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## Assessing the Impacts of Academic and Vocational Education on Women Empowerment, A moderating Role of Culture in Southern Punjab, Pakistan.

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to understand the impact of academic and vocational education on women's empowerment within the cultural context of southern Punjab, Pakistan. Women in this region often encounter various challenges that limit their ability to exercise their rights fully, making it essential to examine the role of education in promoting their empowerment.

**Design and Methodology:** The research employed a quantitative design and utilized a convenience sampling method to gather data from 384 women affiliated with academic institutions and vocational training centres across southern Punjab. Data collection was conducted via structured questionnaires, covering dimensions of empowerment, educational background, and cultural influences.

**Findings:** The results reveal that both academic and vocational education contribute positively to women's empowerment. However, cultural factors play a significant role, with supportive cultural environments encouraging empowerment, while restrictive norms and traditions in less supportive cultures pose barriers.

**Implications:** These findings provide actionable insights for policymakers and educators aiming to enhance women's empowerment through targeted educational interventions. Strategies that cultivate a supportive cultural environment are crucial for maximizing the impact of both academic and vocational education on women's empowerment, particularly in culturally sensitive regions.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Vocational Education, Culture

### 1. Introduction

The issue of women's empowerment received widespread attention during the International Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985. Bhattacharya (2020) describes it as an approach whereby women come together to achieve independence, assert their right to freedom of choice, and unite to control resources to confront and eradicate oppression. Women's empowerment is fundamentally about rights and building a more equitable society.

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This includes increased mobility, expanded opportunities, decision-making power, and the ability to take the steps necessary to impact their lives.

At the global level, women's empowerment is recognized as a key factor for social and economic progress. It is about using resources, opportunities and scope to make conscious decisions and take actions that can change a situation. This includes protection from violence and discrimination, ensuring access to education, and participation in health and economic decisions (Stolak et al., 2023). Currently, women's empowerment and environmental sustainability are two major global challenges. The focus of women's empowerment efforts is usually on improving women's social, political and economic status (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2019; Sinha et al., 2019; Duflo, 2012; Ghasemi et al., 2021). The first step is to create a supportive socio-political climate that protects women from discrimination, abuse and harassment (Ghasemi et al., 2021).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent the global development agenda from 2015 to 2030, emphasize the importance of women's empowerment. Specifically, SDG 5 aims to eliminate discrimination, violence and harmful practices against women, ensure equal opportunities, and promote women's full participation in political and socio-economic decision-making processes. It also advocates measures to provide women with equal access to economic and financial resources, especially land (Mingst, 2022). Furthermore, SDG 16 enhances women's empowerment by promoting inclusive and peaceful societies and reducing violence. These goals emphasize the important role of women's empowerment in socio-economic development. In Bangladesh, women's economic empowerment is crucial for sustainable development as it ensures women's participation in mainstream development initiatives. Since the 1990s, the country has seen a significant increase in the number of women entrepreneurs who contribute significantly to the economy. To improve women's economic situation, support and growth of women's businesses is necessary.

Encouraging women to start and run businesses will improve women's economic prospects and promote development in countries like Bangladesh (Zafar & Zaki, 2023). Women entrepreneurs are increasingly recognized as important contributors to development and have the potential to increase well-being and prosperity in emerging economies (Bhattacharya & Deb, 2020). In Bangladesh, middle- and upper-class women generally have good access to professional jobs and higher education. Conversely, the majority of women in Sindh, especially in rural areas, have limited access to employment opportunities, healthcare, and educational resources due to the overwhelming influence of tribal culture and mobility restrictions associated with their socio-economic status. Political instability and inadequate infrastructure further impede women's progress.

FAO (2019) reports that 70% of the poor worldwide are women, and more than 80% live in rural areas. Entrepreneurship offers rural women the opportunity to realize their potential and contribute to their communities (Bishop et al., 2022). For women entrepreneurs, self-development is essential to succeed in their ventures (Bayeh, 2020). Empowerment means the autonomy to think and act independently, believing in one's ability to create change, taking control of one's life, making decisions freely, realizing one's full potential, and achieving equality in society (Phala & Mukonza, 2021). In essence, empowerment is a journey in which individuals pursue activities that enable them to overcome obstacles and shape their own destiny (Nawaz, 2020). Gender ideology and the gender division of labor often restrict women

to the status of housewife, which is associated with low wages, lack of social security, job insecurity, limited bargaining power, and difficulties due to labor regulations (Darmawan et al., 2022). These situations, including the situation of part-time housewives, reveal society's broader view of women and their role in the workplace. Women empowerment is an important contemporary issue that aims to increase women's economic, social, and political power (Reshi & Sudha, 2022).

While middle- and upper-class women have more career opportunities and access to higher education, many women in southern Punjab live in rural areas and have minimal access to jobs, healthcare, and education due to tight control by tribal communities. Their limited opportunities are further exacerbated by their low socio-economic status. Previous studies have examined the psychological and political aspects of academic and vocational education (Gupta et al., 2021). This study attempts to explore these factors through the lens of public policy, considering culture as a moderating factor. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how academic and vocational education can promote women's empowerment and how cultural barriers in southern Punjab affect this process.

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

1. Investigate the association between academic education and women's empowerment.
2. Investigate the relationship between women's advancement and vocational training.
3. Investigate whether cultural influences affect the relationship between women's empowerment and academic education.
4. Investigate whether cultural influences affect the relationship between women's empowerment and vocational training.

### **1.2 Significance of Study**

This research is significant because it clarifies the connection between academic and occupational training and how it affects women's empowerment, a concept that is shaped by cultural norms. This study will also demonstrate how culturally embedded gender discrimination prevents women from achieving their full potential through formal education and career training, and how introducing these elements can help women become more empowered.

The theoretical significance of this study is its investigation into the complex relationship between education, cultural context, and women's empowerment in southern Punjab, Pakistan. This study improves on existing paradigms that associate education with gender equality by looking into how academic and how academic and vocational education affects women's empowerment. It Supports social constructivism theories, which focus on the impact that social norms have on individual experience, due to emphasis on the pivotal role cultural influences play in determining the effectiveness of interventions for women's education. The findings show how empowering cultures create empowerment while restrictive cultures block it; thus, they provide empirical evidence for ideas on women empowerment. Overall, the study adds to the theoretical discussion on gender, education and empowerment by encouraging further reflection about the inclusion of cultural factors into policies and efforts towards women empowerment.

## 2. Literature Review

The term “empowerment” is frequently used but often misunderstood. Its meaning is sometimes confused with ideas such as “speaking up,” “enabling,” and “engaging” (Bose, 2020; Stromquist, 2022). Education helps both to affirm achievement and to affirm possibilities. For empowered women, entrepreneurship serves as a means of empowerment and can transform difficult situations into favorable opportunities. Educated women play a vital role in national development, and improving women’s educational levels can further improve their status in various fields. Although there is still much to be learned about how education empowers women, the idea that education empowers women is gaining attention (Stromquist, 2022; Zouboulis et al., 2020). Education gives women the knowledge, skills and strategies they need for personal and professional development and a better understanding of social issues. Emphasis should be placed on women's employment, health and education. Economic empowerment, which can be achieved through education, is crucial to improving gender balance. Illiteracy contributes greatly to the abuse and exploitation of women, as literacy and education are essential to understand and secure legal rights and protections (Dhiman, 2023).

For instance, the empowerment of women in rural areas is one social challenge that many governments understand needs to be countered so governments often organize themselves with the hope of creating environments that allow women to learn profitable skills in accredited training programs. Skills development encompasses the skills gained through various degrees of formal, informal, and workplace-based education and training (Sharaunga et al., 2019). It focuses more on the actual skills you learn by doing than the curriculum of your specific training plan. Employees. While this skill-oriented training method has many benefits as reported in the industrialized countries, the women of these countries are often demotivated from full-time work due to social and cultural barriers (Khan & Mazhar, 2017). Caste, gender, & class related social challenges devalue the potential of rural women and retard their progress (Gupta et al., 2024).

Promoting women's education is essential to achieve gender equality in various areas, including economic, social, political, psychological and technological aspects. However, challenges remain in the field of women's education, especially in higher education, where equity and access remain key issues (Ramachandran & Ganesh, 2023). As Swami Vivekananda explains, improving women's conditions is crucial to the well-being of the world. The exclusion of women from development efforts makes these efforts inequitable and incomplete. The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in March 1990, emphasized the need to remove barriers that prevent girls and women from fully participating in education and to improve their access to education (Munene, 2021).

The relationship between women's empowerment and education is deep, as empowered women can address social issues, advocate for justice, and fight injustice. The Indian government has launched various policies and programs to promote women's empowerment within a democratic framework. Major initiatives include the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 and the Mahila Samakya (Education for Women Empowerment) Programme of 1987 (Uddin, 2015). The 86th Amendment to the Constitution enshrined free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14 as a fundamental right. One of the most prominent initiatives to achieve universal primary education was the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) introduced in 2001-02 (Sowjanya & Hans, 2016).

Many theorists and social scientists contend that women must actively participate in the political, social, and economic arenas in order to achieve sustainable development (Bayeh, 2020). According to FAO research from 2019, women make up 70% of the world's impoverished, and more than 80% of them live in rural areas. Women in these areas can use entrepreneurship as a means to put their skills to use and give back to their communities (Bishop et al., 2022). Empowering women is crucial for success in self-employment and is a significant indicator of social progress and sustainable development goals (Kabeer, 2021).

An important part is played by Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), which includes both initial vocational training and continuous skill development through "re-skilling" and "up-skilling." Despite this, TVET is often undervalued, and women are frequently encouraged into stereotypical careers (Akula, 2021). The underrepresentation of women in formal business training limits their access to job opportunities, financial gains, and career advancement. Typically, low-income and marginalized women prefer short-term "practical gender needs" training over longer-term "strategic gender needs" training that addresses deeper causes of female subordination (Moser, 2020).

Women's empowerment aims to enable individuals to make decisions in circumstances where they have been previously marginalized (Kabeer, 2021). Consequently, industries like handicrafts and basic food processing, traditionally dominated by women, often suffer from oversaturation, substandard working conditions, and minimal profits. Women also tend to favor starting small businesses and homestead farming (WB, FAO, IFAD, 2008; Yadewani & Duraipandi, 2024). The Oxford American Dictionary defines "empowerment" as making someone more competent and resilient, particularly in managing their life and asserting their rights. While discussions on women's empowerment often focus on increasing their involvement in leadership roles, it's important to remember that women were historically considered inferior.

As per the World Bank (2018), empowerment entails enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make decisions and convert those decisions into intended actions and consequences. Empowered individuals can take action and enjoy freedom of choice, enabling them to shape their lives and the decisions affecting them. Irhoumah (2020) describes empowerment as a process that includes internal changes (power within), enhanced capabilities (power to), and community mobilization (power with) to challenge gender subordination (power over). Empowered individuals participate more in decision-making, believing they have the capacity and right to do so (Kabeer, 2021). Women's empowerment has become a global phenomenon, with increasing attention since the 1980s. Despite its earlier use in the 1960s, the term gained significant prominence only in recent decades. 2001 was proclaimed the "International Year for Women's Empowerment" by the UN, and it was given a similar moniker in India. The ability to influence societal changes for a more equitable system on a national and worldwide scale, as well as the right to choose, control over one's life, access to resources and opportunities, and dignity are the five essential elements of women's empowerment.

Usha and Sharma (2021) highlight the vital role of women in societal advancement. Historically, women have influenced civilizations profoundly, yet often occupy inferior roles. Empowerment aims to provide equal opportunities and greater control over one's life, allowing individuals to address issues they deem important and gain authority over their own lives,

communities, and society (Tasleem, 2020). Empowerment is seen as increasing an individual's or community's spiritual, political, social, or economic power. Interpretations of empowerment vary across political, social, and cultural contexts, reflecting local values and belief systems. The common application of "empowerment" is raising the power of low-power groups closer to that of high-power groups (Bhadra, 2022).

For millennia, women were considered inferior to men, with restrictions on their rights and opportunities, including voting, property ownership, and various occupations. This situation stemmed from deep-rooted traditions and cultural norms (Tasleem, 2022). Many women, lacking the confidence to navigate life independently, adhered to these traditional roles. However, as time has passed, women have increasingly gained the empowerment needed to pursue their goals, including choosing their own paths in life, careers, and voting rights (Hatim, 2022).

Development has traditionally been associated with "modernization" and "Westernization," seen as a process where tradition-bound individuals shed historical impediments to embrace modern institutions, technologies, and values (Connelly et al., 2020). Cultural norms, including those related to gender roles, are often deeply ingrained and transmitted across generations. These norms can significantly influence women's opportunities and outcomes in various spheres (Guiso et al., 2024). Empirical research highlights the role of cultural values in shaping female outcomes, especially regarding labor force participation (Liu, 2020). Generational attitudes towards gender roles, as explored by Farré and Vella (2023), show that cultural perspectives on women's roles can be inherited and affect labor market participation. Alesina and Giuliano (2021) emphasize the impact of family culture on women's outcomes, while Campa et al. (2021) examine how gender culture influences workplace equality in Italy.

In Pakistan, despite women constituting 52% of the population, they continue to face significant barriers to empowerment, including limited resources, knowledge, opportunities, and ongoing issues such as poverty and violence (Wineinger, 2022). The difficulties Pakistani women confront highlight the necessity for an all-encompassing definition of empowerment that considers its social, political, financial, and economic aspects. Cultural and social expectations often perpetuate gender stereotypes, resulting in women being disproportionately represented in lower-status and lower-paying jobs, known as "pink-collar" jobs (Randev, 2024). These stereotypes, which suggest that women are less suited for high-risk or leadership roles, contribute to the glass ceiling that limits their advancement in the workplace (Aldossari, 2021). Despite increasing numbers of women in executive positions, societal perceptions undermine their leadership and management abilities.

## **2.1 Underpinning Theory**

The core message of feminism lies in providing equality between men and women in the political, social, and economic spheres of life. This term was first coined by French radical socialist and utopian philosopher Charles Fourier in 1837 as "the disease of feminine traits manifesting in males." This feminist movement started in the United States and Europe, developed into Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and has now become the global phenomenon it is today. In fact, feminism is nothing but a general term expressing a broad range of the cultural issues associated with female patriarchal oppression said Dicker (2016). Actually,

originating mainly in the West, feminism has spread to reach far and wide around the globe as many organizations today represent its huge array.

Women's rights gave rise to feminist thought, first articulated in the 18th century with the appearance of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The feminist movement, complementing broader egalitarian movements, gained momentum exponentially in the 1970s and 1980s. According to feminist theory, education is an invaluable means of giving women power. In this regard, education may afford women both access to information and skills and self-confidence in order to attack the status quo of the mainstream gender roles and, therefore, to fight for a higher social, political, and economic status. Education may be used as a tool in promoting gender equality, and thus, for the empowerment of women in speaking about their rights while, at the same time, acting as a tool of social change upon the very prism of feminism.

### 3. Research Methodology

For current study, the target population has been taken from Bahawalpur and Multan. The estimated population of females in Bahawalpur and Multan is 1,789,148 and 2,310,408, which collectively contribute to 4,099,556, respectively (Census Report, 2017). In this present study, women from educational centers (Government Sadiq Egerton College Bahawalpur, Moon Girls College Bahawalpur, Superior College Multan, Institute of Southern Punjab Multan) and vocational centers (Govt. Vocational Training Institute for Women (GVTIW), Bahawalpur, Vocational Training Institute Multan Female), Southern Punjab, Pakistan, are the unit of analysis. The sample size of current study was 384. The statistical software program for social science (SPSS) was employed to analyze the study and analyze data. The study employed SPSS and PLS for data summary, tabular presentation creation, and frequency of occurrence measurement of the outcomes. A 5-point Likert scale was employed by the researchers in this investigation.

#### 3.1 Research Instrument

It is critical that the collected data be relevant to the context under study in this study, an adapted research instrument was used by the researcher. "A modified research instrument is one that was previously validated or used but was modified to fit the context or objectives of the study." The researcher developed the adapted instrument from the previous versions of the approved instruments because the particular requirements and characteristics of the anticipated audience were not met with the currently validated instruments. This strategy contributes to increased reliability and subjectivity since it assured the incorporation of suitable themes and language that is appropriate to the culture. In order to provide a complete understanding of the research topic, the researcher used the instrument modified to gather perspectives and experiences regarding complex ideas as related to the study. This indicates sensitivity and rigor in order to address the complexities of the topic.

**Table 1: Items of Research Questionnaire**

Sr. No	Statements	Source
WE1	Women are given appropriate status in Pakistan.	Kabeer, 2001
WE2	Government policies and current laws are helping resolve the wage gap issue.	

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<b>WE3</b>	The government and other agencies (schools, etc.) are adequately spreading awareness about women empowerment and its need in the society.	
<b>WE4</b>	Women feel comfortable to speak openly in public forums.	
<b>WE5</b>	Women empowerment is a positive step towards the development of a society.	
<b>WE6</b>	Women perform effectively on many different tasks.	
<b>WE7</b>	Women become active representative of any institution/group.	
<b>C1</b>	Women should be at home and men should be at work.	Uddin, 2013
<b>C2</b>	Women feel pressure by society to dress in her own manner.	
<b>C3</b>	Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working to pay.	
<b>C4</b>	Bringing up children is the most important job of the women.	
<b>C5</b>	Our culture favors male children from inheriting business over female.	
<b>C6</b>	Women have lesser employment security than men.	
<b>C7</b>	Women should be married at her 20's.	
<b>AE1</b>	It is good for women to have higher education.	Tasleem, 2021
<b>AE2</b>	Women youth are developed by gaining high level of education.	
<b>AE3</b>	Efficiency in a society can be increased by giving education to women.	
<b>AE4</b>	Level of education enhances the women worker's productivity.	
<b>AE5</b>	Parents should feel proud in letting their daughters join higher education institutions.	
<b>AE6</b>	Women should be given a chance in managing projects for educational development.	
<b>AE7</b>	Government should give more educational opportunities to women.	
<b>VE1</b>	Graduates of TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) are well trained.	Okwelle & Ayonmike, 2014
<b>VE2</b>	First choice of career for women is through the vocational education.	
<b>VE3</b>	Vocational and technical education can earn a living for women.	
<b>VE4</b>	Technical skills provide the foundation of women's future development.	
<b>VE5</b>	Establishment of vocational and technical schools help in specializing women in a choice of study.	

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<b>VE6</b>	Vocational education leads to jobs that are highly regarded in our country.
<b>VE7</b>	Vocational education allows you to find a job quickly after obtaining a qualification.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

##### 4.1 Response rate

The Multan and Bahawalpur, cities of Southern Punjab, Pakistan provided the evidence. Surveying the 384 respondents from Southern Punjab, Pakistan was deemed appropriate based on the study's design. Of the 384 questionnaires that were distributed, 384 were used, producing a 100% valid response rate, even though the researchers immediately received all 384 of the distributed questionnaires back, achieving the intended 100% response rate. After the respondents completed each questionnaire, it was instantly reviewed. After taking necessary precautions, it was discovered to have no missing responsive during data entry.

##### 4.2 Cronbach Alpha

The questionnaire's validity and reliability were evaluated using Cronbach alpha. Finding the Cronbach alpha was crucial to assessing the validity and reliability of the instrument. 384 participants in the procedure were requested to give honest answers. In order to evaluate dependability, Cronbach alpha was employed in this study; ideal findings ranged between 0 and 1. The acceptance threshold is debatable, however scores closer to one are seen as more reliable. Certain circumstances deem reliability levels between 0.5 and 0.6 tolerable (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). The table displays the alpha values for each construct. It is evident that the majority of reliability coefficients exceed 0.8, indicating a high level of reliability for these constructions. However, the least reliable structures have a reliability coefficient of 0.851.

**Table 2: Reliability Coefficient**

Sr. No	Construct	Cronbach Alpha	No. of Items
1	Women Empowerment	.852	7
2	Culture	.851	7
3	Academic Education	.859	7
4	Vocational Education	.855	7

##### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics

A following data collection, descriptive statistics were employed in the SPSS program to analyze the gathered data, aiming to offer an overview of the dataset. The sample, consisting of respondents from public organizations, was summarized using descriptive tests. A total of 384 respondents were included in the analysis.

**Table 3: Respondent Profile**

Demography	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	0	0%
	Female	384	100%
<b>Age</b>	18-20 Years	21	5.5%
	21-23 Years	116	30.2%
	24-26 Years	189	49.2%
	27 Years and above	58	15.1%
<b>Academic Qualification</b>	Matriculation	0	0%

	Intermediate	11	2.9%
	Diploma	17	4.4%
	Bachelors	195	50.8%
	MS/M.Phil.	151	39.3%
	Ph.D.	10	2.6%
<b>Occupation/Status</b>	Student	231	60.2%
	Job	109	28.4%
	At Home	44	11.5%
<b>Salary Per Month (Rs)</b>	No Salary	288	75%
	10,000-30,000	27	7%
	31,000-60,000	47	12.2%
	61,000-90,000	11	2.9%
	Above 90,000	11	2.9%

#### 4.4 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is conducted to characterize the main attributes of the dataset. Mean and standard deviation, are utilized to provide an overview of respondents' questionnaire responses. The findings show that all variables have a mean that ranges from 3.20 to 4.10. These numbers are higher than usual and fall within an acceptable range.

**Table 4: Descriptive Analysis**

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
<b>Education</b>	384	1	5	3.58	.297
<b>Culture</b>	384	1	5	3.20	.447
<b>Vocational Education</b>	384	1	5	4.10	.662
<b>Women Empowerment</b>	384	1	5	3.62	.537
<b>Valid N (listwise)</b>	384				

Hair et al. (2021) report that the current study has a 0.95 t-esteem at a significant level of 0.05. The coefficient ranges' values between "+1" and "-1" also make sense. As a result, correlation coefficient values close to "+1" indicate a stronger link, whereas values close to "-1" indicate insufficient closeness. The precise p-esteem, t-worth, and path coefficients connecting the components from the current study are displayed in the table. Path values determine whether the hypothesis is accepted or not. Endogenous variables are explained using the SPSS algorithms. Therefore, at a significance level of 0.05, all of the hypotheses are supported, as demonstrated by the findings of the current review.

#### 1.5 Hypotheses results

**Table 5: Hypotheses Testing (Direct Paths)**

Hypotheses	Coefficients	SD	T-Values	P-Values	Decision
AE -> WE	0.123	0.029	4.286	0.000	Accepted
VE -> WE	0.542	0.039	13.908	0.000	Accepted

The results show that both academic education (H1: coefficient = 0.123, T = 4.286, p < 0.001) and vocational education (H2: coefficient = 0.542, T = 13.908, p < 0.001) have a significant positive impact on women's empowerment, with both hypotheses accepted.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The study posits that there exists a significant correlation between women's empowerment in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, and academic education. It is also evident from the bootstrapping data that ( $\beta = 0.123$ ,  $t = 4.286$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

**H<sub>2</sub>:** The findings ( $\beta = 0.542$ ,  $t = 13.908$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) show that women's empowerment in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, and vocational education are significantly correlated.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** The study's hypothesis is that academic education in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, has no appreciable influence on culture. It is also evident from the bootstrapping results that ( $\beta = 0.019$ ,  $t = 0.626$ ,  $p = 0.531$ ).

**H<sub>4</sub>:** The findings ( $\beta = 0.146$ ,  $t = 5.456$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) show that there is a substantial correlation between Southern Punjab, Pakistan's culture and vocational education.

**Table 6: Hypotheses Testing with Moderator (Moderation Analysis)**

Hypotheses	Coeff.	SD	T-Values	P-Values
AE *C*WE	0.019	0.030	0.626	0.531
VE *C*WE	0.146	0.027	5.456	0.000

## 5. Conclusion

The study examines how women's empowerment is impacted by academic and vocational education, taking into account the ways in which these impacts are influenced by cultural influences. It highlights that while both forms of education can enhance women's empowerment by improving their skills, knowledge, and socio-economic status, cultural norms often constrain these benefits by suppressing women's basic rights. Education, particularly vocational training, equips women with skills and confidence to participate more fully in societal development and decision-making processes. Despite cultural influences, vocational education shows a direct and significant positive relationship with women's empowerment. Nonetheless, the study's conclusions indicate that demographic variables such as gender, age, educational background, occupation, and income have little bearing on the consequences of women's empowerment.

The results of the study suggest several practical implications to promote women's empowerment in southern Punjab, Pakistan through academic and vocational education. Above all, educational institutions and professional training schools need to develop and implement targeted programs that not only focus on talent development but also address the cultural barriers faced by women. This can include workshops and campaigns that educate communities and families on the value of educating women and why this needs to be fought for. Second, community leaders need to partner with legislators and education authorities to ensure that there are conditions in place to facilitate the empowerment of girls. This can be done through initiatives which engage boys and men to serve as accomplices in the plight for gender parity and the renunciation of injurious traditions and social standards. The third concern is specialized educational material that assumes progressive thought but simultaneously preserves and incorporates regional cultural settings. For cultural perceptions to be gradually transformed, such educational programs should have modules on women's rights, gender equality, and benefits of women entering the labor.

Continuous research and evaluation through monitoring of the process of implementation and formulation along with adaptation of strategies based upon the response of the community in the midst of cultural changes will demand. Cultural responsive approach,

engagement with the community, and inclusion of stakeholders is most likely to increase the positive impact of academic and vocational education on women's empowerment in southern Punjab.

## **6. Research Implications and Future Recommendation**

This study provides some implications from its results in terms of future research as well as real-world applications pertaining to women's empowerment through education. The first finding of this study is that policymakers and practitioners designing academic and career training programs for women in southern Punjab ought to take culturally sensitive approaches as findings of this study recommend supportive conditions be created which enhance female empowerment through this way: the incorporation of community feedback and interaction with local leaders. Other research avenues include some specific cultural factors that determine the successfulness of educational programs, in addition to exploring how groups within southern Punjab perceive and advocate for women's education. Longitudinal research studying the long-term impact that education and vocational training make in women's empowerment also might be appropriate, including cultural perception change over the long term.

Comparative studies within other regional locations with different cultural backgrounds may be fruitful to understand the relationship between empowerment and education better in other contexts. One can further explore how community engagement strategies and male champions may influence the rights and outcomes in education for women. Lastly, qualitative research methods are useful in qualitative research, such as focus groups and interviews, to derive knowledge of the personal lives of women pursuing education in different cultural settings.

## **7. Limitations of Study**

Like other calculated and logical examinations, the ongoing work contains various significant impediments. Thusly, the accompanying contemplations ought to be made prior to deciphering the review's discoveries. The ebb and flow examination's expansiveness were restricted on the grounds that it solely analyzed city occupants, disregarding rustic people all the while. The main technique used to assemble the information was self-announcing. Subsequently, cross-approval of the gathered information was impractical. To work on the legitimacy of the information assembled, further estimation methods can be utilized in later examinations. The elements that could have restricted respondents' responses and reactions were evaluated in the ongoing review utilizing the quantitative technique. Likewise, subjective or blended techniques approaches might be utilized instead of quantitative strategies in future examination to analyze the connection between specific variables.

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