

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ENHANCING WOMEN'S SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of higher education in enhancing women's self-esteem and self-confidence using a quantitative research design. Data were collected from the university students through a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, with participants selected randomly from the selected departments. The data were analysed using SPSS with descriptive statistics. The findings indicate that higher education has a significant positive impact on women's self-image, self-worth, decision-making ability, and overall confidence. Most respondents reported improved self-esteem, stronger identity, and greater confidence in academic and professional settings. The study concludes that higher education is a key factor in empowering women and promoting their personal and social development.

Keywords: Higher Education, Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, Women Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has immense impact on people's social, psychological, and personal growth. In modern civilizations, education is seen as a crucial tool for self-improvement and empowerment in addition to being a way to gain knowledge and professional skills (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2020). Higher education has become an especially potent tool for women in terms of boosting their social position, expanding their prospects, and strengthening their psychological well-being. As nations understand the need of gender equality, academic research has focused on the impact of higher education in developing women's confidence and self-perception (United Nations, 2023).

According to Carol Dweck 2019, self-esteem and self-confidence are two significant psychological concepts that affect a person's total personality development and social engagement. Self-esteem is a person's assessment of their own value, skills,

and social standing. Angela Duckworth 2018, says that women with high self-esteem typically have a positive self-image, are more motivated, and are more resilient in the face of adversity. According to Naila Kabeer (2020), self-confidence, on the other hand, indicates a person's belief in their capacity to carry out activities, make decisions, and engage successfully in many social and professional contexts. Women must possess these attributes in order to actively engage in leadership, professional, and educational responsibilities (Sarah Ahmed, 2021).

Women in various nations have traditionally experienced educational challenges due to cultural, societal, and economic concerns (UNESCO, 2021). Margaret Archer, 2018 investigate that limited access to educational possibilities frequently led to decreased confidence, limited employment options, and poorer engagement in decision-making processes. However, the growth of higher

education has gradually rehabilitated these dynamics by empowering women with knowledge, critical thinking abilities, and exposure to a variety of opinions. Academic learning and campus experiences provide women with opportunity to express their thoughts, participate in intellectual discussions, and build a greater sense of identity and independence.

Higher education institutions also offer nurturing environments that promote personal development and self-expression. Women can improve their communication skills, leadership abilities, and self-confidence by participating in academic activities, group discussions, research projects, and extracurricular programs. As women move through higher education, they frequently become more conscious of their abilities, rights, and potential contributions to society. This approach considerably improves both self-esteem and self-confidence (United Nations Development Programme 2022).

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019), declares that education allows women to gain economic freedom and social mobility. Educated women are more likely to work, make educated life choices, and question established preconceptions that limit their potential. They get more confidence in their abilities and a better understanding of their personal value as they gain access to more knowledge and professional prospects. As a result, higher education plays a critical role in women's empowerment and psychological growth.

Despite the widely acknowledged benefits of education, there is still a need to investigate how higher education affects women's self-esteem and confidence in various social and cultural circumstances. Understanding this link can assist educators, legislators, and institutions in developing educational programs and supportive environments that foster women's psychological empowerment and personal development.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the transforming function of higher education in influencing women's self-esteem and confidence. The study's primary goals are to analyse the relationship between higher education and women's self-esteem, as well as to examine the impact of higher education on women's self-

confidence. The study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how educational experiences affect women's personal growth and empowerment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education has long been recognized as a critical factor in the empowerment and personal development of women. Numerous studies highlight that access to higher education enhances women's awareness, independence, and participation in social and economic activities (Kumari, & Vishvakarma, 2025). According to Yaseenzai, & Malik, 2024, education provides women with the knowledge and confidence necessary to challenge social barriers and pursue their aspirations. Research indicates that women who attain higher levels of education often demonstrate stronger self-perception, improved decision-making abilities, and greater participation in leadership roles. Educational institutions also provide opportunities for intellectual engagement, social interaction, and exposure to diverse perspectives, all of which contribute to the development of positive self-esteem and confidence among female students (Achak, Azizi, Boutib, Chergaoui, & Marfak, 2025).

Several empirical studies support the relationship between higher education and women's self-esteem. For instance, research conducted by Morris Rosenberg suggests that education plays a significant role in shaping individuals' perceptions of self-worth and competence (Perveen, Altaf, & Tehreem, 2022). Women who pursue higher education often experience increased self-respect, independence, and confidence in their abilities (Khan, Anwar, Khan, Ullah, & Sultan, 2022). Educational achievements, academic success, and participation in classroom discussions help women develop a stronger sense of identity and personal value. Additionally, exposure to supportive academic environments and mentorship further reinforces their confidence and encourages them to pursue professional and personal goals (Selimović, A., Selimović, & Husarić, 2019).

From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between education and self-esteem can be explained through the framework of the Self-Esteem Theory and Social Cognitive Theory

proposed by Albert Bandura (Albert Bandura, (1997). Self-Esteem Theory suggests that individuals develop a sense of self-worth through social experiences and achievements (Naila Kabeer, (1999). Higher education provides opportunities for academic accomplishments and social recognition, which enhance women's self-evaluation and personal confidence. Similarly, Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the role of self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to perform tasks successfully. Through academic learning, skill development, and exposure to role models, women in higher education environments strengthen their belief in their capabilities, leading to improved self-confidence and self-esteem (Morris Rosenberg, (1965). Furthermore, various studies have emphasized that higher education contributes significantly to women's psychological empowerment. Researchers have found that female students who actively participate in academic programs, leadership activities, and research initiatives often develop stronger communication skills and a higher level of self-confidence. Education also promotes critical thinking, independence, and social awareness, enabling women to overcome traditional gender stereotypes and

societal limitations. Consequently, higher education not only enhances women's academic and professional prospects but also fosters personal growth by strengthening their self-esteem and confidence, which are essential for their active participation in modern society.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative research design to examine the role of higher education in enhancing women's self-esteem and self-confidence. Data were collected through a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire from 30 eight-semester female students at Women University, selected through random sampling from the departments of Education, English, and Psychology. The instrument measured two variables: self-esteem and self-confidence. The collected data were analysed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistics.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the empirical findings from the study conducted on the role of higher education in shaping women's self-esteem and self-confidence.

4.1 Higher education has helped me develop a positive image of myself

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	18	60.0	60.0	60.0
	A	11	36.7	36.7	96.7
	N	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.1 The survey results show higher education has a profoundly positive impact on self-image, with 96.7% of respondents are

agree. A significant 60% strongly agree, while 36.7% agree, and only 3.3% remain neutral. The data suggests higher education fosters a positive self-image among students.

4.2 I feel more respected by those around me because of my education.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	10	33.3	33.3	33.3
	A	15	50.0	50.0	83.3
	N	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.2 The survey results show that 83.3% of respondents feel more respected due to their education, with 33.3% strongly agreeing and

50% agreeing. Meanwhile, 16.7% remain neutral. Overall, education enhances perceived respect from others.

4.3 My achievements in education have contributed to my self-worth.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	14	46.7	46.7	46.7
	A	11	36.7	36.7	83.3
	N	3	10.0	10.0	93.3
	DA	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.3 The survey results show that 83.3% of respondents believe their educational achievements have contributed to their self-

worth, with 46.7% strongly agreeing and 36.7% agreeing. Only 6.7% disagree, while 10% remain neutral.

4.4 Pursuing higher education has strengthened my self-belief.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	16	53.3	53.3	53.3
	A	10	33.3	33.3	86.7
	N	2	6.7	6.7	93.3
	DA	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.4 The survey results indicate that pursuing higher education has strengthened self-belief, with 53.3% strongly agreeing and 33.3%

agreeing, totalling 86.6%. A small percentage, 6.7%, disagree, while another 6.7% remain neutral. Its signify that higher education boosts self-belief.

4.5 Higher education makes me feel more valuable in society

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	17	56.7	56.7	56.7
	A	8	26.7	26.7	83.3
	N	4	13.3	13.3	96.7
	DA	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.5 The survey results show that 83.3% of respondents believe higher education makes them feel more valuable in society, with 56.7%

strongly agreeing and 26.7% agreeing. Only 3.3% disagree, while 13.3% remain neutral. The result indicates a strong positive response with moderate consistency.

4.6 I have a stronger sense of identity because of my academic experience.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	12	40.0	40.0	40.0
	A	13	43.3	43.3	83.3
	N	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.6 The survey results indicate that 83.3% of respondents have a stronger sense of identity due to their academic experience, with 40%

strongly agreeing and 43.3% agreeing. Meanwhile, 16.7% remain neutral. The cumulative percentage confirms that the

majority of respondents perceive a stronger personal identity as a result of their educational experiences. These findings suggest that higher education not only imparts knowledge but also

plays a crucial role in helping women develop a clearer and more confident sense of who they are.

4.7 Education has helped me overcome insecurities about myself.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	9	30.0	30.0	30.0
	A	13	43.3	43.3	73.3
	N	5	16.7	16.7	90.0
	DA	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total		30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.7 The survey results indicate that 73.3% of respondents believe education has helped them overcome insecurities, with 30% strongly

agreeing and 43.3% agreeing. Meanwhile, 16.7% remain neutral, and 10% disagree.

4.8 My self-esteem has improved since entering higher education.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	11	36.7	36.7	36.7
	A	12	40.0	40.0	76.7
	N	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
Total		30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.8 The survey results indicate that 76.7% of respondents believe their self-esteem has improved since entering higher education,

with 36.7% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing. Meanwhile, 23.3% remain neutral. Higher education enhances self-esteem of women.

4.9 I feel more confident in making important life decisions due to my education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	15	50.0	50.0	50.0
	A	12	40.0	40.0	90.0
	N	1	3.3	3.3	93.3
	DA	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total		30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.9 The survey results show that 90% of respondents feel more confident in making important life decisions due to their education, with 50% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing. Only 6.7% disagree, while 3.3% remain neutral. Its indicate a strong positive response with moderate variability. These results demonstrate

a strong positive response, with moderate variability among participants. Overall, the findings suggest that higher education plays a crucial role in strengthening decision-making confidence, empowering women to make informed and confident choices in their personal and professional lives.

4.10 I believe I can achieve my goals because of the skills I've gained through education.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	13	43.3	43.3	43.3
	A	11	36.7	36.7	80.0
	N	5	16.7	16.7	96.7

DA	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.10 The survey results indicate that 80% of respondents believe they can achieve their goals due to the skills gained through education, with 43.3% strongly agreeing and 36.7%

agreeing. Meanwhile, 16.7% remain neutral, and 3.3% disagree. The survey results indicate that higher education significantly contributes to women's confidence in achieving their goals.

4.11 I can handle criticism and feedback more constructively now.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	6	20.0	20.0	20.0
	A	20	66.7	66.7	86.7
	N	2	6.7	6.7	93.3
	DA	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total		30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.11 The survey results show that 86.7% of respondents believe they can handle criticism and feedback more constructively, with 20% strongly agreeing and 66.7% agreeing. Meanwhile, 6.7% remain neutral, and 6.7%

disagree. The mean score of 2.0000 and standard deviation of 0.74278 indicate a strong positive response with moderate consistency. Education enhances constructive feedback handling.

4.12 I am more confident interacting in professional or academic settings.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	8	26.7	26.7	26.7
	A	14	46.7	46.7	73.3
	N	8	26.7	26.7	100.0
Total		30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.12 The survey results indicate that 73.4% of respondents are more confident interacting in professional or academic settings,

with 26.7% strongly agreeing and 46.7% agreeing. Meanwhile, 26.7% remain neutral. The result show that education enhances professional and academic confidence.

4.13 I feel prepared to face challenges and uncertainties in life.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	9	30.0	30.0	30.0
	A	16	53.3	53.3	83.3
	N	3	10.0	10.0	93.3
	DA	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total		30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.13 The survey results show that 83.3% of respondents feel prepared to face challenges and uncertainties in life, with 30% strongly agreeing and 53.3% agreeing. Meanwhile, 10% remain neutral, and 6.7% disagree. These

findings suggest a strong positive response with moderate variability, highlighting that higher education equips women with the confidence, skills, and resilience needed to confront personal and professional challenges effectively.

4.14 I have developed the confidence to lead and make decisions.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	9	30.0	30.0	30.0
	A	15	50.0	50.0	80.0
	N	5	16.7	16.7	96.7
	DA	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total		30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.14 The survey results show that 80% of respondents believe they have developed the confidence to lead and make decisions, with

30% strongly agreeing and 50% agreeing. Meanwhile, 16.7% remain neutral, and 3.3% disagree.

4.15 I believe education has helped me become a more emotionally resilient person.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	7	23.3	24.1	24.1
	A	13	43.3	44.8	69.0
	N	8	26.7	27.6	96.6
	DA	1	3.3	3.4	100.0
	Total	29	96.7	100.0	
Missing	System	1	3.3		
Total		30	100.0		

Table 4.15 The survey results indicate that 68.9% of respondents believe education has helped them become a more emotionally resilient person, with 24.1% strongly agreeing and 44.8% agreeing. Meanwhile, 27.6% remain neutral, and 3.4% disagree. One respondent didn't answer.. Education enhances emotional resilience. These findings suggest a generally positive response with moderate variability, highlighting that higher education supports the development of emotional strength and the ability to cope with personal challenges.

consistently contributes to fostering a positive perception of self among women.

In terms of social perception, education appears to enhance how individuals believe they are viewed by others. A significant 83.3% of respondents reported feeling more respected due to their educational attainment. The relatively low standard deviation reflects a shared perception among participants, reinforcing the idea that education elevates social standing and interpersonal recognition.

Similarly, educational achievements were found to be closely linked with a sense of self-worth. A large majority (83.3%) acknowledged that their academic accomplishments have contributed positively to how they value themselves. Although a small proportion expressed neutrality or disagreement, the overall trend strongly supports the role of academic success in building internal validation and personal pride. The data further indicate that higher education strengthens self-belief. Approximately 86.6% of respondents agreed that pursuing higher education has reinforced their confidence in their own abilities. This finding highlights the empowering nature of educational engagement, which not only imparts knowledge but also builds psychological strength.

Moreover, higher education contributes to a sense of societal value. Most respondents

FINDING

The analysis of survey data clearly demonstrates that higher education plays a significant and transformative role in enhancing women's self-esteem, self-confidence, and overall personal development. Across all measured indicators, respondents expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions regarding the impact of their educational experiences.

The findings reveal a remarkably strong influence of higher education on self-image. An overwhelming majority (96.7%) of respondents agreed that their self-image has improved, with a substantial proportion expressing strong agreement. The very low level of neutrality and absence of disagreement indicate a near consensus, suggesting that higher education

(83.3%) reported feeling more valuable within society as a result of their education. This suggests that education not only transforms internal perceptions but also shapes individuals' sense of belonging and contribution to the broader community.

A strong sense of identity also emerged as a key outcome of academic experience. The majority of participants (83.3%) indicated that their educational journey has helped them develop a clearer and stronger sense of self. This reflects the role of higher education in identity formation, particularly among women navigating social and cultural expectations.

In addition, education was found to help individuals overcome personal insecurities. While the majority (73.3%) agreed with this statement, the slightly higher variation in responses suggests that this impact may differ depending on individual experiences. Nevertheless, the overall trend remains positive, indicating that education provides a supportive environment for personal growth.

Improvement in self-esteem was another notable finding, with 76.7% of respondents reporting enhanced self-esteem since entering higher education. Although some respondents remained neutral, the dominant positive response indicates that educational exposure plays a meaningful role in boosting self-confidence.

One of the strongest outcomes relates to decision-making confidence. A striking 90% of respondents reported feeling more confident in making important life decisions due to their education. This finding underscores the practical and life-oriented benefits of higher education beyond academic achievement.

Furthermore, 80% of respondents expressed confidence in achieving their goals as a result of the skills gained through education. This demonstrates that higher education not only builds confidence but also equips individuals with a forward-looking mindset and goal-oriented thinking.

The ability to handle criticism constructively was also enhanced, as indicated by 86.7% of respondents. This suggests that educational environments foster critical thinking, emotional maturity, and resilience in dealing with feedback.

In professional and academic interactions, 73.4% of respondents reported increased confidence. Although a notable proportion remained neutral, the overall findings suggest that higher education helps individuals feel more comfortable and competent in formal settings.

Additionally, a large majority (83.3%) felt prepared to face life's challenges and uncertainties. This reflects the role of education in developing adaptability and problem-solving skills, which are essential for navigating complex life situations.

Leadership and decision-making abilities were also positively influenced, with 80% of respondents indicating increased confidence in these areas. This highlights the role of higher education in nurturing leadership potential among women.

Finally, education was found to contribute to emotional resilience, with 68.9% of respondents acknowledging this impact. Although this is slightly lower compared to other indicators, it still represents a strong positive trend, suggesting that education supports emotional strength and coping mechanisms.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the significant role of higher education in enhancing women's self-esteem and self-confidence. A clear majority of respondents reported positive changes in self-image, self-worth, and self-belief, highlighting the contribution of education to personal and psychological development. Higher education was found to strengthen decision-making abilities, increase perceived social respect, and foster a stronger sense of identity. These outcomes suggest that education extends beyond academic achievement, functioning as a mechanism for empowerment and social recognition.

Although minor variations were observed in areas such as emotional resilience and overcoming insecurities, the overall pattern remains strongly positive. This indicates that higher education consistently contributes to building confidence and empowering women across multiple dimensions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that higher education has a substantial positive impact on women's self-esteem and self-confidence. It enhances self-perception, strengthens independence, and improves the ability to make informed life decisions.

The results affirm that higher education serves as a vital instrument of empowerment.

Expanding access to educational opportunities for women is therefore essential for promoting individual growth and achieving broader social development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In light of the findings, this study offers several important recommendations aimed at maximizing the transformative potential of higher education in enhancing women's self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Policymakers should prioritize expanding equitable access to higher education for women, particularly in marginalized and rural communities. Financial support mechanisms such as scholarships, grants, and fee concessions should be enhanced to reduce economic barriers and encourage female enrolment.
- Educational institutions should incorporate structured programs that focus on personal development, including leadership training, communication skills, and critical thinking. Such initiatives can play a vital role in reinforcing self-confidence and self-efficacy among female students.
- Universities should develop mentorship networks that connect students with successful female professionals and academics. Exposure to role models can inspire students, strengthen their aspirations, and reinforce their belief in their own potential.
- Institutions must foster safe, inclusive, and gender-sensitive environments where women feel valued and supported. Counselling services, peer support groups, and psychological well-being programs should be strengthened

to address issues related to self-esteem and emotional resilience.

- Awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives should be conducted to challenge societal norms and stereotypes that limit women's educational participation and personal growth. Families and communities must be sensitized to the long-term benefits of educating women.
- Institutions should provide comprehensive career counselling and skill development programs to help women align their education with career goals. This will further strengthen their confidence in achieving professional success.
- Future studies should explore the long-term and comparative impact of higher education on women across different socio-economic and cultural contexts. This will provide deeper insights into how educational experiences shape confidence and identity over time.

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