



ORCID of JARH: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0723-9485>

CrossRef. DOI #: <https://doi.org/10.67244/jar.bwo-researches.v6i2.a598>

Link to the Paper: <https://jar.bwo-researches.com/index.php/jarh/article/view/598>

Edition Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH, 6\(2\) Apr-Jun 2026](#)

HJRS Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH \(HEC-Recognised for 2026-2027\)](#)

Empowerment through Enterprise: Assessing The Role of Business Development Training and Microfinance in Rural Malawian Women's Poverty Reduction

Author 1:	Kachamba Ngwira , Researcher, School of Technology, Malawi University of Science and Technology, Malawi, mbe-008-22@must.ac.mw , https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5193-0644
Corresponding & Author 2:	Saima Sajid , Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Business and Communication, Inti International University, Nilai, Negri Sembilan, Malaysia, saima.sajid@newinti.edu.my , https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1625-4593
Author 3:	Syed Saqlain ul Hassan , Designation, Department, Law, University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan, saqulainkazmi@gmail.com , https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8914-8081
Author 4:	Farhana Sajid , PhD Scholar, Department of Education, Ibadat International University, Punjab, Pakistan, sajid.farhana911@gmail.com , https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0237-5012
Author 5:	Rugenera Marc , Faculty of Business and Communication, INT International University, Malaysia, i24029263@student.newinti.edu.my , https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2534-7323

Paper Information

Citation of the paper:

(JARH)Ngwira. K., Sajid. S., Hassan. S. S. U., Sajid. F., Marc, R. (2026). Empowerment Through Enterprise: Assessing The Role of Business Development Training and Microfinance in Rural Malawian Women's Poverty Reduction. In *Journal of Academic Research for Humanities*, 6(2), 66–79.

Subject Areas for JARH:

- 1 Business Management
- 2 Social Sciences

Timeline of the Paper at JARH:

Received on: 20-04-2026.
Reviews Completed on: 16-05-2026.
Accepted on: 15-06-2026.
Online on: 30-06-2026.

License:



[Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#)

Recognised for BWO-R:



Published by BWO Research INTL:



DOI Image of the paper:



Abstract

QR Code for the Paper:



The study examines the effect of the Business Development Training (BDT) on business performance and economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs of the rural areas of Blantyre, Malawi, focused on beneficiaries of the Project Innovation Centre (PIC) Business Development fund. This study adopted a cross-sectional survey using quantitative methods with a sample of 150 women entrepreneurs who have attended BDT. Data analysis focused on descriptive income generated, confidence in entrepreneurial activities, identification of target customers, and business performance. The results suggested that BDT has a substantial impact on increasing entrepreneurial confidence and economic empowerment. Significantly, 94% of respondents reported greater entrepreneurial confidence, and 73% indicated higher profits and expansion of business. Effects were particularly pronounced among women with secondary and tertiary education, suggesting the importance of education in leveraging training. Yet, the impact of BDT was limited by contextual factors. Participants' perception of the relevance of training was low, while illiteracy and the lack of infrastructure and market access prevented the skills learned from translating into long-term economic impact. Further, the study identified a lack of representation of younger women and those with lower educational attainment, which may indicate a lack of inclusivity and equal access to such programs. The research calls for more context-sensitive, inclusive, and market-access-and-infrastructure integrated BDT interventions for improved outcomes. The study was based on self-reported cross-sectional data without a control group, which could limit causal inference. In summary, the study offers empirical insights from rural Malawi on the need for integrated approaches to business development training and structural and contextual support to achieve inclusive and effective poverty reduction.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Business Development Training, Poverty Reduction, Economic Empowerment, Microfinance

1. Introduction

The empowerment of women in rural low-income communities through business financing elicits the need for more assistance. This comes in the form of syndication of microcredit with Business Development Training (BDT), which gives participants additional skills and, more importantly, confidence. This combination has been shown to be more effective for female entrepreneurs in growing their business as compared to receiving credit only. The ability to make sustainable managerial decisions as well as engage in necessary managerial tasks is a skill necessary for successful entrepreneurial endeavors, which rural female communities must possess. The development of these skills allows women to make the necessary decisions to ensure the sustainability of their business. The combination of skills-based entrepreneurship, or business development, and programs is effective in increasing the profit graph of women. This also encourages multiple income-generating activities without the need for funding or additional financial support (World Bank Group, 2016). The strengthening of women's entrepreneurial spirit and economic resilience demonstrates the importance of rural programs that are structured with targeted skills.

Women's economic involvement in Malawi and other African countries is hampered by restrictive socio-cultural practices that impact their ability to earn, low literacy, and inadequate financial services. Empirical evidence is distinct regarding the importance of market access and financial resources as complements to business expansion. Building an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs has also proven to be of high value.

In the PIC Business Development Fund from Malawi, the same techniques of integration are utilized by merging access to capital, capacity building, and training on entrepreneurship. For married women business owners, gendered socio-cultural norms, including the spousal consent requirement, shape the ways in which women can access finances and participate economically. For the first time, financial barriers

are addressed with comprehensive training and policy, as well as socio-economic barriers. Meaningfully alleviating poverty will lead to socioeconomic and financial empowerment and sustainable economic and social collateral (Abebe & Kegne, 2025; Sánchez-Riofrío et al., 2024). Based on the above discussion, the study formulated the following RO and RQ.

1.2. Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the effect of the Business Development Training (BDT) on business performance and economic empowerment of rural women in Malawi.
2. To determine the role of personal characteristics (education, age, and marital status) in the impact of BDT.
3. To determine the barriers that prevent the success of BDT programs among rural women entrepreneurs.
4. To determine a statistically significant association between education and progress in business performance (Such as profit and business growth)

1.3. Research Questions.

1. How does Business Development Training influence women's entrepreneurial performance, such as business confidence, identification of customers, and profits?
2. How does gender (age, marital status, and educational attainment) affect the effectiveness of BDT?
3. What are the structural and contextual factors (e.g., illiteracy, lack of infrastructure, and access to the market) that limit the impact of BDT?
4. Is there a statistically significant association between education and progress in business performance (such as profit growth and business growth)?

2. Literature review

Business Development Training (BDT) is a coordinated body of activities aimed at developing knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to establish, run, and grow business enterprises (Coronel-Pangol et al., 2025). It is especially applicable to micro and small businesses, which depend on informal sources of

finance like family, friends, or microcredit institutions. More than technical skills, BDT is critical in contributing to the economic participation of women by bolstering their capacity to make sound financial, social, and entrepreneurial choices, particularly in a context where cultural norms limit their participation in economic activities (World Bank, 2026).

The FAO (2021) points out the need to have culturally sensitive and gender responsive training models that address the unique needs of rural women entrepreneurs as opposed to the application of generic models (Banerjee et al., 2015). In rural settings like Malawi, BDT has played a crucial role in poverty alleviation plans. Structural constraints such as limited land access, financial resources, and formal markets are often faced by women in these areas (Babajide et al., 2022).

BDT can be used to overcome these challenges by developing human capital and by empowering women to diversify sources of income and to switch subsistence activities to more structured and growth-oriented businesses. This is an integrated approach that is supported by empirical evidence. Indicatively, Khandker, S. R. (2005) discovered that when combined training and microfinance programs are used, there are higher income and asset gains than when credit-only interventions are employed. Likewise, experimental results of entrepreneurship training programs show that it improves loan repayment and business creation, as well as livelihood diversification (Sanchez-Riofrío et al., 2024). In addition to financial performance, BDT also works on the larger aspects of empowerment. Entrepreneurship confidence, networking, and decision-making power of women have been demonstrated to improve because of training programmes (Nhleko et al., 2023). They are of particular significance in rural Malawi, where the role of women in the economy is frequently underestimated (Derbyshire, 2025).

The growth of confidence and social capital allows women to be more actively involved in the process of making decisions both in the home

and in the community, with positive spillover effects on education, health, and the overall well-being of the family (Franzke et al., 2022). The need to overcome structural barriers like illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, and limited market access limits the ability of some women to fully take advantage of training programmes (Ndione et al., 2024). A lot of training interventions are based on text-based reading and writing, something that may exclude participants with low literacy levels. Moreover, cultural norms and gender roles might restrict the mobility and involvement of women in training activities, diminishing the reach and impact of the programmes. Unless special efforts are put into overcoming these obstacles, BDT can contribute to reinforcing pre-existing inequalities instead of diminishing them. Another dimension that has a critical impact on determining the success of BDT is market access. Malawi-based evidence indicates that most women entrepreneurs fail to create stable markets and stable purchasers to enable them to transfer newly acquired skills into sustainable income (Mngomezulu et al., 2024). The effectiveness of training programmes can be highly improved by integrating market linkage interventions like cooperatives, participation in value chains, and local networks. The enhanced access to the market allows women to increase the number of customers, stabilize demand, and achieve better prices, which enhances financial performance and social capital (Behera et al., 2025; Ogbari et al., 2024). Therefore, BDT programmes that integrate training with market access initiatives have a higher chance of achieving significant poverty reduction (Ajide & Dada, 2023).

The example of the PIC Business Development Fund in Malawi demonstrates the possibilities of combined strategies. Such programmes can help women overcome the main obstacles to business development and economic inclusion (Kato, 2023). Though there are still a few empirical studies on PIC specifically, there is some evidence to suggest that integrated models are more effective than credit-only interventions in enhancing income

and enterprise growth. Despite these positive aspects, there are still concerns about the conceptualization and measurement of the empowerment of women. [Kabeer, N. \(2005\)](#) is of the view that most development interventions have equated the term empowerment to the effects on economies, including income or business performance, without considering the deeper dimensions such as agency, autonomy, and structural inequalities. This emphasizes the importance of a multidimensional approach to measuring empowerment, especially within the rural setting.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The research uses the conceptual framework of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) to streamline the conceptualization of the role of Business Development Training in the economic empowerment of women. The SLF divides livelihood assets into human, financial, and social capital, which together affect livelihood outcomes in terms of generating income, sustaining a business, or reducing poverty. As a way of operating this framework, the items of the survey were systematically mapped to specific types of capital and outcome variables (see the table below).

Table 1: Operationalization of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

SLF Capital Type	Survey Item (Variable)	Measurement (Likert Scale)	Related Outcome Variable
Human Capital	Relevance of training	1-5 (SD-SA)	Business sustainability
	Knowledge improvement of business	1-5	Business Sustainability
	Entrepreneurial confidence	1-5	Income generation
	Opportunity recognition skills	1-5	Income generation
Financial Capital	Growth in profits	1-5	Income
	Expansion of business (stock/customers)	1-5	Business sustainability.

	Financial services availability	1-5	Poverty Reduction
Social Capital	Social Capital Market Access	1-5	Business sustainability
	Membership in networks/groups	1-5	Poverty reduction
	Customer access	1-5	Income generation
Structural Constraints (Cross-cutting)	Illiteracy	1-5	Limits all outcomes
	Poor infrastructure	1-5	Reduces the sustainability of business.
	Restricted access to the market	1-5	Limits income

3. Research Methodology

The paper, using quantitative research, makes observations regarding the effects of Business Development Training (BDT) on women's entrepreneurship clubs in Malawi's rural areas and on lifting them out of poverty. Such frameworks can be achieved to facilitate objective analysis of BDT's effects on income, asset accumulation, and other well-being indicators.

3.1. Population and Sampling

The target population is women who have participated in the BDT programs organized by the PIC Business Development Fund and other organizations of a like nature in Malawi, based in rural areas. The use of the stratified random sampling technique ensured that there was a broad spectrum of respondents, considering that there are disparities in terms of age, sector, and level of expertise in business development ([Omari, 2011](#)).

The population was stratified based on the following;

1. Age groups with categories (20-35,36-50, above 50 years Old)

2. Educational Level categories of (Tertiary, Secondary, Primary, and Informal)
3. Sector of Business (e.g., small-scale production, agribusiness, Retail)

3.2. Data Collection Methods

The data were gathered by conducting structured questionnaires with the respondents through trained enumerators. The questions included such issues as socioeconomic status, involvement in the BDT, the variation and growth of income, ownership of assets, access to the market, and the results of social empowerment. The outcome was more valid due to closed questions and Likert-scale questions.

3.3. Validity, Reliability, Pilot Testing.

Expert review was used to determine content validity. The subject matter experts in the field of entrepreneurship, microfinance, and rural development tested the questionnaire by rating the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the items.

The researcher also considered internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, and a value of 0.7 and above is acceptable (Kline, 2000).

Table 2: Reliability Test Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Training Relevance	0.76
Customer Identification Support	0.81
Entrepreneurial Confidence	0.84
Business Performance Outcomes	0.79

Source: Author's own work

3.4 Data Analysis

1. The Chi-square test of independence was used to find out the relationship that exists between the education level and the outcome of the business performance.
2. The outcomes of the age groups were compared, and the differences in outcomes were analyzed with the help of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).
3. The level of significance was determined as $p < 0.05$.
4. A group logistic regression model was used to Test the association between the education level (categorical predictor) and the

probability of reporting improved business performance (binary outcome: agree vs. disagree). This method is suitable because it enables the analysis of categorical independent variables and a dichotomous dependent variable, which provides solid estimates of association whilst controlling for the group-level variations.

4. Results

This study aimed to assess the impact of business development Training (BDT) on the business development and economic empowerment of women's entrepreneurial groups in Blantyre Rural, Malawi. To meet the objectives, interviews were conducted with different women entrepreneurs under the PIC Business Development Fund by sending a team of research assistants face-to-face. The sample of the study was from a sound business background, which reflects the seriousness of their perspectives on the issue discussed above.

All the attitudinal items were measured on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. An increase in values implies that there are more favorable perceptions and better business results.

All Likert-scale items were recorded where needed to ensure that higher scores across the board represent responses that are increasingly positive.

Research Question: How does Business Development Training influence women's entrepreneurial responses that are increasingly positive?

This subsection will answer Research Question 1 by demonstrating whether Business Development Training enhanced entrepreneurial performance in terms of higher levels of confidence, better identification of customers, increased participation in the market, and better business performance.

4.1. Demographics of respondents

The sample of the study consisted of 150 businesswomen, with the majority having formal education. 88.7% attended high school, 26.7% had tertiary qualifications, 10% had primary

school, and only 7% had informal education.

Table 3: The education level of respondents.

Table 1: Education level of respondents					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Tertiary	40	26.7	26.7	26.7
	High School	93	62.0	62.0	88.7
	Primary	10	6.7	6.7	95.3
	Informal	7	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors owns work

Table 4: Responses on women's exposure to Business training.

Research Questions	Response	Count
Received formal Training	Disagree	0
	Neutral	0
	Strongly Disagree	0
	Agree	41
	Strongly Agree	109
Training Relevancy	Strongly Agree	75
	Disagree	3
	Neutral	3
	Agree	69
	Strongly Disagree	0
Customer Identification support	Strongly Agree	52
	Disagree	1
	Neutral	15
	Agree	82
	Disagree	0
Improved Entrepreneurial Confidence	Strongly Agree	5
	Disagree	4
	Neutral	0
	Agree	141
	Strongly Disagree	0
Increased Profits and Business scale	Strongly Agree	4
	Disagree	12
	Neutral	18
	Agree	110
	Strongly Disagree	5

Source: Authors owns work

Table 5: Training Effectiveness and Business Outcomes

Descriptor	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Received formal Training	150	1	4	1.97	1.331
Training Relevancy	150	1	4	2.43	1.368

Customer Identification support	150	1	5	3.98	1.328
Improved Entrepreneurial Confidence	150	1	4	3.85	.621
Increased Profits and Business Scale	150	1	5	3.95	1.321
Valid N (listwise)	150				

Source: Authors owns work

Descriptive data (means, standard deviations, and ranges) are provided for key training and outcome variables in Table 5. The participants indicated a low level of formal training received (M = 1.97, SD = 1.331) and a moderate level of training relevancy (M = 2.43, SD = 1.368). They, on the other hand, identified high scores in customer identification support (M = 3.98, SD = 1.328), entrepreneurial confidence (M = 3.85, SD = 0.621), and increased profits/business size (M = 3.95, SD = 1.321). The results have shown that, while there was room for improvement when it came to training delivery and the relevance of the content, the Programme produced improvements in the level of self-assurance and customer-centric abilities of the participants, which are essential for the growth of small businesses. Formal training and relevancy have relatively low mean scores, indicating that delivery systems may not be very effective and content may not be very relevant. Notably, in the case of entrepreneurial confidence, the SD was low (0.621), suggesting low variance in opinion across this benefit. Variability in profit outcomes, however, underscores the importance of enabling contextual factors such as participants' prior education, market access, and infrastructure. The need for basic literacy and external support was highlighted by a greater proportion of respondents with secondary and tertiary education who seemed to be better equipped to

convert training into income.

4.2. Gender, Age, Marital status, and educational attainment effect on the effectiveness of Business development

Annexure (A)

Source: Authors owns work

As illustrated in the pie chart in Figure 3, most participants in the survey are aged over 50 years, accounting for 40%. The next age category of 36-50 years makes up 30% of respondents. Women aged 20–35 years make up a small proportion, which indicates that older women are more actively involved or targeted by the business development program.

Annexure (B)

Source: Author's own Work

Table 6: Educational Attainment and Reported Increase in Outcomes

Education Level	Reported Increase (Agree/Strongly Disagree)	Neutral, Disagree, or No/Low Increase	Total
Tertiary	36	4	40
High school	85	8	93
Primary	6	4	10
Informal	3	4	7
Total	130	20	150

Note. Frequencies summarize reported increases by educational attainment category.

Source: Author's own work

Data showed that most of the BDT participants were educated up to high school or tertiary level. This educational advantage would probably have influenced their ability to learn and utilize training. Being a married woman was the most common category, perhaps indicative of higher household support or financial burden, encouraging participation in BDT interventions.

Age distribution indicated that women aged 36 years and above were overrepresented, and those aged 20–35 years were underrepresented. This may raise questions about the availability and appeal of BDT programs for younger women who would generally have higher levels of education but may be bound by sociocultural or economic limitations.

Annexure (C)

Source: Authors owns work

The educational attainment level of most participants, as shown in the bar chart in Figure 4 above, consists of tertiary education. This is further followed by a high school education, with only a small fraction of individuals possessing informal or primary education. Thus, it can be said that most recipients of the business development program were better educated, which potentially impacted their capability to take advantage of the training.

As the chart in Figure 2 illustrates, most participants in the business development program were married, with never-married women coming next. Divorced and widowed individuals, along with other statuses, were considerably less represented. This indicates that marital status might have some impact on participation, potentially linked to domestic support or financial obligation.

4.3. Research Question 2: What structural and contextual factors limit the impact of BDT?

This subsection answers Research Question 2 by identifying the structural and contextual barriers that constrained the effectiveness of Business Development Training in rural settings.

Table 7: Exposure to Business Training

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	109	72.7	72.7	72.7
Valid	Agree	41	27.3	27.3	100.0
Valid	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's own work

The importance of contextualized practical skills in entrepreneurial training is that it equips learners with ways to implement knowledge gained during the training while running a business, which enhances productivity and business continuity. Training aimed at equipping practitioners' skills relevant to their business context leads to improved business performance and sustains business continuity, especially for micro and small-scale enterprises (Ayatse, 2024;

Amdemichael, 2025). Relevant skills training also engages the trainers; thus, the training becomes a means to achieve the goal of at least reducing poverty.

Annexure (D)

Source: Authors owns work

Q3, were you supported in identifying customers and markets

Market-oriented training helps entrepreneurs make what the customer wants and sell it. (Alemu, 2024). In economically developing states like Malawi, identifying customers provides a pathway to improved profits, growth of a business, and even lessening poverty. This has a great payoff. It determines whether training was only theoretical and then helps generate real income.

Table 8: Customer and market identification support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	52	34.7	34.7	34.7
	Disagree	1	.7	.7	35.3
	Neutral	15	10.0	10.0	45.3
	Agree	82	54.7	54.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors owns work

Q4: Did the business training help improve confidence?

The confidence to respond to the challenge of entrepreneurship is referred to as entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Participants' entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a strong predictor of their willingness to act following the acquisition of relevant training.

Table 9: Business training and entrepreneurial confidence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	5	3.3	3.3	3.3
	Disagree	4	2.7	2.7	6.0
	Agree	141	94.0	94.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's Own Work

Q5. Did the business training help increase profits or scale up operations

The ability to achieve profitability and to

scale up operations is a direct measure of the economic benefit that can be derived from the training. Evidence supports the claim that training in business that is complemented with development services improves enterprise performance in terms of revenue and operational expansion, which leads to poverty alleviation (Amdemichael, 2025; Alemu, 2024). It therefore goes without saying that to achieve the desired economic impact from the training, these indicators must be measured to ascertain the impact of the training

Table 10: Business and Profitability

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	4	2.7	2.7	2.7
	Disagree	12	8.0	8.0	10.7
	Neutral	18	12.0	12.0	22.7
	Agree	110	73.3	73.3	96.0
	Strongly Disagree	5	3.3	3.3	99.3
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors owns work

Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant association between education and the progress of business performance?

This subsection answers Research Question 3 by reporting inferential statistical tests on whether education and other respondent characteristics were associated with improved business performance.

4.4. Chi-Square Test

4.4.1. Correlation of Education Level and Growth in Profits.

A chi-square test of Independence was used to test the relationship between the level of education and the reported increase in profits. It was found that the level of education and the increase in profits showed a statistically significant correlation, Pearson $\chi^2(2, N = 150) = 9.47, p = .009$. The effect size calculated based on the Cramer V is .28, which signifies a small to medium association. The respondents with secondary and tertiary education were more apt to report higher profits as compared to those with primary or informal education.

Table 11: Crosstabulation of Education Level by Profit Increase

Education Level	Profit Increased (Agree)	No Increase (Disagree/Neutral)	Total
Tertiary	36	4	40
Secondary	85	8	93
Primary/Informal	9	8	17
Total	130	20	150

Table 12. Chi-Square Test Results

Test	Value	df	Sig. (p-value)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.47	2	.009
Cramér's V	.28	—	—

Source: Researchers' own work

4.5. Independent Samples t-Test

4.5.1. Variation in Business Confidence based on Marital Status.

The independent samples t-test was conducted to establish whether the business confidence was different by marital status. The results showed that the difference between the scores in business confidence between the married and unmarried respondents was statistically significant, $t(148) = 2.89, p = .004$. Married respondents were found to have high business confidence ($M = 4.12, SD = 0.61$) as compared to unmarried respondents ($M = 3.78, SD = 0.74$).

Table 13. Group Statistics for Business Confidence by Marital Status

Marital Status	N	Mean Confidence	Std. Deviation
Married	95	4.12	0.61
Unmarried	55	3.78	0.74

Table 14. Independent Samples T-Test Results

Test	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Equal variances assumed	2.89	148	.004

4.6. One -Way ANOVA

4.6.1 Differences in Profit Growth by Age.

One-way analysis of variance was carried out to determine the differences in the scores of profit increase across age groups. The findings showed that the difference between the age groups is statistically significant, $F(2, 147) = 3.87, p = .023$. Respondents aged 50 years and above recorded the highest mean profit score ($M =$

4.10, $SD = 0.60$), followed by those aged 36–50 years ($M = 3.98, SD = 0.65$), while respondents aged 20–35 years had the lowest mean score ($M = 3.65, SD = 0.72$).

Table 15. Descriptive Statistics for Profit Increase by Age Group

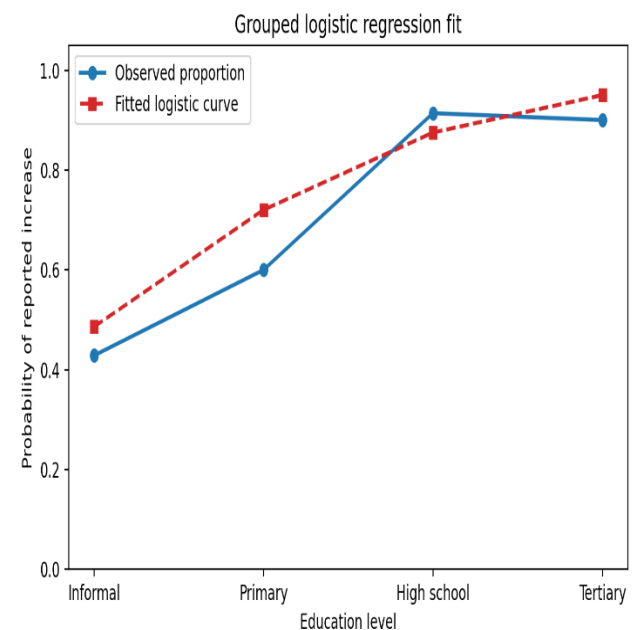
Age Group	N	Mean Profit Score	Std. Deviation
20–35	40	3.65	0.72
36–50	70	3.98	0.65
50+	40	4.10	0.60

Table 16. One-Way ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.86	2	2.43	3.87	.023
Within Groups	92.21	147	0.63		
Total	97.07	149			

4.7. Binary logistic Regression Analysis results.

Figure 6: Binary logistic regression model of improved business outcomes



Source: Authors own work

The binary logistic results indicate that education was an important predictor of reporting improved business outcomes. The statistically significant and positive coefficient indicates that women who were more educated were more likely to report more gains in business performance compared to those who possessed lower levels of education. This finding supports the previous chi-square and ANOVA results and

gives more support for the fact that education enhances the benefits involved with Business Development Training. Combined, the findings will provide direct answers to the research questions by showing the performance effects of training and constraints that limit the effects, and the respondent characteristics that are statistically related to the improved outcomes.

5.0 Conclusion and Policy Implementation

This research evaluated how Business Development Training (BDT) with microfinance contributed to the economic empowerment of women in rural Malawi. The results affirm that BDT has a positive impact on entrepreneurial confidence, business performance, and participation in the market. Nevertheless, the results show important areas of training relevance, inclusivity, and structural support curtailing total impact. It is thus suggested that policymakers develop youth-based training programmes, such as digital entrepreneurship programs and flexible training schedules, to attract younger women to participate. The perceived relevance of training was significantly low, although most participants reported having received training.

Furthermore, research has discovered that BDT can significantly enhance entrepreneurial confidence and business performance. Lastly, structural barriers like inadequate infrastructure, illiteracy, and socio-cultural constraints also remain barriers to the effectiveness of BDT programs. Such barriers decrease the possibility of women taking part in training fully and using the skills gained. The policymakers ought to thus invest in rural infrastructure, promote gender-inclusive policies, and address socio-cultural constraints that inhibit the economic participation of women. Finally, although BDT with microfinance has a solid potential to empower women economically and decrease poverty, the effectiveness of the approach

depends on the inclusive design, contextual relevance, and supportive structural conditions. Using empirical results to directly correlate policy recommendations, as is the case in this study, gives a more solid basis for designing effective and evidence-based development interventions.

5.1 Limitations

This research has a few restrictions that must be noted. Firstly, the cross-sectional design will not enable the establishment of causal relationships between Business Development Training (BDT) and economic outcomes, since the data will only capture a single point in time. Secondly, the research is based on self-reported data, which is subject to response bias in the form of social desirability bias or recall bias. Thirdly, there is no control or comparison group to determine whether the results observed can be directly attributed to the training intervention. Fourthly, the research is limited to the beneficiaries of one programme, the PIC Business Development Fund, which might limit the overall applicability of the results to other settings and programmes.

5.2 Future research recommendations

Future studies must take the results of this study as a foundation, finding ways of overcoming the methodological and contextual limitations of this study as well as enhancing the comprehension of women's economic empowerment in rural Malawi.

Firstly, the policy must be used in future studies as a quasi-experimental design or randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to identify the differences between women who undergo integrated Business Development Training (BDT) and microfinance and women who do not receive microfinance only.

Therefore, longitudinal studies are advisable to monitor the variations with time. A panel study that has a 12–24-month-long follow-up on the subjects would be helpful in learning more about the long-term sustainability of business

outcomes, the long-term effects of training, and long-term poverty reduction outcomes.

6.0 References

- Abebe, A., & Kegne, M. (2023). The role of microfinance institutions in women's entrepreneurship development. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 12(1), 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-023-00285-0>.
- Asongu, S. A., & Odhiambo, N. M. (2023). Enhancing inclusive development in Sub-Saharan Africa: The role of microfinance. *Journal of African Business*, 24(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228916.2022.2101234>
- Banerjee, A., Karlan, D., & Zinman, J. (2015). Six randomized evaluations of microcredit: Introduction and further steps - American Economic Association. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 7(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20140287>.
- Chakaniza, P., Alhassan, A. L., & Zeka, B. (2025). Gender, remittances and household entrepreneurship: New perspectives from Malawi. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJGE-03-2025-0069>
- Mgomezulu, W. R., Dar, J. A., & Maonga, B. B. (2024). Gendered differences in household engagement in non-farm business operations and implications on household welfare: A case of rural and urban Malawi. *Social Sciences*, 13(12). <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13120643>
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (2021). Making agrifood systems more resilient to shocks and stresses. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4476en>.
- Edeme, R. K., Nkulu, C. N., Idenyi, O. S., & Arazu, W. O. (2022). Infrastructural development, financial inclusion, and economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa. In *Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics* (pp. 45–60). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-5646-0_4
- Beta, W., Mwila, N. K., & Ogunmokun, O. (2024). A review of and future research agenda on women entrepreneurship in Africa. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 30(4), 1041–1092. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-10-2022-0890>
- Ajide, F. M., & Dada, J. T. (n.d.). Poverty & public policy. *Poverty & Public Policy*, 15(2), 199–226. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pop4.368>
- Kato, A. I. (2023). Unlocking the potential of microfinance solutions on urban women entrepreneurship development in East Africa: A bibliometric analysis perspective. *Sustainability*, 15(20). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su152014862>
- Asongu, S., & Odhiambo, N. M. (2023). Microfinance institutions and female entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa: Avoidable female unemployment thresholds. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, 16(5), 1258–1275. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-11-2022-0359>.
- Abebe, A., & Kegne, M. (2023). The role of microfinance institutions in women's entrepreneurship development. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 12(1), 17-. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-023-00285-0>
- Gavaza, B. K., Donga, G., & Muchineripi, J. N. (2025). Microfinance and women's entrepreneurship in South African townships. *International Journal of Business Ecosystem & Strategy* (2687-2293), 7(4), 12–22. <https://doi.org/10.36096/ijbes.v7i4.872>
- Asongu, S. (2023). Female unemployment and the procedure that a woman has to go through to start a business: Microfinance policy thresholds. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 20(5), 939–955. <https://doi.org/10.1108/srj-05-2023-0280>
- Ogbari, M. E., Folorunso, F., Simon-Ilogho, B., Adebayo, O., Olanrewaju, K., Efegbudu, J., & Omoregbe, M. (2024). Social empowerment and its effect on poverty alleviation for sustainable development among women entrepreneurs in the Nigerian agricultural sector. *Sustainability*, 16(6). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16062225>
- Babajide, A. A., Obembe, D., Solomon, H., & Woldesenbet, K. (2022). Microfinance and entrepreneurship: The enabling role of social capital amongst female entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 49(8), 1152–1171. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSE-11-2020-0745>.
- Ukanwa, I., Xiong, L., Wasim, J., & Galloway, L. (2022). Microfinance and micropreneurship in rural South-East Nigeria: An exploration of the effects of institutions. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 34(7–8), 650–667. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2022.2087747>
- Ranabahu, N., & Tanima, F. A. (2021). Empowering vulnerable microfinance women through entrepreneurship: Opportunities, challenges, and the way forward. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 14(2), 145–166. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJGE-01-2021-0020>.
- Khandker, S. R. (2005). Microfinance and poverty: Evidence using panel data from Bangladesh. *The World Bank Economic Review*, 19(2), 263–286. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhi008>
- Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and Women's Empowerment: A critical examination of the third MDG. *Gender & Development*, 13(1), 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1355207051233133227>
- Kivalya, N. Y., & Caballero-Montes, T. (2023). Understanding the dimensions of women entrepreneurs' empowerment: A systematic review of the microfinance literature and avenues for research. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 16(2), 197–226.

- <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijge-06-2023-0162>.
- Chikwira, C., Vengesai, E., & Mandude, P. (2022). The impact of microfinance institutions on poverty alleviation. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 15(9), 393. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm15090393>.
- Behera, S. K., Panda, R. K., & Senapati, S. (2025). Role of financial and social capital in rural women micro-enterprises: Assessing entrepreneurial orientation as a performance catalyst. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, 20(1), 59–93. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jec-01-2025-0010>.
- Sánchez-Ríofrío, A.-M., Faytong-Haro, M., Roa, O., & Valderrama-Álvarez, J. (2024). Enhancing women's entrepreneurship in rural Ecuador: A study protocol aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. *Economies*, 12(9). <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies12090225>.
- Shetty G, S., Baliga, V., & Thomas Gil, M. (2024b). Impact of entrepreneurial mindset and motivation on business performance: Deciphering the effects of entrepreneurship development program (EDPs) on trainees. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2314733>
- Chatzinikolaou, D., & Vlahos, C. (2022b). Crisis, innovation, and change management: A blind spot for micro-firms? *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, 16(3), 698–719. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jee-07-2022-0210>.
- Verschueren, N., Dessel, J. V., Verslyppe, A., Schoensetters, Y., & Baelmans, M. (2023). A maturity matrix model to strengthen the quality cultures in higher education. *Education Sciences*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13020123>.
- Nhleko, M.-A. N., Msomi, T. S., & Ogunsola, S. A. (2023). Challenges of women entrepreneurship and empowerment in South Africa: Evidence from rural areas. *International Journal of Environmental, Sustainability, and Social Science*, 4(5), 1398–1407. <https://doi.org/10.38142/ijess.v4i5.796>.
- CSW70 (2026). UN Women – Headquarters. Retrieved April 15, 2026, from: www.unwomen.org, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women/csw70-2026>.
- World Bank (2026), Women, business and the law 2026 report. Retrieved April 15, 2026, from <https://wbl.worldbank.org>, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/publications/flagship-report>
- Franzke, S., Wu, J., Froese, F. J., & Chan, Z. X. (2022). Female entrepreneurship in Asia: A critical review and future directions. *Asian Business & Management*, 21(3), 343–372. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-022-00186-2>.
- Nicholls-Nixon, C. L., & Maxheimer, M. M. (2022). How coaching services help early-stage entrepreneurs: An exploration of gender differences. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 29(5), 742–763. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jsbed-09-2021-0355>.
- Widiastuti, T., Rusydiana, A., & Mawardi, I. (2023). Microfinance and women empowerment: Evidence from developing countries. *Sustainability*, 15(5), 4128. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15054128>.
- Adom, K., & Ackom, B. (2023). Towards a greater understanding of the prevalence of immigrant entrepreneurship in the informal economy of Ghana: An institutional theory perspective. *Journal of African Business*, 25(2), 264–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228916.2023.2170860>.
- World Bank Group. (2016, August 30). Female entrepreneurship resource point - introduction and module 1: Why gender matters. World Bank Group. <https://www.worldbank.org>, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/publication/female-entrepreneurship-resource-point-introduction-and-module-1-why-gender-matters>.
- World Bank. (2026), Women, business and the law 2026 report. Available at: <https://wbl.worldbank.org>, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/publications/flagship-report>, Retrieved April 15, 2026.
- Zucchella, A., Kabbara, D., & Virtuani, R. (2025). Female informal entrepreneurship: Conceptualizing a contextualized and multi-level process. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 33(2), 384–402. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jsbed-03-2024-0111>.
- Oliveira, R. T. S., Veloso, Y. I. F., Freitas, V., & de Paula, V. A. F. (n.d.). Women entrepreneurs in the informal economy: Challenges and motivations for entering the informal market. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 33(2), 644–655. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.70070>.
- Coronel-Pangol, K., Orden-Cruz, C., & Paule-Vianez, J. (2025). Women entrepreneurs' access to microfinance and cooperative finance in Latin America: Differences between opportunity and necessity entrepreneurship. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 21(1), 113–119. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-025-01135-z>.
- Ndione, M., Ashta, A., & Bako Liba, B. B. (2024). Banks, microfinance institutions, and fintech: How the ratio of male and female entrepreneurs moderates their capacity for financial inclusion. *Cogent Economics & Finance*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322039.2024.2402031>
- Rejeb, A., Rejeb, K., & Süle, E. (2025). A systematic review of female entrepreneurship using co-word and main path analyses. *Quality & Quantity*, 60(1), 727–765. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11335-025-02281-w>
- Machingambi, J., & Rankhumise, E. (2026). Navigating financial challenges: A systematic review of enablers for women entrepreneurs in South Africa. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 19(3), 181. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm19030181>.
- Derbyshire, L. E. (2025). Success factors for financial education targeted at small and micro-enterprise owners—a South African outlook. *Cogent Business & Management*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2603019>

Annexure (A)

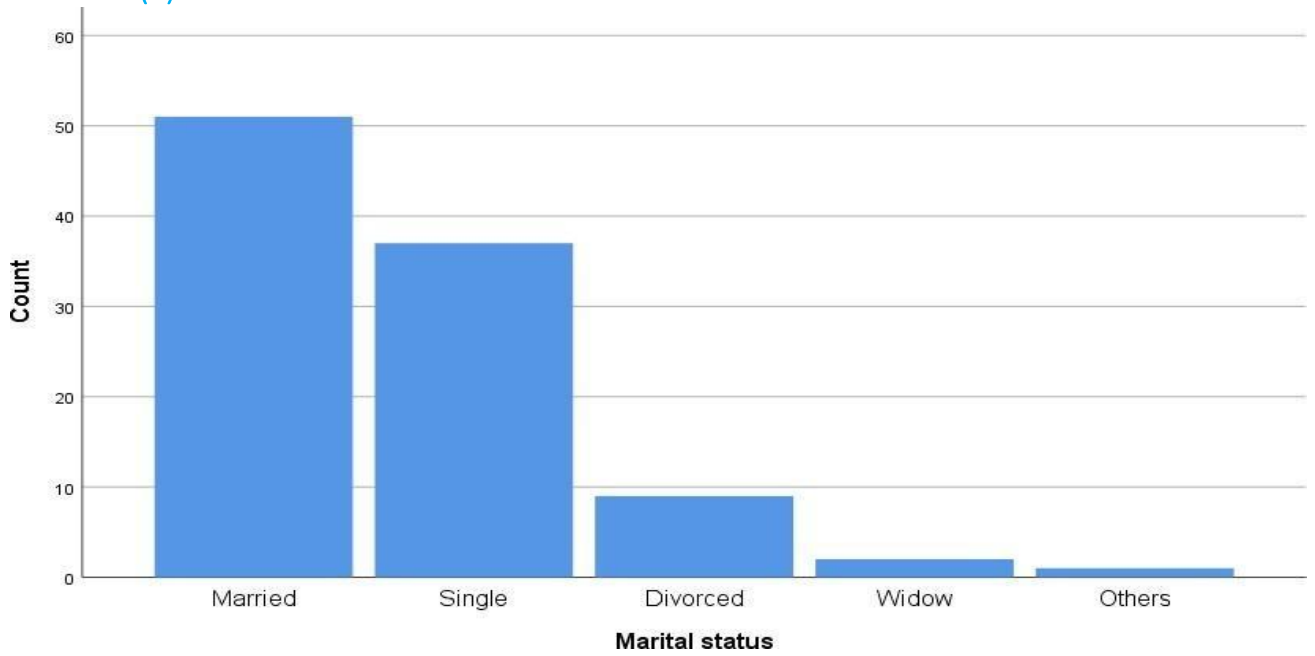


Figure 2: Marital Status of participants

Annexure (B)

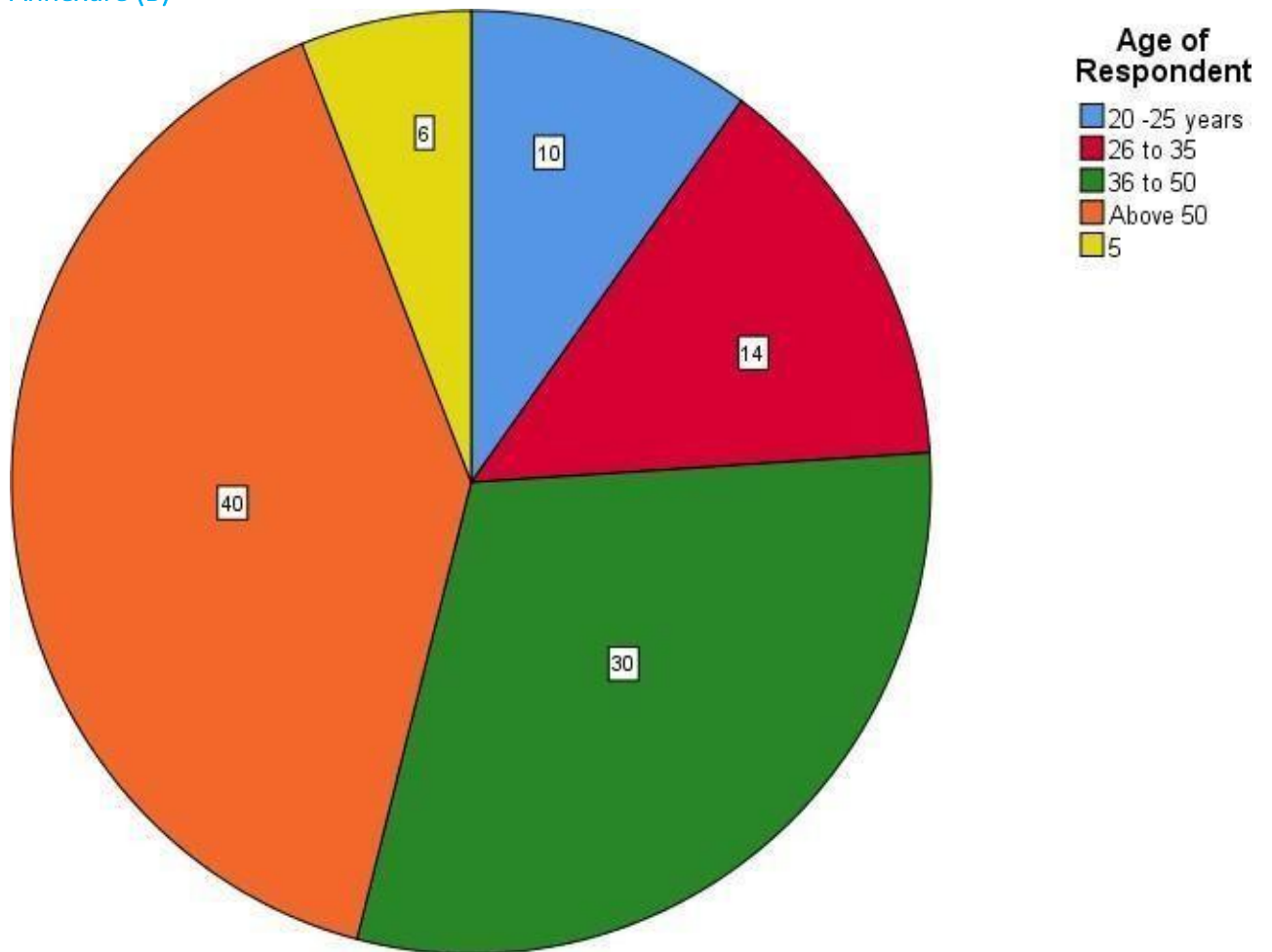


Figure 3: Age of participants

Annexure (C)

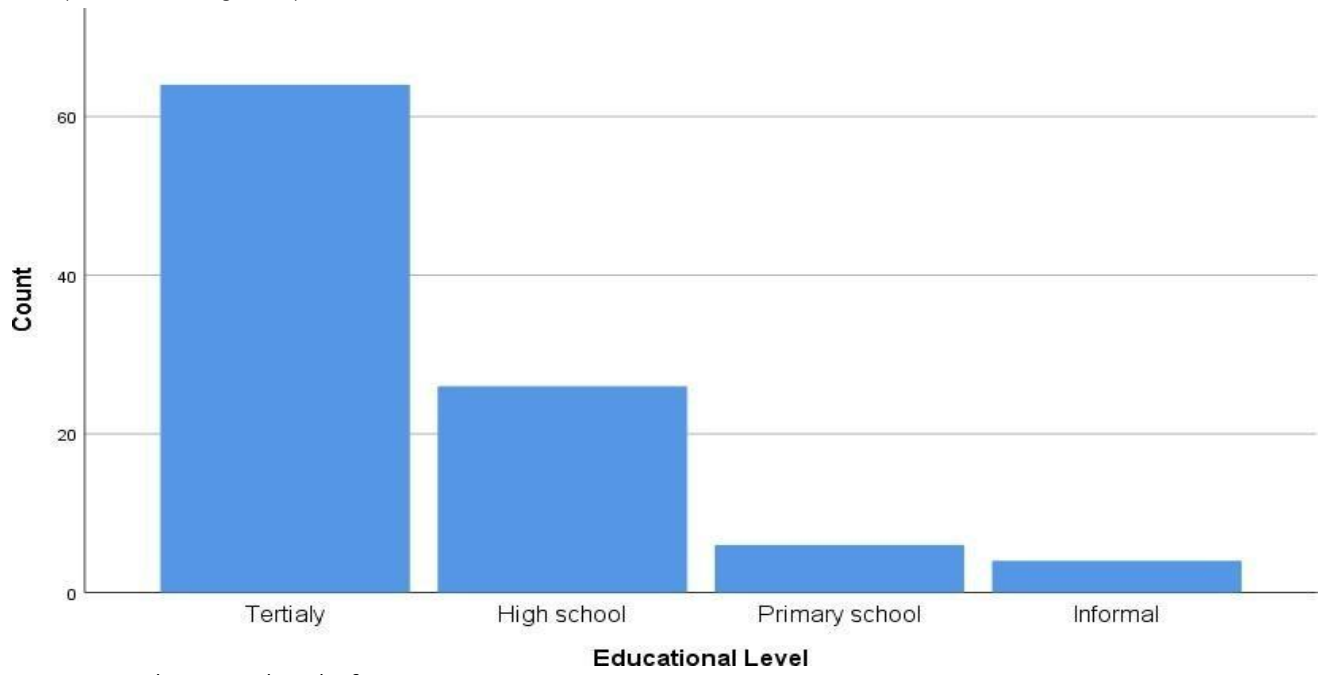


Figure 4: Education level of participants
Annexure (D)

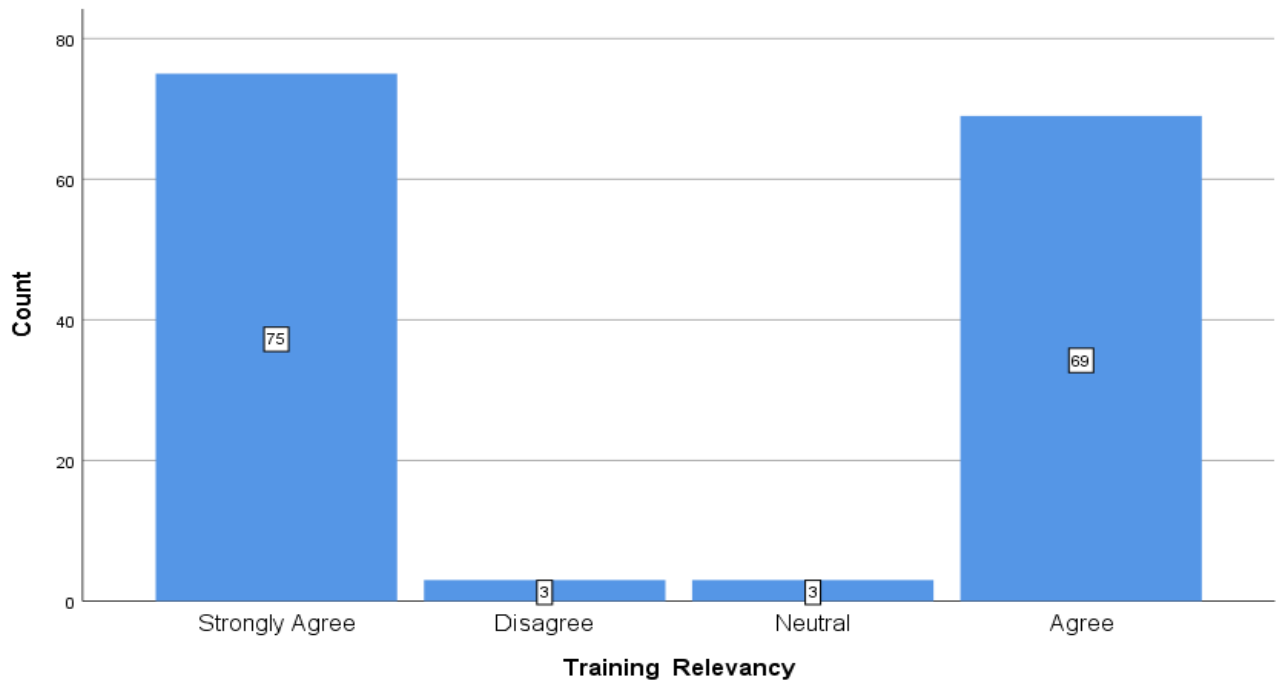


Figure 5: Training Relevancy