research approach. Specifically, the quantitative portion of the research is the main focus of this work. 120 women who have finished the vocational training program that are selected for the quantitative phase and given a standardized questionnaire. Thus, with the help of the questionnaire's Likert-scale and closed-ended questions, quantitative information about participants' opinions of how vocational training affects their job, entrepreneurship, and income was gathered. Age, educational background, and type of vocational training acquired are all deliberately chosen to ensure diversity in sample. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, are used to analyze the data obtained from the quantitative surveys in order to produce a summary of respondents' perspectives regarding value of vocational training. This phase focuses on the income, entrepreneurship, and employment outcomes in order to identify more general patterns and trends regarding the women's economic empowerment through vocational training. The utilization of mixed-methods approach, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative data, provides a thorough comprehension of the research goals and illuminates

various experiences and broad patterns that confirmed influence of vocational training on women's economic opportunities.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Table 1 Age of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15 to 20	24	20.0	20.0	20.0
	20 to 25	35	29.2	29.2	49.2
	25 to 30	61	50.8	50.8	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

In the give Table 1, the data collected confirms that the majority of respondents were in between 25 to 30 years age of respondents. In particular, 50.8% of respondents were between ages of 25 and 30, followed by 29.2% between ages of 20 and 25, while 20% of the respondents were between ages of 15 to 20.

Table 2 Education of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High	15	12.5	12.5	12.5
	Middle	31	25.8	25.8	38.3
	Primary	74	61.7	61.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

The table 2 results demonstrates that there were 120 respondents who have participated in current research study with 74 having completed their education at the Primary level, and 31 respondents having education at the Middle level. Notably, 15 of these respondents had attained the high level of the education.

Table 3 Marital Status of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Married	50	41.7	41.7	41.7
	Unmarried	70	58.3	58.3	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

The table 3 indicates marital status of women. In total 120 respondents 41.7% were married, while 70 percent were unmarried. Thus, these results provide significant information about respondents' marital status attribute.

Table 4 Main Sources of Income

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Self-Income	12	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Husband Income	38	31.7	31.7	41.7
	Father Income	70	58.3	58.3	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 provides valuable insights into the primary revenue streams of the participants. Depending on where they get their financial support, it splits the respondents into three main categories. First off, a significant portion of respondents 10%, identified "self-income" as their main source of income, suggesting that they are self-sufficient. It is noteworthy, however, that a significant percentage of respondents 31.7% of total identified "husband income" as their main source of income, highlighting significance of that source. 58.3% of respondents depend on fathers as main sources of the financial support, making "father income" most prevalent source of income among them. These results provide insight into various economic dynamics and income sources of investigated group, with the majority depending on father support, followed by those who rely on husband income and lesser percentage who earn money on their own.

Table 5 Impact of Vocational Training on Level of Income

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	2	1.7	1.7	1.7
	Strongly Disagree	4	3.3	3.3	5.0
	Neutral	11	9.2	9.2	14.2
	Agree	34	28.3	28.3	42.5
	Strongly Agree	69	57.5	57.5	100.0
Total		120	100.0	100.0	

The table 5 examines impact of occupational training on income levels as perceived by respondents. It shows statistics in terms of frequency, percentage, valid percentage, and cumulative percentage. Notably, respondents (57.5%) "strongly agree" vocational training improves income. An additional 28.3% "Agree" with this assumption, indicating broad agreement on the possible financial benefits of vocational training. On the contrary, just a small fraction, 1.7% and 3.3%, "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with this viewpoint. 9.2% of respondents are "Neutral" on subject. These findings indicate the widespread opinion among those polled in beneficial relationship between vocational training and increased income.

Table 6 Impact of Vocational training on Entrepreneurship

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	16	13.3	13.3	13.3
	Disagree	18	15.0	15.0	28.3
	Strongly Disagree	25	20.8	20.8	49.2
	Agree	25	20.8	20.8	70.0
	Strongly Agree	36	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total		120	100.0	100.0	

The Table 6 provides a complete assessment of respondents' perception on the relationship between vocational training and women's entrepreneurship. Notably, majority of respondents, comprising 50.8% (those who agree & strongly agree), agree that vocational training has favorable influence on women entrepreneurship. A smaller proportion, 15.0%, disagree, while 20.8% strongly disagree, indicating negative opinion. 13.3% have "neutral" position, indicating that they have no firm stance on matter. These results indicate diversity of viewpoints in studied group about impact of vocational

training on encouraging women's entrepreneurial activities, with a sizable majority acknowledging its favorable influence.

Table 7 Impact of Vocational Training on Women's Employment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	12	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Strongly Disagree	18	15.0	15.0	25.0
	Agree	33	27.5	27.5	52.5
	Strongly Agree	57	47.5	47.5	100.0
Total		120	100.0	100.0	

Respondents' differing opinions about the connection between women's employment prospects and vocational training are shown in Table 7. Significantly, the majority 75% agree that vocational training enhances the women's career prospects (including those who "agree" and "strongly agree." Merely 15% of participants expressed a "Strongly Disagree" with this perspective, indicating a very negative sentiment. 10% also have a "Neutral" attitude, which denotes that they are unsure of their own position. The results illustrate the diversity of opinions among those asked regarding the effect of vocational training on the women's employment, with a significant majority acknowledging its positive contribution.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with recent research, the results of study on the effect of vocational training on women's income highlight the importance of this type of training in improving women's economic prospects. A significant proportion of participants, specifically 85.8% who rated their agreement as "Agree" or "strongly agree," acknowledge positive correlation between occupational training and increasing income. This is in line other studies that highlight value of skill development and career training for women to become economically empowered (Danjuma, Malami, & Gatawa, 2011; Patel & Patel, 2020). These results demonstrate how vocational training programs be able to decrease gender pay gap by giving women greater access to better jobs and higher wages. According to recent research of Jones et al. (2019) relatively low percentage of respondents who "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with this idea is consistent with understanding that vocational training has become an essential tool for women's economic empowerment and livelihood improvement. While 9.2% remain "neutral" on topic, this indicates a need for greater investigation into factors that affect perceptions of vocational training and income link, potentially revealing impediments or opportunities for future policy and program development.

The impact of vocational training on women's entrepreneurship are consistent with recent literature and contribute significantly to discussion of this topic. The fact that majority of respondents, 50.8%, agree or strongly agree with favorable impact of vocational training on women's entrepreneurship supports recent research findings. Many studies have highlighted importance of skill development and vocational training in promoting the women's entrepreneurship, which contributes to economic independence & gender equality (Ahamad, Sinha & Shastri, 2016; Andriahery & Qamruzzaman, 2022). These findings highlight critical significance of vocational training programs in enabling

women to successfully create and manage their enterprises. The presence of a very small fraction (15.0%) who "disagree" with notion and another 20.8% who "strongly disagree" shows prevalence of multiple points of view among respondent group. It highlights its hands-on and practical aspect, emphasizing its role in promoting employability. This change in opinion may necessitate additional study into unique obstacles and barriers that certain people connect with vocational training for women's entrepreneurship, opening up a new path for future study and policy concerns (Sah, Sarkar, Biswas, Pal, & Singh, 2018).

The 13.3% of respondents who hold a "neutral" attitude represent a part of the population whose opinions may be influenced by a variety of causes, demanding more in-depth research into their views. Such comprehensive research could aid in tailoring vocational training program to better suit the requirements and aspirations of female entrepreneurs. The study's conclusions ultimately have significant ramifications for scholars and decision-makers alike. The influence of vocational training on women's employment, is consistent with current research on the function of vocational training in improving women's employability. On contrary, just a small fraction, 1.7% and 3.3%, "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with viewpoint. A large majority of respondents, 75% (combining agree and strongly agree), agree that vocational training improves women's employment prospects. Women's empowerment is a complex and ever-changing notion. It has several facets, including economic, social, political, and cultural issues. This agreement with prior studies emphasizes the critical role of skill development and vocational training in economically empowering women and closing gender gaps in workforce (Cho, Kalomba, Mobarak, & Orozco-Olvera, 2013; Vyas, 2018; Waris & Viraktamath, 2013).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insight into how the vocational training influences women's employment, entrepreneurship, and income. The results are consistent with the previous research, highlighting the role that vocational training plays in improving the women's economic opportunities. The vast majority of respondents voiced favorable thoughts, recognizing beneficial connections amid women's entrepreneurship, employability, and vocational training and increases in income. Still, there are certain drawbacks to this research, such as sample representativeness and possible response bias. We suggest that future research take a multidisciplinary approach to solve these limitations. A more thorough grasp of complex variables at play in the relationship between vocational training and women's economic empowerment can be obtained over qualitative studies, longitudinal studies, and diversifying the sample selection. Ultimately, the findings have critical implications for both researchers and policymakers. They underscore standing of continued support for vocational training programs, but also necessity of tailoring these programs to diverse needs and experiences of women.

By addressing these challenges and pursuing innovative research avenues, we can strive for more inclusive and effective vocational training programs that empower women, close income gender gaps, and foster the entrepreneurship and employment opportunities. The pursuit of such initiatives holds the promise of enhancing not only individual lives but also the overall economic landscape, contributing to a more equitable and prosperous society. The study's conclusions ultimately have

significant ramifications for scholars and decision-makers alike. They emphasize how crucial it is to keep funding for vocational training program while also making sure that these programs are customized to the unique needs and experiences of women. We can work towards more inclusive and successful vocational training program that empower women, close income gender inequalities, and promote entrepreneurship and employment prospects by tackling these issues and exploring novel research pathways. The implementation of such programs has the potential to improve not just people's lives but also the state of the economy as a whole, resulting in a society that is more affluent and egalitarian.

Implications

Researchers should recognize the significance of investigating "neutral" responses in survey data. Understanding the causes that cause people to be unsure about the influence of vocational training on women's income, entrepreneurship, and employment is critical for in-depth research. This can reveal nuances and issues that were previously hidden by mostly the favorable or negative replies. Qualitative research on the experiences and perspectives of people who hold opposing views can yield significant insights. These investigations can uncover unique issues, misunderstandings, or contextual elements that can be used to guide targeted interventions and program enhancements. Longitudinal studies that examine the actual outcomes of women who have received vocational training can also give real proof of the program's success and help to refine policy recommendations for long-term impact. The survey's overwhelmingly favorable comments about the influence of vocational training on women's economic prospects highlight the need of policymakers continuing to fund these programs. Expanding the reach and funding of the vocational training initiatives can make a major difference in empowering the women in terms of the income, entrepreneurship, and employment. Policymakers must, however, acknowledge the range of ideas and experiences within the studied group.

To address this, they should think about establishing and executing customized training program that are suited to individual needs of women at various phases of their economic journey. Moreover, awareness and outreach campaigns are crucial for those who remain neutral or disagree with the positive impact of vocational training. These initiatives should aim to dispel misconceptions and highlight tangible benefits of participating in such programs. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be put in place to assess effectiveness of vocational training programs, ensuring that they are achieving their intended outcomes and guiding policy adjustments as needed. In sum, embracing an inclusive style that considers diverse views and experiences will maximize impact of vocational training programs on women's fiscal empowerment. Actions aimed at raising awareness and reaching out to those who are still uncertain about the benefits of vocational training are also essential. Dispelling falsehoods and highlighting the useful advantages of participating in such a program should be goals of these campaigns towards the desired leading outcomes. In this linking, to measure efficacy of vocational training program, rigorous monitoring and evaluation methods should be put in place, ensuring that they achieve their intended goals and guiding desired policy revisions as appropriate.

Limitations & Future Research Recommendation

While the study's findings are convincing, there are a few limitations to consider. Response bias is an issue, as respondents may have given answers that conformed to societal expectations rather than expressing their real beliefs. To overcome this constraint, future research should investigate novel survey methodology or conduct anonymous interviews to promote more frank responses and reveal intricacies of individual perspectives. Another critical issue to address is sample representativeness. The survey sample may not completely reflect the general population, thereby adding bias. Future study should attempt to diversify the sample by including people from the various demographics, geographic places, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This increased representativeness will help to provide a more complete and accurate assessment of influence of vocational training on women's income, entrepreneurship & employment. Thus, to address constraint, longitudinal studies tracking changes in income, entrepreneurship, and service following participation in vocational training programs might provide useful insights into the long-term viability and impact of these programs. Such study can reveal whether the favorable effects persist or change over time, allowing for more specific policy suggestions. In order to delve deeper into the motivations and experiences impacting respondents' perceptions, qualitative studies such as the in-depth interviews and focus groups are therefore essential.

This technique can fill in the gaps in quantitative surveys by shining light on the specific hurdles and opportunities that women face when it comes to vocational training. Longitudinal research on long-term consequences of vocational training should be prioritized in future studies. Researchers can analyze long-term impact and discover any potential shifts in income, entrepreneurship, and employment by following the individuals over time. This method can help to determine whether vocational training serves as a catalyst for long-term empowerment. A vital tip is to diversify the sample selection. Research can gather broad insights and offer more specialized policy suggestions by including participants from various demographics and geographies. Furthermore, determining the causal relationship between occupational training and the measured outcomes is critical. Using experimental or quasi-experimental methods can aid in determining if vocational training program have direct impact on income, entrepreneurship & employment. Finally, policy assessment studies that assess efficacy of various vocational training policies and program across regions help create evidence-based policy recommendations. This approach will offer policymakers with inclusive view of what works best in different situations, guiding them toward effective measures for women's economic empowerment.

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