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*Full Length Research Paper*

# Empowering Women's Role through Technical and Vocational Programs: A Northern Jordan Case Study

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Abstract

The present study deals with a very significant issue in Jordan, which is the Jordanian women's empowerment in the Northern provinces (Irbid, Ajloun, and Jarash). It aims at discovering the constraints that face women's empowerment of Jordan to serve and develop their society through developing a questionnaire to collect data, and calculate the arithmetic means and standard deviations of each constraint. The study also aims at measuring the impact of technical and vocational educational programs on women empowerment of Jordan to serve and develop their society, by conducting a pretest and posttest pilot study to measure the trainees acquirement level of the executive secretarial skills through the designed training program, in order to help them getting job opportunities instead of waiting for their rank in the civil service bureau, and to assist them by acquiring the technical and vocational empowerment skills, and teach them the required skills in office management and secretarial work, which will contribute to increasing their employment ratios, as shown later. The programs came as a result of survey that shows the need for such well-trained secretaries and office works to fulfill the demands of both private and public sectors in the Northern provinces. Study sample consists of 50 unemployed female trainees who hold bachelor or diploma certificates, who were put through the educational program which was held over a period of nine months for two years (2015-2017) within two groups of 25 trainees. The program results showed statically a significant difference between the pretest and posttest of program aspects, in favor of posttest value, it showed that means of all constraints ranged between (3.22–3.53), with the social constraints ranked first with a mean and standard deviation of (M=3.53, SD= 1.21), and the personal constraints ranked last with a mean and standard deviation of (M=3.22, SD= 1.17). It also showed that women trainees employment has a high ratio of 84%, due to the empowerment of these women which broaden their minds and opened up for them new avenues and job opportunities by training them on the technical knowledge and skills which are required to be qualified executive secretaries. Furthermore, this program has positive effects on the social and economic lives of trainees.

**Keywords:** E-TVET funds, technical education, vocational education, women empowerment, Jordan.

**INTRODUCTION**

Women empowerment became one of the common concepts in most countries, especially in the social development field, and in women's writings and literatures, where the concept of empowerment substantially replaced the concepts of advancement and prosperity wellbeing, whether in the discussion of policies and programs, or the fight against poverty and community participation, and forms one of the main concepts in national and international conferences. The idea of this paper came as a result of a discussion between the two researchers about the situation of graduated female students in Jordan, and how the universities can help by giving them the chance to compete for job opportunities in the private sector instead of waiting for their rank at the civil service bureau. This discussion brought out the idea of present study and researchers sent an application form to the employment department of technical and vocational education training (E-TVET) funds, and therefore, the project came to light and becomes a reality.

Under the patronage of his Majesty King Abdullah II, a visionary framework was presented through the national agenda in 2006, and ambitious comprehensive reforms were called for in order to design and roll-out a cost efficient and effective training system program that improve the prospects of youth labor seekers and provide the economy with technical and well qualified skilled human resources at all levels. In the process of rolling out the reforms, however many challenges have impacted on full realization of the anticipated results, notably the economic downturn (following an international financial global crisis), and the significant influx of migrants often desperately seizing scarce employment opportunities. Despite these challenges, several results have been achieved since 2008, such as the establishment and operation of E-TVET council and the E-TVET council secretariat, the development of accreditation and quality assurance centre (CAQA), the beginning of significant reform in the VTC, and the implementation of E-TVET Funds.

The investment in E-TVET is essential to create an educated, skilled, and dynamic labor force with high levels of labor force participation, where the E-TVET sector is considered a major contributor and sponsor of the economic growth and social cohesion, and it helps to reduce poverty and promote development of human capital. Analysis of the Jordan labor market panel survey (JLMPS), in 2010 showed that those with TVET, on an average earn an additional (47.3 JD) per month relative to those without such training. This wage differential would lead to (a) gain an approximately (17,000 JD) over the course of a 30-years work-life, which significantly exceeds the average TVET cost per person in Jordan.

Today, women programs have been targeted by the E-TVET system which has previously been geared to prepare an able-bodied Jordanian youth for employment at the Jordanian public sector, given the importance of contribution that women can make to the economy. Unfortunately, Women only make up 37% of the total enrolment in TVET programs. Only limited number of courses is provided in women-friendly atmosphere and they are generally related to the traditional female professions like hairdressing. The participation of women in labor market is often limited to the pre-defined ideas of what they can and cannot do, which not only restrain their individual rights to participate in the economic aspects of countries, but also deny their communities and nations to benefit from their talents, and therefore hold backs growth and economic development. Most women do not have access to vocational training and employment due to the social norms or stereotypes which classify training and employment as either appropriate for females or males.

Among the objectives of E-TVET achievements strategy, for the period (2008-2013) there were significant points related to the Jordanian women empowerment:

1. Increase the participation of women in labor force.
2. Assess the extent and nature of women's participation in boards, councils, and committees related to E-TVET.
3. Develop the necessary measures to increase women's participation.

To achieve these objectives, the following targets were drawn in order to improve women comprehensiveness:

1. Media campaigns that aimed to change employers' stereotypes (discriminating against women) are designed and implemented.
2. Apprenticeship programs are designed to enhance women employment opportunities.
3. Market programs are carried-out for women in the non-traditional career areas.

4. Gender sensitive curricula and training programs/class groups for women only.
5. Programs are designed for women in the areas of small business development.
6. Management and leadership courses are conducted for working women.

### **The Jordan National E-TVET Strategy, 2014**

Women all over the world, face variety of challenges: low representation in the political parties, exclusion from the workforce or having barriers to it, consequences of family status laws, physical and sexual abuses, and sometime having the responsibility to support their families by themselves. Nevertheless, women are known to be leaders at home; they oversee and raise their children, and care for their families, in addition to having a job, all at the same time but women can face these challenges and make the world a better place for themselves, their families, and their communities.

The proportion of women working outside the home has increased very slowly over the recent decades. The female labor market activity rate was 12% in 1985, and increased between (15%-18%) in 2007 (DOS, 2008a). Over the years the media has encouraged a more liberal attitude about working women, and women's employment has also gained greater legitimacy as a result of various activities led by the female members of the royal family and royal NGOs. However, the ambiguous legislations, lack of infrastructure, and stereotypes and prejudices still hold back women from fully participating in the labor market. It's also worth noticing that no data exist to allow female activities in the private sector to be evaluated. Many poor and low-class women work as a result of economical necessity, but a substantial number of working women come from middle-class families. Women's access to education has increased, and this led to high ambitions of women to work outside the home. Differences in the mind-set toward women's employment were frequently based on work nature and circumstances and the opposition to working women emerge to be less in skilled, high-level, and mid-level occupations, such as teaching, nursing, and secretarial work (Teleon et al., 2009).

The contradiction in the case of Jordanian woman relies on the fact that empirical data show Jordanian women to be slowly incorporating into the labor market, regardless of their improved educational achievement levels, where on one hand, better educated women choose to wait for their opportunity to obtain one of the scarce jobs in public sector and as a result stay unemployed, and on the other hand women with fewer skills are less expectedly to enter the labor market, for a variety of reasons such as non-professional jobs are often considered inappropriate for women, majority of employers in the private sector can't offer women an attractive working conditions, women are expected to be mainly mothers and housewives, and little support is available in the form of childcare facilities. In addition, employers especially those in the private sector may give preference to men when hiring and promoting employees, and labor laws still place extra loads on private employers who employ women.

In general, the increased educational achievement level of women, the high rates of non-participation females in the labor market, and unemployment of female lead to a serious misuse of resources invested in women's education. The circumstances may also demonstrate the restraints of women's right to follow their vision of personal achievement and their eagerness to donate to the financial interests of their families. In addition, it obstructs economic growth of the countries and businesses that lack employees with the adequate skills and talents. Therefore, greater efforts should be put to facilitate the integration of women into the labor market and persuade them to enter occupations and sectors, where adequate jobs have been created. This may require supplying them with the skills that help them to integrate successfully, and discover ways to make the new jobs and workplaces more attractive and female-friendly for them.

### **STUDY PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS**

It is possible to formulate the current research problems through the following questions:

1. What is the impact of technical and vocational educational programs on women empowerment of Jordan to serve and develop their society?
2. What are the constraints face women empowerment through technical and vocational education in Jordan to serve and develop their society?

## **STUDY OBJECTIVES**

1. To study the impact of technical and vocational educational programs on women empowerment of Jordan to serve and develop their society.
2. To study the constraints of technical and vocational education that face women empowerment in Jordan to serve and develop their society.

## **STUDY IMPORTANCE**

The significance of this research project, which came as a result of researcher's discussion with experts as well his observation and studies about the situation of graduated female students in Jordan stems from the women empowerment efforts to give them the correct role in the society, with the fact that employed women contribute to the family income which give them more respect among family members (Teleon et al., 2009).

In addition, there is a high percentage of educated and university graduate females who are looking for a job opportunity at the public sector with limited chances for employment and non-qualification for the private sector jobs. Therefore, the researcher proposed the idea of the study project to train such females and supply them with the require skills in office management and secretarial work.

Based on a survey that covers the governate of Irbid, the researcher concluded that there is a significant need for well-trained secretaries and office managers who are fully equipped with all the skills needed in the labor market.

## **STUDY LIMITATIONS**

The present study suffers from the following limitations that are represented in the obstacles or constraints that face women empowerment:

### **Violence**

it's the prime factor that goes up against women's empowerment, where physical, emotional, mental torture and agony are deep rooted in the society from ancient times, which are responsible for decline in female sex ratio.

### **Gender Inequality**

Women empowerment is not only limited to the economical independence of women, but it includes gender equality and many other things.

### **Family restrictions**

An illiterate guardian who will not send the female children's to educational institutions.

### **Early marriages**

It results in dropouts from school, where lack of awareness of female education is considered one of its causes.

## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

A process of enabling women to have access and make productive contributions to the economical independence, political participation, and social development. Empowerment enables the individuals to recognize their identities and strengths in all aspects of life. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater independence in making decisions, and freedom from the restraints imposed on them by customs, beliefs, and practices in the society. Finally, it means supporting women's potentials and capabilities to influence the social institutions that affect their lives (Al-Said, 2010).

### **Empowering**

The synonym for the word "tamkeen" in English is the word enabling, but not empowering, where the correct translation for the term "Istiqwa the Women" is "Women Empowerment", and the word power means strength, empowering means strengthening, and empowerment means "Istiqwa", making themselves strong, or strengthen themselves. "Istiqwa the Women" or "Women Empowerment" means strengthen the women to defeat men and cope with them in the conflict that governs the relationship between them, according to the Western culture which produced the term (Mohammad, 2012).

## **Empowering**

Linguistically, means enabling, reinforcing, strengthening, or enhancing. Empowering also means supporting the infrastructure of the organization, by providing the technical resources, strengthening the independence and self-responsibility, and focusing on the employees at the workshop by giving them the strength, information, rewards, knowledge, and protect them in the cases of emergency and non-expected behavior during customer service and focusing on the employees who deal with the customers and interact with them (Khader, 2003; Ahmed, 2008).

The researchers concluded the following simple concepts of empowerment, through the previous definitions:

1. Increase the spiritual, political, social, and economical powers and capabilities of women in the societies.
2. Give women all rights imposed for her.
3. Men will split and share employment opportunities with women.
4. Highlight women position and standing in the society.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PREVIOUS STUDIES**

The study by Opadhyay, 2005, which entitled "Women's Empowerment in India" aimed at to discussing women's empowerment in India, which relies heavily on several key variables including geographical location (dweller, rural line), educational level, marital status, and age, where the researcher noticed several national, regional, and sectional policies for women empowerment in India and particularly in the areas of health, education, economic, and politic, but still there was a gap that exists between the declare policies and the actual level of empowerment, and identified the following reasons for this gap: reasons related to laws and policies, reasons related to economic returns for women, reasons related to the violation of women's rights, and reasons related to women movement freedom restriction, access to education and health services, poor participation in decision making, and lack of experience.

While the study of Abdel Mowla, 2006, entitled "Education and Economic Empowerment of Women in Egypt", aims to formulate a policy in order to describes describe the factors that affect women's economical and educational empowerment through four levels: literal level, corporate working level, economy level, and the global economy level, and for this reason the study concentrated on examining the relationship between the education and economic empowerment of women in Egypt using the Egyptian labor market data for the year 2006, where the focus was on women's capabilities to work with good wages and good work quality. The study found that education enables women to gain strength in the labor market, and give them the competitive advantages to obtain employment opportunities, where it turned out that women get greater benefit than men when getting education in the field of improving labor market outcomes. The study concluded that educational empowerment of women contribute significantly to the improvement of their economical empowerment and give them greater opportunities to enhance the economical participation in the development of Egypt.

But the study entitled "Women Empowerment and Economic Development" by (Duflo, 2012) aimed to examine the relationship between the women empowerment and economical development, where the researcher assumes a strong relationship between these two variables by focusing on the women's role to achieve the economical development, with the fact that most research conducted in this topic did focus on the men role in achieving economical development, in a way that achieved injustice between men and women in this area. The researcher also reviewed the literature related to this topic and the controversy about the relationship between women empowerment and the economical development. The study

concluded that women empowerment will lead to the improvement of economical development and the achievement of high levels of prosperity, particularly in the areas of health, foodstuff, and nutrition. It also stressed on the need to achieve a balance between women and men role in the economical development.

Blattman, et.al, 2013 conducted a study entitled " Building Women's Economic and Social Empowerment Through Enterprise, Uganda", where researchers studied the effects of granting women, especially the poor women in Uganda grants grant and training train on the basic skills to achieve the economical empowerment of women, through the design and implementation of programs that were prepared previously for this purpose and designed by non-governmental Italian organization. The sample contained 1800 poor young woman women at 120 villages who were randomly selected, and took part of these programs for a period of 18 months. Those women were divided into groups under the supervision of proficient supervisors, and the information was collected for a period of (2009-2012). The study found that poor women managed to get specific benefits, through the establishment of their own businesses, which means that the implemented programs achieved higher value and benefit than its costs. In general, the study concluded that economical empowerment of women could bring positive effects for them, especially in the health area.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research depends on the descriptive and experimental analytical research approach, which tends to identify and describe the characteristics of sample phenomenon through the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data.

The potential risks of the research project:

The potential risks of implementing the project are very limited and confined with the need to make effort with the various businesses institutions on the Northern Province to conduct partnerships with them to hire the training program graduates.

Expected effects of the research project:

1. The graduation of modern trained female employees in the secretarial field and office work to meet the needs of labor market.
2. Contribute to the achievement of positive economical and social effects on the female trainees and the society as a whole.
3. Contribute to raising the provided service quality level in the secretarial field and office work, which will contribute to the development of provided services at the businesses institutions level and the recipients of these various services.

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

**Question one: What is the impact of technical and vocational educational programs on women empowerment of Jordan to serve and develop their society?**

To answer this question, the researcher computed paired sample T-test to test the impact of implementing the secretarial program to provide a range of skills for women, in order to help them in their empowerment and make them qualified for different jobs, as shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Paired sample T-test to test impact of implementing the secretarial program to provide a range of skills for women, in order to help them in their empowerment and make them qualified for different jobs.

No.	Program aspects	Test	N	Mean	SD	T	P-Value
1	Office communication	Pre	50	3.7933	.46772	-3.249	.001

	skills in the English language	Post	50	3.9500	.61747		
2	Computer skills	Pre	50	3.6793	.72346	-3.290	.001
		Post	50	3.8867	.72942		
3	Specialized secretarial skills	Pre	50	3.8239	.69625	-3.229	.001
		Post	50	4.0075	.64589		
4	Executive secretary	Pre	50	3.7570	.61958	-3.751	.000
		Post	50	3.9485	.61897		
5	Duties of the secretary in the English language	Pre	50	4.1161	.38097	-3.481	.001
		Post	50	4.2139	.33650		
6	Office management	Pre	50	4.1217	.53379	-5.914	.000
		Post	50	4.3620	.38187		
7	Computer applications in the secretariat	Pre	50	4.0303	.73189	-3.895	.000
		Post	50	4.2545	.61391		
8	Soft skills	Pre	50	4.0178	.79786	-3.331	.001
		Post	50	4.2249	.63366		
9	Public relations	Pre	50	4.1918	.61572	-2.962	.004
		Post	50	4.3522	.50802		
10	Business correspondence	Pre	50	4.2108	.64017	-2.700	.008
		Post	50	4.3614	.55220		
11	English printing and typing using the computer	Pre	50	4.4192	.54141	-2.067	.040
		Post	50	4.5210	.55795		
12	Arabic printing and typing using the computer	Pre	50	4.3036	.59699	-3.249	.001
		Post	50	4.4643	.54600		
13	Time management and meetings	Pre	50	4.0928	.60774	-4.926	.000
		Post	50	4.3293	.56444		
14	Field training	Pre	50	4.1350	.81282	-4.120	.000
		Post	50	4.4110	.56361		

Table 1 shows statically significant differences between pretest and posttest of program aspects, due to the fact that p-value of all program aspects is less than 0.05, which is a significant level. It favor of the posttest, which means that there is a positive impact of implementing the secretarial program to provide a range of skills for women, in order to help them in their empowerment and make them qualified for the different jobs.

**Question two: What are the constraints of technical and vocational education that face women empowerment in Jordan to serve and develop their society?**

To answer this question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the different constraints that face the women empowerment of Jordan to serve and develop their society, were computed. Table 2 below shows this:

**Table 2:** Mean and Standard deviation for the different constraints that face the women empowerment of Jordan to serve and develop their society.

No.	Obstacles/ constraints	Mean	SD	Rank	Level Importance
1	Social constraints	3.53	1.21	1	Moderate
3	Economical constraints	3.35	1.25	2	Moderate
2	Personal constraints	3.22	1.17	3	Moderate
	<b>Total</b>			--	Moderate

Table 2 shows means and standard deviations for all constraints, where the means ranged between (3.22-3.53) compared with the total instrument mean for the domain. The social constraints ranked first with a mean and standard deviation of (M=3.53, SD=1.21), the economic constraints ranked second with a mean and standard deviation of (M=3.35, SD=1.25) and the personal constraints ranked in last place with a mean and standard deviation of (M=3.22, SD=1.17).

**Table 3:** Employment ratios of female trainees at Irbid and Al-Huson University colleges.

	Number	Trainees acquire employment	Trainees didn't acquire employment	Employed trainees from each college %
<b>Trainees of Al-Huson University College</b>	25	22	3	88%
<b>Trainees of Irbid University College</b>	25	20	5	80%
<b>Total</b>	50	42	8	84%

It is noticed from Table 3 above that employment ratios of trainees are much higher than unemployment ratios, where the employment ratios of trainees at Al-Huson University College reached a high ratio of 88% and the employment ratios of trainees at Irbid University College were also high at 80%, with an average of



80% for both colleges. This result indicates that the designed training program was useful and had positive impact on the trainers, by increasing the employment level and contributing to women empowerment.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study concluded the followings:

First of all, there is a positive impact of implementing the secretarial program to provide a range of skills for women, in order to help them in their empowerment and make them well- qualified for the different jobs.

Secondly, the designed training program was useful and had positive impact on the trainees, by increasing the employment level and contributing to women empowerment.

Finally, there are different constraints that impact women empowerment, such as social, economical, and personal constraints.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the above conclusions the researcher suggested the following recommendations:

1. Awareness of female education is essential since it is a pre-condition for fighting against their oppression and it is a must to build healthy societies. It's said that "Educated mothers will educate family which results in educated population of a nation, which builds strong nation".
2. Encourage and ensure socio-economical participation of women in local and international forums.
3. Proper implementation of schemes provided by the government should be done by respective agencies.
4. Change the approach towards women based on sex discrimination and raises the awareness to remove gender inequality.
5. Encourage the feeling of self-dependence amongst women.
6. Such program should be considered as a model for stake holders to decrease the number of unemployed graduated females by equipping them with the needed skills demanded by labor market.

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