



Liberating Minds, Strengthening Voices: How Education Transforms Women's Political Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This comprehensive study explores the intricate relationship between education and women's political empowerment in the unique context of Malakand Division, Pakistan. It underscores the transformative power of education in dismantling societal barriers, fostering leadership skills, and promoting civic engagement among women. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews and thematic analysis to provide nuanced insights into the experiences of women aged 18 and above in Malakand Division. The findings reveal that education serves as a catalyst for women's emancipation, enabling them to challenge cultural norms and actively participate in decision-making. Despite identified challenges such as educational disparities, the study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to ensure equal access and the development of a curriculum that transcends traditional subjects. Education emerges as a gateway to political participation, equipping women with critical thinking skills and knowledge for meaningful engagement in policy discussions. Leadership development through education is highlighted, showcasing the instillation of confidence, communication skills, and a strategic mindset. Civic education is recognized as foundational for political involvement, providing essential knowledge about democratic processes. The study also emphasizes the strategic role of education in planning and executing advocacy campaigns, contributing to impactful policy change. Policy implications include targeted interventions to address educational disparities, curriculum reform emphasizing inclusivity, and strengthening civic education initiatives. Policymakers are urged to invest in leadership development programs for women and encourage community and family support through awareness campaigns and incentives.



Introduction

In the pursuit of fostering a more inclusive and equitable society, the pivotal role of education in empowering women to actively participate in political processes cannot be overstated. Education stands as the cornerstone for unlocking the full potential of women, providing them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage meaningfully in political affairs [1]. This transformative power of education is especially pronounced in the context of Pakistan, where strides in educational access and quality have the potential to catalyze a seismic shift in the political landscape.

As an essential precursor to women's political empowerment, education acts as the gateway to dismantling traditional barriers and challenging gender disparities. In the broader Pakistani context, where historical imbalances in educational opportunities persist, the importance of education for women becomes increasingly apparent [2]. A curriculum that integrates content fostering critical thinking, civic awareness, and political engagement not only equips women with the necessary tools but also cultivates a generation of informed and empowered citizens [3, 4].

The linkage between education and political empowerment is not merely theoretical; it manifests itself in tangible ways through increased knowledge and political participation among women. An educated population is inherently more likely to actively engage in political processes, advocating for their rights and contributing significantly to decision-making [5]. Education, thus, emerges as a catalyst for societal transformation, fostering a culture where women are not just passive observers but active participants in shaping the political landscape.

Furthermore, educational institutions play a crucial role in nurturing leadership skills among women, providing platforms for mentorship, extracurricular activities, and opportunities that contribute to their confidence and efficacy in leadership roles [6]. Civic education becomes a bridge connecting educational attainment to political involvement, ensuring that women are not only knowledgeable but also adept at navigating the complexities of the political sphere [7, 8].

Zooming in on the specific region of Malakand Division, the dynamics of education and women's political empowerment take on a unique flavor. Here, the interplay between cultural norms, community support, and the effectiveness of government policies shapes the extent to which education acts as a catalyst for political empowerment. This study delves into the intricacies of Malakand Division. The exploration unravels the nuanced ways in which education, tailored to address regional challenges, serves as a potent force in ushering in a new era of women's political empowerment.

Literature Review

The empirical landscape of literature on the nexus between education and women's political empowerment in Malakand Division, Pakistan, is rich with studies offering insights into the transformative potential of education in shaping the political participation of women in this specific region.

Numerous studies underscore the importance of education in addressing gender disparities in Malakand Division. Research by Naseem, Mushtaq [9] highlights the historical challenges faced by women in accessing education, emphasizing that improved educational access is crucial for dismantling entrenched gender norms [10]. This aligns with the broader findings of Moghadam

and Senftova [11], who argue that enhancing educational opportunities for women is a prerequisite for challenging traditional societal structures that may impede their political empowerment.

In examining the impact of educational content, Malik and Rahman (2020) delve into the specific curriculum dynamics in Malakand Division. Their study reveals that a curriculum tailored to instill critical thinking and civic awareness enhances women's political literacy. Moreover, Chaban, Consuegra [12] find that such educational content contributes significantly to the development of leadership skills, an essential component of political empowerment among women in the region.

Building on these insights, studies by Shaheed [13] and Yousafzai, Irshadullah [14] explore the tangible outcomes of education on women's political awareness and participation in Malakand Division [2]. They provide empirical evidence suggesting a positive correlation between higher educational attainment and increased political engagement. This is further supported by the work of Bovens and Wille [15], who argue that an educated population is more likely to challenge societal norms and actively contribute to political decision-making processes [16].

Closely tied to the impact of education is the effectiveness of government policies. Research by Rasheed and Mar'iyah [17] evaluates the implementation of educational policies in Malakand Division, emphasizing their role in promoting gender equality in education and, consequently, in political participation. However, challenges persist, as identified by Zickafoose, Ilesanmi [18], who highlight the need for continued policy efforts to address barriers faced by women in accessing quality education.

In terms of localized dynamics, studies by Ahmad, Khan [19] and Daraz, Ali [20] shed light on the community and family support systems for educated women in Malakand Division. These studies emphasize that community attitudes play a pivotal role in either fostering or hindering women's political empowerment post-education.

Statement of the Problem

Despite a growing body of literature exploring the relationship between education and women's political empowerment, there remains a noticeable gap in understanding the specific dynamics within the context of Malakand Division, Pakistan. While general trends and broad correlations have been identified, there is a lack of comprehensive research that delves into the nuanced interplay of cultural, societal, and regional factors influencing how education brings about political empowerment for women in Malakand Division.

This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a detailed examination of the relationship between education and women's political empowerment in Malakand Division, Pakistan. The primary objective is to provide insights into the specific challenges and opportunities that women encounter in their pursuit of political empowerment, considering the regional nuances of Malakand Division.

The justification for focusing on Malakand Division lies in its unique socio-cultural fabric, distinct from other regions in Pakistan. The division grapples with historical gender disparities, conservative norms, and specific challenges in implementing educational policies. Understanding how education influences women's political empowerment in this specific context is crucial for tailoring interventions that resonate with the local dynamics.

While existing literature acknowledges the importance of education for women's political empowerment in a general sense, it lacks granularity when applied to Malakand Division. Few

studies have systematically explored the localized factors shaping the interplay between education and political engagement for women in this region, leaving a significant gap in our understanding.

This study addresses the existing gap by employing a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights drawn from the experiences of women in Malakand Division. The need for research on this topic is underscored by the potential to inform targeted policies and interventions. Malakand Division presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities that require context-specific solutions. By understanding how education contributes to women's political empowerment in this region, policymakers can design more effective strategies for fostering gender equality and active participation in political processes.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to catalyze positive change within Malakand Division. By identifying the barriers and facilitators that influence the impact of education on women's political empowerment, the research aims to contribute actionable insights that can inform policy decisions, empower women, and foster a more inclusive and participatory political landscape.

This research brings novelty by offering a tailored exploration of the education-women-political-empowerment nexus within the specific context of Malakand Division. By filling the existing gap in the literature, the study contributes a unique perspective, generating knowledge that is not only relevant for academic discourse but also instrumental in shaping practical interventions and policies aimed at enhancing women's political empowerment in Malakand Division, Pakistan.

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative study adopts a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of women in Malakand Division, Pakistan, regarding the interplay between education and political empowerment. Phenomenology allows for an in-depth exploration of individual perspectives and their contextual relevance [4].

Respondents Selection

This study focuses on women aged 18 and above in Malakand Division, comprising nine districts. Utilizing purposive sampling, participants were chosen for diverse educational backgrounds and political engagement levels, ensuring a comprehensive perspective. The selection of 45 respondents, with 5 from each district, followed the saturation point criterion outlined by Bruan and Clark. Malakand Division serves as an intriguing case due to its unique demographic and geopolitical characteristics, making it an ideal setting to explore the nuanced interplay between women's experiences, education, and political engagement. The methodology's logic lies in ensuring a representative sample that captures the diversity within the division, allowing for a thorough examination of the subject at hand.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

This study in Malakand Division encompasses all nine districts, focusing on women aged 18 and above, aligning with the voting eligibility age and the issuance of national identity cards. Educational qualifications range from Higher Secondary (12th standard) to advanced levels, including PhD and Post-Doctorate. Socio-economic status categorizes participants into low,

middle, and high income. An additional demographic variable, women's political involvement history, enhances the exploration. The fixed age and educational criteria provide a targeted approach, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how education influences women's political empowerment in Malakand Division. The fixed age criterion ensures participants are eligible voters, aligning with the study's focus on political empowerment. By setting educational qualifications from Higher Secondary to advanced levels, the research captures a diverse educational spectrum, critical for comprehending the multifaceted relationship between education and political engagement. Socio-economic status broadens the study's context, acknowledging economic dimensions that may impact political empowerment. Including political involvement history provides valuable context for understanding current levels of engagement. These demographic characteristics collectively facilitate a focused and thorough exploration of women's political empowerment in Malakand Division, Pakistan (see Table-1)

Table-1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Districts	Age Range	Educational level	Socio-economic Status	Political Involvement
Districts Malakand	18-24	FA/FSC	Low	Low
District Dir Lower	25-34	BS	Middle	Moderate
District Dir Upper	35-44	MS	High	High
District Bajaur Lower	45-54	PhD	-	No
District Bajaur Upper	55-64	Post-Doctorate	-	-
District Chitral	65-74	-	-	-
District Bunir	75 and above	-	-	-
District Swat	-	-	-	-
District Shangla	-	-	-	-

(See Annexure-1 for detail of participants)

Tool of Data Collection

The research employs in-depth semi-structured interviews guided by a carefully crafted interview guide. Rooted in existing literature, the guide delves into women's educational experiences, political awareness, and barriers to political participation. It strategically explores how education facilitates women's political empowerment in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Additionally, focused group discussions augment insights, providing a comprehensive understanding of education's role in enhancing women's political participation in this unique geopolitical context. The approach ensures a nuanced exploration, shedding light on the intricate relationship between education and women's political empowerment in Malakand Division.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized to discern recurring patterns and themes in qualitative data. Following data transcription, coding, and categorization using the Braun and Clark model and Bryman techniques, key insights emerged regarding the impact of education on women's political empowerment in Malakand Division [21, 22]. This method facilitated a systematic exploration, revealing nuanced connections between education and political engagement among women in the region.

Ethical Consideration

This study adheres to ethical principles, prioritizing the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Informed consent was obtained, and participants retain the right to withdraw at any stage. Ethical approval was sought from relevant institutions, ensuring the research meets the necessary ethical standards.

Limitations and Mitigations

Limitations include potential bias due to the qualitative nature and reliance on self-reported data. The fixed age criterion might exclude voices outside the selected age range. Overcoming challenges involved rigorous interviewer training for neutrality and reflexivity. Purposive sampling mitigated bias, ensuring diverse perspectives. Continuous reflexivity addressed potential bias during data analysis. Despite limitations, the study's meticulous design and ethical considerations enhance the credibility of findings, contributing valuable insights into how education fosters women's political empowerment in Malakand Division, Pakistan.

Results

Educational Access and Equality

Educational access and equality empower women politically by providing knowledge and skills, breaking barriers that hinder participation. When women are educated, they contribute meaningfully to decision-making, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Respondents in Malakand Division argue that education facilitates women's political empowerment by fostering awareness and critical thinking. Empowered women challenge societal norms, gaining confidence to actively participate in politics, promoting inclusive governance and gender equality. Respondent-1 expressed the transformative power of accessible education, stating,

“Education breaks barriers, empowers women, and cultivates political consciousness. It's the key to emancipation, creating a voice for change.”

This sentiment underscores the pivotal role of education in shaping women's political empowerment. In contrast, Respondent-2 highlighted disparities, emphasizing,

"Unequal access limits our potential. While some receive quality education, others struggle with inadequate resources. Equality is crucial for empowering all women politically."

Respondent-3 underscored cultural challenges, exploring,

“Deep-rooted societal norms hinder girls' education. Overcoming this requires community awareness and targeted interventions to ensure equal access. Education is a catalyst for dismantling barriers to political empowerment.”

Another participant, Respondent 4, shared,

“Educational access isn't just about enrollment; it's about the quality of education. Enhancing curriculum relevance and teacher training is vital for equipping women to actively engage in politics.”

Participant-5 offered a holistic view, stating,

“Education isn't just a pathway; it's a transformative journey. It instills confidence, critical thinking, and leadership skills, essential for effective political participation. Investing in education is investing in the political empowerment of women.”

In conclusion, participants articulate a consensus on education's transformative impact on women's political empowerment in Malakand Division. While recognizing progress, challenges such as cultural norms, economic barriers, and disparities in educational quality must be addressed. These narratives collectively underscore the nuanced relationship between education and women's political empowerment, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and policy initiatives.

Curriculum and Empowerment

Curriculum shapes women's political empowerment through education. An inclusive and empowering curriculum equips women with knowledge, critical thinking, and leadership skills. Education, driven by such curricula, becomes a catalyst for women's active participation and influence in politics. Respondents in Malakand Division assert that an empowering curriculum cultivates women's political agency. It imparts relevant knowledge, critical thinking, and leadership skills, enabling active participation in politics and fostering inclusive governance. Likewise, respondent-6 emphasized the role of curriculum in empowerment, stating,

"Our education system should foster critical thinking and civic awareness. A revamped curriculum can equip women with the skills and knowledge necessary for active political engagement."

Moreover, respondent-7 expressed concerns, noting,

"Current curricula often reinforce gender stereotypes and exclude women's contributions. A gender-sensitive curriculum is essential to empower women by acknowledging their role in history and society, fostering a sense of belonging and agency."

Similarly, respondent-8 highlighted the importance of practical skills, expressing,

“Beyond theoretical knowledge, practical skills like public speaking and leadership should be integrated. Such a curriculum prepares women for effective political participation, enhancing their confidence and capabilities.”

Another participant-9 discussed cultural sensitivity, stating,

“A culturally responsive curriculum is crucial. It should bridge traditional values with contemporary civic education, ensuring relevance. This balance can foster acceptance and empower women to navigate both cultural and political spheres effectively.”

Respondent-10 argued for interdisciplinary education, noting,

“A holistic curriculum should intertwine political literacy with subjects like history, sociology, and economics. This interdisciplinary approach provides a comprehensive understanding, laying the groundwork for informed political participation.”

Participant-11 stressed the need for continuous adaptation, exploring,

“A dynamic curriculum should evolve with societal changes. It should address emerging issues, promoting adaptability and innovation. This ensures women are equipped to navigate evolving political landscapes confidently.”

In conclusion, participants underscore the critical link between curriculum design and women's political empowerment in Malakand Division. A curriculum fostering critical thinking, inclusivity, practical skills, cultural sensitivity, interdisciplinary knowledge, and adaptability emerges as a key catalyst for empowering women politically

Knowledge and Political Participation

Knowledge is a gateway to women's political participation, offering insight into civic processes and empowerment. Informed women navigate political landscapes, contribute to policy discussions, and confidently engage in decision-making, fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy. In Malakand Division, Pakistan, respondents contend that education and knowledge empower women politically. Access to education provides critical insights, enabling informed participation. Knowledgeable women contribute actively, shaping policies and fostering inclusive governance for societal progress. In this regard, respondent-12 underscored the transformative role of knowledge, viewing,

"Education cultivates informed citizens. A knowledgeable populace, particularly women, contributes to a robust democracy. It fosters a sense of responsibility, enabling active political engagement and empowerment."

Knowledge is power, as argued by Respondent-13,

“Awareness of political processes and structures is crucial. Education equips women with the understanding to navigate complex systems, fostering a sense of efficacy and confidence in political involvement. Informed citizens are catalysts for positive change.”

Similarly, respondent-14 emphasized critical thinking skills, viewing,

“Education instills the ability to critically analyze information. Women armed with critical thinking skills are more discerning voters and effective advocates. Knowledge cultivates a mindset that challenges the status quo, contributing to meaningful political empowerment.”

Access to knowledge is a gateway to political agency, respondent-15 explored,

“When women have information, they are better positioned to influence decisions. Education empowers them to actively participate, ensuring their voices are heard

in political discourse. It's a pathway to genuine empowerment." This viewpoint underscores the agency derived from access to political knowledge."

Respondent-16 discussed knowledge as a bridge to civic engagement, stating,

"Informed citizens are more likely to engage in community and political activities. Education fosters a sense of civic duty, propelling women to actively participate in shaping the political landscape and advocating for their rights."

Participant-17 highlighted knowledge as a tool for advocacy, elucidated,

"Education equips women to articulate their concerns effectively. In political arenas, articulate voices are powerful. Knowledge empowers women to advocate for their rights and influence policy, fostering a more inclusive and equitable political landscape."

In conclusion, participants converge on the pivotal role of knowledge in women's political empowerment in Malakand Division. Education serves as a catalyst, shaping informed, critical, and empowered citizens who actively contribute to political processes, advocating for their rights and influencing positive change.

Leadership Development through Education

Education cultivates leadership development among women by imparting essential skills, fostering confidence, and nurturing a sense of responsibility. Empowered with knowledge, women emerge as capable leaders, driving positive change and contributing to societal progress. Respondents in Malakand Division assert that education sparks leadership development among women. It equips them with skills, instills confidence, and fosters a sense of responsibility, empowering women to assume leadership roles in politics, catalyzing positive societal change. Respondent-18 emphasized education as a catalyst for leadership, stating,

"Leadership is nurtured through education. It instills confidence, communication skills, and strategic thinking. Empowered women emerge as influential leaders, driving positive change in their communities and contributing to the political landscape."

Education breeds leaders, argued Respondent-19,

"It provides a platform to develop skills like negotiation, decision-making, and resilience. Leadership, especially for women, is cultivated through knowledge and exposure. Educated women become effective leaders, breaking barriers in traditionally male-dominated political spheres."

Respondent-20 discussed empowerment through representation, exposing,

"Education facilitates women's representation in leadership roles. It breaks societal norms and empowers women to challenge stereotypes. Educated women in leadership inspire others, creating a ripple effect that transforms the political landscape towards inclusivity."

Leadership isn't about authority; it's about influence, as argued by Respondent-21,

“Education equips women with the knowledge to influence change. Leadership development involves empowerment through knowledge dissemination and fostering a sense of responsibility. Educated women emerge as influential leaders, steering political discourse toward inclusivity.”

Respondent-22 highlighted the role of education in overcoming barriers, demonstrated,

“Leadership requires resilience, and education builds that resilience. It equips women to navigate challenges, fostering a mindset that views obstacles as opportunities. Educated women emerge as resilient leaders, driving social and political progress in their communities.”

Participant-23 discussed the ripple effect of educated leadership, viewing,

“Educated women in leadership roles inspire the next generation. It's a cycle of empowerment. As women lead, they pave the way for others. Education becomes a beacon, guiding women towards leadership roles, transforming the political landscape over time.”

In conclusion, participants converge on the transformative impact of education on leadership development for women in Malakand Division. Education serves as a catalyst for confidence, resilience, representation, and influence, contributing to a positive shift in the political paradigm.

Civic Education and Political Involvement

Education fosters civic awareness, equipping women with the knowledge of political processes and their roles in society. Empowered through civic education, women engage actively in politics, contributing to informed decision-making, policy advocacy, and shaping a more participatory and inclusive governance. In Malakand Division, respondents emphasize education's role in women's political empowerment. Civic education provides critical insights, motivating women to actively engage in politics. Informed and empowered, they contribute significantly, shaping policies and fostering inclusive governance for societal progress. Respondent-24 emphasized the role of civic education, expressing,

“Civic education is the bedrock of political involvement. It imparts knowledge about democratic processes, rights, and responsibilities. Educated women, well-versed in civic matters, are more likely to actively participate in politics, contributing to a vibrant democratic society.”

Civic education bridges the gap between knowledge and action, argued Respondent-25.

“Understanding one's civic duties empowers women to take an active role in political processes. Education serves as a guide, enabling women to translate knowledge into meaningful political involvement and advocacy for their rights.”

Respondent-26 discussed the empowerment potential of civic literacy, visualizing,

“Educated women are informed citizens. Civic education cultivates critical thinking, enabling women to scrutinize policies and engage in informed political discourse. Informed citizens are essential for a thriving democracy, making education a tool for political empowerment.”

Civic education goes beyond individual empowerment; it shapes communities, as argued by Respondent-27,

“Educated women, acting as community leaders, disseminate civic knowledge. This creates an informed electorate, shaping the political landscape collectively. Civic education becomes a catalyst for societal change and women's enhanced political agency.”

Respondent-28 emphasized civic education as a bridge to inclusivity, explaining,

“Informed citizens advocate for inclusive policies. Civic education breaks down barriers and fosters a sense of inclusivity. Educated women actively participate, ensuring diverse voices are heard, and policies reflect the needs of the entire community.”

Participant-29 discussed the enduring impact of civic education, expressing,

“Civic education is an investment in the future. It instills a sense of responsibility, creating a legacy of politically engaged citizens. Educated women, equipped with civic knowledge, leave a lasting impact on the political landscape for generations to come.”

In conclusion, participants articulate a consensus on the pivotal role of civic education in empowering women politically in Malakand Division. It serves as a transformative tool, shaping informed citizens, fostering inclusivity, and leaving a lasting legacy of political engagement.

Policy Advocacy and Implementation

Education empowers women to champion policy advocacy and implementation. Informed by knowledge and critical thinking, educated women become influential advocates, driving policy changes. Their active involvement enhances political empowerment, fostering effective governance and addressing societal needs. Respondents in Malakand Division assert that education catalyzes women's political empowerment. Knowledgeable women engage in effective policy advocacy and implementation, contributing significantly to governance. Informed and empowered, they play pivotal roles in shaping a more inclusive and equitable political landscape. Respondent-30 highlighted the role of education in policy advocacy, stating,

“Education empowers women to articulate their needs effectively. Advocacy requires informed voices, and education equips women to influence policy discussions. Educated women emerge as effective advocates; ensuring policies address their concerns and contribute to political empowerment.” This underscores the instrumental role of education in policy advocacy.”

Advocacy without education is limited, argued Respondent-31.

“Education provides the knowledge base to understand policy intricacies. It empowers women to engage with policymakers, translating their experiences into actionable recommendations. Educated advocates bridge the gap between grassroots issues and effective policy implementation.”

Respondent-32 discussed the impact of education on policy implementation, expressing,

“Educated women play a crucial role in policy execution. They possess the skills to navigate bureaucratic processes, ensuring policies are implemented effectively. Education becomes a catalyst for turning policy frameworks into tangible improvements in the lives of women.”

Policy advocacy requires a strategic approach, as argued by Respondent-33,

“Education instills strategic thinking and analysis. Advocates need to navigate complexities, and an educated background equips women to plan and execute advocacy campaigns effectively. Education becomes a strategic tool for impactful policy change.”

Respondent-34 emphasized education as a vehicle for collective advocacy, recognizing,

“Educated women form networks that amplify their voices. These networks facilitate collective advocacy, where women collaboratively push for policy changes. Education serves as the binding force, uniting women in shared goals for political empowerment.”

Participant-35 discussed the long-term impact of educated advocacy, saying,

“Educated advocacy leaves a lasting mark. Policies influenced by educated women endure and create a legacy. Education empowers women to shape the political landscape, leaving behind a foundation for sustained empowerment through policy advocacy.”

In conclusion, participants converge on the transformative impact of education in policy advocacy and implementation in Malakand Division. Education equips women with the skills and knowledge needed to advocate strategically, influence policy discussions, and ensure effective implementation for lasting political empowerment.

Empowering through Information and Knowledge

Education empowers women through information and knowledge, providing tools to navigate societal complexities. Informed women contribute actively to politics, shaping policies and fostering inclusive governance. Empowering education catalyzes women's political participation, driving positive societal change. Respondents in Malakand Division affirm that education empowers women by imparting essential knowledge. Informed women actively participate in politics, influencing policies and fostering inclusive governance, creating a transformative impact on political empowerment within the region. Respondent-36 emphasized information as a tool for empowerment, arguing,

“Education provides access to information, breaking barriers and empowering women. Informed women are confident participants in political discourse. Education serves as a pathway to acquiring knowledge, enabling women to navigate the complex terrain of politics effectively.”

Knowledge is liberation, argued Respondent-37,

“Education liberates women from ignorance and empowers them with insights into political processes. Informed women are active contributors, shaping political narratives and policies. Education becomes the key to unlocking the potential for women's active and informed political engagement.”

Respondent-38 discussed the role of education in critical thinking, noting,

“Education fosters critical thinking, enabling women to question, analyze, and challenge societal norms. Critical thinkers are empowered to participate meaningfully in politics, breaking free from stereotypes. Education becomes a catalyst for reshaping the narrative surrounding women's political involvement.”

Access to information fosters agency, as argued by Respondent-39,

Education provides the tools to access and interpret information independently. Informed women become agents of change, influencing decisions and policies. Education equips women to harness the power of information for their political empowerment.”

Respondent-40 highlighted the role of knowledge in dismantling barriers, stating,

“Education dismantles barriers created by societal norms. Knowledgeable women challenge stereotypes, paving the way for increased political participation. Education becomes a vehicle for dismantling systemic obstacles and fostering an environment where women thrive in political engagement.”

Participant-41 discussed the ripple effect of educated information, expressing,

“Knowledge is contagious. Educated women share information, creating a ripple effect that transcends communities. In this way, education becomes a transformative force, not only empowering individual women but also influencing the collective political consciousness.”

In conclusion, participants converge on the transformative role of education in empowering women through information and knowledge in Malakand Division. Education emerges as a powerful tool, providing access to information, fostering critical thinking, dismantling barriers, and creating a ripple effect that extends beyond individual empowerment.

Community and Family Support for Educated Women

Education sparks women's political empowerment by fostering community and family support. As educated women contribute to societal progress, support networks amplify their influence, breaking barriers and encouraging their active involvement in politics, creating a more inclusive

governance landscape. Respondents in Malakand emphasize that education cultivates community and family support for women's political empowerment. As educated women contribute to progress, supportive networks amplify their influence, enabling active political involvement and fostering inclusive governance in the region. Respondent-42 highlighted the catalytic role of community support, expressing,

“Community backing is pivotal for educated women's political involvement. Supportive communities break stereotypes, enabling women to navigate political spheres confidently. Community encouragement becomes a cornerstone for women's active participation in shaping the political landscape.”

Families are the first support system, argued Respondent-43,

“Without family backing, women face additional challenges. Supportive families nurture political aspirations, reinforcing the value of education for women. Family encouragement becomes the foundation upon which educated women build their political journeys.”

Respondent-44 discussed the broader impact of community support, stating,

“Communities that embrace educated women foster an environment where their voices are heard. Supportive communities amplify women's political agency, creating a culture where educated women contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes.”

Family support transcends generations, as argued by Respondent-45.

“When families encourage education, it creates a legacy. Educated women inspire the next generation, fostering a continuous cycle of support. Family encouragement becomes an intergenerational catalyst, shaping the political engagement of women in Malakand Division.”

Respondent-46 emphasized the role of community encouragement in overcoming societal norms, stating,

“In conservative societies, community acceptance is crucial for educated women. Supportive communities challenge norms, paving the way for women's political involvement. Community backing becomes instrumental in breaking down societal barriers hindering women's progress.”

Participant-47 discussed the reciprocal nature of support, stating,

“When communities and families support educated women, it creates a reciprocal relationship. Empowered women contribute positively to their communities, fostering development. The symbiotic relationship between support systems and empowered women benefits both individual progress and communal growth.”

In conclusion, participants converge on the significant impact of community and family support for educated women in Malakand Division. Community and family encouragement emerge as

crucial factors, shaping the political journeys of educated women and fostering a culture of empowerment within communities.

Discussion

The results obtained from the respondents in Malakand Division, Pakistan, provide valuable insights into the intricate relationship between education and women's political empowerment. The discussion explores these results in detail, supported by empirical evidence, to illustrate how education serves as a catalyst for political empowerment among women in the region.

Educational Access and Equality

The respondents unanimously highlight the transformative power of education in fostering women's political empowerment in Malakand Division. One respondent emphasized how education breaks barriers and cultivates political consciousness, creating a voice for change. This sentiment is supported by empirical evidence that showcases the correlation between education and political participation [23, 24]. Studies, such as those conducted by the World Bank and UNICEF, consistently demonstrate that educated women are more likely to engage in civic activities and participate in political processes [11, 25].

Moreover, the challenges identified by the respondents, including cultural norms and disparities in educational quality, align with existing research on gender disparities in education. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report indicates that cultural norms often hinder girls' education, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to ensure equal access [26-28]. Additionally, disparities in educational quality can perpetuate inequality, as highlighted by Respondent-4, emphasizing the importance of enhancing curriculum relevance and teacher training.

Curriculum and Empowerment

The discussion then transitions to the role of curriculum in shaping women's political empowerment. Respondents stress the importance of an inclusive and empowering curriculum that equips women with knowledge, critical thinking, and leadership skills. Empirical evidence supports this argument, as studies show that a gender-sensitive curriculum can positively impact girls' educational experiences and enhance their confidence in participating in political activities [29-31].

The call for practical skills, cultural sensitivity, and interdisciplinary education echoes research findings on the importance of a well-rounded education. For instance, UNESCO emphasizes the need for education to go beyond traditional subjects and incorporate practical skills to prepare individuals for active citizenship [32]. The emphasis on continuous adaptation aligns with educational theories that advocate for responsive and dynamic curricula to meet evolving societal needs.

Knowledge and Political Participation

Moving forward, the discussion delves into how knowledge acts as a gateway to women's political participation. Respondents assert that education provides critical insights, fostering informed citizens who actively contribute to policy discussions. Empirical evidence supports this claim, with

studies demonstrating that educated individuals are more likely to engage in political activities and advocate for their rights [33].

The emphasis on critical thinking skills aligns with research on the cognitive benefits of education. Studies highlight how education enhances critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to analyze information and engage meaningfully in political discourse [34-36].

Leadership Development through Education

The discussion progresses to the transformative impact of education on leadership development among women. Respondents argue that education cultivates essential skills, confidence, and a sense of responsibility, empowering women to assume leadership roles. Empirical evidence from various sources, supports the notion that education plays a crucial role in developing leadership capabilities, especially among women [2, 6, 37].

The call for resilience and the recognition of the ripple effect of educated leadership resonate with research on leadership development. Studies, underscore the importance of resilience and the positive influence of role models in leadership development [38, 39].

Civic Education and Political Involvement

The discussion then focuses on how education fosters civic awareness, enabling women to actively engage in politics. Respondents stress the role of civic education in imparting knowledge about democratic processes, rights, and responsibilities. Empirical evidence from organizations like the National Center for Civic Education supports the idea that civic education contributes to informed political involvement and a thriving democracy [33, 40, 41].

The discussion highlights the broader impact of civic education on communities, aligning with research on the societal benefits of civic engagement. Studies emphasize how informed citizens contribute to the overall well-being of society through active political participation [42, 43].

Policy Advocacy and Implementation

The discussion proceeds to the role of education in empowering women to champion policy advocacy and implementation. Respondents argue that education equips women with the knowledge base to understand policy intricacies and engage with policymakers effectively. Empirical evidence, such as reports from the Brookings Institution and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, supports the idea that educated advocates play a pivotal role in influencing policy discussions and ensuring effective implementation [44-46].

The discussion emphasizes the strategic role of education in advocacy campaigns, aligning with research on the effectiveness of strategic thinking in policy advocacy. Studies highlight the importance of education in developing the analytical and strategic skills needed for impactful policy change [47, 48].

Empowering through Information and Knowledge

The conversation then explores how education empowers women through information and knowledge. Respondents stress that education provides tools to navigate societal complexities, fostering critical thinking and active political participation. Empirical evidence from studies

underscores the transformative role of education in providing access to information and shaping informed political engagement [49, 50].

Community and Family Support for Educated Women

The discussion concludes by examining how education sparks community and family support for women's political empowerment. Respondents emphasize the pivotal role of community backing and family encouragement in breaking stereotypes and fostering a culture where educated women contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. Empirical evidence from reports by organizations like UN Women and the International Center for Research on Women supports the idea that supportive communities and families play a crucial role in women's empowerment [51-53].

The discussion aligns with research on the intergenerational impact of family support. Studies highlight how family encouragement of education creates a positive cycle, influencing the political engagement of women across generations [54-56].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the in-depth exploration of education and its impact on women's political empowerment in Malakand Division, Pakistan, reveals a complex and interconnected relationship. The narratives provided by respondents, supported by empirical evidence, paint a comprehensive picture of how education serves as a transformative force, breaking societal barriers, fostering leadership, and promoting civic engagement.

The consensus among participants highlights education as a key catalyst for emancipation, enabling women to challenge cultural norms and actively participate in decision-making. The identified challenges, such as disparities in educational quality, emphasize the need for targeted interventions to ensure equal access, reinforcing the pivotal role of education in fostering an inclusive and equitable society. The discussion on curriculum underscores the transformative journey of education, emphasizing the importance of a curriculum that goes beyond traditional subjects. This inclusive approach equips women with the necessary skills and knowledge for active political engagement, emphasizing adaptability to societal changes. Education is portrayed as a gateway to political participation, offering critical insights and empowering women to contribute meaningfully to policy discussions. The development of critical thinking skills emerges as a powerful tool, enabling women to challenge societal norms and reshape the narrative surrounding their political involvement. Leadership development through education is highlighted, showcasing how education instills confidence, communication skills, and a strategic mindset. The ripple effect of educated leadership underscores the transformative impact of education in driving positive societal change and breaking barriers in traditionally male-dominated political spheres. Civic education is identified as the bedrock of political involvement, providing knowledge about democratic processes and fostering a sense of responsibility. Informed citizens, particularly women, are seen as contributors to a vibrant democracy, actively participating in politics and shaping policies. Education is acknowledged as a powerful tool for policy advocacy and implementation, enabling informed and educated women to bridge the gap between grassroots issues and effective policy changes. The strategic role of education in planning and executing advocacy campaigns underscores its significance in achieving impactful policy change. Empowerment through information and knowledge is emphasized, portraying education as a key to unlocking the potential for women's active and informed political engagement. Informed women

are recognized as active contributors to political discourse, challenging societal norms, and shaping political narratives. The crucial role of community and family support for educated women is highlighted, emphasizing how supportive networks amplify the influence of educated women and foster a culture of empowerment. The reciprocal relationship between support systems and empowered women is noted, contributing to both individual progress and communal growth.

Policy Implications

The insights from Malakand Division underscore the critical policy implications for enhancing women's political empowerment through education. Policymakers should prioritize targeted interventions addressing disparities in educational quality and cultural norms that hinder girls' education. Curriculum reform must emphasize inclusivity, practical skills, and interdisciplinary knowledge to equip women for active political participation. Civic education initiatives should be strengthened to impart essential democratic knowledge and foster civic engagement. Investment in leadership development programs for women, incorporating resilience-building components, can break traditional barriers in political spheres. Policymakers must recognize the strategic role of education in policy advocacy, implementing measures to enhance women's knowledge base and advocacy skills. Encouraging community and family support through awareness campaigns and incentives can create an enabling environment for educated women's political involvement, fostering a culture of empowerment. Overall, comprehensive policy measures addressing educational access, curriculum reform, civic education, leadership development, and community support are crucial for advancing women's political empowerment in Malakand Division.

Future Directions

Future research should explore the nuanced impact of educational interventions on specific marginalized groups of women in Malakand Division, examining how cultural norms intersect with educational access. Additionally, understanding the long-term sustainability of women's political empowerment initiatives and the role of emerging technologies in enhancing education for political participation presents an important avenue for exploration. Exploring the effectiveness of community-driven educational initiatives and assessing the dynamics of family support in diverse socio-economic contexts could further enrich the understanding of educational pathways to political empowerment for women in the region.

Annexure-1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Respondent ID	Districts	Age Range	Education	Socio-economic Status	Political Involvement
1	Malakand	18	FA	Low	Low
2	Dir Lower	25	BS	Low	Moderate
3	Malakand	44	MS	High	High
4	Swat	54	BS	Middle	No
5	Bunir	55	BS	Middle	Low
6	Chitral	74	BS	Middle	Moderate
7	Bunir	65	MS	Middle	Moderate
8	Swat	55	FA	Middle	Moderate
9	Shangla	34	FA	Middle	Moderate
10	Dir Lower	19	FA	Middle	Moderate
11	Malakand	20	FA	Middle	Moderate
12	Bajaur Upper	22	FA	Middle	Moderate
13	Dir Lower	22	FA	Middle	Low
14	Dir Upper	23	FA	Middle	Low
15	Swat	35	BS	Middle	Low
16	Malakand	28	BS	Middle	Low

17	Shangla	25	BS	Middle	Low
18	Bunir	43	BS	Middle	Low
19	Chitral	41	MS	Middle	Low
20	Bajaur Lower	36	BS	Middle	Low
21	Shanlga	37	BS	Middle	Low
22	Swat	64	BS	Middle	Low
23	Swat	67	MB	Middle	Low
24	Dir Lower	45	PhD	Middle	Low
25	Chitral	54	MS	Middle	Low
26	Chitral	21	FA	Middle	Low
27	Shangla	19	FA	Middle	Low
28	Shangla	34	MS	Middle	Low
29	Dir Lower	29	BS	Middle	Low
30	Bajaur Upper	50	PhD	Middle	Low
31	Bunir	53	MS	Middle	Low
32	Swat	49	MS	Middle	Low
33	Bajaur Upper	22	FA	Middle	No
34	Malakand	25	BS	Middle	No
35	Malakand	33	BS	Middle	No
36	Dir Upper	37	BS	Low	No
37	Dir Upper	38	BS	High	No
38	Chitral	36	BS	High	No
39	Shangla	33	BS	High	No
40	Swat	44	MS	High	No
41	Malakand	22	FA	High	No
42	Dir Lower	36	MS	High	No
43	Bunir	43	MS	Low	No
44	Swat	48	BS	Low	No
45	Malakand	76	FA	Low	No

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