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Linking Women's Empowerment to Higher Education for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The 2030 Agenda placed significant emphasis on women's empowerment, asserting that it would propel the achievement of all sustainable development targets and objectives. Due to the significance of the subject matter, this article investigates the correlation between education for sustainable development and women's empowerment in Islamabad, Pakistan, through an analysis of the literacy rates, occupational classifications, and residential areas of employed women in the city. This qualitative study develops interpretively from the perspective of feminist research. Eight health and education professionals were enlisted for multistage sampling. Through semi-structured interviews, information was gathered and analyzed using thematic content analysis. The results demonstrated that working increased the socioeconomic empowerment of participants in comparison to not working. Health care professionals exhibited this tendency less frequently than education personnel. Pakistan requires more educated women for the empowerment of women and sustainable development, according to the findings.

Keywords: *gender education, Education of sustainable development, self-employment, attitude towards entrepreneurship, university education.*

Introduction

The present study has formulated the following research inquiry within the patriarchal society of Pakistan: To what degree does a university education impact the intentions and attitudes of university students regarding self-employment through the cultivation of their perspectives on gender equality and the empowerment of women? To examine this matter, the current research utilizes narratives supplied by college students in conjunction with the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 4&5) to support the desire of female students to enter the self-employment sector. By utilizing dependable and sound constructs, the narrative explains in a substantial manner approximately 54% of the self-employment intention of the female students who participated. Nevertheless, the most significant finding to contemplate is the

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validation that the favorable attitudes of female students towards gender equality can influence their perspectives on the empowerment of women. Similarly, it influences attitudes toward and the intention to engage in self-employment. In addition to its inherent constraints, the present investigation offers certain practical and theoretical ramifications within the Pakistani milieu. In particular, gendered supporting activities that are based on entrepreneurial education have the potential to transform the gender attitudes and stereotypes of female students via the use of debate and persuasion. This, in turn, may strengthen their intentions and sentiments toward self-employment.

There are currently more than 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 who are concentrated in emerging economies, one of which is Pakistan. Compare to kids in stable and wealthy countries, impoverished youth, especially girls, face the greatest rates of economic inequality and poverty. As a result, given the persistent socio-economic structural disparities, self-employment emerges as a suboptimal professional trajectory for a considerable number of women. This is a more significant development issue in Pakistan, where demographic forces are shifting. Pakistan, which has been primarily affected by terrorism in recent years, ranks fifth in terms of population density and is one of the youngest countries globally. At present, Pakistan is experiencing its highest youth generation in its recorded history, with 29% of its population falling within the age range of 15-29 years (GOP, 2019).

Thus, advancing sustainable development requires gender equality and women empowerment. In particular, the 2030 sustainable development agenda includes a distinct goal concerning gender parity and the empowerment of women (SDG5). Furthermore, other objectives incorporate gender equality targets, and a more harmonious proposition advocates for the division of data by gender across multiple indicators (UN WOMEN, 2019).

However, achieving gender equality necessitates the implementation of a rights-based approach that guarantees not only enrollment but also completion of educational levels for both sexes. However, all individuals are equally empowered via education. Both entities require the necessary attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge to effectively contribute to the cause of sustainable development (Hassa, 2020). Education promotes majority rule and a national economy that reduces poverty and increases possibilities, encouraging sustainable development. The existence of SDG4, the lone education sustainable development target, shows that a consensus has been established. It seeks to increase by one-half the number of young people possessing the necessary skills for employment, entrepreneurship, and respectable work by the conclusion of 2030. Therefore, in order to achieve inclusive and sustainable development, education is an essential component (Debnath, Chowdhury, Khan & Chowdhury, 2020).

However, not all education promotes sustainability. Education that just encourages economic growth may encourage unsustainable consumerism. Thus, formal gender equality education is essential for worldwide women's development and gender empowerment programs. This approach

may facilitate the eradication of pervasive subliminal biases and gender stereotypes. In pursuit of this objective, efforts shall be made to promote lifelong learning opportunities and guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Tiwari & Bajpai, 2021).

As a result, higher education becomes more attractive in the evolving professional landscape by serving as a conduit for innovation and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among young individuals, both male and female (USAID, 2019). As a result, individuals' intentions and perceptions regarding self-employment as a viable career option and a trustworthy substitute for confronting unemployment and growth obstacles will be enhanced (Hassan & Naz, 2020).

Research Gap

Nevertheless, the existing body of empirical research on the gendered effects of university programs, particularly those centered on entrepreneurship is inconclusive. While certain studies indicate more pronounced positive impacts (Hassan, 2020; Pathania, 2017; Tiwari & Bajpai, 2021; Hassan & Naz, 2020; Debnath et al, 2020), others report minimal gains for female participants (Finatto et al, 2021; Hassan, Iqbal & Shakir, 2020), and still others find no significant gender effect (Nasiri & Hamelin, 2). The incongruous results have been ascribed to conceptual and empirical constraints, in addition to the absence of crucial information regarding instructional approaches (Zaman et al, 2021; Hassan et al, 2020; Mengesha, 2020; Agu et al, 2021).

The gendered education effect studies also include Western and MENA university students. There is a lack of research on this topic in South Asian countries (Hassan et al, 2020), particularly in Pakistan (Hassan & Naz, 2020), where patriarchal society causes severe discrimination against women (Hassan, Iqbal & Shakir, 2020). Only 1% of women in Pakistan are entrepreneurs, compared to 28% of men.

In conclusion, the integration of gender awareness into the mainstream, the co-construction of knowledge, and the questioning of established conventions are all components of effective education (Pathania, 2017). Nevertheless, gendered education impact studies, meta-analyses (Hassan, 2020), and recent reviews (Tiwari & Bajpai, 2021) fail to incorporate gender equality as an instructional approach that encourages university instructors and students to question and dismantle established notions regarding men, women, and human society, which serve to legitimise and sustain these perspectives (Agu, 2021; Yasir, Xie & Zhang, 2022; Malhotra & Kiran, 2023; Agu et al, 2021; Sharma et al, 2023; Soomro & Shah, 2022).

Foundations of the Study

This inquiry is based on the above conversation. This study examines a university-level entrepreneurship program that promotes gender equality, women's empowerment, and company ownership. This concept encompasses more than a mere compilation of self-employment or empowerment activities that promote empowerment (Megasi, 2022). It also involves a process of influencing gender attitudes via dialogue and encouragement (Hassan 2020). Such an approach can

particularly prepare female students in terms of cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural readiness to confront the distinct obstacles associated with sustainable development, such as securing employment, entrepreneurship and promoting women empowerment and equality (Pathania, 2017). Students participated in these activities while considering societal values and various university modules. They were presented with information regarding gender roles within the household, gender stereotypes, women's entrepreneurship, education for women, a respectable occupation, and employment beyond the home. In particular, students explicitly contest entrepreneurial stereotypes and notions of success through these activities. In the majority of sessions, students also direct the conversation regarding how women can achieve success in various contexts. In conclusion, the alternative models of entrepreneurship were deliberated upon collectively by educators, pupils, and female entrepreneurial role models throughout these activities (Tiwari & Bajpai, 2021).

Research Questions and Objectives

In light of the patriarchal social structure in Pakistan, the present study aimed to investigate whether a university-based education influences the attitudes and intentions of university students towards self-employment by fostering their perspectives on gender equality and the empowerment of women. In particular, the current study evaluated the confidence level of each student regarding the capacity of their university education to enable them to pursue self-employment. Thus, their entrepreneurial goals and each student's equal opportunity and empowerment views are related. Consequently, these intentions, attitudes, and perceptions may undergo a transformation among students enrolled in the identical programme (Hassan & Naz, 2020). Thus, the present study endeavours to achieve two objectives in the realm of higher education: self-employment and empowerment:

- To investigate the opinions about women's empowerment on the formation of self-employment-related attitudes and intentions among university students.
- In the context of higher education, determine whether gender-based perceptions of self-employment are supported by the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Significance of the Study

In multiple ways, the present study contributes to the extant body of knowledge: From a theoretical standpoint, this framework combines the perspectives of the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (4&5) in order to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the connections between gender equality, women's empowerment, entrepreneurial attitudes, and intention. The aforementioned statement supports the implementation of the TPB and the notion that intentions can potentially be predicted by the variables of immediate attitude (namely, Attitude, Social Norms, and Perceived Behavioural Control) (Ajzen, 1991). By showing how university education benefits female students, new research have advanced entrepreneurial

education (Hassan & Naz, 2020).

Literature Review

Attitudes towards self-employment

Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) has become important in understanding self-employment attitudes and antecedents. TPB was first developed to describe planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and has subsequently been applied to self-employment attitudes (Yasir, Xie & Zhang, 2022) using its three attitudinal antecedents. Two factors influence the perceived desirability of continuing the behavior: the individual's attitude toward the behavior's consequences (PA) and the perception of social norms. The third construct, known as perceived behavioral control (PBC), pertains to individuals' beliefs regarding the personally controllable or realizable nature of the behavior. Thus, it is situational competence or self-efficacy. Both theories are equally logical (Malhotra & Kiran, 2023) since they explain self-employment mindset through three factors: Personal Attitude and Social Norms (which bears resemblance to desirability), and Perceived Behavioral Control (which is analogous to feasibility) (Yasir, Xie & Zhang, 2022). Furthermore, by considering 'intention' as an immediate precursor to behaviour, as proposed by TPB (Ajzen, 1991), it becomes possible to tackle the fundamental inquiry within the field of entrepreneurship, which is how an individual becomes an entrepreneur (Yasir et al, 2021).

Yasir et al (2021) argue that the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is particularly valuable in elucidating the inclination towards self-employment, given its relevance to the processes that may be influenced by the entrepreneur-based university programme (Agu, 2021). An example of a fundamental determinant of self-employment attitude is an individual's personal attitude towards self-employment (PA). This PA consists of a person's unwavering conviction that embarking on a novel economic endeavor is a rational decision regarding their career (Bux & Van Vuuren, 2019). Hence, it is reasonable to postulate that the immediate objective of entrepreneur-based education is to foster a favorable disposition towards entrepreneurship. Additionally, a fundamental element of an individual's entrepreneurial intention is the conviction that self-employment (PBC) is a feasible prospect (Agu, 2021). Entrepreneurship education may have an influence on this conviction. Furthermore, the concept of subjective norm pertains to individuals' "perceptions of what significant others in their lives believe regarding their decision to pursue self-employment, with the degree of motivation to adhere to those perceptions weighted" (Yasir, Xie & Zhang, 2022). Entrepreneurship is motivated by a desire to work for oneself. Personal attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective social norms may affect this purpose (Yasir et al, 2021). Nabi et al. (2017) recently conducted a synthesis of the 159 empirical scholarly articles that were published between 2004 and 2016. However, Nabi et al. (2017) identified a scarcity of research concerning the moderating influence of gender in their synthesis.

Furthermore, since self-efficacy gaps are the primary cause of gender disparities in entrepreneurial career choice, university education can increase students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy through the

diagnostic power of Theory of Planned Behavior. This will increase their venture feasibility, attractiveness, and self-employment aspirations (Yasir et al, 2021). Hence, entrepreneurship scholars have recently commenced empirical examinations of the constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in relation to gendered entrepreneurship education impact studies. Research on self-employment supports the TPB by examining how perceived behavioral control, social norms, and personal attitude affect self-employment attitude (Malhotra & Kiran, 2023).

Scholars also argue the controversial influence of social norms on self-employment in business (Malhotra & Kiran, 2023; Agu et al, 2021). Although certain research has indicated that SN has a relatively minor impact on self-employment attitude in comparison to perceived behavioral control and personal attitude (Yousaf et al, 2022; Uddin et al, 2022), alternative studies have discovered a substantial correlation between SN and emotional intelligence (Bux & Van vuuren, 2019; Agu et al, 2021). As a consequence, Social Norm is omitted from the analysis by a number of researchers (Nabi et al, 2017). In contrast, several studies have put forth the notion that self-employment attitude can be influenced by social norms via perceived behavioral control and personal attitude (Malhotra & Kiran, 2023; Yasir et al, 2021). As a result, a social norm can be defined as the anticipation of potential gains or losses by individuals in their immediate social circle if they engage in a particular behavior (Sharma et al, 2023). Consequently, this is due to the fact that Social Norms can exert their influence predominantly via Perceived Behavioral Control and Personal Attitude, in addition to directly affecting self-employment attitude (Uddim et al, 2022; Yousaf et al, 2022).

As a consequence, Social Norm is omitted from the analysis by a number of researchers (Kisubi, Bonuke & Korir, 2021). In contrast, several studies have put forth the notion that self-employment attitude can be influenced by social norms via perceived behavioral control and personal attitude (Otachi, 2019; Chung & Lee, 2020). As a result, a social norm can be defined as the anticipation of potential gains or losses by individuals in their immediate social circle if they engage in a particular behavior (Maheshwari & Kha, 2022). Consequently, this is due to the fact that Social Norms can exert their influence predominantly via Perceived Behavioral Control and Personal Attitude, in addition to directly affecting self-employment attitude (Sampene et al, 2023; Tsaknis & sahinidis, 2020).

Therefore, the present study posits, as elaborated in the subsequent section, that the perceptions of female students regarding women's empowerment and gender equality may have a substantial impact on the formation of their attitude and intention towards self-employment.

Benefits of University-based Entrepreneurship Education

The developed nations have greater opportunities for women than less developed nations. The high rate of youth unemployment, coupled with childbearing and early marriage, restricts their ability to invest in human capital and forces them to rely on males. Furthermore, in many low-income developing countries, females are economically disadvantaged due to gender roles that are rooted in societal stereotypes (Parveen, Sheikh & ur Rahman, 2023). Subsequently, the fundamental

inquiry is whether entrepreneurship education for women can cultivate human capital that propels them toward a greater equilibrium of gender equality, or if such circumstances are maintained by adherence to personal inclinations or societal conventions, which are resistant to policy adjustments (Zaman et al, 2021).

According to the research of Ma, Lan & Tar (2020), women have the potential to increase their economic and social empowerment by receiving a combination of vocational and life skills education. Furthermore, the authors suggest that obstacles that appear insurmountable due to adherence to societal conventions may not always impede this progress. Therefore, these results are examined through the lens of entrepreneurship education's socioeconomic perspective (Aliedan et al, 2022).

Hence, the present investigation posits that young female university students can transform their mindset regarding entrepreneurship through instruction. This transition helps individuals perceive, contemplate, and respond to their living conditions and develop the information, skills, and talents needed for innovative thinking, which will help them succeed socioeconomically (Wijayati et al, 2021). Therefore, entrepreneurship education enhances the likelihood that women will prioritize their own welfare in addition to that of their family members. Put simply, female students with higher levels of education are likely to hold more favorable attitudes and beliefs regarding their utilization of resources, control over them, and involvement in economic decision-making (Ma, Lan & Tar, 2020). To summarize, entrepreneurship education contributes to both the macro-level pursuit of economic growth and global transformation and the micro-level advancement of personal fulfillment and the probability of overcoming barriers associated with gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Zaman et al, 2021).

University-based Entrepreneurship Education and Gender

During their meta-analysis, Aliedan et al. (2022) found that entrepreneurship education may not benefit male students as much as females in their self-employment views. They also used social role theory (Wijayati et al, 2021) to argue that gender-based expectations drive men and women to choose gender-stereotyped careers. Additionally, the argument is consistent with the claim that women are more likely to limit their career aspirations out of a perceived deficiency in essential abilities (Bandura, 1992). Therefore, it is plausible that entrepreneurship education may yield greater advantages for women in terms of honing their skills and augmenting their emotional intelligence, in comparison to men. Parveen, Sheikh and ur Rahman (2023) therefore characterize entrepreneurship education as a "equalizer."

Consequently, adherence to the findings of Tsaknis & Sahinidis, (2020) suggests that gender-based assumptions incentivize males to pursue careers associated with masculinity, such as self-employment. Therefore, it has been estimated that males have a reduced knowledge disparity regarding entrepreneurship compared to females (Sampene et al, 2023). Therefore, it is improbable that entrepreneurship education would assist males in developing their intention to pursue self-

employment by reducing the barriers to entrepreneurial knowledge (Maheshwari & Kha, 2022).

Research Methodology

Didactic Methods

Therefore, it is plausible that entrepreneurship education may yield greater advantages for women in terms of honing their skills and augmenting their emotional intelligence, in comparison to men. Chung & Lee (2020) therefore characterize entrepreneurship education as a "equalizer."

The current study employs a portfolio of complementary activities organized into four sections (Nabi et al., 2017):

- An instructional component comprising of various modules covering entrepreneurial marketing, management, accounting, and finance (including the historical context, the entrepreneurial process, opportunity identification, business model development, strategy formulation, business organization, business plan composition, business financing, expansion, and comprehension of financial statements, break-even analysis, and valuation (Otache, 2019; Kisubi, Bonuke & Korir, 2021)
- an instructional component that examines the personal characteristics and circumstances of individuals who achieve entrepreneurial success, including but not limited to risk-taking, risk-taking aptitude, self-efficacy, and work style (Kisubi, Bonuke & Korir, 2021);
- A component devoted to "business planning" that encompasses business plan competitions and guidance on developing a specific business concept;
- Presentations, interviews with practitioners (women entrepreneurs in particular, and networking events) comprise the interaction with practice component.

To summarize, the prevailing pedagogical approach consisted of lecture-discussion, explication, and occasionally incorporated action learning (Uddin et al, 2022).

Focused Group Discussion

The subsequent step involved organizing the chosen students into cohorts and inquiring about their self-employment and empowerment in relation to their tertiary education. It was decided to record and transcribe their narrations. Codes, themes, and similarities and dissimilarities were generated in order to address the study's fundamental inquiry.

Sampling and Data Collection

Entrepreneurial scholars agree that existing entrepreneurs are not representative of the relevant behavioral complexity (Hassan et al, 2020), so university business students with a wide range of entrepreneurial mindsets and goals will reveal professional options when making major career decisions. Therefore, this particular sample type is not only appropriate but also preferable for

evaluating the intention to pursue self-employment as a profession. Therefore, during the academic years 2021-2022, 70 undergraduate and graduate students from a prominent public university in Pakistan participated in focus group interviews in order to address the research question.

In addition to saving time, the interview protocol was drafted and distributed to the chosen students in advance so that they might be aware of the questions that would be asked of them. In addition, the present study employed the technique of purposive sampling to identify the most pertinent participants. The collection of data exclusively from pertinent participants is of the utmost importance in research, given that the data is intended to facilitate a thorough understanding of the theoretical framework (Agu, 2021).

Forty students were enrolled in the BS Accounting & Finance degree programme, which lasted four years and eight semesters; twenty students were affiliated with the MSc Accounting & Finance study programme, which lasted two years and four semesters; and ten students were enrolled in the M Phil Commerce research degree programme, which lasted two years and four semesters. Moreover, of the total student body, 22 were male and 48 were female. In conclusion, 62 of the participants fell within the age range of 20 to 25 years, with only 8 individuals exceeding the age of 25.

Tool of Data Collection

This study examined whether patriarchal university education in Pakistan affects university students' self-employment attitudes and intentions by promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. In accordance with this, the present investigation utilised accounts provided by university students concerning their academic pursuits and entrepreneurial endeavours. These accounts were based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Sustainable Development Goals (4&5) and served as supplementary explanations for the students' inclination towards self-employment. NVIVO 12 determined, on the basis of the themes generated, that the proportions of female and male pupils intending to become self-employed were 43.6 and 54%, respectively.

In particular, the present study examined the influence of perceived behavioural control, social norms, personal attitude, and gender equality and women's empowerment on students' self-employment career intention as predicted by the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The results of the present investigation indicate that Personal Attitude and Perceived Behavioural Control have a substantial influence on the intention of self-employed students, regardless of gender. In contrast, the present investigation identified divergent accounts from male and female participants concerning the influence of personal attitude on their inclination towards self-employment. In contrast to the male participants, the female students exhibited a marked sense of enthusiasm and unwavering confidence in their aspiration to pursue self-employment. According to Otache (2019), the results of this study indicate that a university-based education could potentially serve as an equaliser, reducing the limiting effects of limited desirability and feasibility regarding the intention to pursue self-employment and ultimately increasing the chances for successful self-employment

creation, particularly among female students. Hence, in line with prior investigations (Hassan et al, 2020; Yousaf et al, 2022; Yasir et al, 2021), the results of the present study validated the need to instill confidence and desirability in female students regarding self-employment through university-based programmes that offer entrepreneurship education, guidance, and support (Nabi et al, 2017; Sharma et al, 2023).

This study found no significant effect of social norms on self-employment intention in male or female samples. This study supports previous research on TPB in entrepreneurship (Wijayati et al, 2021; Aliedan et al, 2022). However, our study had found that Social Norms affect students' self-employment attractiveness and practicability.

In particular, female students who regard themselves as satisfying family, friend, and significant others' expectations are more likely to be confidently self-employed than male students. The sole justification for this is that students, including women, are typically in the process of exploring their career path options. Therefore, academics and practitioners (such as female entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial instructors) as well as family members, acquaintances, companions, and significant others, may find their perspectives to be impactful on this undertaking (Parveen, Sheikh & ur Rahman, 2023). The extent to which women in Pakistan can exercise agency is primarily influenced by the dynamics within the home, where the entrepreneurial decisions they make are contingent on the support and cooperation of their spouse and family (Hassan 2020). This finding supports the notion that female learners are most likely to benefit from SN in the field of self-employment, considering their person-centered nature, as well as their need for belonging and interpersonal skills (Pathania, 2017).

In conclusion, the results of the present study strongly suggested that the time has come to integrate underrepresented youth, particularly women, into Pakistan's development processes. In particular, these findings can facilitate the implementation of the national youth entrepreneurship scheme, which the Pakistani government intends to establish over the next five years and provide the youth with subsidised loans, tools, resources, and basic training and aptitude in order to engage in self-employment (National Youth Development Framework, 2019; Government of Pakistan).

Nevertheless, the findings of recent studies suggest that in order to actualize this objective, measures to encourage self-employment as a viable vocation among young individuals, particularly women, could consist of incorporating feminist role models into entrepreneurial instruction and enlisting successful female entrepreneurs to share their entrepreneurial experiences in the entrepreneurship education programme.

The present study suggests that the philosophical establishing of entrepreneurship discussion should not set the feminine against the desirable entrepreneur model, which perpetuates an unfavorable view of women's empowerment and gender equality and undermines their trustworthiness as trustworthy entrepreneurial models before self-employment (Tiwari & Bajpai, 2021).

Research Contributions

In multiple ways, the present results contribute to the existing body of literature. To begin with, the findings of the present investigation demonstrate that the Theory of Planned Behaviour provides a sound conceptual structure for elucidating the impact of entrepreneurship education on the entrepreneurial intentions of female students. Additionally, the present study highlights the mechanisms by which entrepreneurship education influences the attitudes and intentions of female students to pursue self-employment by fostering their perceptions of gender equality and women's empowerment. Acknowledging these processes is crucial, as doing so enables us to develop more effective entrepreneurship education programmes that address the concerns of aspiring female entrepreneurs (Hassan & Naz, 2020). In particular, the current research revealed that entrepreneurship education influences the attitudes and intentions of female students towards self-employment by influencing their perceptions of gender equality and women's empowerment. Alternatively stated, entrepreneurship education should be structured to foster female students' entrepreneurial aspirations and attitudes by cultivating positive perspectives on gender equality and women's empowerment and instilling in them a desire to experiment with entrepreneurial endeavours. Furthermore, the present investigation fulfils a requirement for theory-driven models that assess the impact of entrepreneurship education programmes (Debnath et al, 2020), thereby making a scholarly contribution to the field of entrepreneurship education. Therefore, researchers evaluating the impacts of various entrepreneurship education approaches and practices, particularly on female students in patriarchal societies, would benefit from the findings of the present study. In conclusion, by being replicable for the evaluation of a particular entrepreneurship education programme, the results may contribute to less inconsistent outcomes in impact research centred on entrepreneurship education. In particular, the results of the present study contribute to the advancement of knowledge regarding the impact of entrepreneurship education programmes. This furthers the case for investing in entrepreneurship education programmes for female students and encourages education policymakers to foster positive attitudes towards gender equality and women's empowerment (Finatto et al, 2021).

Research Margins and Future Guidelines

As is the case with all research, this study has a number of limitations. The present study exclusively gathered data from a single department of a preeminent public university situated in a single nation, namely Pakistan. Considering the social construction of perceptions regarding gender equality and women's empowerment, cultural differences may prove to be significant in this regard. From this vantage point, subsequent investigations ought to replicate ongoing research conducted across multiple nations. Secondly, due to the cross-sectional nature of the current study, causality cannot be established for any of the proposed connections. Therefore, emphasise that the results contribute to answering the research question but do not establish causation in the suggested associations unless further longitudinal studies are conducted. As said, female students' views on gender equality and women's empowerment may be more important in predicting their self-

employment goals and attitudes and deciding the venture's viability and success. In order to examine these associations throughout the entrepreneurial process, longitudinal research is necessary. Lastly, the justifications put forth to substantiate the results are, at this time, only preliminary in nature. Nevertheless, by incorporating perceptions of empowerment and gender equality as immediate constructs that elucidate the development of self-employment attitudes and intentions among female students, these arguments can be evaluated more thoroughly. An intriguing avenue of inquiry could be the examination of how female students' perceptions of women's empowerment and gender equality shape their attitudes and intentions towards self-employment (including the intention to actually launch a business). This research could also shed light on the impact of these perceptions on the outcomes of new business ventures (Hassan, Iqbal & Shakir, 2020).

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