

Sana Khan

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Meanings of education in the life narratives of educated unemployed women in Pakistan

Master's Degree Programme in Gender Studies

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KHAN, SANA

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explored the narratives of six educated unemployed women living in the main cities of Pakistan, primarily focusing on their past educational experiences and its meaning in their current unemployed lives. The term "educated unemployed" highlights the contradiction these women face after getting education and being unable to secure employment. Moreover, this study not only addresses the contradiction but also examines the positive outcomes their education has brought into their lives. The findings of this study are based on existing literature on "gender, education, and employment," as well as feminist discussions on women's right to education and work. Central to this research is the focus on the voices and experiences of Pakistani women. This research is based on narrative interviews and thematic analysis, through which various themes emerged. The findings show that although these women's education did not lead to employment for several reasons, they still experienced positive changes in their lives. However, they also felt that their education is being wasted without corresponding employment opportunities.

Keywords: education, employment, feminist discussions, unemployed women, experiences, Pakistan, Pakistani women, narratives

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1. Introduction:

1.1 The initial phase of the research

My research interest has developed around the topic of women's education and work perhaps because of my experience as a teacher for two years and my father's advice to me from an early age to pursue good education and to secure a job to become financially independent. According to my father's teachings to me, education for girls is more important than it is for boys, because, in Pakistan, a woman is dependent on men in one aspect or the other, so for him a woman should be educated and employed, to secure her future and value in the society. What he said to me depicts the dependence of women in Pakistani society on their male counterparts in terms of finances, decision-making, education, and work. Also, Pakistan does not have a social benefits system, where women can be supported by the government financially. So, from the very beginning, I have been instilled with the value of independence. When I graduated, in 2019, I felt a sudden emptiness in my life, despite it being only for two months, I was eager to get a job since I wanted to do something in my life with the education I received and overcome the feeling of emptiness. For some reason, I could not find a job related to my field, so like most women in Pakistan, I applied to become a primary school teacher, which is a female-oriented job in Pakistan, I still wished for a job related to my field, but I had the satisfaction of doing something in my life.

This background relates to my choice of thesis topic that concerns the narratives of unemployed women about the meanings of education in their lives. Since they are unemployed, I am interested in exploring through their narratives what happens when they stay unemployed after receiving education. Is education for these women meaningful and if yes, in what ways? Do they experience positive outcomes in their current lives because of their educational experience? Moreover, I am interested in the contradiction of "educated but unemployed" that has not been given much attention in Pakistani context. In addition, as a researcher, having the same positionality as my interview participants, I am aware of the reasons for the disparity between educated women and unemployment (also mentioned in chapter 2) but what is missing is the research discussing this contradiction. So, the best way to know about this contradiction is knowing unemployed, educated Pakistani women experiences and to bring forward their voice.

Women's education has been one of the oldest debates in feminist discourse; focusing on women's education to bring equality and for the betterment of the society. Starting from Mary

Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the rights of women*, 1792 and Betty Friedan's book 'The Feminist Mystique'. The discussion on women's right to education and work is still a debatable topic in many societies, including Pakistan. These classical debates on women's right to education and work would help me in the analysis of the data collected through interviews and to also see how this classical discussion is still relatable.

The focus of this research is on the narratives of educated but unemployed women in Pakistan's urban areas. The aim is to uncover the experiences of women about their education; with education, I primarily mean their four-year bachelor's degree (university life or higher education) and onwards. The emphasis of this research is on educated unemployed women narrating their experiences and the meanings of education in their past and current lives. Here, in this research, I am specifically interested in the stories of currently *unemployed* educated women. When I refer to 'unemployed women', I am looking for experiences of women who do not leave their home to work at a different location, spend their time, and receive incentives for their work; nevertheless, I recognize and equally value the work of the women who are housewives, stay-at-home moms, and do unpaid care work, and I also recognize women's work who are self-employed. But my research's focus is on the education that prepares a woman for paid work and what happens when they do not have that work.

Secondly, I will search for the contradiction. By that, I mean: what does education mean to these educated unemployed women when they are unemployed for one reason or another? Does education make sense for them without employment?

1.2 Research aims and questions:

The aim of this research is to gain insights into women's experiences of what education has meant and continues to mean to them in their changing life situations. It aims to understand how and in what way education plays its role in the lives of unemployed women. It aims to see in what other ways, other than formal work, education plays its part in the lives of women. Moreover, it focuses on uncovering the contradiction in being an educated woman who is unemployed.

Here are the research questions that I aim to answer:

- What are the contradictions these women narrate about being “educated unemployed” in relation to their educational experiences?
- In what specific ways women narrate their educational experiences and its positive outcomes in their current lives?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Situation of women in a Pakistani society

I will begin with providing background information on situation of women in Pakistan, particularly in terms of education and employment. Pakistani society is highly regulated by socio-cultural norms and stereotypical beliefs that restricts women in taking part in public life whether it be education or employment. Patriarchy and gender-biased interpretation of religious texts are deeply rooted in Muslim-majority countries due to which women's participation in public life is not usually supported. (Pio and Syed, 2013) In terms of employment, it is obvious that the situation is same especially, the gender gap in Pakistan that is in every part of the country, women are held back socially and economically by extremist and prejudiced practices. Patriarchal culture, norms, and values have imposed constraints on women's social and economic mobility. As a result, in the labor force, women have never reached the level of men. Again, the significant obstacles women face in their career development are patriarchal practices, segregation of jobs because of gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes. (Raza and Murad,2010) In addition, gender roles and traditional expectations in Pakistan results in women quitting their jobs because according to these roles and expectations, "marriage should be the primary status in a women's life. For women in Pakistan, work and career is treated as a privilege that are women 'allowed' for them to be happy. (Mohsin and Syed, 2020) This privilege is usually either allowed or denied by the male members of their family, but they are expected to prioritize their marriage and family first. Furthermore, gender equity at home is a problem because according to gender roles women must do a second shift after their job that is house chores. Most women doctors would leave their jobs because it is difficult to manage both. This defines as one of the reasons for women being highly educated but unemployed. (Mohsin and Syed, 2020)

These studies explain why women in Pakistan cannot participate in public life or work in the field in which they got a degree. it shows the barriers women face in terms of getting employed which is crucial to know as a researcher. These studies also helped me see that most research in the field of women's education and employment focusses on why educated women do not enter the workforce, but not much on what happens to their education afterwards and how do they experience being educated and unemployed. These studies focus majorly in finding the reasons for them not being the part of the work force primarily concerned with the 'quantities' but less is

known about what unemployed women have to say about their education and its meaning especially in Pakistani context.

Not to deny the fact that there has been improvement in support for women's participation in education; Usually, unmarried girls in Pakistan who are pursuing higher education often receive parental support for their studies. This support is driven by the belief that education equips girls with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate potential challenges in their future married lives, particularly if they meet difficulties with their spouses or in-laws. (Moazam and sheikhani, 2018) It is noteworthy that this emphasis on education is not primarily tied to financial independence or earning money but rather centers on the value of women having a solid educational foundation. In addition to it, a crucial point mentioned in the study by Moazam and sheikhani is that "education serves as decorative thing and does not have any emancipatory effect." This observation emphasizes the prevailing socio-cultural lens through which women's education is perceived. It is often regarded to enhance one's desirability as a suitable marriage partner within society, without an expectation of bringing about transformative effects in their life. These studies could also assist me in seeing women's narratives in diverse ways, as my focus is educated women with no employment, this would help me seeing how education is meaningful in their personal and family life without professional job? the emphasis on education not being on financial independence but rather on having strong educational background motivates me to see what these educated unemployed women have to say about this belief that education is for enhancing their suitability within the society or is it different for them since they are educated unemployed.

In Pakistan, the division of family roles is based on the cultural norms and traditions, where men and women are assigned different responsibilities, leading to women taking on majority of the household duties. (Ali, et al.,2010) This situation results in anxiety, stress and both mental and physical exhaustion for women. They are left with less free time, isolation from public life and restrictions on access to education and employment opportunities. Moreover, women also do not have the authority to make decisions for themselves, living in a male dominated society where cultural and traditional norms give men the authority to make decisions on behalf of women irrespective of whether the man is her father, uncle, brother, or husband. (Ali, et al., 2010)

Research explored the difficulties caused in professional Pakistani women's lives due to the sociocultural context. It discovered the limitations on women's employment due to organizational

barriers have been improved significantly but still, dominant ‘gender relations’ in many ways are drawbacks in women’s participation in formal jobs. (Grünenfelder,2013) In Pakistani society, women’s work is usually accepted if the reason for her job is the financial need of her family. It is because of the statement that men and women have distinct roles and therefore adopt different skills and qualities. (Grünenfelder,2013) Not only this, but living on the earnings of women is considered a dishonor by parents and male members of the family. Particularly, in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan where the tribal laws and environment are conservative, and men and women are not allowed to work together as well as the issues related to the security of girls have made it worse. Consequently, ‘social conservatism, security, and religious interpretations have made it difficult to maintain gender parity in employment’(Zia,1998).

2.2 Women and education

There have been studies done related to how education has brought changes into the lives of women in different societies specifically in Pakistan and its nearby countries like India and Bangladesh because these countries share some similarities and history.

Education in the lives of women can bring about remarkable changes, such as boosting their confidence and elevating their status within the family and society. “Women, who are educated are confident and capable of making their own decisions.” (Noureen and Awan, 2011). While this case study by Noureen and Awan focused on the importance of education for women in Pakistan and by interviewing women aged 50-60 from a local female university who held positions of significance, it still stays a valuable study in terms of understanding the intersection of education and women in Pakistan. (Noureen and Awan, 2011) Experiences of being an educated woman in India were brought forward by Sharma-Brymer and Christine Fox using phenomenological hermeneutical method. Women's narratives were documented using an exploratory phenomenological approach to find the meanings behind their experiences rather than just the facts. To gain a more profound comprehension of the lived experience, multiple levels of sub-themes, primary themes, and a phenomenological theme were developed. “It opened new ways for understanding what it means to be a woman with education.” (Sharma & Fox, 2008) The stories methodically highlight the struggles and tensions faced by women.

These educated women go through constant negotiation between navigating private and public lives. Despite being confident and being aware of what is good for them, they often choose not to

change the traditional ways. This offers fresh perspectives on analyzing the lives of educated women within a certain socio-cultural framework. (Sharma & Fox, 2008) This study might help me in what I aim to study in this research is the contradiction of being educated and unemployed.

Daily life narratives of women in Urban Bangalore (India) have been studied, raising a question '*How do women with higher education view their own experiences of being educated in their everyday life?*'. Studying educated women's narratives revealed intricacies in gender relations, emphasizing the tensions and conflicts faced by women in their public and private life. Education as a tool for empowerment and social change is emphasized theoretically though women are still navigating the social expectation and gender roles. (Sharma Brymer, 2006) educated women have different experiences of being educated internally and externally. Educated women felt confident for being educated but this confidence was limited within their internal and external space. (Sharma Brymer, 2006) "as educated women they could do what they wanted to do but their experiences pointed out that they are compromising and adjusting within their internal and external space. The space of living as a traditional, educated woman in Indian society entails the choice of the educated woman to be so, as the participants' experiences showed." (Sharma Brymer, 2006)

Moreover, education for women is also a source of financial independence. According to (Malik and Courtney, 2011) women who pursue higher education get many benefits such as financial independence. This financial independence leads to a rise in status and recognition from their family and community. Though Malik and Courtney studied faculty members of local university, that means they held positions to pursue their careers, but my interest is to see women who are unemployed and do not have financial independence, what is it in that case. Not only financial independence but other advantages were also seen besides receiving an education, being financially independent women also felt growth in self-assurance, social value, and having a voice. (Malik and Courtney, 2011) From the critical feminist lens, it has been studied to understand the social and cultural opportunities that a woman gets through higher education and college spaces in Mewat, India. (Kisana and Arora, 2023) Despite their social agency being restricted, their college space was seen as transformative environment which offered them an "escape" (Kisana and Arora, 2023) College provides opportunities for imagination, dialogue, friendship, and support, all of which contribute to the intricate network of opportunities that lies ahead. Young women who come to college to "hang out" and make friends with other women perceive it as the one time in

their busy lives where they can partake in entertainment while sharing stories with other women. (Kisana and Arora, 2023) In my research, where I am studying women's education and its meaning in their past and current unemployed lives, this would give a background as education provides women an escape and to explore different opportunities, but what happens when their education is over, and they are unemployed? What do they have to say about their education and their lives then?

Education for women who are from disadvantage backgrounds is much more important for their empowerment. In such cases, the intersection of race, class and socio-economic backgrounds can make it more difficult. The narratives of black midlife women, (E.M. Lemmer,2009) shows how black midlife women give *“meaning to their story of educational history and its contribution to their self-identity.”* The analysis of their written life histories and interviews illustrates how these women made meaning of trauma and life transitions and gained empowerment through educational and professional success. Their educational achievements made them focus on their positive self-identity and reconciling prior setbacks. It adds that, *“women's education may have not brought them extra ordinary benefits “but they have contributed immeasurably to a positive sense of self in each woman.”* (E.M. Lemmer, 2009)

To elaborate further on the intersection of women and education, the factor of religion also plays a crucial role. It has been observed in a case study based on two ethnographic studies conducted in Pakistan and India, focusing on the lived experiences and meaning of empowerment via education for Muslim women in Pakistan and India. Taking into account, the women studied were from low-income communities, focusing on the educational position they held to define what it means to be empowered in their respective communities. They were also questioned, “what it means to be educated” living in a Muslim minority (India) and living in a Muslim Majority country (Pakistan). They mainly focused on religion and society, though women's vision of what it meant to them to be educated agreed on the value of being exposed to other people, this was taken as a sign of being educated. Not only this, but women also had the feeling that they got new roles and responsibilities, that contributes to their empowerment. Their empowerment had allowed them to have more freedom and opportunities. Both in private and public life. Women get the feeling of desirability through education (Shah and Khurshid, 2019)

Although women's participation in higher education has increased steadily in Bangladesh but employment rate has not progressed that. It has resulted in the question of “whether women in

Bangladesh have enhanced agency and empowerment through by means of their education?” Because of “stereotyped subject selection, limited IT competence, a lack of relevant job skills and limited career aspirations,” women have been able to improve their intrinsic, but not their instrumental empowerment. Moreover, it was also found prevalent that almost 85% of women had no decision-making power at the time of their enrolment in an institution, in fact, it was decided by the male guardians (father, brother, husband) of the women. Whereas the subject selection was reported by most of the women to be their own choice. through the experiences of higher education, the women got the opportunity to speak out and make contribution in the decision-making in their families and contributing positively to the gender dynamics of their households. Furthermore, all respondents intended to earn an MA degree and have their own independent income, indicating that education had positively influenced their aspirations. (Ahmed and Hyndman-rizk, 2017)

Moreover, construction of women’s university lives both from past and present within the framework of socio-cultural experiences has been studied in the context of South Korean society. (Lee, 2013) it can be useful when analyzing the experiences of educated unemployed women in Pakistan because Pakistani society is likewise profoundly entrenched in the socio-cultural values (as discussed above) and these values may have an influence on how women construct their experiences of education and how they narrate their unemployed lives. Thus, without considering of women’s off-campus experiences from past and present and the larger social structures that exist in a particular place at a particular moment (social structure) one cannot fully understand a woman's academic experience (education). (Lee, 2013)

(Skjortnes and Heidi Holt, 2010) it provides insights into how gender dynamic works within the higher education in the Toliara region of Madagascar. Despite the conventional gender expectations and economic pressure from extended families' women’s participation in higher education influences gender relations and individual freedoms. It emphasizes on keeping in mind ‘women’s perspectives’ in higher education research by foregrounding female students experiences of navigating societal expectations and educational challenges. Education is not culturally neutral but contains both explicit and implicit propositions and meanings that may change people’s perception of reality. In addition, “Education is also valued both positively and negatively at the same time, according to position and power relations in family and society. Women with higher education engage in complex processes of change induced by the processes

of education. At the same time, they choose ways of maintaining a certain continuity with family and kinship values in how they construct and manage their lives as women.” (Skjortnes and Heidi Holt, 2010) Education impacts several aspects of a women’s lives e.g., opinion-building and confidence building in case they must protest for their rights in case of violation, though much of education role is not seen in changing social norms and value regarding women’s role in society. (Awan, 2016) Educated women in Pakistan continue to face restrictions in areas such as marriage choices, divorce, unrestricted mobility, and inheritance rights. Furthermore, the level of education they attain influences the extent of their freedoms. Supporters of traditional values in Pakistani society still exert pressure to limit the achievements of all women, seeking to confine their activities to their homes, regardless of their educational level. (Awan,2016) Education is most crucial for growing women's confidence and awareness of their rights. Through this, women are capable of handling matters from various perspectives, strategize effectively, and address family concerns in a non-confrontational manner. (Noureen,2015)

These studies concern the education and women and how their education brought change into their lives such as empowerment, agency, and opportunities to connect with people. My research concern what is the meaning of education in the lives of educated women in Pakistan would help to see other positive changes they had in their lives or these above-mentioned benefits of education in the lives of women is different as my participants are unemployed.

2.3 Women and unemployment

I would also like to discuss some literature related to women and unemployment. These will concern about what does unemployment do to women. A study by Starrin and Larsson in which thirty-six women were interviewed is a contribution towards getting an understanding of the impact of unemployment on women. According to the results of the study, four groups of unemployed women were generated which are as follows the give-uppers, the clenchers, the refocusers, and the ambivalent. The group named the give-uppers had lost control of their life and the meaning of their days. For the give-uppers, the role of a housewife is not seen as something that they can replace as paid work. They also showed signs of a lack of confidence, hope, and life will. Another group and the largest one were the clencher. They had a great impact on their identity and mental condition. Unemployment brought them isolation and bad self-confidence. According to Marshall ‘Unemployed women' are often neglected mostly the married ones. ‘The concept of a

woman as 'unemployed' has been squeezed out between the spheres of paid and domestic labor'. It simply stand-ins between waged and unwaged work. (Marshall, 1983)

A Research based on interviews about women's unemployment in Sweden was carried and the central point of it was how women were missing the daily structure in their life. According to the results of the research, women face no lesser adverse consequences of unemployment than men. Moreover, when it comes to identity, women felt that doing house chores does not provide them with self-identity it is only paid work that can help them create their personal identity and that they missed something productive in their life. it also concludes that 'Women's positive sense of self is greatly undermined by not having paid work.' (Davies, Esseveld, 1982)

Another research project conducted by Davies and Esseveld in 1985 deals with how women cope with unemployment and how important is paid work in their life. it included thematically generated interviews with 40 women. A positive aspect emerged which is that women do not have to worry about double shifts. At the same time, unemployment had a negative consequence as well, which is a sense of insecurity because they were unaware of their future. In addition, men's and women's coping mechanisms also vary. Caring for others in the family or outside is the coping mechanism for women still a sense of positivity about themselves was missing.

Personal and professional identities also hold considerable significance when discussion of educated, unemployed women is ongoing and how they renegotiate these identities. In relation to personal and professional identities, Lisa Smulyan's study of Redefining self and success: becoming teachers and doctors provides helpful insights of how women graduate from a liberal arts college navigate the complexities of personal and professional identities over a decade. The study suggests that the traditional or non-traditional is no longer applicable because these women actively reconceptualize their lives, identities, the meaning of success and significance of their chosen career. It states that, "Through these women's words we hear both a response to culturally produced social structures and discourses and a desire to try to reframe some of the meanings they have learned about women and careers." (Smulyan, 2004)

"Through the voices of the participants, we can begin to hear how women construct the meanings of career and success within the discourses available to them. It is in the process of negotiating or balancing these forces that these women may begin to contribute to a new set of cultural meanings,

problematizing what it means to have a career, to achieve success, and to be a working woman and trying to develop new discourses to explain themselves” (Smulyan, 2004)

These studies related to unemployment are important because they show what unemployment means for women. The studies I mentioned from European countries, alongside my research concerning Pakistan, might present two different views of unemployment for women. However, they also help in understanding what Pakistani women experience regarding employment in their lives, considering they are highly educated yet restricted from working due to previously mentioned reasons. These studies raise questions about whether education holds the same value when these women are unemployed and what aspects of their lives they miss. Overall, the studies would help me address the contradiction I aim to address in this research.

3. Theoretical framework

Feminist discussion on education and work of women

My research is situated within the feminist's discussion on women's rights to education and work. This discussion will establish the relevance of studying the experiences of educated unemployed women, illustrating how it remains pertinent within the historical debates surrounding women's rights to education and employment. Beginning with the earliest feminist work on women and education was made by *Mary Wollstonecraft with her work called "A Vindication of the rights of women, 1792"* Her book and overall work was mainly about the reforming the education of women in order to improve their political and social standings. (p.26)

She even published her work on education named "thoughts on the education of daughters, 1787" shows her interest in the theories of education. What reform she wanted in the education was the argument that women are equally rational as of a man. "Rationality is what claims moral agency and moral agency is what gives us claims to rights." (p.36) Wollstonecraft also argues that for someone to become moral agent, they must develop their 'rational abilities' to a level where they are able to have some improvement. (p. 36) Wollstonecraft's felt disheartened by the fact that education of women being ignored has led to women's mind 'weak' and 'unhealthy'. These Conditions have made women unable to take up the rights but according to Wollstonecraft as reform is needed in order to give women any political rights, 'Unhealthy states of minds' of women at that time was what motivated Wollstonecraft to write vindication of women's rights and her observation was that this could only be reformed through educational reforms. This observation of her meant that she needs to argue that women were as rational as men and they were not someone to be ruled over by their husbands or fathers. Moreover, this also entails the obligation to provide an explanation for why her contemporaries seem to prefer living in conditions like slavery, as well as delving into how inadequate education can diminish individuals' inclination towards seeking freedom and independence. (p.40)

"Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she

knows why she ought to be virtuous? unless freedom strengthen her reason till, she comprehends her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good?" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 67).

Wollstonecraft's idea of moral agency through educational reform, or obtaining proper education, will help me analyze the meaning of education in the lives of unemployed women. Though, it is a classical study, it will aid in discussing and analyzing the narratives of unemployed women who, despite their lack of employment, still make use of their education and possess the moral agency and capabilities that Mary Wollstonecraft and other early feminists and activists fought for.

Moreover, second wave feminist works also plays an important role primarily, Betty Friedan's book "the feminist mystique, 1963" the problem that had no name. mainly discussing the lives of housewives in American society. she talks about this unspoken problem of the dissatisfaction and unfulfillment in their roles as mothers and housewives. Despite of having busy schedules and doing all chores they still had this question, is this all? Society and experts, advised on how to please their husbands, raise their children, and maintain their homes, but were discouraged from pursuing careers or higher education. "They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights--the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for" (The Feminist Mystique, p.16) "Sometimes a woman would say "I feel empty somehow . . . incomplete." Or she would say, "I feel as if I don't exist."

One of the quotes by Betty Friedan, taken from website states,

"The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own. The key to the trap is, of course, education. The feminine mystique has made higher education for women seem suspect, unnecessary and even dangerous. But I think that education, and only education, has saved, and can continue to save, American women from the greater dangers of the feminine mystique." (The feminist Mystique, 1963)

This work of Betty Friedan shows how women during that time had no satisfaction and feeling of fulfillment in their lives just by living as housewives, doing the same house chore every day, following all the traditional roles the society expected them to do so, they still felt dissatisfied. It provides my research with a way to analyze my interview data to see if the social pressure is still exerted on Pakistani women just like in the time of second wave feminism. It would provide me with a base to start my study in order to analyze the experiences and narratives of unemployed

educated women living in Pakistan about their situation. Moreover, Maria C Lugones work, “not just so as to greatly increase the chances that true accounts of women’s lives will be given, but also because the articulation of experience (in myriad ways) is among the hallmarks of a self-determining individual or community. There are not just epistemological, but moral and political reasons for demanding that the woman’s voice be heard, after centuries of androcentric din.” Will help in understanding women’s experiences of their education and unemployment.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data collection

My MA thesis aims to gain insights into women's experiences of what education has meant and continues to mean to them in their changing life situations. It aims to understand how and in what way education plays its role in the lives of unemployed women. It aims to see in what other ways other than formal work, educations play its part in the lives of women. Moreover, it focuses to uncover the contradiction in being an educated women who is unemployed.

I conducted narrative interviews of six women in their 20s in Pakistan. According to Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016 'Narrative interviews are means of collecting people's own stories about their experiences'. People frequently narrate stories about the events in their lives as a means of making sense of them. The narrative method prioritizes the meanings that the subjects provide to their own stories and puts them at the centre of the research process. Therefore, narratives may more accurately capture the context and integrity of people's lives while we are researching them, learning about their experiences, and attempting to comprehend their lives than can surveys and graphs. This is why, I found narrative interviews to be the most suitable to explore the narratives and personal stories of women in relation to their education.

For interviews, I prepared a list of 16 questions with some sub-questions to ask from the interview participants (see appendix 2). The questions were structured in a way that will cover their past, present and future in terms of their education. It included questions regarding their educational journey and experiences of education and employment, if they had any. what they acquired through their education, their typical day in the past as a student and now. Their hobbies and activities in daily life. Questions regarding being outside formal work and issues faced related to unemployment were also asked. In some cases, the participants who did their internships or had some previous job experiences were asked about their experience of it.

Due to different geographical locations, the interviews were one-on-one via zoom audio call. Initially, I planned to conduct it via video call for a better interaction with my interviewees but due to the reason that my participants were hesitant to talk through video call, so I had to change the

requirement to audio as per my participants were comfortable. So, all participants were interviewed via zoom audio call.

The interviews were divided into two sessions. In the first session, I briefly introduced myself and my research. Then, I explained the information sheet (see appendix 1) and consent form. which they were sent before the interview. The first session lasted for 15 mins. The second session consisted of questions prepared for the interview (see appendix 2) and lasted 60 minutes.

For recruiting participants, I contacted the administrators of the 'Pakistani women only groups' on Facebook. These groups consisted of more than 42k people in it. The purpose of these groups is to provide support, information, sharing experiences, suggesting one another and growth for women. First, I explained about my research and the aim of my post to the admin, after they agreed, I posted my recruitment call. The aim behind using this platform was to reach as many women from diverse backgrounds, as I could. Initially, I was struggling to get an engagement on my post, so I also posted on Instagram account, and I recruited only one participant through it. After a few more postings in the group, I finally got a good response and recruited the rest of the 5 participants through these groups.

The recruitment process started in the beginning of November 2023 and the interviews were conducted in December 2023 till the first week of January 2024. As a result, six women agreed to participate in interviews for my research. I set the age criteria to be 23- 35 for my research and all my participants were in their 20s. My research participants were all from main cities of Pakistan like Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar. All of them had at least bachelor's level education as it was the requirement set for my interview participants. As the purpose of my study is to understand the meaning of education in the life narrative of unemployed women in Pakistan so my participants were all unemployed at the time of the interview except for one who was working remotely, and one was having her home-based business. All of them, except for one woman, had some working experience in a formal environment due to their degree requirement for example internships or being part of any project.

In my research, even though marital status did not matter but the results will have some variations as only one participant was married with kids. The rest of them had no kids and were living with their parents at the time of the interviews. During my research interviews, participants communicated in both English and Urdu. In the transcripts, I translated segments of the interview

conducted in Urdu into English, while leaving the English portions unchanged. This is because my thesis will be written and presented in English.

4.2 Analysis methods:

For Analysis, I used Thematic analysis method, “it is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.” (Braun and Clarke,2006). My purpose for using this analysis method is to uncover every possible theme that emerged during the interview. The basic steps in the process of doing thematic analysis consist of Six phases as explained by Brain and Clarke.

Phase 1: familiarizing yourself with your data

The data's familiarity started after an individual interview, and I would reflect through the interview and the answers of my interview. It involved listening to the audio recording repeatedly to ensure I understood correctly. This process involved the transcription of the interviews. Through transcription, I was familiar enough with the main idea my participants had to share with me.

Phase 2: generating initial codes

During this phase, I first learnt the use of NVIVO, and tried understanding how to use it. I uploaded my six transcripts into it and keeping the research questions in mind I started with each transcript and highlighted the relevant quotes and forming codes by giving it a name. I also focused on the recurring concepts to make sure I cover everything.

Phase 3: searching for themes

By this phase, I developed many different codes, and I started the process of merging these codes under one broader theme. Giving the initial name to the theme that could cover every aspect of the codes present within was tough. Finally, I managed to develop several themes and by this time I could see what my discussion would lead to.

Phase 4: reviewing themes

After I changed codes into themes, I reviewed these and read the transcripts again to see if I had covered everything.

Phase 5: defining and naming themes

I carefully made definitions for each theme, ensuring they were precise and captured the essence of the data. Naming the themes briefly helped in conveying the findings.

Phase 6: producing the report

Lastly, the themes were synthesized into coherent narrative, the finding presented in structured manner, supported by relevant quotes from the transcripts.

4.3 Research Ethics:

When recruiting the interview participants for my research, I provided them with comprehensive details. First through the recruitment call posted in the groups I tried adding all the important details in it about the research. After I was contacted by the interested individuals, I provided them with an information sheet that included complete details regarding what the research is about, the process, data protection and management. Through this, I eliminated the risk of recruiting participants who may have felt uncomfortable sharing their experiences. They were told they could withdraw their consent if they feel uncomfortable during the interview or if they do not feel comfortable answering a question.

The data collected during the research like consent form, recorded audio tapes, transcriptions and translations will be kept safe. The researcher will use secure storage system called Seafile which is monitored by University of Turku. During the writing process of thesis, some data may be kept in researcher's laptop but it will be protected with password. Antivirus and security system will be installed to keep the data safe. All the research data will be discarded from the Seafile after the researcher graduates from University of Turku.

For privacy of my interview participants, their written interview data i.e. Transcripts is anonymized by using pseudonyms and by eliminating any details that may uncover their identity. Interview participants words will be cited in English which will also reduce the risk of identifiability. Participants were also informed that they can also get their transcripts to verify the accuracy. The researcher meticulously conducted the translation work to ensure precision and prevent any misrepresentation. Adherence to ethical standards was maintained throughout the

research, aligning with both The Finnish National Board for Research Integrity and the General Data Protection Regulation of the EU.

4.4 Participants' Information:

Noor: Noor, a 23-year-old recent graduate with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, is currently living with her parents. She is unmarried and, at present, does not have a job. Although Noor has no professional employment experience yet, she completed a 15-day unpaid internship, which provided her with some exposure to the field.

Eman: Eman, a 23-year-old recent graduate with a master's degree in Physiology, is currently living with her parents. She is engaged and planning to be married soon. Although Eman does not have a job at present, she runs a home-based business. Additionally, she has gained practical experience through an internship.

Dua: Dua, a 26-year-old, who has done MSc English literature. She is working remotely at present and has worked on site for 3 years. She is Nikkahfied, that Islamically, means legally married but according to the culture she has not yet moved to live with her husband. She has been through the phase of unemployment in her life.

Zahra: Zahra, a 29-year-old, she has done a bachelor's degree in pharm D. She also started her MPhil but couldn't continue it. She is currently not working professionally but engages in freelance work occasionally. She is unmarried and at present living with her family. She has previous professional work experience of about seven to eight months.

Gul: Gul, a 23-year-old, recent graduate with a bachelors in English language and literature. She is not currently employed. She is unmarried and living with her parents. She has gained experience of working as a teacher in a project-based job for about six months.

Arooj: Arooj, a 27-year-old, she has done Masters in classical Islamic learning (Alimah programme) which is religious studies. She is unemployed and has never been employed professionally. She is married and the only participant with children.

5. Analysis

5.1 Contradictions of being educated and unemployed

In this theme, I will center the attention on the past educational lives of the six educated unemployed women in Pakistan. Since these women are now graduated but unemployed; I would like to explore this contradiction of educated but unemployed. I will here analyze; how does these six educated unemployed women experience their past (Education) in their current lives.

5.1.1 Time wastage and financial dependence

From the interviews, my findings indicated that the interviewees felt their education was not very useful without employment, leading to a sense of wasted time and increased disappointment. My participants shared about their routine and compared it with their previous routines when they were pursuing education; stating that it has been different since then. It was different for them because they do not have anything productive to do. They are aware of how capable they are because of what they learnt from their education but due to unemployment, they have the feeling that their time and education are being wasted. Education and time wastage was distinctively explained by Noor as she understands the fact that it is not to blame her education for being useless but the conservative family that does not allow her to do a job. It is her education that has enabled her to look at things in a certain way. She thought it was her education that made her understand that ‘this is time wastage,’ the time when she is doing nothing productive. According to Noor’s thought, a lot could be done with her routine, whereas other girls think that this ‘unproductive routine’ is expected of them as girls, she tells:

“Education makes me feel I am wasting my time. Because, I have education, I can say this, it is a waste of time otherwise, I have seen girls who thinks that this is their routine and don’t consider it as a time wastage because they don’t know the importance of ..umm because they have never experienced the things that their time can be utilized in many different ways. So, they do not really know that because I think it is because of the education I have that I can see that this is time wastage.” (Noor)

Even though, Noor experiences many positive outcomes from her education in her current life but unemployed self is building this contradiction, at some point she feels her education is not a wastage but when she compares her current life in terms of employment she says, “The thing that I am experiencing these days is like I am wasting my time and so my education is not playing a very big role.” (Noor) So, even though “the level of education women attain influences the extent of their freedoms. Supporters of traditional values in Pakistani society still exert pressure to limit the achievements of all women, seeking to confine their activities to their homes, regardless of their educational level. (Awan,2016) In the same way, Zahra also experienced that her education is getting wasted, the knowledge she gained cannot be utilized at home. She feels that after studying for 5 years becoming a Doctor of Pharmacy and 2 years of MPhil, she does not see her education being useful anywhere inside home. She mentioned about being an educated girl living in Pakistan:

“I studied this much, it could have been used somewhere and, I have interest in doing a job. So right now, I feel like there was no use of studying especially being a girl in Pakistan because a boy gets a lot of support that as you studied now you have to move forward. Do the job! do the job! And we are kept inside the home. so, it is like mixed feelings about this..... I have not noticed that my degree is giving me any benefits. Yes, if I was employed just like when I was working in (pharmacy) at that time It was beneficial but otherwise, by staying at home there is no as such benefits to me.” (Zahra)

She also regrets leaving her job because of moral problems, because the type of job she was supposed to do did not feel right to her. So, she regrets saying that “I feel that I had something that time, so it was better. It feels like this. For now, I have nothing on my hands so that feels much bad....it feels good that I left that job, and I am doing nothing bad but on the other side, I feel bad that, if I had continued that job, I would have gone much further.” (Zahra) She believes that if she had continued doing her job, her education might have been more beneficial, but it is not possible while staying at home.

Gul shares a similar experience from her employment of six months as a teaching assistant under best English teachers of the city, from that experience she learned a lot and gained a lot more motivation for becoming a teacher. But, as it was for only six months she had to leave and look for other opportunity but Gul similar to Zahra’s and Noor’s experiences, had to go through some

challenges, her challenges according to her own words were more of a cultural norm, though her father was supportive of her doing a job but he had requirements on what kind of job she would do. Usually, a government job and that too of a teaching position is considered the best and most respectable one and rest of the jobs like typical 9-5 office jobs are considered low on position or not so suitable for girls and women. So, after her last employment experience she feels “nostalgic”. She says, “Right after that [her job for six months] I felt very bad because after that I wasn’t able to find any other opportunity at all. I was applying to different colleges for jobs but no luck. You can say there was a kind of nostalgia because of working there. So that was also a lot.” (Gul) She differentiates between education as on its own and in terms of employment and this also shows the contradiction:

“If I see it as a subject then I always feel very good that I opted and that I am very satisfied but yeah, if I see it through unemployment, then I feel like yes after studying this much, I mean at home it is being wasted. So, it is a mixed feeling. Motivation and disappointment.”
(Gul)

For her, employment is a source of connection with her education where she could use what was learnt in a professional environment.

“I have started to gradually forget about the things that I have studied, the courses I have studied. When I was in job so then frequently on and off, I had connection with my courses at some point I was applying the courses professionally.” (Gul)

What I interpret from the interviews is that these educated women need something in their lives which would make them feel that they are doing something productive and useful. For most of them, it is employment through that they can gain a feeling of productivity in their routine. Dua is currently doing remote work but shares her experience from the time after graduation with no job. For her sitting idle does not settle with her, she wants something in life going on, whether it is education or employment. She says:

“I cannot sit free. I mean, I cannot sit at home doing nothing. From the very start I have had this habit. Either you have studies but when my studies were completed so I was totally free. I had nothing to do. Then, I applied for many jobs. and everybody has a different nature, so mine is that I cannot sit freely at home.” (Dua)

In Dua's experience of employment, she is still unhappy with her employment situation financially, she feels having a master's degree gives you hope that you will be able to achieve many things in life but while living in Pakistan, it is not possible. She says, "In our Pakistan, one thing is the package, which is really low. If somebody gets a degree, they feel like they have done nothing. At that time, I had feelings that I would get lots of achievements, I could achieve something really nice. But. that has not happened yet so now my feelings are 'ok, well, I have got one degree.' That is, it." (Dua)

Likewise, Eman also experienced that sitting idle makes her feel so useless, as a home-based business owner, from the perspective of work, she finds meaning in doing what she does and feels productive but when she has less work to do, she feels useless. She says, "I don't have the habit of sitting idle because, if I sit idle for a while then I feel so much useless. Then, I feel like there is no one more useless creature than me. If I don't have orders, (this participant has a home-based artwork business) then, I slip into anxiety a little bit and I get lots of issues from this thing. For example, if I start getting less orders then, I am, like, I have to do something" (Eman).

For some, staying at home is equivalent to doing nothing in the context of their education, Zahra explains, "Right now, I am just home mostly. Sometimes, I do freelance but it is like on and off. So, I am just unemployed, like not really doing anything. Mostly just at home." (Zahra)

Financial constraints were also brought up by my interviewees when questions like, "do you think you are unemployed?" or "what problems do you face due to your employment status?" were asked. According to my interviewees, their financial status as individuals is linked to their overall value within the household. They feel embarrassed when they have to ask for money from any male member of the family. In Pakistani society, traditionally, a male member is responsible for managing the household expenditures. However, my interpretation is that their education has made them feel capable of earning independently and accomplishing many things on their own without asking for help. Despite their education and potential, their status as unemployed women leave them feeling frustrated. According to Zahra:

"One thing that I have observed is that if a person is employed so, that person is respected a lot. In this sense, I feel a little, that if was employed then at least I would have money for my own expenditure. Now, mostly I have to get it from my father or from my brother. So,

it is a thing you have to kill your heart that, no, not this or do this. I feel this a lot. If I had money of my own or some sort of savings, then I could buy whatever I wanted to. If going somewhere or to do something or do some course so you can do that without hesitation. But now, as I don't have anything like that so obviously you have to suffer.” (Zahra)

My interpretation of what Zahra has to say is linked to the contradiction I am discussing here, though education for these young women is so important and they have attained professional degrees but while being unemployed, it is not that accomplishing. Gul shares her experiences from her short-term job that during that time she could buy things which she liked and that made her feel independent but in her current unemployed life, she feels dependent and has to ask for money. Perception on education for her changed during and after graduation, she quotes it as:

“You can say when you come into work life you have a completely different perception about your education. Then you want that your education should give you financial benefits while when you are a student you think, even if it is not financial, I can do this, I can do that, but, no you need financial support because you have to do further studies and you are at that stage that you can't tell you parents to support you for MPhil or for masters.”
(Gul)

Disappointments and motivations both were seen in her narration of being educated unemployed, she knows her self-worth and capabilities that were achieved and learned through education, educated women have motivation and hope to have in better because they have this sense that they have education and they can at some point find something for them but because of being unemployed they have doubts. Gul shares, “You start questioning yourself that am I not good enough to get a job? So, I can say that it is very disappointing but at some point ... even it is disappointing and hurtful... but at some point, this motivates you too that no, you must do something. You have to prove yourself. (But giggles) but motivation ones are less, and disappointments are more.” (Gul)

5.1.2 The question of “what did you do after studying this much?”

Education and employment of women in Pakistan is regulated by “patriarchal practices, segregation of jobs and because of gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes.” (Raza and

Murad,2010) and their “work and career are treated as a privilege that are they are ‘allowed’ for them to be happy.” (Mohsin and Syed, 2020) What I analyze, from this is that education and especially employment is considered as an option, it is considered as a favor given to women by their society, culture, and male members of their family. Women according to these studies are able to do jobs outside home but with permission and this permission can be taken back from them at any point in their life mostly in cases when they are about to get married or unable to manage the double shift as stated by Mohsin and Syed, “gender equity at home is a problem because according to gender roles women had to do a second shift after their job that is house chores. Most women doctors would leave their jobs because it is difficult to manage both.” (Mohsin & Syed, 2020).

Due to these restrictions imposed on Pakistani educated women; they face contradiction. The contradiction in being educated but unemployed. This contradiction is because they have professional degrees, skills and capabilities and are aware that they can improve their lives with a job. However, I found another reason causing this contradiction in the lives of educated unemployed women which is the expectations from them being educated women and the justification of the need for the education they attained. The traditional gender roles and expectation are persisting, and women are highly educated this has resulted in them being questioned for the purpose of their education as if their education were not their right at first place. They are being questioned for not using their degrees whereas these restrictions and roles and responsibilities are continuing. As Quoted by Sharma-brymer in the context of Indian society “as educated women they could do what they wanted to do but their experiences pointed out that they are compromising and adjusting within their internal and external space. The space of living as a traditional, educated woman in Indian society entails the choice of the educated woman to be so” (Sharma-brymer,). According to my interview data and analysis, my participants mentioned this struggle they have to go through where they are being questioned for the purpose of their education. As explained by Gul, who is currently unemployed, she says:

“Sometimes, when you go somewhere people usually taunt you that, ‘what did you do after studying that much?’ you know the Pakistani typical society. If you do something, there is a problem and if you don’t, they then have a problem. So, what was the need to study that much? So, this happens sometimes. This also hurts. You also think that what have I done with my degree?” (Gul)

On the one hand, Gul is being restricted to do certain kind of jobs, being encouraged to think of bigger goals, give Central superior services exam (CSS), and have government job, which is achievable but takes a lot of hard work and time. Because of this, she struggles to find a suitable job, but she is being asked the importance of her education when she is not doing any job.

Zahra, in her current unemployed life, has to go through a comparable situation to Gul's.

“It is from my relatives that I get to hear criticisms that what did you do after studying that much. Because in our family, if I see in both maternal and paternal relatives it is us two sisters who got to study this much. Our parents provided us with education, others have not provided their girls with education. So, this is one thing, I get to hear a lot that my sister is a doctor in a good position. (Zahra)so, I get to hear that ‘what did you do after studying this much?’ You are still sitting at home. I mean it hurts a lot that I am not sitting at home because of my own will but I am trying.” (Zahra)

Zahra had to leave her MPhil program before completing her research due to financial constraints and the need to care for her ill father. She faced job rejections and had to avoid certain positions due to environmental concerns. Despite her circumstances, Zahra frequently encountered the question, "What did you do after studying this much?" In her experience, she and her sister were the only two girls in their family to attain such a high level of education. While her sister holds a good position and is employed, Zahra remains at home, facing the contradiction of being educated yet unemployed.

Similarly, Eman running a home-based business also faces the same contradiction, even though she is running a business but, because she does not go out to earn either in her field related job or anywhere outside the boundaries of home. She faces what she calls an “emotional turmoil” and then she feels she should be going out to earn and has recently started to look for jobs as pre-primary teacher for a short duration because she will be leaving it before her marriage.

“When someone tells me that you should do a job you have to pursue a career, when you have taken a degree. You should do something in the field or at least you should go out and earn because mostly they don't really think that I earn, and I am just depending on my parents and staying at home. So just when they say to me then there is like emotional turmoil and I start to think I should do some job, I should do some work, I should go out.

Other than that, I am chill about this.....I want to do a job. I want to go out because last week I told you there were some relatives who came and who were like oh you are not doing a job' and that hit me... that hit me really badly and I was like crying and all 'no I want to do job' at that time I was like no! No! I want to do a job." (Eman)

Providing a context to make an argument, Eman's subject is related to field of physiology for employment she had two options she could go for teaching or laboratory work. She was not interested in getting into the profession of teaching and laboratory work required people from microbiology or biochemistry and if not, they required experience. When I asked about why she chose this subject she said she was good at science but also mainly because her mother wanted her daughters to go into science fields. The problem I also visualize is the involvement of family members and parents in subject selection, they want the girls to go for highly valued subjects like field of medicine, engineering or any profession related to teaching. What is not seen is what the individual interested in? And now she is unemployed and being questioned about the same thing as Zahra and Gul were.

"Just like many people now, when I go out in gatherings and all everyone is like "oh why did you study this much if your never wanted to do job in this field?' Why did you study this much?" (Eman)

They are being questioned about the need for their study when they are unemployed. My interviewee, who is happily unemployed with a master's degree in classical Islamic studies has to face certain questions or biased attitude towards her in social gatherings. She says:

"If you go to social gatherings, so they ask you, 'what are you doing nowadays?' And then you say, I am a stay-at-home Mom. And they are like 'oh, OK.' so, then it feels like a prejudice and biasness. But other than that, there is nothing. Soo, it is not its difficulty or so, but it is one thing that I noticed. It makes socializing difficult because when you meet new people, they get immediate bias in their minds against you." (Arooj)

Even though, Arooj is happy with her being unemployed and following the traditional roles of a family where a husband earns, and a wife takes care (work for) of the family and house she has to go through a similar contradiction what other interviewees had to go through. Arooj shares her experience:

“I mean there is one thing, I do not know, at one time it used to impact me a lot. Now, it does impact on me but then I stopped going to such gatherings where, I knew, I would face biasness. Because the environment makes a lot of difference, I feel like this has happened a lot of times to me, especially if you go to a new gathering. You do not really know, and then they are like “ok. what have you done?” to tell them, OK, I got married young and I have Kids and I am not actively working, even though like I do have interest and hobbies and things that I can pursue and then they are like ‘okay fine’, like not hang out the next time? I mean it is a little bit biased. If you hang out with such people who think, ok, if you are not working then you are wasting your time. If you're not working, what have you done in your life? Then if you hang out with such people Then you start feeling less of yourself. It is better just not to hang out with such people to like you. The solution for this is that you stop going to such places and you stop meeting such people and just interact with like-minded people.” (Arooj)

From Arooj’s experience, the questions that these educated Pakistani women have to go through make them feel less of themselves and their education overall. By asking them, what have you done after studying this much is such demotivation for women.

Due to being questioned for the worth of their education when they are unemployed or unemployed in the eyes of the society these educated women have gone through the experience of losing their confidence, connection with people and the skills they learnt during their education.

My interviewee also shared about losing connection with people due to unemployment because previously they were having a chance to meet and talk to people in their university life but after graduation, they have lost that, and they also do not have job to fulfill that missing part from their educational lives. Noor shares her experience:

“You know because I have lost any kind of connection with everybody and no frequent connection...I face the loss of loss of communication skills and being extreme introvert as I used to be a good chit chat kind of girl back in my university days and now, I am really not that kind of girl. I just skip the relatives gathering now. (Noor)

In a similar way, Eman also shares from her educational experience that gave her the confidence because she used to go out and meet new people, having a conversation with them. So, according

to her, if she had a job outside the home, she would be in a better place than she is now financially and in terms of socializing. Due to being questioned about education without employment, they have become less interested in socializing. What also came into attention was being ‘unable to relate in a discussion’ this was brought up by both Noor and Eman as they discussed their friendships and how do they feel meeting with them after graduating from university. They both first said that they meet their friends not so often now because everyone is busy in their own life and have jobs. As shared by Noor, she says I am just a listener in a gathering:

“I feel um, bad because I do not have any colleague stories, job stories then u know I am just a listener in that gathering and it happened recently In November, I told you, we all met for our degree forms, so everybody had stories from their jobs, I had none. I have no colleagues and they all have colleagues, and they all have new friends and new stories, and their life is moving, and I am I feel stuck I have no stories but yeah.” (Noor)

Noor, because of being educated unemployed feels that her life is stuck because she has nothing new to tell her friends from university. She starts comparing herself with her friends and says that their life is moving but not hers. Similarly, Eman also experienced feeling useless when meeting her friends from university.

“When you don’t have a job so usually when you go out so when people are sitting together and discussing like their job experiences, and I stay quiet and say what can I tell? I don’t have anything to say job related at that time I feel like ok yeah, I am not doing a job or not good enough. So, I feel a bit useless.” (Eman)

In the same way, jealousy and anxiety were also experienced by my interviewees upon meeting their university employed friends.

“It feels good to be meeting a friend but it is clear that they are all at good place so a little bit of I mean jealousy is there. What if something happened and I could have also been there, but it is good that at least the other person is getting successful. (Zahra)

“I can say, I get anxiety because, I feel like they are doing something with their life that I am not doing.” (Gul)

These educated women feel that their life could have been better if they had secured a good employment. Having a job would have made their life at ease, providing them at least with the feeling that their education is being worthy, and they have something to do in their lives. Moreover,

they also feel that they would be valued more if they had a job. according to Arooj's thoughts her choice of staying at home makes people look down upon her. She thinks that this generation has now developed a different mindset that if a woman is not working, she is wasting her potential. While rest of the participants experiences tells that they are losing the potential they gained through education opposing to Arooj's thoughts on the need of work for keeping their potential

Arooj shares her thoughts:

“I think now comparatively like 10-15 years before and now our generation has a mindset like if you are not working you are basically wasting your potential. So, the people that I interact with, at many places, I feel that just because I'm staying at home by choice, there a lot of people look down upon me because I'm not actively working and that is what I don't get that why do they have a mindset like that, but apparently it a very normal now I feel that in our generation has developed this mindset that ok if have education then why don't you utilize it? And why are you not working?” (Arooj)

5.1.3 Finding the alternative!

Some of the participants expressed the need to find other ways of doing something productive in their lives after graduation. The Jobs related to their degree required them to go outside home for work but due to family restrictions on women working outside home, they were not allowed to do so. One of my interview participants tells, “I was seeing a few opportunities to grow towards them, but because of this patriarchal society, I couldn't go towards them.....” (Noor) She narrates about her past when she was still a student, they had discussions on jobs market, skills and demands of industry at the university, during that period, she wanted to do a job in order to have salary and savings for her goals in life which can be achieved through earning and for earning she needs a job:

“I have a goal of buying a house for myself and my mom so for that I need to earn and when I need to earn, I have to find another way so for that I have, you know, reimagined a few things. I looked for, I searched for things to work from home and to search for remote jobs.....So now I have to shift my learning path, my learning career, I have to shift to get a remote job. So, I will look towards coding or content writing or social media marketing

something like that.... things that can be done remotely. So, I have to change my learning path.” (Noor)

All my interview participants had professional degrees, Noor having an electrical engineering degree realizes that she chose a path of education where she is supposed to go out for work and getting a job from home in her field of study is not possible, but due to restrictions from family, she is unable to do a job. Even though she realizes how her education provided her with different skills and knowledge but not getting a job is problematic for her. What I realize here is that in her life education is supported as she never mentioned about difficulties accessing her education or the field of education but what seems to be the problem for her is going out to earn, which is so common in a Pakistani society. Education for women is ‘Decorative thing with no emancipatory effect as education for girls does not mean financial independence but rather focuses on the value of women having a proper educational foundation, mainly for marriage purposes’ (Moazzam and Sheikhani, 2018) My analysis agrees with the argument on education not being for the purpose of financial independence but what goes against is that it does have an emancipatory effect for these women, she was given with skills and knowledge that now she can use to change her leaning path, this will be discussed in detail in the next section. As Noor says, “I am capable of learning new things and you know, I mean, I am not dumb and dull.” (Noor) This shows, she is aware of her capabilities and skills that she can be able to learn new things to be able to start some work from home.

Their Educational life gave these women a chance to do something in their daily routines for instance, learning a new skill, handling different situations, or working on any academic tasks. It had made their routines and schedules occupied. Though after graduation, as now they have no university related tasks, they have felt their life is monotonous. Zahra explains:

“I miss a lot is the chance of doing something new daily. Now it is such a monotonous life as I know when i wake up tomorrow, it will be the same thing. So, there is nothing, I mean to do something new you get the excitement that you will do something. When we used to go to the hospital (During her studies) so we were dealing with different cases and situations or dealing with something new. It is early, sometimes late. So, this one thing I miss a lot. So, even if I had a job there could be something new, I mean a new work task or project or to meet someone. this is one thing which I miss a lot.” (Zahra)

While she shared what she missed about her educational past, she also shared that she had been applying for different job opportunities, but due to one reason or another she could not get the job. She mentioned further that certain jobs have an “environment issue.” With this she means a job that is not suitable or safe for a woman to work in, in most of her field related jobs, boys are preferred. Now she says the gap has increased and it is getting difficult to get a job. But still she is motivated to study further and complete her master's which she had to leave because of her father's illness and financial constraints.

“I still want to study further and do a job. I mean, I look for scholarships that I can get somewhere. At least move out of Pakistan so if you go out of here then you have lots of opportunities. I can use my degree in many ways. While living here, it seems difficult, but I must do it in sha Allah. I have thought about it... at least I will complete my master's after that rest is up to Allah.” (Zahra)

According to Zahra, “Because, I was not getting anything from there (from the degree she attained) then I joined freelancing.” (Zahra) she misses the new things to do in her daily life that was possible during her education. Like Noor's plan of changing her learning path; Zahra considered freelancing as a content writer and designing to have the feeling of doing something new. She says:

“It acts as a distraction. Mostly we are at home. And my father is also ill. So mostly, I am depressed. So, with this [freelancing] you get a little bit of distracted. When you talk to another person your mood may lift up. you get new ideas that you can do this or make this. It is good in this way. It is like ‘If the window is open, air comes in; otherwise, there is suffocation in a closed room.’ So, it is just in this way.” (Zahra)

I also observed that my participants have anxiety about their future after graduation. This anxiety about the future is due to inactivity. During their education period, they felt active and less stressed about their future as compared to now. As described by Gul, “There wasn't much to stress about [while she was still studying] in a sense that I am doing nothing now I am stressed about this. With Gul facing stress about her future now, she is trying to let her potential out that she gained through

her education, she had started working on some projects voluntarily as an organizer. She admits that these are not supporting her financially, but it is still helpful for her in terms of networking and friendships that previously she had through her education. she explained:

“I am doing some projects because now I can’t stay seven days a week at home. It is always depressing. So, in the start there was a lot of depression built up. I started getting anxiety about my future.” (Gul)

Eman’s narrative provides a different view, as she had been working since her university days as a home-based business owner. For her, after education, she has enough time available to get her business orders completed in time. For Eman, it seems like, after university, life had been in favor for her, as she had her work path cleared from the very beginning of her university days. she is interested in doing this work in future:

“Now obviously there is no university life, so, I have too much time that I am done completing the orders before deadline. So, after that I have enough time that I can do my house chores easily otherwise before it was like with university and doing orders so there were many clashes like delayed delivery of orders. And that at that time workload was more but workload is less nowadays or maybe I feel more because I have more time now, I do not have university to go to.” (Eman)

But similar to Noor and Zahra but with a different reason she seems to be interested in learning other things in life it could be because she chose the field of science primarily because it was her mother’s wish from her to follow the field of science, but she had been interested in business and graphic designing from the beginning. She says:

“I had this that after completing this degree I will opt for any other degree but not any field of science. but till now I have made no adjustments. I am looking forward for doing something other than this like diploma in digital marketing or something like that.” (Eman)

Despite of the fact that Eman runs a home-based business and earns from home without needing to go out which means living up to the societies and cultural expectations, she faces another challenge which is the type of work a woman does, is it in accordance with her education. She shares that it often happens at home, with siblings or relatives etc. When someone is assigned a

task to do, they usually tell her to do the work because she had been at home the entire day. So, because of this Eman feels that “I don’t go out, I don’t do any work.” Eman, being a physiologist and doing a business though she has interest in doing what she does has to go through this challenge where her work is not considered work because she does it from home. The concept of what is considered as an employed is different according to different people, what Eman had to experience from within her home was employment should be something for what she has to go out of her house. This might relate to the fact that women’s work by staying at home is not counted as work despite challenging the traditional notion of what constitutes work. “The categories of 'paid employment' and 'domestic labor', as used by many feminists, have come to be exhaustive of the possibilities for conceptualizing the work situation of women.” (Marshall,1984)

Contrasting to what Noor, Zahra, Gul and Eman’s thoughts and experiences, Arooj mentioned the concept of traditional family. She belongs to a family where the wife is supposed to stay at home and raise the kids. For her, education is something she always wanted to get, but not for the purpose of earning or employment. But only because she felt that it is good to be educated. She was happy and content with her decision to follow the traditional way of family. What I also observe is her definition of what counts as a work. She says:

“And I also feel like in the end, all of it comes around to money. Ok, why are you working? Because I want to earn or why are you working? Because I want to travel. Why are you working? Because I want to afford sorts and such things for myself so the thing that I tried to make quickly realize is if you are getting all of this without working then why do you need to work?” (Arooj)

She adds on further:

“To be very honest, I am very, very thankful that I have the support system and I have a husband who can provide for me, and I can stay at home and be completely, completely chill about it and be completely relaxed. I don't know where the money is coming from. I'm completely happy. I don't have to work 9:00 to 5:00 and think, OK, I need to Earn this much to make sure my house is taken care of, I simply go to my husband, I ask him, I need this much money. He does give it to me. He doesn't ask me how I spend it. Like what more can you ask for? (Giggles)” (Arooj)

In her definition, work is the typical 9 to 5 that a person does in a professional environment. which for her goes against the family value she described while choosing her educational path Aswell. It aligns with Zahra's definitions of what employment is, "According to my opinion, employment is something that makes your time set. Like 9 to 5 or like 8 to 4. in this way, it is like your routine is set. You know you have to go and get out of home and work. So, it is like definition of employment. (Zahra)

For Arooj, there are some boundaries that she needed to keep in mind for example not to get into certain field of study because those are against of Islamic values as well as due to the co-education system in most of the universities in Pakistan. She adds, "even though I wanted to go into a creative, I wanted to pursue something creative. a lot of creative fields here, like a lot of creative fields everywhere, are not very Islamic So like if you for example go into fashion or if you go into photography or like filmmaking, like a lot of things are not religiously like, they don't, they do not harmonize with what our beliefs are." (Arooj)

Moreover, her finances are managed by her husband, and she is supported completely. Her thoughts on the purpose of work after education seem to be the result of traditional values and strong financial support. Arooj's experience of her life after education gives us different view of the experience of unemployed educated women. It looks like for her education matters because it is good to be a knowledgeable person, to be able to teach her kids and also towards her identity of being an 'Alimah.' (Explained in Positive outcomes of being educated)

Contradicting the education and employment meaning for Arooj, Gul explains, "I am unemployed because I don't have an official job to support my finances. I am not taking care of my finances; I am getting money from my parents." (Gul) Even for Eman who is running a home-based business, she thinks financially: "If I think like financially, so, financially I would have been at a better place because business and a job are together then, obviously I would have earned better." (Eman) While they had similar thoughts on what employment is and what is it needed for but due to different backgrounds its meaning for each is different.

5.2 Positive outcomes

This theme aims to answer the research question that states, "what are the specific ways educational experiences of unemployed women brings positive changes in their lives" I will

discourse how these women experienced their educational life and how is it meaningful for them in their present-day life?

After all the feminist/activists struggle for the women's right to education and work, till the present day, though many improvements have been made, it is still important and a relatable discussion. My interviewees shared how they have been able to improve many areas of their lives through their educational experiences and these improvements are not always the material things in life but the intangible things. While doing the analysis, I will consider the social-cultural context of Pakistan, patriarchal structures, and biased norms and expectations in terms of education and employment in the experiences shared by research interviewees.

5.2.1 Skills acquired through education

From interviews, my findings indicate that my participants have experienced the 'ways to communicate' through education. They shared about the diverse ways their communication skills improved through their educational experiences. Communication skills, for them, are crucial in different context; for some of these, communication skills helped them to present their thoughts and views effectively, some have been able to perform well in the job interviews, some came out of their introversion. In my interpretation of the themes, I find that they have linked their knowledge with communication skills because according to most interviewees, the knowledge gained through their education has made their communication skills better. It appears that the knowledge they gained through their education has given them "a sense of confidence" to present their views and opinions in social gatherings. It is consistent with the conclusion drawn by Noreen and Awan's study, that emphasized the phenomenal changes brought by education like elevated confidence and better status in family and society. (Noreen and Awan, 2011). Other than knowledge, education has provided these women to be in an environment where they can also improve their learning abilities, as Eman shares her thoughts:

“It helps us in a way that if we are sitting and talking in between four people so we have this much knowledge that we could communicate on that topic if it is related to our field. In fact, if it is not related to field, so many times while we are studying, we are also taught about other things. It is not necessary that we are only taught about things related to the

field. (Eman)..... I can see the skill of like speaking just like I can speak on certain topics, current situations that are ongoing in this world of ours (Eman)”

Eman talks about her communication skills improved because of the knowledge she gained through her education. She mentions being taught about other things when she was getting her degree. She says that it is not only the knowledge she achieved related to her field but also other things which are not related to her field of study. With other things, she means the ways you interact with people, and you learn from them. It could also be the manners and behaviors taught by the teachers during that period. This field and non-field related knowledge improved her communication skills and made her capable of communicating on certain topics while being part of any gathering.

One of the interviewees put it beautifully, “You learn the ways to talk through education.” (Gul) She also indicated her specific degree and overall education improved her knowledge with political discussions and English vocabulary and reading as her Specific field of study required her reading lots of novels and, while she was Preparing for CSS (Central superior services) exams, she had to keep herself updated with current issues through reading newspapers. As a recent graduate who has just completed a short-term project-based job, Gul is currently seeking new job opportunities. This experience has taught her valuable conversation skills for job interviews. When asked about her feelings regarding her education, she shares her insights:

“The language helped me a lot in my interviews. In the places they selected me was because of my education, due to my language” “You know, the way to talk professionally and casually, so there have been many changes because of those things.” (Gul)

Likewise, Zahra also states that “one of the most prominent skills that I learnt was of communication.....So, I feel like my communication skills have improved a lot.” While Zahra talks about her communication skill being improved, she also adds about some sort of “fear;” with fear I believe the fear of speaking. She tells:

“There was fear inside. a lot of fear that I already have this fear and I am asked to come forward. But my communication skills developed in this. Now, I can talk well with people.” (Zahra)

“I as a leader used to speak on behalf of them (group fellows) and, if we needed to bring something or take something, or to talk to the teacher. Other than this, if we were going somewhere, they brought me forward because I can talk well. (Zahra)

She shares her experience of her university’s time when she was a leader of her group, these groups were made by teachers to perform some sort of laboratory work. It shows that education provided her with this opportunity where she developed her skills and made her come forward more often and speak on behalf of others. This developed her communication skills a lot better and that now she can speak well. In her current life this is also proving to be beneficial for her as she does some freelance work and for that she must communicate with customers. I observe that her education provided her with space and support to overcome her fear, which in other scenarios would not be the case. In one part of the interview when I asked Zahra, "Share how your education contributed to the way you have grown as a person?" She shared that:

“Initially, we used to stay at home and not meet people but when we entered pharmacy (the subject) we got to know about people. Due to this we developed sympathy and empathy because we used to stay in between patients. how to be sensitive of how you talk to elders and youngsters. Your voice and tone. I mean your body language all of this developed a lot because of this (Education)” (Zahra)

Here, she is referring that even just going to the educational institution provided her with opportunities to meet people. It could be the “other things” that Eman referred to.

Another interview participant brings forward the difference between being an illiterate and literate person. As she commented:

“When you have education then, I feel like, you think before you speak, just like if we are sitting in a gathering, and you see two people there, one who is illiterate and one who is literate. The illiterate will say anything without thinking. If an educated person is sitting, there that person will never say anything without giving it a thought. That person will have valid points, right? So, I feel like you get calmness in you, being an educated person. You think before you say, and you know what point to adjust where.” (Dua)

Calmness through education is what appears to be in the thoughts of Dua, for her the difference between literate and illiterate is evident, her statement shows confidence in self by being a literate person and makes a general comparison between communication ways of literate and illiterate. Her bringing up the comparison was quite different than the rest of participants contradicting to it, Arooj says, from her experience, ‘It is not necessary that you have education; your manners and upbringing also make a significant difference.’ She said this in relation to her mother’s education, who was the least educated in her in laws but the most stood out one because her mother was civilized. Both these narrations give us an overview of what they might think of their life without education, for Dua she imagines her life without education having lack of sensible speaking skills while for Arooj, education is not necessarily but more of manners and behaviors learnt from the beginning.

Not only this, but the feeling of having a voice was also shared by my interview participants. They share that being educated has given them the ability of critical and reflective thinking and to present their point of views on worldly matters. Over here they did not mention anything about speaking for themselves if they had personally had to face any injustices due to social or cultural norms or the patriarchal structure in Pakistan but about outside the sphere of their home. I see this important for them to have a voice to speak and for that they need the knowledge and capabilities their education has provided. The quote by Gul adds into this:

“It helped me with my communication skills. really a lot. I would say the 21st century challenges we are going through, so communication matters a lot. If it is through social media or if it is through direct communication or print media but communication matters. You should know the way to communicate what you want to, to make your voice heard by people. So, that I would say helped me a lot in my communication skills, my soft skills.”

(Gul)

My interview participants previously mentioned the skill of communication they learnt from education; besides this, they talked about some skills they learnt in their educational life. For interviewees, the educational institution offered them extracurricular activities to learn and develop new skills and find their potential. For some interviewees, they felt that they had those

skills from the beginning, but education refined those skills and talents. “I was always, I always had this, this creative bug and these places just help enhance those.” (Arooj)

For Arooj it seems like she does not think of key role of her education in developing those skills and talents, but rather refined those, though, she had those skills and what she calls it as ‘creative bug’ from her mother, but educational institution provides these women with those opportunities, space to enhance their talents. To know their capabilities to the fullest, Arooj’s experience shows:

“When I was in college, I was in the journaling club, and then I was part of, like, another club So, a lot of these things helped broaden my perspective. Like how I can use other things and how I can, like, do stuff at home. But like more large scale, even now I design stuff on Canva like I do a lot of stuff on canvas. So that is I learned those during my Madrassa [Islamic educational institution] years.” (Arooj)

This gets back to the concept of a ‘broadened perspective,’ and not only the knowledge as previously discussed but the extracurricular activities help in it. As Arooj is Happily not working, she is looking into other ways that she can utilize these skills that she has had refined within the boundary of her home. She is not earning from these activities but helping her by giving independence. She shares from her life:

“There were times when I just lost the will to do stuff like when I had my kids and I had my postpartum Depression was just like, I don't want to do anything. I just... I just don't want to live, I am done with this Life uh, so, but the thing is that creativity was something that always helped me identify and something that I always feel is my own like it's not something that is my family. Or not something that's my kids or it's not something that's my husband. It is something that I like and it's something that I'm appreciated for. It is something that I am good at, so, It is my own thing. something that gives me independence in a way I would like to say.” (Arooj)

Participating in these extracurricular activities and even academic tasks such as presentations enhanced their confidence. “When you participate in that (extracurricular activities) it always like, it brings confidence in you, when you give presentation in your bachelor’s journey; it brings confidence.....if I wasn’t educated, I would have missed all these opportunities.” (Gul)

Gul seems to not imagine the skills she has now without her education, she shares her story from her last professional work experience, where she was present in some ceremony and the presenter host got absent and she was the one who was asked to come forward and handle the presentation. That is when she felt incredibly happy and appreciated by her friends for giving a nice presentation on the spot. She feels that it was her education, that prepared her for this and gave her the confidence, not only this she feels that it was because she was a major in English language, but she was also given preference because of that.

5.2.2 Personal Growth

Throughout the interview data, women shared the positive outcomes of their education. Interviewees shared their feelings of gratitude for being educated, being able to have exposure in life, a broader horizon, self-improvement, becoming an approachable person and being able to use education for children. They expressed confidence in their education. They expressed self-awareness of them being educated and the realization of the importance of the time they had spent in their educational institution. When I asked Noor “how do you feel about your studies today? she answered:

“I do not perceive my education as useless because I know how educated I am, and I know the way I think and look at things it is because of my education so that was phase (a phase where she perceived her education as useless)”

She uses the term useless to clarify that despite being educated unemployed she still does not consider her education as useless but mentions a phase where she felt that way. She goes through these phases of disappointments of not being able to do the job, but she is aware of her self-worth because of the education. she continues:

“Otherwise, I am very positive about it (education) and I am very grateful of things I have learned and not just the technical things that I have learned the behaviors that I have learned while sitting in an institution for 4 years for about 8 hours of my day I spent there it has developed me into a very different being.” (Noor)

She knows the value of the opportunity the educational institution provided her with, developed her in different ways, especially intellectually. She says, “I know what I have learned from education. From educational institute I know the importance. One of my elder brother never got into university so he does not know what kind of environment that is and that is why he is conservative because he has not experienced it so that is why you know umm if someone has not experienced it so they have a different view different opinion about it and the people who have experienced the thing they have a different opinion about it so now and I have experienced it I will not think of education as something worthless it is always worthy.”(Noor)

Her statement shows her denial of patriarchy in a way she differentiates between herself and her brother and links it to the experience of education. For her education is what made her to look the things as she looks at them now, she values the experience and understands the fact that if someone has not experienced education, they will think of it as a negative thing.

Education for these women is not only for attaining a degree but they feel that it is about knowing your capabilities and potential through the education. Through the experience of education, they could know who they are and what else they are able to do in their lives. Zahra indicates this:

“I mean, I came out of myself. I made friends and I got many leadership positions. This way, it remained a nice experience for me. To come out of yourself, to explore your own self. To meet and greet people. Other than this we had good connections with our seniors. We had sports and we used to participate in that. so, this is a really nice experience if you are searching for yourself... you can get out with friends and all that.” (Zahra)

These statements from Zahra ‘I came out of myself... To come out of yourself, to explore your own self..... if you are searching for yourself’ shows the changes education brought in her. She describes herself as an introverted person during the interview and acknowledges her time in university, enabling her to express herself by interacting with people in university and the time spent with friends. If it were not for this experience of education, she would never be able to understand her true potential and self. Arooj also shared her thoughts about her education experience; her description combines what Noor and Zahra say about their educational experiences, but for Arooj, she describes it as the exposure through education:

“It gave me exposure because, when you interact with a lot of people, you experience a lot of things. Umm, you experience different people, you experience different ways of thinking, experiences, different lifestyles, and you become, I think, more accepting and you become more forgiving which is nice I believe.” (Arooj)

According to Arooj, any education that a person gets be it secular, religious or any skills gives you a perspective. According to her, education gives you options to go for in case of need and she relates it to education because through education she could make friends, colleagues, and teachers. As Arooj is a mother of two kids, she shares experience from that point of view. For her the concept of education broadens you as she is now aware of how to use the internet, YouTube, websites, and who to ask for help if needed while teaching her kids. She discusses her experience of education from a different point of view, as she has a background in religious studies. According to her thoughts and what I as a woman from Pakistan has also come across this mentality that a “maulvi or mullah” (Islamic cleric) is uneducated because in Pakistan, studying in a reputable university and a degree in medicine and engineering is only encouraged. so, for her:

“Education is very important in addressing that also (maulvi or mullah is uneducated). Yeah, just because I am more inclined towards Deen (Religion). I am someone who covers (in terms of clothing), I do pardah (veil), but that does not mean I am uneducated, I am uncivilized. So, I want to and I think that's a very good perspective and that's something that you should be doing..... because that makes you more approachable so people approach you more, people are more accepting because then you can back it up with facts that you can back it up with Knowledge.” (Arooj)

For Arooj, the religious knowledge she had through her education is helping her now to become a more approachable person. She feels that she has that knowledge about religious matters and if she is in a situation where she must deal with some arguments, she is confident enough to answer them with the facts. Moreover, Arooj discusses her education being meaningful in terms of improving her children's life, as she is the only interviewee with children, so her perspective adds to this research. She says, “it has helped me improve my children's life, it has made it easier for me to help them connect to Islam more and at a younger age.” (Arooj)

Education for her is crucial in her current life because her children are at the age which are the foundation years for learning, her children have developed a love for learning after seeing her

mother learning especially in this case reference to religious studies this is one of the reasons she is immensely grateful for her studies.

Growth in knowledge was expressed by my interviewees and findings indicates that knowledge for them is to think critically to make decisions, to decide what is good and bad for them, in short having autonomy over their life. As my participants have higher levels of education it might show that there is a link between education and autonomy ‘graduate level education results in more autonomy contrary to the women with less level of education, yet the autonomy varies depending on women.’ (Agha and Tarar, 2018) Noor’s answer on asking about her feelings when she was pursuing her education, clarifies, ‘I was feeling like I was growing in knowledge which perhaps in other circumstances; if I had not got this knowledge my brain would not be that working.’ (Noor) Further in the interview she adds that, “I think it is because of the education I have, I know, how and what is good for me and what is the right decision or what is wrong decision and when to take a decision and when to speak for myself. When to stay quiet and all this is personal growth, and this is because of the education I have.” (Noor)

For some knowledge through education is for their consciousness (ability to think and understand) Eman’s thoughts gaining knowledge through education is not to get into professional employment though she accepts the fact that most people attain education for the purpose of employment but for her education is for her own consciousness. In her opinion, people can get employed even without having the education for that, the thought behind this may be the reason that she is currently running a home-based business with an education in a different field. She puts her thoughts this way:

“I studied this [her field of study] not because I will do a job in this field, but I studied for my own consciousness, to increase my own knowledge. I studied for my own growth”
(Eman)

Knowledge through education for some women is about impact on your mindset, Gul shares her story of her educational journey. Initially, she was asked to go for medical profession, she tried two times but could not pass the test, then she was imposed to go for CSS (Competitive examination) and for that one must have good command in English. She then chose to do her bachelor's in English literature and language. She was not interested in studying this subject in the beginning but what changed her mind as she tells:

“During my degree when I got the scholarship, and I got the chance to go out and study about these subjects then I got to know that this is very interesting. literature is really vast and interesting, and it is a kind of subject that impacts your future or life philosophy. it impacts a lot on your mindset because when you read books about philosophers, authors then it somehow impacts your life.” (Gul)

When discussing the extracurricular opportunities provided by education to these women, they expressed the role of their teachers in identifying their potentials. Teachers could play the role for the women as a role model or as someone who could help them in pursuing their potential. They could offer these women with opportunities to access that could help them in their skills what can help them other than formal employment. For Noor, her teacher’s recognition of her potential made her join different societies in her university. She felt that:

“Teachers can see the potential in you that you cannot even see in yourself sometimes. teachers see the potential in you that you don’t even know that you have this much of it. So, there was a teacher who said about joining societies because umm I don’t know how she said it but she said it she saw something in me, so I was into joining societies in the start.” (Noor)

Friendships were also the central part of their lives, for some of these women, still it is. Friendships developed through their educational experiences provided women with social support. During their studies, they had the chance to meet people from various backgrounds, experiencing various perspectives. They felt friendships developed through education were a supportive space for them to share their feelings without thinking a lot. Arooj expresses her feelings about friends made through her college and Madrassa years:

“They [her college friends] have seen you growing, the bond with them is totally different. So, it's very different. It’s easier to connect with them on some levels because they know your life in and out so while talking to them you don’t worry that I am giving too much information. It is like a therapy session, when we meet them, you feel light. It’s good for your mental health. (giggles).” (Arooj)

In Arooj's experience, her friends were supportive for her mental health that made her feel grateful to have them. She said that it is not easy to study for six years without any support system as she felt her studies were difficult and she had kids but because she had her friends who supported her, she was able to do it. She says, "I'm very lucky to have a very good support system and have very good friends like I never felt like in a way when I meet them that you're b*tching about people gossiping about people like, OK, I mean competition among friends. I'm blessed to have like a very good circle." Similarly, Gul also experienced better mental health as Arooj's when meeting friends. Gul felt meeting with her friends was one reason she is missing in her current (Unemployed) routine. She says in favour of her university life routine, 'I used to go out. If you are staying outside, you meet friends so the element of getting sad or depression is reduced a lot, you also go for outing usually a week or after a week we used to go for outing to restaurants. So, I had preferred that routine more. It was better.'" (Gul)

Not only in friendships, but these women also emphasized on the improvement in their relationships with parents and siblings. The reason behind improved relations seems to be having topics for discussion related to studies, getting help with their studies, achieving scholarships. Zahra shares that her relationship with her father and siblings improved a lot with time and she connects it with her education. Education developed a strong relation with father and siblings, because she expressed that, parents do not do much communication with their children, they are anxious to talk to their kids, so she felt that now she has developed a good bonding with her father. In terms of siblings, she puts it:

"My relation with my sister in the start wasn't so good I mean we used to fight a lot but when I joined PharmD, and it is clear she was also from the medical field so she would explain a lot of things to me in a better way so because of that our relation was improved a lot....." (Zahra)

Gul also shared that during her bachelors, she got scholarship to study in a foreign country for few months, she says, "when I went for studies, so, that was something my father is so proud of still. So, he feels like that yes when he sits in a gathering, he explains this with pride that one of my daughters got a job and the other one [Gul] got scholarship." (Gul)

Arooj shares a different thought on education, according to her getting lots of Education may make you feel you are better than your seniors or your parents, but for her she did not develop this feeling of being better than other because she thinks she had done religious studies after secular studies(college) and feels that there is a strong element of respect in that. This also changed her

“I sometimes also feel that sometimes when you get lots of education you get the thing that maybe you are better than your parents, and maybe you're better than your seniors but I don't know I haven't developed this thing maybe after i got secular education i have done a religious education maybe because of that there is a lot of improvement because there is a strong concept of respect and that is what she developed after her secular education when she entered religious education. She shares from her personal experience, “when I was in my college days, I remember There were instances when I used to be very rude to my teachers. But when you are studying in Madrassa you can't think like that if you have to convey something you are supposed to do in a very polite way.” (Arooj)

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the life narratives of unemployed educated women living in the urban areas of Pakistan. Specifically, it aims to investigate their experiences with education—education that was supposed to provide them with employment. Additionally, the study analyses the positive outcomes of education despite of unemployment and seeks to understand the contradictions these women face in their daily lives due to their unemployed status. I planned accordingly two research questions to answer during the analysis section. I will here discuss the results and its implications in turns. The first research questions aimed to focus on finding the contradictions unemployed educated women narrated through their experiences.

My findings indicate that the education of unemployed women is not that useful as it would be in case of employment. They felt that their routines after their education lacked productivity as previously, they had a very productive routine either due to educational experience or short-term employment experience they had gained. What I also found was that regardless of their higher education they still had to face restriction in the matters of employment either because of patriarchy, care work, cultural norms, traditional family values or by their own will. They felt that without employment their education and time is being wasted. They are unable to use it professionally at home because of the type of degrees they have, they have to go out of their homes for work. They describe this contradiction that they are satisfied with what they learnt and experienced through their education but when it comes to employment, they feel it is useless and all that gained knowledge and skill are being wasted. My findings also show the financial dependence of these educated women. They feel the need to be employed to take care of their further education and daily life needs. Not only this the one woman with remote work also expressed that she had not achieved anything extraordinary financially yet through her education, which again exerts the importance of financial independence of women living in Pakistani society. They also felt that if they were financially independent/with a job they would be respected and valued more. One participant who was married believed in traditional family roles, she seemed satisfied and stress free by the fact that she was unemployed and had no problems financially as her husband was taking care of. It depends on the personal aims, family values and situations, financial status of the families these women belong to.

Moreover, interestingly a repeated question appeared during the interviews. It was the question of ‘what did you do after studying this much?’ This question was being asked by my interviewees by their relatives. I found that the biggest contradiction they face is to explain the need for their education in the absence of employment-the same employment that is being restricted by biased practices and norms. Being women, they are questioned for the need to study that much if they were not able to secure a job. According to my finding, educated women in Pakistan must deal with a triangle, one angle is the traditional gender roles and expectations. Second, are the restrictions and third is the expectations on them to work when they have got a degree. These questions about the need for or worth of their education had led them to avoid social gatherings and meeting people even one of the participants who was happily unemployed was questioned the same and she decided to avoid such gatherings. Educated unemployed women also felt when meeting their friends, that they had nothing new to share and that their life was stuck at a place and felt lost in a discussion. What I interpret is that educated women never the less know the worth of their education and the worth here is not the debate by me but what I analyze is that the traditional care work (house chores) is still women’s work, secondly the same old restrictions on women still persists though it has been reduced and improved but is prevailing in terms of employment. Thirdly, their right to get education is being questioned like it was something that was not needed or needed for the purpose of job? The attitudes towards women’s education seems so rigid and still based on the same concept of education being useful for better husband, children’s education etc. but what my result shows that these women, in my research, mostly unmarried, are not striving for that, what they are missing in their lives is employment, an opportunity to go out and work in their field related job.

Another noteworthy discovery is that these educated women are actively seeking alternative opportunities that allow them to work from home. As said before, they miss productivity in their daily monotonous routine and due to financial constraints, they are looking for online or remote based jobs to start earning. My findings show that their education could not lead to jobs related to their field, but they were able to use the skills and knowledge achieved through their education in order to look for other opportunities. Some are planning to start freelancing, content writing or digital media marketing to earn while some are doing voluntary work or have hobbies to deal with daily routines.

Regardless of how educated unemployed women narrated the contradiction they still realize how important their education is for them in their daily lives. They shared their past experiences and how those experiences are still meaningful for them in their present lives. My findings while focusing on the second research questions i.e. In what specific ways women narrate their educational experiences and its positive outcomes in their current lives?

The results were divided in to two sub themes, the first being the skills acquired through education and second was their personal growth. For these educated unemployed women their educational time period provided them with opportunities to learn and develop skills. Results shows that the knowledge women get through education helped them in improving their communication skills which then also gave them a sense of confidence because they were aware that they are able to communicate with others in different situation. In most cases, they had fear of speaking which was improved through education. they were capable of speaking for themselves and making a sensible decision for what is right and wrong for them. what I observed is that irrespective of the education they had received they still were not able to exercise complete agency as they were still being restricted from doing jobs. Moreover, these women felt that their relations with their siblings and parents improved because of their education. For the one participant with children, her education was helpful for her in teaching her children.

Educated unemployed women shared in detailed what were their positive outcomes of their education and also currently these are still useful but there is dissatisfaction because of unemployment. They believe their potential could be used in many ways. In their narratives, while discussing the contradiction, they kept move back and forth about when education was useful and beneficial and to the time when they felt it is not that beneficial. None of them were demotivated about their education because they had no job but they were in this phase of contradictory thoughts about past education and current unemployed life.

My research focusing particularly on educated, unemployed women in Pakistan provides a fresh perspective in the area of education and employment. It shows that in Pakistan the gender biased beliefs and practices, patriarchy and traditional roles and expectations are still rooted in the society. (Pio and Syed,2013; Raza and Murad, 2010; Mohsin and Syed, 2020) Women are expected to be educated for getting a suitable marriage partner and dealing with family life (Moazam and sheikhani, 2018)

This study also relates to Betty Friedan's concept of the "Feminine Mystique," which describes the dissatisfaction women felt with their roles and the limitations imposed on their professional development. Friedan's work highlights how societal expectations restricted women's opportunities and fulfillment. Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft's advocacy for women's education emphasized that women are rational beings deserving of the same opportunities for intellectual and professional growth as men. Wollstonecraft's struggle for women's education and her assertion of women's rationality remains relevant as it relates to the finding of study. Despite their advanced knowledge and skills, these women experienced a sense of frustration and hopelessness due to the barriers they faced in the job market. Thus, both Friedan's and Wollstonecraft's ideas help illuminate the gap between educational attainment and employment opportunities, revealing the persistent challenges that educated women encounter in their professional lives. According to my research, the reason for getting higher education for these women personally was never the aim to look for the best partner but in fact they had high hopes and aims to pursue a career in their respected fields of study. My research indicates that, despite the extensive body of work already present in this field, significant debate persists. Commonly, the discourse is overshadowed by statements asserting that considerable progress has been made and that the issue is sufficiently addressed by the fact that more girls are receiving education.

My research is based on a group of six women, each with a unique background. Despite their diverse experiences, common themes emerged, demonstrating the importance of narrative interviews in studying women's lives. Previous studies in Pakistan have predominantly relied on quantitative methods, often overlooking women's voices and stories. My research contributes to this particularly by examining the intersection of being educated and unemployed, which adds valuable insights to the discourse. I also believe that my study findings have similarities to what Sharma Brymer research in 2006 in India. Lastly, my research contributes by bringing forward women's positive experiences of their education and highlighting their valuable stories. Through this study, I aim to make their voices heard and their narratives recognized within the broader discourse.

6.1 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences and narratives of educated unemployed women of Pakistan, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged, and it will also provide a way forward for other researchers interested. First, being the sample size for this research including only six individuals so the results of this study cannot be generalized for the whole Pakistani women community but it does help in adding their voices into the discussions on women, education and employment. Secondly, the participants were from urban areas of Pakistan which is another factor that this research cannot be generalized as the experiences and narratives of women from rural areas might differ. In addition, in qualitative narrative studies, it is possible that participants may have consciously or unconsciously changed their narratives in a way to sound more favorable and acceptable. Participants background including their financial status and personal circumstances were not completely taken into account but it depended on the long interviews.

7. Conclusion

This research project has highlighted the narratives of educated unemployed women living in the main cities of Pakistan, through their experiences of meaning of education in the past and current lives. This thesis concerned two research questions: 1) What are the contradictions these women narrate about being “educated unemployed” in relation to their educational experiences? 2) In what specific ways women narrate their educational experiences and its positive outcomes in their current lives?

This study revealed women’s education experiences and its meaning in their current unemployed lives. My findings states that education for Pakistani women has provided them with many positive outcomes indeed. They have experienced better communication skills, enhanced knowledge, better routine, confidence, friendships, and better relations gained and developed through their education. But they also were in contradiction, due to unemployment. On the one hand, they recognized the positive outcomes of their education, but they had reservations and concerns regarding it.

These educated women feel that their current unemployment limits their ability to use the skills, knowledge, and personal growth they gained through their education and believe that having a job would address this gap. Some of these women, who either ran home-based businesses or worked remotely, shared that they still felt something was missing in their lives. This was due to their work not being recognized as proper or the earnings being too low. Additionally, all these educated women were questioned about the purpose of their education without employment even the one who was content with following a traditional family life also faced challenges in socializing because she was questioned about the purpose of her education. Women have been given permission to get higher education, but they still lack the autonomy over their lives. What education gave them the ability to know their rights and speak for themselves, yet they cannot have authority over their lives and make decisions for themselves in employment. Parents also often impose their choices on their daughters. In this study, many of the women selected their fields of study based on their parents' wishes, peer or family pressure which led into male-dominated professions or fields that were not well-suited for women, hence not given permission for.

Moreover, this study suggests that while women in Pakistan gain knowledge and skills through education, patriarchy, socio-cultural beliefs, and traditional values continue to restrict their ability to start or continue professional careers. What is particularly interesting is that the same culture and society then questions them for not pursuing their careers further.

In conclusion, my research has highlighted the voices and experiences of educated Pakistani women and upon asking by the end of the interview about how they feel, these women expressed happiness and accomplishment, feeling that they have achieved something meaningful in their lives and recognizing the value of their knowledge and experiences.

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Appendix 1:

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

“Meanings of education in the life narratives of unemployed women in Pakistan”

Invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in research that studies how unemployed women in Pakistan experience the role of education in their lives and how they navigate their identities in relation to their status of unemployment. The goal is to gain insights into women’s own experiences of what education has meant and continues to mean to them in their changing life situations.

You are requested to participate in this research because the research focuses on:

- women living in Pakistan
- minimum bachelor’s level education
- currently unemployed
- aged 23-35 years.

If you decide to participate, it is requested to ensure that you can fulfil the following requirements;

- you are able to use zoom app
- a stable internet connection
- quiet place where you can talk comfortably.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the research, but you are also requested to read the research purpose carefully before submitting your consent. You can refuse to participate in the research, withdraw from the research or cancel your consent to participate in the research at any point without any negative consequences to the researcher’s work if you inform before March 2024, at which point the writing of the thesis will be completed. You can inform the researcher about the cancelling of

your consent by sending an email and also explain how you want your data taken for the study to be dealt with.

Responsible persons of the research

This research is conducted by a Researcher Sana Khan as a part of the requirement of her Master's Degree Programme in Gender Studies at the University of Turku in Finland under supervision of Professor Anu Koivunen from School of History, Culture and Arts Studies at the University of Turku.

Research process

In this research, an interview will be conducted online via Zoom in the months of November-December 2023. First, the research will be explained to the participant using the information sheet and consent form and it will take 15 minutes. After agreeing to proceed, the actual interview will be conducted and will last for approximately 60 minutes.

The interview data collected will be used to analyse the role of education in the life narratives of women. It will help to understand how Pakistani women make meaning of their education in their lives when they are not formally employed. You are expected to talk honestly and freely without thinking about right and wrong answers. the purpose is to gain insights into what education has meant to you in different phases of your life so far.

The interviews will be audio recorded. It is your choice to give interviews either in English or in Urdu. The Interviews will be transcribed by the researcher herself.

Researcher's Master's thesis will be written in English, which is why the Urdu Transcription will be translated into English. No other person will be involved in this process. The interview is initially scheduled to occur once, but if any extra questions arise following the initial interviews, you may be contacted for an additional interview.

This research project is designed to conclude once her thesis submission is officially approved.

Possible benefits and risks

There will be no compensation for participating in this research, but participating in this research and sharing your experiences can bring valuable insights to the understanding of role of education among unemployed Pakistani women which has not been previously given much attention.

Talking about the risks, there is no physical danger in participating in this research, and your participation is guaranteed anonymity. However, during the interviews some questions may trigger past memories or experiences. In that case, you are free to not answer that question. During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from it. Withdrawing from the interview means you are no longer participating in this research but if you wish to join later, please inform the researcher via email.

Incentives for participation

No fee is paid for participating in the research.

Processing personal data

The information obtained in the research is confidential. The interview and personal data will not be used for any other purposes and the data will be kept secured. The personal data such as name of the research participants will be replaced with a pseudonym to ensure the anonymity of the participants. The research participant can also ask the researcher for their transcript of the interview before it being cited in the thesis to check if it is transcribed accurately and to ensure their anonymity.

This research is conducted following Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Storage of research data and reporting the research results

The data collected during the research like consent form, recorded audio tapes, transcriptions and translations will be kept safe. The researcher will use secure storage system called Seafile which is monitored by University of Turku.

During the writing process of thesis, some data may be kept in researcher laptop but it will be protected with password. Antivirus and security system will be installed to keep the data safe. All

the research data will be discarded from the Seafire after the researcher graduates from University of Turku.

The research results are reported in thesis and seminar presentation at the University of Turku

Contact person for further enquiries

If you have questions about the research, you can contact Sana Khan, Researcher, email: sana.s.khan@utu.fi.

Ms. Sana Khan

Student/Researcher

Faculty of Humanities

Department of Gender Studies

Appendix 2:

Interview questions

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your educational background.
 - 2.1 What did you study and where?
3. Can you tell me why did you choose that particular subject to get a degree in?
4. Please describe what were your feelings about your education when you were pursuing this degree?
5. Can you describe what was a typical day like for you when you were studying?
6. How did you imagine your future life when you were studying?
7. How do you feel about your studies today?
8. What adjustments you have made to your educational aspirations.
 - 8.1 Has your perception about your education changed overtime?
 - 8.2 what does it mean to you now?
9. Can you tell me about friendships or social networks that you acquired during your education.
 - 9.1 Are you still in contact with those friends?
 - 9.2 how do you connect with each other and how often?
 - 9.3 How does it make you feel when meeting your friends or any acquaintance?
10. Tell me what did you do yesterday?
 - 10.1 Can you share more about your activities or hobbies?
 - 10.2 Which one is your favorite?
 - 10.3 Have any of your educational experiences sparked your interest in these activities?
Can you share about it?
 - 10.4 Have you found something that you are passionate about because of what you studied/ or education?
 - 10.5 Can you share how these activities you mentioned helps you (In what ways) in your day-to-day life. Please share examples from your very own experiences.
11. Share how your education contributed the way you have grown as a person?
 - 11.1 How do you feel about that (whatever the RP shares)?

12. do you define yourself as unemployed? If not why? do you think there is a terminology issue?
 - 12.1 why are you unemployed? did you choose to be unemployed?
 - 12.2 have you ever been employed? If yes! Please share its experience.
 - 12.3 how do you feel now being outside formal work?
 - 12.4 How do you imagine your life if you were working now?
13. Do you experience difficulties because of your employment status?
 - 13.1 Can you share more about these (whatever mentioned) from your experience?
 - 13.2 how do you feel about the challenges that you have to face?
14. Can you describe what did you do yesterday?
15. In your experience have your education helped in your relation with family?
 - 15.1 How your studies bring change with your role as a daughter, wife and mother?
 - 15.2 Share experiences how education is the part of the roles you perform.
16. Do you have something to share about how education provided you with skills that is valuable in this changing world?