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**Contents**

<b>S.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
1	Taming the Female River: A Gendered Environmental History of the Chenab  Ayesha Shafiq, PhD	1
2	Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Hypothetical Performance of Scholar on University Level  Syed Yasir Ali Gilani, PhD Kinza Al Sadat Fareeha Javed	15
3	Political Interest and Political Participation of Women: Mediating Role of Education  Amber Ferdoos, PhD Saira Batool, PhD Huma Butt Sadia Shafique	27
4	Examining Individual Behaviors towards Inclusive and Diverse Leadership in Universities: A Study on Attitudes and perceptions  Iqra Waheed	46
5	Sketching Gender Dynamics: A Cartoonist Take on Women's Professional Journey from Boardroom to Offices in Europe and South Asia  Ayesha Nazir Gill	64



## Taming the Female River: A Gendered Environmental History of the Chenab

### Abstract

*By situating it within the longstanding traditions of gendered and anthropomorphized understandings of rivers in South Asia, this article explores how local communities in Punjab viewed the River Chenab as a maada (female) river, owing to its fertility, fluidity, and unpredictable yet nurturing floods. Drawing on local and British archival sources, the article traces the heterogeneous and negotiated precolonial environmental relations around the Chenab. It explains how these were strained and altered under a colonial environmental transformation grounded in the ideas of productivity and hydraulic order. This article foregrounds the understudied role of river-training schemes in altering the Chenab's morphology and seasonal rhythms and argues that environmental transformation of the Chenab led to a symbolic shift: the river, once perceived as a fertile and unpredictable female force, was reshaped into a regulated, mechanical system under the paternalistic Punjab administration and colonial hydraulic regime.*

**Keywords:** Gendered ecological transformation, Colonial Hydrology, Environmental History, River Training, Punjab

### INTRODUCTION

Why is the environment anthropomorphized? There are cultural and symbolic practices that imbue natural elements with human and predominantly gendered attributes. Such attributions have served to imagine nature as part of social structures for thousands of years. Several languages assign gender to natural phenomena based on a wide array of factors, ranging from the sound of the word to philosophical inspiration and gendered social structures. When complex meanings are assigned to anthropomorphized language about nature, they do not merely reflect abstract cultural concepts but also shape how communities perceive, use, and relate to their environments. Thus, anthropomorphizing of nature is deeply rooted in cultural epistemologies that link the environment to human social life. When applied to specific landscapes, such as Punjab, we can see how local communities used symbolic frameworks to visualize ecological features not only as sites of gendered meaning but also of spiritual significance and of socio-political negotiation. Specifically, considering the case of rivers in Punjab, in pre-colonial times, the environmental relationships among people, land, and rivers not only defined cultivation practices and settlement patterns but also informed the symbolic and cultural meanings attached to the rivers themselves. Such relationships have received scholarly attention in the literature on the environment in South Asia, which refers to the artistic and ecological character of South Asian rivers. This literature shows that fertility, fluidity, and emotional depth are associated with the feminine principle in environmental phenomena in local South Asian cultures and societies. The idea of sacred framing of rivers

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resonates with Vandana Shiva's (1989) ecofeminist interpretation of *Prakriti* as the creative female principle of nature, which defines the cycles of giving and renewal that underpin both ecological balance and social sustenance. Shiva particularly considers modern irrigation a masculinist and reductionist project in which nature is subdued, and communities living in harmony with the rivers are displaced. Amita Baviskar's (1995) *In the Belly of the River*, which looks at the River Narmada's representation as goddess for the larger Hindu community and mother for the local Adivasis that live along the river, brings forth a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between local communities and their environment and also looks at the interests, contradictions and conflicts that drive these interactions. Diana Eck (2012) in *India: A Sacred Geography*, traces the longstanding tradition of personifying rivers such as the Ganga and Yamuna as goddesses whose nurturing and purifying powers link geography with divinity.

Merchant's analysis of how early modern Europe transformed nature from an organic, often feminine presence into a mechanistic resource is also crucial for understanding colonial environmental thought in South Asia. In *The Death of Nature* (Merchant, 1980), she shows how metaphors of domination that are tied to the rise of scientific rationality and have gendered overtones have legitimized the control and subjugation of natural processes. It has been argued that the epistemic shifts in science similar to those Merchant identified were not confined to Europe; they were transferred through imperial structures to the colonies (Arnold, 1996; Prakash, 1999; Adas, 1989). In this sense, Merchant's framework helps us understand how the gendered, relational, and sacred meanings that were attached to rivers in South Asia came into tension with a Western worldview that saw the environment as an object of mastery and extraction. This understanding helps link works that specifically discuss colonial hydrology as a triumph of science in colonial Punjab.

Keeping this context in mind, we can compare the local, historically rooted understanding of rivers with studies of the colonial period, which reveal how the fluidity of local environmental relations was undermined by a colonial administration with a mechanistic, utilitarian view of nature. Gilmartin argues that British engineers and administrators viewed river waters as a resource that needed to be subjugated to extend state control through colonial science, and that this process encapsulated the struggle to achieve productivity against a wasteful nature (Gilmartin, 2015). Flood control policies similarly sought to exclude natural processes via massive technological systems, a tendency which Weil argues aligns with the modern 'techno-chauvinism' (Weil, 2006). Weil's arguments of river training measures for the River Indus share many similarities with the discussion presented in this article and will be discussed in detail later. His argument about techno-chauvinism resonates with Vandana Shiva's understanding of how technology embodies a mindset that privileges domination, control, and abstraction over relational, ecological, and communal (and feminist) ways of knowing. Thus, while anthropomorphized and gendered understandings of rivers have long shaped local ecological practices and cultural imagination in South Asia, colonial interventions recast these fluid relationships through another gendered ethos based on mastery, productivity, and imperial progress. However, as Baviskar reminds us, alongside symbolic representations of nature in local communities, we should also look at the situated interests, conflicts, and negotiations that structure everyday interactions between

communities and their environments (Baviskar, 1995). Thus, this article also looks at the precolonial relations around the river as complex and heterogeneous. In examining the gendered ecological transformation, this work explains how colonial hydraulic regimes did not simply manage water but also redefined the river's identity, agency, and relationship with riparian communities.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Building on current literature, this article addresses the broader question of how hydrological changes introduced in the colonial period impacted the environment. By focusing on the River Chenab, it asks about the local environmental relations between the river and local communities. It explores how they changed under colonial interventions that prioritised fixity over fluidity. This is done by analysing the spatial, ideational, and environmental understanding of the River Chenab in local communities, and then comparing it with the shift in the river's understanding by the colonial engineers and administration. This comparative analysis helps us understand the impact of the hydraulic interventions introduced in the colonial period.

### **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

The article primarily relies on documentary sources. This includes Punjabi texts and translations of Sanskrit texts to understand local environmental vision and practices. Colonial-era records of local agricultural practices helped to make this argument. Colonial texts include reports and published works by revenue officials, engineers, and surveyors, as well as official correspondence viewed at the India Office Records at the British Library and the Punjab Archives in Lahore. These records provide detailed insights into the workings of the colonial government, its policies, and projects. Data from these local and colonial sources was triangulated with other sources and analysed using principles of historical criticism.

### **The Environmental Context**

Water is the identity of Punjab. It not only defines its geography but also its society and the lives of its people. Besides the six major rivers, Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Sutlej, and Bias, their valleys are also traversed by several seasonal streams and torrents. These water bodies have nurtured the land for centuries, supporting agriculture for a population that learned to adapt to the flow of water that waded through the plains with a will of its own. All major rivers have meandering courses. Together, they form a river system that merges at various points. Finally, the waters of all these rivers are carried out of Punjab by the Indus, which drains into the Arabian Sea after crossing another five hundred miles through the province of Sindh in the South. Because of the shifting courses, the valleys between these rivers are overlaid with fertile silt, but the arid highlands away from the rivers are cultivable only with artificial irrigation. Riparian regions take advantage of floods and inundation canals as well as a high-water table, but are also subjected to river action. The rivers routinely swallow large swathes of land on one bank and throw up on the other, allowing for a fluidity in property that was characteristic of riparian villages in the pre-colonial period.

### Chenab as the Female River

From ancient times, rivers in South Asia have been understood through feminine metaphors. *The Nadistuti hymn in the Rig Veda mentions the Sapta Sindhu, or seven rivers, which are grammatically feminine*, and invokes them for their sacred significance. Askini, the ancient name of the Chenab, is also praised in this hymn and later celebrated as a life-giving entity whose waters carry healing potential, just as the great river Sindhu, the oceans, and the mountains do. However, in ancient sacred texts, Askini is not considered a goddess like several other eastern rivers, including Saraswati and Ganges (Pandey, 1949; Rig Veda, 1896).

Chenab's later representation in historical literature continues to connect it closely with feminine metaphor and themes of love. There is a local saying, Chenab Ashiqan, Ravi Rashkan te Sindh Sadiqan, meaning Chenab is the river of lovers, Ravi the river of the sumptuous, and Sind of the truthful. There are several *Qissas* (folk romantic tales) associated with the Chenab valley, which it shares with the Ravi. The tale most closely linked with Chenab is that of Sohni, who drowned in it while crossing it on an earthen pot to meet her lover Mahiwal. In this epic tale, Chenab symbolizes the obstacles in the path of those who challenge societal norms, but its waters also liberate. Since the *Qissa* is a genre that brings together themes of earthly romance with divine love, the Chenab here is the river of life that separates the soul from God yet also serves as the medium for reunion. The river thus engulfs life and death for the people living on its banks (Shah, 2017). Similarly, in Waris Shah's *Heer Ranjha*, the Chenab is more than a setting; in fact, it becomes a participant in human emotion, symbolizing endurance and liberation (Shah, 2006; Sayyid, 2003). Such mystic and symbolic understanding of rivers, particularly of the Chenab, is held across religious communities in Punjab.<sup>1</sup> The *Qissas* also link Chenab with female emotion and love, as all female protagonists, Sohni, Heer, and Sahiba, live on the banks of Chenab. In contrast, the male protagonists are not tied to the land or the river but are itinerant as traders, pastoralists,

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<sup>1</sup> In recent times the symbolism of the rivers was particularly evident during the Muslim-Sikh riots when Punjab was portioned in 1947 to incorporate Muslim dominated Western part in Pakistan and Sikh dominated Eastern part in India. The famous poet Amrita Pritam, who hailed from Gujranwala which is a city on the banks of River Chenab, wrote how Chenab embodied destruction and hate that engulfed Punjab while addressing the famous Muslim sufi poet Waris Shah

Rise! O' narrator of the grieving;  
rise! look at your Punjab  
Today, fields are lined with corpses,  
and blood fills the Chenab

Someone has mixed poison  
in the five rivers' flow  
Their deadly water is, now,  
irrigating our lands galore  
Amrita Pritam, *Aj Akahan Waris Shah Nu* [Today I ask Waris Shah].

or wanderers.<sup>2</sup> Geographically speaking, the Chenab is the second-longest river that flows through Punjab. Owing to soil quality and hydrological variation, the Chenab had long flowed in wide, shifting channels, its active bed spanning several miles during flood seasons. Its relationship with agricultural land changes with its course. It originates as a mountain stream and combines with various streams in Kashmir until it enters Punjab, cutting through the massive alluvial plains, allowing drainage to spread over several hundred meters at times, creating channels that isolate considerable tracts as islands. Even in its upper reaches in the Punjab plains near Wazirabad, the river can swell to as much as 5 kilometres, with a main channel depth of up to 15 metres during the flood season. Its floods are sandy in this region, although the course is relatively well defined until Chiniot. It becomes more tumultuous as the River Jhelum drains into it at Trimmu, after which it spreads like a fan. As it comes into contact with the saline soil of Jhang, it creates patches of infertile soil which the British found particularly repugnant (Jhang Gazetteer, 1884, p. 5).

Chenab's most fertile areas are in its lower reaches, where silt spreads over several miles in flood season. Owing to this, it was called the *maada* [female] river in the regions of Muzaffargarh and Multan. Characterization of the Chenab as female and its metaphorical link with female emotion were indications of its fertile waters. This was particularly compared with other rivers that merge into it. The Sutlej was specifically called the *Nar* or Male River because of its relatively stable course and less fertile silt. Chenab's fertility was considered superior to Indus, as goes the saying: *Darya Sind sona leve te kalai deve, Darya Chenab kalai leve te sona deve*. Indus takes gold and gives tin; Chenab takes tin and deposits gold (Darling, 1928, p. 110; Muzaffargarh Gazetteer, 1908, p. 7).

The Muzaffargarh Gazetteer described the riparian belt along the Chenab as long, silty strips that were annually flooded and renewed by side-channels (dhands and dhors), with whole villages shifting to raised platforms (machan) during the summer inundations, which were not considered anomalous but woven into agricultural and social processes. Chenab's seasonal transformations embodied renewal, reproduction, and resilience, reflecting a culturally feminized idea of abundance that was celebrated in local agricultural communities.

### **Traditional approaches to riparian agriculture around the Chenab**

As discussed above, Chenab's floods were traditionally regarded as a living rhythm that shaped both the fertility and uncertainty of riparian life. Its floods were celebrated as seasonal blessings as the local saying in Muzaffargarh goes: "*Je bor awe tan bakhat vadhdwe, Je na awe tan soka khawe*" If flood comes, it increases our luck; If it comes not, drought consumes us (GOP, 1908, p. 7).

Each season, Chenab's waters renewed the land by spreading fine silt that enriched the fields, leached surface salts, replenished wells with fresh water, and scattered the seeds of trees and useful grasses. However, the same flow could shift suddenly, bringing destruction. Thus, while Chenab's floods were an important resource that increased the productivity of riparian agricultural lands, living along the river had its own risks. Firstly, while the floods bring silt,

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<sup>2</sup> Mirza from the Qissa Mirza-Sahiban was a pastoral nomad of the Kharral tribe while Sahiban was a landholding family along Chenab.

they could also scour the land or bring sand, making the land infertile. If floodwater moved over saline tracts and then entered fertile lands, it became harmful because the water became brackish (*kala pani*), damaging crops. While houses were usually built on higher plinths to protect against floods and often protected by ring embankments, a heavy flood could nevertheless destroy them. Riverbank erosion submerged fields and houses, and at times, entire villages. The floods allowed only for a winter/spring crop in the areas too close to the river.

In precolonial times, the riparian people did take measures to reduce such risks. Where possible, inundation canals were dug, which not only carried floodwater inland but also regulated flood intensity. The canal heads were protected with embankments. While floods could be controlled to a large extent with these mechanisms, riverbank erosion posed a greater risk. At times, the banks were covered with thick *belas* (jungles) that prevented the river from flowing. Erosion, in which silt from one bank was eroded and deposited on the other bank, happened where the channel or the bank was curved. Such a channel could devour 50-100 feet per day (Bellasis, 1912, p. 2). When the river deposited silt to create a new bank or island, it was quickly covered with jungle or given over to cultivation. Many times, these new banks were above the flood level and were not submerged again for several seasons (Bellasis, 1912, p. 5). Generally, the local practice was to let the jungle flourish for some time so that it could strengthen the soil before it was cleared for cultivation. Because the silt was deposited from one bank to another, forming a new landmass, the process was considered a transfer of land from one bank to another. The property rights on such land were regulated through a custom called *lein-dein* or give and take, under which the property continued to belong to the original landholders. This was a cross-river property that brought the population on opposite banks together.

Since such land was at continuous risk, it was generally held by underprivileged groups such as the lower castes in the village, or leased out for grazing and cultivation to nomads who moved to the riverine villages from the interfluvial highlands in the summers. These groups, with the support of the village community, then migrated across the river to claim the newly emerged lands when needed. Thus, the river action created a fluid property that was integrated into a hierarchical village society. While the underprivileged group dealt with the vicissitudes of the river, larger landholders cultivated their lands at relatively safer locations where medium-level floods deposited gold. However, even they could be betrayed by the river when it chose to fill their lands with sand instead of silt. Often, the riverine landholders had links to other villages and could move to another location if their land was affected by floods, erosion, or soil depletion, and return after some years. This riparian life was not marked by absolute harmony, but as Baviskar noted in the case of communities living along the River Narmada, conflicts and hierarchies were important factors in defining the community and its environmental relationships. Through these complex interactions, the Chenab's feminized fertility was reflected in the social organization along its banks, where the river's generative power shaped patterns of cultivation, mobility, and interdependence within riparian life. These patterns of environmental relations changed during the colonial period with the advent of more encompassing state control and the implementation of

technology - two developments that are often considered paternalistic, masculine, and reductive.

### **Colonial Encounters**

The British colonisers had two major preoccupations with the rivers: expanding communications for better territorial control by building bridges across rivers and protecting the rail and road network from floods; and to limit the influence of river in defining the agricultural property so that riparian lands fell in line with a stable property regime that placed the population in a decipherable matrix and ensured smooth revenue collection and state control. These two aspects aligned with the administrative approach, which N. G. Barrier labelled 'paternalist' and relied on a philosophy characterized by centralized, bureaucratic, and 'fatherly' rule by British officials over Punjab.

Early colonial administration of the Punjab acknowledged its agricultural potential, particularly for cash crops used in British industries. However, the uncertainty of its rivers and agriculture was a significant concern. There were proposals to improve agriculture in the province as well as navigation for internal and external commerce (Smith, 1849, p. 7). The colonial engineers sought to replace the dynamic, natural hydrology of the Punjab plains with artificial channels that promised stability and control. Some early projects, such as the Bari Doab Canal, were introduced to secure cultivation against the vagaries of the seasons, drought, and famine. However, the tension between the old riparian rhythms and the new engineered landscapes was a significant issue for early administrators.

The colonial encounter, therefore, reconfigured the fluid interplay between water, land, and mobility that had long defined riparian life, but could not completely erase it. This section discusses how these issues were dealt with in various ways. While attempts were made to establish definite property rights, a flexible revenue policy was adopted to prevent over-taxation and subsequent desertions by the cultivators. However, a more permanent change in environmental relations was introduced with the hydraulic engineering works as discussed in this section. Owing to its abundant water supply, its active riparian population, and its location in the province with large swathes of cultivable land available for irrigation, Chenab became the locus of both hydraulic engineering works and paternalistic administrative changes.

### **Definite Property Rights**

While the rivers' inefficiency for both navigation and agriculture was a concern for the colonial engineers and the provincial administration, the latter was also concerned with the nature of riparian property, which, as discussed, was aligned with the rhythms of the rivers, particularly along the Chenab. The British Colonial rule in India prioritized secure property regimes in land, eliminating forms of ownership that seemed too fluid or that were deemed unproductive. Riparian agriculture, with its shifting property and floating population, was a disagreeable feature of local agriculture. For instance, soon after the annexation of Punjab to the East India Company territories in 1849, the Commissioner of Multan wrote to the Punjab government:

The custom hitherto obtaining along these rivers, the Ravi and Chenab, regarding the right to increment, appears to be that the land thrown up is considered as belonging to the estate opposite, from which land may have lately been abraded. If abrasion had formerly taken place on the side of the present increment, it is considered a restoration and belongs to the owner of the estate on that side. This custom is productive of much inconvenience and endless disputes. I should strongly recommend the adoption of the custom obtaining throughout the Gangetic provinces, viz., of the main stream being the boundary (Tupper, 1881, p. 284).

His proposal was accepted; the custom was redefined in the villages under river action at the time, and the principles of *lein-dein* were abandoned. However, in later years, when the custom regarding the alluvial and diluvial on riverbanks was recorded by Lewis Tupper, a civil servant working on his independent inquiry into customary law, 210 villages out of 281 confirmed that *lein-dein* was their actual custom. Tupper believed that the 71 villages that accepted the river's deep stream as their boundary had developed this custom under British rule, enforced by the government during the early settlement operations. Most villages along the Chenab traditionally observed *lein-dein*. Even though the river defined the sarkars under the Mughals and the Sikhs, the fluctuating village boundaries could lay across the river. Tupper found it astonishing that *lein-dein* was practiced along the River Sutlej as well, which meant that the village boundaries kept shifting from one state to another, that is, between the Khalsa and Bahawalpur states (Tupper, 1881, p.5). This showed the level of control (or lack of it) exercised by the pre-colonial states in the region. The communities decided property-related issues without state interference. Since, in most riparian villages, revenue was collected from headmen rather than individual landholders, state functionaries were not concerned with the location of land for revenue purposes. Such independence was not compatible with the colonial state, which tended to exercise greater control over its subjects. Although the initial settlements imposed collective revenue demands on villages, documentation of individual rights was an important part of village revenue records. Thus, issues related to the shifting of property had to be addressed.

Colonial officials observed that along with property, the subjects were also on the move. A revenue settlement officer noted about the cultivators living around the river Chenab in the Jhang district:

The non-hereditary cultivators are in no way attached to the soil; on the contrary, they are continually on the move, either from the well cultivation to the *sailab* [flood], or from bad to fertile soils. Even proprietors often quit their estates to join their brotherhoods in the Khangarh district to take to the easier cultivation near canals; or else they move off to the *Kachcha* [river bed] of the Leiah district in seasons when the Indus may have fertilised by its deposit a tract larger than the ordinary. Even the owners show but little attachment to their properties (GOP, 1884, p. 93).

Often, the properties of absentee landholders were taken up as government wasteland during settlement operations. When these landholders returned, they had to petition for the return of their lands. Thousands of acres of such lands were taken up and were not always returned to the petitioners (PRACP, 1877).

By redefining customary riparian tenure and fixing boundaries to the ‘deep stream,’ the colonial state attempted to transform a fluid, community-based relationship with the Chenab into a rigid, bureaucratic property regime. This shift represented the broader paternalistic logic of Punjab administration, in which the state sought to discipline both land and people in a framework of efficiency and order. Stabilization of dynamic property forms disrupted the ecological reciprocity between the riparian communities and the river, which was based on temporal and spatial flexibility that coincided with the Chenab’s natural cycles. It replaced it with a landscape of surveillance, documentation, and interference.

The need to establish rigid property rights was necessary to maintain state control and to simplify revenue administration. Similarly, the ability to collect fixed revenue in cash for successive years was the primary objective of land revenue management under British rule (GOI, 1905). However, fixed revenue was incompatible with the fluctuations in local agriculture. The cultivators frequently requested remissions. Fixed assessment in the *sailaba* lands also led to heavy indebtedness in some riparian villages (Lyll, 1880). Within thirty years of revenue administration, it became evident that, besides the usual remissions and reductions of revenue, a system of fluctuating assessments had to be put in place by the introduction of smaller fixed revenue equal to that on unirrigated land, along with a water rent assessed every year. Fluctuating assessments were introduced as a pragmatic response to the uncertainty inherent in riparian agriculture. This arrangement was more of a compromise between bureaucratic control and agricultural reality. While the colonial state sought to establish a secure revenue system, it recognized that absolute control over the assessment was not possible in regions subject to constant environmental change. The fluctuating assessments thus balanced fiscal stability with ecological variability.

In this way, flexibility of *lein-dein* was reinterpreted through colonial administrative reason, in a way consistent with Prakash’s argument about adaptation of colonial science to native logic and cultural understanding (Prakash, 1999). The riverine landscape was transformed into a bureaucratically intelligible terrain with fixed boundaries while simultaneously claiming that fluctuating assessments were restorations or clarifications of ‘custom’. This hybrid approach was, however, less applicable to engineering interventions, which could provide a more reliable revenue base and greater control over ecology and society.

### **Embankments**

Embankments were early manifestations of colonial engineering before the introduction of more widely recognized canal networks in Punjab. As Weil has shown in the case of Indus, river training through embankments was the arena in which colonial engineering became a dominant approach to dealing with environmental phenomena (Weil, 2006, p. 16). In the case of Chenab, the process of building embankments began not as a way of controlling the floods but to protect infrastructure. Indus defined the Western periphery of the Punjab’s river system, but Chenab was central, and major communication lines cut through its valleys. In the mid-nineteenth century, the embankments protected the expanding colonial communication network, particularly the Grand Trunk Road, railway lines, and telegraph systems that bound the province to the imperial center (Mathur, 1973, p. 108). In 1853, engineers working on the Grand Trunk Road across the Rechna Doab advocated for massive embankments extending

as far as Wazirabad in the upper Chenab valley to stabilize the roadbed and secure floating bridges during periods of high water (Sarkar, 1926, p. 18). Later, these works were reinforced with the construction of the Alexandria bridge in 1876. With the expansion of commercial and administrative traffic, similar protective works were introduced downstream, particularly at Multan, where the Sher Shah Bridge was constructed in 1889. Such works were celebrated as hallmarks of Punjab's infrastructural modernization (Sarkar, 1926, p. 16). These early embankments gradually inaugurated a regime of river training.

Thus, the construction of embankments along the Punjab rivers in the late nineteenth century began a gradual but significant transformation of the natural floodplains. The subsequent introduction of the Chenab Canal system further intensified these changes, leading to the expansion of embankments. Canal irrigation altered local hydrology, raising water tables in some areas while depriving others of silt-bearing floods.

### **The Chenab Canal vs. The Chenab River**

Embankments and canals led to a fundamental shift in the flow regime and morphology of the Chenab, altering its seasonal rhythms and flooding patterns, displacing the social and economic practices of riparian communities whose livelihoods depended on the flexible ecology of flood agriculture.

The Chenab Canal, inaugurated in 1892, irrigated 1.8 million acres with its branches and distributaries. Thousands of villages were populated with migrants brought from eastern Punjab, who were from the supposedly best agricultural castes of Punjab, mainly *Jats* and, to some extent, *Arains*, leading to the dispossession of local nomad groups (Bhattacharya, 2018, pp. 339-384). The villages aligned along the straight distributaries of the Chenab Canal epitomized state control. Both nature and colonial subjects were brought under strict state control, allowing for a stable production regime. In 1896, only four years after the Chenab Colony was launched, the landholders from the riverine tracts of Chenab forwarded a petition to the government listing the following grievances (PRAP, 1897, p.85):

1. The loss of *sailab* [floods] in the Chenab Bet [riparian tract] owing to the opening of the canal.
2. The restriction of their grazing area
3. The desertion of their tenants.

To this, the colonization officer responsible for allotting lands in the Chenab Colony responded: 'We cannot bring a whole *doaba* [interfluvial plain] under cultivation without upsetting the existing order of things, and where many gain, some must inevitably suffer.' (PRAP, 1897, p. 86).

A report produced by the Chief Engineer at the irrigation department, which, in his own words, was 'neither very scientific nor very accurate', claimed that while the canals were designed to practically use up the entire winter weather supply of the rivers, they did not appreciably affect the river discharges during flood season (PRAP, 1902, p. 655). However, the people from riverine tracts continued to claim that the canals had affected the nature of floods and impoverished their lands. Writing in 1925, Malcolm Darling noted that the

Chenab was no longer carrying gold into the soils of the Southern districts. The construction of canals further north reduced both flooding and siltation, leading the Chenab to lose its reputation (Darling, 1928, p. 97).

The floods were also affected because of the expansion of embankments constructed to protect the canals. As discussed, before 1892, Chenab was trained and confined between embankments at two major points, Alexandra Bridge in Wazirabad and the Sher Shah Bridge in Multan. After the inauguration of the Chenab Canal and its distributaries, flood embankments were constructed along the Chenab to convert the flooded area into canal-irrigated land. These embankments ran parallel to the riverbank at a distance to prevent erosion and were several hundred miles long (Bellasis, 1912, p.6). These were at times breached to allow the river to inundate cultivable land. Belasis, an engineer at the irrigation department, noted:

When any new line of flood embankment is under consideration, the people should always be consulted. An embankment may shut off the floods from land which has hitherto benefited from them, and the people may prefer the old arrangement to the new. A single rabi crop in the year (the rabi is generally the more valuable crop), with freedom from canal assessments, may suit them best. Their villages or homesteads are usually placed on high ground or protected by local ring embankments. There may thus be a temptation for the people to cut the embankment, a straightforward operation because the men who watch it can be evaded or bribed. For the above reasons, the location of a flood embankment should be carefully considered, and there should be no delay in supplying canal water to the affected lands.

The chief engineer, Sidney Preston, also noted that the river appeared drier in the winter season because the entire water supply was diverted to the perennial canal. He believed that this may have caused some cultivators and revenue officers to believe that the inundations had also been materially reduced by the operations of these large canals (PRAP, 1902, p. 662). Inundation canals along the river used by riparian communities were also affected. The water was drawn for the perineal canals, and, particularly during the winters, the entire river water supply was directed to the perennial canals. In contrast, the river received some water from the catchment area below the canal, but the water reached the riparian lands too late for sowing the highest crop and dried up too soon for its maturation (PRAP, 1902, p. 661).

The impact of canals on the River Chenab was permanent. The nature of its relationship with the population on its banks changed drastically. Although it was not rigorously trained like the European rivers, like the Danube, it was nevertheless tamed in sporadic phases. Its own importance diminished as its offshoots carried off its water away from its banks. In present-day Punjab, all districts along rivers are visibly underdeveloped while canal-irrigated lands thrive. Even though canal-irrigated lands have their own environmental issues, such as waterlogging and salinity, they have better infrastructure, road and railway access, and developed markets. The situation is further exacerbated by the division of the Indus Basin, allowing India rights over the water of three rivers: Beas, Sutlej, and Ravi, and Pakistan over Chenab, Jhelum, and Indus.

## CONCLUSION

Colonial administration triggered environmental changes in Punjab through revenue and property regimes and through technological change. In the case of the River Chenab, these transformations meant that its flow was controlled and its morphology and floodplains were altered, affecting its fertile, replenishing, and nurturing nature. The river that had once symbolized the feminine force of nature, love, freedom, and divine connection in Punjab's folklore was an instrument of production and control in colonial imagination. However, we should keep in mind that precolonial riparian life was also shaped by complexity and hierarchy because riverine land was constantly shifting and at continual risk. The river's fluidity created a correspondingly fluid property regime embedded within village hierarchies, in which mobility, vulnerability, and unequal exposure to the river's volatility were central features of everyday life.

Colonial interventions could not eliminate this variability, and the limits of administrative reform led officials to retain flexible assessment systems, acknowledging, although reluctantly, the persistence of environmental uncertainty. However, where fiscal reform had to compromise, the hydraulic transformation succeeded. The network of canals and embankments permanently altered the Chenab's flood regime, sediment flow, and social landscape, producing a more fixed and regulated environment that encapsulated the colonial ideals of stability and control. The colonial state tamed the Chenab to secure its revenues and extend its power, but at the cost of severing the ecological and cultural relationships that had long bound communities to the living, feminine rhythms of the Chenab. While the symbolism was not completely erased, by prioritising the fixed environmental regime of canal irrigation, the Punjab government effectively bypassed the old, gendered understanding of the river to introduce another gendered ethos based on domination and control of nature.

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## Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Hypothetical Performance of Scholars at University Level

### Abstract

*This research investigates the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools on the hypothetical performance of postgraduate scholars. Several factors shape academic performance at the university level, and this study focuses on those that influence students' outcomes and contribute to academic performance. The population consisted of 460 postgraduate scholars, with a sample of 210 drawn from federal public sector universities in Islamabad. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using inferential statistics ( $\chi^2$  test). Findings reveal that AI tools significantly enhance students' problem-solving skills, which positively affect their hypothetical academic performance. Based on these results, the study recommends that academicians actively integrate AI tools into teaching and mentoring practices to strengthen students' academic development and overall performance at the university level.*

**Keywords:** AI tools, Artificial Intelligence, Hypothetical Performance, Learning, Scholars

### INTRODUCTION

AI stands for Artificial Intelligence. It comprises all the computational tools used to learn from Web 3.0 and 4.0 tools. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a set of technologies that enable computers to perform a variety of advanced functions, including the ability to see, understand, and translate spoken and written language, analyze data, make recommendations, and more. Some of these AI types are not even scientifically possible right now. According to the current classification system, there are four primary AI types: reactive, limited-memory, theory-of-mind, and self-aware. In contrast, ICT is a comprehensive term that encompasses all communication devices that transfer information via the internet, including radio, TV, cellular headphones and headsets, personal computer hardware/software, broadcasting schemes, and so on. The numerous facilities, including internet, wireless systems, cell phones, electronic mail, etc., are several facilities related to teaching and learning, such as video-conferencing, teleconferencing, telephone conferencing, and education-based social networking websites. ICT relates to storing, retrieving, transferring, and influencing digital information; it is a prolonged manifestation of information technology (IT) that emphasizes the attractiveness of incorporated infrastructures and the integration of communications and broadcasting (phone lines and wireless signals). PCs serve as elementary, innovative software, storage, and audio-visual systems that help operators admit, store, communicate, and process

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influencing their educational experiences and personal development. From personalized information (Burnett, 2001). The impact of AI in education and on students is profound, learning to innovative tools, AI is reshaping how students engage with information, fostering critical skills for the future. AI tools are effective devices for expanding educational avenues in both formal and non-formal instruction, as students are sometimes prohibited from learning through direct instruction due to specific social or communal limitations, such as cultural subgroups, adolescents and females, individuals with disabilities, and the aging (Bossaert, 2011).

### **Objectives of Research**

Main objectives were:

1. To find out the use of AI tools by the students at the university level.
2. To find the impact of AI tools on the progress of students' hypothetical execution.

### **Significance of the Study**

The AI tools are an important part of all subjects, fields, and in every arena of learning, including industry, agriculture, business, medicine, and engineering. The HEC has taken steps to improve the university-industry relationship to prepare skilled human resources better, enhance economic and industrial outputs, and develop a global competence initiative. The use of AI tools plays a vital role in the sustainability of educational initiatives and enhances understanding. The framework and online availability of learning materials for educators within the country may help in preparing educational programs, learning materials, and lesson plans (HEC, 2020).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Artificial intelligence is progressing at an astonishing pace, raising profound ethical concerns regarding its use, ownership, accountability, and long-term implications for humanity. As technologists, ethicists, and policymakers look to the future of AI, ongoing debates about control, power dynamics, and AI's potential to surpass human capabilities underscore the need to address these ethical challenges in the present. Some significant steps are being taken to understand and mitigate these challenges to harness AI's immense potential. Here is a look at some of the most pressing ethical issues surrounding AI today: Bias and Discrimination, Transparency and Accountability, Creativity and Ownership, Social Manipulation and Misinformation, Security and Surveillance, and Job Displacement.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The radical changes in the research component at the postgraduate level have transformed the themes and philosophy of the specified subjects of learning from a country's culture and civilization to global comparative aspects, with a focus on critically antagonistic views of the world scholarly community. This change has been integrated simultaneously across new themes and issues due to the development of computer and information technology applications in this new global village of learning. Now, no view, theme, theory, or philosophy could be restricted to a closed community without revealing its secrets to global civilization. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan demonstrates a significant step toward stimulating higher education

through computer-based technologies by consolidating research associations across the country. On the other hand, AI researchers are influencing postgraduate research. The researcher conducted various investigations and concluded that several barriers influence AI-based research, including control, budgetary, communal, individual, and regulatory. The related literature now focuses on the "Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools for the Hypothetical Execution of Scholars at the University Level".

### **Characteristics of ICTs**

AI's attributes are its abilities, and these characteristics enable it to be much more than just a computer and to learn, comprehend, and adapt to its surroundings. In this research, we examined the intricacies of these characteristics.

1. **Learning Capability:** One of the main characteristics of AI is its capacity to draw lessons from the data. Unlike conventional AI systems, AI does not require explicit instructions for all tasks. Machine learning algorithms process information, identify patterns, and make assumptions or decisions. The more information AI gets exposed to, the better it gets at what it does.
2. **Problem-Solving:** AI is a master at solving complex issues, including those humans are unable to solve. AI employs algorithms and data to analyze problems and develop efficient solutions. Often, it is faster than any human could.
3. **Reasoning:** Thinking is a different key characteristic that AI has. AI can make rational decisions based on the data it holds, using rules and logic to conclude.
4. **Perception:** AI's ability to sense the environment around it is a different characteristic that makes AI stand out. AI uses sensors and data to understand its environment, much like humans use their senses.
5. **Adaptability:** It is the most important characteristic of AI applications. AI systems are constantly evolving and adapting to the latest information or changes in their surroundings without needing to be reprogrammed.
6. **Automation:** Automation is among the main features that AI can utilize. Automated completion of tasks with no human involvement, thereby increasing the speed and decreasing mistakes.
7. **Data Handling:** AI's capacity to process vast quantities of data is a fantastic characteristic. AI can store, process, and analyze data at speeds humans cannot.
8. **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** AI comprehends and communicates with humans in a way that makes it much easier to communicate with machines.
9. **Self-Correction:** Self-correction is an attribute of AI that improves its precision as time passes. AI systems learn from mistakes and adapt their strategies to improve efficiency.
10. **Efficiency:** One of the attractive features of AI applications is that they can improve effectiveness. AI can complete tasks faster and more precisely than humans, thereby saving time and energy.
11. **Decision-Making:** The ability of AI to make choices is crucial to many sectors. AI uses data analysis and pattern recognition to make accurate, informed decisions.
12. AI tools are available worldwide, anywhere, and anytime (Macharia & Pelsler, 2021).

### Advantages of ICTs in education

The Council for Educational Technology (2020) has set out a comprehensive approach to the use of AI tools in learning. AI emphasizes how the increasing capabilities of technology can build on and strengthen human intelligence to improve teaching and learning experiences. That includes:

- Building partnerships among educators, innovators, researchers, and community members to establish a shared vision of powerful teaching and learning with AI
- Engaging in research partnerships and hosting research communities to understand the transformative potential and address the risks
- Connecting our values and knowledge to rigorous approaches to AI research and development  
Informing policymakers on how to safeguard learners' rights, data privacy, and ensure equitable opportunities to learn
- Informing policymakers on how to safeguard learners' rights, data privacy, and ensure equitable opportunities to learn

### Integration of AI Tools

ICTs play a significant role in knowledge progression. Hargittai (2019) has pondered their tendency and degree, which is condensed as:

1. **Usage in organization, testing, and guidance: Commonly, the instructional innovation is utilized for all-inclusive managerial, testing, and instructional drives.**
2. **Proper utilization of automated assemblies and broad communications:** The field of instructional innovation comprises machines and various broad communications; projectors, tape recorders, and so on.
3. **Describing the objectives and destinations:** It can help in advancing small-scale education, reproductions, amusements, framework approach, showing professional morals and qualities through study hall associations, and so on.
4. **Assortment, creation, and manipulation of AV aids: Appropriate determination and utilization of instructional innovation broad media help in material choice and data dissemination—**these guide and help instructors as well as students to accomplish the learning targets unequivocally.
5. **Presentation of framework strategy:** Educational innovation is obliging in using this tactic for the evaluation of framework and sub-frameworks in an educational institution.

### Limitations of ICTs in education

The National Council for Educational Technology (2019) has given some limitations in educational practices. As artificial intelligence continues to integrate into various sectors, its application in education is both celebrated and scrutinized. While AI holds significant potential to transform learning experiences, it also presents several disadvantages that require careful consideration and must be addressed to ensure a balanced, effective learning environment. The main points that outline the learning system are as follows;

1. AI tools hypothetically endanger the student's collective development.
2. AI tools are apparently imperiling the learner's intellectual improvement.

3. By the use of AI tools, students' emotional progress has been waning at the same time.
4. By utilizing AI tools, students' well-being has been imperiled.
5. Misuse of AI tools creates a massive hurdle in the learning process.
6. Complete control could not be possible over the student's usage of AI tools.
7. AI tools are moderately expensive.

### **How to successfully implement and use AI in education**

Successfully using AI in education requires careful planning, teacher training, good infrastructure, and constant evaluation. Higher education institutions need to set clear goals for how they want to use AI, whether to improve personalized learning, streamline administrative tasks, or better engage students. By setting measurable objectives and aligning them with the school's mission, administrators can ensure that AI initiatives are purposeful and focused. Investing in teacher training and professional development is essential. Teachers need to learn how to use AI tools effectively and understand how AI can enhance traditional teaching methods. As AI continues to evolve, teachers must stay up to date on the latest AI advancements and teaching strategies through ongoing professional development programs. Institutes must have the right technology in place to support AI. Institutes should also use flexible AI platforms that can grow and adapt to changing needs. Regular evaluation and feedback from students and teachers are crucial for assessing the impact of AI and making necessary improvements, ensuring that AI tools enhance the educational experience for everyone.

The future of artificial intelligence in education is promising, thanks to technological advancements and a better understanding of how AI can improve learning. Personalized learning is a key area where adaptive learning systems and intelligent tutoring systems create customized learning experiences for students. These systems adjust to each student's strengths and weaknesses, making learning more effective. AI is also set to revolutionize administrative tasks in education. Automated grading systems can save teachers a lot of time, especially in subjects like math and coding. AI can also streamline tasks like enrolment, scheduling, and record-keeping, allowing educators to focus more on teaching. Additionally, AI can enhance student engagement with interactive content and gamified educational software, making learning more enjoyable (Clugston, 2022).

AI can support teachers and promote accessibility and inclusion. AI-powered professional development tools can recommend resources and training tailored to teachers' needs and interests, fostering continuous professional growth. Classroom management tools can help teachers monitor student engagement and provide valuable insights. Assistive technologies, such as speech-to-text applications for hearing-impaired students and text-to-speech for visually impaired students, along with real-time language translation services, can make education more accessible to diverse student populations. While the potential benefits of AI in education are vast, it is crucial to address ethical considerations and challenges. Ensuring that artificial intelligence systems are free from bias and provide fair opportunities for all students is essential (Clugston, 2022).

### **Impact of ICTs on Academic Achievement**

AI supports teachers in administrative tasks, such as grading and assessment, freeing up valuable time. Automated grading systems powered by AI streamline routine tasks, enabling educators to focus on interactive teaching methods, mentorship, and targeted interventions for struggling students. The essential concerns that highlight the impact of AI on students' hypothetical accomplishment were as follows:

1. The constructive outcome of AI usage in preparing lessons has not been illustrated. At the end of the day, many of the impacts on academic achievement are hard to measure.
2. Is the positive impact practically convincing when associated with an instructional strategy? It is acknowledged that specific uses of AI tools can influence students' achievement when ICTs are used to enhance a teacher's thinking strategies.
3. AI tools prove to be less fruitful when the endpoints for their usage are not vibrant. While such an announcement would appear, apparently, self-evident, the unambiguous targets for ICT use in guidance are constantly, rather unclearly described.
4. Broadcast type pedagogics are seen as increasingly successful in the foundation for state authoritative testing, which tend to quantify the outcomes of such evident practices, are supplementary 'constructivist' in academic elegances, creating sophistications and complexities (Vincent, 2020).

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study was quantitative in nature, and a survey method was employed; responses were collected on a five-point Likert scale. The research was based on two variables. The first one was the AI tools, which were an independent variable, while the second one, the hypothetical accomplishment of scholars, was a dependent variable (Gay, 2010).

#### **Population of the Study**

The population was selected from federal public sector general universities. There are sixteen universities in FCI, twelve of which are in the government sector, and the remaining four are private entities. Four universities fall within the general public sector, where both male and female learners study Education and History at the postgraduate level.

#### **Sample of the Study**

Consequently, 210 students out of the population of 460 (45% of the population) have been selected as a sample using proportionate random sampling (Gay, 2010).

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is the theoretical framework used in this study. This model, developed by Fred Davis in 1986, explains the factors that influence individuals' decisions to adopt or reject new technologies. The model posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the key determinants of an individual's intention to use a technology, which, in turn, influences actual use. According to the TAM, perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which a technology is perceived to improve job performance, while perceived ease of use refers to the degree to which the technology is perceived to be easy to use. These

two factors, along with other external variables such as social influence, determine an individual's attitude toward using a technology, which ultimately influences their intention to use it. The TAM has been widely used and tested across various settings, including higher education. Previously, TAM has been applied in studies on the introduction of calculators into mathematics education and on computer integration in educational spaces. Drawing from the main tenets of TAM, it can be viewed as a helpful lens for addressing the introduction of artificial intelligence into educational spaces. Artificial intelligence, such as chatbots (ChatGPT, ChatSonic, etc.), requires testing in higher education; therefore, TAM provides a lens for interrogating the findings to a certain extent.

Chatbots are computer programs designed to simulate human conversation, and they can be used for a variety of purposes, including providing student support, answering questions, and offering personalized learning experiences. In the context of higher education, the TAM can be applied to understand students' acceptance of chatbots as a new technology. For example, students may perceive chatbots as applicable when they provide timely and accurate information, help with academic tasks, and offer personalized recommendations. On the other hand, students may perceive chatbots as challenging to use if they require a high level of technological expertise or are not user-friendly. In addition to perceived usefulness and ease of use, social influence can also play a role in students' acceptance of chatbots. For example, if students perceive that their peers or instructors are using chatbots, they may be more likely to adopt them. Overall, the TAM can provide a helpful framework for understanding and predicting students' acceptance of chatbots in higher education. By identifying the factors that influence students' attitudes and intentions toward using chatbots, educators can design more effective interventions to promote their adoption and enhance students' learning experiences.

### Research Instruments

The questionnaire was formulated on a five-point (Likert) scale. The trustworthiness of the questionnaire was found satisfactory after the consultation of academic experts.

**Table:** *Determined Standards of Cronbach Alpha*

Scales	No. of Items	Alpha value
Checklist for AI tools	30	0.96
Examining Existing AI Tools	22	0.92
Use of AI tools and its impact on Scholars	22	0.94

### Data Collection

The data was collected through various methods: individual visits, email, and contact with companions and associates. The questionnaire was handed over to two hundred and ten (210) students. Respondents were able to comprehend the items, as each was associated with the research procedures.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. In descriptive measurement graphs, percentages, mean scores, and correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) were used to assess numerical variation in the data. For the determination of inferential statistics, regression or chi-square was employed.

### Data Analysis of Facilities to Check List

To assess the availability of basic facilities in the respective sampled universities' concerned departments, they were first classified and then quantified to verify learners' proficiency in the use of ICT tools. So, the checklist was formulated to verify the item-wise facilities to improve the research study. The item-wise data was further tabulated according to their relevance to the ICT lab.

**Table: Use of ICT skills in Microcomputer at Federal Public Sector Universities. (N=210)**

Statement	Description	VH	H	Avg.	L	VL
Usage of AI skills regarding computational tools	Frequency	167	38	05	00	00
	Percentage	79.5%	18.1%	2.4 %	0.0 %	0.0 %

Table 4.4 indicates that 79.5% have very high proficiency in using AI skills on computers, 18.1% have high proficiency, and only 2.4% have average proficiency.

**Table: AI skills regarding access to websites at Federal Public Universities. (N=210)**

Statement	Description	VH	H	Avg.	L	VL
Use of ICT instruments regarding access to websites	Frequency	26	169	15	00	00
	Percentage	12.4%	80.5%	7.1%	0.0 %	0.0 %

Table 4.12 shows that 12.4% have very high proficiency in using AI to access websites, whereas 80.5% have high proficiency, and 7.1% have average proficiency.

### Data Analysis Related to Examining the AI Tools

The subsequent tables show the competency levels of postgraduate students in examining current ICT tools and their impact on academic achievement.

**Table: Cross tabulation between Formulas for tabulating data (N=210)**

		Result (CGPA)			Total	$\chi^2$ - value	P-value
Statement	Level	3.00	2.00	1.00			
Developing, formulating, and using Arithmetic, Statistical Formulas and Functions on an Excel Sheet for tabulating and analyzing data*	5.00	59	17	00	76	23.049	0.003
	4.00	19	16	00	35		
	3.00	23	7	00	30		
	2.00	21	18	03	42		
Result (CGPA)	1.00	19	08	00	27		
Total		141	66	03	210		

Level of significance =  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $df = 8$

The table indicates that the  $\chi^2$  value is 23.049, with a P-value of 0.003 at 0.05 and  $df=8$ . So, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), "there is no significant impact of AI usage for tabulating and analyzing data in an Excel Sheet on students' academic achievement (CGPA)" was rejected.

**Table:** Cross tabulation among AI tools to for video/audio conferencing (N=210)

Statement	Level	Result (CGPA)			Total	$\chi^2$ -value	P-value
		3.00	2.00	1.00			
Proficiency in the use of AI for operational usage of video and audio conferencing and online lectures*	5.00	55	27	00	82	24.221	0.002
	4.00	37	06	00	43		
	3.00	19	18	03	40		
	2.00	22	12	00	34		
	1.00	08	03	00	11		
Total		141	66	03	210		

Level of significance =  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $df = 8$

The table indicates that the Chi-square test was applied and that a significant relationship was found between the dependent and independent variables, with a  $\chi^2$  (Chi-Square) value of 24.221 and a corresponding p-value of 0.002 at the 0.05 level. Resultantly, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), "there is no significant impact of AI tools for effective usage of audio conferencing on students' academic achievement (CGPA)," is therefore rejected.

### AI Usage and Its Impact on the Hypothetical Accomplishment of Scholars

The subsequent tables are as follows:

**Table:** Cross tabulation between ETV and Hypothetical Accomplishment (N=210)

Statement	Level	Result (CGPA)			Total	$\chi^2$ - value	P-value
		3.00	2.00	1.00			
ETV promotes two-way communication, hence it covers a vast area of information for the best intellect of scholars *	5.00	47	23	00	70	36.172	0.000
	4.00	47	07	00	54		
	3.00	12	18	03	33		
	2.00	25	11	00	36		
	1.00	10	07	00	17		
Total		141	66	3	210		

The data indicate that the  $\chi^2$ -value is 36.172 with a p-value of 0.000, at the 0.05 level, and  $df = 8$ . Hence, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected, concluding that educational television has an impact on the hypothetical accomplishment of scholars at the university level.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study was quantitative (descriptive/survey-based) in nature, with questionnaires consisting of seventy-two (72) items, arranged and applied to the sample, even though two open-ended questions (suggestions) were also included after the questionnaire. Now, in the third millennium, science and technological advancement have been used to achieve more positive results in daily life, for example, through "computer-based learning". These findings align with studies by Colliver (2019) and Roslan (2020), who report that the impact of

internet/web technologies on students' academic achievement was greater for declarative knowledge and for the unquestionable presentation. Reciprocal examination of mean problem-interpretation skill scores from the review technique revealed a distinction in critical-thinking proficiencies between the assemblies. Measurable investigation of the information on problem-solving abilities evaluations did not strengthen the null hypothesis that "There is no significant impact taking place by the usage of AI tools for providing remarkable outcomes and on the academic achievement of students at the post-graduate level"; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Based on the analysis of the data, the following findings emerged.

#### **Findings related to objective I (checklist for AI tools)**

By the analysis of data based on the checklist after survey and observation, the following subsequent findings emerged and materialized:

1. Majority (36%) of the learners were of the age cluster in the middle of >20-30 years, 34% between 31-40 years, 20% between 41-50 years, and 10% between 51- <60 years.
2. About two-thirds of students 69% were unemployed, whereas 31 % were employed.
3. Nearly four-fifths of the students, 79.5%, strongly agreed, 18.1% agreed, whereas the others showed average retention regarding the learning through the assistance of AI-based tools (Table 4.4)

#### **Findings related to objective I, II (Examining the Existing AI Tools)**

There is an association between students' academic achievement and the usage of AI for MS PowerPoint. Cross-tabulation was applied;  $\chi^2$ -test values were 26.706, 29.559, and 23.063, with subsequent p-values of 0.001, 0.00001, and 0.003 at a significance level of 0.05. So, the null hypothesis, "There is no significant impact in the use of AI tools for presentation (MS PPT) on academic achievement," was rejected.

#### **Findings to objective II (use of AI and its impact on Academic Achievement)**

An association was found between the usage of ETV for online tutorials and students' academic achievement. The chi-square test was used to cross-tabulate the dependent and independent variables, yielding  $\chi^2 = 23.331$  with a p-value of 0.003 at  $\alpha = 0.05$  and 8 degrees of freedom. So, the null hypothesis, "There is no significant impact of the use of AI tool for online tutorials as well as computer simulations on academic achievement of students," was rejected (Table 4.5).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the statistical/numerical exploration of the data and the study's findings, the researcher draws these conclusions. Artificial Intelligence (AI) / web tools are more effective than conventional skills in the consistent academic achievement of students in universities. Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are operative in a wide range of perspectives on students' academic achievement. Scholars have reported promising results from the use of web-based technology in tutoring. Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are more accommodating in easing objective problem-solving abilities of learners as well as in the learning process, which is associated with the outcome strategy.

**Recommendations**

In light of the findings of existing studies and the drawn conclusions, the researcher may propose the following recommendations for development in Pakistan.

1. Consequences of the study show that the application of AI tools has been found more operational for the academic achievement of students at the postgraduate level. To brand its integration more associative in computational education at the grassroots level. For this reason, it is recommended that ICTs be introduced as an inclusive discipline in the curricula of Pakistan at the primary and elementary levels.
2. Results of the study found that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been more effective for the academic achievement of learners at the university level. Because in public-sector institutions, more accommodations for the application of AI tools have been available, particularly at the postgraduate level. Therefore, it is recommended that the government assign the forthcoming financial plan for education to increase funding and enhance the effective use of these facilities, so that amenities for AI tools are increased in small cities and rural regions as well.
3. To stimulate AI tools in education at the post-graduate stage for students to become more familiar with their usage. Therefore, it is recommended that the libraries in educational institutions should be transformed into online libraries. It is because the learners from the underprivileged families do not have access to IT services at home.
4. Research centers for the alumni of educational institutes and post-graduate students might become famous with an ample number of PCs linked to the internet. Online tutoring might be used to address this problem, as replication and guided hands-on practice are very important at the graduate and postgraduate levels.

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## Political Interest and Political Participation of Women: Mediating Role of Education

### Abstract

*This study examines the relationship between political interest, education, and political participation among educated Pakistani women, with a focus on education as a mediating factor. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 400 female students across four universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi through a structured survey. Analysis in SPSS included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, linear regression, and mediation testing using the Hayes PROCESS macro. Results show a significant positive relationship between political interest and political participation, and education substantially increases political interest. However, education did not significantly strengthen the link between political interest and political involvement. These findings suggest that although higher education enhances political awareness, sociocultural and structural barriers continue to restrict women's active political engagement. The study underscores the need for context-sensitive strategies that convert political knowledge into meaningful participation while addressing persistent gendered constraints in Pakistan's political landscape.*

**Keywords:** Political interest, Political Participation, Educated Women, Urban Women, Mediation, Higher Education

### INTRODUCTION

Political interest plays a crucial role in political participation, whereby individuals engage with political events, institutions, and processes. It underpins civic participation and democratic vitality by promoting activities such as voting, candidacy, and lobbying (Berinsky, 2006; Smets & Van Ham, 2013). More than a transient or situational sentiment, political interest constitutes a long-term mindset that influences patterns of political involvement (Luskin, 1990; Robinson, 2017). The resource model of political participation underscores the importance of political interest, often treating it as a more potent predictor of political activity than socioeconomic status (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, 1995). Women's participation is a crucial aspect of political involvement and a key topic in discussions on human rights, gender equality, and inclusive development. Women's political involvement is also essential for the legitimacy of democratic institutions and ensuring that policy decisions address the diverse needs of society. When women hold political leadership positions, social

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issues tend to be more responsive to concerns such as healthcare, education, and welfare policies (Susan, 2013). Additionally, women's political participation promotes greater democracy, reduces inequalities, and fosters collaboration across social and political lines (World Economic Forum, 2017). It also acts as a multiplier by increasing women's voter turnout and enhancing the quality and inclusiveness of governance (Nancy, Schlozman, and Sidney, 2001).

Despite these dynamics, global trends show that women remain underrepresented in political institutions. Even though other countries have seen increases in women's political participation, as demonstrated in the United States and the United Kingdom (Currell, 2005; Burns, 2007; Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2010), women's representation worldwide is still low. Current statistics indicate that women occupy 15.2 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide. In developed democracies, progress has been uneven; for instance, in 2002, only six of fifty U.S. governors were women (Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes, 2007). These disparities suggest that verbal commitments to gender equality, such as those outlined in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2019), have not yet led to substantial equality in political leadership roles (Morobane, 2014; Chalaby, 2017).

The political participation of women in South Asia, especially in Pakistan, is influenced by cultural, structural, and institutional factors. Although more educated women are demonstrating increased interest in politics, this does not always lead to active involvement. The prevailing gender norms and the view of politics as a male domain, along with economic dependency and domestic responsibilities, continue to restrict women's political agency (Kayser, 2013). These limitations highlight the need to analyze not only the levels of political interest but also how that interest can evolve into participation, particularly within patriarchal and conservative socio-political environments. In this context, education emerges as a crucial mediating factor. It is inherently transformative, equipping individuals with cognitive and analytical skills to make informed decisions in the political sphere (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Hillygus, 2005). For women in Pakistan, education serves as an empowering force, helping challenge rigid gender norms and fostering a stronger sense of civic consciousness and agency. However, the relationship between political interest, education, and political participation has not been sufficiently theorized or empirically studied in societies where gender inequality is deeply embedded.

This paper addresses this gap by examining the link between political interest and political participation among educated women in Pakistan, and how education mediates this relationship. The study aims to explore the role of education in fostering political awareness and capacity, enabling women to overcome societal barriers and turn political interest into meaningful participation, focusing on educated women as respondents. In doing so, the research will contribute to the broader academic discussions on gender, education, and political participation, offering context-specific insights into the challenges and opportunities for increasing women's political empowerment in Pakistan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature has established a strong link between political interest and political participation, as political interest is seen as a precondition for civic and electoral involvement. According to Almond and Verba (2015), focusing on political issues and being involved in political processes are the most important aspects of political interest. Consistent with Armington (2014), Quintelier & Van Deth (2014), and Galston (2004), it was shown that higher political interest significantly increases the likelihood of voting, campaigning, and engaging in political activism. All these studies demonstrate that political interest is a fundamental factor shaping political behavior. A substantial body of literature highlights education as a key factor in political participation. Scholars such as Claes and Hooghe (2017), Sondheimer and Green (2010), and Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001) have demonstrated how education enhances cognitive abilities, political awareness, and civic skills, thereby enabling engagement.

Education influences participation both directly—by improving knowledge and political efficacy—and indirectly—by increasing opportunities for civic engagement through student or community groups. However, the strength of this relationship varies across countries. For example, Pelkonen (2012) and Siedler (2010) found that educational reforms reduced the impact of political participation in Norway and Germany. In contrast, studies from the U.S. and U.K. report stronger associations, likely due to the overlap between education and socioeconomic advantages (Milligan, Moretti, and Oreopoulos, 2004).

Despite these insights, much of the existing literature focuses on general populations or Western contexts, with relatively less attention to how education interacts with gender and cultural norms in patriarchal societies.

Gendered analyses of political participation often identify structural, cultural, and psychological barriers that disproportionately hinder women's engagement in political life (Kunovich & Paxton, 2005; Fleschenberg & Bari, 2015). In conservative societies such as Pakistan, these barriers are particularly acute. Studies by Naz (2011), Naz and Ahmad (2012), and Agbalajobi (2010) document the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms, gender discrimination, and limited access to education, all of which constrain women's political agency. Even women with higher education often face social resistance or internalized norms that discourage political involvement (UNDP, 2005; Nazir et al., 2019; Prihatini, 2020).

While some recent scholarship in Pakistan (e.g., Khan et al., 2021) has begun to explore the role of education in enhancing rural women's political knowledge and participation, these studies do not systematically investigate how education mediates the relationship between political interest and political participation, particularly among urban women, a group increasingly exposed to both educational opportunities and sociocultural constraints. This study builds upon and extends previous research in several important ways: Unlike many cross-national or Western-centric studies, this research focuses specifically on Pakistan. In this country, cultural conservatism and patriarchal norms significantly shape gendered patterns of political behavior. While previous studies have explored the individual effects of political interest or education on political participation, this study uniquely examines education as a mediating variable, a mechanism through which political interest translates

into actual political engagement. This study centers on young urban women, a demographic that occupies a transitional space between traditional norms and modern influences. By examining how education affects their political interest and behavior, the study adds a critical gender dimension to the literature on political participation in developing societies. By grounding the analysis in the Relative Education Model and Social Capital Theory, this study presents a nuanced theoretical framework to explain how education provides not only knowledge but also social resources and positional advantages that facilitate political engagement among marginalized groups.

This research addresses a clear empirical and theoretical gap in the literature, investigating how education mediates the relationship between political interest and participation among women in a highly patriarchal context. By focusing on urban Pakistan and applying a robust theoretical lens, the study provides new insights into the conditions under which education can become a transformative force for women's political empowerment. It aims to inform both academic understanding and policy interventions targeted at improving women's civic and political inclusion through education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in the Relative Education Model, which conceptualizes education as a positional good. Its value lies not merely in its possession but in how it differentiates individuals from one another within a social hierarchy. Within this model, education becomes a critical determinant of access to resources, status, and opportunities, particularly in stratified societies. Social capital theory, developed by Granovetter (1973) and Lin (1999), complements this perspective by emphasizing the role of social networks in accessing such resources. Social capital refers to the benefits individuals gain from their social ties and networks, which can be instrumental in achieving personal and collective goals. Education, as a foundational social institution, not only determines occupational or economic outcomes but also plays a central role in the formation and expansion of social networks. Through these networks, individuals acquire civic skills, political awareness, and normative values that shape their engagement with political processes. Scholars such as Dee (2004) and Hadjar and Becker (2006) argue that education also transmits democratic, pluralistic, and participatory values, which foster political interest and engagement.

Political interest, defined as the cognitive and emotional engagement with political affairs, is widely recognized as a precursor to political participation. However, the transition from interest to participation is not automatic. It is mediated by a range of factors, including cultural norms, gender roles, age, and educational attainment. Within the framework of the Relative Education Model, education is viewed as enhancing political knowledge, critical thinking, and civic competence, thereby equipping individuals with the tools necessary to act upon their political interests (Shahdeed, 2017; Sharif & Hina, 2018). A substantial body of research has confirmed the positive relationship between educational attainment and political engagement, with education functioning as a key agent of political socialization (Siddiqui, 2015; Radu, 2018; Wang et al., 2019). Despite progress in some areas, gender disparities in political engagement remain significant across both developed and developing contexts. In Western societies, women are less likely than men to join political parties, attend

demonstrations, or express political interest (Oxaal & Baden, 1997; Berinsky & Lenz, 2011; Robinson & Gottlieb, 2019). These disparities are further exacerbated in many developing countries, including Pakistan, where patriarchal structures, rigid gender norms, and cultural conservatism continue to marginalize women from political spheres (Naz, 2011; Naz & Ahmad, 2012; Agbalajobi, 2010). In such settings, women's political disempowerment is not only institutional but also deeply embedded in the sociocultural fabric, where their participation is often restricted, and their political agency is limited (UNDP, 2005; Nazir et al., 2019; Prihatini, 2020).

In the Pakistani context, this study posits that education may serve as a mediating force, especially for young urban women, by fostering political awareness and challenging traditional gender norms. The Relative Education Model offers a compelling lens for examining how women's educational attainment can translate political interest into active political participation. By equipping women with critical knowledge and access to broader social networks, education enhances their capacity to navigate and resist the sociocultural constraints that typically hinder their civic engagement. Thus, this framework underscores the intricate interplay between education, social capital, and cultural norms in shaping women's political behavior. It highlights the potential of education to act as a catalyst for political empowerment, especially in patriarchal societies where systemic barriers continue to limit women's roles in democratic processes.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The study investigates the relationship between **political interest** (independent variable) and **political participation** (dependent variable), with **education** as a mediating variable. Political interest, defined as the degree to which individuals engage with and are concerned about political affairs, is theorized to influence political participation. It encompasses a range of activities through which citizens express their political preferences and exert influence over the political decision-making process. However, the direct relationship between these variables may not be sufficient to explain variations in political participation, necessitating the inclusion of education as a critical mediating factor. Education is hypothesized to enhance individuals' cognitive and social capacities, thereby influencing their political interests and participation. It provides individuals with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to comprehend political processes, participate in political discourse, and take informed action. Education bridges the gap between mere awareness and active involvement by mediating the relationship between political interest and participation, highlighting its pivotal role in shaping political behavior. This framework highlights the interconnections among political interests, education, and political participation, offering a nuanced understanding of how these variables interact to shape democratic engagement.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study used a cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between political interest and political participation, and the mediating role of education, among female university students. The research was conducted in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, two urban centers in Pakistan renowned for their diverse academic environments and dense concentration of higher education institutions. Four universities were purposively selected for their academic

diversity and student populations: These institutions provided a representative setting for exploring the political behaviors and attitudes of young, educated women. The study population consisted of female students enrolled in BS, MS, and PhD programs across the selected universities. This demographic was chosen for its relevance to the research focus, given their advanced educational exposure and potential influence on political discourse and civic culture in Pakistan. From an estimated population of 20,000 female students across the four institutions, a sample of 400 respondents was selected using simple random sampling. This approach ensured that each participant had an equal chance of being selected, thereby minimizing sampling bias and enhancing the generalizability of the findings. An equal distribution of 100 participants per university was maintained to allow for balanced institutional representation.

Quantitative data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed in English, reflecting the medium of instruction across the selected institutions. Before distribution, necessary permissions were obtained from university authorities, and the data collection process was facilitated during regular class hours with the cooperation of academic staff. The researchers personally administered and retrieved the questionnaires, ensuring clear instructions and complete responses. This study was reviewed and approved by the Board of the Faculty of the International Islamic University, Islamabad. Ethical approval was granted under the reference number [No.IIU.BOF/2023]. All participants provided informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study, and all procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the relevant institution. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals who participated in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, their right to confidentiality, and their freedom to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection to ensure their voluntary and informed participation, in accordance with ethical research standards.

### **Control Variables**

This study incorporates three control variables to ensure a more precise analysis of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. These control variables are:

***Higher Level of Education:*** By controlling education, the study focuses specifically on university students, thereby minimizing the potential confounding effects of varying educational levels among respondents.

***Urban Residence:*** Including urban residence as a control variable acknowledges the potential influence of socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors unique to urban settings. As all respondents reside in the metropolitan areas of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, this control ensures that the findings reflect urban-specific dynamics without interference from rural-urban disparities.

***Gender:*** As a categorical variable, gender is controlled by including only female respondents in the study. This approach eliminates the potential confounding effects of gender-related differences, ensuring that the observed relationships reflect women's experiences in political

interest and participation. Incorporating these control variables enhances the study's internal validity, providing a more rigorous and focused investigation of the mediated relationship between political interest and political participation.

### **Political Participation as the Dependent Variable**

In this study, political participation is conceptualized as the dependent variable. The following definition by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1999) has been adopted to guide the analysis: "Political participation encompasses a spectrum of activities through which individuals engage in the democratic process and contribute to shaping the governance of their society. It involves registering to vote, casting ballots in elections, affiliating with political parties, actively participating in political campaigns, joining demonstrations or protests, making financial contributions to political candidates, and supporting civic initiatives, such as circulating petitions. Essentially, political participation reflects the extent to which individuals involve themselves in the various facets of the political landscape, exerting their influence and contributing to the functioning of a democratic society." This definition is the foundation for exploring political engagement in alignment with the study's objectives. To operationalize the concept, researchers have employed a scale using eight specific indicators of political participation:

1. Have you registered to vote?
2. Did you cast your vote in the 2024 election?
3. Did you cast a vote for the political party of your choice?
4. Are you a member of a political party?
5. Have you participated in a political campaign?
6. Have you ever organized or participated in a demonstration or protest?
7. Have you ever donated money to a political candidate?
8. Have you ever circulated a petition?

The researchers ensured the internal consistency and reliability of the political participation scale by using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951). The scale, comprising eight items, achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.752, indicating acceptable reliability. This robust methodological approach enables a comprehensive and reliable assessment of political participation, thereby facilitating an in-depth understanding of the political engagement patterns among the study's respondents.

### **Political Interest as the Independent Variable**

In this study, political interest is conceptualized as the independent variable. Drawing on Almond and Verba's (2015) theoretical framework, political interest is defined through a dual philosophical approach, encompassing general interest in political affairs and active engagement in significant political activities, such as campaigns and protests. This definition aligns with the study's objectives, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of political interest among educated women.

The study operationalizes political interest using five specific indicators:

- V1. General interest in politics and governmental activities.
- V2 Interest in election campaigns.

V3. Interest in demonstrations.

V4. Interest in political parties and their performance.

V5. Engagement in discussions about political issues with friends or family.

### ***Political Interest Scale***

A customized scale was developed to measure the political interest of educated women, incorporating five normative statements that reflect the indicators mentioned earlier. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5), allowing respondents to express varying degrees of agreement or disagreement. This design ensures a nuanced assessment of political interest by capturing variations in intensity across respondents' perceptions and attitudes. The scale's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.804, indicating high internal consistency.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

**Table 1: Education of respondents (N=400)**

Education	Frequency	Percentage
BS	365	91.3
MS	35	8.8
Total	400	100

Education is a critical mediator in influencing individual behaviors, perceptions, and participation in societal or professional domains. All respondents in the study are highly educated, as indicated in Table 1. Education is a crucial variable that helps individuals bridge the gap between political interest and active participation, making it a cornerstone for understanding this relationship.

### **Descriptive Analysis of Political Interest**

**Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Women Regarding Political Interest (N=400)**

Statements	SA f (%)	A f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)	Mean	Sd	Mode
I have a general interest in Governmental activities	77 (19.3)	153 (38.3)	136 (34.0)	34 (8.5)	2.68	0.88	3.00
I am interested in election Campaigns	57 (14.3)	136 (34.0)	153 (38.3)	54 (13.5)	2.49	0.89	2.00
I am interested in demonstrations	67 (16.8)	197 (49.3)	91 (22.8)	45 (11.3)	2.72	0.87	3.00
I am interested in political parties and their performance	65 (16.3)	172 (43.0)	107 (26.8)	56 (14.0)	2.62	0.91	3.00
I have a general interest in political discussions	86 (21.5)	176 (44.0)	86 (21.0)	52 (13.0)	2.74	0.94	3.00

Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics of Political Interest of Women

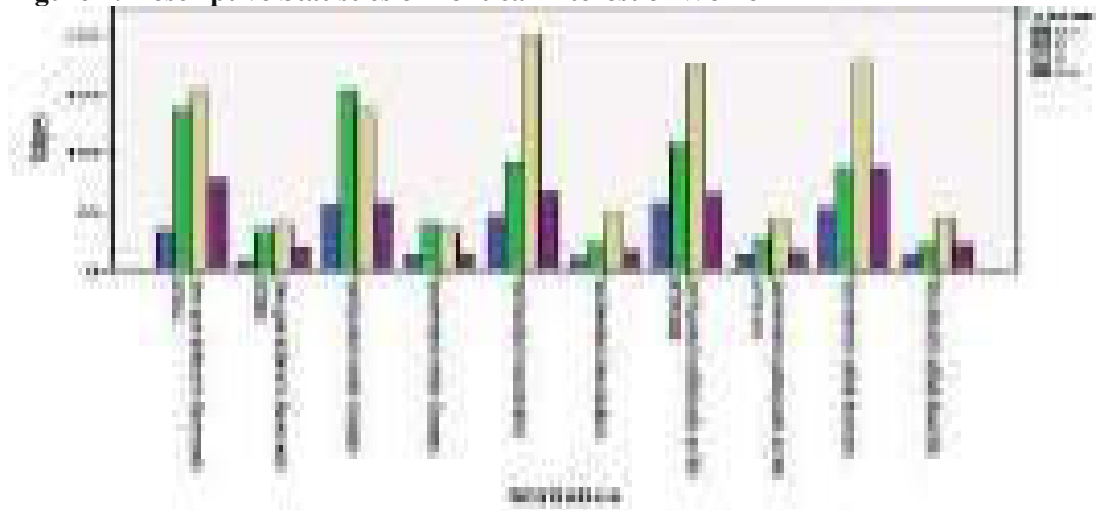
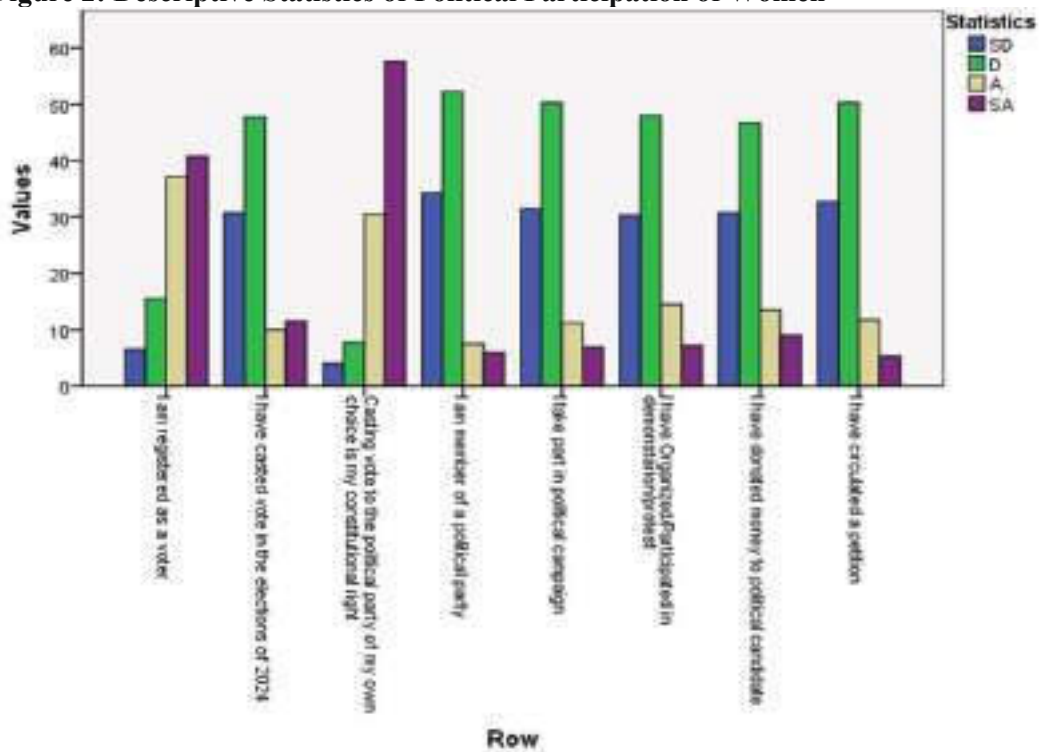


Figure 2: Descriptive Statistics of Political Participation of Women



### Association between Political Interest and Political Participation of Women

**Table 3: Correlation matrix showing the relationship between two variables: "political interest" and "political participation"**

Variable	1	2
Political Interest		
Political Participation	.50**	

**Note.**  $N = 400$ .  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

**Table 4: Linear Regression Model Predicting Political Participation from Political Interest Measures**

Predictor	Estimate (B)	SE	T	p
Intercept	1.28	0.09	14.05	< .001
General Interest in Government Activities	0.08	0.03	2.33	.021
Interest in Election Campaigns	0.10	0.03	3.37	.001
Interest in Demonstrations	-0.01	0.03	-0.27	.790
Interest in Political Parties and Their Performance	0.10	0.03	3.25	.001
Interest in Political Discussions	0.11	0.03	3.99	< .001

**Note.** Dependent variable = Political Participation.  $N = 400$ . Significance values are two-tailed.

The correlation matrix reveals a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.499$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between political interest and participation in politics. As individuals' political interest increases, their political participation tends to increase as well. The correlation coefficient of 0.499 indicates a moderate positive relationship between the two variables.

The ANOVA table provides information on the variance in the dependent variable explained by the regression model, the overall significance of the model, and the significance of each predictor variable. Additionally, the Model Coefficients table provides information about the estimated coefficients (slopes) of each predictor variable, along with their standard errors, t-values, and p-values. The Regression model has a sum of squares of 28.111 and 5 degrees of freedom, indicating that the model explains a significant amount of the variance in political participation. The Mean Square is 5.622, representing the average variance amount defined by each predictor. The F-value of 28.180 is significant at  $p < .001$ , indicating that the regression model predicts political participation. The Total sum of squares is 106.719, indicating the total variance in political participation. The ANOVA table indicates that the regression model is a significant predictor of political participation ( $F(5,394) = 28.180$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The predictors in the model explain a considerable amount of the variability in Political Participation. The model explains 26.3% of the variance in Political Participation ( $R$ -squared = .263), suggesting that it is moderately effective in explaining political participation. The  $R$ -value of 0.513 indicates a moderate positive linear relationship between political interest and political participation.

The coefficients table indicates that all predictor variables except interest in the demonstration are significant predictors of political participation. Specifically, one unit increase in General Interest in Government Activities, Interest in Election Campaigns,

Interest in Political Parties and their Performance, and Interest in Political Discussions is associated with increases in Political Participation by .077, .104, .100, and .110, respectively. These coefficients are all significant at  $p < .05$ , except for Interest in Demonstration, which is not a significant predictor of Political Participation.

**Table 6: Mediation Estimates**

Mediation Estimates						
Effect	Estimate	SE	Z	P	% Mediation	
Indirect	4.43e-4	0.00452	0.0981	0.922	0.116	
Direct	0.381	0.03345	11.3955	< .001	99.884	
Total	0.382	0.03315	11.5140	< .001	100.000	
Path Estimates						
			Estimate	SE	Z	p
Political Interest	→	Education	0.05649	0.0207	2.7248	0.006
Education	→	MPP	0.00785	0.0799	0.0982	0.922
Political Participation	→	MPP	0.38121	0.0335	11.3955	< .001

MPP (Mean Political Participation)

The path estimate for the effect of **political interest (Education)** on **education (political interest)** is significant (Estimate = **0.05649**, SE = 0.0207, Z = 2.7248,  $p = 0.006$ ). This finding indicates that women with higher levels of education tend to develop a more substantial interest in politics. Education enhances awareness of political rights and the importance of participation in political processes, such as voting. The indirect effect of education on political participation through political interest is minimal and not statistically significant (Indirect Effect = 0.000443, SE = 0.00452, Z = 0.0981,  $p = 0.922$ ).

The findings suggest that while education increases political interest, this interest does not necessarily translate into a significant increase in active political participation beyond basic activities, such as voting. Education has a positive influence on women's political interest, as evidenced by the considerable path estimate (0.05649,  $p = 0.006$ ). Women with higher levels of education are more aware of political issues and their rights, leading to increased interest in politics.

The analysis examines the relationship between political interest and participation, considering education as a mediating factor. Urban residence and gender are control variables, as the study focuses on highly educated women from urban areas. The Pearson correlation coefficient between political interest and political participation is 0.499, with a significance level of  $p < 0.001$ . This moderate and significant positive correlation suggests that women with greater political interest are more likely to engage in political participation. The overall model fit indicates that the independent variables explain a significant portion of the variance in political participation ( $R^2 = 0.263$ ,  $F = 28.2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Interest in Political Discussions:** Estimate = **0.110**,  $p < 0.001$  (strongest predictor).

**Interest in Election Campaigns:** Estimate = **0.104**,  $p = 0.001$ .

**Interest in Political Parties and Their Performance:** Estimate = **0.100**,  $p = 0.001$ .

**General Interest in Government Activities:** Estimate = 0.077,  $p = 0.021$ .

These findings suggest that specific dimensions of political interest, particularly discussions and active interest in campaigns and parties, drive political participation.

**Interest in Demonstration:** This predictor is not significant (Estimate = -0.009,  $p = 0.790$ ), indicating that this dimension of political interest does not directly influence participation.

The mediation analysis evaluates how education influences the relationship between political interest and political participation: The direct effect of political interest on political participation is significant (Estimate = 0.381,  $p < 0.001$ ). The total effect of political interest on political participation (direct + indirect) is 0.382 ( $p < 0.001$ ), confirming a robust overall relationship. The indirect effect of political interest on political participation via education is minimal and statistically insignificant (Estimate = 0.000443,  $p = 0.922$ ). Education may slightly enhance political participation, but its mediating role is negligible.

**Political Interest → Education:** The path is significant (Estimate = 0.05649,  $p = 0.006$ ).

Women with a greater interest in politics tend to seek or benefit from education, which broadens their understanding of the subject.

**Education → Political Participation:** The path is insignificant (Estimate = 0.00785,  $p = 0.922$ ).

This finding suggests that education does not significantly mediate the translation of political interest into political participation. The study was conducted among highly educated urban women. Urban residence likely contributes to better access to education and resources, enabling women to be politically aware and participatory. The selection of highly educated women emphasizes the role of education in shaping political interest and participation. Still, structural factors (such as gender roles or urban-rural disparities) are minimized.

The findings provide empirical support for the positive relationship between political interest and participation, aligning with the literature that emphasizes the centrality of political interest in fostering engagement. Almond and Verba (2015) and Galston (2004) argue that political interest is the foundation of political behavior, corroborated by the current study's evidence that educated women with a greater interest in political discussions, campaigns, and parties actively participate in politics. Recent scholarly work depicts that female voter turnout and participation in public life encourage responsiveness to women's needs at all levels of government, municipal, provincial, and national (Lutz, 2022). However, the barriers to women's political participation remain significant, particularly in developing countries (Dar & Shairgojri, 2022).

The theoretical foundations of this study highlight the importance of social capital and social networking for individuals' political empowerment and participation in the country's political affairs. However, in the context of Pakistan, one of the key barriers to women's political participation is entrenched patriarchy, which influences societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles. In many traditional societies, including parts of Pakistan (Malik &

Khan, 2022), politics is perceived as a male-dominated sphere, making it difficult for women to assert their presence. Cultural expectations that prioritize women's domestic roles over public involvement discourage their participation in electoral processes. According to a study conducted by Rai (2018), cultural traditions rooted in power structures and gender hierarchies create substantial barriers to women's political participation. However, Rahman and Asad (2024) reported that women are confined to domestic roles, limiting their political agency. Hierarchical gender roles limit women's involvement in collectivist countries like Pakistan, where women, even with higher education, are expected to prioritize family responsibilities, restricting their time and resources for political activities. Cultural perceptions of politics (Karim & Iqbal, 2023) considered it a male-dominated domain, discouraging women from seeking leadership positions. Women face social backlash for challenging traditional roles, with the media often portraying female politicians negatively. Societal norms reinforce male-dominated political networks, excluding women from gaining opportunities for social capital and networking in politics as an institution.

Education is considered a key indicator of progress and development, but cultural and structural barriers continue to hinder women's political engagement. Patriarchal norms, religious conservatism, and gender-based violence restrict women's ability to participate in electoral politics (Ilyas, 2021; Ikram & Raza, 2022). The perception of women as custodians of family honor remains deeply embedded, making any form of public participation, particularly in politics, a challenging endeavor (Khan, 2020). The case of Pakistan is exceptional in that the intersection of culture, religion, and politics has created a complex environment for highly educated women seeking to participate in politics. Many female politicians and activists have reported facing significant societal resistance and view their political engagement as a challenge to traditional norms (Anwar, 2021). Women's self-censorship due to these societal pressures has limited their engagement, with many opting for indirect forms of activism rather than direct political involvement (Farooq, 2021). This resistance to women's political participation is not unique to Pakistan but resonates with similar struggles faced by women in patriarchal societies worldwide (Yusuf & Faiz, 2022).

Despite its limited mediating effect, education plays a significant role in shaping political interest. As Sondheimer and Green (2010) highlight, education fosters analytical thinking and political knowledge, contributing to greater interest in political affairs, as evidenced by the significant path from education to political interest. While Sondheimer and Green's (2010) framework underscores the transformative role of education in addressing barriers to women's political participation, the current study challenges its universality, showing that, in specific contexts, education primarily boosts political interest without significantly affecting broader participation. This divergence highlights the importance of considering cultural and demographic contexts when assessing the impact of education on women's political agency.

The findings of Naz and Ahmad (2012) and Khan et al. (2021) emphasize the critical role of education in reducing the gender gap in political involvement and enhancing women's political agency. Naz and Ahmad argue that education empowers women to overcome traditional barriers, thereby enabling them to participate more actively in politics. Similarly, Khan et al. highlight that educated women in rural Pakistan demonstrate higher political

knowledge and participation, suggesting that education plays a transformative role even in restrictive environments. However, the current study, focusing on highly educated urban women, reveals a nuanced reality. While education significantly enhances women's political interest, making them more informed, confident, and engaged in political discussions and voting, it does not strongly influence broader political participation activities, such as joining political parties or participating in demonstrations. This disparity may stem from contextual differences: In rural Pakistan, as highlighted by Khan et al. (2021), education might be the primary avenue for women to gain access to political knowledge and opportunities, making its impact more pronounced. Conversely, in urban settings where women already benefit from better access to resources and exposure, the incremental effect of education on political participation may diminish.

Naz and Ahmad (2012) and Khan et al. (2021) consider general political knowledge and participation, including less intensive forms of engagement, such as voting or attending local events. The present study, however, focuses on a broader spectrum of involvement, finding that education has a limited direct impact on more active and visible political involvement. For highly educated urban women, societal norms, safety concerns, and structural limitations may outweigh the role of education in facilitating active participation. These constraints may not be as pronounced in rural studies, where education serves as a gateway to political agency. The historical trajectory of women's political participation in Pakistan underscores the enduring impact of conservative policies. At the same time, there have been periods of increased representation, but true empowerment remains a challenge due to cultural and religious barriers, even for highly educated women (Shaheer & Muhammad, 2023). The future of women's political engagement in Pakistan hinges on shifting societal perceptions, implementing legal reforms, and cultivating an environment of political awareness and advocacy that enables women to actively participate in governance without fear of cultural backlash or political marginalization (Shah & Zaman, 2022).

The divergence in findings suggests that the role of education in fostering political participation is heavily context-dependent. Sociocultural barriers, combined with a lack of institutional support, have led to persistently low levels of women's political engagement in Pakistan, despite legislative measures aimed at improving representation (Saeed & Qureshi, 2023). Political participation among women is not only discouraged within families but also actively opposed at the community level (Bukhari & Ameer, 2022), where honor-based traditions further reinforce female exclusion from decision-making processes (Burnet, 2020).

While education may bridge gender gaps and promote agency in restrictive rural environments, its direct influence in urban settings with pre-existing advantages is less significant. This finding underscores the importance of considering both demographic and structural factors when assessing the impact of education on women's political engagement. In many parts of Pakistan, women are not permitted to leave their homes unaccompanied, making participation in political rallies, discussions, and campaign activities nearly impossible (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2022). Even educated and politically aware women face family-imposed restrictions on travel, with male guardians refusing to allow them to attend political meetings, vote at polling stations, or participate in community leadership activities

(Raza & Hussain, 2022). The fear of public visibility and the stigma associated with being seen in mixed-gender spaces deter many women from actively pursuing political ambitions (Shah, 2023). The negligible role of interest in demonstrations as a predictor of participation highlights the contextual specificity of political engagement in Pakistan. This finding aligns with Fleschenberg and Bari's (2015) observation that sociocultural norms and security considerations influence women's political behaviors, steering them toward less aggressive forms of participation, such as discussions and campaigns.

The study reveals a moderate and significant positive relationship between political interest and political participation among highly educated urban women in Pakistan, with specific dimensions, such as interest in political discussions, campaigns, and party performance, emerging as the strongest predictors of participation. However, interest in demonstrations was not a significant driver of political involvement, highlighting the influence of sociocultural and security concerns on preferred forms of engagement. While education significantly enhances political interest, its direct effect on political participation is minimal, suggesting that structural and cultural barriers, such as entrenched patriarchy, traditional gender roles, and societal resistance, continue to limit women's active political engagement despite their educational attainment. These findings underscore the context-dependent nature of political participation, suggesting that while education fosters awareness and interest, broader participation remains hindered by persistent sociocultural constraints.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study underscores the intricate relationship between political interest, education, and political participation among highly educated urban women in Pakistan, offering nuanced insights into their civic engagement. The findings reveal that education significantly enhances political interest by equipping women with knowledge, critical reasoning, and analytical skills that deepen their understanding of political systems and processes. Educated women demonstrate greater curiosity about political affairs, show awareness of governmental activities, and are more likely to engage in informed discussions and evaluate political parties and election campaigns. However, while education cultivates political awareness, its influence on actual political participation remains limited. The results indicate that formal education motivates women to exercise their voting rights but does not substantially translate into active participation in political organizations, demonstrations, or leadership roles. This restricted impact appears to stem from entrenched sociocultural and structural constraints that continue to shape women's political behavior. Social expectations, family influence, safety concerns, and gendered perceptions of public engagement often define the boundaries of acceptable political involvement, thereby discouraging women—even highly educated women—from pursuing visible or confrontational forms of participation. Consequently, education alone is insufficient to overcome the cultural and institutional barriers that regulate women's political agency. The study highlights that while political interest is an essential precursor to participation, it requires an enabling environment supported by inclusive social norms, gender-sensitive political institutions, and awareness programs that translate knowledge into action. Addressing these contextual barriers is vital for expanding women's participation beyond voting and for ensuring that education becomes a transformative force for political empowerment rather than a passive source of awareness. Ultimately, fostering

equitable political engagement among women in Pakistan demands both structural reforms and cultural shifts that align educational gains with active and sustained political participation.

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## Examining Individual Behaviors towards Inclusive and Diverse Leadership in Universities: A Study on Attitudes and Perceptions

### Abstract

*This study examines how behaviors of influential and affected participants contribute to an inclusive workplace climate and how leadership diversity impacts university performance. Using a cross-sectional survey, data were collected from employees at various Pakistani universities via a self-administered online questionnaire comprising Likert-scale items on leadership diversity, engagement, and workplace behavior. The sample included 100 respondents, most aged 18–25 (36%) and predominantly male (56%). Results reveal a strong need for institutions to strengthen leadership skills, adopt inclusive leadership styles, improve communication, and actively promote diversity. Findings show apparent gaps in leadership effectiveness and representation, underscoring the importance of increasing diversity in leadership positions. The study recommends that higher education institutions prioritize inclusive leadership development, enhance communication practices, and implement meaningful diversity and inclusion initiatives.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Diversity, Inclusion, Employee, Satisfaction

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, diversity and inclusion have become central concerns for organizations operating in an increasingly globalized world. A diverse workforce enhances innovation, creativity, and problem-solving by bringing together individuals with distinct backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Within this global corporate environment, “inclusion” has emerged as a critical component for sustaining competitive advantage, promoting employee well-being, and enabling organizational success. Inclusion is described as a positive diversity management strategy that emphasizes valuing individual differences rather than treating diversity as a challenge to be corrected (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2009; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007). It satisfies employees’ simultaneous needs for individuality and belonging, enabling them to express themselves authentically while still feeling accepted (Shore et al., 2011). Organizations that apply inclusive principles move beyond merely tolerating diversity toward cultivating equitable spaces where all workers are viewed as “insiders” (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Hope Pelled et al., 1999). However, diversity alone is insufficient. To truly harness its potential, organizations must intentionally foster inclusive work environments that respect each employee. Leadership plays a central role in driving this cultural transformation. Research reveals that diverse leadership teams contribute significantly to improved innovation, decision-making, and organizational profitability. For instance, McKinsey & Company reports that organizations with gender-diverse leadership are 21% more likely to achieve above-average profitability. In universities, diverse leadership not only strengthens

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organizational performance but also signals institutional commitment to equity and inclusion. However, sustainable inclusion requires systems for employee voice. Regular employee surveys, focus groups, town halls, and diversity training enable institutions to understand concerns and co-create inclusive work climates. Universities that consistently act on employee feedback tend to achieve higher engagement, retention, and overall performance. In a rapidly globalizing world, diversity and inclusion have become essential for institutional survival and innovation. Universities, as knowledge-driven organizations, must recognize the strategic importance of inclusion for enhancing their overall effectiveness (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2013; Mor Barak, 2011; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Leadership plays a pivotal role in implementing inclusive policies and shaping inclusive organizational cultures. Shore et al. (2011) identify inclusive leadership as a key contextual factor influencing employees' experiences of inclusion. Global debates—led by organizations such as Catalyst, Deloitte, and Korn Ferry—emphasize the influence of leadership behaviours on workplace inclusivity (Ferdman et al., 2020). Inclusive leaders support participation, representation, psychological safety, and equitable treatment for all team members.

This study aims to examine:

- how leadership diversity shapes employee experiences,
- how employees perceive working under leaders from diverse backgrounds, and
- Which institutional strategies are most effective for building inclusive leadership pipelines in higher education?

Inclusive leadership is associated with psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006), creativity (Carmeli et al., 2010), error learning (Ye et al., 2019), and work engagement (Choi et al., 2015). Nevertheless, conceptual clarity around inclusive leadership remains limited (Boekhorst, 2015; Shore & Chung, 2021). Diversity in leadership also predicts better decision-making, higher innovation, and improved retention, key drivers of organizational success. However, leadership diversity alone is not enough. Sustainable inclusion requires continuous feedback systems, open dialogue, and actionable responses to employee concerns. Through surveys, focus groups, resource groups, and training, organizations can foster equitable, respectful, and high-performing workplaces.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To investigate the relationship between diverse leadership and employee satisfaction, retention, and engagement.
2. To explore employees' comfort and openness toward working under leaders from diverse backgrounds.
3. To identify effective strategies for attracting, retaining, and promoting diverse talent in university leadership structures.

### **Significance of Study:**

Understanding the impacts of diversity in leadership is critical for modern educational institutions. Universities that promote diversity benefit from enhanced creativity, improved productivity, and more substantial competitiveness. A diverse leadership team ensures

representation of multiple perspectives and supports equitable decision-making processes. Diversity also strengthens employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention, all of which contribute to organizational performance. However, achieving meaningful diversity and inclusion requires ongoing institutional commitment and evidence-based strategies. This research provides insights into the challenges universities face and highlights practical ways to build inclusive and sustainable leadership structures.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a **cross-sectional survey research design** to examine employees' perceptions of leadership diversity, inclusive behaviours, and workplace climate within universities in Pakistan. A cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because it allows the collection of data at a single point in time, enabling the researcher to capture existing patterns, attitudes, and associations among variables without manipulating the study environment.

### Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling technique was adopted to recruit participants from different academic and administrative departments. This non-probability sampling method was chosen for its practicality and accessibility, especially in university settings, where reaching diverse employee groups required flexibility. Although convenience sampling limits generalizability, it allows efficient data collection within resource and time constraints.

### Sample Size

A total of **250** university employees were initially approached through an online Google Forms link distributed via institutional email and professional networks. Of these, 100 participants completed the survey, yielding a 40% response rate. The final sample size of 100 was sufficient for conducting correlational and regression analyses, meeting minimum statistical requirements for exploratory studies.

### Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through a **self-administered online questionnaire** explicitly designed for this study. The instrument comprised close-ended items measured on a Likert scale to assess the following key constructs:

- **Leadership Diversity** perceptions of representation and inclusivity within leadership structures
- **Employee Engagement:** levels of involvement, enthusiasm, and commitment to work
- **Inclusive Behaviours:** employees' experiences with fairness, respect, and recognition
- **Workplace Climate** overall sense of belongingness, openness, and psychological safety

The online format enabled participants to complete the survey anonymously and at their convenience, promoting honest and unbiased responses.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, standard deviation) were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and overall response patterns. Inferential analyses, including correlation, multiple regression, and factor analyses, were performed to examine relationships among variables, test hypotheses, and explore underlying constructs in leadership diversity and inclusion. These analyses helped determine the extent to which leadership diversity predicts engagement, retention, and workplace climate outcomes.

### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical research standards. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and the right to withdraw without penalty.

**Informed consent** was obtained electronically before participation. Confidentiality was ensured by not collecting any personal identifiers, and data were stored securely with restricted access. Additionally, the study design minimized any potential psychological or professional risks to participants.

### Theoretical Framework:

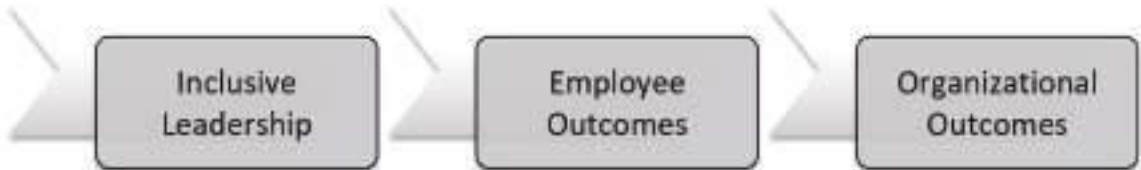
Inclusive leadership centres on leaders' responsibility to meet employees' needs for both individuality and belonging, particularly in diverse workplaces. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) first defined inclusive leadership as "*words and deeds by a leader that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others' contributions*" (p. 927). This was later expanded by Carmeli et al. (2010), who emphasized leaders' *visibility, accessibility, and availability* in their interactions with followers. Building on this foundation, Randel et al. (2018) conceptualised inclusive leadership as supporting employees as valued group members through ensuring fairness and equity, encouraging shared decision-making, and promoting diverse contributions.

The behavioral leadership theory provides an important theoretical anchor for understanding inclusive leadership. Behavioural theorists argue that leadership effectiveness is shaped not by inherent traits but by observable behaviours (Sergio, 2008). This perspective maintains that leaders are *made rather than born* and that anyone can learn effective leadership behaviours (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). Classic studies at Ohio State University (1940s) and the University of Michigan (1950s) identified key leadership behaviours that differentiate effective leaders, shifting focus away from traits to actions. Several foundational concepts further enrich the understanding of inclusive leadership. Randel et al.'s (2018) work builds on Shore et al. (2011) and Brewer's Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, proposing that inclusion requires balancing employees' need for belonging with their need for uniqueness. Workplace diversity frameworks such as the discrimination-and-fairness perspective highlight the importance of equitable treatment, equal opportunities, and unbiased practices, all of which are embedded in inclusive leadership. Similarly, the integration-and-learning perspective views diversity as a resource that enhances learning, adaptation, and innovation (Ely & Thomas, 2001). These ideas are reflected in Kuknor and Bhattacharya's characterization of inclusive leadership behaviours, especially the development of learning-oriented

environments for diverse groups. Within this study, people-oriented leadership aligns closely with inclusive leadership. People-oriented leaders prioritise relationship-building, communication, and interpersonal sensitivity, enabling them to address employees' needs at all levels. By fostering trust, support, and motivation, people-oriented leaders create conditions in which employees feel respected, valued, and empowered to contribute (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). This approach complements the principles of inclusive leadership, particularly in academic institutions where diversity, collaboration, and shared engagement play central roles.

### **Theoretical Framework of Inclusion:**

The purpose of leadership, including inclusive leadership, is to bring about change and mould the future. Beyond this, inclusive leadership emphasises the joint creation of a vision, a comprehensive understanding of oneself and one's surroundings, the creation and maintenance of connections, and the ongoing improvement of one's character (Leadership, 2018).



***Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Inclusive Leadership***

According to psychologist Edwin Hollander, inclusive leadership is about building connections that benefit both parties. It takes "doing things with people, rather than to people" to reach this next level of leadership. He goes on to say that this approach breaks with the long-standing practice of emphasising the leader's attributes rather than attending to followers' needs and perceptions. According to him, inclusive leadership is far more focused on including followers than on using them as tools for manipulating people in positions of authority. For inclusive leadership to be successfully implemented, respect, acknowledgment, responsiveness, and accountability are essential (Joseph et al., 2020). Another Author and consultant, Frederic Laloux, discusses a non-hierarchical system in which self-management structures and procedures are established. He defines a leader as someone who helps others develop their leadership skills and sense of autonomy. To empower someone, that person must be clever or honourable enough to cede some of his power. Laloux thinks it is feasible to establish a company in which there is no distinction between those in positions of power and those in positions of weakness. Additionally, he argues that a "sense and respond" strategy should be used instead of the "predict and control system" because the world has grown more complicated (Joseph et al., 2020).

Figure 2: Inclusive Leadership Theoretical Framework

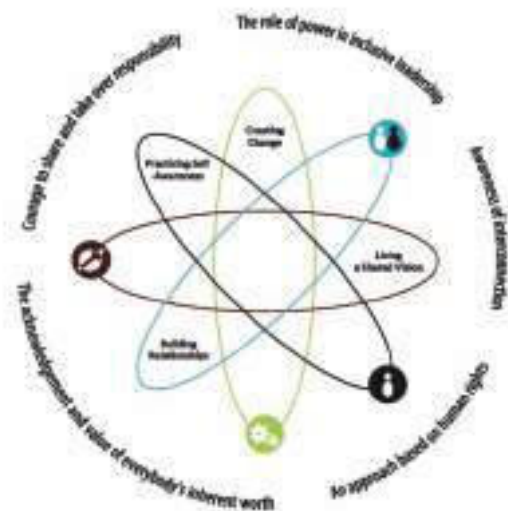


Figure 3: Inclusion Framework (Jagers, 2019)

	Low Belongingness	High Belongingness
Low Value in Uniqueness	<p><b>Exclusion</b></p> <p>Individual is not treated as an organizational insider with unique value in the work group but there are other employees or groups who are insiders.</p>	<p><b>Assimilation</b></p> <p>Individual is treated as an insider in the work group when they conform to organizational/dominant culture norms and downplay uniqueness.</p>
High Value in Uniqueness	<p><b>Differentiation</b></p> <p>Individual is not treated as an organizational insider in the work group but their unique characteristics are seen as valuable and required for group/ organization success.</p>	<p><b>Inclusion</b></p> <p>Individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group.</p>

**Levels of Inclusive and Diverse Leadership:**

According to research, inclusive leaders who are accessible and transparent provide their staff members with chances to advance their knowledge, skills, and cognitive function. These have also been shown to affect both personal and professional resources that support sentiments of job engagement (Kopperud et al., 2014). In more recent studies, it has been argued that leadership is crucial for fostering employee work engagement because it tends to generate a positive atmosphere that supports engagement (Choi et al., 2015). Leaders perform functions as drivers of motivation and pleasure for workers. In other words, as it fosters connections at all organizational levels so that tasks are carried out to the advantage of both parties, IL may be ideally suited to creating EE (Sugiyama, Cavanagh, Esch, Bilmoria, & Brown, 2016).

According to the Social Exchange Theory (SET), when one person does something for another that is of value to them, they are expected to provide something similarly valuable for return (Blau, 1964). As a result, the relationship between the leader and the follower is said to develop into a reciprocal one (Strom et al., 2014). In essence, SET is a process that involves "transactions" or simply "exchange" and is two-sided, mutually reliant, and mutually rewarding (Blau, 1964). According to an IL style viewpoint, relationships are viewed as a two-way leader-follower interaction reliant on respect, acknowledgment, responsiveness, and accountability (Hollander, 2012).

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The discussion elaborates on the objectives using the findings. The quantitative results of the study are presented through a discussion of the survey participants' demographic information. The important tables and graphs for pictorial presentation of results are also attached below.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of participants**

Variables	Categories	Statistics	
		<i>f</i>	%
<b>Age</b>		100	100
	18-25	36	36
	26-35	26	26
	36-45	16	16
	46-55	22	22
<b>Gender</b>			
	Male	56	56
	Female	44	44
<b>Position</b>			
	Entry-level employee	60	60
	Middle-level employee	28	28
	Senior-level employee	6	6
	Executive/coordinator role	6	6
<b>Province</b>			
	Punjab	20	20
	KPK	28	28
	Sindh	10	10
	Balochistan	10	10
	GB	4	4
<b>Tenure in Organization</b>			
	Less than 1 year	80	80
	1-3 years	8	8
	4-6 years	6	6
	7-10 years	6	6
<b>Higher Education Institute</b>			
	University	70	70
	College	30	30

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the analytic sample (N = 100). The age distribution is skewed toward early-career cohorts: 36% were aged 18–25, and a further 26%

were 26–35 years old, together accounting for almost two-thirds of respondents. Mid-career (36–45) and mature staff (46–55) comprised 16% and 22%, respectively.

Females represented 44% of the sample and males 56%, yielding a gender split adequate for comparative analyses. Positionally, the majority were entry-level employees (60%), with middle-level staff contributing 28%; senior-level faculty/administrators and executive/co-ordinator roles each constituted only 6%.

Geographically, participants were recruited from five administrative regions of Pakistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) supplied the largest share (28%), followed by Punjab (20%). Sindh and Balochistan each contributed 10%, while Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) accounted for 4%. Organisational tenure was heavily concentrated in the first employment year: 80% reported less than 12 months of service, 8% between 1 and 3 years, and 12% had four or more years of service. Finally, 70% of respondents were employed at public-sector universities and 30% at affiliated degree colleges, reflecting the dual-sector structure of Pakistani higher education. From the objective one, i.e., investigate the relationship between diverse leadership and employee satisfaction, retention, and engagement, we can see the level of employee satisfaction with current leadership.

**Table 2: How would you rate your supervisor's leadership skills? Scale (1-4)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Good	60	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Fine	10	10.0	10.0	70.0
	Poor	30	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The survey opened with an evaluation: “How satisfied are you with the leadership and management in your organisation?” Only 60% of respondents selected the two positive categories (“Very satisfied” 50%; “Satisfied” 10%), whereas 40 % declared themselves “Dissatisfied”. In higher-education contexts where transformational and participatory styles are normative, a two-fifths dissatisfaction rate is conspicuous and signals that the status quo is failing a significant minority. When the same respondents graded their supervisor’s concrete behaviours, the pattern persisted: 30% rated overall leadership skills “Poor,” and another 18% said their contributions are “Rarely” recognised. Taken together, these items establish a baseline of mediocre leadership quality against which any diversity intervention can be measured.

**Table 3: What leadership style do you think your supervisor adopts?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Authoritarian	60	60.0	60.0
	Democratic	30	30.0	30.0
	Servant	10	10.0	10.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

**Table 4: How effective is your supervisor at communicating with their team?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Effective	60	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Somewhat Effective	30	30.0	30.0	90.0
	Not Effective	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

In tables 3 and 4, the respondents were asked to project their satisfaction onto a counterfactual diverse leadership team. Two items capture the affective component of engagement:

“To what extent has a diverse leadership team contributed to increased employee engagement and retention?” 70% agreed (40% strongly, 30% somewhat).

“Has leadership diversity positively impacted your job performance?” 60% answered “Yes, positively”; no respondent claimed an adverse effect.

Statistically, these are single-item measures, but their face validity is high: employees are not merely endorsing a socially desirable statement; they are retrospectively (or prospectively) linking diversity to their own motivation and performance. The absence of counter-arguing responses (zero “Strongly disagree” or “Negative impact”) is particularly telling in a 100-case sample and suggests a ceiling effect in favour of diversity.

**Table 5:**

**How effective do you think your higher education institute is at promoting diversity and inclusion in its leadership and in its policies and practices?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Effective	20	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Somewhat Effective	60	60.0	60.0	80.0
	Not Effective	20	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6:**

**How well do your supervisor support and develop their team members?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Well	50	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Well	30	30.0	30.0	80.0
	Not Well	10	10.0	10.0	90.0
	Do not know	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

**Table 7:*****Do you feel that your supervisor recognizes and values your contributions to the team?***

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Sometimes	42	42.0	42.0	82.0
	Rarely	18	18.0	18.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

**Table 8:*****How satisfied are you with the leadership and management in your organization?***

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Satisfied	50	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Satisfied	10	10.0	10.0	60.0
	Dissatisfied	40	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

From the above tables, moving from the individual to the collective, 40 % agreed that “a diverse leadership team positively impacts the productivity of the university as a whole”. In comparison, the remaining 60 % were neutral. Crucially, not a single respondent disagreed. In social-psychological terms, the valence is uniformly positive or neutral, indicating that diversity is perceived as either beneficial or cost-free. This finding corroborates the business-case narrative reported in multinational samples (Hunt et al., 2018; McKinsey, 2020) and extends it to public-sector universities in Pakistan. SET posits that employees reciprocate resources (fairness, voice, representation) with higher effort and loyalty. When 70 % of respondents already believe that a diverse leadership team would heighten engagement/retention, they are effectively signalling that demographic inclusiveness functions as a relational resource that universities can exchange for discretionary behaviour. The 40% dissatisfaction with current (largely homogeneous) leadership provides the contrast condition: the absence of diversity erodes the exchange balance, lowering satisfaction.

**Table 9:*****In your opinion, what are the most important qualities a good leader should possess?***

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Visionary thinking</b>	Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Effective communication skills</b>	Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Adaptability and flexibility</b>	Yes	70	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Sometimes	30	30.0	30.0	100.0
<b>Integrity and ethics</b>	Yes	20	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Sometimes	80	80.0	80.0	100.0
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>	Yes	70	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Sometimes	30	30.0	30.0	100.0
<b>Empathy and compassion</b>	Yes	60	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Sometimes	40	40.0	40.0	100.0
<b>Decisiveness</b>	Yes	30	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Sometimes	70	70.0	70.0	100.0

In Table 9, respondents were invited to tick every attribute they considered essential; consequently, each item is reported as either “Yes” or “Sometimes” rather than as mutually exclusive choices. Universal endorsement was obtained for only two qualities: every participant (100%) ticked both “Visionary thinking” and “Effective communication skills”, making them the undisputed core competencies for university leadership in this sample. The next cluster, adaptability/flexibility and emotional intelligence, was judged indispensable by 70%, while the remaining 30% felt these traits were “sometimes” needed rather than mandatory.

Integrity and ethics showed the opposite pattern: just one-fifth (20%) regarded them as an ever-present requirement, whereas 80% considered them situation-dependent. This does not imply low importance; instead, respondents may view ethical conduct as contextual rather than as a constant to be observed in daily leader behaviour.

Empathy and compassion divided the sample: 60% “Yes” and 40% “Sometimes”; decisiveness was viewed as consistently necessary by only 30%, with 70% believing it is required only in specific circumstances. Taken together, the rank-order of perceived essentiality is:

1. Vision & communication (tied at 100%),
2. Adaptability & emotional intelligence (70%),
3. Empathy (60%),
4. Integrity (20%),
5. Decisiveness (30%).

Thus, university employees in this study prioritise cognitive-strategic and interpersonal-relational skills over dispositional ethics or quick decision-making when they picture an “ideal” academic leader.

The results of some items were asked, “Would you feel comfortable working under leaders from different cultural, gender, ethnic, or other diverse backgrounds?” Content analysis showed 100 % affirmative responses, many with amplifying comments such as “Diversity brings new ideas” and “We need fresh perspectives in higher education.” While social-desirability bias cannot be ruled out, the unanimity is still noteworthy in a society often portrayed as collectivist and hierarchy-bound. A four-point scale (“Very welcoming” to “Not at all welcoming”) revealed that no respondent selected the extreme positive anchor; 70% chose “Somewhat welcoming,” and 30% chose “Not at all welcoming.” The pattern suggests a two-tier campus climate: individuals are personally open, yet they perceive the institution as only moderately inclusive. This micro–macro gap is common in emerging-economy universities where global norms collide with local traditions (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). When asked, “Indicate your confidence in your university’s ability to recruit and retain a diverse leadership team,” 90 % declared themselves “Confident.” The item serves as a behavioural-intention proxy: employees not only accept diverse leaders but expect the university to deliver them. Such confidence is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for successful diversity initiatives because it reduces resistance and change fatigue (Nishii, 2013).

Employees simultaneously seek belonging and uniqueness. A leadership cadre that is “somewhat diverse” (60% respondent perception) partially satisfies the uniqueness need, but the 30% “not diverse at all” subgroup still triggers in-group/out-group dynamics. Increasing representational diversity would therefore reduce identity threat and enhance comfort, especially for early-career faculty (80% of the sample have <1 year of tenure).

Responses that resonate with objective 3 of the study, which is to identify effective strategies for attracting, retaining, and promoting diverse talent in university leadership.

The first point of discussion is the results from the demand-side evidence gathered from the employees' heads. The respondents selected as many strategies as they wished. The rank-order is unambiguous:

- Providing D&I training specifically for leaders is 80 %
- Expand recruiting to attract diverse candidates is 70 %
- Creating internal leadership-development programmes for under-represented groups is 60 %
- Implementing blind-hiring practices is 30 %
- Offering mentorship/sponsorship for underrepresented employees is 10 %

The first three choices all concern human-capital investment and pipeline development, whereas structural fixes (e.g., blind hiring) and individual sponsorship lag behind. This mirrors findings in Western universities where “grow-your-own” schemes outperform one-off procedural tweaks (Lacerenza et al., 2017). The second point of discussion is the training utilisation gap.

Currently, only 50% of respondents have attended any D&I training provided by their institution, yet 80% recommend it. The 30-percentage-point gap is a ready-made intervention target: supply is failing demand. Moreover, among the 50% who received leadership training, 80% rated it “Valuable” or “Very valuable,” reinforcing the business case for scaling up.

The third point of discussion is Internal vs. external labour markets. The popularity of “create internal leadership-development programmes” (60 %) indicates that employees trust home-grown talent pipelines more than external market searches. Pakistani universities can therefore leverage their own postgraduate pools and junior faculty rather than relying solely on market competition, which often suffers from thin applicant diversity.

The last is the Policy sequencing discussion. A prudent implementation sequence emerges: Phase 1 – Universal D&I training for existing leaders (highest endorsement, lowest cost). Phase 2 – Systematic outreach recruitment (requires HR reform but enjoys 70 % support). Phase 3 – Formal mentorship and sponsorship (currently low uptake but critical for retention). Blind hiring can be piloted in parallel, yet its modest 30 % endorsement suggests it should not be the flagship initiative.

**Table 10: One-Sample Statistics T-test**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>
<b>Age</b>	100	2.24	1.164	.116
<b>Gender</b>	100	1.44	.499	.050
<b>Position</b>	100	1.58	.855	.085
<b>What is your tenure in the organization?</b>	100	1.38	.850	.085
<b>People's Satisfaction with Leadership and Management</b>	0 <sup>a,b</sup>	.	.	.
<b>How would you rate your supervisor's leadership skills? Scale (1-4)</b>	100	2.70	.905	.090
<b>What leadership style do you think your supervisor adopts?</b>	100	1.50	.674	.067
<b>How effective is your supervisor at communicating with their team?</b>	100	1.50	.674	.067
<b>Do you think that a diverse and inclusive leadership team contributes to a more inclusive and supportive environment for students, faculty, and staff?</b>	100	2.82	1.058	.106
<b>How effective do you think your higher education institute is at promoting diversity and inclusion in its leadership and in its policies and practices?</b>	100	2.00	.636	.064
<b>How well does your supervisor support and develop their team members?</b>	100	1.80	.985	.098
<b>Do you feel that your supervisor recognizes and values your contributions to the team?</b>	100	2.02	1.341	.134
<b>How satisfied are you with the leadership and management in your organization?</b>	100	1.90	.948	.095

<b>In your opinion, what are the most important qualities a good leader should possess?</b>	100	1.00	.000 <sup>c</sup>	.000
<b>Visionary thinking</b>	100	1.00	.000 <sup>c</sup>	.000
<b>Effective communication skills</b>	100	1.00	.000 <sup>c</sup>	.000
<b>Integrity and ethics</b>	100	1.80	.402	.040
<b>Adaptability and flexibility</b>	100	1.30	.461	.046
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>	100	1.30	.461	.046
<b>Empathy and compassion</b>	100	1.40	.492	.049
<b>Decisiveness</b>	100	1.70	.461	.046
<b>Have you participated in any diversity and inclusion training, or programs provided by your higher education institute?</b>	100	1.50	.503	.050
<b>If you have received leadership training, how valuable do you think it was for your professional development?</b>	100	2.00	.636	.064
<b>Do you believe that leadership development programs are important for organizations to invest in?</b>	100	2.00	.778	.078
<b>How diverse is the leadership team in your higher education institute?</b>	100	2.50	1.030	.103
<b>How important do you believe diverse and inclusive leadership is for the success of a higher education institute?</b>	100	1.00	.000 <sup>c</sup>	.000

a. t cannot be computed because the sum of case weights is less than or equal to 1.

b. t cannot be computed. There are no valid cases for this analysis because not all case-weights are positive.

c. t cannot be computed because the standard deviation is 0.

**Table 11: ANOVA**

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Do you believe that your higher education institute could do more to promote diversity and inclusion?</b>	Between Groups	.786	1	.786	3.317	.072
	Within Groups	23.214	98	.237		
	Total	24.000	99			
<b>Have you witnessed any instances of discrimination or bias in your higher education institute based on diversity factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion,</b>	Between Groups	2.344	1	2.344	10.608	.002
	Within Groups	21.656	98	.221		
	Total	24.000	99			

or disability?						
<b>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A diverse leadership team is better able to understand and meet the needs of a diverse workforce and customer base."</b>	Between	2.344	1	2.344	4.924	.029
	Groups					
	Within	46.656	98	.476		
	Groups					
	Total	49.000	99			
<b>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Having a diverse leadership team is essential for creating an inclusive work culture."</b>	Between	.786	1	.786	3.317	.072
	Groups					
	Within	23.214	98	.237		
	Groups					
	Total	24.000	99			

The present study set out to examine how employees in Pakistani higher-education institutions perceive the link between leadership diversity and their own satisfaction, retention and engagement; to gauge their openness toward leaders from diverse backgrounds; and to identify concrete strategies for attracting and retaining such leaders. Three sets of findings deserve emphasis.

First, the data reveal a clear “diversity dividend” in employee attitudes. Although only 10% of respondents described their current leadership team as “very diverse”, 70% agreed that a more diverse leadership cadre would boost engagement and retention, and 60% stated that it would enhance their personal job performance. Not a single participant reported an anticipated adverse effect. This unanimous positive valence aligns with Social Exchange Theory: demographic inclusiveness functions as a relational resource that employees reciprocate with higher discretionary effort (Blau, 1964). The 40% dissatisfaction with existing (largely homogeneous) leadership provides the contrast condition; absence of diversity erodes the exchange balance and lowers satisfaction. Longitudinal work is needed, but the cross-sectional pattern is consistent with multinational studies linking inclusive leadership to affective commitment (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018).

Second, employees are not merely tolerant of diverse leaders; they expect them. Every respondent (100 %) self-reported comfort working under leaders from different genders, ethnicities, or cultural backgrounds, and 90 % expressed confidence that their university can recruit and retain such a team. However, institutional welcomeness was rated only “somewhat” by 70% and “not at all” by 30%, revealing a micro–macro gap common in emerging-economy universities, where global inclusion norms collide with local traditions (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Closing this gap through structural inclusion practices is therefore both desired and feasible.

Third, the study offers an employee-driven roadmap for change. When invited to select multiple strategies, respondents prioritised human-capital levers: 80% endorsed mandatory diversity & inclusion training for leaders, 70% recommended expanded outreach and

recruitment, and 60% urged internal leadership-development pipelines for underrepresented groups. Structural fixes such as blind hiring (30 %) or mentorship schemes (10%) received weaker support, suggesting that capacity-building and pipeline expansion should precede procedural redesign. The current 50 % participation rate in D&I training and the 80% “valuable” rating among attendees reinforce the cost-effectiveness of scaling up education before implementing more contentious selection reforms.

Several boundary conditions must be acknowledged. The convenience sample over-represents young, entry-level staff (80% with < 1 year of tenure) and institutions located in KPK and Punjab; elite or rural universities may hold different views. Social-desirability bias may have inflated the unanimity on “comfort with diverse leaders”, while the cross-sectional design precludes causal claims. Future research should link attitudinal data to objective turnover, promotion, and performance metrics, and should test intervention packages in randomised controlled trials.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to quantify how Pakistani university employees perceive the link between leadership diversity and their own satisfaction, retention, and engagement; to measure their openness to leaders from varied backgrounds; and to rank strategies for diversifying leadership pipelines. The data show a robust, positive association: 70% of staff expect higher engagement/retention under a more diverse leadership team, 60% report that such diversity would improve their personal performance, and 100% report comfort with demographically diverse leaders. Crucially, respondents have prioritised concrete actions, leadership training (80%), expanded outreach recruitment (70%), and internal development tracks for underrepresented groups (60%), providing universities with an employee-endorsed roadmap. Implementing these high-consensus initiatives first is likely to narrow the current 40% dissatisfaction gap, strengthen the psychological contract, and ultimately enhance organisational effectiveness in Pakistan’s rapidly expanding higher-education sector.

**Limitations:** There are several limitations, including:

**Generalizability:** The findings of this study may not be generalizable to all universities in Pakistan due to differences in university size, location, and culture.

**Self-report bias:** The data collected in this study relied heavily on self-report measures, which may be subject to response bias and social desirability bias.

**Causation versus correlation:** This study may establish only a correlation between diverse leadership, an inclusive environment, and university performance, but it cannot prove causation.

**Sample size:** The sample size for this study has been limited, which has affected the statistical power of the analysis and limited the generalizability of the findings.

**Time constraint:** The study’s time frame was limited, which affected the depth and breadth of the research.

**Potential confounding variables:** Factors beyond diversity and inclusion can affect organizational performance, such as economic conditions, market competition, and technological advancements.

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## Sketching Gender Dynamics: A Cartoonist's Take on Women's Professional Journey from Boardrooms to Offices in Europe and South Asia

### Abstract

*The professional experiences of women in the Global North and Global South reveal a dynamic interplay of socio-cultural norms, organizational structures, and global forces. While Europe has advanced gender-equality policies, women still struggle to break through leadership barriers. In contrast, women in South Asia navigate deeply rooted societal expectations, limited opportunities, and institutional constraints, making career progression especially challenging. Relying on personal agency, they confront both cultural norms and workplace inequities. This paper offers a comparative analysis of women's careers in Europe and South Asia, examining how cultural, societal, and organizational dynamics shape leadership pathways, gendered obstacles, and diversity initiatives. Using a qualitative approach, it employs four selected cartoons, two European, one Indian, and one Pakistani, as visual lenses within a critical cultural gender studies framework. Findings show persistent inequities in both regions: European women face a glass ceiling, while South Asian women confront dual cultural and professional barriers. The paper argues for transformative organizational cultures, inclusive mentorship, and meaningful diversity beyond compliance.*

**Keywords:** Gender Dynamics, Women in Leadership, Global North, Global South, Workplace Inequality, Cartoon Analysis

### INTRODUCTION

An engulfing story unfolds through the newspaper cartoon sketches as we explore the career paths of the women in boardrooms and offices and compare the landscapes of the Global North and South. This stereotypical story is not only descriptive but also analytical, embedded in the complex web of gender dynamics that professional worlds are based on, structured around the historical realities of life, occupational case studies, and cultural portrayals that appear in newspapers, books, films, and social media. To depict these complexities, the paper assumes the viewpoint of talented cartoonists whose representation clearly illustrates the struggles, successes, and contradictions women have to endure in trying to find their way around the professional arenas. In recent decades, European society has also made significant progress toward gender equality, as women have overcome barriers and even ascended to positions of authority. Women have remained victims of structural barriers that have stalled their advancement to top leadership positions despite regulatory frameworks and diversity efforts. Even now, since the role congruity theory noted by Eagly and Karau (2002) emphasizes that gender stereotypes influence how women are viewed as leaders, it remains true that gender stereotypes can affect women's potential in leadership. Kanter's

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(1977) idea of the glass ceiling also describes the invisible obstacles that prevent women from reaching the top of organizational structures. This situation in Europe preconditions the interpretation of the opposition to South Asia. South Asia, in its turn, has a different, but equally interesting canvas. In this case, the career lines are shaped by powerful cultural practices, social norms, and unequal access to educational facilities and economic resources. Females have to cope with the demands of many roles to negotiate with deep-rooted patriarchal values.

Kabeer (2005) and Afshar (1998) identify the importance of cultural norms and the necessity of empowerment structures to counterbalance structural inequalities. These views are used in the study to understand how women in South Asia are reinventing workplace stories through resilience and agency. This study situates these regional understandings within the global debate on gender equality. Misra and Murray-Close (2014) illustrate how women's labor force participation in Europe has transformed due to policy reforms and social change, and the European Union's Gender Equality Strategy 2020 is an example of institutional commitment (European Commission, 2020).

The World Bank (2021) provides gender-specific reports that illuminate the economic and legal obstacles faced by South Asian women, placing the need for systemic change in perspective. This decision to put cartoons as a prism is not a coincidence. Visual narratives are a compelling, available, and multidimensional means of analyzing complicated gender matters. Pratt and Woolley (2007) maintain that cartoons are the right tool for conveying social stories and thus can be used to uncover the nuances of the situations experienced by professional women. It will be compatible with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5), which focus on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls (United Nations, 2015). Moreover, intersectionality theory frames this study as women not only have a professional life based on gender but also by race, class, and other identity constructs and markers (Crenshaw, 1989). The research incorporates the results of corporate diversity studies (McKinsey & Company, 2020; Catalyst, 2019) and examines the business logic of gender inclusion and its association with organizational performance.

This study also brings the past, present, and future together by examining how the Fourth Industrial Revolution is transforming the world of work, requiring new skills and diverse organizational designs (World Economic Forum, 2018). The synthesis of these insights results in the introduction being a logical development of the contextualization of gender dynamics to the justification of the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions made by this study.

### ***Problem Statement***

This study aims to shed light on the complexities of gender dynamics by examining the distinctions, similarities, and dynamic nature of women's experiences in the world of work, particularly in Europe and South Asia. This study was added to the broader gender equality debate to inform policy and create a more inclusive, equal professional landscape that is more accommodating to women across diverse cultural and geographical settings.

### Research Objectives

- To investigate coverage of women's professional experiences in chosen cartoons of the Global North and the Global South, attention should be paid to gender roles and workplace issues, as well as leadership ambitions.
- To examine cultural, social, and organizational aspects that may determine the career path of women based on the chosen visual stories.
- To find out similarities and differences in the description of women's struggles and agency in professional areas, to give some insights into global gender dynamics.

### Research Questions

1. What is the representation of female professional paths, especially female roles, work issues, and leadership goals in chosen cartoons of the Global North and Global South?
2. What cultural, social, and structural issues that affect the career path of women are brought out in these visual images?
3. How do the struggles of women and their agency differ in the portrayal of women in different cultural contexts, using chosen cartoons?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Gender Dynamics in European Workplaces*

Eagly and Karau's (2002) project is an important contribution, as it highlights the effects of gender stereotypes on perceptions of leadership. By pointing out the challenges women can encounter in pursuing leadership roles, this theory highlights how cultural requirements can shape career choices. A study by Misra and Murray-Close (2014) examined the changing nature of women's roles in the workforce in Europe. In their study, they explore the various factors that influence women's career choices. These dimensions examine the roles that organizational policies and social movements play in advancing gender equality. The European Union Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 provides a detailed guideline for understanding current activities and challenges in establishing gender equality in European workplaces. This course of action demonstrates a desire to address systemic issues (European Commission, 2020). Kabeer (2005) and Afshar (1998) provide essential details on gender roles in South Asian societies. These two contributions are significant. These studies provide insight into the challenges and opportunities that women face in balancing the needs of traditional society with the demands of their professional lives.

The World Bank's publications on gender-related challenges in South Asian countries aid in developing a contextual understanding of the economic and social factors shaping women's experiences in the workforce. Such reports also indicate the need to adopt a subtle strategy to eliminate regional differences (World Bank, 2021). The study uses an intersectionality approach (Crenshaw, 1989) to address the complexity of women's experiences in professional environments. It is through this theoretical lens that a deeper investigation can be carried out, considering the interactions among factors such as racial and ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and gender, among others, to determine the complexities of a person's professional journey. A theoretical basis for the adoption of visual narratives to explain the intersectionality and diverse experiences of women in European workplaces is provided by

Czerwiec et al. (2015), who examined the opportunities of graphic storytelling for articulating complex social issues. The paper acknowledges that the work environment is evolving and that gender diversity is significant in handling technological shocks. This follows the findings of the World Economic Forum (2018). Studies by McKinsey and Company (2020) and Catalyst (2019) reveal a connection between financial performance and gender diversity in leadership positions. This indicates that the financial value of developing inclusive workplace cultures is high.

Discussion about their study concerning the editorial cartoons, which discussed the World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1999, Patricia and Stanley (1998) stated that their results have shown that the cartoonists, more concerned with the human rights situation in China and the management of this conference, have paid little attention to the actual objectives and problems of the conference. When discussing the female participants of the conference as compared to the Chinese male elite of power, they were mostly depicted as conservative and dull. They claimed that the assembly's goals and achievements were deliberately disregarded and that the female participants were downplayed to a state of helplessness and ineffectiveness. Through which, the political cartoonists aided the symbolic destruction of women.

### ***Gender Dynamics in South Asian Workplaces***

The complex interplay among cultural practices, social expectations, and the professional lives of women has been brought to light through scholarly inquiries into gender dynamics in South Asian workplaces. In this regard, Kabeer (2005) and Afshar (1998) are worth noting, as they provide valuable insights into the complexity of gender roles in South Asian countries. The study by Kabeer explores the challenges and solutions that women face in balancing the demands of tradition with their career goals, providing insight into the multifaceted determinants shaping women's careers. The study that Afshar has gone to investigate fluid identities of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran would offer a better insight into how strategic directions are determined in the given socio-cultural context of a particular country.

The contextual interpretation of gender dynamics in South Asia, as well as the World Bank's publications on Women, Business, and the Law (2021), discuss the economic and social factors that affect women's experiences in the labor market. Offering illumination on the legislative and regulatory procedures that affect the professional paths of women in South Asian nations, the papers provide an empirical basis for research on the barriers women experience in these nations. The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), is critical for thinking about how the issues of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status intersect with those of gender. This knowledge is required to understand the complex issues women face in their everyday careers. The introduction of cartoonists affected by feminist comics is a new strategy that can be employed to explore gender relationships inwardly. South Asian workplaces attempt to show the diversity and complexity of women's careers in South Asia, with the assistance of artists such as Alison Bechdel and Marjane Satrapi. This has been achieved through an inspiration from their works. The complex interaction between cultural expectations and professional aspirations is shown through the power of graphic

storytelling (Czerwiec et al., 2015). This provides new insight into the lives of women in the area.

### ***Intersectionality and the Global Context***

Kimberlé Crenshaw's work in the late 1980s was an influential contribution to the theory of intersectionality, a critical concept first discussed within the framework of feminist studies. The phrase is defined by Crenshaw (1989) as the linkage among social categorizations such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, and how a social categorization affects and is compounded by other social categorizations, thereby shaping the experiences and possibilities of individuals. Intersectionality is a powerful analytical tool and can be applied globally to gain insight into the multiple, complex issues of oppression and privilege that many people face. The study of the intersectionality of gender and race is especially pertinent when applied to the global community since it unveils the numerous instances in which people, and especially women, are discriminated against by the hands of an institutionalized system.

Collins (2000) illuminates that black women can face challenges distinct from those faced by white women or black men. This understanding is necessary to formulate policies and measures that account for the unique needs of people across the world's vast population. To make the matter even worse, the intersectionality lens is not limited to gender and race but also other social categories like class and sexuality. Economic inequalities are greatly enhanced in a globalized setting, leading to diverse consequences on people based on their socio-economic status. hooks (2000) argues that interrelations between class and race can contribute to the extent of inequalities already present, with marginalized groups bearing the brunt of globalization consequences. This highlights the importance of considering multiple axes of identity to achieve a comprehensive approach to addressing the problems that globalization presents to different communities. The term intersectionality implies different dimensions, and sexual orientation is one of them. This aspect illuminates the specific issues that individuals of various sexual orientations face in several different situations around the world.

Crenshaw (2015) claims that LGBT rights, in particular, are affected by a range of factors, including cultural, legal, and socio-economic ones, which interrelate to determine the experiences of people within the broader global context. In order to foster inclusivity and advocate for the rights of individuals with diverse sexual orientations on an international level, it is crucial to understand these intersections. Intersectionality is particularly relevant to migration and displacement within the global community. Several types of discrimination, that is, discrimination associated with such aspects as race, gender, or socioeconomic status, often intersect with each other in the lives of immigrants and refugees.

Anthias (2002) discusses the complexity of experiences that migrating women face and points out how these experiences are affected by their gender and immigrant status. The need to research these crossovers is to ensure that the formulation of immigration laws and support systems is competent enough to meet the diverse needs of the people who have been displaced.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Deborah Cameron (1958), a prominent British linguist, has addressed the issue of equal opportunities for women in the context of language and communication. In her work, "Verbal Hygiene for Women: Linguistics Misapplied," she examines communication training aimed at women as an example of linguistics applied to address the problems women experience in certain linguistic domains, with the goal of achieving equal opportunities (1994). She has also critiqued the idea that men and women speak differently because their minds work differently, highlighting the danger of generalizing about the impact of gender on language. Cameron (1994), such programs appear under a variety of headings, including 'assertiveness', 'management', 'leadership', and 'personal effectiveness', as well as simply 'communication'; and while they may target both sexes as trainees, there is a tendency for them to target women ('leadership skills for women', 'women in management', 'women's assertiveness'), on the assumption that women have distinctive, and perhaps more pressing, training needs'. Then it discusses the issue of premature speculation in language and gender studies, especially regarding contrasts between men and women.

Given the significant investment of time, money, and personal involvement, she recommends that applied linguists, who work in language education and learning, have the knack for further developing these communication-preparation programs. Incorporating their mastery could prompt more productive improvements in this field. Moreover, Cameron proposes that issues connected to 'verbal hygiene for women' bring up more extensive issues about what comprises successful communication and how cultural, social, and political variables impact language learning and use. She argues that language interpreters should consider how best to utilize their aptitude in practice. Cameron's work serves as an indication of her criticism of the connection between language and communication training and of the quest to achieve equal opportunities for women. The author in *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (1992) gives examples from Ancient Greece and from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell to illustrate how powerful language can be in influencing social relations, as well as how it can obscure or distort the truth through persuasive speech.

The text addresses the issue of feminists struggling against the use of language as a weapon of oppression and the silence of the subordinates, and that the language does not necessarily serve the interests of the powerful and oppressive. Instead, it should be taken by the sidelined groups. She gives examples of feminist action in the past, such as the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, when women protested restrictions on their freedom of expression. There is also a discussion of John Stuart Mill opposing the use of the gender-neutral pronoun he and his advocacy of the use of gender-neutral language, which does not discount the work done by modernist female authors like Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and others, in developing a literary language that can address the experiences of women. Language is considered by feminists an important tool in the struggle for equality and liberation, rather than a marginal issue.

'Politics of Variation: Sex Differences in Language', a different article (1992) In her analysis of the study of sex differences in language use, Deborah Cameron points out that the field is far from a comprehensive collection of research results and that it is primarily focused on two

issues: addressing the sexism that exists in semantic science and highlighting the political implications of sex differences. A detailed examination of sex differences inherently communicates a political dimension because of its role in shaping cultural norms. Research on sex differences generally aims to validate feminine mediocrity and provides scientific evidence to support the notion that women are intellectually weaker than men. This prejudice has been employed as a tactic to uphold women's subjugation; examples include attributing to women's perceived lower levels of aggression as a barrier to effective leadership or their alleged incapacity to become engineers due to their lack of spatial capacity. Then, she continues (1992, p. 37): 'But this is to allow the opponent to set the terms for debate, conceding an important point of contention and accepting presumptions that feminists might want to question (such as the idea that women should only be treated equally to the extent that they resemble men). She is also perplexed by why researchers focus more on examining gender differences than on discussing similarities. Although 'sex similarity' is a thing, she wonders why it is not explored more. To overcome this type of sexism, Cameron implies paying close attention to scientific discoveries. As an example, studies have disputed the claim that women are naturally weaker than men and have shown that they are effective in certain qualities, such as stamina and hardiness. However, criticizing biased study results may not be the solution, as it is important to discuss why scientists draw so much serious attention to sex differences and interpret their results in a sexist way.

In their attention to sex differences, there are two reasons why women linguists might be interested in language: the first is to uncover an acceptable female language capable of differentiating among mental or cultural differences, and the second is to unveil the power relations in language that perpetuate gender inequality. Their arrangement may appear confusing at times, but these goals may align with feminist linguistics. Cameron's work shows her keen interest in the correlation between the quest for equal opportunities for women and language and communication abilities. Using Deborah Cameron's writings as a source of inspiration, this study employs a comparative analytical approach based on critical cultural gender studies. We will examine how social, psychological, and cultural meanings are created, negotiated, and contested in the cartoonist's surroundings using this framework. Through the lens of a cartoonist's work, this study employs a qualitative methodology to explore and understand the career paths taken by women in Europe and South Asia, from boardrooms to offices. Qualitative methods are best suited to capturing the richness and complexity of human experiences, providing context and depth to the various aspects of gender dynamics in the workplace.

Ten cartoons of Liza Donnelly from America, India, and Pakistan were chosen as examples using random sampling procedures. Four cartoons were created by skilled cartoonists with experience in visually telling stories about gender dynamics or other related topics; two were from Europe, one from India, and one from Pakistan. The primary source of data for this study was cartoonist illustrations that depicted different aspects of women's career paths. These images depict women in a range of occupations and circumstances, often including views from boardrooms, offices, and other professional settings. Deborah Cameron's method was used to analyze the cartoonists' images.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

To identify recurrent themes, patterns, and depictions of women's experiences in professional contexts, the cartoonist's images were subjected to content analysis using Deborah Cameron's approach. In this approach, the researcher used Lexical Choices, Syntactic Structures, Phonological Features, Speech Acts, Conversational Implicature, Meaning Construction, and Semantic Fields.

American cartoonist Liza Donnelly is well-known for her contributions to *The New Yorker*. In addition to being a well-known public speaker, she is the resident cartoonist for CBC News and the author of over fifteen books, including *Funny Ladies: The New Yorker's Greatest Women Cartoonists and Their Cartoons* and *Women on Men*. She has been drawing political and cultural cartoons for over thirty years, and she currently writes columns and cartoons for *Forbes.com* and *Harvard Business Review*, focusing on women's rights and politics. Working with *New York Times* writer Nicholas Kristoff, she produced an original cartoon for his *Times* newsletter. She drew illustrations to support the PBS program about the world's mistreatment of women that was based on Kristoff's book.

Liza's depiction of the acceptability of women in the business sphere includes the following: this cartoon depicts the injustice many women face when applying for jobs. Some women may experience inequity in their workplaces. As an illustration (fig. 1) (2018), women are not paid the same amount as men for performing the same work. In this figure, we see a woman being interviewed by a man, and she asks him what the rationale is for hiring her. She says, "Are you hiring me because I am cheap, I am qualified, or I am cheap and qualified?" (Donnelly, 2022).



**Figure 1: Man, Interview Woman**

From Fig. 1, **Graphic Analysis:** The female candidate is portrayed as a well-groomed, educated middle-class woman, reflecting a status quite similar to that of her interviewer.

**Lexical Choices:** The term "cheap" refers to the candidate's cost-effectiveness, while "qualified" highlights their expertise.

**Syntactic Structures:** Repeating "I am cheap, I am qualified" Emphasizes the contrast. Additionally, "or" creates an apparent disjunction that defines the possibilities.

**Phonological Features:** The speaker's repeated use of "cheap" and the increasing tone of "qualified" may indicate skepticism or inquiry, giving nuance to the issue.

**Speech Acts:** The statement asks about the motive behind the employment decision.

**Conversational Implicature:** The speaker implies that getting hired solely on cost, solely on qualifications, or on both may be concerning.

**Meaning Construction:** By juxtaposing "cheap" and "qualified," the hiring decision may be ambiguous.

**Semantic Fields:** The statement focuses on employment, qualifications, and cost. The terms "cheap" and "qualified" refer to finances and skills, respectively.

The employment of women in the workforce has increased due to educational advancements, yet the pay disparity remains a persistent problem. Research by the European Commission (2022) states that the gender pay gap in the EU was 12.7% in 2021 and has not changed in the past ten years. This indicates that women make 13.1 percent less an hour on average than men do. It goes on to say that, in the European Union (EU) and the euro region in 2022, women's gross hourly wages were, on average, 12.7% and 13.2% lower than men's, respectively. From -0.7% in Luxembourg to 21.3% in Estonia, the gender wage gap ranged from 22.0 percentage points across EU members. Despite having to compete with males for jobs based on age, education, experience, and other factors, women nonetheless fall prey to the Glass Ceiling. Less than 10% of CEOs of leading corporations are women due to pay disparities and promotion risks stemming from their hierarchical position.

Then we see that there are certain traditionally conceived physical traits that women are expected to possess, to excel in the job market, namely height, posture, and depth of voice, which Balcon (2021) criticizes Cameron (1992) condemns when she refutes Deborah Tannen's (1990) viewpoint of guiding women to replicate male discourse while conversing with men, in a professional environment. Liza also felt that women are deprived of opportunities and experiences that are crucial to their personal and professional development, which males can take for granted. She highlighted this issue through (Fig. 2) in which a girl is giving an audition to a panel of male judges who are telling her, "We absolutely love your pitch, but we want all women to be changed to men".



**Figure 2: The New Hollywood: Mad Man**

**Graphic Analysis:** The image shows men reclining on chairs with their legs spread out, having coffee etc. One of them has arms folded, and the other is sitting in a casual posture, speaking to an anxious-looking young girl standing in a corner with some paper- seemingly a script in her hand.

**Lexical Choices:** The sentence replaces "women" with "men," indicating a gender transition. The phrase "absolutely love," though seemingly positive, is used sarcastically or ironically, implying that the panel appreciates the pitch only after erasing women from the narrative. This ironic twist highlights gender bias and reinforces the expectation that male-centered narratives are preferred. Moving from "women" to "men" shifts the pitch's focus away from women and toward males, underlining the exclusionary undertone.

**Syntactic Structures:** The syntactic structure is consistent, with the sole change being the replacement of "women" with "men." Syntactic symmetry and coherence are preserved throughout the sentence.

**Phonological Features:** The speaker's passion, conveyed through "absolutely love," determines tone and intonation, which may remain intact. However, the speaker's tone may reflect an emphasis shift due to gender reference.

**Speech Acts:** The statement conveys approval and interest. As a positive response to the pitch with the gender reference adjustment, it can be considered an endorsement.

**Conversational Implicature:** Switching from "women" to "men" conveys a specific choice or requirement, altering the conversational implicature. The speaker prefers men as the intended audience, changing the pitch's underlying assumptions and expectations.

**Meaning Construction:** The gender reference is changed from "women" to "men." This adjustment implies a preference for men while preserving pitch acceptance.

**Semantic Fields:** The statement includes approval, enthusiasm, and audience specification—the semantic field shifts towards male-audience considerations with the change in gender reference. Positive semantics emphasize approval and satisfaction with pitch.

Maher (2019), founder of Kerning the Gap, in her study, also urged 21st-century society to abandon old-fashioned stereotypes and eradicate outdated notions that certain traits are gender-specific, as they are driven solely by societal expectations rather than genetics. From Fig. 2, we can conclude that any form of character demoralization, injury, or stereotyping intended against a person, regardless of gender, is morally repulsive and runs counter to the values of democracy and ethical conduct. This would be the case regardless of the person's sex. Not only does engaging in such actions undermine the values of a just and fair society, but it also undermines the basic foundation of a political system that can function properly. The failing goes beyond politics to community attitudes. A patriarchal mindset is still evident, and derogatory comments about women in politics are rife on social media (Venkiteswaran, 2021).

The concept of bringing down a politician, whether a woman politician or any politician for that matter, through character assassination is a way of approaching politics that is both risky and unethical. Venkiteswaran (2021) stated that an Amnesty International report (Troll Patrol India: Exposing Online Abuse Faced by Women Politicians in India. 2020) published last year showed the shocking scale of abuse female politicians in India face on Twitter. Sexist remarks are regularly directed at women who contest elections, whether about their appearance, clothing, or experience. Banerjee was likewise subjected to gendered slurs during the most recent campaign.

Constructive discussion, collaborative effort, and the pursuit of common goals are the three pillars on which genuine societal development is built. The use of character assassination not only stifles the potential for positive change but also erodes citizens' confidence and faith in their elected leaders. To cultivate a healthy political environment that benefits society as a whole, it is essential to place strong emphasis on policies, ideas, and genuine debate (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Assassination**

***“The easiest way to bring a woman politician down is not to run faster than her, but to assassinate her character.”***

**Lexical Choices:** The statement employs a rich use of language in pointing out how a woman politician can be sabotaged. The word "assassinate" means a calculated and fatal assault on her personality. The term, bring a woman politician down highlights the adverse effects of character assassination.

**Syntactic Structures:** The syntactic structure is uncomplicated, with a subject-verb-object pattern. It is explicit that the intention to weaken a woman politician is proposed. The importance of character assassination is stressed in its convenience.

**Features of phonetics:** To underline the seriousness of the proposed plan, it is possible to deliver the sentence in a monotonous and systematic voice. Emphasis made on words such as assassinate and character can express the seriousness of the intended action and deliberate its purpose.

**Speech Acts:** The statement gives an objective or practice in the form of a sentence. It proposes destroying a lady politician through her character. The speaker is noticing one of the political weak points and tools.

**Conversational Implicature:** This means that women politicians put political methods to the test. An easy and possible method of bringing down a woman politician is through character assassination. This is politically critical through the use of words.

**Construction of meaning:** The metaphor of assassinating is applied to a female politician in the sentence where it is used. The term means that women politicians will be exposed to character attacks, with character assassination being a strong political strategy.

**Semantic Fields:** These areas are concerned with politics, strategy, and gender forces. The comment in political maneuvering is defined by the word " character assassination, and the mention of a female politician provides gender. General semantics presents a negative image of political practices against women in politics.

Figure 3 of the presence of predators in the workplace is a serious problem that not only disrupts the professional atmosphere but also causes a lot of damage to the mental state of persons, published by Pakistan Dawn. This is a serious problem that warrants attention. Workplace predators often create a toxic environment, which is often characterized by abusive behavior, manipulation, and exploitation. The effects of this environment may be lasting on the mental health of the people who are victims of such an environment. The people who exist within the environment where they feel constantly scared of being harassed, bullied, or mistreated in any other way can feel even more stressed, anxious, and even depressed.

The victims might find it hard to focus on their jobs, which could lead to low productivity and overall reduced job satisfaction. The stress of mental calmness that predators at the workplace may trigger may not only be limited to the work environment, but also spill over to the personal lives of people as they strive to adjust to the psychological damage that the

abusive environment may cause them. The effects of predatory behavior at the workplace sometimes have such far-reaching consequences in the lives of some individuals that they are long-term and harmful both in their personal lives and their work lives. That is what happens in the case of specific individuals.

The impact of the trauma may be long-lasting on individuals who have gone through continuous perspectives of abuse, resulting in the individual's self-esteem, self-confidence, and their established relationships with others. The injuries that predators leave at the workplace may harm both the career and the individual's development. The reasons are that the victims can develop trust problems and phobias against the authority. The adverse effect may extend beyond the immediate victims, affecting the company's culture and morale. To counterbalance the adverse impact workplace predator have on the mental health and well-being of their employees, organizations must prioritize creating a healthy and supportive working environment, enacting strict anti-harassment policies, and promoting a culture of respect and empathy (Fig. 4).



**Figure 4: Predators in the workplace**

***Predators in the workplace destroyed their mental peace and, for some, led to permanent adverse effects on their personal and professional lives.***

**Lexical Choices:** The statement uses strong, emotive language to express the impact of workplace predators on individuals. The adjectives "destroyed," "mental peace," "permanent adverse effects and personal and professional lives" convey the severity and long-term effects of the negative experiences recounted.

**Syntactic Structures:** The structure includes a primary and a subordinate sentence. The primary clause, "Predators in the workplace destroyed their mental peace," is followed by

"and for some, led to permanent adverse effects on their personal and professional lives." This structure allows for a complex presentation of cause and effect.

**Phonological Features:** The sentence can be given with a tone that conveys the gravity of the situation. The focus on "destroyed," "permanent adverse effects," and "personal and professional lives" emphasizes workplace predators' terrible impact. The tone may show sympathy for those afflicted.

**Speech Acts:** The statement presents facts on the negative impact of workplace predators. Instead of directing action, it explains a situation and its effects. The speaker notes the harm of workplace predatory behavior.

**Conversational Implicature:** Recognizing the significant influence of workplace predators on individuals. It entails an understanding that such events go beyond discomfort and impact mental health and life trajectory.

**Meaning Construction:** Vivid descriptions of workplace predators' harmful influence create meaning. Strong language and a clear cause-and-effect link create a dramatic story by emphasizing the severity and lasting effects of the recounted occurrences.

**Semantic Fields:** Includes workplace dynamics, psychological well-being, and personal/professional aspects of individuals' lives. The phrase "workplace predators" refers to occupational surroundings, whereas "mental peace" and its effects on "personal and professional lives" encompass psychological and holistic life experiences.

### **Comparative Analysis**

The South Asian region stands out for the wide range of cultural, social, and economic conditions. Typically, women's professional paths are strongly shaped by prevailing gender roles and cultural demands. In countries like India and Pakistan, social conventions might demand more of the roles women play within the family, which could influence their career paths. Despite the rise in the number of women entering the labor force in South Asian countries, there are still issues to be addressed, including limited access to education and employment opportunities. Compared with developed countries, the percentage of women in leadership positions, including those in boardrooms, is usually lower in countries often described as underdeveloped.

Legal and policy systems regarding gender equality across European nations are not homogeneous. Rules that motivate women to join the workforce have been adopted, but the extent to which they are applied may vary. South Asian female employees may have to face numerous problems, such as gender-based discrimination, limited access to education and health services, and social expectations. Lathika Subhas, an Indian politician, believes that women workers in major political parties in India are not lacking; they are sidelined and not given party tickets to run in elections. Subhash claims she had asked women in Kerala for at least 20 percent representation among the candidates. We had at least hoped for a female candidate in each district. However, the women heads who used to work with the party have been completely overlooked, complained Subhash (Venkiteswaran, 2021).

There are many different countries in Europe, each with its unique cultural standards. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) observes that several European Nations have made substantial progress in fostering gender equality and challenging traditional gender norms in the workplace. However, with 67.9 out of 100 points, the EU still has a long way to go toward gender equality. In many European countries, the percentage of women participating in the labor force is relatively high. A significant contributor to this is the existence of policies that encourage work-life balance, parental leave, and flexible working arrangements.

Countries in Europe, notably those in Scandinavia, have made strides in increasing the number of women holding leadership roles, including in corporate boardrooms. The implementation of quotas and other initiatives has addressed gender inequality. The European Union (EU) directives that promote gender equality are frequently adopted by EU member states to combat gender-based discrimination and advance equal opportunities in the workplace. Several different policies and regulations have been put into place. According to the 2023 Report on Gender Equality in the EU, although progress has been made, there are still difficulties that require attention. These challenges include the gender pay gap and the underrepresentation of women in particular industries and leadership roles.

Professional consequences of harassment for women include decreased job satisfaction; withdrawal from the Organization (i.e., distancing oneself from the work physically or mentally without quitting, or having thoughts or intentions of leaving the company), decreased organizational commitment (i.e., feeling angry or disillusioned with the company), increased job stress, and decreased performance or productivity in South Asia as well as European region (NASEM, 2018).

When more women are subjected to psychological harassment in a given setting, they are more likely to consider leaving. In some cases, they leave as a direct result of the nuisance they have experienced. The targets are subjected to a greater number of negative impacts and repercussions in proportion to the perpetrator's level of influence over them. The first findings of the research indicate that when women are subjected to psychological harassment in conjunction with other forms of harassment.

Throughout this research, the pervasive implications of intersectionality have been brought to light. These influences extend beyond society and individual identity to the realms of labor, employment, and leadership. By the intersectionality theory, the current research has shed light on how oppressive institutions, such as racism and sexism, are intertwined with one another and cannot be investigated in isolation from one another (Phoenix, 2006; Veenstra, 2013).

In general, the themes identified in this research are interconnected and overlap, indicating a relational interplay across varying degrees of diversity (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). Crenshaw (1989) argues that women experience a high degree of complexity in their lives and that there is no universally applicable form of feminism. She also states that there are many different types of feminism. This is because their male colleagues and bosses often exhibit behavior

that fosters exclusion, such as passive listening, indifference, and alienation, to the extent of expecting them to behave and speak like men.

According to the findings of this study, women in Europe are not only subjected to subtle and difficult-to-prove forms of racism and sexism, but they are also subjected to complicated and refined forms of these attitudes. According to Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008), who suggest that women are likely to face workplace discrimination, this also needs to be taken into account. In addition, when considering the concept of intersectionality among women in leadership roles, Porter and Sweetman (2005) argue that these women are likely to face significantly more obstacles and prejudice than men in leadership positions. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) point out that women are more likely to experience feelings of isolation when they lack mentors or a support network. Furthermore, they are less likely to obtain the assistance they might require when confronted with extreme obstacles in leadership roles, due to their gender and ethnicity. Black Caribbean women believe that they are required to put in more effort than their White counterparts do to achieve top positions (Kumra & Manfredi, 2012).

Recent studies have shown that women from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi regions have been subjected to derogatory comments regarding their performance while they are at work. (Aleena, 2021) While the suffering of Pakistan's women is anguishing, this extreme inequity in the world's fifth most populous nation should concern moralists as well as foreign policy realists for the simple reason that greater inclusion and equality of women make the world more peaceful for all. Although Venkiteswaran's (2021) study focuses on India, it sheds light on broader South Asian trends.

India ranks 140 out of 156 countries in terms of gender equality, and it is the third-worst performer in South Asia, ahead of only Pakistan and Afghanistan. Based on the findings presented here, it appears that South Asian women are more likely to receive lower salary packages and pay raises from organizations and companies, which are likely to affect their advancement in their professional careers. It has also been demonstrated by this research that, even though South Asian women are enrolling in higher education at a faster rate than in the past, the assumption is that they are incompetent and lack assertiveness. Based on this information, it appears that many of these women are not even being given the chance to enter leadership roles within the organization. Despite these challenges, these women did not let them prevent them from entering the workforce; in fact, they utilized a variety of techniques and resources to advance in their careers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Women in South Asia continue to face a range of complex challenges in their pursuit of jobs and leadership roles. These women attempt to overcome these challenges by utilizing their distinctive abilities and asserting their agency. According to the findings of our qualitative research, European and South Asian women equally continue to confront a wide variety of obstacles in the workplace, even though there are rules and regulations in place to prevent discrimination. It seems to imply that merely complying with the law is insufficient to address the complex problems and difficulties associated with intersectionality. There are

additional aspects that take place both within and outside the workplace that affect the careers of European and South Asian women. These factors include a lack of mentors, constructive action, and challenges relating to culture and familial situations. These women, on the other hand, have not been deterred from achieving success in their careers by the hurdles they have faced; instead, they have proven they have overcome them. A few of these women advanced in their careers by drawing on the positive energy associated with their culture, faith, and gender. However, because there are significant gaps not only in employment and leadership but also in unemployment, organizations' diversity policies need to be further refined to ensure disadvantaged women have equal and inclusive opportunities in the workplace. It is essential to take into account the roles of family, religion, and ethnicity as dimensions that families and men may need to reform to facilitate the successful development of women in leadership positions. This is in addition to holding the organization and the government accountable for their actions.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results of this research have shed light on the multifaceted nature of the problems and obstacles that South Asian women in South Asian heritage face when seeking jobs and leadership roles. Even though organizations have established laws and regulations, South Asian women who are considered members of a gender minority by the male-dominated society continue to experience discrimination in the workplace that is indirect and discreet, most of the time. However, there are occasions when women notice this bias quite glaringly and loudly. In light of this, it appears that organizations should place a higher priority on the goals and indicators related to diversity. The results of this study demonstrate that women who work for companies that actively promote diversity have a significantly higher chance of attaining higher levels of professional advancement. For instance, there are South Asian women who have stood their ground in the face of discrimination at work. A few of these women have taken the companies they worked for to the industrial tribunal, based on the fact that they have a compelling case against them. Indeed, these findings may be of assistance to other South Asian women and researchers interested in understanding the problems and difficulties these women experience as they advance in their careers and how they might address these concerns. Organizations need to encourage diversity in leadership by considering candidates based on their qualifications, skills, and potential rather than gender. Businesses can take an active approach to diversity by establishing strategic networks to mentor, monitor, and advise both men and women in their professional lives. They must encourage leaders to exhibit behaviors that foster inclusion, such as active listening, empathy, and collaboration. These networks should preferably be led by both male and female role models who share the subjects' professional background. The provision of diversity training programs, particularly at the board level, may be of assistance in lowering unfavorable attitudes towards women who are members of discriminatory groups, especially South Asian women. In addition, the government and officials of European companies and organizations need to not only recognize and promote talented women within their organizations but also actively promote dynamic policies and practices that ensure fair employment and equal opportunities for all employees, notably women as managers and mentors.

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