

Women's Empowerment through Higher Education in Pakistan: A Critical Factor for Economic Development

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ABSTRACT

Higher education (HEdu) is crucial and necessary for both male and female members of any community. Empowerment is the process of allowing or authorizing individuals to think, act, and direct their job autonomously. Education contributes significantly to improving women's living situations and women's empowerment is critical to a country's overall growth. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the role of education to empowering the women and its role in the sustainable development in Pakistan. This study used the secondary data from 2005-2024 and analyze through figures and also used the thematic analysis as well based on discussion. This study found that 49% of the Pakistan population contains on females, and higher education enrollments has significantly contributed in the economic development. Furthermore, this also found that female labor force participation (FLFP) in general and with higher education significantly contribute in the economic development, while, unemployed female labor force has significantly harmed the economic development (GDPpc) in Pakistan. Therefore, this study concluded that based on the empirical evidence and thematic analysis that higher education is crucial factor for women's empowerment and women's empowerment (WEmp) is crucial factor for economic development in Pakistan. Therefore, this study highly recommended that government and society take action to attract the female to higher education and participate in the labor force to contribute in the economic development.

Keywords: Higher education; women's empowerment; GDP; education; labor

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education is critical to improving a country and meeting modern-day living standards. HEdu is crucial and necessary for both males and females of any community. Women, on the other hand, experience a number of barriers to HEdu and are routinely favored against in this area. By the way, women's Edu is knowingly worse in outmoded civilizations and undeveloped nations such as ours. Literary data suggests that women's chances of obtaining HEdu are low; women are subjugated to gender-precise

responsibilities in a male-dominated society (Batoool *et al.*, 2013; Khokhar, 2018; Rehman *et al.*, 2025). Thus, the prevalent socio-cultural and economic norms of society make obstacles for women of receiving a *HEdu* and hindered them from performing their appropriate part in social improvement (Goetz, 2003). Higher education's importance as a catalyst for women's emancipation is widely acknowledged (Alhazmi, 2023).

Empowerment (*Emp*) is the progression of permitting or authorizing individuals to think, act, and direct their job autonomously (Bhat, 2015; Kaur, 2018). It alludes to freedom from all forms of tyranny and bondage. It also provides an escape from year-long bondage. It necessitates a complete reorganization of social and economic connections. It is a narrative about liberty and identity formation in which several players compete for reputation. The goal is to free individuals from externally imposed self-concepts. Empowerment requires frameworks that promote tolerance and acknowledgement of differences, create a safe environment for individuals, and give fundamental resources for self-realization. The free measure rules (and the upshot right to nondiscrimination based on population) help to broaden subjects' self-realizations to comprise those accessible in other adherent states (Witte, 2019). Empowerment seems to be a transitional moment between systems of slavery and racial subordination rather than a major liberating act. It is often referred to as sovereignty in decision assembly. In other terms, it refers to the individual's liberation into a larger cultural realm and "imagined community" that transcends margins. Empowerment, instead, refers to a critical examination of power that may result in confrontation, allowing current power structures to be subverted. It is the process of gaining control over one's own destiny and life circumstances (Bhat, 2015; Kaur, 2018). It not only helps to build human resources but also improves people's excellence of life. Here, education is a critical component for achieving *Emp*. It offers a fresh way of looking at things (Bhat, 2015). It has the potential to bring about significant attitudinal changes, which are critical to the country's socioeconomic and political success. Education supports the conscientization process, which allows humans to reflect on themselves (Ojha, 2016).

The most important constraining elements contributing to women's disadvantaged status are ignorance, helplessness, and susceptibility (Ojha, 2016). *Edu* empowers women to learn their truths and combat economic and social inequality. This is critical for affluence, development, and wellbeing (Jha, 2014). An educated woman offers the foundation for a family to thrive in a competitive society. According to studies, she raises better, more educated, and healthier-children, resulting in increased social and economic productivity in the micro economy, or home. An educated woman has more negotiating power due to improved access to knowledge, resulting in greater autonomy. Education helps women to develop their perspectives and understanding, allowing families, societies, and the nation as a whole to become more competitive. It contributes significantly to improving women's living situations (Jaysawal & Saha, 2023).

In Pakistan, there is a large disparity among female and male basic *Edu* and literacy levels. Malik and Rose (2015) discovered deliberating the occasions for sponsoring *Edu* in Pakistan for the Oslo Summit, that women's performance in education has been the worst, with only 59% of girls receiving primary education (*PEdu*) and only 13% completing high school (HSE) up to ninth grade. Another survey found that 72% of girls don't complete HSE, and just 10% of females attend university (Syed, 2018). In this perspective, advanced regions with stronger gender-equality outperformed in women's *Edu* in general, and *HEdu* in precise in Pakistan (Arab & Faiza, 2020). Numerous socio-cultural hurdles exist, including the feudal system, patriarchal society, a lack of familial support, restricted travel freedom, and a lack of government assistance (Mehmood *et al.*, 2018), and terror of harassment (Joseph, 2015; Leach, 2013), poverty abolition (Khan *et al.*, 2015; Saleem *et al.*, 2019), are to blame for Pakistan's low higher educational profile. In Pakistan, women must contest hard for their fundamental rights. Noreen and Khalid (2012) stated that *Edu* has a noteworthy impact on a country's growth. *HEdu* opens up new chances and possibilities for women, allowing them to make a living and advance in society.

Despite progressive legislation and enlightening access, women's economic operation in Pakistan is not just low, but also a serious obstacle to *GDPpc* (Rasheed & Nosheen, 2024). According to the World Bank (2024), in Pakistan, the FLFP rate is 24.3%, while males are 80.3% in 2024. This is in disparity to the worldwide average of 47%, indicating that Burma only employs half of its human resources. It is more than just a statistical issue of a small number of women in the labor market; it reflects fundamental social-economic restraints, entrance obstacles, vocational school discrimination, and workplace discrimination. These discriminatory hurdles impede women's full involvement in the economy, impeding national progress and *GDPpc*. Another operational explanation is the large gender wage disparity between men and women, with women earning less for equivalent labor. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2022) that women in Pakistan get 34% less than males on average. Still, a lack of enabling infrastructure, such as child-care facilities or adequate transportation, has pushed women to engage in very few economic-activities. Sustainable development involves more than just improving people's well-being; it also includes the protection and support of all living things, as well as addressing human needs.

Women's empowerment is critical to a country's overall growth since they are an integral aspect of society that cannot be overlooked. Multiple policies and campaigns have been launched in Pakistan to achieve gender parity, yet female labor-force participation remains one of the lowest globally. Existing literature virtually unanimously identifies barriers such as a lack of education and occupational training, socio-cultural constraints, and job discrimination (Rasheed & Nosheen, 2024), therefore, the women does not the significant role in the sustainable development in Pakistan. To women's economic engagement in Pakistan Choudhry *et al.* (2019), evaluating the consequences of recent legislative changes and measuring the efficacy of various empowerment initiatives remains essentially a black box. Furthermore, there is a dearth of detailed understanding of how local differences in Pakistan affect women's economic possibilities and limits. This study will try to minimize the gap, with an updated look at the enabling environment for women's economic involvement, as well as a critical analysis of the success of previous generations' initiatives and the persistent regional inequities to play a substantial role in the sustainable development of Pakistan. It will also contribute to the growth of existing research and make concrete recommendations for boosting women's participation in Pakistan's economic development. This research will provide policy-makers, educators, and development experts with an in-depth understanding of these processes, which are critical for working towards more wide-ranging and impartial economic partaking in Pakistan. Furthermore, digital gaps have widened, restricting women's access to *Edu* and distant employment prospects (World Bank, 2024). These recent developments highlight the critical need for specific policies to address both old and emerging impediments to *WEmp*. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the role of education to empowering the women and its role in the sustainable development in Pakistan.

Theoretical Background

Feminist ideology shapes our perception of *WEmp* via *HEdu*. It offers the theoretical foundation for our framework's first dimension, economic productivity. Feminist theory enables us to investigate how higher education might empower women to question established norms, increase economic productivity, and contribute to *GDPpc*. Similarly, social capital theory is an important component of our proposed paradigm, particularly for understanding the effect of *HEdu* on women's health and well-being. This theory allows us to inspect the social ramifications of women's empowerment via higher education and how it contributes to sustainable development (Alhazmi, 2023). Capabilities approach, initiated by Sen (2000), is a vital aspect of theoretical framework and drives our view of higher education's role in poverty alleviation, particularly in Pakistan. This method enables us to look further into how higher education empowers women and helps to long-term development. Furthermore, the capacity perspective holds that an individual's well-being and quality of life are determined by their capacities - their freedom to do and be appreciated (Sen, 2000). Economic resources, social situations, health, and education all help to

support these qualities. Education is seen as a critical predictor of human potential, providing people with the information and skills necessary to improve their well-being and quality of life (Alhazmi, 2023). In conclusion, the capacity approach offers a helpful viewpoint on how higher education may help women improve their capacities while also reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development. Offering insights into the function of education in increasing capacities assists us to achieve the objective of the study and achieving the study's objectives in the Pakistan environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nawaz *et al.* (2017) confirmed that *HEdu* enhances women's position in the society. Their study found a substantial association between *HEdu* and decision-making, with more *Edu* leading to more decisions in household concerns. Similarly, Sharma and Afroz (2014) discovered that highly educated women had a greater empathetic of their rights, permitting them to make sensible choices. As a result, *HEdu* for women is related at inside the home. It also enhances women's self-esteem and allows them to make decisions, especially regarding themselves. Furthermore, Women make up about half of population, and their involvement in economic, political, and social, activities is critical for economic progress and independence. Every community has cultural limits that distinguish between genders and determine the bounds of their actions; therefore, women confront certain fundamental impediments to participation in all aspects of life (Naz & Chaudhry, 2012). Women in a strong male culture are pushed and tugged by patriarchal social conventions, and they are not permitted to make their own judgements. Women's empowerment is dependent on factors such as *Edu*, economic-independence, cultural and social difficulties, and economic prospects for women. Bushra and Wajiha (2015) found a substantial link between empowerment factors and increased involvement in society. According to Sengupta (2013), patriarchal societies are the cheapest and most flexible labor sources.

According to Akhter and Akbar (2016), the birth of a male kid offers joy to his fathers. Pakistani people prefer male children because they believe that male children bear the entire family's duty, whereas female children are a liability. Though, women serve a dual role in the society, handling home and fields for unpaid employment, they are nevertheless denied basic respect and the opportunity to direct their own life. It has also been noticed that women with better education, expertise, and abilities are not offered comparable salary or positions within the organization (Arif *et al.*, 2017). Higher education has a vital role in improving women's income levels since it promotes self-esteem, independence, and confidence, as well as allowing women to break free from norms (Asghar, 2018). Highly educated women may make their own decisions and raise knowledge other things (Batool & Batool, 2018). Jayaweera (2010) similarly stated that access to *HEdu* augmented the value of life for women since it improved their standing in the society. In this context, higher education for women is strongly connected with more freedom of thought and increased political options and participation. Untaught women, on the other hand, rely heavily on males throughout their lives. In conclusion, women face discrimination at both the societal and institutional levels; it is a pressing issue that requires in-depth analysis of all elements, with a focus on the role of *HEdu* in reducing those concerns (Friedman, 2004).

Alhazmi (2023) provides a comprehensive framework that explains the critical role of *HEdu* in empowering women, particularly in the Arab setting, and how it contributes to long-term development. The framework is based on four key dimensions: *GDPpc*, health and well-being, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability. Each dimension is supported by a distinct theoretical perspective: feminist theory, social capital theory, and the capacity approach. via a thorough examination of current material, they demonstrate the transformational potential of women's empowerment via higher education in fostering sustainable development. Similarly, Rasheed and Nosheen (2024) assessed women's involvement in the economy, and could lead to a significant increase in Pakistan's GDP and raise household income levels. The revised statistics and insights are designed to teach policymakers and

development experts on successful economic empowerment methods for women in Pakistan, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the secondary data from 2005 to 2024 collected from World Development Indicators (2025) to gives empirical evidence between variables in the past through figures. This study also used the thematic analysis as well based on discussion.

Empirical Analysis

Figure 1 demonstrates that 49% of the Pakistan population contains on females, while the rest of population are male.

Figure 1: Average Population of Female and Male

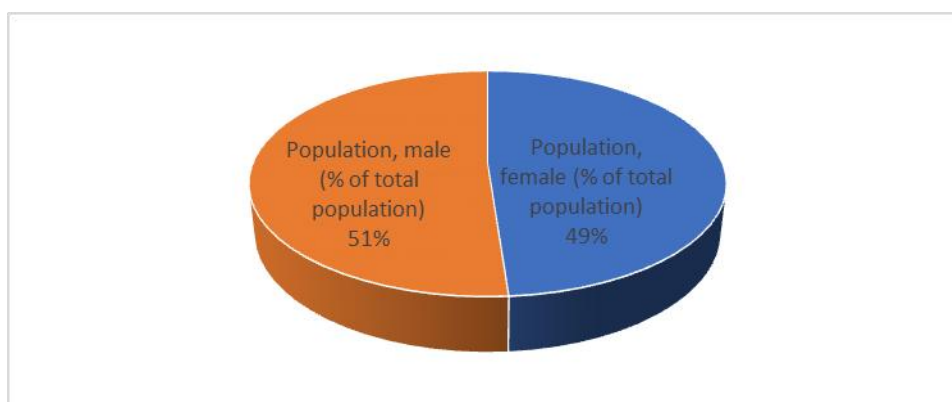


Figure 2 demonstrate the link between the female school enrollment and economic development, which shows that the more female is enrolled in the primary school but the enrollment decreases as the level of education rises. The average enrollment is 67% in primary, 29% in secondary and only 8% in the *HEdu* level in the Pakistan in the last 20 years. However, the trend of the higher education enrollments and GDP per capita growth seems to be same direction, means that higher education enrollments has significantly contribute in the economic development in Pakistan.

Figure 2: School Enrollments of Female and Economic Development

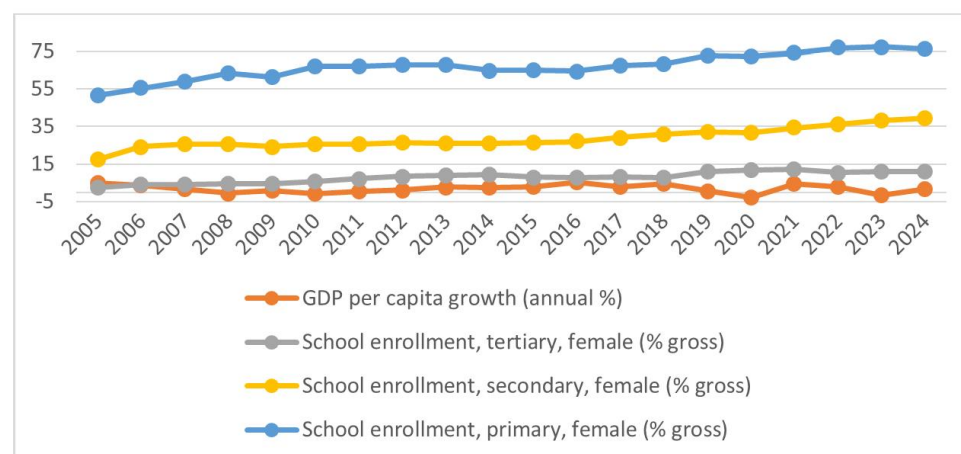


Figure 3 demonstrate the link between *FLFP* and economic development, which shows that only 21% female participate in the labor force in base of average of last 20 years data. The female participation the labor force is too less as compared with population oof the female in base of average of last 20 years data. However, the trend of the female labor force and GDP per capita growth seems to be same direction, means that *FLFP* has significantly contribute in the economic development in Pakistan. Similarly, *FLFP* with basic education is 14%, with intermediate 11% and with higher education 31% base of average of last 20 years data. Therefore, the female with higher education participates more with lower-level education, means higher level of education empower women and more participate in the labor force and significantly contribute in the economic development.

Figure 3: Female labor force and Economic Development

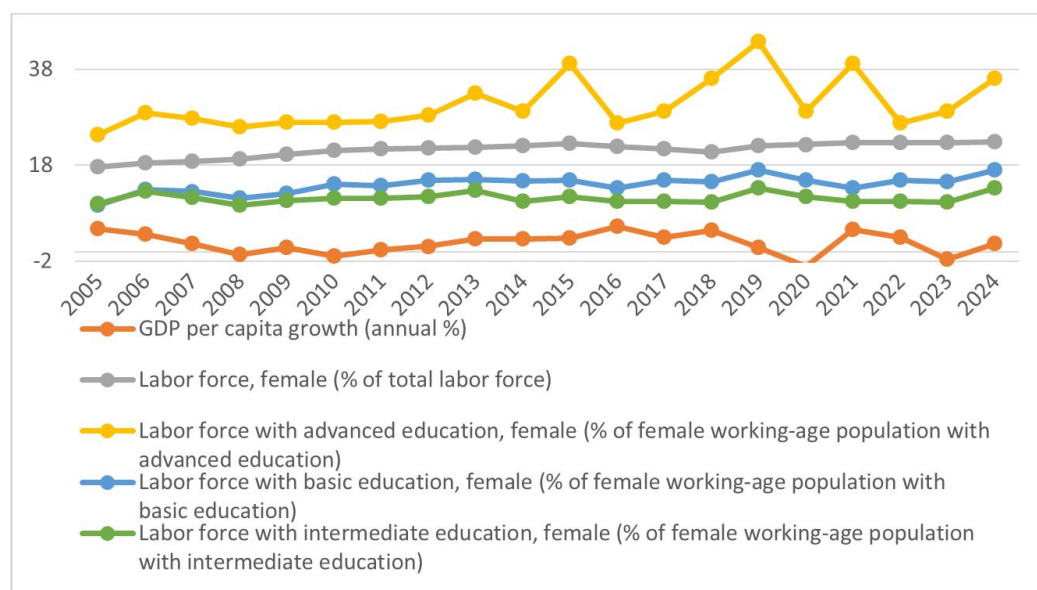
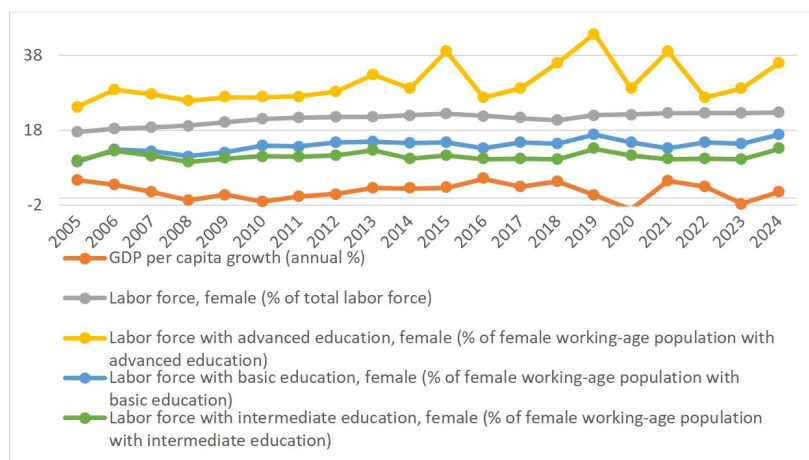


Figure 4 demonstrate the relationship between unemployed *FLFP* and GDPpc, which shows that only 4% female participate in the labor force as %age of total *FLFP* is unemployed on base of average of last 20 years data. However, the trend of the unemployed *FLFP* and GDP per capita growth seems to be opposite direction, means that unemployed female labor force has significantly discourage in the economic development in Pakistan. Similarly, unemployed female labor force with basic education is 6%, with intermediate 11% and with higher education 15% base of average of last 20 years data. Therefore, the unemployed female labor force with higher education is not good sign for economic development. Moreover, unemployed female labor force has more fluctuation than other unemployed female labor force with lower level. Therefore, unemployed female labor force has significantly harmed the economic development in Pakistan.

Figure 4: Unemployed Female labor force and Economic Development



DISCUSSION

Women with rights are more poised, have higher living standards, and can make their own decisions. Women and men should team up to help the economy grow, and women should use their abilities. Women should make advantage of their latent skills. Women's empowerment lessens poverty in society by allowing them to spend more time with their family and rely less on others. A society in which women have equal rights is being formed. Men and women should be paid equally for the same types of labor. There should be no gender discernment at the workplace. The first step toward women's empowerment is to shift people's perspectives. Women must be able to access all resources and credits (Sohail, 2014). Furthermore, education among women is the most effective weapon for gaining power in society. It helps to reduce inequalities and serves as a method of boosting their standing within the family. Educated women are more politically involved and have a better understanding of their legal rights and how to exercise them. Education is an input not only for economic growth but also for inner strength, therefore the necessity for higher education among women, particularly rural women, is not adequately recognized in rural regions (Taxak, 2013). Moreover, even beyond literacy, education may significantly improve women's rights, dignity, and security. *Edu* is the key to unlocking the golden door of freedom and growth (Shetty & Hans, 2015).

According to Malik and Courtney (2011), *HEdu* permits women to have an impression on several discriminatory behaviors at the same time, resultant in positive alteration. Similarly, Sharma and Afroz (2014) stated that there is no question about the critical importance of *WEmp* via *HEdu*. It is now evident that literacy alone is not the ultimate solution; instead, women need be thoroughly educated in order to understand their rights and responsibilities. And should be entitled to use their rights as needed in the situation of India. Moreover, Arab and Faiza (2020) stated that higher education has an important role in releasing women from oppression and repression. Elsayed and Shirshikova (2023) emphasize the necessity of expanding access to *HEdu* for better social and labor-outcomes, predominantly for women. Alhazmi (2023) demonstrate the transformational potential of *WEmp* via higher education in fostering sustainable development. Similarly, Rasheed and Nosheen (2024) concluded *WEmp* could lead to a significant increase in Pakistan's GDP and raise household income levels. Ahmed and Hyndman-Rizk (2020) concluded that *HEdu* is necessary but insufficient to improve FLFP and economic occasions for women in Bangladesh's capable job market, if the quality of higher education is improved rather than the quantity. To accomplish development, gender equity, and reaching their full-potential as people, *Edu* must underwrite to the elimination of gender pigeonholes. Any development activity can only be completed

with mutual-cooperation and active involvement from both women and men. *WEmp* is a belief-mediated progression in which the influence of simply objective social factors, moderated by their proclivity to cultivate emancipatory ideas. Women and men should collaborate for economic progress, and women should take advantage of their abilities. Empowering women benefits not just individual women, but also families and communities as a whole via collective feat for GDPpc (Dominic & Jothi, 2012).

Furthermore, Nawaz *et al.* (2017) confirmed that higher education enhances women's position in the family and community. Bushra and Wajiha (2015) found a substantial link between empowerment factors and increased involvement in society. According to Sengupta (2013), patriarchal societies are the cheapest and most flexible labor sources. According to Akhter and Akbar (2016), believe that women serve a dual protagonist in the society, handling the home and working in the fields for unpaid employment, they are nevertheless denied basic respect and the opportunity to direct their own life. Arif *et al.* (2017) noticed that women with better education, expertise, and abilities are not offered comparable salary or positions within the organization. Higher education has a vital role in improving women's income levels since it promotes self-esteem, independence, and confidence, as well as allowing women to break free from traditional gender norms (Asghar, 2018). *HEdu* women may make their own decisions and raise knowledge about their truths, among other things (Batool & Batool, 2018). Furthermore, Jayaweera (2010) similarly stated that *HEdu* for women is muscularly connected with more freedom of thought and appearance, healthier decision-making, engrossment in economic-activities, and increased political options. Ignorant women, on the other hand, rely heavily on males throughout their lives. In conclusion, women face discrimination at both the societal and institutional levels; it is a pressing issue that requires in-depth analysis of all elements, with a focus on the role of higher education in reducing those concerns (Friedman, 2004). Moreover, Le and Nguyen (2021) underlined the reputation of female *Edu* in achieving sustainable-development. Women are crucial in our culture; without active engagement from women, society cannot progress. Women's empowerment is critical for national development, particularly in developing nations such as Pakistan (Khan *et al.*, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Education is critical to improving a country and meeting modern-day living standards. *HEdu* is crucial and necessary for both male and female members of any community. Empowerment is the process of allowing or authorizing individuals to think, act, and direct their job autonomously. Education helps women to develop their perspectives and understanding, allowing families, societies, and the nation as a whole to become more competitive. It contributes significantly to improving women's living situations. Women's empowerment is critical to a country's overall growth since they are an integral aspect of society that cannot be overlooked. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the role of education to empowering the women and its role in the sustainable development in Pakistan. This study used the secondary data from 2005-2024 and analyze through figures and also used the thematic analysis as well based on discussion. This study found that 49% of the Pakistan population contains on females, and higher education enrollments has significantly contributed in the economic development. Furthermore, this also found that female labor force participation in general and with higher education significantly contribute in the economic development, while, unemployed female labor force has significantly harmed the economic development in Pakistan. Therefore, this study concluded that based on the empirical evidence and thematic analysis that higher education is crucial factor for women's empowerment and women's empowerment is crucial factor for economic development in Pakistan. Education has a favorable association with the determinants of women's empowerment in Pakistan, prompting new legislation to raise women's status and encourage parents to educate their children. The government's participation is critical, and it must gain the trust of other organizations, community leaders, and the general public in order to implement gender balancing policies and initiatives that will contribute to women's economic, social, and political empowerment. Therefore, this study highly recommended that government and

society take action to attract the female to higher education. Furthermore, the government establish more educational institutions to give more opportunities to females for education, give security and remove restriction. Because, to achieve the goal of sustainable development both the males and females work together. Moreover, the society and government also facilitate the female to participate in the labor force to contribute in the economic development.

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