Higher Education for Women: A Self-empowerment and Gender Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to understand the intrinsic value of higher education in promoting personal empowerment of women students. Theoretically it is based on the model of personal empowerment, along with generative power modes - power-within and power-to. The postmodern school of thought on education, in terms of knowledge, critical consciousness and delivery; is an additive in understanding the role of education for the receivers in this study. Also, gender theory which relates to gender equality in access to education and access in education informs the theoretical base of this study. Using quantitative data this paper attempts to expound on the importance of higher education during academic years and its impact on the propagation of women empowerment and critical awareness. Analysis indicates that higher education in Pakistan needs a thorough inspection of content and determination of common goals and targets for achieving true women participation.

Keywords: Critical Consciousness, Development, Gender, Higher Education, Self-empowerment

1. OVERVIEW

According to Noureen (2015), women have made substantial progress in academia since the beginning. Nidiffer (2003) points out that gender is holistic and persists in today's higher education throughout the world. Gender constructs are responsive to social contexts and can change over time. Higher education is one of the primary institutions that shape social attitudes towards women and gender. Therefore, it needs to be contemplated that the very institution that holds promise for developing both knowledge and mankind in a society is not marred by gender discrimination.

Over the past two decades research has ensued discussions about challenges to the higher education in terms of social inequalities [Leathwood and Read (2009)], and gender inequities. Social researchers, along with feminism advocates, have started to look into the matter of quality of higher education in midst of globalisation and competitiveness to ascertain its efficacy for gender equity.

Since knowledge has lost its essence as a "public good" and has been transferred into the category of "marketable units of commodity" [Leathwood and Read (2009)], higher education has lapsed at the counter of social inequalities, oblivious to social and cultural objectives [Naidoo (2003)] while pursuing national and global competitiveness. Therefore, gender equity remains a luxury of thought.

Undoubtedly, women's ingress to higher education has expanded significantly since the 1990s in most parts of the world, with women being more in number at undergraduate and graduate programmes, scoring educational achievements and marking their presence in public spheres. This increased number of women, however, does not convey the accurate account of women's progress [Leathwood and Read (2009)] or empowerment through higher education.

Moreover, since development theory acknowledges that the gender dimension has become a key factor in any solutions proposed for global problems, and as many higher education institutions are now engaged in far-

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Author's note: This paper is a condensed form of my MPhil thesis which employed Explanatory Sequential Research Design to understand and expound on the experiences of women in higher education.

Anyone interested in further information from this study can contact me at <syrakhan88@hotmail.com>

reaching curriculum innovation to keep abreast of social change, the omission of this aspect is no longer acceptable [Yates (2006)].

Over the last decade Pakistan has too shown outgrowth in higher education. With HEC (Higher Education Commission) in working, not only the number of universities has risen but has also ensured access to a larger proportion. Now a larger number of students, male and female, graduates from Degree Awarding Institutions (DAIs) every year. Research is central focus along with expansion of fields for students to choose from and to fulfil country's requirements of skills with respect to the global technical and professional environment. So far the participation and access of women to higher education is merely a number count. It needs to be seen if this expansion of higher education has burgeoned the capacity of education for self-development of women by providing access to curriculum alongside access to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Such information can be achieved through communication among all levels of decision-making and stakeholders. As the requirements of knowledge economy are on constant influx, women themselves should be regarded as a worthy source of information and must be asked of their opinions and views. Moreover, the examination of the process of empowerment must occur repeatedly and frequently to make sure it is in existence and is helping women become change agents rather than following past legacy of being passive recipients of development enterprise. However, no golden rule can be followed to determine outcomes.

This study attempts to unpack the nature of innate value of knowledge to raise the critical approach in women and its ability to address the gender imbalance. It aims a comprehensive study of the personal experiences of women to assess the contribution of higher education in the lives of women pursuing degree courses, in the local universities, in terms of critical consciousness and self-empowerment; using a personal dimension for empowerment and power in its productive, generative form.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONTEXTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

This study entails the concepts of personal empowerment, post modern education theory, power and gender theory for women education.

The ideology of empowerment has its earliest roots in Paulo Freire's educational approach (1960s) of *Conscientisation*. It refers to the awakening and development of a critical vision; it enhances the capacity of critical thinking in the oppressed and is the first milestone in the process of empowerment. Dighe (1995) says it is important to distinguish between literacy for empowerment and literacy for domestication. Any educational endeavour that does not provide women consciousness raising and participation, along with the necessary literacy skills, only serves to reinforce the existing structures of power, the domestic role of women and

thus, does not facilitate a change in social relations and personal growth for women neither within nor outside their homes. Therefore, emphasis should be on awareness raising through education and not on mere acquisition of literacy so that women can work for the betterment of their social statuses.

Power as an explanatory and determining term imbedded in empowerment concept also needs due attention. As this paper relates empowerment to education and development, concepts of power-within and power-to conform to its theoretical base. Equitable notion of power-within is taken as a starting point which then leads to power-to followed by power-with. The path winding from power-within and merging into power-to marks an acquisition of new potentials. Empowerment in this premises deals with more than simply bringing a previously cut out group into the decision making circle. It subsumes an entire progression of leading an individual or a group to being able and to recognise themselves as able to proficiently participate in the transformative procedures, beginning with decision making.

Finally, Gender theory on education equality also forms the basis of analysis and theorisation of concepts for this thesis. Gender theory demands a fair curriculum which is inclusive of women and their issues. It suggests that the educational content needs to be deliberated with women as equal beneficiaries and should be able to reform their internalised oppression. The most powerful demand on development policy related to gender equality throughout the first wave of feminism critique on development remained to be equal recognition of all citizens (men and women) in terms of access, progression and completion of education [Unterhalter (2008)]. Since the Women's Year 1975 conference, curriculum has been a salient feature of educational reforms to counter the unequal outcomes of education imparted to women [Yates (2006)]. Therefore, in a discussion of education and empowerment process of women, curriculum cannot be bracketed out.

The Personal Empowerment model given by Jo Rowlands (1995) differentiates between process of empowerment and the changes that may result because of that process. This is a dynamic model that helps in a detailed analysis of individual, self-empowerment among women. I have used this model for the basis and analysis of my study for several reasons: its three dimensional approach caters to the need of my study to enquire the process of empowerment that is expedited by education in an adult's life in light of changes and reasons; it refers to the personal growth and development of the self which is followed by empowerment of community and society at large. Also, this model provided an opportunity to merge two theories espousing the need for change agents-postmodern view of education and women empowerment framework.

For a theory driven, rudimentary conceptual model I have built on Rowland's personal empowerment model. There are a number of ways in which this framework varies from the original one other than the self-proclaiming contextual differences. This was necessitated by the fact that Rowlands (1995)

was dealing with a limited population which was exposed to an external influence in form of a development agency's intervention.

Since this study is strictly concerned with the inherent value of education and tends to steer clear of many material factors that do exist and play a very significant role as separate elements as well as factors impacting the correlations and interactions of other elements. Original model has been helpful in developing a conceptual framework conforming the psycho-social factors of personal growth through education and exercise of power-to and power-within. Education is a key to unlock the latches of internalised oppression, and moulding self-perception; it creates numerous everlasting spaces for practicing fluid power which is not a zero-sum game.

Moreover, Rowlands (1995) realises that every individual possesses a prior history and never enters into the processes of empowerment with a blank experience card. However, she took prior experience at one point in time to keep things simpler and only related it with the impact it has on the core development. Current study captures the views and experiences of women students in second half of their post-secondary degrees at higher education institutes; this makes them exposed to modification and personal growth and empowerment processes of education for at least fourteen years and in an average age of 23 years. This made it necessary to consider the prior experience and existing history as a major determining factor at each of the three levels of analysis.

Rowlands (1995) explains how without core an individual is not able to take, create and exercise power except through manipulation or power-over. With the five given elements of the model I have added the element of consciousness raising for a) education as the factor of enquiry develops critical consciousness/awareness raising among the recipients and b) for gender conditioning and achievement of strategic needs, consciousness raising has to be part of the core of the individuals; especially if the individual has to be able to move off the 'gender assigned' roles and perceptions that her context and culture have given her.

3. DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

3.1. Empowerment Process

"Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action." [Marilee Karl, (1995) Women and Empowerment, p.14][2]

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[2]Marilee Karl, also co-founder of ISIS international, presented this definition of empowerment in her book Women and Empowerment which was a final instalment in the Women and World Development Series. Karl used numerous examples from around the world to present the nature and extent of women's disempowerment and the efforts they have been making on their own for creating a world that exercises power in a more equitable manner and benefits all. She has been acclaimed for her simple and uncomplicated definition of empowerment which encompasses a huge range of activities that women can undertake for fashioning of a just world.

This research banks on Karl's definition of Empowerment with added explanation of Conscientisation—it centres on individuals becoming subjects in their own lives and developing critical consciousness- that is, an understanding of their circumstances and the social environment that leads to action for change [Rowlands (1997)] .

In this study, empowerment is further categorised as a process as literature shows agreement by many scholars[3] on empowerment being a long-term, open-ended and a dynamic process. It does not have clear beginnings, middle or end; it cannot be defined through specific activities or end results and involves deep and broad changes in societal structures [Oxaal and Baden (1997)]. Razavi and Miller (1995) term it as a social movement which cannot be engineered. Similarly, Kabeer (2012) describes empowerment process as a complex phenomenon which has several routes and multiple dimensions. And each process is unique with respect to the factors that hinder or facilitate it.

The process of empowerment for women entails a cognitive aspect [Dighe (1995)] which requires women to recognise their status quo and the ideology of women being submissive to men and its seepage into the socio-cultural norms [Batliwala (1994)]. Empowerment in education and alternate development (informed through feminism) are correlated as both involve a certain level of personal development/empowerment in the long, open-ended empowerment process.

3.2. Personal Empowerment

It is the basic form of empowerment which is about convening a sense of self-confidence and capacity and eliminating effects of internalised oppression [Rowlands (1995)]. Achievement of personal empowerment does not invariably conclude achievement of empowerment on close relations or community empowerment. Core of every experience of personal empowerment is inhibited and/or encouraged by various factors which then influence and bring about changes.

Core elements of the women personal empowerment, according to the original model of Rowlands (1995), include development of self-esteem, self-confidence, and dignity, sense of agency and sense of self in a wider context. These elements ascertain the existence of empowerment process taking place; an increase in their status shows changes as a result of development of core are taking place [Tasli (2007)].

This study takes all these five elements combined with critical consciousness of social settings onto consideration for appreciating the role of higher education in women empowerment process and any increase in these will signify existence of personal empowerment and personal development among women students.

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[3]Moser (1993, 1995 and 2007), Dighe (1995) Oxaal and Baden (1997), Rowlands (1995, 1997 and 2005), Kabeer (2001 and 2005).

3.3. Explanation of the Term Power

Power-to is productive power which creates new opportunities and actions without domination [Rowlands (1997); Rahman (2013)]. This power fosters decision-making authority and problem solving attitude [Oxaal and Baden (1997)]. It is the ability to inspire an activity, it is a generating power that relates to creating new opportunities [Ibrahim and Alkire (2007)]. Also, it is related to power-with as it calls for sharing. Power-with finds a common ground and builds collective strength. It is, thus, closely related to collective empowerment [Tasli (2007)].

Power-within is often described as self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness. It relates to how individuals can recognise the power relations in their lives and based on this they act accordingly, in order to bring change or to influence the existing power structures [Oxaal and Baden (1997)]. An important quality of power-within is that it regenerates and enriches itself; it cannot be given or generated on behalf of others [Kabeer (2012)]. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) define it as self-respect and self-acceptance.

A dominant theme of Foucault's philosophy has been the interrelationship between knowledge and power. Building on Foucault, Development describes Power as Knowledge. Knowledge brings legitimacy and authority to the actions of an individual. It enables her/him to functionally interpret the context she/he lives in and making changes in existing power relations possible. Foucault believed that knowledge is inextricably tied to power while he described power to be "permanent, repetitious and self-reproducing" [Buckley (2000); cited in Gaventa (2003)]. His contention is that the revolutions in knowledge of discourses have led a new human interaction structure where the enlightened exercise power-over the target groups (like the sick for medical doctors) [Gunaratna, (2013); cited in Gaventa (2003)]. Development discourse, too, created and intervened upon the target groups such as the Third World, backward economies, agricultural economies, poor women of underdeveloped countries and so on [Gaventa (2003)].

Many feminist writers, too, followed in Foucault's wake to explicate meanings of power in terms of gender as Foucault also brackets power with its 'energy' classification of the term [Rowlands (1995)] or generative form.

As this paper relates empowerment to education and development, concepts of power-within and power-to conform to its theoretical base. Equitable notion of power-within is taken as a starting point which then leads to power-to followed by power-with. The path winding from power-within and merging into power-to marks an acquisition of new potentials. Empowerment in this premises deals with more than simply bringing a previously cut out group into the decision making circle. It subsumes an entire progression of leading an individual or a group to being able and to recognise themselves as able to proficiently participate in the transformative procedures, beginning with decision making.

3.4. Awareness-Raising/Critical Consciousness

It is also referred to as conscious-raising [Tasli (2007)] or critical-awareness and aims at developing a critical-consciousness in women (and men) so that they move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical perspective on it [Kabeer (1999)]. One of the main instruments of the empowerment approach is awareness-raising. The process of awareness-raising should aim at altering women's self-image and their beliefs about their rights and capabilities; challenging the sense of inferiority; creating awareness of how gender discrimination acts on them; recognising the true value of their labour and contributions to the family, society, and economy [Batliwala (1994)]. Awareness-raising, as a strategy, aims at altering the self-image of a woman and builds her confidence. It helps her discover and polish her capabilities and forms and repairs consciousness within her that enables her to act as a change agent for herself and the society. It encourages women for collective action.

In this study, awareness-raising has been taken synonymous to critical-consciousness and reflects a part of the core development. It shows education for awareness building is most appropriate for a model of empowerment that constitutes generative form of power, and in its productive form that power strives for a better self-image and development and nurturing of skills and capabilities that are necessary for personal growth and societal change towards equity and positivity. This traverses along other core elements adopted from the original model of empowerment [Rowlands (1995)] especially the sense of belonging and dignity so for purposes of analysis of this research critical consciousness is identified as awareness of one's social surroundings in terms of gender demarcations that exist within the society and awareness of one's place. Moreover, as education is in limelight, critical consciousness has to be a central theme despite the aspect of enquiry.

3.5. Higher Education

It is broadly referred to as "all post-secondary education" (Task Force on Higher Education, World Bank, 2014). Higher education involves teaching, curriculum, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, exacting applied works (internships or residency programmes) and research. The time for higher education is ideally between 15-24 years of age.

In this research higher education applies to the degree courses (taught and research) provided at HEC recognised universities only. Moreover, it takes into account only curriculum and co-curriculum activities part of higher education as units of analysis.

Specified in the realm of this research, curriculum is the course content of compulsory courses required for degree. While co-curriculum activities are defined as those activities and events which are an extension to the degree programmes and are compulsory for all students to attend. These may be graded

and may be held outside university premises by a third party. A Power as Knowledge and power-within and power-to scan makes it necessary to question the role of curriculum and co-curriculum content. This pertains to what knowledge is delivered as educational content and in what way that knowledge is constructed [Simmonds (2014)]. Here Co-curriculum does not include any extra-curricular activities taken by the students because activities like sports and arts bring an entirely other dimension of self-growth and grooming and needs a particular set of tools for analysis. It will not do justice to add them here and treat them in a singular lens ignoring the intricacies. Moreover, pre-testing and groundwork on the sites had given me a hint that not many women students participate in sports and other activities outside the norm of regular university curriculum that takes them away from university routine on a regular basis and carry no academic credit.

3.6. Gender Issue

Gender is described as a socially constructed term that defines the roles and relations between men and women. This shows that gender is a social and cultural construct [Razavi and Miller (1995)] which defines the positions of men and women in relation to each other within household and society. Moreover, its mutable features change across cultures and are influenced by socio-economic factors [Tasli (2007)].

For this study, women empowerment is the gender issue in consideration. This leads to the conviction that along with being a class, ethnic and racial issue empowerment of women is also a gender issue and an issue of transforming social relations. As literature has revealed that even at the most basic level of personal empowerment practice women do encounter power relations and gender conditioning as obstacles; it is mandatory to conceive this issue under the premise of gender analysis (along other dimensions) to reduce the obstacles [Rowlands (1997)]. With respect to gender, curriculum and co-curriculum's inclusion of women issues, women as role models and information on gender discrimination has been deliberated.

In this study, for analysis and planning process, gender interest is defined as a prioritised concern [Moser (1993)] and can be translated as needs. As Molyneux (1998) demonstrates that although needs and interests are conceptually two different philosophies but in planning process they come closely together. This study analyses strategic gender interests with higher education as an intervention to provide men and women with equitable opportunities and resources. Comprehensively, strategic gender interests/needs are taken as a consequentiality of education aimed at awareness raising and represent a flow of power and exercise of generative power for progression in one's status.

4. RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

I have used the 2013 ranking of HEC[4] and opted for the category of general, large universities of Islamabad from the ranking document. Further, according to HEC ranking criteria, large universities are those that have more than 7000 enrolled students. For easy approach to gatekeepers and facilitation of access inside the campuses and administrative units it was felt necessary that such universities should be selected which were originally established in the Federal region and/or have their headquarters established here. Based on this criteria five universities became part of this study.

For each university information on departments and faculties was collected through respective university's website and prospectus. Five main divisions were concluded on the basis of faculty- Natural sciences, Applied Sciences (includes all subjects related to pure sciences, computer sciences and their application), Social Sciences (including architecture and accounts), Management Sciences and Arts and Linguistics. This division has been made to board-in the voices of students from various subject areas. Using Krejcie and Morgan sampling table (1970), a sample size of 378 was determined for an estimated population of 27100 enrolled women in these five universities of Islamabad.

Final sample women students ranged from junior to final year students, had at least 70 percent attendance and their CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average- as guided by the office) was acceptable for their final exam eligibility of their respective semesters. Moreover, students from other provinces were specifically requested to participate in the research.

Sample was firstly divided amongst institutions according to the proportion of number of women students currently enrolled at each university. This was followed by a further proportional division of sample within a university according to the number of women students in each faculty. This information was explicitly requested from the university registrar office before starting data collection and was reconfirmed once at the site.

The study uses quantitative analysis- frequencies, cross-tabulations and charts to form and understand a pattern of responses ascertained through questionnaires related to level of empowerment and general views of the respondents.

4.1. Limitations of Data

The sample used in this research only focuses on general universities while HEIs in Pakistan include degree colleges as well as degree awarding

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[4]This was the latest official HEC ranking available when I planned and began data collection. It can be downloaded from http://www.hec.gov.pk/InsideHEC/Divisions/QALI/ Others/RankingofUniversities/Documents/Final_Ranking_List s_dated5th%20July%202013.pdf

universities. There are many types of degree awarding institutions all around the country with different specific fields of specialisations. And as women percentage varies with subject or specialisation wise and with type of institution, this factor is important for an accurate generalisability of results. General universities offer a wide variety of subjects for students to choose from therefore, they exhibit an eclectic environment and have a larger student body which is not very closely knitted in many ways. While specific specialisation (such as medical colleges, accountancy houses) Degree Awarding Institutions do not exhibit a varied multicultural outlook and have a distinct variation of male female population as per subject area; so data collected from such institutes may have highlighted an entirely different set of elements and situations of empowerment in terms of curriculum and co-curriculum.

Similarly, it does not move around the differences between women universities and co-education universities. All tools were intended for a collective view of the women students and did not target women university students and co-education university students any differently.

This study provides a base for future endeavours and a basic outlook of how current curriculum and co-curriculum is shaping the minds of the students and how is it making them receptive of gender issues. We think what we are taught, so academics need to train minds about women. Moreover, it merely provides a description and impact of two basic elements of higher education practiced in universities and based on the data collected, this study only discusses the gaps and areas for support in these elements by educational planning. It does not go beyond curriculum to analyse the impact of teaching methods, university management, facilities and globalisation or technology on the processes of empowerment.

Moreover, despite my effort to include participants with varied outlooks this study remains mainly an urban viewpoint.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Informants' Profile

A total of 378 participants filled questionnaires. Only 99 individuals shared their age, which revealed an average age of 23 years, with a majority of participants (86 percent) being single while 12 percent were married and 1 percent reported themselves as divorced. 3 (1 percent) women did not specify their marital status. Most participants were enrolled in postgraduate programmes, 45 percent belonged to graduate programmes and 1 percent were Doctorate studies scholars.

A Majority of the respondents belonged to Punjab, followed by Federal and then Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Sindh. Balochistan and Gilgit Baltistan had equal share while Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) had the least

number of participants in this survey. Out of total, 78 percent were day scholars and 28 percent were boarding at either university provided accommodation or a private hostel.

Only 11 percent were part of some sort of student body and carried out extra-curricular activities e.g. debating society, sports club, drama/cultural club etc. Whereas 30 percent held some form of formal employment at some point in their lives.

5.2. Personal Empowerment

First section gave a list of elements and situations, that a woman may regard necessary for empowerment in Pakistan, based on a literature-based model of personal empowerment [Rowlands (1995)], other reviewed literature and consultations. Table 5.2 shows the results gathered:

Table 5.2

Elements of Personal Empowerment of Women in Pakistan

	Lite-racy	Prac-tical skills	In-come	Career	Confi-dence	Esteem	Travel	Out-door Acti-vities	Perso-nal time	Being part of a large group	Friend-ships	Deci-sion mak-ing	Any element added by the respon-dent
Valid N	378	378	378	378	378	378	378	378	378	378	378	378	378
Total Percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Importance Scale	2	7	4	8	1	3	9	10	11	9	5	6	–
Necessary (%)	68	51	57	47	71	66	46	43	39	46	56	55	3
Not Necessary (%)	32	49	43	53	29	34	54	57	61	54	44	45	97

Source: Field data.

Self-confidence remained the popular choice throughout the sample. A markedly large number of women students believe that a confident woman is more capable of running her life and day to day affairs efficiently; therefore, women should possess confidence. Interestingly, personal income falls slightly lower in the priority table and friendships and decision-making participation are deemed more important than travelling, participating in activities outside the household and being part of a larger social group. This makes one ponder on the significance of self-confidence required by a modern day Pakistani woman. She is looking for personal growth, self-confidence and self-esteem through higher education. Self-confidence allows her to recognise and enhance her value to society by being an active member who has a say in matters that impact her life; rather than moulding herself according to the given guidelines and stay a passive member.

Similarly, time allocated solely and specifically for one's own self was considered necessary by the least percentage of women. 61 percent women students expressed that a personal time slot is not an important feature of an empowered woman's life. Literature shows that an organized woman is more able to realise things and gain information on her status and status of women around her (Rowlands, 1995). Similarly, organization helps her learn about her rights and development. This adds to her confidence and leads to creation of a space to exercise her cognitive skills and understand that disempowerment is not an individual shortcoming. This further leads to her understanding of the need to develop ways of having some kind of 'time for herself' where every ounce of energy and effort is not going in to meeting her practical gender needs. This time slot broadens her space and adds incrementally to her self-esteem. Therefore, not requiring a personal time slot for self-empowerment by majority of the respondents shows that the women in this study are not aware of the benefits of time-for-self either because it is least available in their lives and the lives of the women around them so they do not deem it necessary or because they lack orientation of what to do when not involved in gender specific roles.

Through this study I can infer that women do not prefer a separate time slot as a result of both these reasons. Higher education is not giving them enough space to experience power within and then power to. Since, there is lesser evidence of power to and expressive space there seems less need of time spent in discussion groups and self-grooming by women. However, considering the need for a schedule that allows women a time slot strictly for themselves, it can be argued that a change is called-for so as to help women find time for activities that make them happy, helps them grow and provides them an opportunity to experience personally construed spaces and power-within.

Out of 208 (55 percent) women who wanted a say in the household decision making, 36 are married women, this translates into 77 percent of the total married women. This can be used to infer that single women who are in the academic phase of their life do not want to bear the entire or major responsibility sharing for household decisions while most married women want to have an equal participation in all household decision making.

52 percent (198 out of 374) women consider themselves empowered according to the choices they made in the previous question and out of these 63 percent women students believe higher education has been a contributing factor for their empowerment. Conversely, 78 percent married women judge themselves empowered but 50 percent of these do not give higher education credit for their empowered state. On the other hand, the fraction of single women who think of themselves as empowered ladies is lower (58 percent) than the same figure for married women and out of these only 43 (36 percent) believe higher education has helped them achieve this state. Divorced women neither consider themselves empowered nor do they believe higher education has helped them empower themselves in any way.

Faculty analysis shows that most Management students and Social Sciences students feel higher education has been effective in helping them achieve empowerment, according to the choices they selected as necessary for the same.

Upon further analysis of the data for this question, it can be suggested that more students in Natural Sciences (59 percent) believe that they are empowered while students in Social Sciences are next- with 56 percent population considering themselves empowered in light of the choices they have made in previous question-, followed by Management Sciences at 54 percent. Arts and Linguistics and Applied Sciences show a less empowered population, 49 percent and 47 percent respectively. Moreover, when asked about higher education's role in their empowerment, 76 percent of the Natural Sciences students readily gave credit to higher education for their empowerment, followed by Management Sciences with 69 percent, Social Sciences with 63 percent and Arts and Linguistics with 63 percent students, while a smaller number of Applied Sciences students recognise the role of higher education in their lives, with a percentage of 52 percent.

Furthermore, in a university wise breakdown it reveals that an all-girls university shows a relatively higher number of women (34 percent) who consider higher education responsible for their empowerment. Contrary to this finding, intra-university ratios indicate that in an all-girls institute where 52 percent women are satisfied with higher education, a sizeable population of 48 percent is not satisfied with higher education's ability to empower them. The two universities with highest percentages (85 percent and 79 percent) of women students who believe in their empowerment through higher education's assistance offer combined education, with one known for its Management and Applied Sciences programme while the other is highly acclaimed only for its Management Sciences faculty.

5.3. Core Development

The next question specifically focused on the core personal empowerment elements of the original model and any changes the respondents experienced during their pursuance of higher education. More than half of the respondents experienced a general improvement in all the listed elements.

A lion's share of the students from Social Sciences (74 percent) and Management Sciences (75 percent) experienced an increase in their self-confidence, 41 percent of Applied Sciences students felt no change and 11 percent students from basic or Natural Sciences reported a decrease in their confidence. For self-esteem, most of the Arts and Linguistics students reported that higher education brought about no change in their existing self-esteem. In conjunction with the responses to the previous question, it can be postulated that the Natural Sciences group, which reported the maximum number of

Table 5.3

Development of Core Elements through Higher Education

Core Aspects	Changes Increase	As No Change	Observed Decrease	Valid N	Missing	Total
Self-Confidence	252 (67%)	113 (30%)	13 (3%)	378	0	378
Self-Esteem	224 (59%)	137 (36%)	14 (4%)	375	3	378
Ability to Deal with Surroundings Effectively	224 (59%)	140 (37%)	13 (4%)	377	1	378
Sense of Belonging	212 (56%)	137 (36%)	28 (7%)	377	1	378
Dignity	177 (47%)	183 (48%)	16 (4%)	376	2	378

Source: Field data.

empowered ladies, a majority of which acknowledged higher education as their benefactor, also has the maximum output for higher education improving the students' self-esteem. About 78 percent students felt that the higher education has boosted their self-esteem. However, a majority -60 percent- students have experienced no change in their dignity and 7 percent think that they have experienced a decline in their feeling of being worthy of respect from others.

For dealing and associating with society at large higher education has been most helpful for Management studies students. 75 percent Management students felt their ability to deal with their surroundings has been enhanced due to their higher education experience but a sizeable portion of Arts and Linguistics (54 percent) respondents felt no change. Similarly, a larger number of Management students (35 percent of total 212 students who have experienced an increase in their social, economic and political affiliations) report a sense of belonging to the society and public spheres while students from other faculty (55 percent) feel no change in their affiliations or they believe it has decreased (12 percent) since they started their quest for higher education. 46 percent Arts and Linguistic respondents believe higher education caused no change in their civic engagements while many students from Social Sciences (43 percent), Applied Sciences (42 percent) and Natural Sciences (36 percent) also did not experience any momentous change. Out of 36 students who reported a decrease, 24 percent are from Arts and Linguistics and Social Sciences, 12 percent from each group.

In Applied Sciences, like Natural Sciences, most students (62 percent) do not relate any change in their dignity levels. In the case of this element Arts and Linguistic students show a maximum increase of their sense of dignity as 56 percent believe it has improved while only 2 percent experienced any decrease and 42 percent have felt no change whatsoever. Majority of Applied Sciences students do not feel any change. Dignity has, nonetheless, vastly improved for many Social Sciences, Management and Arts and Linguistics enrolled women students.

For all core elements, except the ability to deal with your surroundings, every woman student in PhD reported an increase, showing the higher the level of your education the more advanced you will be in your personal empowerment

process. However, 67 percent students believe that their ability to deal with their surroundings has witnessed no major change. This could be because by the time one progresses to a doctorate degree one gets well-acquainted with social and cultural demarcations and how to deal with them.

5.4. Critical Consciousness

With respect to critical consciousness as defined in this thesis, the last section of the questionnaire was dedicated to six questions that inquired about gender conditioning through higher education to look into the curriculum for knowledge and curriculum for women particulars. Table 5.4 presents a brief picture for this section.

Table 5.4

Critical Consciousness for Gender Issues through Higher Education

	Gender	Awareness	Through	Higher	Education	
	Informing students about General social diversity	Informing students about gender conditioning of the society through curriculum	Preparing women to understand gender conditioning effectively	Preparing students to deal with gender conditioning effectively	Presenting Women as role models/ Examples	Reporting and discussing Women related issues In Pakistan
Not part of education	186 (49%)	186 (49%)	204 (54%)	244 (65 %)	206 (55%)	142 (38%)
Sometimes part of education	133 (35%)	123 (33%)	128 (34%)	98 (26%)	135 (36%)	146 (39%)
Always a part of education	59 (16%)	69 (18%)	42 (11%)	36 (10%)	35 (9%)	87 (23%)
N	378	378	374	378	376	375
Missing	0	0	4	0	2	3
Total	378	378	378	378	378	378

Source: field data

For all questions asked, with the exception of women issues in Pakistan, 'not part of education' has been the prevalent answer. In this section, Management Sciences and Social and Applied Sciences students were more positive about the role of higher education in incorporating gender knowledge into the mainstream education as for all six questions many of these students chose 'sometimes' or 'yes' as the category of response. However, if one observes the data from within these three faculties separately, it can be seen that in each faculty more students opted for 'not part of education' than the other two categories.

For example, with reference to gender awareness, a prominent portion of the total sample that chose yes or sometimes comprised of these students. However, within Applied Sciences 44 percent more students think that their curriculum does not give information to students in classrooms about men and women issues of public and private spheres. Similarly, in Management Sciences 21 percent more students think curriculum is not equipped in this regard and in Social Sciences this disparity is of 29 percent.

According to the students, Natural Sciences curriculum or co-curriculum content is not inclusive of gender dimension at all as shown by the responses of women of this faculty. But for Arts and Linguistics, most women students believe their curriculum sometimes includes social diversity, gender issues and women role models In addition, at times co-curriculum handles women specific topics while lacks to explain to most of them about how to deal with these issues effectively.

Similarly, data with respect to degree programmes shows that most of the respondents in undergraduate degrees across all faculties feel gender to be a more prominent part of their curriculum and co-curriculum than graduate and doctorate students.

6. CONCLUSION

The effects of higher education in Pakistan seem paradoxical and similar to the case of Jordan as described by Jansen (2006). Higher education adds to the self-esteem of women and encourages them to participate in public roles. But it also adds to her cultural prestige which reflects positively on her family and husband. Higher education, in this way, challenges and reinforces existing gender structures; therefore, an increased access of women to higher education is generally not fully reflected in labour markets, families or societies. Noreen and Khalid (2012) also recount a similar conclusion of their study by stating that education has to come with policy and social changes to encourage women become part of leadership and mainstream economy instead of conforming to a job list approved by traditional stereotype culture.

Higher education in Pakistan has not been able to help majority of women break through this mind-set, even at individual level. Since there are no changes in the women themselves, they have not been able to address the power dynamics and influence change in other people around. Women are unable to create a possibility of negotiations, they face power-over and respond through submission. Personal empowerment through education has to enable women to create an identity and a place for themselves to participate in the world.

Analysis of this study also reports exclusion of women and gender concerns from the higher education content. As curricula has been receiving particular attention around the world in fields where women are less, the curricula of sciences and technological fields is reported to be void of women

achievements and contributions [Rosser 1995)]. This is however, not restricted to fields where women are under-represented but is also found in general curriculum in higher education. Even in disciplines where women are more than men, women are excluded from textbooks and curricular materials and activities [Miller and Miller (2002)].

Quality of education and its importance for women have always been a part of discursive agenda in the mainstream intelligentsia of Pakistan. In spite of the recognition and social struggle for rhetoric of equality, women's situation in higher education remains the same in Pakistan. Women, despite having hypothetically equal access to universities alongside men, have not been able to bring any change in their social position and status through education. Women are still under-represented, lacking power and status in the higher education system of Pakistan. Higher education is still plagued with gender and subject biases for women. As a human resource development agency and a means of upward socio-economic mobility for women, higher education in Pakistan has only helped a limited number of women and has instead impeded the achievement of gender and social equity by echoing unjust social and gender organisations of the current system.

The impact of higher education has been patchy; perhaps largely because of the sole focus on the number of women students. Graduate and post graduate programmes are not conceived and designed deliberately to empower women, in terms of either the structure, methodology employed, or the philosophy behind it. The focus has been strongly aimed at delivering a particular service by developing the necessary skills, rather than a broader development of enhanced abilities and capacities which would leave women better placed to develop and manage their own agendas.

This study shows that access to higher education has improved the status of women in a very restricted way. Its content and experience have not been able to provide all women with a sense of self, dignity and the ability to counter social constraints; in fact it is making them a congenial part of a system in which social differentiation of gender constructs and gender inequality within a family and society perpetuates. There are many nuances between education and empowerment that are more vividly presented by exploration of gender inequality through qualitative studies.

Gender equality and women's empowerment should not only remain a priority in terms of access to education but also in terms of recognition in the curriculum in order to reach the grass roots where genuine change can take place and awareness can be raised that changes are necessary.

A just and equal society can be formulated in Pakistan and some changes have already begun. In spite of all the existing restrictions and limitations on women, many participants in the study expressed perseverance and a strong resolve not to perpetuate the system within their homes and their circle of

influence. The significance of these female graduates as role models within their families and communities must not be overlooked.

Women's participation in higher education is a means to address the gender parity issues in Pakistan and can act as an arbitrament to harmonise different dimensions of the systems which obscure progress towards an egalitarian society. Higher education can have a manifold impact on gender discrimination by developing core in scores of women students simultaneously. Thus, its importance as an avenue to bring about change in socio-cultural settings cannot be discounted. Similarly, participation of men can also not be overlooked. Inclusion of men as a part of solution needs to be foregrounded in every future effort. All men (students, teachers as well as policy makers at all levels) need to be sensitised to the need of gender equity in higher education in such a way that they do not feel powerless and help stimulate the change needed in societal thought process to accept women in public and private domains on equal terms.

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