QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678

JANUARY- MARCH, Volume No: 03 Issue No: 01 (2026)

TECHNICAL SKILLS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF-EFFICACY ROLE IN PROMOTING SELF-EMPLOYMENT

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Abstract

Self-employment is a primary source of income and employment in developing countries, particularly where formal jobs are unavailable. The ability to engage in self-employment is influenced positively by a person's technical skills and entrepreneurial SE. Therefore, this study explored the relationship between self-employment and technical skills and the role of entrepreneurial SE in the prediction of self-employment. The research design was quantitative and cross-sectional correlational. A total of 244 participants was targeted and purposively sampled. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation and simple linear regression. Results showed that there was a positive and moderate relationship between technical skills and self-employment ($r = .443$, $p < .001$). Entrepreneurial SE positively predicted self-employment ($R = .517$, $R^2 = .267$, $\beta = .517$, $p < .001$), explaining 26.7% of the variance in self-employment. On the basis of the results, this study concluded that entrepreneurial SE and practical skills are integral to self-employment. This study recommended the incorporation of activities that promote entrepreneurship and integrate self-employment training and economic and business skills into current practical TVET training. This would empower youths and adults to undertake self-employment. The findings of this study are relevant to vocational training personnel, educational institutions and policymakers to tailor their policies to achieve self-employment of youths in Pakistan.

Keywords: Technical skills, entrepreneurial SE, self-employment, vocational education, entrepreneurship, Pakistan.

Introduction

The increase in self-employment has changed the way we look at economic development. It provides alternatives to the traditional methods of ending unemployment, under-employment, poverty, and vulnerability. In developing countries, where the formal employment opportunities do not exceed the demands of the growing workforce, self-employment provides a means for economic participation and income generation. It creates an opportunity for the employment of available skills and resources in starting an independent economic venture rather than relying on salaried employment. A man successful in self-employment not only provides employment to himself but also to others. Different skills and attributes are needed for succeeding in self-employment. The potential and the will to be self-employed is of little help if one is not trained in the psychology and the techniques of starting an enterprise and managing the uncertainties of the market. There is a growing understanding of the importance of self-employment in most of the educational and vocational training institutions of the developing countries. There is an increasing acceptance of the need for incorporating the skills of self-employment in various training programs (Newman et al., 2019; Nabi et al., 2017).

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ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678

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Skill based occupations and vocations require occupational competencies and ability to identify and address technical problems in the field (Rausch et al., 2024). Such skills provide the opportunity for practitioners to produce and transform their occupational skills, knowledge and talents into marketable goods and services. Electricians, ICT experts, tailors, beauticians, automotive and plumbing technicians, and other vocational artisans may use their occupational skills to set up small businesses or provide professional services. From a human capital perspective, the accumulation of human skills, knowledge and capabilities promote the individual's productive abilities to use his/her skills and opportunities available to him/her. However, it is essential to combine the technical skills with other related competencies such as communication, interpersonal relations, marketing, financial and other management skills. According to Mack et al. (2024), it is important to provide entrepreneural and business skills in addition to the occupational skills and knowledge in vocational education and training. Vocational education should be oriented to equip learners with the knowledge and skills that enhance their ability to identify, evaluate and use existing and potential business opportunities. Given the current state of market, technical skills should be considered the essential foundation for self employment.

Other than tech skills, other factors contribute to one’s self-employment decision. Among those factors is Entrepreneurial SE. SE is an individual’s belief in their capacity to successfully accomplish a task (Waddington, 2023). People with higher SE are confident to overcome challenges, work long hours, and take on unpleasant or risky tasks to meet their goals. Higher levels of SE lead to a person feeling more in control of their future and viewing challenges as merely obstacles to be overcome as opposed to dealing with setbacks. With SE, people feel in charge of their own fate and act on their judgement more decisively and with greater confidence. Higher SE does the same for people considering opportunities, making choices, risk-taking, and challenging tasks. Of the 121 quantitative studies, Newman et al. (2019), showed that SE was an influential construct and critical factor in determining intentions toward entrepreneurial activities. In extension, people with higher SE are not only confident to create their own businesses, they are also more inclined to assume control of their financial future by engaging in independent economic activities.

The connection between technical skills and entrepreneurial SE is important because the possession of technical skills and the belief in the ability to utilize those skills are two associated yet different aspects of entrepreneurial readiness. Technical skills help individuals gain the knowledge and practical skills to produce or deliver goods and services (Apunda et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial SE is the confidence in the skills to manage the commercial and business-related uncertainty within an enterprise. There are people with high levels of technical skills who are reluctant to start a business because they have little confidence in their ability to do the following: attract customers, deal with the uncertainties of the marketplace, and manage the financial and commercial uncertainties of a business. There are also people with high levels of entrepreneurial self-confidence, but with low levels of technical skills, who experience challenges in delivering quality services and products. Therefore, the combination of occupational skills and entrepreneurial self-confidence is a better rationale for starting a business than either of the two factors. The integration of vocational training with entrepreneurial skills is a strategy that has gained acceptance in the vocational education and training area. This strategy strengthens the skills of individuals to engage in paid employment and start a business.

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In the case of Pakistan, developing youth's technical skills and ability to take the initiative in business has become even more critical due to high youth unemployment and low formal employment opportunities. There is a need for skills-based economic participation. TVETs provide learners the skills to find employment or work as self-employed. It is true that the role of vocational education is to foster the acquisition of skills to use tools and technologies. However, the role of vocational education should not end with graduates' ability to use tools and technologies. It should also be assessed by its contribution to the graduates' ability to apply their skills to make a living through productive and self-sustaining work. Research from Pakistan shows that entrepreneurial SE and entrepreneurship education impact individuals' entrepreneurial orientation. Zahid et al. (2021) examined the predictors of self-employment behavior among business graduates in Pakistan and identified entrepreneurial education, business incubation programs, entrepreneurial SE and social entrepreneurial attitudes as important predictors in explaining self-employment. Likewise, a study on Pakistani TVET students (2024) pointed to the role of SE and the quality of vocational education in improving the entrepreneurial intentions of TVET students. Considering these findings, it can be posited that the exploration of the intent and inclusion of entrepreneurship as a domain in formal, non-formal and informal educational and vocational training systems in Pakistan is worthy of scholarly attention. However, it is important to recognize that entrepreneurial intention and actual self-employment are not the same. One can hold an intention to be self-employed without actually engaging in self-employment. Thus, exploring how SE, combined with the right skills, relates to individuals' engagement in self-employment has important implications for the design of more effective vocational and entrepreneurship education programs.

While other studies have looked at entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial intent, and vocational and entrepreneurial skills and SE, less is known about the combined impact of technical skills and entrepreneurial SE, and how this impacts self-employment in developing nations like Pakistan. Most entrepreneurship research has been on business students and university graduates and their intent to start entrepreneurial ventures. The relationship between their occupational skills, entrepreneurial self-confidence, and their employment status has not been studied. There is a need to investigate how both elements, that is, the occupational skills and self-confidence, play a role in enabling individuals to participate in the economy through enterprise formation. According to the social cognition theory, the combination of technical skills, and entrepreneurial self-confidence is essential for self-employment. The aim of the study is to examine how both elements influence self-employment and how much each element contributes to the overall effect. The findings of the study are expected to provide evidence-based information that can help improve the transition of individuals from vocational training to self-employment in Pakistan and other similar countries. The research questions that guided the study were;

1. Is there a relationship between technical skills and self-employment among individuals?
2. To what extent entrepreneurial SE influenced the promotion of self-employment among individuals?

Literature Review and Theoretical Perspective

The literature review was organized around the two questions and shows how the entrepreneurial self-confidence and the combination of both elements play a key role for self-employment. The information shows the existing research gap and combines different theoretical frameworks.

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Self-Employment: Concept and Significance

Self-employment refers to the situation where an individual works for himself/herself by using their skills, knowledge and other resources to create income producing opportunities (Shefiu, 2016). There are numerous ways of being self-employed including starting a business, practicing a profession, engaging in some other activity that produces income, etc. Self-employment is more common in developing countries as it provides additional means of employment when the formal sector of the labor market is inadequate to absorb the ever increasing workforce. While self-employment is often seen as a way to provide employment for the individual, it has more far reaching benefits as it stimulates entrepreneurship and encourages local businesses. For developmental purposes, there is a need for both self- and other-employment. For instance, a woman may start a business to provide an extra source of income but also to send a message to the rest of the society about her capabilities to undertake business activities. Nabi et al. (2017) argue that the education of women on entrepreneurship is crucial for developing self-employment engagement and entrepreneurship abilities. Newman et al. (2019) further build on this argument and state that it is the belief and confidence in an individual to undertake business that helps in fostering self-employment. There are many ways of viewing self-employment. For instance, it may be the best way out of absolute poverty, or it may be providing employment for the self and sending a message to the rest of the society about what the individual is capable of.

Technical Skills and Self-Employment

There are general skills required in the world of work. They enable individuals to perform various tasks in the workplace, utilize office equipment and technology, solve work-related problems and produce the required output in the field of their vocation and profession. They can be acquired through formal education and training, and on the job or work-related learning. For self-employment, having some Technical Skills is essential to help individuals transform their work-related knowledge and experience into products and services they can sell on the labour market. Relevant Technical Skills can help people establish businesses in various fields (i.e. electrical services, tailoring, automobile repair, beauty services, construction, handicrafts, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), etc. From a human capital perspective, Technical Skills enhance an individual's productive capacity and encourage their participation in the world of work. However, having relevant Technical Skills to set up a business does not guarantee self-employment. The individual needs to be aware of the requirements of the market, provide quality service, and address the needs of customers. They should also adapt their skills and competencies to various economic conditions. The knowledge and skills can be combined to provide different products and services to satisfy various market needs. Mack et al. (2024) advocated for the integration of Entrepreneurial Knowledge and skills into vocational education and training. Vocational Education and Training (VET) prepares individuals to engage in different types of employment including self-employment and other independent economic activities. The OECD (2019) stressed the need to prepare the workforce to acquire skills that enable them to adapt to different requirements of the labor market. Technical skills therefore may help to create self-employment potential through the development of occupational skills that help individuals earn an income independently. Furthermore, the evidence indicated that the respondents had practical self-employment skills in addition to their classroom learning.

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Relationship Between Technical Skills and Self-Employment

The ability to convert work-related knowledge into productive economic activities is indicative of the relationship between technical skills and self-employment. Technical skills and work experience give people the ability to identify areas of business activity, provide specialized services, and launch small businesses. Technical skills reduce a person's reliance on external service providers. For example, a person trained in information technology has the ability to provide digital services, and persons trained in mechanical or electrical works have the ability to launch service businesses. The above examples illustrate the ability of persons to use technical skills to engage in self-employment. This is more so in countries where the economic activity is dominated by small businesses and individual service providers. The relationship between technical skills and self-employment is not always the case. Acquiring technical skills does not always mean a person will engage in an independent economy activity. Other factors such as a person's ability to access the market, business and financial knowhow, and the support of family members may contribute to a person starting an independent economic activity. The work of Mack et al. (2024) outlines the need for integration of work-related learning with the knowledge and skills of entrepreneurship. This means that to gain an understanding of how different occupational skills and knowledge can facilitate people's participation in independent economic activities, it is important to investigate the relation between technical skills and self-employment.

Entrepreneurial SE: Concept and Dimensions

Entrepreneurial SE is the individual's confidence in the performance of the activities and responsibilities in initiating, organizing and managing an entrepreneurial activity. The activities concerned are uncertain, require making decisions and managing risks. This concept is an important psychological trait, especially for individuals who desire to use their ability, skills and talents for creating opportunities (business and/or job). The entrepreneurial SE concept is adapted from Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (1997) which argues that the belief an individual has regarding his/her capabilities influences his/her decisions, level of motivation, the effort and the duration (persistence) he/she will use to deal with a stressful situation. In the context of entrepreneurship, SE is the degree of belief an individual has about his/her capability to undertake activities related to business in the presence of challenges and uncertainties. Chen et al. (1998) identified 5 important dimensions of entrepreneurial SE; marketing, innovation, management, risk taking and financial control. The dimension of marketing SE refers to the individual's self-confidence in his/her ability to identify customers and discover business opportunities. Innovation SE is the belief in one's ability to invent and introduce new products and services. Management SE denotes the individual's confidence in his/her ability to manage the business. Risk taking SE is the belief in one's ability to take risks. Financial control SE is the confidence of an individual to manage financial activities of the business. Newman et al. (2019) discussed the theoretical and empirical importance of entrepreneurial SE in their review and established it as an important area of research in the field of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial SE and Self-Employment

Since the self-employed face many challenges similar to those faced by employees, having SE regarding entrepreneurship may encourage a greater likelihood of self-employment. Starting an independent business requires initiative in recognizing market opportunities, interacting with customers and other service providers, prudent use of financial resources, and facing and overcoming the challenges of business. The belief in one's ability

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to face and overcome such challenges may explain the willingness to undertake such responsibility and display high persistence to continue in the business in the face of challenges. Conversely, the absence of such belief may explain why, in the face of lack of other challenges, the individual may find it difficult to take the plunge to start an independent business. This is supported by the findings of Chen et al. (1998) who have demonstrated the usefulness of entrepreneurial SE in the context of differentiating the capability of an individual to function both as an entrepreneur and as a manager. Similarly, SE is helpful in understanding the intentions and outcomes of entrepreneurs, as demonstrated by Newman et al. (2019). Finally, entrepreneurial SE indicates the belief that an individual holds about his ability to act in an entrepreneurial capacity. In self-employment, such belief is critical in enabling individuals to convert their occupational abilities into self-employment.

Integration of Technical Skills and Entrepreneurial SE in Promoting Self-Employment

Self-employment is the outcome of the interaction of various individual-level factors. Two of these factors are the individual's level of technical skills and the individual's level of entrepreneurial SE. Technical skills refer to the knowledge and abilities needed to function in a given occupation. Entrepreneurial SE, on the other hand, denotes an individual's belief in his/her capacity to start and run a business. These two factors, when integrated, increase one's preparedness for self-employment. This is because possession of technical skills gives individuals the capability to come up with marketable products and services, while being entrepreneurial self-efficacious propels individuals to make decisions and take actions in the face of challenges associated with starting and running a business. Due to insufficient entrepreneurial confidence, individuals may have technical skills and still not engage in self-employment. This is equally true the other way round. Mack et al. (2024) noted that the lack of adequate integration of entrepreneurship in vocational education can potentially limit the establishment of entrepreneurial SE. On the other hand, Newman et al. (2019) noted that SE has a positive correlation with entrepreneurial development. Both views therefore suggest that an individual's occupation-related skills and his/her entrepreneurial confidence should be integrated when studying self-employment. Analyzing the two constructs can help improve the understanding of why an individual is, or is not, involved in independent economic activities.

Prior research has analyzed technical and vocational education, entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial intentions, and entrepreneurial SE. But more studies are required to analyze the role of technical skills and entrepreneurial SE for self-employment in developing countries. Most research in the field of entrepreneurship has focused on the investigation of entrepreneurial intentions and motivations for starting a business. The study of actual self-employment behavior of the entrepreneur and its association with the entrepreneur's occupational competencies has been largely neglected. Furthermore, within the entrepreneurial preparedness framework, both technical skills and entrepreneurial SE have been analyzed as independent constructs. Keeping in view the above arguments, it is essential to investigate the relationship between the two components within the same framework. Overall, according to the existing evidence, it can be argued that individuals in the workforce of developing countries are lacking the necessary skills as well as confidence in taking entrepreneurial responsibility to engage in self-employment. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap and investigate the relationship between technical skills and self-employment as well as the role of entrepreneurial SE in promoting self-employment. The results of this study may have an overall positive impact on the literature by presenting

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evidence regarding the role of occupational skills and entrepreneurial SE in promoting self-employment.

Theoretical Perspective

This study is primarily based upon Human Capital Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, both of which contribute to the theoretical explanation of how the occupational skills and psychological beliefs of individuals foster their choice of being self-employed. The blend of the two theories enables the study to analyze the practical skills needed to engage in independent economic activities and the confidence to undertake responsibilities of an entrepreneur.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), posits that educational attainment and related investments in skills and training enlarge individuals' productive capabilities and increase their opportunities in the labor market. Improving human capital through education and skills enhances people's ability to undertake occupational activities, increase productivity, and participate in economic activities. In the current study, technical skills are regarded as part of individuals' human capital, since they enable people to acquire specialized knowledge and competencies that facilitate them to earn their living through diverse means. The current study assumes that entrepreneurial individuals have enhanced the opportunity to be self-employed through the acquisition of vocational skills and professional training. For example, a vocational trainee in tailoring, electrical work, IT, Mechanical services, etc. has the opportunity to set up a business in these vocations upon completion of the training. Human Capital Theory justifies how the acquisition of technical skills may enhance people's productive capabilities and enable them to engage in various forms of independent economic activities.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986, 1997) encompasses how personal, behavioral, and environmental factors influence human behavior. SE is the belief in one's capability to act in a manner to accomplish a specific outcome. For Bandura (1997), SE determines what people will attempt to do, and how vigorously and persistently they will pursue goals. It also defines how people will react to challenging situations. Generally, if one believes that he or she can achieve a goal, that individual will exert effort, persist and be confident in tackling the challenges to attain the goal. Entrepreneurial SE is the belief in one's ability to carry out a series of acts to begin, execute and steer a business. These acts include identifying opportunities in the market, formulating strategies and plans to act on the opportunities, creating and implementing innovative ideas to achieve the plans, steering the business by controlling resources, as well as being financially independent. For example, the dimension of financial control in entrepreneurial SE encapsulates the ability to formulate, conceptualize and plan for possible financial and organizational activities required to start a business. From the above, it is evident that Social Cognitive Theory is a key foundation in the construct of SE in the field of entrepreneurship. The study under focus employs Social Cognitive Theory to demonstrate that individuals' SE in entrepreneurship influences their self-employment decisions.

Integration of Human Capital Theory and Social Cognitive Theory

The integration of Human Capital Theory and Social Cognitive Theory helps us understand how relationship between technical skills, entrepreneurial SE and self-employment. Human Capital Theory focuses on the importance of acquiring occupational

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skills and competencies, while Social Cognitive Theory helps understand the role of people's beliefs about their abilities to undertake actions and influence their behaviors. In this regard, the technical skills are the instrumental means that allow people to perform special occupation activities and create marketable products and services. Entrepreneurial SE is the psychological belief of an individual to be able to exercise his/her skills and competencies in an independent business environment. According to the both theories, attaining relevant skills and having confidence of using skills to achieve economic ends, are important to the engagement in self-employment. This study combines both theories to examine the relationship between the existence of technical skills and self-employment, and the role of entrepreneurial SE in promoting independence in economic activities.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey based correlational research design to study the role of technical skills and entrepreneurial SE in case of self-employment. The nature and strength of the relationships between the variables under consideration, namely technical skills, entrepreneurial SE and self-employment were examined in a correlational research design without manipulating any of the study variables.

Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the study included persons having technical and vocational skills, acquired from various educational institutions, vocational training centers and skill development programs. The study focused on persons having technical training and occupational skills who have the potential to exercise their skill for engaging in self-employment activities. Sample size of 244 was drawn through simple random sampling technique.

Instrumentation

Data was collected using a questionnaire that was developed using published works relevant to the study and established measurement scales. The questionnaire has two major parts. The first part comprises of a series of questions targeting the respondents' demographic information. These include: the respondents' gender, age, educational background, the field of technology the respondents have a training in, as well as his/her previous relevant employment/self-employment background. The second part of the questionnaire contained statements that evaluated the research variables which include; technical skills, entrepreneurial SE and self-employment.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Technical skills	10	0.86
Entrepreneurial SE	22	0.91
Self-employment	8	0.88
Overall Questionnaire	40	0.92

Data Collection and Scoring Procedures

To assess respondents' level of technical skills, items pertaining to their practical skills in the workplace, application of technical knowledge, and problem-solving skills, as well as their ability to execute tasks in their field of specialization, were included. Entrepreneurial SE was assessed through items adapted from the entrepreneurial SE

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framework developed by Chen et al. (1998) that measured respondents' level of confidence in their skills in marketing, management and innovation, risk-taking, and financial control. Self-employment was measured with items that assessed respondents' engagement in independent economic activities, their use of technical skills to earn an income, and their ability to take on the responsibility of being their own boss. The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, from '1' (strongly disagree) to '5' (strongly agree). A higher score indicated a greater agreement with the statement.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS (version 25.0). Descriptive and inferential statistics were performed on the data in order to analyze the responses and address the research questions. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe respondents' demographic characteristics. Responses to the statements on the Likert Scale were analyzed using means and standard deviations. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was computed to measure the research instrument's internal consistency. To understand the nature and strength of the relationships among the variables, the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed. To determine the contributions of the two variables to self-employment, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The level of statistical significance was set at $p \leq .05$.

Results

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of the participants' demographic characteristics (N=244)

Sr. No.	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	male	69	28.3
		female	175	71.7
	Age	18-22	144	59.0
		23-27	92	37.7
		28-32	8	3.3
2	Academic Qualification	Matric	76	31.1
		Inter	56	23.0
		Bachelors	28	11.5
		Masters	68	27.9
		Diploma	16	6.6
3	Technical Field	IT and CS	3	1.2
		textile and fashion	65	26.6
		mechanical and electrical	51	20.9
		hospitality and management	125	51.2
4	Employed Status	employeed	44	18.0
		self-employeed	38	15.6
		unemployeed	10	4.1
		student	152	62.3

Demographic data of the participants (N=244) is presented in Table 2. The majority (n=175; 71.7%) of the participants were females, with 28.3% (n=69) being males. Regarding age, the largest number of participants (n=144; 59.0%) were in the 18-22 years age bracket, followed by 23-27 years (n=92; 37.7%). The remainder (n=8; 3.3%) was in the 28-32 years

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ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678

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age bracket. Concerning academic qualifications, the largest number of participants (n=76; 31.1%) had matric, followed by masters (n=68; 27.9%), intermediate (n=56; 23.0%), bachelors (n=28; 11.5%), and diplomas (n=16; 6.6%). In relation to technical fields, the largest number of participants (n=125; 51.2%) was in hospitality and management, followed by textile and fashion (n=65; 26.6%), mechanical and electrical (n=51; 20.9%), and IT and computer science (n=3; 1.2%). The largest number of participants (n=152; 62.3%) was students, followed by employees (n=44; 18.0%), self-employed (n=38; 15.6%), and unemployed (n=10; 4.1%). Generally, the demographic data of the sample provides evidence to show that the study involved predominantly young females, students and those in the hospitality and management areas.

Table 3

Pearson product moment coefficient correlation analysis between technical skills and self-employment among individuals

Variables	*N*	*r-value*	*Sig.*
Technical skills and self-employment	244	0.443	0.000

Pearson product-moment correlation of technical skills and self-employment among (N = 244) individuals is presented in Table 3. Results indicated that the relationship between the two variables is positively moderate and statistically significant ($r = .443$, $p < .001$). Hence, it is evident that individuals high in technical skills tend to be more engaged in self-employment. The positive correlation shows that with improvement in individuals' technical skills, chances for individuals to be engaged in independent self-employment activities increase. Thus, results show that there is a positive relationship between individuals' technical skills and self-employment, and therefore, the results that showed no significant relationship between the two variables is rejected. Results also point that, to facilitate individuals to engage in self-employment, the development of required technical competencies should also be taken into consideration.

Table 4

Linear regression analysis for entrepreneurial SE influenced the promotion of self-employment among individuals

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.517[a]	.267	.264	2.97866

a. Predictors: (Constant), EntS

b. Dependent Variable: E

Table 5

ANOVA analysis for entrepreneurial SE influenced the promotion of self-employment among individuals

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	783.833	1	783.833	88.345	.000[b]
	Residual	2147.130	242	8.872		
	Total	2930.963	243			

a. Dependent Variable: E

b. Predictors: (Constant), EntS

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JANUARY- MARCH, Volume No: 03 Issue No: 01 (2026)

Table 6

Coefficient analysis for entrepreneurial SE influenced the promotion of self-employment among individuals

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.473	1.876		7.716	.000
	EntS	.197	.021	.517	9.399	.000

a. Dependent Variable: E

The tables present results of a simple linear regression analysis to assess the role of entrepreneurial SE in causing self-employment. Model summary in Table 4 shows entrepreneurial SE and self-employment have a moderate positive relationship (R = .517). The coefficient of determination (R^2 = .267) shows entrepreneurial SE explains 26.7% of the variance in self-employment and the remaining 73.3% may be caused by other variables which the model does not include. Adjusted R^2 = .264, shows the model explains approximately 26.4% of the variance, after adjustment. The results of ANOVA in Table 5 show the regression model is statistically significant, F (1, 242) = 88.345, $p < .001$, showing entrepreneurial SE positively and significantly predicts self-employment. Coefficient analysis in Table 6, shows a positive and significant regression coefficient of entrepreneurial SE (B = .197, SE = .021, β = .517, t = 9.399, $p < .001$). This means, an increase in entrepreneurial SE by one unit, leads to an increase in self-employment by .197 unit, all other things remaining the same. The standardized coefficient (β = .517) shows a positive association of the two variables. Therefore, the null hypothesis of entrepreneurial SE not predicting self-employment is rejected. It is understood, with fair degree of confidence, individuals with higher level of SE towards entrepreneurial activities are more inclined towards self-employment.

Discussion

The study analyzed the relationship between technical skills and self-employment, and assessed the role of entrepreneurial SE in predicting self-employment. The results of the study indicate that, in addition to the individual's practical skills, entrepreneurial SE is equally important to predict self-employment. The results of the correlation analysis indicate a positive and moderate significance between self-employment and individual's technical skills. The results of the regression analysis indicate that entrepreneurial SE is a positive and significant predictor of self-employment. The results of the present study indicated that having domain-related knowledge and skills is not enough for individuals to engage in self-employment.

The existence of an association between technical skills and self-employment indicates that technical and practical skills of an individual are competent sources for employing self-employment opportunities. In the case of self-employment, an individual must undertake the main activities of the business due to limited financial and human resources at his/her disposal, especially at the start-up stage. Practical and technical skills can help individuals in self-employment through productive competence and can, therefore, be aligned with the Human Capital Theory.

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ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678

JANUARY- MARCH, Volume No: 03 Issue No: 01 (2026)

Practical and technical skills of an individual help in the process of entrepreneurship i.e. setting up, managing and growing the business. For self-employment, it might be necessary to combine other factors in addition to practical and technical skills, for example finance, market and business opportunities, and social and institutional resources. This outcome is aligned with other studies that highlighted the role of vocational and entrepreneurial skills in attaining employment. One study on Pakistani TVET students showed that the quality of students' TVET was linked with the students' level of intention to be entrepreneurial and their readiness to consider entrepreneurship as a career. Hence, based on the study, the authors suggested that students of TVET could be oriented towards entrepreneurship by vocational and/or technical training to enable them identify and mobilize the requisite resources to start-up businesses. Similar results have been reported in the literature on the self-employment of business students of Pakistan. So, even though the studies focused on the intent of entrepreneurship as opposed to the explicit form of self-employment, they have contextual relevance for this study. Overall, the studies suggested that vocational and technical training have a positive influence on self-employment.

The second major finding was the positive effect of entrepreneurial SE on self-employment. The regression model explained 26.7% of the variance in self-employment. Therefore, it can be said that entrepreneurial SE of the respondents accounted for a major part in their self-employment. Also, the positive, unstandardized coefficient suggested that with an increase in the respondents' score on entrepreneurial SE, their score on self-employment also increased. In light of the findings, it can be said that respondents have the required technical skills to establish and run a business, but may lack belief in their capability to run and manage a business. Hence, entrepreneurial SE may serve as a psychological resource to respondents to believe in their capability to perform entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, the respondents may be inclined to take actions related to entrepreneurship to achieve self-employment.

This is also supported by Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that individual perceptions of their capabilities impact their choices, efforts and levels of persistence in the face of challenges (Bandura, 1997). With regard to entrepreneurship, SE serves to motivate the individual to identify and exploit business opportunities, and to be persistent and remain challenged in the face of obstacles and setbacks, and to come up with different ways of addressing challenges. Newman et al. (2019) in their systematic review on the literature on entrepreneurial SE, highlighted its importance in the analysis of causes and effects of entrepreneurial activities and its importance in entrepreneurship education and training. More recent studies (Sahid et al., 2024) positively correlated entrepreneurial SE and business creation among university graduates and highlighted the role of environment and entrepreneurial intention in interpreting the positive association. Findings of these studies corroborate with the current study and enrich the literature on the role of confidence in entrepreneurial ability in determining the self-employment choice of individuals.

The results apply to the case of Pakistan, where the TVET system can provide an alternative means of employment and income-generation opportunity. One study conducted on TVET students from the higher education sector of Pakistan, showed SE and quality of TVET positively impacted entrepreneurial intent (2024). Similar to the aforementioned study, Soomro and Shah (2022), found positive impact of Entrepreneurial SE on commerce students of a university of Pakistan and positively impacted their Entrepreneurial Intent. The abovementioned studies suggest that together with SE to take the entrepreneurial route,

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

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students should learn about various functions of a business, as it may persuade the students to consider entrepreneurship as a career. The current study adds to the previous studies by indicating positively influencing self-employment intent, and also predicting entrepreneurial SE.

The sample demographics help explain the results. Most respondents were between 18 and 22 years old (59.0%). 62.3% of respondents reported they were students, and 15.6% of the respondents said they were self-employed. The results of the survey indicate the sample has relatively young respondents who may be at an earlier stage of career development, or be considering their future employment options. Therefore, the results of the survey may help provide evidence on the role of technical skills and entrepreneurial SE in relation to self-employment of young people. The sample includes a small number of individuals who were self-employed. Therefore, the survey results should not be interpreted to indicate individuals in the sample are long-term self-employed individuals, or long-term business owners, or long-term entrepreneurs. If the self-employment scale is considered a perceived readiness or capability for self-employment, this should be included in the text.

Results show that the development of self-employment is made up of two dimensions: technical skills and entrepreneurship. Technical skills refer to an individual's ability to perform the tasks required to provide a product or service to the market. SE reflects an individual's willingness to work for him/herself. The results of this study are thus in line with the perspectives of the Human Capital Theory and the Social Cognitive Theory: practical skills enable a person to perform the tasks that enhance their productive capacity; SE reflects the individual's readiness to productively participate in the market. The current studies, however, examined the relationship between technical skills and self-employment and the regression of entrepreneurial SE separately. Hence, the current studies are unable to determine the relative importance of each of the predictors. It is hoped that future studies will assess the joint influence of these factors and the effects of entrepreneurship education, finance and support, as well as the state of the market and the institutions.

Conclusion

The study established a relationship between entrepreneurial and technical skills and self-employment. Results showed that there is a moderate, positive and significant relationship between technical skills and self-employment, indicating that the greater the individual's level of technical skills, the higher the probability that the individual is self-employed. This may be attributed to the fact that, in some professions, an individual may not be able to practice the profession without specific skills. Such skills may assist the individual to transform their skills and knowledge into activities through which the individual may be able to generate an independent income. Results also showed that positive and significant relationship exists between entrepreneurial SE and self-employment. The regression model accounted for 26.7% of the variation in self-employment. This shows that possessing self-confidence about your capability of identifying, pursuing and accepting business/ entrepreneurial opportunities is vital. The study shows that promoting self-employment goes beyond the provision of technical training. It builds a person's self confidence and ability to transform skills into entrepreneurship and business activities. Thus, elements of entrepreneurship should be incorporated with other technical and vocational training/education for youth. A comprehensive approach combining the different dimensions of entrepreneurship and other technical and vocational training and education for youth would most closely address the realities on the ground. The study has a number of

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implications for actors and stakeholders dealing with youth training and employment including educational and vocational training institutions and personnel as well as trainers and policy-makers. Based on the findings, it is recommendable that research and policy focus be placed on the enhancement of entrepreneurship training in combination with specific technical and vocational training of youth in Pakistan. The approach of the study used to identify technical skills and self-employment (SE) is innovative and can serve as a base for further development of context-based, practice-oriented, training and entrepreneurship.

Recommendation

Following recommendations are made to educational institutions, technical and vocational training providers, policymakers and individuals interested in self-employment.

1. It would be useful for education and training institutions to combine the teaching of specific technical skills and entrepreneurial skills. This is to enable beneficiaries of training to adequately plan, prepare and engage in various forms of economic activities.
2. There is a need to work on strengthening entrepreneurial SE. This may be achieved through use of pedagogical activities such as business simulations, entrepreneurial projects and challenges.
3. Innovations in vocational and technical training should aim at increased emphasis on occupations and entrepreneurship, and market-oriented as well as practical training. This can be accomplished by engaging industry and business in training, workshop, and apprenticeship programs.
4. Establishing incubation and mentoring facilities for self-employment by educational and training institutions in collaboration with entrepreneurship development organizations would also be of added value.
5. Promote youth participation in self-employment. The sample mainly comprised young people, so relevant stakeholders, especially educational institutions and policymakers, should create specific programs and initiatives to encourage youth to think of self-employment as a career option. Stakeholders can develop programs such as career counselling, and awareness programs on entrepreneurship, and encourage participation in business competitions, and provide tools and support to start up businesses.
6. Promote collaboration between training institutions and industry. Partnerships between TVET institutions, private businesses, local industries and EDIs should be encouraged. Such collaborations can offer learners an opportunity to be exposed to the business world, and differentiate their perception about entrepreneurship and business. Partnerships with local industries can also give TVET learners an opportunity to gain exposure to different business worlds and learn about various ways of making a living.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the study examined only 244 cases, so conclusions from the study are limited to cases similar to these cases. Second, the nature of a quantitative cross-sectional survey restricted the study from exploring cause-and-effect relationships. Third, the study explored the relationships of technical skills and self-employment and entrepreneurial SE separately. Fourth, the study did not integrate self-employment, entrepreneurial intent and perceived self-employment readiness. Longitudinal

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studies should examine these three constructs to see if they help individuals start and sustain a business to earn an income over time. Furthermore, qualitative or mixed methods research should explore barriers to self-employment at the individual, institutional and context level within the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Pakistan.