

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE WOMEN'S HANDICRAFTS MARKET IN HERAT PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN

Wahideh Soroosh, Independent Researcher, Afghanistan

ABSTRACT

This quantitative study investigates the impact of vocational training on women's employment in the Handicrafts Market of Herat Province, Afghanistan. The study surveyed 306 trained women out of a population of 1,500 using Cochran's formula for sample size determination. Data were analyzed using SPSS. The findings revealed that vocational training significantly improved women's employment prospects by enhancing occupational creativity, job performance, job success, and job satisfaction. The strongest correlation was observed with job satisfaction ($r = 0.601$, $p < .01$). Regression analysis confirmed a positive and significant impact of training on overall employment effectiveness. These findings underscore the role of targeted vocational programs as effective tools for women's economic empowerment and professional development in Afghanistan's local markets.

Keywords: Technical and vocational training, employment, women, handicrafts

INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is widely recognized as a critical mechanism for equipping individuals with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary for employment across diverse economic sectors (UNESCO, 2016; Sadie, 2020). TVET programs contribute to poverty reduction, job creation, and social inclusion, particularly among marginalized groups such as women and rural populations (International Labour Organization, 2020). Despite their potential, the translation of vocational training into sustainable employment for women remains constrained in many developing countries by social, economic, and cultural barriers (Gautam, 2020). These barriers include limited access to training centers, restrictive gender norms, financial constraints, and insufficient linkages between training programs and labor market demand (World Bank, 2021; World Bank, 2025).

Although vocational training has been shown across multiple contexts to enhance women's employment prospects, entrepreneurial engagement, and economic independence, its effectiveness within Afghanistan remains insufficiently understood (Adeleke, 2014; Agarwal & Mani, 2024). Evidence from neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Nepal, and regions of India demonstrates that women who receive vocational and technical skills training often experience increased income generation, greater empowerment, and higher participation in household and community decision-making. These findings suggest that well-designed training programs can

play a critical role in advancing women's socioeconomic status. However, transferring these successes to Afghanistan is far from straightforward.

In Afghanistan, especially in the years following significant political and structural shifts, women face heightened constraints that severely limit their participation in both formal and informal labor markets. Reports from international organizations highlight that Afghan women continue to encounter systemic barriers such as restrictive gender norms, reduced mobility, limited access to markets, and the absence of financial capital and mentorship opportunities. Even when vocational training programs exist, often supported by development agencies and humanitarian actors, their potential impact is curtailed by cultural expectations and policies that restrict women's public engagement (Shah, Parveen & Saboor, 2024). As a result, many women trained in handicrafts, home-based work, or small-scale production struggle to translate acquired skills into sustainable income or market presence.

Despite increasing investment in vocational initiatives across Afghanistan, empirical research evaluating their actual impact on women's employment outcomes remains scarce. Very little is known about how specific training programs influence women's participation in local economic spaces such as the Women's Handicrafts Market in Herat, or how structural and cultural barriers shape the transition from skill acquisition to income generation. This gap in the literature limits both program improvement and evidence-based policymaking. Therefore, there is a critical need to examine the real-world effectiveness of vocational training for Afghan women, identify the contextual obstacles that undermine its success, and determine the factors that enable or hinder women's economic participation. Addressing this gap is essential for designing interventions that can meaningfully contribute to women's empowerment and economic resilience in Afghanistan.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws upon Human Capital Theory and Empowerment Theory. Human Capital Theory posits that investment in individuals' knowledge, skills, and abilities enhances productivity and employability (Becker, 1993), while Empowerment Theory highlights how expanding individuals' access to resources and decision-making capacity fosters both economic and social advancement (Johnson, 2015; Kabeer, 1999). Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine how vocational training contributes to both the economic and personal empowerment of women. Beyond skill acquisition, vocational programs also promote social transformation by challenging traditional gender roles and expanding women's participation in public and economic life (Gautam, 2020). Moreover, integrating entrepreneurship into vocational curricula can foster self-employment, mitigate unemployment, and contribute to local economic development (Babar & Sharma, 2016).

Given these dimensions, this study adopts a quantitative, case-study approach to investigate the impact of vocational training on women's employment in the Women's Handicrafts Market of Herat Province, Afghanistan. It examines how acquired skills translate into sustainable employment, identifies barriers and opportunities within the process, and analyzes the role of contextual factors such as market access, start-up capital, and support networks. By doing so, this research aims to provide evidence-based insights to guide policymakers, practitioners, and development organizations in designing more effective vocational training programs that maximize women's human capital, promote gender equity, and foster long-term economic empowerment in Afghanistan.

The conceptual framework (figure 1) shows how vocational training acts as a key driver of women's economic participation by enhancing women's skills, confidence, and decision-making capacity—key elements of human capital and empowerment. These gains impact women's employment and income-generating outcomes, particularly in the women's handicraft market in Herat province. However, the extent to which training leads to sustainable economic activity is shaped by social, economic, and cultural contextual factors that can facilitate or constrain women's ability to apply their skills. Policy and planning interventions—such as market linkages, financial support, and community participation—act as external forces that strengthen or weaken each stage of this process. Taken together, the framework explains how training, context, and policy interact to determine women's employment outcomes in Afghanistan Figure 1.

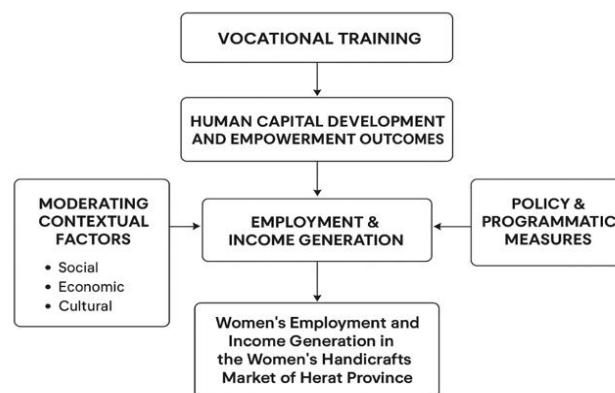


Figure 1
THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Source: Author (2025)

Vocational training enhances women's human capital and strengthens their skills and capacities for economic activity. As human capital improves, women experience greater empowerment, which increases their self-confidence and readiness to participate in the market. However, the extent to which education is converted into employment and income generation is moderated by social, economic and cultural factors that can facilitate or constrain women's ability to put their skills into practice. At all stages of this process, policy and planning actions play a critical role by shaping the broader environment, either supporting or constraining women's opportunities to use their vocational skills effectively.

Research Questions

- To what extent does vocational training influence women's occupational creativity in the Women's Handicrafts Market of Herat Province?
- How does vocational training affect women's job performance in their handicraft-related activities and market participation?
- What is the relationship between vocational training and women's job success, including productivity, sales, and business continuity?
- How does participation in vocational training programs shape women's job satisfaction in the Women's Handicrafts Market?

- What aspects of vocational training (e.g., skill content, mentoring, market linkages) are most strongly associated with improved employment outcomes among women artisans in Herat?

METHODS

Research design

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design to examine the impact of vocational training on women's employment in the Women's Handicrafts Market of Herat Province, Afghanistan. A case-study approach was adopted to provide a focused, context-specific analysis of how acquired skills translate into sustainable employment outcomes. The study aimed to assess the relationships between vocational training and key employment-related outcomes (occupational creativity, job performance, job success, job satisfaction), and overall employment outcomes.

Population and sample

The statistical population consisted of women who had completed vocational training programs and were engaged in handicraft production in Herat. Based on available data, the total population was estimated at approximately 1,500 women. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for finite populations, resulting in 306 participants. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring representation across different training programs and age groups. Inclusion criteria included: (a) completion of at least one vocational training course, and (b) active participation in handicraft production or sales within the Women's Handicrafts Market.

Data collection instrument

- Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into two sections: Vocational Training Assessment, which measured participants' perceptions of training effectiveness, including skill acquisition, practical application, and relevance to employment.
- Employment Outcomes Assessment, which evaluated occupational creativity, job performance, job success, job satisfaction, and overall employment effectiveness.

All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Very Low") to 5 ("Very High"). The questionnaire was adapted from validated instruments used in prior research (Babel & Sharma, 2016; Gautam, 2020) and reviewed by a panel of experts for content validity.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Reliability coefficients for individual constructs ranged from $\alpha = 0.713$ to 0.739 , while the overall questionnaire reliability was $\alpha = 0.887$, indicating acceptable reliability for subsequent analyses.

Construct validity was established through expert review and alignment with theoretical frameworks (Human Capital Theory and Empowerment Theory). The questionnaire was pre-tested with 20 participants outside the main sample, and minor adjustments were made for clarity.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Institution/Committee. Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality of responses was ensured. Questionnaires were distributed in person within the Women's Handicrafts Market, and data collection was completed over a period of two months. Of 306 distributed questionnaires, all were completed and returned, yielding a 100% response rate.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version [insert version]. The analysis proceeded in several steps:

- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and overall responses.
- Normality testing was conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to determine whether parametric tests were appropriate. All variables met normality assumptions ($p > .05$).
- Pearson correlation analysis examined the strength and direction of relationships between vocational training and employment outcomes.
- Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to assess the predictive effect of vocational training on key employment variables. The ANOVA test was applied to evaluate the overall significance of regression models.

Effect sizes and significance levels were reported in accordance with APA 6 guidelines, and all analyses were interpreted at a 95% confidence level ($p < .05$).

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis of the Participants

The sample consisted of 306 women who had completed vocational training and were engaged in the handicrafts market in Herat Province. Most participants held an elementary (35%) or high school diploma (35%), while 23.2% possessed a bachelor's degree. Regarding marital status, 70% were married and 30% were single. Age distribution indicated that the largest group was under 25 years (44.77%), followed by 25–35 years (34.31%), with the remainder in older age categories. These findings suggest that the majority of participants were young, married women with relatively low educational attainment Table 1.

Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Reliability coefficients for each construct were as follows:

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Job Engagement	7	0.717
Occupational Creativity	9	0.739
Job Success	6	0.713
Job Performance	4	0.72
Job Satisfaction	7	0.729
Vocational Training	5	0.733
Overall	38	0.887

All coefficients exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability for further analysis.

Normality Testing

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to assess the normality of the distribution for all variables. All significance values were greater than 0.05, indicating that the data were normally distributed and parametric tests were appropriate for hypothesis testing Table 2.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	p-value
Employment outcomes	306	1.916	0.423	0.722	0.635
Job Creativity	306	1.752	0.457	0.704	0.701
Job Success	306	1.874	0.391	0.688	0.719
Job Performance	306	1.944	0.59	0.735	0.604
Job Satisfaction	306	1.683	0.399	0.71	0.689
Vocational Training	306	1.778	0.408	0.699	0.712

Note: $p > .05$ indicates normal distribution

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Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine relationships between vocational training and employment outcomes. The results indicated statistically significant positive correlations for all variables:

Outcome Variable	r	p-value	Interpretation
Occupational Creativity	0.516	< .001	Moderate positive
Job Performance	0.26	< .001	Weak positive
Job Success	0.254	< .001	Weak positive
Job Satisfaction	0.601	< .001	Strong positive
Employment outcomes	0.278	< .001	Weak-to-moderate positive

These findings support the hypothesis that vocational training is positively associated with improvements in occupational creativity, job performance, job success, job satisfaction, and employment outcomes Table 4.

ANOVA Results

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the overall linear relationship between vocational training (independent variable) and employment outcomes (dependent variables). Results indicated a statistically significant relationship:

Model	Sum of Squares	df	F	p-value
Regression	111.7	2	277.89	< .001
Residual	39.258	97	—	—
Total	150.963	306	—	—

The F-statistic ($F = 277.89$, $p < .001$) confirms that vocational training significantly predicts employment outcomes among women in the handicrafts market Table 5.

Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was used to assess the predictive effect of vocational training on employment-related outcomes. Results demonstrated significant positive relationships for all dependent variables:

Dependent Variable	Standard Error (SE)	β (Correlation)	t	p-value
Occupational Creativity	0.036	0.145	3.287	< .001
Job Performance	0.037	0.803	22.676	< .001
Job Success	0.033	0.096	2.994	0.003
Job Satisfaction	0.039	0.809	3.955	< .001
Employment Outcomes	0.029	0.609	3.855	< .001

These results indicate that vocational training has a substantial and positive effect on occupational creativity, job performance, success, satisfaction, and overall employment among trained women in Herat Table 6.

Overall, the results provide strong evidence that participation in vocational training programs enhances women's employment outcomes in the handicrafts market. Job satisfaction showed the strongest association with training, while job performance and success displayed moderate yet significant relationships. These findings support both Human Capital Theory and Empowerment Theory, demonstrating that skill development not only improves economic productivity but also contributes to women's professional and personal empowerment.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the impact of vocational training on women's employment in the Women's Handicrafts Market of Herat Province, Afghanistan. The findings indicate that technical and vocational education significantly enhances occupational creativity, job performance, job success, job satisfaction, and overall employment outcomes among trained women.

Consistent with Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), the results demonstrate that investment in vocational skills increases women's productivity and employability. Women who participated in training programs were better equipped to apply their skills in the handicraft sector, thereby improving job performance and achieving greater success in their professional roles. These outcomes align with previous studies from Pakistan and Nepal, which reported that vocational training contributes to income generation, entrepreneurial engagement, and financial independence for women (Babar & Sharma, 2016; Gautam, 2020).

The strongest association was observed between vocational training and job satisfaction ($r = .601, p < .001$), suggesting that training not only improves technical competence but also positively influences participants' perceptions of their work and professional fulfillment. This finding supports Empowerment Theory (Kabeer, 1999), which posits that skill acquisition, increased agency, and access to resources foster both social and economic empowerment. In the context of Herat, vocational training programs appear to strengthen women's confidence, autonomy, and capacity to participate actively in economic activities, despite prevailing cultural and structural barriers (Loyalka, 2015; Loyalka et al., 2015)

Moderate yet significant correlations were found for occupational creativity, job performance, and job success, indicating that while vocational training enhances these outcomes, additional factors—such as access to capital, market linkages, and supportive networks—may moderate the effectiveness of training (Martin, 2016; Rahman & Sultana, 2012). This aligns with previous research emphasizing that vocational training alone is insufficient; sustainable employment requires complementary interventions that address financial, social, and cultural constraints (World Bank, 2021; CARE, 2024).

The regression analyses confirmed that vocational training is a significant predictor of employment outcomes, supporting the study's hypotheses (Dilanchiev, 2014; Diwakar & Ahamad, 2015; Rocke-Collymore, 2014). These results underscore the multidimensional benefits of TVET programs, demonstrating that well-designed training initiatives can improve not only technical skills but also women's professional growth, job satisfaction, and economic participation (Ebrahimi et al., 2022; Faber & León-Araúz, 2016).

Implications

The findings have several practical and policy implications:

- **Program Design:** Vocational training programs should integrate both technical skills and entrepreneurship training to enhance employability and income-generation potential.
- **Market Linkages:** Facilitating access to markets and start-up capital is essential to maximize the effectiveness of training programs.
- **Policy Support:** Policymakers should develop supportive policies, including mentorship initiatives and flexible training schedules, to overcome social and cultural barriers.
- **Empowerment Outcomes:** Programs should be designed to strengthen women's agency, confidence, and decision-making capacity, promoting broader social and economic empowerment.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the research focused solely on the Women's Handicrafts Market in Herat, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions or

sectors in Afghanistan. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term impact of vocational training on women's employment and empowerment. Finally, data were collected through self-reported questionnaires, which may introduce response bias (Garbuja & Pasa, 2016).

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that vocational training significantly enhances women's employment outcomes in Afghanistan's handicrafts sector. Training improves occupational creativity, job performance, job success, and job satisfaction, contributing to both economic productivity and social empowerment. The strongest effect on job satisfaction highlights the transformative potential of skill development programs in enhancing women's professional and personal fulfillment.

To maximize the impact of TVET programs, it is crucial to complement skill acquisition with supportive measures such as market access, financial resources, mentorship, and culturally sensitive interventions. By addressing both technical and socio-cultural dimensions, policymakers, development organizations, and practitioners can implement vocational training initiatives that not only increase employment but also empower Afghan women socially, economically, and professionally.

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Received: 15-Jan-2026, Manuscript No. IJE-26-16823; **Editor assigned:** 16-Jan-2026, Pre QC No. IJE-26-16823 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 30-Jan-2026, QC No. IJE-26-16823; **Revised:** 04-Feb-2026, Manuscript No. IJE-26-16823(R); **Published:** 11-Feb-2026