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Pre-Covid Impact on employability by NAVTTC (National Vocational and Technical Training Commission) Trainings in Lahore

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Abstract
NAVTTC program gives the opportunity to the learners with employment stability and career progression in the era of demanding skills. The study determines the pre-COVID impact on employability by NAVTTC training program in Lahore, Pakistan. The nature of the study was quantitative with descriptive and ross-sectional survey research method. The population of the study consisted of all technical and vocational institutions that were situated in Lahore. The stratified convenient random sampling technique was used to select the total sample of the study i.e. 150 students. Data were collected with the help of self-administered questionnaire. Validity was ensured as per expert opinion and Cronbach's alpha reliability was measured after pilot testing i.e. 0.774. After data were collected, descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential analysis (independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA) was employed to examine the objectives. The findings revealed that gender does not show significant mean difference about the pre-covid impact of NAVTTC training. Thus, it is recommended to diversify the training program of NAVTTC that covers a wide range of industry collaboration to train the participants.
Keywords: NAVTTC participants and pre-COVID

Introduction
In Pakistan NAVTTC or National Vocational and Technical Training Commission has been playing a significant role to fill up the skilled labor demand of the country by offering vocational and technical education (Alam, 2015). Created with the aim of addressing the ever-growing unemployment rate among the youth, NAVTTC has been instrumental in polishing the required talent of the learners especially in Punjab that is urban area and holds a prominent position in economic turnover of country (Batada, 2022). This research therefore seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of NAVTTC's training programs in Lahore prior to Covid-19 pandemic with special reference to employment; training received and; general socio-economic status of the trained individuals.

Before the advent of COVID-19 pandemic the growth of technical education in Lahore was observed in demand of skilled personnel in manufacturing, service sector and construction industry (Faheem & Shah, 2024). It is essential to observe that NAVTTC's training programs were intended to offer a link between the gap of deficiency of those skills sought by the industry and the skills available in the workforce learned by the institution (Altaf & Shabir, 2024). The level of efficacy of these programs can be analyzed with a view to comparing the baseline situation, which was the pre-COVID situation, with a relatively stable economic scenario that existed before the start of the pandemic (Shah et al., 2020).

Pre-Covid systematic reviews have also revealed that vocationally oriented training improves employability among the targeted beneficiaries (Eichhorst et al., 2022). For instance,

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Khan (2018) also pointed out that women participants of NAVTTC programs in urban areas were having higher employment chances than the nonparticipants. As a result, the research concentrated on the synchronizing of training curricula in line with the market demand to produce graduates with the necessary skills pertinent to the industry standards.

The other important area which has been identified as the NAVTTC's intervention point and bears a direct relation with the improvement of participants' technical competency that has an obvious link with improving the productivity (Khan et al., 2024). In a study by Hassan Naqvi et al. (2021), it was revealed that the learners who completed vocational training through NAVTTC has positive consequences for their technical skills and job performance enhancing productivity in the workplace relevant fields. This was especially the case most pointedly with the manufacturing and services industries which are dominant in Lahore.

The area of improvement that NAVTTC has brought about is skills development of participant's increase which has a direct correlation to productivity (Khan & Ali, 2024). In a similar manner, Lakho et al, (2023) indicated that employability skills enhanced through vocational training offered through NAVTTC has greatly acted as a positive force as most trainees reported an enhanced technical know-how in their area of specialization thus improving on their output in their practices. This trend was particularly seen in the manufacturing and service industries and these are dominant industries in Lahore.

Vocational training is also generally supporting the socioeconomic aspect of individuals that are involved in the program (Mirabel et al., 2022). In line with these positive impacts, Haladu & Mohammed (2021) concluded that the programs of NAVTTC helped in the economic development of the individuals as well as the community. The study showed that out of all the participants who underwent training and got placed in different companies, most of them embarked on entrepreneurship, thus employing other people and supporting the economy of the given area. This entrepreneurial impact was particularly quite high in urban areas such as Lahore which registered relative better market and resource access (Gielnik et al., 2019).

However, other researches have also indicated some difficulties regarding the execution of NAVTTC programs despite the above-mentioned positive results. According to Lee et al. (2019) some of the concerns that are evident include; the misfit between the training programs offered in the universities and what the industries require, and scarcity of well-developed training tools for advanced trainings. Such challenges call for regular assessments and modifications of training to enhance pragmatic applicability of the training programs (Psacharopoulos, 1997).

While hard skills are regarded as the most significant factors which help to get a job, there is a growing focus in the recent literature on the significance of soft skills for the enhancement of employability. In the need of a short report in late 2021, Kohler and Drummer (2018) highlighted that soft skills training including communication skills, collaborative skills, and problem-solving skills have been integrated into NAVTTC training system. The idea of covering each sector of training in vocational skills has been fruitful in the areas where the service sector employers offer employment to a significant number of people, and such skills will be valued (Stalder & Nagele, 2011).

The integration of women to vocation training is therefore a topic of interest in the recent past. In a recent study on the gender-sensitive enrolment in NAVTTC programs in Lahore, Avdullahi (2015) argued that though, conscious efforts have been made to enroll more female learner-trainers in various centers, which have maximally helped them become economically independent it has also helped in changing the gender stereotypical male dominated society. It

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was as well revealed in the study that female participants were more inclined to the entrepreneurial activities following the training, adding value to the local economy (Ledman et al., 2021).

The effectiveness of NAVTTC's programs in terms of their broader economic outreach has been also under discussion. Pilz (2017) examined the role of vocational training to fight poverty. According to their research skills, there was a discovery that high level of NAVTTC program's participants had more benefits in terms of increased income levels that positively impacted their households and the communities. The same study pointed out that such programs were effective in mitigating the high unemployment rate among the youths which has remained a thorn in urban areas (Koudahl, 2010).

There is research on the sustainability of vocational training outcomes that has been undertaken in current literature. Villar (2008) have aimed to investigate the training carried out by NAVTTC and its relation with long term employment, and career advancement. By following up the respondents, the research found out that, those who undertook NAVTTC programs were more likely to get stable employment and career progression compared to those who have not been trained in NAVTTC.

This brings us to the analysis of the pre COVID impact of NAVTTC training programs in Lahore establish the level of effectiveness of vocational education and training in Pakistan and where appropriate advice on policy or program improvement. The assessment of the benefits of these programs in general, prior to the pandemic, help to identify what impact they had during the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, this may help determine factors that explain higher levels of employment, skills development, and improved socio-economic status that vocational education users require for enhancing vocation training in line with the existing and emerging demand for human capital in the job market. So, by targeting Lahore being one of the largest Pakistani cities, the study also emphasizes the importance of the vocational education in regard to reducing unemployment in urban areas and improving the economic development. This makes useful for policy maker, educators and industries interested in developing a vocational system that could help minimize the skills gap in Pakistan. Thus, the objective of the study was to find out the impact of pre-COVID of NAVTTC training in Lahore. For this purpose, following are the research questions of the study:

1. Is there a difference between male and female students in terms of their participation in **N**AVTTC training?
2. Is there a difference between students' perception about **N**AVTTC training based on the technical departments?

Research Methodology

Survey research method under quantitative approach was employed to conduct the present research study with ross sectional survey research design. The data were collected from a sample to be representative of a greater population at one point in time (Christensen et al., 2011). Research design is a strategy and procedures that makes the decisions from comprehensive assumptions towards detailed methods for data collection and analysis. This study is descriptive based on quantitative research.

Population and sample of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all technical and vocational institutions that were situated in Lahore. Stratified convenient random sampling technique was used. A sample of 150 students were selected from the technical and vocational institutions, Lahore. Since, there were

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two strata (male and female students) in the population, therefore, stratified random sampling technique was used to draw sample from each stratum. Therefore, 150 students were selected as sample of the study. Table 1 shows that frequency and percentage of sample study.

Table 1: *Number of Male and Female Students Respondent*

Types of Respondents	Selected Students	Percentage
Male	61	40.6%
Female	89	59.3%
Total	150	100%

Instrumentation

The self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was developed on the bases of previous researches and literature review for the NAVTTC training program. The questionnaire was divided into two parts; the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the dimensions related to NAVTTC Trainees. Questionnaire was developed on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire contained the options of 1=Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3= Neutral (N), 4=Agree (A), 5=Strongly Agree (SA).

Data Collection and Analysis

Researcher personally collected the data by survey method. Printed guidelines were given to the respondents to fill the questionnaires. Completed questionnaires were collected by the researcher. In this way data were collected from 150 students successfully. A formal Permission letter was issued by the department to pursue for data collection and to assess the targeted sample. The researcher personally visited to the sample institutions with the permission of the honorable supervisor and the principals of target institutions. Before the data collection it was given the appropriate instructions to fill the questionnaire.

It was also ensured to the respondents that the collected data was entirely used for academic purpose and kept confidential. The data were collected without given any compensation and on the willing of the respondents. The response of the primary data was coding and entered into sheets by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Therefore, both descriptive (Mean and Standard Deviation) and inferential statistics (one-way ANOVA and independent sample t-test) were used to analyze the hypotheses proposed in this study.

Results

Table 2: *Mean difference between male and female students' perception about NAVTTC training program*

Gender	N	M	SD	t-value	Df	Sig.
Male	61	3.87	0.622	0.037	150	0.970
Female	89	3.88	0.707			

The table 1 presented the data to compares the mean scores of males (N=61) and females (N=89) on NAVTTC training. The mean score for males is 3.87 with a standard deviation of

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0.622, while the mean score for females is 3.88 with a standard deviation of 0.707. The t-value is 0.037 with 150 degrees of freedom, and the significance level (Sig.) is 0.970. Since the significance level is much greater than the typical alpha level of 0.05, the difference in mean scores between males and females is not statistically significant. This indicates that there is no meaningful difference in the variable being measured between the two gender groups, suggesting that gender does not play a significant role in influencing this particular outcome.

Table 3: *Mean difference between students' perception about NAVTTC training program based on department*

Variable	N	M	SD	t-value	df	Sig.
Department 1	75	116.9	12.8	0.642	149	0.589
Department 2	75	117.9	12.7			

The data provided compares the mean perception scores of students from two different departments regarding the NAVTTC training program. Department 1 has 75 students with a mean score of 116.9 and a standard deviation of 12.8, while Department 2 also has 75 students with a slightly higher mean score of 117.9 and a standard deviation of 12.7. The t-value is 0.642 with 149 degrees of freedom, and the significance level (Sig.) is 0.589. Given that the significance level is well above the conventional threshold of 0.05, the difference in mean perception scores between the two departments is not statistically significant. This implies that students from both departments perceive the NAVTTC training program similarly, with no significant variation based on departmental affiliation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The general gender and departmental distribution of students' perception towards NAVTTC training program are not significantly different. More specifically, whatever difference existed between the two, the male and female students' mean scores were found to be almost equal, thereby indicating that there is no difference that can be attributed to gender when it comes to the perception that students have concerning the NAVTTC training. This also resonates with earlier studies that find that Vocational Training Programs from NAVTTC especially are designed to be secular, hence gender-neutral programs that do not create any discriminative difference between male and female participants.

Likewise, the test of between departmental differences in perceptions didn't reveal significant difference between students from different department. Similarly, mean scores of both the departments were relatively close to each other which shows that NAVTTC training program is valued on an equal level irrespective of the fields of specialization. This consistency in perception may be as a result of homogeneity of the training offered in NAVTTC where the programs are structured to follow industry standards irrespective of the department. The absence of powerful variations proves that the educational program needs to have an equal impact on all disciplines, strengthening the approach of the vocational training program to the highly comprehensive method of qualifications development.

Therefore, the findings indicate that gender and departmental affiliation dichotomy are not viable predictors of students' perceptions of the NAVTTC training program. This indicates that all the students embrace program and this is true for any group of students, thus making the program effective. These findings are useful for policy makers and educators because they

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indicate exactly how effectively and fairly the program has delivered vocational training regardless of the demographic and discipline type. More future studies could investigate other antecedent factors, including an element of SES or prior learning, to discover more about the factors that do influence students' perceptions and performance in secondary technical colleges and vocational training projects.

Recommendation

The subsequent recommendations are made in light of the findings of the present study.

1. It is recommended that aims of NAVTTC must met by continuing to enhance on the standardized procedure that it uses in all its curriculum formation and implementation. This helps in guaranteeing that all the students regardless of the station in life get a quality and fair training.
2. However, since no gender disparity was observed in these cases, it is advisable that NAVTTC should keep on encouraging and assessing the compliance with inclusion policies within the programs. To further enhance the program's gender sensitivity, it is also necessary to guarantee that training information, approaches to training and learning resources provided to students in any training program are also sensitive to gender and fields of study.
3. It will beneficial for NAVTTC to consider other possible covariates, including socioeconomic status, prior education experience or geographical origin that might affect the students' perception and final results.
4. It is recommended that NAVTTC should designate considerable capital to publicizing its current message about why vocational training should be the objective for every student.
5. In order to continue the success of the training programs, it is imperative that NAVTTC incorporate measures for the evaluation of all its training programs and additionally there should be feedback sessions to be conducted.

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