

Role of Higher Education Institutions in Developing Entrepreneurial Intention among Female Students

Abstract

This study explores the role of HEIs in providing entrepreneurial experiences and opportunities to female students for developing their entrepreneurial intention. Explanatory sequential design and multi-stage sampling plan used in this study. Total 103 female students of graduating class, studying in the HEC recognized universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, have participated in Phase- I to complete a survey questionnaire and eight students were selected for a face-to-face interview in Phase-II. The quantitative data (Phase I) led to the qualitative data (Phase II) and the results were drawn through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings show that Entrepreneurship is a new concept in HEIs due to lack of awareness and orientation. HEIs are providing experiences and opportunities (seminars/workshops/career fairs) to students but fail to provide entrepreneurial exposure, which could help female students in developing entrepreneurial intentions.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial intention, Female Students, Entrepreneurial Experiences, Entrepreneurial Opportunities, Higher Education Institutions*

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in achieving broader sustainability (Garzon et al., 2018). The World Development Report (2019) emphasized that higher education is the main platform that can accelerate economic growth and stability of the country through developing entrepreneurial skills and knowledge among youth. Thus, according to the European Commission, (2013) higher education can promote innovation, and entrepreneurial culture. It helps to develop the entrepreneurial intention among male and females to reduce poverty, unemployment and expand economic growth and development within society (Choukir et al, 2019). Entrepreneurship has achieved an important place in educational discussions nowadays and is thriving across the world. Its importance and relevance has now been realized in all fields, thus promotion of

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entrepreneurship has become an accepted need in any country (Khan, 2008). The 21st century demands the acquisition of new skills and knowledge for entrepreneurial culture and practice to compete in today's global world (Silva, 2008). Entrepreneurship is far ahead from just creation of knowledge towards creating new opportunities and innovative ideas to bring change (Linen, 2004). Global Entrepreneurship Monitors (GEM) (2010) discusses entrepreneurship as a lifelong learning, knowledge, skills and practice that varied from level of elementary education programs till higher education institutions level. Higher education plays a decisive role in enabling students in developing skills that are required for entrepreneurship i.e. innovative ideas and vision, awareness, open-mindedness, risk taking, responsibility, decisiveness, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and good communication skills etc (Krueger, 2003; Kutako, 2004; Oteh, 2009).

According to Khan (2008) educational trends are changing across the world now and higher education is emphasizing to design such curricula that can promote entrepreneurship education in order to meet 21st century demands of the global market. On the other hand, Pakistan is facing a massive discrepancy between the curriculum offered in higher education institutions and industry demands (Naseer, 2015) therefore, students are unable to practice their theoretical knowledge in their practical fields. It is the liability of higher education institutions to develop students' self-efficacy in entrepreneurship through providing them exposure, and opportunities. HEC (2016) reported that both male and female students have the opportunity to attain such skills, knowledge and practical exposure to experience their entrepreneurial intention. However, research conducted by Ahmad, Arshad and Nawaz (2019) concluded that HEC is not playing a vital role in promoting entrepreneurship in respect of funds, infrastructure and faculty training to promote entrepreneurship. According to Paoloni and Serafini (2018) women entrepreneurship is gaining significant importance and value across the nations and verified their level of interest in performing entrepreneurial activities. However, in the Pakistani context, female entrepreneurship is a comparatively new idea (Khan, Ahmed, Nawaz & Ramazan, 2011).

According to the Government of Pakistan-National Youth Development Framework (2019) Pakistan has the highest young population (15-29 age group) in history and is 5th in the world. However, as a developing country, Pakistan is far behind in entrepreneurship. Pakistan has only 1% women entrepreneurs which is very less as compared to the male entrepreneurs at 21%. Being in a male hegemonic society, women are highly discriminated and segregated as compared to the men. This gender segregation, gender biases and inequalities, having less knowledge about business and lack of training (Hassan & Naz, 2020), less emotional and financial support and multiple responsibilities do not allow female entrepreneurs to develop their intention to engage themselves in entrepreneurship (Yaqoob, 2020). It can be improved if they

gain proper knowledge about starting entrepreneurial activity, family support, financial aid, shared responsibilities, and respect for their individual decisions and female participation in entrepreneurial activities can improve socio-economic conditions of Pakistan and as well as help in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN Women, 2019). Vision 2030 focuses on eliminating gender inequities, and promoting female empowerment through entrepreneurship. In Pakistan Vision 2025, it is documented that the aim of the vision is to streamline and promote the energies of youth of Pakistan and enable them to utilize their potential for economic growth and development of their country through innovation-oriented entrepreneurship.

Shaheen et al, (2013) have verified that women play an important part in the economic growth and development of Pakistan, Hence, got the attention of academia in Pakistan to make a positive impact worldwide. Therefore, it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to offer such entrepreneurial exposure, platforms, experiences and opportunities to their female students that can develop their intention.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of Higher Education Institutions in providing entrepreneurial experiences to the female students?
2. What specific opportunities do Higher Education Institutions offer to the students for developing their entrepreneurial intention?

Entrepreneurship education is an innovative approach and it is all about creating jobs, excellence and employment opportunities. European Commission (2004) reported that entrepreneurial mindset, skills and attitude could be developed among youth through education. Research studies indicated that entrepreneurial experiences have an effect on Perceived Behavior Control (PBC) (Kirby, 2002; Shane, 2003; McMullen & Shephard, 2006). Thus, according to Linen (2004a) developing intention among students is requisite to perform entrepreneurial behavior for entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and activity based set of education and training. The dynamics of entrepreneurship further identified that PBC, attitude and social norms are the key features to explain entrepreneurial intention (Kolvereid, 1996; Autio et al, 2001; Linan & Chen, 2011).

Women in Pakistan are playing a dynamic role in the fields of business and forming new milestones. They have great entrepreneurial potential; however, they need support and encouragement from their families to further excel in their respective fields. Entrepreneurship creates change and women entrepreneurship, thus, is the need of the time to bring change in society. This includes self-employment,

alleviation of poverty, gender differences, and social and economic development in Pakistan. The Ajzen Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been chosen for the theoretical underpinning of this study because of its relevance to the research questions formulated. The theories provide a framework to study entrepreneurial intention among female students. The important factor of this theory is to know the individual's behavior that is known as intention. It is a statement that a person who has strong intentions can gain success. TPB can be a significant model to provide an opportunity in order to predict entrepreneurial activities and events and has been used in past research studies in explaining entrepreneurial intention across various cultures and contexts (Lin & Lee, 2004; Scholten et al., 2004).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Type and Design

Mixed method research was employed in which the data was gathered to get in-depth results about the entrepreneurial intention. Using explanatory sequential mixed methods research design; quantitative data is collected and analyzed in the first phase of the study followed by qualitative data collection and its analysis in the second phase of the study. In this research design the equal priority has been given to the quantitative and qualitative data that provides a baseline data to better understand and connect the latter (Creswell, 2011).

Sampling

This research used a multistage sampling framework to select the respondents and participants of this research from each of the sampling units of the study in two different phases of research. The sampling unit at stage one was HEC recognized Universities with functioning ORIC offices situated in Rawalpindi/Islamabad and the sample was selected through simple random sampling technique. In the second stage, the graduating class female students studying in these universities were selected through convenience sampling techniques to collect quantitative data. The researcher approached those female students who were accessible and agreed to participate in the study. In the third stage, a subsample of eight female students was selected from the respondents of Phase-I through purposive sampling technique based on predetermined criteria of selection.

Data collection instruments

Quantitative (Phase-I) data was collected through self-administered adapted survey questionnaires. The survey questionnaire was adapted and content validity was done. This meant that some of the items were adapted using contextual changes. A five-point Likert scale was used for Phase-I and individualized interview protocol was designed to collect qualitative data in Phase-II. A self-administered questionnaire was pilot tested on 15 students where the internal consistency Cronbach's Alpha value of the survey questionnaire was .925. The quantitative data was analyzed in percentage

and mean values of the responses were calculated through SPSS. Individualized interview protocol was also developed based on the results drawn from the survey questionnaire of Phase- I.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Quantitative Results

Table 1
Specific Entrepreneurial Experiences

<u>Items</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std.Dev</u>
My university provides an environment for learning about entrepreneurial ideas	102	3.54	1.183
My university recognizes the development of new product/services by the students	103	3.62	1.067
In my university, students are encouraged to pursue our individual ideas	102	3.65	0.908
My university provides entrepreneurial experience through internship activities	100	3.52	1.096
My university has incorporated an optional course about entrepreneurship in syllabi	101	3.08	1.181
My university offers/includes entrepreneurial activities as a part of classroom teaching	103	3.53	1.055
I meet people in my university with (many) good ideas for new entrepreneurial activities	103	3.72	1.15
My degree would give me enough experience to become an entrepreneur	100	3.55	1.167

Results of the study show that the highest mean score was 3.72 with Standard Deviation 1.150 towards the item “university interaction for new ideas” which indicates that their university provides them opportunity to meet people with good ideas for new entrepreneurial activities. The study also shows the lowest mean score as 3.08 and Standard Deviation as 1.181 towards the item “entrepreneurship course in syllabi” which shows that their University did not incorporate an optional course about entrepreneurship in the syllabi.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities

Table 2
Entrepreneurial Opportunities

<u>Items</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>St.Dev</u>
Valued entrepreneurial activities (than others)	103	3.4	0.974
Opportunities to develop problem-solving skills)	102	3.89	1.089
Opportunities to develop leadership skills and abilities	102	4.15	0.979

Opportunities to develop communication skills	103	4.07	1.078
Provision of exposure for networking/ professional contacts	103	3.47	1.083
Entrepreneurial education through different workshops/seminars	103	3.73	1.122
Encouragement of graduates to pursue entrepreneurship ventures	103	3.55	0.967
Provision of opportunity/ resources for ventures)	103	3.47	0.978

Results show that the highest mean score was 4.15 with Standard Deviation .979, which highly supported the item “opportunities to develop leadership skills and abilities” which shows that their university provides them different opportunities to develop their leadership skills and abilities. The lowest mean score was 3.40 in item “valued entrepreneurial activities (than others)” with Standard Deviation .974, which shows that in their university, entrepreneurial activities are not valued above recreational activities. This mean score was low as compared to other items but, it was above the cut point of mean set for the Likert scale, with the cut point score being 3.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data was categorized in provisional and emergent themes. In this paper, the interview excerpts are shared in compliance with the above-presented quantitative data. All participants of this study described *entrepreneurial experiences* as community work, internships, and/or teaching practicum. It was interesting to note that most participants were not aware of the term entrepreneurship. Most participants believed that entrepreneurship could only be used in business education and business industry. One participant stated:

“When you gave me the questionnaire to fill, I was wondering why you are asking about entrepreneurship from me. I am a student...how can I tell you anything about entrepreneurship.”

Referring to the *university environment* in providing these experiences, the majority of participants were of the view that the university had provided them a conducive environment to foster their entrepreneurial intent. One participant stated ‘*our university arranges seminars, different sessions and workshops for students to learn about many different entrepreneurial activities and provide some information as well for starting small projects.*’ The majority of the participants responded in affirmation that they have a chance to meet and interact with different people who help and guide them in developing ideas, and that they availed chances of *networking with people* in their Universities during seminars or workshops. Another participant from the discipline of Education stated that: ‘*Our University provides us the opportunity to interact with skilled people in the field of teaching and learning. Where would we meet, and discuss with people in workshops/seminars in order to get information*

regarding starting a business venture.’ Another stated that ‘our university provides us opportunity to interact with skilled people in the field of teaching and learning. Where would we meet, and discuss with people in workshops/seminars in order to get information regarding starting a business venture.’ The participant from Mass Communication stated that: *Yes, our university provides us opportunities to interact and meet with other people if students show interest. But mostly students who study their last semester are interested in starting small businesses and therefore, register themselves in workshops outside the university in order to interact and learn skills that are required for our professional development.* Most participants stated that they got entrepreneurial experience through **Internship**, and one semester internship is a compulsory requirement for completion of their degree programs. However, they had to search for internships themselves, because the university did not provide linkage to any institute. However, one of the participants stated that ‘*Internship is compulsory for my degree completion and it provides me good experience. I did a three-month internship in a bank, but I don’t think it has prepared me to start any kind of business.*’

Students from Humanities and Social Sciences stated that they go to schools for research/teaching practicum, which helps them in using the different strategies they learn in their curriculum. Most participants stated that **community work** is also compulsory to complete their degree and provides them useful experience and exposure to entrepreneurship. One participant from the discipline of Fine Arts opined that ‘*we have to exhibit our painting at the completion of our degree. We just do our community work by exhibiting our thesis work...we can later sell our products in the market and different fairs.* Another participant from the discipline of Education stated “*We designed models and different paintings for students, which was a very good experience for us. We organized sports activities for students, as it was a school for needy children so they became very excited and happy for the activities we arranged for them.*’ Students were asked about the role of their university in **encouraging them to pursue their individual ideas** and they stated that their Universities and their faculty members encouraged and appreciated them extensively to pursue their own ideas.

Another participant stated that ‘*our institution encourages our own ideas. As we have a campaign against smoking which was organized by students. The faculty encouraged us. And also, students have organized a forum for CSS to promote interested students in it.* On the other hand, one of the participants stated that ‘*Being a married woman, whenever I come out of my class after taking a lecture I completely forget everything except my own home. But of course, during the lecture I come up with lots of ideas in my mind about starting something on my own. However, as far as entrepreneurial ideas are concerned I think unmarried girls can better pursue their*

*innovative ideas rather than me as my ideas lingered just inside the classroom premises. Conferring to the views on the role of **entrepreneurial intention** in becoming an entrepreneur, the findings were opposed to quantitative results. The majority of participants stated that they have not developed any intention to become entrepreneurs. The participants widely stated that they would prefer to do a job. One of the participants stated 'I will join Edhi foundation after I graduate. I will teach there, as they not only provide shelter but also moral support to the needy people. Education degree doesn't mean only to teach'. Another one stated 'I have developed strong entrepreneurial intentions just because of my degree. I want to open an art gallery and arrange exhibitions of my paintings just after completing my degree.'*

The majority of the participants pointed out the **significance and relevance of degree programs** to become entrepreneurs in their relevant field, and that the university provides good opportunities and experiences through their degree programs. A participant from Education stated *'our degree is professional. We have gained enough experience in teaching through internships and teaching practicum, which provides good field experience to become a school administrator or manager in this field in our future career.* Another participant from Mass Communication pointed out that: *'Our degree gives good experience but not too much priority has been given to Mass Communication as compared to other management and computer sciences programs. Those programs are mostly considered having more scope. If we tell people that we are doing masters in Mass Communication, they inquire what this degree means. But we can be entrepreneurs in print and electronic media.'*

When asked about **entrepreneurial opportunities** in their role in fostering the entrepreneurial intentions among female students getting higher education, a few participants stated that HEIs provide entrepreneurial opportunities to students across all disciplines. Some stated that they are encouraged but not provided with training or opportunity for their educational career advancement. One of the participants added *'being a woman studying in Co-education University, I have limited opportunities as compared to male students.'* Majority of the participants indicated that seminars are conducted and are an integral part of their educational programs and activities. On the other hand, one participant argued that *'university arranged seminars but we are busy nowadays in our final project so it is not possible for us to attend any of them...my priority is to take my class not to attend seminars.* Most participants considered workshops deliberately as the informative source. Some of the participants across disciplines agreed that workshops should be relevant with their educational requirement, but none of them willingly participated in any of the workshops in their academic session unless they were nominated for them. A participant from Islamic Studies stated *'we have very few opportunities for these activities as our university arranges few entrepreneurial programs for our departments compared to MBA and*

IT disciplines. Universities should also arrange workshops for the Faculty of Social Sciences to develop their professional skills and teaching learning methods''.

The participants stated that they are encouraged to pursue individual ideas but as far as venture or business are concerned; the university does not provide any encouragement to start any venture, and the focus is only on their degree courses. One of the participants highlighted *'we are studying a leadership course for which we have designed many projects in coursework. Most of the students participated in the entrepreneurship annual fair regardless of disciplines. Last year our students from the faculty of education displayed a stall in an entrepreneurial fair, which was a good exposure and experience for all of us. These experiences helped anyone to start a small venture.'* On the other hand, some participants stated *'our university does not provide any encouragement to start any venture through promoting our brochure or providing any financial help but yes they just develop individual entrepreneurial skill for ventures.'*

Results specified that the intention of female students to search for jobs has been developed. However, HEIs do not provide any opportunity exclusively to female students. This is evident when the university organizes a fair, priority is given to male students to manage those stalls and females are unable to handle such activities. One participant stated *'my degree has developed organizational management and leadership skills in me. But as far as venture concerns my institute does not develop intention or offer any opportunity.'*

The triangulation technique is used to discuss the findings of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The quantitative results reveal that female students have been provided with entrepreneurial exposure and experiences and have been encouraged to pursue their individual entrepreneurial ideas whereas the qualitative data in contrast highlighted the lack of awareness and orientation among female students regarding the concept of entrepreneurship at the higher education institutions. The quantitative findings revealed that teaching practice, internship/and community work is compulsory in each discipline to complete their degrees. Likewise, the qualitative findings show that internship/community work is a requirement to complete the degree program in HEIs. However, it is indicated that the institutions do not provide them information about organizations to do their internships. Overall findings show that experiences through internships/community work can only enhance the skills and knowledge among female students but do not develop any kind of new entrepreneurial intentions in them. Leong (2008) concluded that through providing training and developmental programs to students, strong entrepreneurial intention might be developing in them to choose their entrepreneurial career path. This could develop their abilities and interests to have positive attitudes

towards entrepreneurship. It was also discovered that teachers in HEIs gave more emphasis to coursework/internships as compared to workshops, seminars or entrepreneurial exposure to complete their degrees. The worth and importance of workshops and seminars can be understood through the research conducted by Pruett (2012) that workshops are designed according to individual needs in order to educate and develop entrepreneurial skills among students.

Overall results show that HEIs enhance their female **student's entrepreneurial skills and knowledge** per their degree requirements and develop their intention to become professional, but they do not have any specific course included in their syllabus related to entrepreneurship except practicum/internships/and community work. Quantitative finding indicates that university provides opportunity to students across disciplines to meet and interact with people within university in seminars/workshops or career fairs. However, qualitative results revealed that female students have not been provided such entrepreneurial opportunities and platforms as compared to the students from Business and Management disciplines. HEIs do not provide female students such training and opportunities as compared to male students that are needed for their career progression through developing entrepreneurial intention in order to enable them to become a successful entrepreneur. It is verified by Israr and Saleem (2018) in their research that entrepreneurship education can develop entrepreneurial intention among students and suggested Universities provide entrepreneurial training and courses in order to develop entrepreneurial intention among graduates. Overall findings indicate that female students have developed their communicative and leadership skills because of their relevant degree, courses, and practicum/projects that expand their abilities, and skills. although they fail to develop any kind of entrepreneurial intention among them. It is verified through the study conducted by Peterman and Kennedy (2003) that entrepreneurial intention can only be developed through adapting new pedagogical practices, providing exposure, training and resources for enhancing teaching skills and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the role of HEIs in developing entrepreneurial intention among female students. The results lead to the conclusion that the majority of the students are not even aware of the concept of 'entrepreneurship' and HEIs do not provide sufficient awareness to develop entrepreneurial intention among female students. Despite little familiarity, female students have the intention to start small ventures and are interested in self-employment after they graduate. It is also evident that male students get more entrepreneurial opportunities and resources as compared to the female students. Higher Education Institutions are providing experiences and opportunities primarily aiding students to achieve course objectives, but failed to provide specific entrepreneurial exposure, opportunities and courses which could help specifically female students in developing entrepreneurial intentions. Moreover,

students have shown their interest towards entrepreneurial activities but faculty considered such entrepreneurial activities, seminars and workshops, arranged in HEIs, irrelevant to their degree courses. It is verified that due to the weak linkage between industry and academia, fewer entrepreneurial activities, and resources (financial aid, business knowledge, application of their knowledge in real-life) the major entrepreneurial skills including leadership, problem-solving, and communication skills are being developed and enhanced among female students only through their coursework not through any entrepreneurial opportunities (seminars/workshops) at HEIs. HEIs should allow their students to opt for different course(s) from multiple disciplines. In order to develop their knowledge and skills, practitioners should motivate their female students to take active part in entrepreneurial activities across disciplines in HEIs. Entrepreneurial experiences, fairs, job fairs, awareness workshops and seminars, bootcamps, and business projects can be helpful in developing entrepreneurial intention among female students in HEIs and enable them to think out of the box so they can learn and develop practical knowledge of their respective disciplines/or other disciplines to become more creative and innovative in terms of self-employment and resilience.

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