



EDUCATE A WOMAN, EMPOWER A NATION: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN WOMEN'S SOCIOECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract

Education is widely acknowledged as a transformative tool for women's empowerment and national development. In Afghanistan, access to higher education for women remains limited due to socio-cultural, economic, and political constraints. This study aimed to explore the role of education in advancing the socioeconomic status of Afghan women, particularly those enrolled at the Vision Higher Education and Research Institute, which serves female students across various faculties, including medicine, computer science, economics, arts, and journalism. Using a structured questionnaire distributed via WhatsApp, email, Facebook, and the institute's online portal, responses were collected from 200 participants aged between 20 and 30. The survey focused on motivations for pursuing higher education, family support, challenges faced, and the influence of digital learning. Results indicated strong motivation among women for career advancement and financial independence, with significant family support reported. However, barriers such as cultural expectations and limited access to technology persist. The findings underscore the importance of supportive environments and digital platforms in enhancing educational access and impact. In conclusion, education plays a vital role in empowering Afghan women socially and economically. Comprehensive support and innovative educational solutions are essential to overcoming existing challenges and fostering gender equality.

Keywords: Women's education, Empowerment, Higher education, Afghanistan, Socioeconomic development

INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognized as a critical catalyst for societal development and transformation, particularly in advancing the socioeconomic status of women. The empowerment of women through education is not merely a personal gain but a fundamental driver of national progress and sustainable development. Educating women equips them with knowledge, skills, and agency that enable participation in the labor force, decision-making processes, and social reforms, thereby fostering inclusive growth and equality (Ahmed, 2017; Bayeh, 2016). As such, the role of education in women's empowerment is pivotal in shaping resilient and prosperous nations.

In many developing countries, women's access to education has been historically limited due to cultural, economic, and political barriers. However, recent research highlights the transformative power of higher education in improving women's agency and labor force participation, leading to broader socioeconomic benefits (Ahmed & Hyndman-Rizk, 2020; Khaliq et al., 2023). Education not only enhances women's economic prospects but also

contributes to their social empowerment by fostering critical thinking, self-confidence, and leadership skills (Stromquist, 2015; Sundaram, Sekar, & Subburaj, 2014). Moreover, the integration of digital technologies and e-learning platforms presents new opportunities to overcome traditional barriers, especially in regions affected by conflict and gender discrimination, such as Afghanistan (Hakimi et al., 2024; Shaikhzada et al., 2025).

The correlation between women's education and national development is well-documented. Educated women are more likely to participate actively in the workforce, promote healthier families, and contribute to economic growth and social cohesion (Alkanchi et al., 2024; Ismaila, 2022). The empowerment of women through education aligns with global development agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize gender equality and inclusive education as foundational to achieving sustainable progress (Bayeh, 2016; Jaysawal & Saha, 2022).

Despite these benefits, challenges persist, such as socio-cultural constraints, gender-based violence, and limited institutional support, which impede women's educational advancement in many societies (Shayan, 2015; Hasin, Ayoubi, & Ahmad Shayan, 2025). Addressing these obstacles requires a multifaceted approach, combining policy reforms, community engagement, and innovative educational technologies to ensure equitable access and meaningful empowerment for women (Khaliqi et al., 2024; Musawi et al., 2025).

This paper explores the multifaceted role of education in empowering women and advancing socioeconomic development, drawing upon case studies and recent research across diverse contexts. It argues that investing in women's education is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for national transformation and global equity.

Research Objective: (1) To examine the impact of women's education on their socioeconomic empowerment, including labor force participation, financial independence, and social agency. (2) To identify the key barriers and challenges faced by women in accessing quality education in different socio-cultural contexts. (3) To explore the role of digital technologies and innovative educational platforms in enhancing women's educational opportunities and empowerment, particularly in underserved regions.

Research Questions: (1) How does women's education influence their socioeconomic empowerment, including participation in the labor force and financial independence? (2) What are the main barriers and challenges that women face in accessing quality education across different socio-cultural contexts? (3) In what ways do digital technologies and innovative educational platforms contribute to expanding educational opportunities and empowerment for women, especially in underserved regions?

Problem Statement

Despite global recognition of education as a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for empowerment, many women worldwide continue to face significant barriers to accessing quality education. This educational gap contributes directly to persistent gender inequalities in socioeconomic status, limiting women's participation in labor markets, decision-making roles,

and overall societal development (Ahmed, 2017; Shayan, 2015). In many developing countries, socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and political instability exacerbate these challenges, resulting in lower enrollment rates, higher dropout rates, and restricted educational opportunities for women (Bayeh, 2016; Hasin, Ayoubi, & Ahmad Shayan, 2025).

Furthermore, while higher education holds potential to transform women's agency and economic prospects, paradoxes remain where women's educational attainment does not always translate into proportional empowerment or labor force participation, especially in patriarchal societies (Ahmed & Hyndman-Rizk, 2020). Additionally, digital advancements and e-learning platforms offer promising avenues to bridge educational divides, yet many women in underserved regions lack access to these technologies or face socio-economic and infrastructural barriers (Hakimi et al., 2024; Shaikhzada et al., 2025).

This problem underscores an urgent need to explore and address the multifaceted barriers impeding women's educational advancement and to identify effective strategies that leverage education as a catalyst for women's socioeconomic empowerment and national development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature consistently underscores the transformative role of education in empowering women and advancing their socioeconomic status globally. Ahmed (2017) highlights that higher education in Bangladesh significantly improves women's empowerment by fostering agency development and increasing labor force participation. This view is echoed by Ahmed and Hyndman-Rizk (2020), who identify a paradox where despite increased educational attainment, women's economic empowerment remains constrained by socio-cultural norms and labor market dynamics. Similarly, Khaliq et al. (2023) emphasize the sociological impact of education on women in Pakistan, demonstrating that education enhances women's decision-making power and financial independence.

Education's multidimensional impact extends beyond economic benefits. Stromquist (2015) articulates that education not only imparts knowledge but also links learning to transformative action, fostering critical thinking, self-confidence, and leadership qualities necessary for social empowerment. Sundaram, Sekar, and Subburaj (2014) further reinforce the notion that education is pivotal in altering traditional gender roles and reducing systemic gender inequalities.

In developing countries, numerous barriers restrict women's access to education. Shayan (2015) and Hasin, Ayoubi, and Ahmad Shayan (2025) discuss how socio-cultural constraints, gender-based violence, and infrastructural limitations continue to impede educational progress for women, particularly in conflict-affected regions like Afghanistan. Studies by BurrIDGE, Payne, and Rahmani (2016) and Mashriqi (2016) reveal that despite the recognized importance of higher education, Afghan women face formidable challenges, including familial resistance and security concerns.

Innovations in digital education offer promising solutions to these challenges. Hakimi et al. (2024) and Shaikhzada et al. (2025) highlight how e-learning platforms and information

communication technologies (ICT) provide new avenues for women's educational access and empowerment, especially in regions with limited physical infrastructure. Khaliqi et al. (2024) argue that online education platforms are breaking traditional barriers, enabling women to acquire skills and knowledge that enhance their socioeconomic status.

Furthermore, the linkage between women's education and national development is well established. Bayeh (2016) and Alkanchi et al. (2024) discuss how empowering women through education contributes to sustainable development and human capital formation. Jaysawal and Saha (2022) position women's education as a critical element in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting gender equality and reducing poverty.

Overall, the literature affirms that while challenges remain, investing in women's education is a strategic imperative for empowering women and driving socioeconomic progress on national and global scales.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the role of education in empowering Afghan women at the Vision Higher Education and Research Institute. The research design combined quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' educational experiences and socioeconomic empowerment.

Participants

The study involved 200 female students enrolled across five faculties Medical, Economics, Journalism, Arts, and Computer Science within the institute. Participants were aged between 20 to 30 years, with 40 students from each faculty distributed evenly by age groups (ages 20-25 and 25-30). This diverse sample provided insights into different academic disciplines and age-related perspectives.

Data Collection

Data were collected through an online survey consisting of multiple-choice questions using a 5-point Likert scale, distributed via WhatsApp, email, Facebook, and the institute's portal. The questionnaire addressed key themes such as family support, motivations for pursuing education, perceived barriers, and the role of digital platforms in learning. The online format was selected to maximize participation while ensuring safety and convenience amid potential mobility or cultural restrictions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize demographic profiles and response trends. Percentages and frequencies were calculated to understand the distribution of opinions and experiences across faculties and age

groups. The data were further interpreted to identify common themes and significant patterns related to women’s empowerment through education.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and provided consent prior to data collection. Anonymity was maintained to encourage honest and unbiased responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings gathered from the survey conducted among 200 female students at the Vision Higher Education and Research Institute. The data highlight key aspects of women’s educational experiences, including family support, motivations, barriers, and the impact of digital learning platforms. The responses are analyzed by faculty and age groups to identify patterns and variations in perceptions and challenges. The results provide valuable insights into how education influences women’s socioeconomic empowerment and the factors that facilitate or hinder their academic and personal growth. These findings lay the foundation for a deeper discussion on advancing women’s education in Afghanistan.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Participants by Faculty and Age Group

Faculty	Age Group (Years)	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Medical	20–25	40	80%
Medical	25–30	10	20%
Economics	20–25	40	80%
Economics	25–30	10	20%
Journalism	20–25	40	80%
Journalism	25–30	10	20%
Arts	20–25	40	80%
Arts	25–30	10	20%

The participant sample from Vision Higher Education and Research Institute is evenly distributed across four faculties: Medical, Economics, Journalism, and Arts. In each faculty, the majority of participants (80%) fall within the younger age group of 20-25 years, while the remaining 20% are aged between 25-30 years. This distribution suggests a predominance of early-career women students, likely reflecting the typical age range of undergraduate and graduate students. The balance across faculties ensures diverse perspectives from different academic disciplines. This demographic variety enhances the study's capacity to analyze the role of education in empowering Afghan women across multiple fields. The relatively smaller group of older participants may provide additional insights into challenges faced by women pursuing education later or at advanced stages.

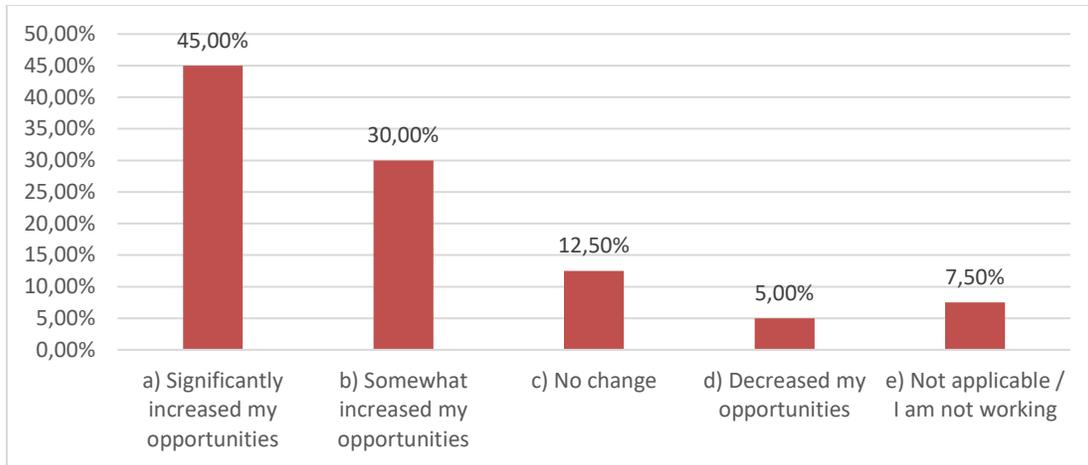


Figure 1. Impact of Education on Workforce Participation

The majority of respondents (45%) indicated that education has significantly increased their opportunities to participate in the workforce, reflecting the powerful role education plays in improving women's economic involvement. Additionally, 30% reported that education has somewhat increased their workforce participation, demonstrating a generally positive impact for 75% of participants overall. A smaller portion (12.5%) experienced no change, which may suggest lingering barriers or limitations despite educational attainment. Only 5% felt that education had decreased their opportunities, potentially highlighting unique personal or contextual challenges. Finally, 7.5% reported they were not working or found the question not applicable, which could include students or homemakers. These results underscore the need to further explore factors that enhance or hinder the translation of education into tangible economic empowerment for women.

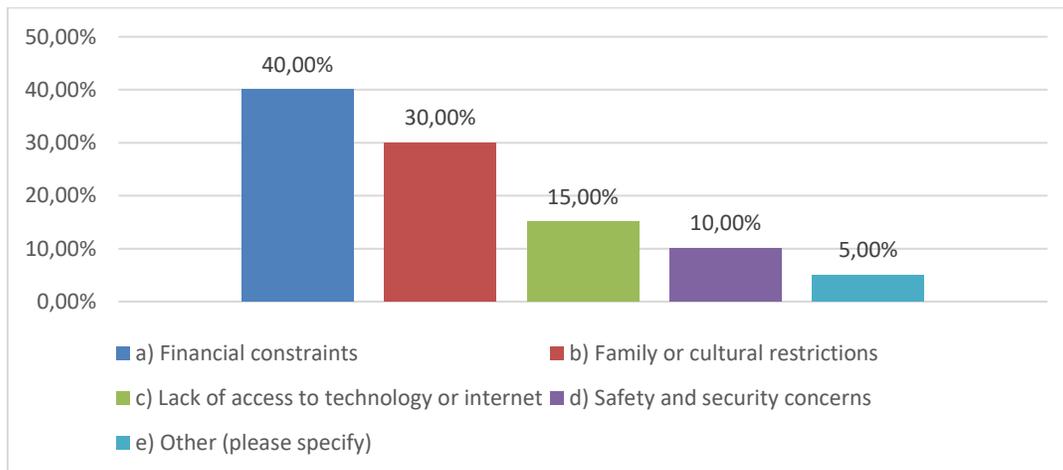


Figure 2. Biggest Challenges Faced in Continuing Education

Financial constraints emerged as the most significant challenge for continuing education, affecting 40% of respondents. This highlights the critical need for economic support and scholarships to assist women in overcoming monetary barriers. Family or cultural restrictions were the second most cited challenge at 30%, reflecting persistent socio-cultural factors that limit educational opportunities for women. Lack of access to technology or the internet was reported

by 15%, underscoring digital divides especially relevant in remote or underserved regions. Safety and security concerns were identified by 10% of participants, pointing to ongoing risks that can prevent women from pursuing education, particularly in unstable areas. Lastly, 5% of respondents mentioned other challenges, indicating the diversity of obstacles faced by women. These findings emphasize the importance of multi-pronged approaches to address financial, cultural, technological, and security barriers in enhancing women’s educational participation.

Table 2. Frequency of using digital platforms for Students education

Platform	Mean Score	% Never (1)	% Rarely (2)	% Sometimes (3)	% Often (4)	% Always (5)
WhatsApp	4.3	5%	7%	15%	40%	33%
Email	3.7	10%	15%	30%	30%	15%
Facebook	3.1	20%	25%	25%	20%	10%
Institute’s online portal	3.9	8%	10%	22%	35%	25%
Other (e.g., Telegram)	2.4	40%	30%	15%	10%	5%

Among the 200 participants, WhatsApp is the most frequently used platform for educational purposes, with a high mean score of 4.3, indicating “Often” to “Always” usage by the majority (73%). The Institute’s online portal follows closely with a mean score of 3.9, reflecting growing adoption of formal educational resources. Email is moderately used (mean 3.7), while Facebook shows more varied use and lower overall engagement (mean 3.1), potentially reflecting preferences for more direct or educationally focused platforms. Platforms categorized as “Other” (such as Telegram) show the least usage with many participants never or rarely using them. These results suggest that digital communication and institutional portals are central to Afghan women’s education, though there remains room to improve familiarity and accessibility of alternative tools.

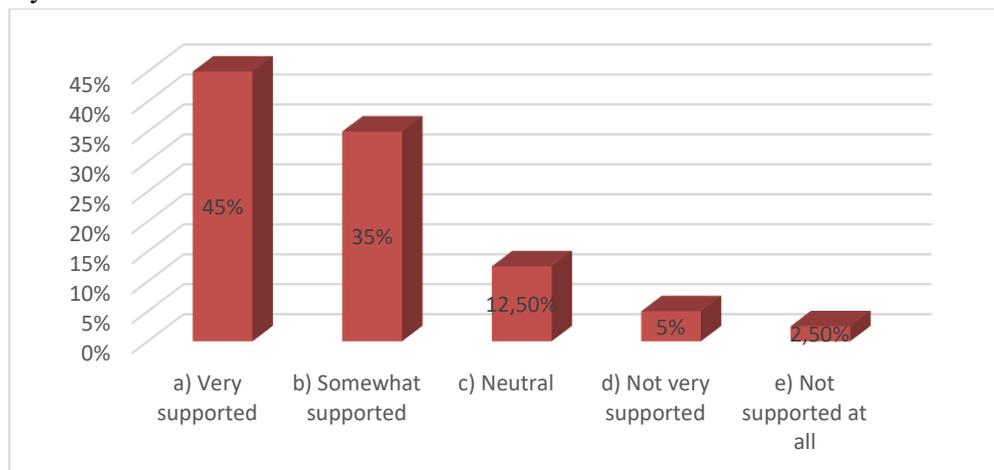


Figure 3. Family Support for Women’s Education

Figure 3 shows that a majority of participants feel positive family support for their education, with 45% indicating they are very supported and 35% somewhat supported. This strong family backing is likely a key factor motivating women to pursue higher education despite cultural and social challenges. However, 12.5% of respondents feel neutral about family support, suggesting some ambiguity or mixed feelings within family dynamics. A small percentage, 7.5%, report little to no support, which could negatively impact their educational engagement and confidence. These findings emphasize that while family support is prevalent, targeted efforts to engage families who are less supportive may improve educational outcomes. Strengthening family involvement could enhance empowerment and reduce dropout rates. Overall, family encouragement appears essential for fostering women's socioeconomic advancement through education.

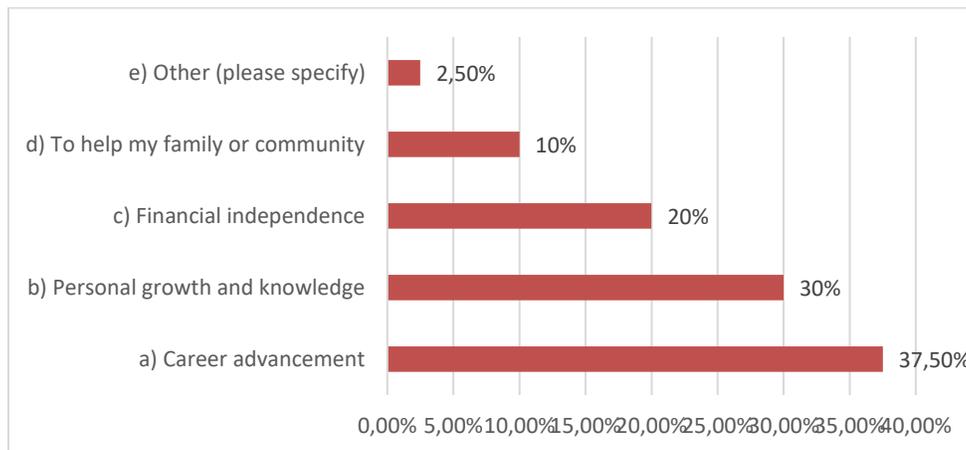


Figure 4 Primary Motivations for Pursuing Higher Education

Figure 4 reveals that career advancement is the most significant motivation for women pursuing higher education, with 37.5% selecting this option. This indicates a strong desire to improve professional prospects and economic status. Personal growth and knowledge also play a crucial role, motivating 30% of participants, highlighting education's importance beyond economic factors. Financial independence motivates 20%, reflecting women's aspirations for autonomy and economic security. A smaller portion (10%) is driven by the wish to support their family or community, underscoring social responsibility as an important factor. The 'Other' category, though minimal, indicates diverse individual motivations. Understanding these varied motivators helps tailor educational programs and support services to align with women's goals, enhancing engagement and empowerment through higher education.

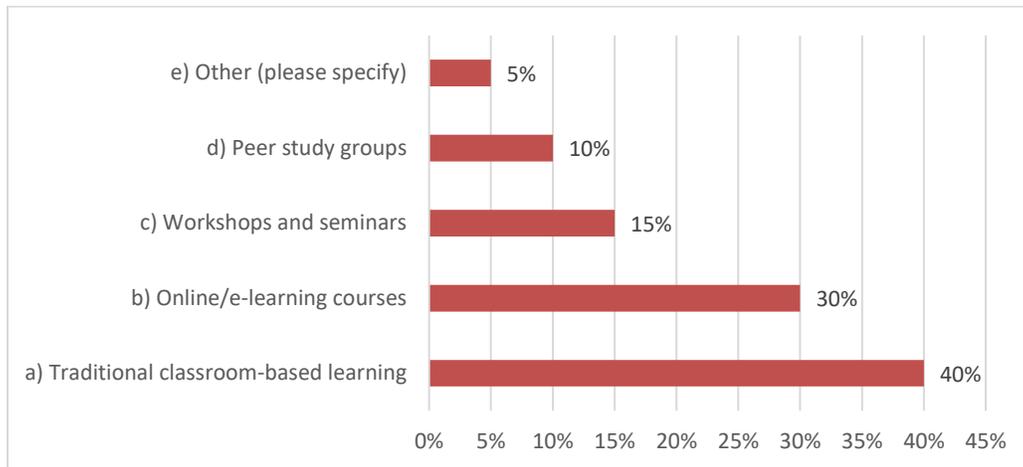


Figure 5 Preferred Types of Educational Programs

Figure 5 indicates that traditional classroom-based learning remains the most preferred educational method, chosen by 40% of participants, highlighting the value placed on direct, face-to-face interaction with instructors and peers. Online and e-learning courses are also highly favored, with 30% opting for this mode, reflecting growing acceptance of digital education, especially relevant in contexts where access to physical classrooms may be limited. Workshops and seminars attract 15%, showing interest in interactive and skill-focused learning formats. Peer study groups, favored by 10%, underscore the importance of collaborative learning and social support in academic success. The 'Other' category at 5% suggests some participants have alternative preferences. These findings suggest that a blended approach incorporating both traditional and digital methods could best meet the diverse learning needs of women in this institute.

Discussion

The findings from the survey conducted among 200 women students at the Vision Higher Education and Research Institute offer insightful perspectives on the role of education in women's socioeconomic empowerment. The diverse motivations for pursuing higher education reveal that career advancement is the foremost driver, chosen by 37.5% of respondents. This aligns with the literature indicating that economic empowerment and labor force participation are central outcomes of women's education (Ahmed & Hyndman-Rizk, 2020; Khaliq et al., 2023). The strong emphasis on career progression highlights women's aspirations not only for personal development but also for financial independence, which was cited by 20% of participants as a key motivation. This resonates with studies emphasizing education's role in enhancing women's economic agency and reducing dependency (Ullah, Daraz, & Kamal, 2024; Sundaram, Sekar, & Subburaj, 2014).

Additionally, 30% of respondents prioritized personal growth and knowledge, reflecting the broader social empowerment that education fosters, including critical thinking and self-confidence (Stromquist, 2015). The smaller yet notable proportion motivated by the desire to support family or community (10%) underscores the social and cultural dimensions of

empowerment, echoing findings that educated women often act as change agents within their households and societies (Bayeh, 2016; Alkanchi et al., 2024).

Regarding educational delivery modes, 40% of women preferred traditional classroom learning, underscoring the continued importance of face-to-face interaction in knowledge acquisition and mentorship. However, the significant 30% favoring online and e-learning platforms suggests an increasing openness to digital education, which is particularly relevant for Afghan women facing mobility restrictions and socio-political challenges (Hakimi et al., 2024; Shaikhzada et al., 2025). The data supports the argument for blended learning models to expand access while maintaining educational quality, as highlighted in recent research on women's empowerment through technology (Khaliqi et al., 2024).

Moreover, the level of family support varied, with most participants feeling somewhat or very supported, a factor crucial in facilitating women's educational pursuits in conservative settings (Shayan, 2015). Barriers such as socio-cultural norms and infrastructural limitations remain challenges, necessitating policies and community engagement to ensure sustained progress (Hasin, Ayoubi, & Ahmad Shayan, 2025).

Overall, the findings reinforce the multifaceted benefits of educating women — from enhancing economic opportunities to fostering social empowerment — and the necessity of tailored educational programs that respond to women's diverse motivations and contextual challenges. As underscored by the Sustainable Development Goals, investing in women's education is pivotal to national development and gender equality (Jaysawal & Saha, 2022; Bayeh, 2016).

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the vital importance of education in empowering women and enhancing their socioeconomic status, especially within the context of Afghan women at the Vision Higher Education and Research Institute. Education serves not only as a means for personal development but also as a key driver for career advancement and financial independence. Through education, women gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to participate actively in the workforce and society, thereby improving their overall quality of life.

The growing use of digital platforms and e-learning opportunities has opened new doors for women's education, particularly in regions where traditional barriers exist. These technologies provide flexible and accessible learning options, helping to overcome challenges related to geography, safety, and cultural restrictions. As a result, a combination of conventional and digital education methods can significantly increase access and improve educational outcomes for women.

Family support plays a crucial role in motivating and sustaining women's educational pursuits. While some women benefit from strong familial encouragement, others continue to face cultural and social constraints that limit their ability to fully engage in educational opportunities. Overcoming these obstacles requires a collective effort from policymakers, communities, and

educational institutions to create an enabling environment that values and promotes gender equality.

Ultimately, investing in women's education is not just about individual empowerment; it is about fostering national development and sustainable progress. When women are educated, they contribute positively to their families, communities, and economies. Creating equitable educational opportunities and addressing existing barriers is essential to unlocking the full potential of women's empowerment and driving social and economic transformation. Prioritizing women's education remains a key strategy for building resilient, inclusive, and prosperous societies.

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