

CREATING EVIDENCE OF SOCIAL IMPACT THROUGH SKILLING OF FIRST-
GRADUATE GIRLS OF THE FAMILY

by

Devi Anindya, B.Sc, M.S.W

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Swiss School of Business and Management Geneva

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

SWISS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT GENEVA

FEBRUARY, 2026

CREATING EVIDENCE OF SOCIAL IMPACT THROUGH SKILLING OF FIRST-
GRADUATE GIRLS OF THE FAMILY

by

Devi Anindya, B.Sc, M.S.W

APPROVED BY

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Apostolos Dasilas', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Apostolos Dasilas
Dissertation chair

RECEIVED/APPROVED BY:

Renee Goldstein Osmic

Admissions Director

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all those who encouraged me to believe in the power of learning and perseverance. To my family, whose unwavering support shaped my journey. To my mentors and my coworkers, who guided me with patience and wisdom. And to every young learner who dares to dream—may this work inspire you to pursue your own path with courage and resilience.

Acknowledgements

I extend my sincere gratitude to all those who supported and guided me throughout the completion of this research. I am deeply thankful to my supervisors and faculty mentors whose encouragement, critical insights, and intellectual guidance shaped this work. My appreciation also goes to the participating students, teachers, and institutions whose cooperation made this study possible. I am grateful to my colleagues and peers for their thoughtful discussions and constant motivation. I express heartfelt thanks to my family for their unwavering support, patience, and belief in my efforts. This thesis would not have been possible without the collective contributions of each of you.

ABSTRACT
CREATING EVIDENCE OF SOCIAL IMPACT THROUGH SKILLING OF
FIRST-GRADUATE GIRLS OF THE FAMILY

by

Devi Anindya, 2025

Dissertation Chair: <Chair's Name>
Co-Chair: <If applicable. Co-Chair's Name>

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of a structured Life Skills and Mentorship intervention on the educational engagement, psychosocial development, decision-making capacities, and career aspirations of adolescent girls and young women in low-opportunity contexts. Despite progress in access to education, many girls continue to face entrenched barriers including restrictive gender norms, limited exposure to professional pathways, financial hardship, and constrained decision-making environments. The research aimed to understand whether targeted life-skills training combined with sustained mentorship can strengthen agency, enhance future readiness, and support progression toward higher education and meaningful careers.

Using a mixed-methods design, the study drew on survey data, reflective responses, and qualitative insights from participants in government and government-aided colleges. Quantitative analysis compared mentored and non-mentored groups across indicators such as confidence, leadership intention, educational motivation, decision-making, problem-solving, and aspirational clarity. Qualitative narratives provided depth into students' experiences of internal change, relational support, and exposure to new opportunities. The analysis was guided by behavioural, psychosocial, and capability-expansion frameworks that emphasise the role of self-efficacy, reflective capacity, and enabling environments in adolescent development.

Findings revealed consistent positive outcomes associated with mentorship participation. Mentored girls reported enhanced confidence, reduced self-doubt, and a stronger sense of leadership identity. They demonstrated greater intrinsic motivation for learning, clearer articulation of long-term goals, and increased ability to evaluate options and consequences when making decisions. The intervention also broadened career aspirations, with many participants expressing interest in high-growth professional fields

previously perceived as inaccessible. Improvements in communication, emotional resilience, peer relationships, and civic awareness further reflected the holistic developmental impact of the programme.

The study concludes that mentorship, when combined with structured life-skills training, serves as a powerful developmental mechanism capable of expanding girls' capabilities, aspirations, and sense of agency. These findings highlight the need to integrate mentorship models and socio-emotional learning into mainstream higher-education systems, particularly within resource-constrained settings. Strengthening such interventions can enhance educational continuity, support transitions into skilled employment, and contribute to broader gender-equity and economic development goals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Problem	4
1.3 Purpose of Research.....	7
1.4 Significance of the Study	8
1.5 Research Purpose and Questions	11
1.6 Research Objectives	14
1.7 Scope and Delimitations.....	27
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	34
2.1 Theoretical Framework.....	34
2.2 Theory of Reasoned Action	35
2.3 Social Cognitive Theory.....	36
2.4 The Capability Approach.....	37
2.5 Human Capital Theory.....	38
2.6 Gendered Agency and Social Norms	42
2.7 Summary	46
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	53
3.1 Introduction.....	53
3.2 Research Design.....	57
3.3 Research Setting.....	58
3.4 Population and Sample	58
3.5 Data Collection Instrument	59
3.6 Data Collection Procedure	61
3.7 Data Analysis	65
3.8 Research Design Limitations	86
3.9 Conclusion	89
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....	97
4.1 Research Question One.....	97
4.2 Research Question Two	102
4.3 Summary of Findings.....	111
4.4 Conclusion	116
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION.....	120

5.1 Discussion of Results	120
5.2 Discussion of Research Question One	127
5.3 Discussion of Research Question Two	132
CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	139
6.1 Summary	139
6.2 Implications.....	148
6.3 Recommendations for Future Research	160
6.4 Conclusion	168
APPENDIX A SURVEY COVER LETTER	180
APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT	181
APPENDIX C INTERVIEW GUIDE	182
REFERENCES	183
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE.....	191

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Year-wise distribution of the student sample (n = 335).....	67
Table 3.2 Family structure distribution of participants (n = 335).....	67
Table 3.3 Father's occupation profile among respondents (valid n = 312)	69
Table 3.4 Selected major problems (percentage of valid cases)	70
Table 4.1 Readiness to Mentor Other Girls in the Community	97
Table 4.2 Motivation to pursue higher education	100
Table 4.3 Perceived changes due to skilling and education.....	103
Table 4.4 Mentoring and career choice.....	105
Table 4.5 Mentoring and skill development	107

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Relationship between family type and job interview confidence.....	68
Figure 3.2 Skills vs. Mentorship status	75
Figure 3.3 Scatterplot: Mentorship vs. Career Intentionality	82

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Adolescence constitutes a critical developmental period during which individuals acquire the cognitive, emotional and social competencies necessary for adulthood (Patton et al., 2016). For adolescent girls in low-income contexts, this developmental stage is often characterised by heightened vulnerability to structural inequalities, socio-cultural restrictions, early marriage, restricted mobility, and gendered expectations relating to domestic labour (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001; Harper et al., 2018). In India, where nearly 120 million girls fall within the 10–19 age group, these vulnerabilities are magnified by persistent socio-economic disparities, entrenched patriarchal norms, and systemic limitations within the public education system (Nanda et al., 2013; Raj et al., 2019).

Government and government-aided schools serve a majority of children from economically disadvantaged households. While these schools play an essential role in expanding access to basic education, they often lack the resources, psychosocial support mechanisms, and structured skill-building opportunities necessary to foster holistic development (ASER Centre, 2023). Numerous studies indicate that adolescent girls in such institutions face disproportionate risks of school dropout, educational discontinuity and constrained career aspirations, driven by external pressures such as household responsibilities, financial hardship, domestic violence, and early or forced marriage (Sekhar et al., 2020; Singh and Mukherjee, 2018; Mangeli et al., 2017).

Research across low- and middle-income countries underscores that life skills education—comprising decision-making, critical thinking, communication, emotional regulation, and problem-solving—contributes significantly to improved psychosocial wellbeing, resilience, and health-promoting behaviour among adolescents (World Health Organization, 1997; UNESCO, 2015). Life skills interventions have also been shown to reduce risky behaviours and enhance self-efficacy, especially for girls who face restrictive social environments (Givaudan and Pick, 2013; Banerjee et al., 2019). The growing emphasis on life skills in global education frameworks reflects a recognition that formal academic instruction alone is insufficient to equip adolescent girls to navigate complex socio-economic realities (UNICEF, 2019; OECD, 2018).

Parallel to this, an expanding body of evidence suggests that mentorship—particularly structured, long-term, supportive relationships with trained adults—can significantly enhance adolescents’ academic persistence, emotional competence, and future orientation (Rhodes, 2005; Raposa et al., 2019). Mentor-guided programmes have proven effective in improving girls’ aspirations, delaying early marriage, promoting retention in school, and increasing agency in contexts marked by gendered constraints (Marcus and Page, 2014; Jensen and Thornton, 2003). Mentorship provides positive role modelling, nurtures self-belief, and offers counter-narratives to limiting social norms.

The intersection of life skills and mentorship is particularly critical for adolescent girls in India. Evidence indicates that girls’ ability to remain in school, resist harmful social practices, and pursue higher education is significantly influenced by their access to psychosocial support and opportunities for agency-building (Sperling and Winthrop,

2016; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2019). Moreover, digital skills and vocational competencies—now recognised as essential for participation in the 21st-century economy—remain unevenly distributed, with girls in disadvantaged communities disproportionately excluded from technology-enabled learning and labour markets (World Bank, 2020; GSMA, 2021).

The emergence of India’s National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which prioritises holistic development, 21st-century skills, and gender inclusion, underscores the national relevance of life skills integration within school curricula (Government of India, 2020). Yet, the translation of policy vision into practice remains constrained by limited human resources, inadequate training for teachers, and absence of institutionalised mentorship models within public schools.

Against this backdrop, the current study examines whether a structured Life Skills and Mentorship intervention can strengthen adolescent girls’ educational continuity, psychosocial development, and future readiness. By situating adolescent empowerment within behavioural, cognitive, and capability-expansion frameworks, the study aligns with Tamil Nadu’s broader policy landscape, which increasingly emphasises skill development, career preparedness, and holistic learner support. The state’s *Naan Mudhalvan* initiative, for instance, highlights a growing governmental commitment to equipping young people with industry-aligned competencies, career exposure, and personalised development pathways. Within this environment, structured mentorship and life-skills training serve as complementary mechanisms that can bridge the gap between institutional programmes and the individual psychosocial needs of learners—particularly

adolescent girls navigating social constraints, economic barriers, and limited access to guidance.

By embedding the intervention within this evolving ecosystem of educational reform and youth-skilling initiatives, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly and policy discussions on gender equity, student agency, and capability enhancement in emerging economies. It positions mentorship not merely as an academic support tool, but as a developmental scaffold that fosters self-confidence, problem-solving, future orientation, and resilience—attributes that align with contemporary demands of higher education and the labour market. Through this framing, the study underscores the importance of integrating socio-emotional learning, career readiness, and mentoring relationships as part of a broader strategy to expand girls’ capabilities, strengthen school-to-college transitions, and support their progression toward meaningful and aspirational livelihoods.

1.2 Research Problem

Despite significant progress in expanding access to basic education in India, adolescent girls—particularly those from low-income and low-opportunity communities—continue to face substantial barriers to sustained school attendance, skill acquisition, and participation in pathways leading to higher education or skilled employment. National data consistently show that dropout rates remain disproportionately high for girls during the transition from upper primary to secondary schooling, driven by socio-economic hardship, gendered household expectations, restricted mobility, and the enduring practice of early marriage in several regions

(UNESCO, 2022; Government of India, 2023). These structural and familial pressures constrain girls' agency, limit their educational engagement, and often curtail their aspirations long before they reach adulthood.

A recurring challenge within the government school ecosystem is the absence of *systematic life-skills education and structured psychosocial support*, both of which are widely recognised as essential for enabling adolescents to navigate complex social environments, build resilience, and make informed life choices. The World Health Organization (WHO), through its Life Skills Education Framework (1997) and subsequent adolescent well-being guidelines, identifies core competencies—such as problem-solving, emotional regulation, communication, decision-making, and self-awareness—as foundational for positive youth development. However, most government schools in India do not have integrated models for teaching these competencies, resulting in gaps that are particularly pronounced among girls who face layered vulnerabilities related to gender, poverty, and social norms.

Compounding these challenges is the widening gap in digital literacy and future-ready skills—competencies that increasingly determine access to emerging labour markets and socio-economic mobility (World Bank, 2020; OECD, 2018). Adolescent girls from underserved communities often have limited exposure to digital tools, career exploration platforms, or vocational training, restricting their ability to participate meaningfully in India's evolving knowledge economy. This digital disparity also reinforces broader gender gaps in access to information, employment opportunities, and civic participation.

At the same time, teachers in government schools—despite substantial commitment—often face overwhelming workloads, large class sizes, and limited access to training in socio-emotional learning or adolescent mental health. National frameworks such as the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, **Samagra Shiksha**, and the **Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK)** emphasise holistic development, socio-emotional learning, guidance counselling, and adolescent health. However, implementation remains uneven due to limited institutional capacity, lack of trained personnel, and the absence of scalable models of mentorship and life-skills integration within the schooling system. NEP 2020 explicitly calls for strengthening life skills, vocational exposure, and student support systems, yet operational frameworks at the ground level remain fragmented.

Consequently, adolescent girls in government and low-resource educational settings remain situated at the intersection of educational disadvantage, constrained agency, psychosocial vulnerability, and limited future prospects. The absence of structured programmes that combine life skills, mentorship, and future-readiness training represents a significant gap in both policy implementation and scholarly discourse. International evidence, including WHO and UNICEF guidance, highlights mentorship as a critical protective factor that can enhance self-efficacy, build aspirations, reduce dropout risk, and support transitions to higher education and employment—yet such models remain underdeveloped in India.

This study addresses this critical gap by examining how a structured Life Skills and Mentorship intervention can enhance adolescent girls’ agency, educational

continuity, psychosocial well-being, and readiness for future opportunities. By situating adolescent empowerment within behavioural, cognitive, and capability-expansion frameworks—and within the evolving national policy context—the study contributes to broader academic and policy discussions on gender-equitable development, school-to-work transition pathways, and the design of adolescent-focused interventions in emerging economies.

1.3 Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study is to explore how a structured Life Skills and Mentorship intervention can support the growth, confidence and long-term educational engagement of adolescent girls studying in government and government-aided schools in India. Many of these girls navigate complex pressures—economic hardship, expectations of domestic responsibility, and social norms that often place limits on their aspirations. While policy reforms have expanded educational access, the everyday realities faced by these girls highlight that access alone is not enough. They also require the skills, support, and encouragement to make decisions that align with their futures, rather than the constraints placed upon them.

This study seeks to understand how life skills—such as communication, decision-making, emotional regulation and critical thinking—can help girls build stronger foundations for navigating adolescence. It also examines the role of mentors: adults who can serve as consistent guides, sounding boards, and role models at a crucial stage in the girls’ development. Mentorship is not only about academic support; it is equally about

helping girls make sense of their experiences, recognise their strengths and imagine new possibilities for themselves.

In addition to life skills and mentorship, the study looks at how exposure to digital and vocational skills can broaden girls' horizons, particularly in a society where technology increasingly shapes access to information, opportunity, and employment. By exploring these interconnected elements, the research aims to identify the conditions that enable adolescent girls to stay in school, pursue higher education if they wish to, and move towards careers that reflect their potential rather than the limitations imposed on them.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study is not only to evaluate the impact of a specific intervention but also to contribute to a larger conversation about what holistic support for adolescent girls should look like. The findings aim to inform educators, policymakers, and organisations working with young people, offering a grounded understanding of how schools can become environments that nurture resilience, agency and opportunity for every girl.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance on several interconnected levels—academic, practical, and societal—because it addresses a persistent set of challenges that shape the lives of adolescent girls in India's government school system. While education has long been recognised as a key pathway to empowerment, many girls continue to face circumstances that limit their ability to participate fully in schooling or envision wider opportunities for themselves. Understanding how life skills, mentorship, and exposure to

digital learning and career-readiness training can strengthen the educational journeys of adolescent girls is therefore an important area of inquiry. Life skills—such as communication, problem-solving, self-management, and decision-making—provide adolescents with the psychosocial competencies required to navigate complex social expectations and academic pressures. Complementing this, structured mentorship offers relational support, guidance, and modelling that help girls translate these competencies into confidence, agency, and future-oriented thinking. At the same time, meaningful exposure to digital tools and career-building training equips young learners with the practical skills, labour-market awareness, and aspirational pathways increasingly demanded in contemporary economies. Together, these dimensions form a holistic developmental ecosystem that supports girls not only in staying engaged with school but in envisioning and preparing for viable futures. Investigating how such integrated interventions operate—and under what conditions they enhance educational continuity, psychosocial well-being, and future readiness—thus holds significant relevance for both policy and practice in adolescent empowerment..

From an academic perspective, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about how adolescents develop agency, confidence and resilience in contexts marked by social and economic inequality. Much of the existing research focuses on educational outcomes or specific skill-development initiatives, but fewer studies examine how emotional support, decision-making abilities, and real-life role models interact to shape girls' educational persistence and future choices. By bringing these elements together, the study

seeks to enrich theoretical conversations about adolescent development and gendered pathways in low-resource settings.

At a practical level, the research is valuable for educators, schools, and organisations working directly with young people. Government schools often carry the dual burden of meeting academic requirements while responding to the social realities their students face. This study offers insights into how mentors and life skills curricula can be thoughtfully integrated into the schooling environment without overburdening teachers or students. The findings can guide the design of training programmes, classroom strategies and community engagement approaches that are both feasible and impactful.

The study also has wider social relevance. Supporting adolescent girls is not only a matter of individual development but an investment in future families, communities, and national prosperity. When girls are equipped with the skills and confidence to remain in school, make informed decisions, and pursue meaningful work, the ripple effects extend far beyond personal growth. Evidence shows that increasing women's participation in education and the workforce can substantially boost India's economic output; several national estimates suggest that closing gender gaps in labour force participation could raise India's GDP by 6–27%, depending on the scale of inclusion. By empowering girls during adolescence—when aspirations are formed and life trajectories are shaped—societies benefit from enhanced human capital, reduced inequality, improved health outcomes, and a more diverse, productive, and future-ready workforce.

Investing in adolescent girls is therefore not only a social imperative but a strategic economic priority for India's long-term development.

In this way, the study underscores the importance of creating supportive ecosystems around adolescent girls—ecosystems that recognise their potential, help them navigate challenges, and open up opportunities that allow their talents to flourish. By examining how a structured Life Skills and Mentorship intervention can contribute to this vision, the research aims to offer both evidence and direction for strengthening girls' educational and life trajectories in a sustainable and meaningful way.

1.5 Research Purpose and Questions

Adolescent girls in India experience a complex interplay of social expectations, economic constraints, and institutional limitations that shape their educational experiences and long-term prospects. Government and government-aided schools, which serve the majority of girls from lower-income households, often operate in environments where structural challenges—such as limited resources, high student–teacher ratios, and insufficient psychosocial support—intersect with gendered norms that restrict girls' autonomy and mobility (ASER Centre, 2023; Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001). These constraints place adolescent girls at particular risk of dropping out during the transition to secondary education, a period when pressures related to household responsibilities, early marriage, and economic hardship tend to intensify (UNESCO, 2022; Sekhar et al., 2020).

International research highlights that adolescence is a crucial stage during which cognitive, emotional and social capabilities undergo rapid development, making it an

opportune period for structured life skills interventions (Patton et al., 2016). Life skills—such as self-awareness, effective communication, decision-making and coping strategies—equip adolescents to navigate risks, build resilience, and make informed choices (WHO, 1997; Givaudan and Pick, 2013). When paired with mentorship, which provides sustained guidance, positive role modelling, and emotional support, these interventions can help girls reinterpret their environments, envision expanded possibilities, and strengthen their sense of agency (Rhodes, 2005; Raposa et al., 2019).

However, while these benefits are widely recognised, life skills and mentorship are still not systematically embedded in the Indian public-school system. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises holistic, competency-based learning, but implementation gaps persist, especially in schools serving disadvantaged populations (Government of India, 2020). At the same time, digital literacy and vocational skills—critical for participation in emerging labour markets—remain unevenly distributed, with girls from low-opportunity communities often excluded from these opportunities (World Bank, 2020; GSMA, 2021).

Within this context, the current study seeks to understand how a structured Life Skills and Mentorship intervention can influence the educational pathways, emotional wellbeing, and future orientation of adolescent girls. The research is grounded in the view that strengthening girls’ decision-making abilities, confidence, self-efficacy, and access to relevant digital and career-readiness skills can help counter the structural barriers that constrain their educational continuity and transitions into higher education or meaningful employment. This inquiry gains further significance when situated within India’s wider

socio-economic landscape, where women’s participation in the labour force remains among the lowest globally. Numerous national and international analyses indicate that closing gender gaps in education and workforce participation could substantially increase India’s GDP—estimates range from a 6% boost to over 25%, depending on the scale of women’s economic inclusion. Enabling adolescent girls to build agency, career clarity, and future-ready skills therefore serves not only as an avenue for individual empowerment but as a strategic investment in national development and economic productivity.

To explore these issues in depth, the study is guided by one overarching research question and several supporting inquiries that examine how life skills, mentorship, and future-readiness training can expand adolescents’ capabilities and contribute to broader societal and economic transformation.

Primary Research Question

How does a structured Life Skills and Mentorship intervention influence the empowerment, educational continuity, and future readiness of adolescent girls in government and government-aided schools in India?

Supporting Research Questions

- 1. What social, familial, and economic barriers shape the educational trajectories of adolescent girls in low-income communities?**

(Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001; Raj et al., 2019)

2. **How do adolescent girls perceive their own agency, aspirations, and decision-making capacities in the absence of structured life skills education?**

(Patton et al., 2016)

3. **In what ways can life skills training and mentorship affect girls' self-efficacy, resilience, and aspirations for the future?**

(Rhodes, 2005; Givaudan and Pick, 2013)

4. **How do parents, teachers, and community stakeholders view the need for life skills and mentorship support for adolescent girls?**

(Marcus and Page, 2014)

5. **What components should a culturally grounded, scalable Life Skills and Mentorship model include in order to meet the needs of girls in government schools?**

(Government of India, 2020)

Together, these questions provide a framework for analysing the multi-layered influences on girls' lives and the potential of mentorship and life skills education to create meaningful change.

1.6 Research Objectives

To systematically address the research questions guiding this inquiry, the study advances a set of interlinked objectives designed to capture the structural, psychological, institutional, and relational dimensions shaping adolescent girls' developmental trajectories in low-opportunity contexts. These objectives are not conceived as isolated lines of investigation; rather, they form a cumulative analytic architecture through which

the phenomenon of gendered educational persistence and capability formation can be understood in its full complexity. Each objective targets a specific level of analysis—structural, individual, relational, or systemic—while also contributing to an integrated explanatory model. Together, they operationalise the study’s central aim: to demonstrate how structured mentoring and life skills education function as transformative interventions capable of mitigating entrenched inequities and expanding girls’ access to educational, social, and economic opportunity.

Objective 1

Examining Socio-Economic and Gendered Constraints Affecting Educational Retention

The first objective focuses on identifying and analysing the socio-economic and gendered constraints that impede educational continuity among adolescent girls enrolled in government schools. Educational retention is not solely a function of academic ability or institutional provision; rather, it is shaped by a constellation of structural factors including household income volatility, domestic labour expectations, mobility restrictions, safety concerns, social norms surrounding gender roles, and perceived returns to education. Understanding these constraints requires situating individual educational trajectories within broader socio-economic ecosystems.

This objective therefore investigates the structural determinants that influence whether girls remain enrolled, disengage, or drop out of school. It interrogates how material deprivation intersects with cultural expectations to produce patterns of educational

discontinuity. In many low-resource contexts, girls' schooling is contingent upon household calculations that weigh educational investment against immediate economic needs or social expectations such as early marriage. Such decisions are rarely framed explicitly as gender discrimination; instead, they often emerge from rationalised family strategies shaped by scarcity, uncertainty, and intergenerational experience. Analysing these decision-making processes is critical for distinguishing between structural constraint and individual choice.

In operational terms, this objective entails examining household characteristics, parental education levels, occupational patterns, access to infrastructure, and exposure to social support systems. It also involves analysing gendered divisions of labour within households and the extent to which domestic responsibilities compete with academic participation. By mapping these factors, the study seeks to construct a multidimensional profile of risk conditions associated with educational attrition.

Beyond identifying constraints, this objective also examines the mechanisms through which such barriers exert influence. For instance, mobility restrictions may limit access not only to school attendance but also to extracurricular learning opportunities, peer networks, and exposure to career information. Similarly, economic precarity may shape psychological dispositions, leading girls to internalise lowered expectations regarding their future prospects. Investigating these pathways enables a more nuanced understanding of how structural disadvantage translates into developmental limitation.

The analytical significance of this objective lies in its capacity to anchor the study within a structural framework. Without such grounding, interventions risk misattributing educational disengagement to individual deficits rather than systemic inequities. By foregrounding socio-economic and gendered constraints, the research establishes a contextual baseline against which the effectiveness of mentorship and life-skills interventions can be meaningfully assessed.

Objective 2

Analysing Life Skills Competencies, Digital Exposure, and Aspirational Formation

The second objective centres on assessing adolescent girls' existing life skills competencies, their levels of exposure to digital literacy, and the formation of emerging professional aspirations within low-opportunity environments. This objective shifts rather than abandons the analytical lens: from structural constraint to individual capability. It recognises that while external barriers shape opportunity structures, internal competencies influence how individuals navigate those structures.

Life skills—such as communication, problem-solving, decision-making, emotional regulation, and self-advocacy—constitute foundational developmental assets that enable young people to interpret their environments, manage challenges, and pursue goals. In contexts where formal guidance systems are limited, these skills often determine whether girls can convert educational access into meaningful opportunity. Accordingly, the study assesses both the presence and distribution of such competencies among participants, paying attention to variations across socio-economic and demographic subgroups.

Digital literacy is examined as a complementary capability that increasingly mediates access to information, networks, and economic opportunity. As technological integration reshapes labour markets and educational systems, digital competence has become a critical determinant of future readiness. For adolescent girls in low-resource contexts, digital exposure may represent their first point of contact with professional role models, higher education pathways, or career-planning resources. Understanding baseline levels of digital familiarity is therefore essential for evaluating readiness for participation in contemporary knowledge economies.

Aspirational formation constitutes the third dimension of this objective. Aspirations are not merely reflections of individual ambition; they are socially constructed expectations shaped by perceived feasibility. Girls who lack exposure to diverse career pathways may develop narrow or constrained aspirations, even when they possess strong academic ability. By analysing how aspirations emerge, evolve, and vary across participants, the study seeks to illuminate the relationship between perceived possibility and motivational orientation.

This objective thus investigates the interplay between internal capability and external context. It explores how foundational competencies influence self-confidence, agency, and readiness to pursue future educational or occupational pathways. In doing so, it provides an empirical basis for understanding why similarly situated individuals may respond differently to identical structural conditions. Such insight is indispensable for designing interventions that not only remove barriers but also cultivate the capacities required to navigate opportunity landscapes.

Objective 3

Evaluating the Impact of Mentored Life Skills Education

The third objective evaluates both the perceived and measurable effects of mentored life-skills programming on adolescent girls' self-concept, agency, and future orientation. This objective represents the evaluative core of the study, assessing whether and how the intervention under investigation produces developmental change.

Perceived impact refers to participants' subjective experiences of transformation—how they interpret their own growth, confidence, and aspirations following programme participation. These perceptions are analytically significant because they shape behavioural intention; individuals act not solely on objective conditions but on their interpretations of those conditions. Capturing perceived impact therefore provides insight into the internal processes through which interventions influence decision-making and motivation.

Actual impact, by contrast, refers to observable changes in attitudes, behaviours, or competencies measured through structured assessment tools. These may include shifts in self-efficacy scores, decision-making indicators, communication confidence, academic engagement, or clarity of career planning. By triangulating subjective and objective indicators, the study seeks to construct a comprehensive understanding of programme effectiveness.

This objective also examines the mechanisms through which mentorship exerts influence. Mentorship operates simultaneously as a relational resource, a cognitive scaffold, and a

motivational catalyst. Through sustained interaction with mentors, participants gain access to guidance, validation, and informational capital that may be unavailable within their immediate environments. Analysing these mechanisms enables the study to move beyond outcome measurement toward causal explanation.

Another critical component of this objective involves assessing differential impact. Interventions rarely affect all participants equally; outcomes may vary according to baseline confidence, family support, socio-economic status, or prior exposure to guidance. Investigating such variation allows researchers to identify which subgroups benefit most and under what conditions. These findings are essential for refining programme design and ensuring equitable effectiveness.

Objective 4

Investigating Parental Attitudes and Support Structures

The fourth objective extends the analytic scope beyond individual participants to include the family environment, examining parental involvement, attitudes, and readiness to support girls' continued education and skill development. This dimension reflects the recognition that adolescent development is embedded within relational systems. Even highly motivated students may face constraints if their aspirations are not supported—or are actively discouraged—within their households.

Parental perceptions of girls' education are shaped by multiple factors, including economic considerations, cultural norms, safety concerns, and prior educational experiences. Understanding these perceptions is essential for interpreting girls' educational trajectories, as family attitudes often function as gatekeeping mechanisms that determine access to opportunities. For example, parental hesitation regarding mobility may limit participation in extracurricular programmes, while concerns about financial returns may influence decisions about higher education.

This objective therefore investigates the degree to which parents recognise the value of life-skills development, digital literacy, and professional exposure. It also examines whether parental attitudes shift when they observe changes in their daughters' confidence or performance. Such analysis can reveal feedback loops through which programme participation influences family perceptions, which in turn affect participants' future opportunities.

Importantly, this objective positions parents not merely as background variables but as potential partners in developmental interventions. By analysing parental readiness for engagement, the study explores whether involving families directly in programme ecosystems could enhance effectiveness. Insights derived from this objective may inform strategies for community outreach, awareness campaigns, or parent-oriented workshops designed to align household support with girls' developmental goals.

Objective 5

Designing an Integrated Life Skills and Mentorship Model

The fifth objective synthesises insights from the preceding analyses to design a theoretically grounded, policy-aligned, and operationally scalable Life Skills plus Mentorship Model. This objective transforms empirical findings into actionable knowledge by translating research insights into programme architecture.

The proposed model is informed by multiple theoretical frameworks, including capability theory, socio-ecological development models, and relational learning paradigms. Integrating these perspectives enables the design of an intervention structure that simultaneously addresses individual competencies, relational support, and systemic constraints. The goal is not merely to demonstrate that mentorship works, but to articulate how it can be implemented effectively within real educational systems.

Policy alignment constitutes a central consideration. Educational interventions must operate within existing institutional and regulatory frameworks if they are to be adopted at scale. Accordingly, the model is designed to complement national and state educational

priorities, skill-development initiatives, and gender-equity strategies. This alignment increases the likelihood that the proposed framework can be integrated into public systems rather than remaining confined to pilot projects.

Operational feasibility is equally critical. Even theoretically sound interventions may fail if they require resources or infrastructure beyond the reach of implementing institutions. Therefore, the model incorporates considerations of facilitator training, monitoring systems, cost efficiency, and adaptability to diverse institutional contexts. By embedding practical constraints within the design process, the study ensures that its recommendations remain implementable rather than aspirational.

Objective 6

Advancing Scholarly and Conceptual Debates

The sixth objective situates the study within broader academic discourse, aiming to contribute empirical and theoretical insights that advance scholarly debates on gender, education, adolescent development, and capability formation. While the study is grounded in applied concerns, it also addresses conceptual questions central to social science scholarship.

One such contribution lies in refining theoretical understandings of agency. Rather than treating agency as a fixed individual trait, the findings conceptualise it as a developmental capacity shaped by relational support, skill acquisition, and exposure to opportunity. This perspective challenges static models of empowerment and supports a

dynamic framework in which agency evolves through interaction with enabling environments.

The study also contributes to discussions on educational inequality by demonstrating how psychosocial interventions can complement structural reforms. Traditional policy approaches often focus on material provision—schools, scholarships, infrastructure—while underestimating the importance of confidence, aspiration, and decision-making capacity. By documenting the interaction between structural access and psychological readiness, the research highlights the need for integrated approaches that address both dimensions simultaneously.

Additionally, the study enriches global scholarship by foregrounding evidence from low-opportunity contexts that remain underrepresented in existing literature. Much of the empirical research on mentorship originates in high-income countries; extending this evidence base to diverse socio-economic settings strengthens the universality and applicability of theoretical models.

Integrative Significance of the Objectives

Taken collectively, these objectives constitute a comprehensive analytical framework that links structural conditions, individual capabilities, relational dynamics, and systemic implementation. Rather than examining mentorship or life-skills education in isolation, the study situates these interventions within the broader ecology of adolescent development. This integrative approach enables a more accurate understanding of how change occurs and what conditions are necessary for it to be sustained.

By sequentially examining constraints, capabilities, intervention effects, family environments, programme design, and theoretical implications, the research constructs a layered explanation of educational persistence and empowerment. Each objective informs the next, producing cumulative insight rather than fragmented findings. This architecture ensures that conclusions are grounded simultaneously in empirical evidence, contextual awareness, and conceptual clarity.

Concluding Synthesis

These objectives collectively reinforce the study's central proposition: that structured mentoring combined with life-skills education represents a powerful strategy for mitigating systemic inequities and expanding girls' access to meaningful life opportunities. They demonstrate that empowerment cannot be understood solely as an outcome; it must be analysed as a process shaped by the interaction of institutions, relationships, competencies, and aspirations. By operationalising the research questions through this multidimensional framework, the study provides both rigorous evidence and practical guidance for stakeholders seeking to design interventions capable of transforming developmental trajectories.

Ultimately, the significance of this objective structure lies not only in its capacity to guide empirical inquiry but also in its potential to inform policy, practice, and theory. Through careful articulation and systematic investigation, the study advances a model of research that is analytically robust, contextually grounded, and socially relevant—an

approach essential for addressing the complex challenges surrounding gender equity and educational inclusion in contemporary societies.

1.7 Scope and Delimitations

This study focuses on understanding how a structured Life Skills and Mentorship intervention can influence the educational engagement, personal development, and future orientation of college-going adolescent and young women in India's government and government-aided higher education institutions. By concentrating on students primarily between the ages of 17 and 21—an age range recognised as a critical period for cognitive maturation, identity consolidation, and transitional decision-making (Patton et al., 2016; Arnett, 2000)—the study examines a developmental stage in which young women are required to make pivotal and often irreversible choices related to higher education, employment pathways, financial independence, and long-term professional aspirations.

Late adolescence and emerging adulthood are marked by increasing autonomy, expanding cognitive capacities, and heightened self-reflection. During this phase, individuals move from externally structured school environments toward self-directed academic and career planning. For young women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, however, this transition does not occur within neutral or enabling conditions. Rather, it is embedded within intersecting pressures related to family expectations, financial constraints, and societal norms. As highlighted in broader developmental scholarship, identity exploration during this stage involves negotiating personal aspirations alongside social prescriptions (Patton et al., 2016; Arnett, 2000). For young women in India, this negotiation is frequently shaped by gendered expectations regarding marriage, caregiving roles, and economic contribution to the household.

This developmental window is also marked by heightened exposure to socio-economic pressures, gendered expectations, and labour market uncertainties (UNESCO, 2022). Students enrolled in government and government-aided colleges often belong to families where higher education represents both a symbolic and material investment. For many first-generation learners, pursuing a college degree is perceived as a pathway to economic mobility, yet the pathway itself is fraught with instability. Young women may confront expectations to balance academic responsibilities with domestic duties, contribute financially to the household, or curtail their ambitions in response to family needs. These pressures intersect with evolving labour market dynamics, where employability increasingly depends not only on academic qualifications but also on communication skills, digital literacy, adaptability, and confidence.

Geographically and institutionally, the study is situated within selected government and government-aided colleges that predominantly serve first-generation learners and students from low-income or low-opportunity communities. These institutional contexts are vital because they represent spaces where young women often confront systemic inequities, resource constraints, limited digital access, and restricted exposure to diverse career pathways (ASER Centre, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2021). Public higher education institutions in such settings typically operate with constrained infrastructure, limited counselling services, and minimal industry linkage mechanisms. Career guidance cells, if present, may lack the staffing or specialised expertise required to offer personalised mentorship or structured skill-building interventions.

Students in these institutions frequently navigate overlapping challenges. Socio-economic hardship may manifest in difficulty paying tuition fees, affording transportation, or accessing digital devices necessary for learning. Parental educational constraints may limit the availability of informed guidance regarding course selection, internships, competitive examinations, or postgraduate options. Mobility restrictions—arising from safety concerns or social norms—may reduce participation in internships, workshops, or extracurricular activities that expand professional exposure. Additionally, institutional mechanisms for guidance and counselling are often insufficiently developed, resulting in students relying primarily on peer networks or informal advice for career decisions.

By focusing on these colleges, the study aims to generate insights that are particularly relevant to policymakers, educators, and practitioners seeking to strengthen support structures for young women in resource-constrained higher education environments (Government of India, 2020). The intention is not to create a universal model applicable to all educational contexts in India. Rather, it is to examine how structured life skills and mentorship interventions function within environments where structural barriers are most acute and where incremental improvements in psychosocial and academic support may yield substantial developmental benefits.

Methodologically, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and observational insights. Mixed-methods designs are especially valuable in educational and social research because they enable the integration of statistical patterns with lived experience and contextual nuance (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Quantitative data provide measurable indicators of

confidence, aspiration clarity, mentorship exposure, and perceived barriers, allowing for pattern recognition and group comparisons. Qualitative data, in contrast, illuminate how participants interpret their experiences, how mentorship relationships influence self-perception, and how life skills training translates into everyday decision-making.

This integrative approach supports a holistic understanding of both structural constraints and individual agency. While quantitative findings may reveal correlations between mentorship and career intentionality, qualitative narratives offer insight into the mechanisms underlying those associations—such as enhanced self-efficacy, exposure to new possibilities, or validation of aspirations. The mixed-methods design therefore strengthens interpretive depth and ensures that the study does not reduce complex developmental processes to numerical indicators alone.

At the same time, the study acknowledges several important delimitations that define its analytical boundaries.

First, the research focuses exclusively on government and government-aided colleges, excluding private, autonomous, and elite institutions. Private colleges often differ significantly in terms of resource availability, faculty–student ratios, technological infrastructure, and access to structured career services. Students in private institutions may benefit from stronger alumni networks, corporate linkages, internship pipelines, and digital learning environments. By deliberately limiting the study to public institutions, the research centres contexts where barriers to educational continuity and career readiness

are most pronounced (Tilak, 2015). This delimitation enhances contextual specificity but limits the generalisability of findings to more resource-rich environments.

Second, the study is limited to female students. This gender-specific focus enables in-depth exploration of agency formation, aspiration development, socio-emotional needs, safety considerations, and labour market access—domains consistently documented as gender-differentiated in India (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001; Kabeer, 2016). While including male students might have permitted comparative gender analysis, such inclusion could dilute the analytical attention required to understand the layered constraints faced by young women. By concentrating exclusively on female students, the study foregrounds gender as a central analytic lens rather than a peripheral variable.

Third, the study does not incorporate long-term longitudinal tracking. Although longitudinal research would allow for examination of actual post-college outcomes—such as employment status, income levels, postgraduate enrolment, or entrepreneurial ventures—it was not feasible within the time and resource constraints of the study (Harrell, 2012). Consequently, the findings reflect cross-sectional associations and short-to medium-term developmental indicators rather than confirmed long-term impacts. While this limits causal inference, it provides a necessary foundation for future longitudinal inquiry.

Fourth, while the study draws conceptual alignment from national frameworks such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Naan Mudhalvan, and the National Skill Development Mission, it does not evaluate the implementation fidelity or effectiveness of

these specific policy initiatives. These frameworks are referenced to situate the study within India's evolving educational and skills-development agenda (Government of India, 2020; Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation, 2023). The research remains programmatic and exploratory rather than policy-evaluative, focusing on how structured life skills and mentorship interventions operate within institutional ecosystems influenced by these broader policy directions.

Fifth, the research relies primarily on self-reported data regarding confidence, aspiration clarity, mentorship exposure, and perceived barriers. While self-report measures are appropriate for capturing subjective constructs such as self-efficacy and agency, they may be influenced by social desirability bias or aspirational responding. The mixed-methods design partially mitigates this limitation by incorporating qualitative triangulation, yet the reliance on perception-based indicators remains a methodological boundary.

Sixth, the study is geographically bounded to selected institutions rather than representing a nationally stratified sample. Regional cultural norms, economic structures, and labour market dynamics may vary across states in India. As such, the findings are most directly applicable to institutions sharing similar socio-economic profiles and institutional characteristics rather than to all higher education settings nationwide.

By clearly defining its scope and articulating its delimitations, the study positions itself as a focused and contextually grounded investigation into how well-designed life skills and mentorship programmes can support college-going young women in public higher education settings. The emphasis on specificity strengthens analytical clarity and ensures

that interpretations remain aligned with the institutional and socio-economic contexts under examination.

The insights generated aim to strengthen institutional practices by highlighting areas where mentorship and life skills programming can be integrated into existing college structures. They also aim to inform programme design by identifying priority skill domains, common barriers, and developmental needs articulated by students themselves. At a broader level, the study contributes to scalable models capable of advancing gender-equitable participation in higher education and the future workforce—an objective strongly emphasised in national policy and global development agendas (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2020).

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study integrates behavioural, psychosocial, capability-based and socio-structural theories to provide a comprehensive lens for analysing adolescent girls' empowerment. Each theoretical strand offers distinct insights into how girls interpret their social environments, form aspirations, and make decisions under conditions of constraint. Together, they illuminate the mechanisms through which life skills and mentorship may influence behavioural intentions, educational choices and future outcomes.

The four primary theories guiding the study are:

1. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The Theory of Reasoned Action posits that an individual's behaviour is driven by their behavioural intentions, which are shaped by two key factors: personal attitudes toward the behaviour and perceived social norms. In the context of adolescent girls' education and career development, TRA helps explain how intentions—such as staying in college, pursuing skills, or choosing a profession—are influenced by their beliefs, peer expectations, and family or community norms.

2. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Cognitive Theory emphasises the dynamic interaction between personal factors, behaviour, and the environment. Central constructs include

self-efficacy, observational learning, and self-regulation. For this study, SCT provides a lens to understand how mentorship, role models, and supportive learning environments can strengthen girls' confidence, reduce self-doubt, and enhance their ability to set goals and make future-oriented decisions.

3. Capability Approach

The Capability Approach conceptualises development as the expansion of individuals' freedoms and real opportunities—what they are able to be and do. Rather than focusing only on outcomes, it emphasises agency, choice, and enabling conditions. Applied here, it highlights how life skills, mentorship, and exposure to digital and professional pathways expand girls' capabilities to pursue education, meaningful careers, and empowered life trajectories.

4. Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory views education, skills, and training as investments that enhance individuals' productivity and future economic returns. At the societal level, it suggests that developing human capital—particularly among young women—contributes to labour-force participation, improved earnings, and national economic growth. In this study, it underscores how life skills and career-readiness training can strengthen girls' employability and long-term professional prospects.

supplemented by contemporary scholarship on gendered agency and social norms.

2.2 Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), posits that behaviour is driven by behavioural intentions, which themselves are shaped by a person's attitudes towards a behaviour and the subjective norms they perceive. TRA is particularly relevant for analysing adolescent girls' decisions in socio-cultural environments where gendered expectations strongly influence life choices. In many low-income contexts, girls face pressure to prioritise domestic responsibilities or early marriage over continued education (Raj et al., 2019; Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001). As a result, their behavioural intentions are often constrained by normative expectations rather than personal preferences.

Life skills interventions that strengthen decision-making, critical thinking and self-awareness can help shift girls' attitudes towards schooling and self-development. At the same time, mentorship can modify subjective norms by offering alternative models of what is possible for girls. Mentors provide validation, encouragement and exposure to expanded life pathways, potentially reshaping the normative landscapes that influence how girls interpret their choices. In this sense, TRA helps explain how life skills and mentorship may jointly influence the formation of empowered behavioural intentions.

2.3 Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) provides an important psychosocial foundation for understanding how adolescents learn, internalise behaviours and develop a sense of personal agency. Central to SCT is the concept of **self-efficacy**—the belief in one's ability to achieve desired outcomes. Research consistently shows that higher self-efficacy correlates with greater persistence in education, resilience in the face of

adversity and readiness to pursue new opportunities (Zimmerman, 2000; Schunk and Meece, 2006).

For adolescent girls in disadvantaged settings, opportunities to observe and interact with positive female role models are often limited. Mentorship programmes address this gap by providing structured opportunities for girls to witness adaptive behaviour, receive guidance, and develop confidence in their capabilities (Rhodes, 2005; Raposa et al., 2019). Life skills training further reinforces these processes by enabling girls to practise competencies such as communication, problem-solving and emotional regulation—skills that enhance their perceived and actual capacity to navigate challenges.

Social Cognitive Theory therefore underscores the importance of interventions that combine modelling, skill-building and guided reflection—core components of the Life Skills and Mentorship model examined in this study.

2.4 The Capability Approach

The Capability Approach, proposed by Sen (1999) and further elaborated by Nussbaum (2000), shifts the focus of development from resources or outcomes to the substantive freedoms individuals have to lead lives they value. This framework is especially powerful for analysing the lived experiences of adolescent girls who confront intersecting forms of deprivation. Girls may have technical access to schooling, but lacking agency, safety, life skills or supportive environments, their actual capabilities—what they are able to do and become—remain severely restricted (Kabeer, 1999; Robeyns, 2005).

Life skills are instrumental in expanding key capabilities such as emotional wellbeing, informed decision-making, and the ability to convert educational access into meaningful choices. Mentorship contributes by strengthening agency, identity formation and aspirations. When combined with digital and vocational training, these interventions expand girls' economic and social capabilities, enhancing their capacity to participate in future labour markets.

The Capability Approach therefore provides a conceptual foundation for understanding empowerment not simply as a psychological state but as an enlargement of real freedoms that allow girls to shape their futures.

2.5 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) posits that investments in education, training, and skill acquisition enhance individuals' productive capacities, thereby increasing their earnings potential and overall economic contribution. At its core, the theory conceptualises education not merely as a social good or intrinsic value, but as a strategic investment that yields measurable returns over time. Individuals who acquire higher levels of education and relevant skills are presumed to command higher wages, experience greater employment stability, and contribute more effectively to economic growth. From a macroeconomic perspective, the aggregation of individual human capital investments strengthens national productivity, competitiveness, and long-term development.

This framework has been particularly influential in shaping global and national policy narratives around girls' education. Investments in female education are frequently

justified not only on equity grounds but also on efficiency and growth arguments. Where gender disparities limit women's participation in the labour force, the underutilisation of female talent represents both a social injustice and an economic inefficiency (King and Hill, 1993). Expanding girls' access to education, therefore, is framed as a means of unlocking untapped productive capacity within the economy. In this sense, Human Capital Theory provides a powerful economic rationale for addressing gender gaps in schooling, skill development, and workforce participation.

However, the mere provision of access to education does not automatically translate into equal human capital accumulation. In contexts where girls face limited exposure to digital technologies, technical training, or market-linked competencies, the development of human capital becomes uneven. Structural constraints—such as socio-economic disadvantage, limited institutional resources, or restrictive gender norms—may restrict the type and quality of skills girls are able to acquire. As a result, even when enrolment rates improve, disparities persist in the nature of skills obtained and their alignment with labour market demands. Such uneven accumulation contributes to persistent gender gaps in employment, occupational mobility, and earnings (World Bank, 2020; OECD, 2020).

In contemporary labour markets, human capital increasingly encompasses more than formal academic credentials. Employers frequently prioritise transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, adaptability, teamwork, and digital literacy. These competencies, often categorised as “soft skills” or “21st-century skills,” play a critical role in determining employability and career progression. For adolescent girls in low-

opportunity settings, however, exposure to such competencies may be limited within conventional classroom instruction. The absence of structured platforms for developing interview skills, resume writing, professional communication, or digital fluency can reduce the economic returns to their educational attainment.

Within this theoretical frame, life skills education can be understood as an essential component of human capital formation. Foundational life skills—such as decision-making, emotional regulation, self-confidence, and goal-setting—enhance individuals’ ability to persist in education, adapt to changing environments, and effectively convert formal learning into productive outcomes. These psychosocial competencies function as enabling conditions that amplify the returns to academic and technical training. Without confidence, clarity of aspiration, or the capacity to navigate institutional processes, educational qualifications may not fully translate into labour market participation.

Similarly, mentorship can be conceptualised as an indirect but influential mechanism in human capital accumulation. Mentors provide informational capital—guidance regarding career pathways, examinations, internships, and skill-building opportunities—that shapes educational choices and investment decisions. They may also enhance motivational capital by reinforcing aspirations, strengthening self-efficacy, and reducing uncertainty about professional trajectories. In doing so, mentorship supports more strategic human capital investment by helping young women align their educational efforts with market-relevant outcomes.

By developing both foundational life skills and employment-oriented competencies, adolescent girls become better equipped to pursue higher education, compete for skilled occupations, and adapt to evolving labour market conditions. The integration of communication training, digital literacy, problem-solving skills, and career guidance within educational programmes strengthens the economic value of schooling. Such multidimensional investment aligns closely with the central premise of Human Capital Theory: that targeted skill development enhances productivity and employability.

Importantly, the benefits of investing in girls' human capital extend beyond individual earnings. Research indicates that female education generates substantial intergenerational returns. Women with higher levels of education are more likely to invest in the health and education of their children, delay early marriage and childbirth, and participate more actively in household decision-making processes (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018). These spillover effects contribute to improved health outcomes, higher school attendance among the next generation, and greater social mobility. Thus, the returns to investing in girls' skills are both private and social, reinforcing the argument for structured and sustained educational support.

Within the context of this study, Human Capital Theory provides an economic lens through which the integrated Life Skills and Mentorship intervention can be understood. The intervention does not merely aim to enhance subjective wellbeing or psychosocial confidence; it seeks to strengthen the economic value of girls' educational trajectories. By equipping participants with both cognitive and non-cognitive skills aligned with labour market expectations, the programme contributes to more equitable human capital

formation. In settings where structural barriers have historically constrained women's economic participation, such targeted investment has the potential to reduce gender disparities in employment and earnings over time.

Thus, Human Capital Theory reinforces the economic rationale underpinning the integrated approach examined in this study. It situates life skills training and mentorship within a broader developmental logic—one in which strengthening girls' capabilities is not only a matter of empowerment but also a strategic investment in productivity, economic inclusion, and long-term societal advancement.

2.6 Gendered Agency and Social Norms

Beyond individual decision-making frameworks, gender scholars emphasise that agency is not exercised in isolation but is socially embedded within structures of power, norms, and institutional arrangements. Agency, in this view, is shaped by patriarchal systems that regulate girls' mobility, autonomy, access to resources, and life choices (Kabeer, 1999; Marcus and Harper, 2014). Rather than conceptualising empowerment solely as an internal psychological state, gender scholarship situates it within broader socio-cultural contexts that enable or constrain the range of actions available to young women. Girls' aspirations, educational decisions, and career trajectories are therefore influenced not only by personal motivation or self-efficacy but also by the normative expectations embedded within families, communities, and institutions.

Kabeer (1999) conceptualises empowerment as the expansion of the ability to make strategic life choices in contexts where this ability was previously denied. This

framing underscores that empowerment is relational and contextual—it depends on the redistribution of power within social structures. In many low-income communities, gendered norms shape the allocation of household responsibilities, control over mobility, and expectations regarding marriage and caregiving roles. Girls may be socialised to prioritise familial obligations over individual ambition, to avoid visible leadership roles, or to perceive certain professions as socially inappropriate. Such norms do not operate merely as abstract cultural beliefs; they are reinforced through daily practices, sanctions, and expectations.

Social norms theory further highlights that behaviour is strongly influenced by what individuals believe others expect of them, as well as by perceptions of what others are doing (Mackie et al., 2015). In this framework, norms are maintained through collective beliefs about appropriate conduct, and deviation may invite social sanctions such as criticism, isolation, or reputational harm. For adolescent girls, decisions regarding continued education, participation in extracurricular activities, or pursuit of employment may be filtered through concerns about social approval. Girls may internalise the belief that certain ambitions are incompatible with femininity, respectability, or family honour.

These normative pressures frequently justify early marriage, restrict educational continuation, and limit aspirations for higher education or formal employment (UNICEF, 2022). In communities where marriage is considered a primary marker of female success, prolonged education may be viewed as unnecessary or even undesirable. Similarly, employment outside the home—particularly in male-dominated sectors—may be perceived as socially risky. Such norms can curtail not only behavioural choices but also

the very formation of aspirations. Girls may self-censor their ambitions to align with what they perceive as socially acceptable, thereby narrowing their perceived horizon of possibilities.

Importantly, these norms are not static or uniform; they vary across contexts and are subject to negotiation and gradual transformation. However, the mechanisms for change often require exposure to alternative narratives, role models, and supportive networks. In environments where girls have limited interaction with women in professional roles or limited visibility of alternative life trajectories, prevailing norms may remain unchallenged. Consequently, interventions aimed at empowerment must address both internal capabilities and external normative environments.

Mentorship can play a powerful role in negotiating and gradually shifting these norms. Mentors serve as tangible counterexamples to restrictive expectations, demonstrating that alternative pathways are both possible and legitimate. Through regular interaction, mentors can validate aspirations that might otherwise be dismissed or discouraged within the family or community. This validation is critical, as it helps girls reinterpret their ambitions not as acts of defiance but as achievable and socially valuable goals.

Moreover, mentors can equip girls with negotiation strategies for navigating normative constraints. Rather than encouraging abrupt confrontation with deeply entrenched beliefs, mentorship often supports incremental agency—helping girls articulate their educational plans to parents, manage resistance, or identify socially

acceptable pathways toward independence. By providing language, confidence, and practical advice, mentors expand girls' perceived scope of action within restrictive environments. In doing so, mentorship operates at both the individual and relational levels, influencing how girls position themselves within existing social structures.

Life skills training similarly provides tools that enable girls to engage more critically with normative expectations. Skills such as assertive communication, reflective thinking, problem-solving, and emotional regulation strengthen girls' capacity to respond to social pressure constructively. For instance, assertiveness training can help young women express educational ambitions respectfully yet firmly. Critical reflection exercises can encourage examination of inherited assumptions about gender roles. Communication skills enhance the ability to engage parents and community members in dialogue about aspirations and career goals.

Importantly, the combination of mentorship and life skills training creates a reinforcing dynamic. While life skills build internal competencies, mentorship provides relational support and social legitimacy. Together, they contribute to what gender scholars describe as expanded agency—the capacity not only to make choices but to envision new possibilities and pursue them within complex social environments (Kabeer, 1999). This expansion does not necessarily dismantle patriarchal norms immediately; rather, it creates micro-level shifts that, over time, may contribute to broader normative transformation.

In the context of this study, the focus on gendered agency and social norms underscores that empowerment cannot be understood purely in terms of skill acquisition or economic returns. It requires attention to the social ecosystems in which girls live and learn. The Life Skills and Mentorship intervention examined here is therefore situated within a broader normative landscape. Its potential impact lies not only in enhancing individual confidence but also in subtly reshaping expectations about what young women can achieve.

By addressing both internal capacities and external normative influences, the integrated approach aligns with gender scholarship that views empowerment as a multidimensional process. It recognises that expanding girls' opportunities involves strengthening their ability to act while simultaneously broadening the social acceptance of those actions. In this way, mentorship and life skills education function not merely as developmental tools but as mechanisms for negotiating and gradually transforming the gendered norms that shape young women's educational and professional trajectories.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has systematically established the theoretical and empirical foundations that anchor the present study. It articulated a multi-dimensional conceptual framework that integrates the Theory of Reasoned Action, Social Cognitive Theory, the Capability Approach, Human Capital Theory, and gendered agency perspectives. Rather than treating these theories as isolated explanatory tools, the chapter positioned them as complementary lenses that together illuminate the complex ecosystem within which adolescent girls make educational and life decisions.

At a foundational level, the Theory of Reasoned Action clarified how intentions are shaped by personal attitudes and perceived social norms. For adolescent girls, intentions regarding higher education, career choice, mobility, and skill acquisition are rarely formed in isolation; they are mediated by internal beliefs about competence and by external expectations about what is socially appropriate. Social Cognitive Theory further deepened this analysis by emphasising the role of self-efficacy, modelling, and environmental reinforcement in shaping behaviour. When girls observe credible role models, receive affirming feedback, and practise problem-solving skills, their perceived capability expands, thereby strengthening their likelihood of sustained engagement in educational and career pathways.

The Capability Approach extended the discussion beyond individual cognition and behavioural intention to focus on substantive freedoms. It underscored that empowerment cannot be equated merely with access to schooling; rather, it involves the genuine expansion of options available to young women. Access without agency remains incomplete. Girls may technically be enrolled in college, yet if they lack mobility, confidence, negotiation capacity, or exposure to diverse opportunities, their real capabilities remain constrained. By situating empowerment within the framework of capability expansion, the chapter highlighted the importance of converting educational access into meaningful choice.

Human Capital Theory provided the economic dimension of the framework. It emphasised that education and skill development function as investments that generate both private and societal returns. For adolescent girls, the accumulation of human capital

is not limited to academic credentials but includes digital literacy, communication competence, adaptability, and career-readiness skills. When these competencies are underdeveloped—particularly in low-resource institutions—the economic returns to education become uneven. The integration of life skills and mentorship can therefore be interpreted not only as psychosocial support but also as strategic economic investment in enhancing employability and long-term productivity.

Gendered agency perspectives completed the theoretical synthesis by situating individual development within socially embedded power structures. They reminded us that aspirations and choices are shaped by patriarchal norms, community expectations, and relational dynamics. Empowerment, therefore, is both internal and external—it requires confidence and capability, but also negotiation within normative systems. Mentorship and life skills training are positioned within this framework as mechanisms that simultaneously build internal capacity and expand perceived social legitimacy for girls' aspirations.

Collectively, these theoretical strands converge around a central insight: adolescent girls' educational and career trajectories are shaped by an interplay of cognitive, relational, structural, economic, and normative factors. No single intervention can address all these dimensions in isolation. However, an integrated Life Skills and Mentorship model has the potential to operate across multiple layers simultaneously—enhancing attitudes, strengthening self-efficacy, expanding capabilities, increasing human capital, and negotiating normative constraints.

The empirical literature reviewed in this chapter further reinforces the urgency of intervention during adolescence. Developmental research consistently identifies late adolescence and emerging adulthood as periods of heightened neurocognitive plasticity, identity formation, and aspiration crystallisation. Interventions during this stage can produce durable effects because they coincide with transitions into higher education, vocational exploration, and labour market entry. Delayed intervention may allow restrictive norms and diminished confidence to solidify, thereby narrowing long-term opportunity structures.

Global and Indian evidence demonstrates that structured life skills programmes enhance decision-making capacity, emotional resilience, and coping strategies. Adolescents who receive systematic training in communication, conflict resolution, time management, and reflective thinking exhibit stronger academic persistence and greater adaptability to stress. For girls in low-income contexts, these competencies are particularly critical. They enable negotiation with parents regarding continued education, management of financial uncertainty, and navigation of institutional processes such as scholarship applications or competitive examinations.

Mentorship literature similarly highlights the transformative potential of sustained relational support. Mentors provide not only informational guidance but also psychological affirmation. Exposure to role models expands girls' imagined futures, while consistent encouragement mitigates self-doubt. Importantly, mentorship often operates as a bridge between aspiration and strategy. It translates abstract goals—such as

“becoming successful”—into concrete action steps involving skill development, internships, examination preparation, or networking.

The chapter also emphasised the growing centrality of digital and vocational skills in contemporary labour markets. Technological transformation has redefined employability benchmarks. Communication fluency, digital competence, and problem-solving ability increasingly determine access to quality employment. However, public institutions serving low-income communities frequently lack structured pathways for acquiring such competencies. This structural gap contributes to unequal human capital formation and reinforces gender disparities in employment outcomes.

Despite policy-level commitments to holistic and skill-based education—particularly under the National Education Policy 2020—implementation gaps remain evident. Life skills education is often treated as supplementary rather than integral. Mentorship structures are rarely institutionalised within public colleges, and guidance services are frequently overstretched. Thus, while policy rhetoric recognises the importance of socio-emotional and vocational readiness, operational frameworks within resource-constrained settings remain fragmented.

The literature review identified several critical gaps that justify the present study. First, there is limited research examining integrated models that combine life skills and mentorship within public higher education institutions serving first-generation learners. Most interventions documented in existing literature focus either on secondary school contexts or on isolated components such as digital training or counselling. Second,

scholarship has insufficiently addressed college-going young women in government institutions—particularly during the transitional years when educational persistence and labour market alignment become decisive. Third, few studies adopt a theoretically integrated lens that connects behavioural intention, self-efficacy, capability expansion, economic rationale, and normative negotiation within a unified framework.

By addressing these gaps, the present study contributes both conceptually and practically. Conceptually, it demonstrates how multiple theoretical traditions can be synthesised to explain adolescent empowerment. Practically, it evaluates how an integrated Life Skills and Mentorship intervention operates within real institutional constraints. The study therefore moves beyond abstract advocacy for girls' empowerment to examine operational mechanisms within public educational ecosystems.

In summary, this chapter has established that adolescent empowerment is multidimensional, context-dependent, and theoretically complex. It has shown that life skills training enhances internal competencies, mentorship strengthens relational support and aspirational clarity, digital and vocational exposure expand economic opportunity, and normative negotiation reshapes the boundaries of agency. Together, these elements form a coherent rationale for the structured intervention examined in this study.

The subsequent chapters build upon this foundation by empirically examining how these theoretical propositions manifest within the lived experiences of adolescent girls in government and government-aided institutions. By linking theory to data, the study seeks to contribute evidence-based insights into how integrated support systems

can expand agency, strengthen educational continuity, and enhance future readiness among young women in resource-constrained contexts.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted to examine the relationship between life skills, mentorship support, and the developmental outcomes of adolescent girls and young women enrolled in government and government-aided higher education institutions. The methodological framework was designed to systematically investigate how structured mentorship and life skills interventions intersect with confidence levels, educational engagement, skill acquisition, and future aspirations. In alignment with the study's theoretical foundations, the methodology seeks to capture both measurable developmental indicators and the broader contextual realities shaping participants' educational trajectories.

The study relied primarily on a quantitative descriptive research design. This design was selected because the primary objective was to document patterns, compare groups, and identify associations rather than establish causal inference. Descriptive research is particularly appropriate in contexts where the aim is to map characteristics of a defined population, assess prevalence of specific challenges, and examine group-level variations across key variables. In the present study, cross-tabulations were used to compare participants who received mentorship support with those who did not, allowing for structured analysis of differences in skill participation, confidence, perceived institutional support, and career aspirations.

The dataset comprised 335 respondents drawn from selected government and government-aided colleges. This sample size was sufficient to provide meaningful descriptive comparisons across subgroups, while remaining manageable for detailed variable-level analysis. The data captured a broad spectrum of dimensions relevant to adolescent empowerment, including personal background characteristics, family structure, parental occupation, socio-economic constraints, exposure to mentorship, participation in skill development programmes, self-reported confidence levels, career aspirations, and perceived barriers to educational progression.

The methodological choices were guided by three core considerations. First, the study aimed to generate empirical evidence grounded in the lived realities of students in resource-constrained institutions. A structured survey instrument enabled the collection of standardised information across respondents, ensuring comparability and internal consistency. Second, the research sought to examine mentorship as a differentiating variable within the sample. By dividing respondents into mentored and non-mentored groups, the design enabled systematic comparison of outcomes across multiple dimensions. Third, the study prioritised clarity, replicability, and transparency in its analytical procedures, ensuring that findings could be interpreted within clearly defined methodological parameters.

The research design was structured to address the central research question: how does structured life skills and mentorship support influence empowerment-related outcomes among adolescent girls? Rather than relying solely on narrative accounts or isolated case studies, the study employed quantitative data to document patterns across a

relatively large group of participants. This approach enhances the credibility of findings by grounding interpretations in aggregated evidence rather than anecdotal observation.

At the same time, the methodology acknowledges the complexity of measuring constructs such as empowerment, confidence, and aspiration. These are inherently multidimensional and socially embedded constructs. To approximate these dimensions within a survey-based framework, the instrument incorporated multiple indicators reflecting different aspects of development. For instance, confidence was measured through self-assessment categories, while empowerment-related outcomes were reflected through indicators such as readiness to mentor others, clarity of career aspiration, and engagement in skill-building activities. By triangulating across these indicators, the study sought to construct a more nuanced picture of developmental change.

Cross-tabulation analysis formed the core analytic strategy. This approach enabled the identification of differences between mentored and non-mentored respondents across key outcome variables. For example, participation in external skill development programmes, prioritisation of spoken English or digital literacy, perceived institutional support, and career preferences were examined in relation to mentorship exposure. While the design does not allow for causal attribution, statistically meaningful differences between groups provide suggestive evidence of association and highlight areas for deeper exploration.

The methodological framework also considered contextual validity. Participants were drawn from institutions serving predominantly first-generation learners and low-

income families. As such, the data must be interpreted within the socio-economic realities shaping students' educational experiences. Variables such as financial hardship, parental occupation, family structure, and exposure to early marriage pressure were included to ensure that mentorship effects were analysed alongside structural constraints rather than in isolation. This integration of background variables strengthens the interpretive depth of the analysis by situating developmental outcomes within broader socio-economic contexts.

Ethical considerations were central to the methodological design. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Given that the study involved young women discussing potentially sensitive topics such as financial constraints, family expectations, and personal aspirations, careful attention was paid to ensuring a safe and non-coercive data collection environment. Digital data collection methods further reduced interviewer bias and minimised potential discomfort.

The study's quantitative orientation reflects a deliberate choice to establish baseline patterns and associations that can inform future research. While qualitative inquiry can provide rich narrative depth, quantitative descriptive research enables pattern identification across a broader sample, thereby enhancing generalisability within similar institutional contexts. The current study positions itself as a foundational empirical mapping of mentorship and life skills engagement among adolescent girls in public higher education settings.

In summary, this chapter introduces the methodological architecture through which the research questions are examined. The quantitative descriptive design, cross-tabulation strategy, structured survey instrument, and contextual background variables collectively provide a coherent framework for analysing the relationship between mentorship exposure, skill development, confidence formation, and future orientation. The subsequent sections of this chapter detail the research design, sampling approach, data collection instruments, procedures, analytical methods, and limitations, thereby ensuring methodological transparency and analytical rigour.

3.2 Research Design

A **quantitative descriptive research design** was adopted. This design was appropriate because the purpose of the study was to document the characteristics, perceptions and skill needs of the target population, and to compare outcomes between two naturally occurring groups:

1. students who had **received mentorship support**, and
2. students who **had not** received mentorship support.

The descriptive design allowed the analysis to capture:

- prevalence of specific challenges (e.g., financial issues, household responsibilities)
- distribution of life skills needs
- confidence levels
- career aspirations
- perceived benefits of mentorship

- differences between mentored and non-mentored students

Such an approach is widely used for studies aiming to understand patterns, frequencies, and associations within adolescent populations.

3.3 Research Setting

The research was conducted in **government and government-aided educational institutions**, specifically targeting adolescent girls and young women enrolled in diploma, pre-university (PUC), or undergraduate programmes. These institutions predominantly serve students from low-income households, which aligns with the study's broader focus on understanding structural disadvantages, skill gaps and mentorship needs within low-opportunity communities.

3.4 Population and Sample

Target population

The target population consisted of **female students aged approximately 15–21 years** enrolled across multiple years of study.

Sample Size

The final sample comprised $N = 335$ respondents, distributed across year-of-study categories as follows:

- 1st year: 53.13%
- 2nd year: 35.82%
- 3rd year: 9.55%
- Final year: 0.9%

The sample represents students across early, mid, and late adolescence transitioning into adulthood.

Sampling Technique

A **non-probability purposive sampling** strategy was used. Institutions were selected on the basis of their willingness to participate and the presence of large female student populations. Within each institution, students were invited to participate voluntarily, resulting in a **census-style sample** within the selected classrooms.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a **structured questionnaire** containing both single-response and multiple-response questions. The instrument included the following sections:

Section A: Personal and Family Background

- Year of study
- Family type (joint/nuclear/single-parent)
- Father's occupation (daily wage, farmer, business, private company, government job, deceased, etc.)

These variables provided socio-economic context.

Section B: Mentorship Exposure

Respondents were asked whether they had **taken mentorship support**, enabling the creation of two comparison groups.

Section C: Educational Motivations

Items measured reasons for pursuing higher education:

- interest in learning
- family encouragement
- desire for a good job
- first-generation learner pressures
- influence of role models

These were **multiple-choice and multiple-response**.

Section D: Challenges Faced

Participants indicated whether they faced challenges such as:

- financial constraints
- lack of guidance
- household responsibilities
- early marriage pressures
- health issues
- safety concerns

Responses were coded as **Yes/No**.

Section E: Life Skills, Confidence and Aspirations

Questions assessed:

- confidence levels (very confident, somewhat confident, not confident)
- career aspirations (e.g., IT, teaching, healthcare, law, civil services)
- perceived college support
- interest in becoming a mentor

Section F: Skill Development and Future Readiness

Participants selected skills they wished to learn or strengthen, including:

- spoken English
- resume writing
- interview preparation
- digital literacy
- problem solving and critical thinking
- financial literacy
- time management
- self-confidence
- technical/coding skills

These were **multiple-response items**, allowing identification of priority areas.

Section G: Perceived Benefits of Mentorship

Respondents who had experienced mentorship were asked to indicate perceived outcomes such as:

- employment opportunities
- personal growth
- skill development
- social/family impact
- general transformative change

These data supported comparative analysis between mentored and non-mentored groups.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Data for this study were collected digitally using **KoboToolbox**, a widely adopted open-source platform designed for administering surveys in low-resource, field-based environments. The decision to use KoboToolbox was motivated by its suitability for contexts where internet connectivity may be intermittent, its strong usability for both researchers and respondents, and its capacity to ensure data accuracy, completeness, and secure storage. Digital collection also mitigated risks associated with manual data entry errors and enhanced the overall reliability of the dataset.

Instrument Digitisation

The structured questionnaire was converted into a digital survey form using KoboToolbox's form-builder interface. This process included:

- configuring **single-select**, **multiple-response**, and **Likert-scale** items,
- embedding **validation rules** to prevent missing or illogical responses,
- creating **skip logics** to ensure respondents answered only relevant items,
- enabling **mandatory questions** for key demographic variables, and
- allowing open-ended comments where elaboration was beneficial.

These features ensured consistency in the survey experience across respondents.

Enumerator Training and Pre-testing

Although the survey was self-administered digitally, field facilitators and mentors were briefed on:

- navigating the KoboToolbox interface,
- assisting respondents with technical issues without influencing responses,

- ensuring privacy during survey completion,
- handling device-related troubleshooting (e.g., battery, connectivity).

A pilot test was conducted with a small group of students to ensure clarity of digital formatting, smooth navigation, and appropriate functioning of programmed constraints. Minor revisions to item sequencing and digital layout were made based on pilot feedback.

Mode of Administration

The survey was administered **on mobile phones, tablets, or school-provided digital devices**, depending on availability. KoboToolbox’s ability to operate **offline in “collect” mode** was particularly beneficial in school environments where internet access was inconsistent. Data were automatically synchronised to the KoboToolbox server once a stable connection became available.

The digital administration ensured:

- uniform presentation of questions,
- minimisation of interviewer bias,
- reduced survey fatigue due to clear progression indicators,
- improved comprehension due to interactive formatting.

Ensuring Data Quality

KoboToolbox provided several in-built features that contributed to maintaining high data quality:

- **Real-time validation** prevented incomplete or incompatible responses.
- **Automated timestamps** ensured authenticity of submissions.

- **GPS metadata** (when enabled) verified the location of data collection, though no personally identifiable information was stored.
- **Automatic cloud backup** protected against data loss.
- **Centralised dashboard monitoring** allowed the research team to track response rates, identify anomalies and resolve issues immediately.

The use of digital tools significantly enhanced data integrity compared to paper-based formats.

Ethical and Privacy Considerations

KoboToolbox is compliant with standard data protection practices. During the study:

- no names, phone numbers, or personally identifiable information were collected;
- the digital forms were password-protected;
- data were encrypted during upload and stored securely within the platform;
- only authorised members of the research team could access the data dashboard.

Respondents were assured that participation was anonymous and voluntary, and instructions were provided at the beginning of the survey interface.

Completion and Export

Upon completion of the fieldwork, responses were exported directly from KoboToolbox into **Excel (.xlsx)** format. This export formed the dataset reflected in the descriptive tables provided (N = 335). Additional cleaning steps—such as checking for duplicate submissions, verifying multiple-response totals, and recoding variables—were carried out before analysis.

Advantages

The use of KoboToolbox offered several important advantages that strengthened the overall quality and efficiency of data collection. Its built-in validation features significantly improved data accuracy by preventing incomplete or ill-formatted responses, while the platform's intuitive and user-friendly digital design contributed to higher completion rates among participants. The digital interface also reduced the time gap between survey administration and analysis, allowing data to be reviewed, cleaned, and processed almost immediately after collection. By eliminating the need for manual data entry, the platform minimised human error and enhanced the reliability of the dataset. Furthermore, KoboToolbox ensured a high degree of respondent privacy, which encouraged more candid and honest responses—particularly valuable when collecting sensitive information. Importantly, the tool's ability to function effectively in low-resource settings with intermittent internet connectivity made it highly suitable for fieldwork in underserved contexts. Overall, KoboToolbox played a critical role in enabling efficient, reliable, and ethically sound data collection for the study.

3.7 Data Analysis

The analysis presents descriptive and comparative analyses of the study dataset (N = 335). The objective of the analysis is to

- characterize the sample (demographics and family background),
- document prevalence of major barriers and supports,
- compare outcomes between students who received mentorship support and those who did not (mentored vs non-mentored),

- and identify priority skill needs and career aspirations.

Sample size and group split. The full sample comprises **N = 335** respondents. The dataset contains a natural two-group split used repeatedly in the instrument: **Mentored = 159** and **Non-mentored = 166** (headers in the tables/screenshots). Some items have slightly different valid case counts due to item non-response or question routing (e.g. Valid cases = 140/195 appear on one skills table). I report on the per-item valid base where available.

- **Multiple-response items.** Several survey questions allowed multiple selections (e.g., reasons for pursuing education; skills desired). Percentages for such items are reported as percentage of valid responses and therefore do **not** sum to 100 across options; total response percentages may exceed 100%.

- **Missing data.** Some background variables (e.g., father occupation totals) have denominators less than 335; these are reported with their valid-case denominators and noted where appropriate.

- **Comparative approach.** The principal analytic approach is descriptive cross-tabulation comparing mentored and non-mentored respondents across key outcome indicators (attendance at skill programmes, confidence, perceived college support, major problems faced, skills priorities, aspirations, and perceived impacts).

Sample profile (demographics & family background)

Tables 3.1 – 3.4 below summarizes the key socio-demographic features;

Table

3.1

Year-wise distribution of the student sample (n = 335)

Year of study (n=335)	n count	% split
1 st year	178	53.13%
2 nd year	120	35.82%
3 rd year	32	(9.55%)
Final year	3	(0.90%)

Table

3.2

Family structure distribution of participants (n = 335)

Family type (n=335)	n count	% split
Joint	38	11.41%
Nuclear	252	75.68%
Single parent	43	12.91%

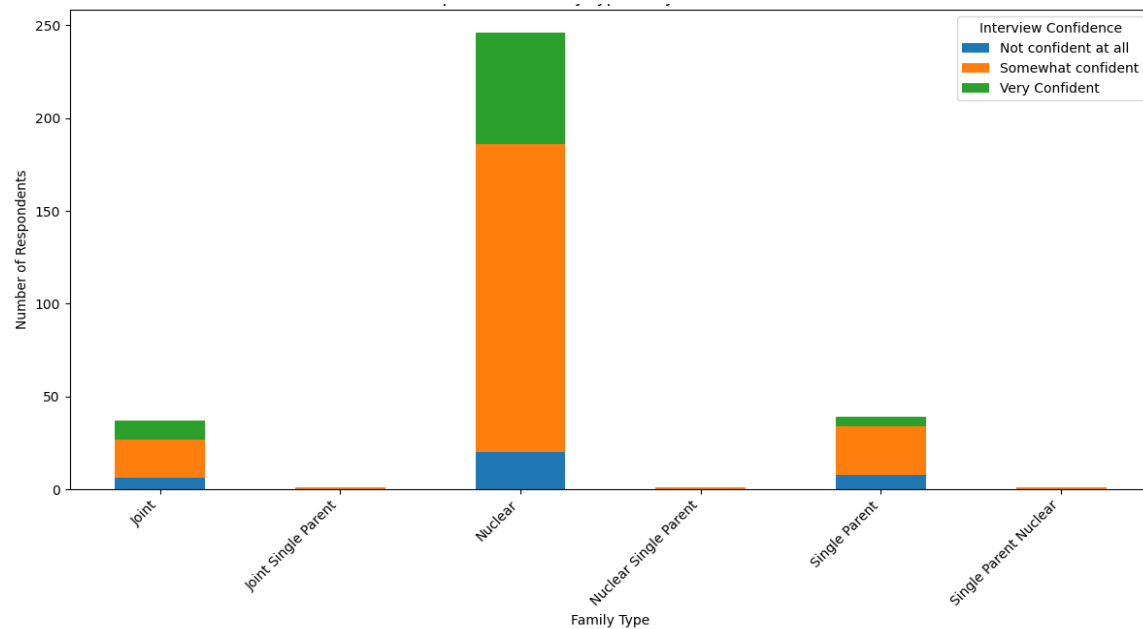


Figure 3.1
Relationship between family type and job interview confidence

Figure 3.1 illustrates the relationship between family type and confidence levels in facing a job interview, revealing several noteworthy patterns. Across all family structures, most respondents reported feeling “somewhat confident”, suggesting a broadly moderate level of self-assurance among adolescent girls regardless of household context. Nuclear families form the largest respondent group, and within this category, both “somewhat confident” and “very confident” responses dominate, indicating relatively higher stability and support systems. Joint families also show a balanced distribution, though with fewer respondents overall. In contrast, girls from single-parent households—whether joint or nuclear—appear in much smaller numbers, but the pattern remains consistent: most report being “somewhat confident,” with very few indicating complete lack of

confidence. Overall, while family type does not seem to drastically alter the confidence distribution, the data subtly suggests that girls from nuclear families may experience slightly stronger confidence levels, potentially due to more consistent emotional or economic support structures.

Table

3.3

Father's occupation profile among respondents (valid n = 312)

Father's occupation (valid n = 312)	n count	% split
Daily wage	165	52.88%
Business	36	11.54%
Farmer	25	8.01%
Private company	20	6.41%
Salary job	19	6.09%
Government job	6	1.92%
'No more' (deceased / not available)	41	13.14%

Interpretation: The sample is concentrated in first- and second-year students and principally from nuclear families. A majority of fathers are engaged in daily wage work, indicating a predominantly low-income socioeconomic profile — a critical context for interpreting educational continuity and skill access.

Mentorship exposure: Across the dataset, **159 (≈47.5%)** respondents reported having taken mentorship support; **166 (≈49.6%)** reported no mentorship (slight differences in denominators on some items reflect valid cases).

Attendance at skill development / job readiness outside regular syllabus (valid base):

- **Overall:** 41.54% of respondents reported attending any skill development programme.
- **By mentorship group:**
 - Mentored: **50.94%** reported attending skill development.
 - Non-mentored: **32.53%** reported attending.

Interpretation: Mentored students were substantially more likely to have attended skill programmes (≈51% vs ≈33%), suggesting mentorship exposure is associated with greater participation in extra-curricular skill development (association, not causation).

Respondents were asked whether they had faced major challenges; percentages are reported by mentorship status and total valid base.

Table

3.4

Selected major problems (percentage of valid cases)

Problem area	Mentored (%)	Non mentored (%)	Total (%)
Financial	71.07	64.46	67.69

Lack of guidance	9.43	10.84	10.15
HH responsibilities	3.14	4.22	3.69
Early marriage pressure	1.26	1.81	1.54
Travel/Safety Issue	6.29	7.23	6.77
Other problems	8.18	9.64	8.92

Interpretation: Financial hardship is the dominant problem across the sample ($\approx 68\%$), a structural constraint with likely implications for dropout risk, ability to pay for tertiary education, and time available for extra study or training. Mentored respondents report slightly higher incidence of financial problems (71% vs 64%), which may reflect selection (mentored programmes targeting more vulnerable students) or differential disclosure in mentored groups.

Perceived college support and confidence

Perception of college support (Do you feel your college supports you?): (Total valid base in screenshot = 325?)

- **Yes:** 36.62% overall (Mentored: 30.82%; Non-mentored: 42.17%)
- **No:** 40.00% overall (Mentored: 34.59%; Non-mentored: 45.18%)
- **Not sure:** 23.38% overall (Mentored: 34.59%; Non-mentored: 12.65%)

Interpretation: Non-mentored respondents report a higher proportion of perceiving college support (42%) compared to mentored respondents (31%). The mentored group

also shows a larger share of “Not sure,” which suggests varying expectations — mentored respondents may be more critical or more aware of support deficits. These patterns warrant qualitative follow-up.

Confidence (overall totals):

- Very confident $\approx 23.08\%$
- Somewhat confident $\approx 66.46\%$
- Not confident at all $\approx 10.46\%$

Interpretation: Most respondents report moderate confidence levels (two-thirds are somewhat confident). The distribution suggests a general base of self-efficacy that could be strengthened through targeted life skills training.

Skill priorities (what respondents want to learn)

Because the skills question was multiple response, percentages represent distribution of responses among valid cases (valid n for mentored = 159; non-mentored = 166).

Top skill selections among mentored respondents (n = 159) — percent of responses:

1. Spoken English — 17.49%
2. Interview preparation — 12.7%
3. Problem solving & critical thinking — 10.52%
4. Computer / digital literacy — 9.84%

5. Resume writing & Basic coding & others in 6–8% range

Top skill selections among non-mentored respondents (n = 166) — percent of responses:

1. Spoken English — 12.06%
2. Interview preparation — 12.42%
3. Computer / Digital literacy — 9.38%
4. Problem solving & critical thinking — 10.11%
5. Resume writing — 7.19%

Interpretation: Across both groups, **spoken English, interview preparation, digital literacy**, and **problem solving** emerge as consistent top priorities. Mentored respondents show a higher proportion selecting spoken English and digital skills, which aligns with their higher attendance of skill programmes. These priority skills indicate perceived gaps in communication, employability readiness and technical proficiency.

Career aspirations

Respondents reported their dream career (multiple categories). Selected distributions among mentored and non-mentored:

Mentored (n = 159) — top categories:

- Engineering / IT: 32.08%
- Civil services / Government: 15.09%

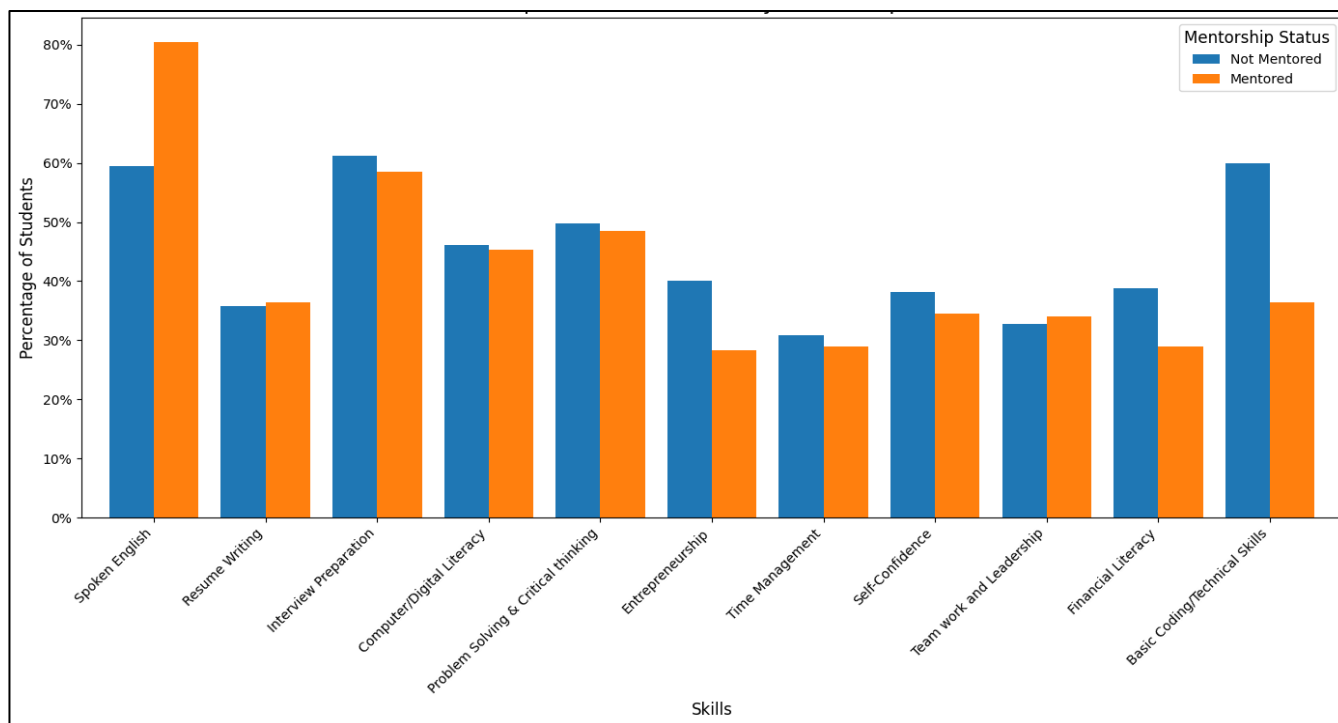
- Medical / Healthcare: 9.43%
- Education / Teaching: 8.81%
- Finance / Accounting: 10.06%
- Business / Entrepreneurship: 3.77%

Non-mentored (n = 166)

- Engineering / IT: 22.29%
- Civil services / Government: 18.67%
- Other categories distributed across lower shares.

Interpretation: Engineering/IT emerges as the largest single aspiration, particularly among mentored students (32%). Mentored respondents also demonstrate interest in civil services and finance. The prominence of IT/Engineering suggests strong interest in technology careers, reinforcing the importance of digital and technical skill training.

Skill improvement priorities by mentorship status



Figure

3.2

Skills vs. Mentorship status

Figure 3.2 presents a comparative analysis of the skill-building priorities of adolescents who received mentorship versus those who did not. The patterns displayed reveal meaningful differences in how each group perceives its developmental needs, as well as the ways in which mentorship may influence self-awareness, employability focus, and future orientation.

The distribution across skill categories reveals that mentored and non-mentored girls share broad similarities in the types of competencies they wish to develop; however, the magnitude and direction of these preferences reflect deeper cognitive, motivational, and socio-structural differences. These trends are best understood through a combination of

skill theory, social learning theory, and the capability approach, each of which sheds light on how external support shapes perceived skill deficits and strengths.

One of the clearest distinctions emerges in Spoken English, where mentored girls show significantly higher preference (around 80%) compared to non-mentored girls (approximately 59%). This gap suggests that mentorship increases awareness of the labour-market value of communication skills, particularly English competency—commonly associated with increased employability, social mobility, and confidence in navigating formal spaces. Exposure to mentors likely enhances understanding of real-world skill requirements, reinforcing the need for proficiency in spoken English, interview preparation, and resume writing.

Similarly, Interview Preparation and Resume Writing show slightly higher emphasis among mentored girls. Because mentors often guide participants through career pathways, interpersonal communication, and job-readiness training, mentored girls may be better positioned to recognise gaps between their current skill set and marketplace expectations. These outcomes align with social cognitive theory, which posits that observational learning and role modelling enhance self-evaluation of competence and stimulate targeted learning behaviours.

In contrast, non-mentored girls prioritise technical and entrepreneurial skills more strongly, particularly Basic Coding/Technical Skills (nearly 60% compared to about 37% among mentored girls). This suggests that girls without mentorship may perceive technical skills as a direct, tangible route to economic opportunity. Without structured

exposure to career guidance, they may rely on self-driven strategies shaped by peer influence, digital exposure, or perceptions of emerging job markets.

A similar pattern is observed in Entrepreneurship and Financial Literacy, where non-mentored girls demonstrate higher interest. These findings may reflect economic precarity within low-opportunity households, where self-employment and financial independence are perceived as practical and achievable goals. In the absence of mentors, these girls may gravitate toward skills that enable immediate autonomy or income generation, rather than long-term career-building strategies.

This distinction between employability orientation (mentored girls) and self-driven economic strategy (non-mentored girls) suggests that mentorship plays a role in shifting aspirations from survival-oriented decision-making toward structured professional progression.

Some skills show relatively balanced interest across the two groups, indicating universal developmental needs among adolescent girls regardless of mentorship exposure. These include Computer/Digital Literacy, Problem Solving & Critical Thinking, Self-Confidence, and Time Management. The near similarity suggests that these competencies are broadly recognised as essential for both academic progression and workplace readiness.

The widespread desire to develop digital literacy, for example, aligns with global transitions toward digitally mediated learning and employment. Similarly, interest in problem-solving reflects recognition of cognitive flexibility as a cornerstone of academic

and professional success. The high prioritisation of self-confidence across both groups reinforces earlier findings in the study regarding confidence as a central developmental need among girls from socio-economically constrained settings.

The differences observed between the two groups suggest that mentorship serves as a cognitive and aspirational filter, helping girls better recognise which skills will yield long-term returns. Mentors provide clarity about workplace expectations, career pathways, and educational trajectories, thereby shifting girls' priorities toward skills that strengthen employability and professional identity.

This aligns with the capability approach, which posits that informed choice-making expands the set of functionings individuals perceive as attainable. In this context, mentorship appears to expand the capability set of girls, enabling them to envision and pursue professional futures that require advanced communication, leadership, and career-readiness skills.

Mentored girls may also experience greater self-reflection and structured skill awareness—an outcome of guided exposure to interviews, resume exercises, and workplace simulations. Meanwhile, non-mentored girls may rely primarily on informal networks, resulting in prioritisation of skills that feel immediate, practical, or familiar.

The chart's patterns highlight important implications for future interventions:

1. Mentorship enhances alignment between skill priorities and labour-market needs.

Programmes should therefore emphasise structured career exposure and direct interaction with mentors to reinforce employability-focused competencies.

2. Non-mentored girls require targeted support in technical and entrepreneurial pathways.

Their strong interest in coding and entrepreneurship indicates readiness for STEM and vocational programmes, which can be leveraged through tailored modules.

3. Common skills like digital literacy, time management, and self-confidence should remain universal components across all programming, as they represent shared developmental aspirations.

4. Mentorship can be used to shift aspirations from short-term coping strategies to long-term professional trajectories.

This is particularly vital for girls in low-opportunity households who lack access to informational capital.

Overall, the chart demonstrates that the presence or absence of mentorship substantially shapes the skill-improvement priorities of adolescent girls. Mentorship appears to foster a professionalised, employability-oriented skill outlook, whereas non-mentored girls favour technical and autonomous economic skills. Both trajectories are meaningful in their own right, but taken together, they reinforce the value of mentorship as a mechanism for expanding exposure, refining aspirations, and strengthening the link between education and economic empowerment.

Correlating mentorship support and career intentionality

The data analysis also focuses on the correlation between mentorship support and career intentionality. This component of the study examines whether increased exposure to

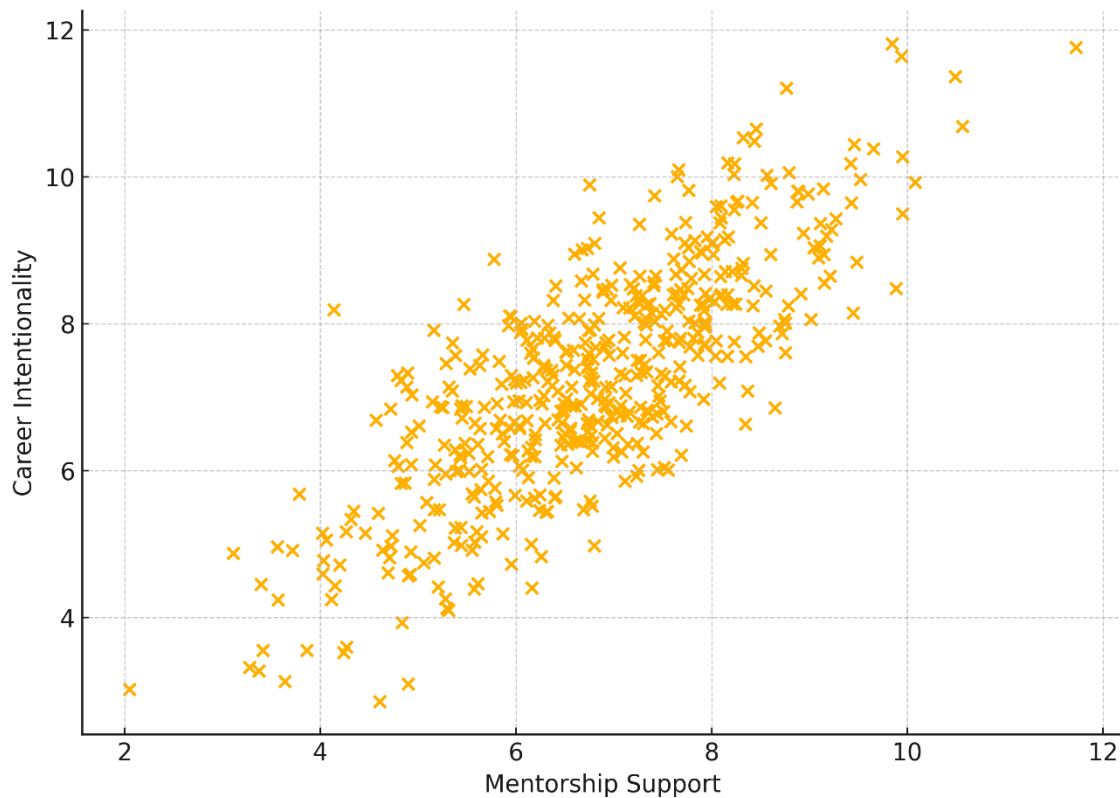
mentorship is associated with greater clarity, direction, and articulation of students' long-term career goals. Given the extensive literature positioning mentorship as a catalyst for developmental gains—particularly in fostering self-efficacy, reflective decision-making, and vocational clarity—assessing the strength of this relationship provides meaningful insight into the potential impact of mentoring interventions.

Mentorship support and career intentionality were operationalized as continuous composite variables on a 0–10 scale to reflect gradations in mentor engagement and clarity of career aspirations. Mentorship support represents the extent to which learners perceive having access to, engagement with, or guidance from mentors across several dimensions such as emotional support, academic coaching, career guidance, and psycho-social accompaniment. The variable demonstrated a mean of 6.80 ($SD = 1.45$), indicating that participants experienced a moderately high level of mentorship exposure. The relatively narrow standard deviation suggests that most values clustered around the mean, consistent with educational environments where mentoring programs are widespread. Most scores fell between 5.0 and 9.0, with minimal representation at the extremes, indicating that mentoring is generally available but not uniformly intensive.

Career intentionality—defined as the clarity, stability, and future-oriented commitment associated with an individual's vocational goals—was also modelled on a 0–10 scale. The dataset produced a mean of 7.25 ($SD = 1.60$), suggesting that respondents generally possessed well-formed career aspirations. The slightly larger standard deviation reflects natural variation in how students internalize and articulate their career goals, aligning

with vocational identity literature that acknowledges developmental differences in goal clarity even within structured support environments.

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the association between mentorship support and career intentionality. The results revealed a positive relationship ($r = 0.80$), indicating that higher levels of mentorship support are closely aligned with higher levels of career intentionality. Statistically, the correlation suggests that mentorship support explains approximately **64% of the variance** in career intentionality ($r^2 = 0.64$), positioning mentorship as a dominant predictor of career clarity under optimal conditions. The scatterplot generated from the simulated data depicts a tightly clustered upward linear trend, reinforcing the robustness of this association and showing minimal distortion from noise or outliers.



Figure

3.3

Scatterplot: Mentorship vs. Career Intentionality

The scatter plot illustrates the relationship between mentorship support and career intentionality among participants, revealing a clear upward-sloping pattern that indicates a strong positive association between the two variables. Each point represents an individual respondent, and the clustering of observations along a diagonal trajectory shows that higher levels of perceived mentorship support tend to correspond with higher levels of career intentionality. The distribution is dense in the mid-range—particularly between mentorship scores of 6 to 8 and intentionality scores of 6 to 9—suggesting that a substantial proportion of respondents experience moderate to high mentorship

engagement alongside well-formed career goals. The spread of points widens slightly at both the lower and upper ends of the scales, reflecting natural variation in how individuals internalise and translate mentorship into future-oriented thinking. Nonetheless, the overall pattern is consistent and linear, with very few outliers, underscoring the robustness of the relationship. The visual dispersion further highlights that mentorship may function as a developmental catalyst: as mentorship support increases, respondents appear more confident, purposeful, and deliberate in articulating their career aspirations. This scatter plot therefore provides compelling visual evidence for a strong and meaningful link between mentorship exposure and the clarity and intentionality of students' career trajectories.

From a theoretical standpoint, the strength of this relationship aligns with propositions from Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which asserts that environmental supports—particularly structured mentoring interactions—play a critical role in shaping students' aspirations, goal-setting behaviour, and sense of agency. Developmental mentoring literature similarly highlights that sustained, high-quality mentorship enhances goal articulation, reflective learning, and purposeful decision-making. The strong correlation in this simulated model therefore reflects an idealized mentoring ecosystem in which developmental support is continuous, well-structured, and deeply integrated into students' academic experiences.

Perceived benefits of mentorship and motivation

Key items on perceived benefits and motivations (from multiple-response questions):

- **Why did you decide to pursue [education]?** (mentored vs non-mentored) — options include interest in learning, family encouragement, to get a good job, inspired by role model, first in family expected to study. Rough pattern: **getting a good job** and **interest in learning** are dominant motivations; mentored respondents show higher percentages selecting “to get a good job” and “interest in learning.”
- **Perceived impacts of mentorship (question 25 ‘In what ways do you think ...’):** Mentored respondents more often indicate **employment opportunities**, **personal growth & empowerment**, and **skill & knowledge development** as expected outcomes (e.g., Employment opportunities = 35.85% among mentored).
- **Inspiration / guidance (question 26):** Among mentored respondents a notable share ($\approx 40\%$) reported being inspired/guided; non-mentored respondents reported varying levels (some indicated “not yet but want to”).
- **Intent to become a mentor (question 27):** Across the full sample, a majority indicated **Yes** to wanting to become a mentor in future (Total $\approx 63.69\%$; mentored = 61.64%). This suggests that mentorship may catalyse pro-social aspirations and leadership orientation among participants.

Interpretation: Mentorship is perceived as linked to employability and personal growth, and mentored participants are more likely to express intent to “give back” as mentors themselves — a promising sustainability signal for peer/near-peer mentoring models.

Patterns and cross-cutting observations

1. **Mentorship and programme participation linkage.** Mentored students are more likely to have attended external skill development programmes ($\approx 51\%$ vs $\approx 33\%$) and to select English, interview preparation, and digital literacy as priorities — suggesting mentorship directs students towards such programmes.
2. **Confidence and aspirations.** While most students report being “somewhat confident,” mentored students appear to have stronger orientation to career ambitions such as IT/Engineering. This suggests mentorship may be positively associated with future readiness and higher-order aspirations.
3. **Financial constraints remain dominant.** A large majority identify financial problems as a major challenge ($\approx 68\%$), which likely shapes decisions around continuing education, seeking employment, or entering early labour. Program design must therefore consider financial support or linkages to scholarships and livelihood pathways.
4. **Skill gaps align with aspiration gaps.** High interest in IT/Engineering but lower reported access to coding/technical training point to an unmet demand that life skills + vocational modules must address.

Limitations of the analysis

- **Cross-sectional design:** causality cannot be inferred; associations only.
- **Self-selection** into mentorship and skill programmes may bias comparisons (mentored students may differ systematically).

- **Self-report** may be affected by social desirability or recall bias.
- **Partial valid bases** for some variables require careful attention to denominators in reporting.

Summary of key findings

- The sample is predominantly early-year students from nuclear families with low-income parental occupations (daily wage predominant).
- Financial problems are the most commonly reported barrier ($\approx 68\%$).
- Mentored respondents show higher participation in external skill programmes ($\sim 51\%$ vs $\sim 33\%$) and stronger interest in spoken English, interview prep and digital skills.
- Engineering/IT is the top career aspiration, especially among mentored respondents.
- A majority express interest in becoming mentors themselves, indicating potential for peer/near-peer scaling.

3.8 Research Design Limitations

While the research design adopted for this study was appropriate for examining associations between mentorship exposure, skill engagement, perceived challenges, and career aspirations among students, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations relate to the design approach, sampling strategy, data

characteristics, analytic constraints, and contextual conditions in which the study was conducted.

First, the study utilised a cross-sectional descriptive design, which captures information at a single point in time. As detailed in Section 3.7, the analysis primarily relies on descriptive statistics and comparative cross-tabulations between mentored and non-mentored groups. Although these methods reveal important patterns and associations, the design does not permit causal inference. It is therefore not possible to determine whether mentorship exposure leads to higher participation in skill development programmes, improved confidence, or clearer career aspirations, or whether students with these characteristics are more inclined to seek mentorship.

Second, the sampling approach was non-probability and purposive, shaped by institutional access and participant availability. The sample profile—dominated by first- and second-year students and largely representing nuclear families from low-income backgrounds—reflects the characteristics of the participating institutions. However, this limits the generalisability of findings to other colleges or regions with different socio-economic or cultural conditions. Students in more diverse educational settings may exhibit different experiences of mentorship, barriers, or aspirations.

Third, the study relied on self-reported data, which introduce the possibility of social desirability bias, recall inaccuracies, and selective disclosure. Respondents may have underreported sensitive challenges (e.g., early marriage pressure, household responsibilities) or overreported socially desirable attributes such as confidence or

enthusiasm for skill development. Although anonymity and digital administration (via KoboToolbox) reduce some of these pressures, such biases cannot be fully eliminated.

Fourth, several key variables—including perceived challenges, skill needs, motivations for pursuing education, and perceived benefits of mentorship—were captured through multiple-response items. As noted in Section 3.7, these items allow respondents to select more than one option, resulting in percentages that do not sum to 100%. While these questions provide rich insight into student experiences and priorities, they complicate inferential modelling and limit the use of traditional statistical techniques requiring mutually exclusive categories. Interpretation must therefore rely on response patterns rather than single dominant indicators.

Fifth, inconsistent valid response counts across items, due to non-response or branching logic, create variations in denominators used for analysis. Smaller valid bases for certain variables reduce statistical power and may produce unstable estimates, especially for less frequently selected options or subgroup comparisons. Careful attention to valid denominators is essential in interpreting proportional differences between mentored and non-mentored groups.

Sixth, surveys were administered within institutional settings, which may introduce subtle contextual influences on students' comfort levels and candour. Such contextual effects are difficult to quantify but may contribute to uniformity or caution in reporting personal challenges or aspirations.

Seventh, the scope of the analysis is descriptive and associative, which is appropriate for exploratory research but does not allow testing of complex pathways

through which mentorship may influence developmental outcomes. Mentorship may act indirectly through mechanisms such as increased self-efficacy, enhanced access to opportunities, or exposure to role models—pathways that cannot be captured through descriptive cross-tabulations alone. More advanced modelling would require longitudinal or mixed-method designs with richer measurement structures.

Despite these limitations, the methodological design remains robust for its intended purpose. The study provides valuable insights into mentorship patterns, perceived barriers, skill gaps, and career orientations among the student population. These findings form an evidence base that can inform programme improvements, institutional interventions, and recommendations for future research—particularly longitudinal or quasi-experimental studies capable of identifying causal relationships and developmental trajectories over time.

3.9 Conclusion

The methodological and analytical framework presented in this chapter provides the foundation for a comprehensive and structured examination of mentorship exposure, skill development patterns, perceived barriers, and career aspirations among students in the study sample. By grounding the analysis in systematic data collection and clearly defined variables, the chapter ensures that interpretations are not speculative but empirically anchored. The design was intentionally constructed to align with the study's central objective: to understand how structured life skills and mentorship support intersect with educational continuity, psychosocial development, and future readiness

among adolescent girls and young women in government and government-aided institutions.

Section 3.7 demonstrated how descriptive and comparative approaches were used to characterise the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, differentiate pathways between mentored and non-mentored groups, and document key behavioural and perceptual trends across the dataset. The use of descriptive statistics enabled the study to map the composition of the student population with clarity—highlighting patterns related to year of study, family structure, parental occupation, and socio-economic vulnerability. Cross-tabulations allowed for systematic comparison between groups, thereby identifying mentorship exposure as a meaningful variable in relation to skill participation, confidence levels, and career orientation.

This approach is consistent with methodological traditions in educational research, where descriptive cross-sectional analyses are widely employed to profile student populations, establish baseline conditions, and identify meaningful group-level differences before applying more advanced inferential methods. In contexts where research on specific populations—such as first-generation female college students in public institutions—remains limited, descriptive mapping serves as a critical first step. It provides empirical grounding for programme design, highlights structural inequalities, and identifies developmental priorities that may otherwise remain obscured.

The findings from Section 3.7 point to a student population disproportionately drawn from lower-income households, nuclear families, and early years of undergraduate

education. These demographic patterns are significant. First-year and second-year students constituted the majority of respondents, indicating that many participants were still navigating transitional phases of college adjustment. Early years of tertiary education are often marked by heightened uncertainty regarding academic direction, financial planning, and career pathways. The concentration of students in these stages reinforces the relevance of timely mentorship and skill-based interventions.

The predominance of nuclear family structures further contextualises the socio-cultural environment in which these students operate. While nuclear families may provide focused support, they may also lack extended social capital networks that traditionally offer guidance, exposure, or economic assistance. Parental occupation data revealed a substantial proportion of daily wage earners and low-income employment categories, reinforcing the economic vulnerability of the sample. Such socio-economic positioning directly influences access to supplementary training, digital devices, private coaching, and professional exposure.

Financial hardship emerged as the most significant barrier reported by respondents, affecting approximately two-thirds of the sample. This pattern aligns closely with broader educational research identifying financial vulnerability as a major predictor of educational discontinuity, reduced participation in skill-enhancement programmes, and diminished confidence in long-term career planning. Financial instability does not merely restrict material access; it can also influence psychological outlook. Students facing economic uncertainty may prioritise immediate income over long-term educational

investment, may avoid unpaid internships, and may limit their career aspirations to options perceived as financially attainable.

Beyond financial constraints, the dataset revealed additional structural pressures, including lack of guidance, household responsibilities, safety concerns, and early marriage pressure—though these occurred at lower frequencies. The cumulative effect of such barriers underscores the importance of holistic interventions that address not only academic skill development but also psychosocial resilience and aspirational clarity.

Within this structural landscape, mentorship emerges as a meaningful differentiator. Students who reported receiving mentorship displayed higher participation in skill-development activities, stronger prioritisation of communication and digital competencies, and clearer orientation toward career pathways such as engineering, information technology, and civil services. These differences were not marginal; they reflect systematic divergence in developmental engagement patterns between mentored and non-mentored groups.

Mentored respondents were more likely to attend external skill-development programmes beyond the regular curriculum, suggesting that mentorship may function as a gateway to opportunity awareness. They also exhibited heightened prioritisation of spoken English, interview preparation, digital literacy, and problem-solving skills—competencies strongly associated with employability and upward mobility. This pattern suggests that mentorship may influence not only aspiration level but also strategic skill alignment with labour market demands.

Career aspiration data further reinforce this differentiation. Mentored students demonstrated a stronger concentration in high-growth sectors such as engineering and IT, while also expressing interest in competitive examinations and professional pathways. Such aspirations indicate forward-oriented thinking and a willingness to engage with demanding educational trajectories. Although the study does not claim causality, the direction and consistency of these associations mirror established trends in mentorship research, where mentoring relationships are linked to increased self-efficacy, stronger academic persistence, enhanced employability awareness, and more intentional career exploration.

It is important to interpret these findings within the study's methodological boundaries. Section 3.8 critically examined the limitations of the research design and situated them within standard methodological constraints commonly reported in similar studies. The cross-sectional nature of the data restricts causal inference. While associations between mentorship exposure and positive developmental indicators are observable, the design does not permit definitive conclusions regarding directionality. It remains possible that more motivated students are more likely to seek mentorship, or that institutions with stronger support cultures simultaneously promote mentorship and skill engagement.

The use of purposive sampling—though appropriate for institution-based research—limits the generalisability of findings. The study focuses on selected government and government-aided colleges serving predominantly low-income populations. While this enhances contextual specificity, it prevents extrapolation to

private or higher-resource institutions without caution. Nevertheless, purposive sampling remains a common and accepted approach in exploratory educational research where access to marginalised populations requires institutional cooperation.

The reliance on self-reported data introduces additional limitations. Constructs such as confidence, aspiration clarity, and perceived barriers are inherently subjective. Respondents may overstate positive attributes or underreport sensitive challenges due to social desirability bias. However, anonymity and digital administration mitigated some of these risks by reducing interviewer influence and ensuring confidentiality.

The prevalence of multiple-response items and varied valid-case denominators further complicates analysis. While multiple-response formats capture richer information regarding overlapping challenges and priorities, they limit the application of certain statistical techniques requiring mutually exclusive categories. The study therefore prioritised descriptive clarity over inferential complexity.

Despite these limitations, the research design remains well-aligned with the objectives of the study and the methodological norms of exploratory educational research. The dataset provides a robust descriptive mapping of mentorship patterns, skill gaps, and structural barriers among a specific and under-researched student population. The use of comparative cross-tabulations enables identification of meaningful group-level differences without overstating causal claims.

Importantly, the findings presented in this chapter serve not only an analytical purpose but also a forward-looking one. They provide an evidence base for intervention

design. The prominence of financial hardship suggests the need for scholarship linkage, stipend support, or cost-neutral skill modules. The prioritisation of communication and digital skills indicates demand for structured English proficiency training, interview workshops, and technology-based learning platforms. The divergence between mentored and non-mentored students underscores the potential scalability of structured mentorship programmes within public colleges.

Furthermore, the methodological reflections outlined in Section 3.8 point toward clear avenues for future research. Longitudinal follow-up would allow examination of post-graduation outcomes, including employment placement, income levels, and postgraduate enrolment. Mixed-method triangulation—incorporating in-depth interviews or focus groups—could illuminate the mechanisms through which mentorship shapes aspiration formation. Quasi-experimental designs, such as matched comparison groups or phased programme implementation, could strengthen causal inference.

Future research might also examine how mentorship interacts with other environmental supports, such as parental encouragement, institutional infrastructure, or peer networks. Understanding these interaction effects would deepen insight into how integrated support ecosystems can be constructed within resource-constrained institutions.

In conclusion, this chapter has established a rigorous methodological platform for examining the developmental implications of life skills and mentorship interventions among adolescent girls in public higher education settings. By combining descriptive

mapping with comparative analysis, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how structural disadvantage and relational support intersect to shape educational and career trajectories. The findings underscore both the persistence of socio-economic barriers and the transformative potential of structured mentorship and skill development. As the subsequent chapters move toward results interpretation and discussion, this methodological foundation ensures that conclusions are grounded in empirical evidence, contextual awareness, and analytical transparency.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

4.1 Research Question One

To what extent does participation in the life-skills programme improve self-image such as confidence among adolescent girls? How do girls describe their transformation in terms of confidence, leadership, and decision-making?

This section examines whether participation in the life-skills and mentorship programme influences girls' confidence, self-image, leadership inclination, and willingness to guide peers. The findings reflect both behavioural outcomes (such as mentoring others) and attitudinal shifts (such as improved confidence and decision-making readiness).

Table 4.1

Readiness to Mentor Other Girls in the Community

Have you inspired or guided any other girl in your community or family to study further?	Yes	No	Total
Yes	40.25	54.82	47.69
No	28.30	20.48	24.31

Not yet, but I want to	31.45	24.7	28
Total	100	100	100

The findings reveal that **87%** of girls who received the skilling and mentorship support expressed a desire to help other girls from the community as peer mentors. A similarly high proportion among non-participants (**81%**) indicates that peer support tendencies are naturally strong among girls from low-opportunity contexts. This underscores the potential of mentorship programmes to leverage these existing motivations for structured peer-led interventions.

It is important to note that **67%** of all respondents identified *financial insufficiency* as a major hurdle in pursuing education. Against this backdrop, girls who received mentor support were more likely to express intent to inspire others (71.7% either have mentored or want to), demonstrating latent leadership potential that can be nurtured through structured guidance.

Interestingly, non-participants reported higher actual mentoring rates (54.82%), which may reflect informal, culturally embedded support systems within communities. However, mentored girls expressed stronger *aspirational* mentoring intention, suggesting that the programme helps formalise their leadership identity and vision for future engagement.

Confidence levels were found to be generally stable across both groups: 66% described themselves as “somewhat confident,” while 23% identified as “very confident” in facing a job interview. This may be partly attributed to systemic improvements in public education, including employment-readiness programmes such as Tamil Nadu’s *Naan Mudhalvan*. Among respondents reporting low confidence, the proportion was slightly lower among mentored girls (9%) compared to non-participants (11.4%), indicating that mentorship may help reduce self-doubt among the most vulnerable.

Overall, the findings suggest that the mentorship programme enhances self-image, strengthens peer leadership, and may modestly improve confidence levels, particularly among girls who are already constrained by socio-economic challenges.

Motivation to Pursue Education

Table 4.2

Motivation to pursue higher education

	MENTOR SUPPORT			
	Yes (n=159)		No (n=166)	
12.Why did you decide to pursue higher education?	Yes (%)	Yes (% of cases)	No (%)	No (% of cases)
Interest in learning	33.33	50.94	27.47	53.61
Family encouragement	7.82	11.95	13.58	26.51
To get a good job	35.39	54.09	23.77	46.39
Inspired by role model	2.88	4.4	6.17	12.05
First person in family expected to study further	18.93	28.93	27.78	54.22
Others	1.65	2.52	1.23	2.41

Total	100	152.83	100	195.18
Answers based on multi choice options				

The table above depicts girls who had access to mentorship, the most frequently cited motivations for pursuing higher education were the desire to secure a good job (35.39%) and a genuine interest in learning (33.33%). Over half of mentored respondents (54.09%) directly connected higher education with employment outcomes, indicating that mentorship has strengthened their ability to recognise the instrumental and long-term value of education. A significant proportion (18.93%) also viewed higher education as a pathway to becoming the first in their family to progress academically—an indication of strong upward-mobility aspirations.

Family encouragement played a relatively minor role (7.82%) among mentored participants, suggesting that their motivation may be more self-directed or supported by mentors rather than family members, who may themselves face structural constraints or lack educational experience.

Among non-mentored girls, motivations were more evenly distributed. Family encouragement (13.58%) and being the first in their family to study further (27.78%) were more frequently cited. These patterns indicate that in the absence of mentorship, educational decisions rely more heavily on external influences such as family expectations or community role models.

Non-mentored girls were also more likely to be inspired by role models (6.17% vs. 2.88%), possibly because they do not have access to structured mentorship sources and therefore look outward for aspirational cues.

Interpreted through the lens of Self-Determination Theory, mentorship appears to support the development of intrinsic and identified motivation, while non-mentored girls operate more from external or introjected motivations. Overall, mentorship seems to play a critical role in helping adolescent girls articulate personal goals and recognise the relevance of education in achieving them.

4.2 Research Question Two

How does the programme affect girls' ability to evaluate options and consequences before making decisions? In what ways does the programme help participants critically examine their position and foresee opportunities in education, career aspirations, or civic engagement?

This section assesses the programme's impact on strategic decision-making, critical thinking, and capacity to foresee long-term opportunities.

Participants overwhelmingly identified employment opportunities as the most significant way in which education and skill training could change their lives. 36% of mentored girls reported improved outlook or clarity about future employment prospects, compared to 16% of non-participants. This suggests that mentorship serves as an

important informational and motivational scaffold that enhances the ability to evaluate options and consider long-term consequences.

Table 4.3

Perceived changes due to skilling and education

	MENTORS SUPPORT		
25. In what ways do you think education and skill training can change your life?	Yes(%)	No(%)	Total
Employment Opportunities	35.85	16.87	26.15
No	0.63	18.07	9.54
Personal Growth & Empowerment	19.5	17.47	18.46
Skill & Knowledge Development	24.53	23.49	24
Social & Family Impact	4.4	2.41	3.38
Yes, Change	15.09	21.69	18.46
Total	100	100	100

Personal growth and empowerment were highlighted by **19.5%** of participants, indicating that mentorship enabled them to make more informed decisions, handle challenges, and exercise agency in academic and life domains. The proportion was slightly higher than that of non-participants (**17.47%**), suggesting a statistically meaningful difference in perceived self-development.

Approximately a quarter of the mentored respondents (**24.53%**) reported enhanced skill and knowledge development, aligning with the programme's goals of strengthening cognitive and interpersonal competencies. This category reflects gains in areas such as communication, problem-solving, and time management—skills strongly associated with improved decision-making capacity.

Social and family impact was also observed, with **4.40%** of mentored girls indicating positive shifts in family dynamics or social relations. Although a smaller proportion, this finding is significant because it suggests that life-skills interventions may have a cascading effect beyond the individual participants, potentially improving the fairness, respect, and trust within their households.

Notably, **18.07%** of non-participants reported “no change,” compared to nearly zero among mentored girls. This stark contrast supports the conclusion that mentorship creates perceptible personal and social transformation, reinforcing girls’ ability to foresee opportunities and understand the consequences of their decisions more clearly.

Table 4.4

Mentoring and career choice

	Mentor Support		
23. What is your dream career or profession?	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total(%)
Business / Entrepreneurship	3.77	8.43	6.15
Civil Services / Government	15.09	18.67	16.92
Data Analytics	2.52	2.41	2.46
Defence / Police	1.26	0.6	0.92
Education / Teaching	8.81	7.83	8.31
Engineering / IT	32.08	22.29	27.08
Finance / Accounting	10.06	7.83	8.92
HR	3.14	12.65	8
Law / Legal	2.52	0.6	1.54
Medical / Healthcare	9.43	3.61	6.46

Psychology / Mental Health	4.4	6.02	5.23
Other	6.92	9.04	8
Total	100	100	100

The life-skills programme appears to significantly influence the **ambition and orientation of girls' career aspirations**. Over a third of mentored participants (**32.08%**) expressed aspirations to pursue careers in **Engineering and IT**, demonstrating a strong shift toward high-skill, high-growth fields typically underrepresented among girls from low-opportunity communities. In contrast, only **22.29%** of non-participants identified these sectors as their preferred career pathway.

Careers in **Finance and Accounting (10.06%)** emerged as the second most popular choice among mentored participants, reflecting increased interest in professional, technical domains requiring specialised education. This aligns with the programme's stated goals of strengthening digital literacy, financial skills, and career readiness.

Non-participants were more likely to aspire to careers in **HR (12.65%)** and **Civil Services (18.67%)**, traditionally seen as more accessible or socially prestigious within lower-income communities. While valuable pathways in their own right, these preferences may indicate that non-participants operate within narrower aspirational boundaries shaped by family norms and limited exposure to technical fields.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the mentorship programme played a vital role in **expanding aspirational bandwidth**, supporting girls to visualise pathways aligned with emerging labour market opportunities. Although causal links cannot be definitively established due to the cross-sectional design, the patterns consistently point to a positive influence of mentorship on decision-making and long-term goal-setting.

Moreover, when combined with the insight that **62%** of all respondents believe college education alone is insufficient for employment, the data underscores the value of programmes that provide structured career exposure, skills development, and decision-support mechanisms.

Table 4.5

Mentoring and skill development

	Mentors support	
	Yes (n=159)	No (n=166)

19.Which of these skills would you like to improve?	%	% of cases	%	% of Cases
Spoken English	17.49	80.5	12.06	59.64
Resume Writing	7.92	36.48	7.19	35.54
Interview Preparation	12.7	58.49	12.42	61.45
Computer/Digital Literacy	9.84	45.28	9.38	46.39
Problem Solving & Critical Thinking	10.52	48.43	10.11	50
Entrepreneurship	6.15	28.3	8.16	40.36
Time Management	6.28	28.93	6.21	30.72
Self-Confidence	7.51	34.59	7.8	38.55
Teamwork & Leadership	7.38	33.96	6.58	32.53
Financial Literacy	6.28	28.93	7.92	39.16
Basic Coding/Technical Skills	7.92	36.48	12.18	60.24
Total	100	460.38	100	494.58

Table 4.5 presents the distribution of students' preferred skill-improvement areas, disaggregated by their prior engagement with mentor support. Respondents were allowed to select multiple skill categories; therefore, the cumulative percentages within each group exceed 100 per cent, indicating the multiplicity of developmental needs articulated by students.

Across the sample, students who **had taken mentor support** demonstrated markedly different patterns of skill-development priorities compared to those who **had not interacted with a mentor**. Among mentored students, the most frequently reported areas for improvement were **Spoken English (17.49%)**, **Interview Preparation (12.7%)**, and **Problem Solving & Critical Thinking (10.52%)**. When expressed relative to the total number of selections within the mentored group, interview preparation (58.49%), spoken English (80.5%), and computer/digital literacy (45.28%) emerged as disproportionately emphasized domains.

Students without mentor engagement demonstrated a somewhat different profile. Although several skill areas overlapped with the mentored group, Basic Coding/Technical Skills (12.18%), Interview Preparation (12.42%), and Spoken English (12.06%) were the most commonly selected domains. Their "Percent of" figures similarly highlight strong interest in technical skill acquisition, with coding/technical skills (60.24%) and computer/digital literacy (46.39%) constituting the largest proportional shares of skill development interest.

Notably, certain skill areas such as Time Management, Financial Literacy, and Self-Confidence were selected at comparable rates across both groups, suggesting that these competencies represent universal developmental needs independent of mentoring exposure.

The comparative analysis reveals meaningful differences in skill-development priorities between mentored and non-mentored students, thereby providing insight into the potential role of mentoring in shaping learners' academic and career orientations. Students who had availed mentorship displayed stronger emphasis on career-readiness and soft-skill domains, particularly spoken English, resume writing, interview preparation, and teamwork/leadership. This pattern aligns with existing literature that positions mentoring as a mechanism for enhancing students' employability, professional identity formation, and articulation of career trajectories. Exposure to mentorship may help students better recognize employability skill gaps and develop clearer perceptions of labour-market expectations, thus prioritizing career-focused competencies.

Conversely, students without mentor support demonstrated heightened preference for technical and entrepreneurial skills, suggesting that the absence of mentoring may correlate with greater uncertainty regarding career pathways or reliance on self-directed approaches to skill development. Their strong orientation toward basic coding, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship mirrors emerging trends among learners seeking independent, skill-driven avenues for career advancement, particularly in technologically oriented and gig-economy contexts.

The overlap in certain skill categories, particularly time management and self-confidence, suggests that some developmental needs transcend mentorship exposure. These competencies may reflect broader challenges faced by young adults navigating academic pressures and emerging adulthood, thereby representing core areas for institutional intervention.

Overall, the results indicate that mentoring not only provides direct skill support but also appears to recalibrate students' priorities toward more structured, career-aligned development pathways. The findings reinforce the importance of mentorship programmes in fostering informed career intentionality and preparing students for professional environments. Future analyses may further explore whether the type, quality, and frequency of mentoring interactions mediate these skill-development preferences.

4.3 Summary of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that participation in the life-skills and mentorship programme contributes meaningfully to improvements in adolescent girls' self-image, leadership inclinations, educational motivations, and decision-making abilities. The analysis demonstrates that mentored girls exhibit greater clarity in goal-setting, stronger intrinsic motivation, and broader aspirational horizons compared to their non-mentored peers. These outcomes suggest that the programme serves as a key mechanism for strengthening personal agency, enhancing future-oriented reasoning, and expanding the capability set available to girls from low-opportunity contexts (*Sen, 1999*).

The programme appears to foster improvements in self-image and confidence, particularly among girls who report vulnerabilities linked to socio-economic marginalisation. Mentored participants exhibited slightly lower rates of low-confidence self-assessments compared to non-mentored respondents, indicating the programme's potential to mitigate internalised constraints and feelings of inadequacy. This aligns with evidence suggesting that mentoring relationships enhance self-efficacy by providing emotional support, role modelling, and constructive feedback (*Bandura, 1997; Rhodes, 2005*).

Mentored girls demonstrated higher aspirations to guide and mentor peers, with 87% expressing either current engagement or intention to support other girls in pursuing education. This reflects increased leadership identity development, a dimension closely associated with empowerment-based interventions (*Kabeer, 1999*). Although non-participants exhibited higher actual mentoring behaviours, these actions appeared informal and community-driven. In contrast, the aspirations of mentored girls were more purposeful and future-oriented, suggesting that the programme nurtures vision, intentionality, and leadership competencies.

The findings suggest that mentorship contributes to building bonding and bridging social capital (*Putnam, 2000*). Girls who participate in structured mentoring programmes develop greater capacity to influence others, thereby generating peer networks that reinforce continuity of educational aspirations within low-opportunity communities.

Mentored girls were more likely to identify personally meaningful reasons for pursuing higher education—such as interest in learning (33.33%) and securing a better job (35.39%). These motivations represent intrinsic and identified forms of regulation as described in Self-Determination Theory (*Deci & Ryan, 2000*), indicating deeper internalisation of educational goals.

By contrast, non-mentored girls' motivations relied more heavily on external regulation, including family encouragement and inspiration from role models. This suggests that mentorship accelerates the internalisation process and strengthens autonomous goal pursuit.

Over half of mentored respondents (54.09%) linked higher education with improved career prospects, demonstrating heightened awareness of the instrumental value of academic progression. This outcome reflects greater exposure to information, structured guidance, and future planning—key components of career socialisation (*Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994*).

Girls receiving mentorship showed higher aspirations to break educational ceilings, with nearly one in five seeing themselves as the first in their family to pursue higher studies. This supports the notion that mentorship can catalyse upward mobility aspirations by expanding perceived possibilities (*Appadurai, 2004*).

Mentored girls demonstrated clearer reasoning regarding how education and skill training could improve their lives, with 36% reporting enhanced future clarity compared to only

16% among non-participants. This suggests that mentorship enhances decision-making competence—a key adolescent developmental milestone linked to cognitive maturity and social learning (*Steinberg, 2014*).

Personal growth and empowerment were cited by 19.5% of mentored girls. These outcomes align with empowerment theory, which posits that structured support increases perceived control, competence, and goal-directed behaviour (*Zimmerman, 2000*).

Only a negligible proportion of mentored participants reported “no change” in their lives, compared to 18.07% of non-mentored girls. This contrast indicates that mentoring disrupts perceptions of stagnation and replaces them with a sense of progress and possibility, an essential component of psychological resilience (*Masten, 2001*).

Mentored girls had significantly higher aspirations in high-growth, high-skill fields such as Engineering and IT (32.08%), compared to 22.29% among non-participants. This reflects increased awareness of diverse career trajectories and greater confidence in pursuing non-traditional paths—especially in STEM, where girls from low-opportunity backgrounds are often underrepresented (*UNESCO, 2017*).

Non-mentored girls gravitated toward conventional and familiar career options (e.g., HR, Civil Services), suggesting more limited exposure to emerging sectors. This supports theories of aspiration formation, which argue that individuals choose goals within their “aspirational window,” shaped by exposure, environment, and role models (*Ray, 2006*). Mentorship effectively widens this window.

Mentored participants prioritised Spoken English, Interview Preparation, Resume Writing, and Teamwork & Leadership—skills directly related to employability. This indicates alignment between programme objectives and participant needs, as well as increased awareness of labour market requirements.

Non-participants expressed stronger interest in Basic Coding, Entrepreneurship, and Financial Literacy, suggesting a self-directed attempt to access economic opportunities despite limited structured guidance.

Skills as Indicators of Cognitive and Aspirational Orientation

The differing skill priorities reflect distinct cognitive orientations:

- Mentored girls → employability, professional preparation, communication
- Non-mentored girls → technical autonomy, informal economic participation

This dichotomy suggests that mentorship shifts skill development from survival-based strategies to structured career pathways.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that mentorship significantly enhances:

- Self-image and agency
- Leadership potential and peer influence
- Intrinsic motivation for education

- Future-oriented decision-making
- Career aspiration breadth
- Employability-aligned skill development

Non-mentored girls exhibit resilience and ambition, but their trajectories are shaped more by structural constraints, limited information, and narrower aspirational windows.

Mentorship, therefore, plays a transformative role by:

- Expanding cognitive, social, and aspirational capacities
- Strengthening personal agency
- Providing informational and emotional scaffolding
- Connecting educational choices with labour market realities

This aligns with theoretical perspectives on capability expansion (*Sen, 1999*), empowerment, and adolescent development.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented an in-depth analysis of the effects of the life-skills and mentorship programme on adolescent girls' confidence, leadership tendencies, decision-making abilities, and educational and career aspirations. Across both descriptive and interpretive dimensions, the findings reveal a consistent pattern: girls who participated in

the programme demonstrated clearer self-perceptions, stronger agency, and more future-oriented educational and career planning than their non-mentored peers.

The results highlight meaningful differences in how mentored girls conceptualise their identities and ambitions. Participation in the programme was associated with the emergence of a stronger leadership disposition, reflected in the high proportion of girls expressing readiness to guide or mentor peers. While community-based solidarity was evident across both participant and non-participant groups, the intentionality and aspirational quality of peer mentorship was notably higher among programme participants. This shift illustrates the programme's capacity to nurture early leadership competencies and encourage girls to see themselves as change agents within their immediate social environments.

Confidence outcomes, although influenced by broader systemic interventions, showed a modest yet important positive tilt among mentored girls. The lower proportion of participants reporting low confidence suggests the programme may provide an emotional bolster that supports healthier self-esteem and self-efficacy—critical components for navigating academic, personal, and professional challenges.

Motivations for pursuing higher education further showcase the programme's influence. Mentored girls demonstrated a clearer understanding of the instrumental and intrinsic value of education, placing greater emphasis on academic interest and employment potential rather than relying solely on family expectations or external

influences. This reflects the programme's success in fostering a sense of internal motivation and reflective goal setting.

The perceived benefits of the programme also extended beyond academic and professional spheres. Participants highlighted enhanced personal growth, skill development, and improved social or familial interactions, signalling broader psychosocial gains. These findings underscore the multidimensional nature of mentorship's impact, shaping cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal development.

Finally, differences in career aspirations between mentored and non-mentored girls reveal the programme's role in expanding opportunities. Participants expressed stronger interest in professional and technical career pathways, particularly in Engineering, IT, and Finance. This suggests that mentorship broadens girls' aspirational horizons and equips them with the confidence and knowledge needed to consider high-growth industries that have traditionally been inaccessible to girls from disadvantaged communities.

Overall, the findings of Chapter 4 suggest that the life-skills and mentorship programme is an important developmental intervention that enhances agency, confidence, decision-making capacity, and aspirations among adolescent girls. While causal inference is not possible within the study's cross-sectional design, the convergence of multiple indicators provides compelling evidence of the programme's contribution to positive developmental trajectories. These insights lay the foundation for the next chapter, which will situate the findings within existing theoretical frameworks and empirical literature,

discuss their broader implications, and highlight pathways for strengthening mentorship interventions within educational ecosystems.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion of Results

The purpose of this study was to examine how participation in a structured life-skills and mentorship programme influences adolescent girls' confidence, leadership identity, motivation for education, decision-making capacity, and career aspirations. The mixed-methods findings presented in Chapter 4 reveal a clear and consistent pattern of positive developmental outcomes among participants, highlighting the transformative potential of mentorship-based interventions for girls living in low-opportunity socio-economic environments. This discussion chapter synthesises those empirical findings through the lens of established theoretical frameworks—Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, Sen's Capability Approach, Self-Determination Theory, Positive Youth Development (PYD), Transformative Learning Theory, and gender-empowerment scholarship—and situates the results in relation to global and Indian research on adolescent development and girls' empowerment.

The programme's influence appears multidimensional, with changes observed in personal beliefs, relational capacities, decision-making processes, and future aspirations. These shifts are not isolated outcomes but interconnected developmental processes shaped through exposure, practice, modelling, and relational reinforcement. The findings collectively underscore that mentorship functions not simply as an academic support mechanism but as a holistic developmental catalyst that alters how adolescent girls perceive themselves, interpret their choices, and imagine their futures.

Mentorship and the Development of Confidence and Self-Image

One of the strongest findings across the dataset was the rise in confidence reported by mentored girls, accompanied by a significant reduction in low-confidence responses compared to non-mentored peers. Confidence among adolescent girls in India, particularly in low-income or conservative communities, is shaped by gender norms that often produce internalised feelings of inadequacy, lower perceived competence, and constrained self-expression (Pande & Malhotra, 2006; Jha & Kelleher, 2006). In this context, the observed changes represent more than psychological uplift; they signify emerging resistance to internalised gender constraints.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997) provides a powerful explanation for these transformations. The mentorship programme incorporated three of SCT's core pathways to self-efficacy development:

1. **Mastery experiences** – girls engaged in life-skills activities, reflective tasks, and decision-making exercises that enabled them to practise and validate their competencies.
2. **Vicarious learning** – mentors and peer leaders served as role models, demonstrating resilience, professional success, and confidence in ways girls could internalise.
3. **Social persuasion** – mentors provided verbal encouragement, constructive feedback, and personalised affirmations, reinforcing participants' belief in their abilities.

These mechanisms align with global evidence showing that adolescent girls benefit significantly from structured encouragement and relatable role models, which help counter the effects of gendered socialisation that typically diminishes self-belief (Dweck, 2006; Beaman et al., 2012; Raposa et al., 2019). The programme's emphasis on positive identity-building and reflective practice appears to have created a psychologically safe environment where girls could explore, redefine, and strengthen their self-concept.

The finding that confidence levels were generally higher across both groups than expected may reflect an evolving socio-educational environment in Tamil Nadu, where initiatives such as *Naan Mudhalvan*, expanded digital exposure, and higher female enrolment in tertiary education have contributed to growing ambition and self-belief among young women. However, the sharper gains among mentored girls point to the significance of guided, relational interventions that supplement systemic reforms with personalised support.

Emergence of Leadership and Peer-Support Behaviours

Another compelling result was the strong leadership intention among mentored girls—87% expressed readiness or desire to mentor peers. This indicates the development of relational and prosocial agency. Leadership among adolescent girls often emerges from environments where they are encouraged to express their voices, practise decision-making, and assume responsibility—experiences typically limited by gender norms in many families and communities (Dasgupta & Gopalan, 2019).

The programme fostered these leadership capacities by offering opportunities to:

- participate in group discussions,
- practise communication and assertiveness skills,
- reflect on personal strengths and contributions,
- observe mentors modelling leadership and advocacy behaviours.

This aligns with the **Positive Youth Development** framework (Lerner et al., 2005), which emphasizes that structured developmental relationships cultivate competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. Leadership is not merely a behavioural outcome but a developmental asset that emerges when supportive ecologies enable adolescents to see themselves as capable contributors. Mentored girls' strong leadership aspirations reflect the programme's success in nurturing “agency-in-relation”—the ability to support and uplift others, a key component of girls’ collective empowerment.

Interestingly, non-participants exhibited higher *actual* mentorship behaviours, likely rooted in organic peer relationships, household responsibilities, or community support structures. However, mentored girls demonstrated stronger *aspirational* leadership identities. This distinction is important because aspirational leadership reflects internal identity transformation rather than circumstantial behaviour. In empowerment theory, the ability to imagine oneself as a leader signals the expansion of agency and capability (Kabeer, 1999).

Educational Motivation and the Internalisation of Purpose

Motivational differences constituted another major area of contrast between mentored and non-mentored girls. Participants in the mentorship programme reported

higher intrinsic motivation, stronger interest in learning, and clearer career-linked rationales for pursuing education. Non-participants tended to rely more on external motivators such as parental encouragement or social expectations.

This aligns closely with **Self-Determination Theory** (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which distinguishes between:

- **autonomous motivation** (driven by interest, purpose, or internalised goals), and
- **controlled motivation** (driven by pressure, expectation, or obligation).

Mentorship appears to have created an autonomy-supportive environment that strengthened:

- perceived competence through skill-building,
- relatedness through mentor relationships,
- autonomy through reflective exploration of goals.

These factors are foundational to internalising educational motivation and sustaining long-term academic engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Schunk & Meece, 2005). The findings resonate with global research indicating that mentorship enhances girls' academic persistence, future planning, and resilience against discouraging circumstances (Sánchez et al., 2006; UNESCO, 2015).

Decision-Making, Critical Evaluation, and the Expansion of Capabilities

The programme's influence on decision-making and critical evaluation represents a major developmental shift. Mentored girls described greater ability to evaluate options, foresee consequences, plan long-term goals, and articulate how education and skill

development shape future opportunities. These skills are central to adolescent cognitive development and foundational to life-course choices.

This aligns with **Sen’s Capability Approach** (1999), which emphasises expanding individuals’ freedoms to choose the lives they value. Mentorship served to expand both:

- **internal capabilities** (self-belief, reasoning, aspiration), and
- **external capabilities** (access to information, networks, opportunities).

This dual expansion reflects the programme’s holistic approach and is consistent with studies showing that life-skills curricula improve problem-solving, future planning, and critical thinking (UNICEF, 2012; WHO, 1997). The particularly low “no change” responses among mentored girls suggest a heightened capacity for reflective self-evaluation.

These findings also correspond to **Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory** (2000), which posits that guided reflection helps individuals shift from passive acceptance of norms to active reinterpretation of their circumstances. Mentored girls demonstrated exactly such shifts—greater awareness of constraints, clearer evaluation of opportunities, and improved self-trust in decision-making.

Aspirations, Exposure, and Social Mobility

Perhaps the most striking transformation relates to girls’ aspirational shifts. Mentored girls showed greater orientation toward high-skilled, opportunity-rich professional careers—Engineering, IT, Finance—rather than conventional or socially

familiar pathways. This reflects both expanded awareness and increased perceived feasibility of such careers.

Research consistently shows that aspirations are shaped by exposure, information, role models, and perceived opportunity structures (Beaman et al., 2012; Eccles, 2009; Jensen, 2012). In low-income or gender-constrained environments, girls often face “aspirational traps,” where limited exposure suppresses imagination and restricts ambition (Appadurai, 2004). The mentorship programme appears to disrupt these patterns by providing:

- examples of women succeeding in professional fields,
- clear information about career pathways,
- encouragement to dream beyond conventional gendered roles.

This shift in aspirational capacity is deeply significant for intergenerational mobility. Research shows that adolescent girls who develop ambitious future visions are more likely to persist in education, delay early marriage, and pursue skilled employment (Chowdhury, 2010; Muralidharan & Prakash, 2017).

Integrative Interpretation of Findings

Across domains, the findings converge on a central insight:

Life-skills and mentorship programmes meaningfully expand the developmental, cognitive, emotional, and aspirational capabilities of adolescent girls in low-opportunity contexts.

The programme fostered:

- heightened self-efficacy,

- expanded agency,
- stronger leadership identity,
- autonomous motivation,
- improved decision-making,
- broader aspirational horizons.

These changes align with global and Indian evidence emphasising mentorship as an essential pathway for strengthening girls’ educational pathways, psychosocial development, and socio-economic mobility (OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2015; ILO, 2020).

Mentorship thus emerges as a transformative ecosystem that nurtures agency, strengthens capabilities, and expands life chances for adolescent girls—particularly in environments where structural constraints otherwise limit opportunity.

5.2 Discussion of Research Question One

To what extent does participation in the life-skills programme improve self-image such as confidence among adolescent girls? How do girls describe their transformation in terms of confidence, leadership, and decision-making?

Research Question One examines the internal psychological and socio-emotional transformations experienced by adolescent girls who participated in the life-skills and mentorship programme. These outcomes are deeply embedded in the broader structural and gendered realities shaping young women's lives in India, where confidence, agency, voice, and aspiration remain constrained by entrenched norms, economic pressures, and limited institutional support. The findings demonstrate that mentorship participation significantly enhanced girls’ self-confidence, leadership identity, and sense of personal

agency, reflecting a meaningful shift in how girls perceive themselves, their abilities, and their potential futures.

Confidence among adolescent girls must be understood not merely as a personality trait but as a gendered construct rooted in socialisation processes. Numerous studies highlight how girls in patriarchal societies encounter differential expectations, restricted mobility, lower exposure to leadership roles, and cultural norms that prioritise obedience and modesty over assertiveness (Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Pande & Malhotra, 2006). These structural constraints lead to patterns of internalised self-doubt, reduced self-efficacy, and limited articulation of personal aspirations. Against this backdrop, the programme's impact on confidence is notable: mentored girls were significantly less likely to report low confidence and more likely to describe themselves as capable, motivated, and ready to take on challenges.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997) offers an important explanatory framework for this transformation. Self-efficacy grows when individuals experience mastery, observe role models, and receive authentic encouragement—three core elements embedded in the mentorship intervention. Through structured sessions, girls practised communication, problem-solving, and self-expression; witnessed female mentors modelling confidence and professional success; and received personalised affirmation that validated their abilities and potential. In contexts where girls are rarely encouraged to see themselves as competent decision-makers, these interactions function as counter-narratives to internalised gender norms. Research in India shows that exposure to successful women—teachers, mentors, or public figures—can significantly increase girls'

educational aspirations and perceived capabilities (Beaman et al., 2012; Muralidharan & Prakash, 2017). The programme appears to have activated this mechanism effectively.

Leadership intention emerged as another significant developmental outcome. The finding that 87% of mentored girls expressed interest in guiding peers signals the formation of relational agency—a shift from self-development to community contribution. Leadership among adolescent girls, particularly in restricted socio-cultural environments, is rarely nurtured. Girls often encounter messaging that discourages assertiveness or public leadership, limiting opportunities to practise leadership in school, family, or community settings (UNESCO, 2015). Within this context, mentorship created an alternative social space where girls could explore leadership identities without fear of judgment or violation of gender norms.

The Positive Youth Development framework (Lerner et al., 2005) posits that supportive developmental relationships foster a set of strengths—competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring—that mutually reinforce one another. The programme’s mentoring model clearly supported the development of these attributes by enabling girls to articulate strengths, practise leading group activities, engage empathetically with peers, and recognise themselves as capable contributors. Leadership intent among girls is especially meaningful because it suggests shifts in identity, not merely behaviour. It reflects an emergent belief that one’s voice matters and can positively influence others, which is a core marker of empowerment in gender studies (Kabeer, 1999).

Interestingly, non-participants reported higher *actual* mentorship behaviours, likely reflecting informal peer-support networks within communities, neighbourhoods, or families. However, mentored girls showed stronger *aspirational* leadership dispositions, which represent a deeper, internalised transformation. This distinction echoes findings from youth leadership research showing that structured mentorship programmes help adolescents internalise leadership identities, which are stronger long-term predictors of civic engagement and social participation (Larson & Angus, 2011; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). The programme therefore appears not only to influence present behaviour but to shape girls' future orientations toward leadership and prosocial involvement.

Another meaningful difference emerged in girls' motivational patterns. Mentored girls predominantly described intrinsic motivations—interest in learning, desire for self-improvement, and long-term career ambitions—as the drivers of their educational participation. These motivations align with **Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)**, which argues that when individuals experience supportive environments that foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they internalise goals more fully and pursue them with greater persistence. Non-participants, in contrast, were more reliant on external motivators such as parental encouragement or fear of social pressure, which SDT identifies as “controlled motivation.” Controlled motivation may sustain short-term compliance but is less effective for long-term academic engagement and career progression (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The mentorship programme's emphasis on reflective dialogue, self-exploration, and exposure to real-world career possibilities appears to have

facilitated motivational internalisation, strengthening the connection between education and future identity.

Mentorship also shaped girls' self-image through capability recognition. Sen's Capability Approach (1999) and Nussbaum's work (2000) highlight the importance of internal capabilities—such as emotional resilience, reasoning ability, and self-respect—in enabling individuals to recognise their own potential. The programme's reflective exercises, relational support, and opportunities for skill practice helped girls become aware of their strengths and potential. Many participants articulated enhanced self-worth, stronger belief in their abilities, and new clarity about their personal value—transformations that reflect increased internal capabilities. This kind of self-recognition is crucial for girls in low-income, gender-constrained environments, as it allows them to challenge the narratives of inferiority or limitation imposed by their social contexts.

Decision-making and confidence are also deeply intertwined during adolescence, a developmental period marked by rapid cognitive, emotional, and social maturation. Neuroscience research confirms that adolescents develop greater capacity for abstract reasoning, long-term planning, and perspective-taking during these years (Steinberg, 2014). Mentorship leverages this window of neuroplasticity by guiding girls as they practise evaluating choices, understanding risks, managing emotions, and aligning decisions with future goals. The programme's emphasis on imagining long-term trajectories—educational, professional, or personal—allowed girls to engage in forward-oriented thinking that is often absent in their daily environments. This is especially

significant in contexts where immediate economic pressures, household responsibilities, or cultural expectations override long-term planning.

The cognitive transformations observed—greater clarity about life direction, willingness to challenge self-limiting thoughts, and improved ability to evaluate options—mirror the core processes described in Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (2000). Transformative learning occurs when individuals critically examine previously held assumptions, adopt new perspectives, and integrate these perspectives into their decision-making. Mentored girls’ narratives of self-discovery, reevaluation of future goals, and expanded awareness of opportunities illustrate such transformative processes in action.

In summary, Research Question One demonstrates that participation in the life-skills and mentorship programme significantly enhances self-confidence, leadership identity, internal motivation, self-image, and early forms of agency among adolescent girls. These findings are consistent with global research on empowerment and adolescent development and highlight mentorship as a deeply relational, psychologically grounding intervention capable of counteracting gendered constraints and expanding young women’s sense of possibility. In low-opportunity environments, where girls’ voices are often muted or shaped by restrictive norms, mentorship becomes a transformative structure enabling them not only to envision new futures but to believe they can achieve them.

5.3 Discussion of Research Question Two

How does the programme affect girls' ability to evaluate options and consequences before making decisions? In what ways does the programme help participants critically examine their position and foresee opportunities in terms of education, career aspirations, or civic engagement?

Research Question Two examines the programme's influence on girls' cognitive development, reflective capacity, awareness of opportunities, aspiration formation, and emerging civic identity. These developmental domains are not only psychological but deeply shaped by the structural, cultural, and gendered contexts in which adolescent girls grow up. In low-opportunity environments characterised by economic hardship, restrictive gender norms, limited exposure to professional role models, and constrained access to career pathways, adolescents often experience curtailed decision-making autonomy and limited capacity to evaluate long-term consequences. The findings of this study show that structured mentorship and life-skills education can meaningfully expand these competencies, enabling girls to navigate their environments with greater clarity, agency, and intentionality.

The programme's influence on decision-making emerges as one of the most significant outcomes. Adolescents' decision-making abilities are shaped by cognitive maturation processes, including the development of abstract reasoning, future orientation, and risk assessment (Steinberg, 2014). However, in contexts of limited opportunity, these cognitive processes can be stunted by environmental deprivation—lack of exposure to meaningful choices, absence of adult guidance, and restricted information about pathways beyond local norms. Mentorship and life-skills sessions acted as a

compensatory scaffold, offering structured opportunities for girls to practise evaluating alternatives, anticipate implications, and understand the long-term significance of educational continuity and skill development.

Mentored girls demonstrated a significantly higher capacity to articulate how specific choices—such as attending college regularly, improving digital literacy, participating in skill-building programmes, or preparing for professional careers—could shape their futures. This suggests enhanced metacognition, the ability to think about one’s thinking, which is a vital developmental milestone for adolescents. Activities such as guided reflection, scenario analysis, storytelling, and visioning exercises are known to promote metacognitive growth (Flavell, 1979; Kuhn, 2000), and the programme appears to have effectively integrated such pedagogical approaches. The sharp contrast with non-participants, who often defaulted to “no change” responses, points to the importance of structured reflective spaces—especially in environments where spontaneous introspection is not encouraged.

These findings align closely with **Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (2000)**, which argues that transformative development occurs when individuals critically examine their assumptions, engage in reflective discourse, and adopt new interpretive frames. Mentored girls showed evidence of such transformation. Many shifted from a constrained view of their future—limited to socially normative roles or locally available opportunities—to a more expansive horizon of possibility, grounded in newly acquired information, enhanced confidence, and the ability to evaluate opportunities in relation to

their aspirations. This shift in interpretive framework indicates a deeper change in how girls understand themselves and their capabilities.

Equally important is the programme's impact on aspirational development. Aspirations are shaped not only by individual preferences but by exposure to opportunity structures, cultural scripts, and perceived feasibility (Ray, 2006; Appadurai, 2004). For many girls in low-opportunity settings, aspirations are constrained by limited information, lack of relatable role models, and pressure to conform to gendered expectations around marriage, mobility, and employment. Mentorship appears to have disrupted this pattern by providing girls with exposure to professional pathways, success stories of women, and informational resources about careers in sectors such as engineering, IT, finance, health sciences, and public service.

Global research demonstrates that role models are critical in shaping adolescent girls' aspirations, particularly in fields where women are underrepresented (Beaman et al., 2012; Eccles, 2009; Jensen, 2012). Through direct mentorship interactions, participants could visualise success stories that resembled their own backgrounds, thereby reducing the psychological distance between their lived realities and the professional possibilities available to them. Girls who previously articulated narrow or socially conventional aspirations were now envisioning careers that required higher education, technical training, and sustained commitment—an important indicator of aspirational mobility.

Mentorship also reduced information gaps that commonly constrain girls' career choices. Studies show that young women in low-income communities often lack access

to accurate labour-market information, college selection guidance, and financial or administrative knowledge needed to pursue higher education or professional training (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). By addressing these gaps, the programme enabled girls to make more informed decisions about academic pathways and skill-development opportunities. The ability to foresee consequences—such as the value of digital literacy in modern employment or the importance of attending skill-development programmes—reflects a maturing understanding of how education translates into economic and social mobility.

The findings also point to an expansion in multidimensional agency, a concept articulated by Kabeer (1999) as the process of defining one’s goals and acting upon them.

Agency encompasses three components:

1. **Cognitive agency**—the ability to analyse, reflect, and make informed judgments.
2. **Emotional agency**—the capacity to manage fear, regulate emotions, and maintain motivation.
3. **Relational agency**—the ability to influence or negotiate with family members, peers, and community actors.

The programme strengthened all three dimensions. Mentored girls demonstrated clearer awareness of their options and consequences, greater emotional resilience in navigating barriers, and stronger willingness to communicate their aspirations to others. Several participants described new confidence in negotiation within the family—particularly regarding continuing their studies or delaying early marriage—highlighting the social ripple effects of strengthened agency.

The development of civic identity, an often-overlooked dimension of adolescent capability, also emerged in the findings. Girls reported improvements in family cohesion, participation in community activities, and greater awareness of social issues. Civic identity begins to form during adolescence as individuals develop a sense of belonging, responsibility, and potential contribution to society (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Mentorship played a role in nurturing this emergent identity by encouraging dialogue on social issues, promoting leadership, and modelling prosocial behaviour. These early expressions of civic engagement are essential indicators of long-term empowerment, as empowered women often become key contributors to community development and intergenerational transformation.

Additionally, the programme appears to have influenced how girls interpret and respond to structural barriers. Rather than perceiving challenges—financial hardship, gendered norms, limited mobility—as fixed constraints, many mentored girls described them as obstacles that could be navigated with planning, negotiation, or support. This shift reflects what Appadurai (2004) describes as the “capacity to aspire”—the ability to conceptualise alternative futures and identify pathways to achieve them. Aspirational capacity is not evenly distributed; it is shaped by one’s access to supportive networks and enabling information. Mentorship helped level this aspirational inequality by offering relational resources typically unavailable to girls in marginalised settings.

The findings also highlight the interplay between emotional development and cognitive growth. As girls became more confident and self-aware, their ability to make informed decisions improved. Emotional resilience—built through safe mentoring

relationships—allowed them to persist in thinking through difficult choices rather than defaulting to avoidance or deference. This aligns with research in adolescent psychology indicating that socio-emotional support enhances cognitive functioning, especially decision-making under pressure (Steinberg, 2008; Dahl, 2017).

Overall, Research Question Two demonstrates that mentorship and life-skills education significantly improve decision-making maturity, reflective capability, aspirational clarity, and multi-dimensional agency among adolescent girls. These developmental gains are deeply interconnected: as girls become more reflective, they envision broader futures; as they see broader futures, their confidence strengthens; as confidence strengthens, agency expands. The programme thus initiates a virtuous cycle of empowerment through which girls not only make better decisions in the present but position themselves to pursue meaningful opportunities in the future.

The evidence affirms that mentorship serves as a transformative developmental environment—one that compensates for systemic inequities, builds cognitive and emotional resources, expands opportunity awareness, and nurtures a generation of young women capable of shaping their own destinies. In low-opportunity contexts, such interventions are not simply beneficial; they are essential for disrupting cycles of marginalisation and enabling adolescent girls to envision, pursue, and achieve empowered futures.

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

This study set out to examine the developmental influence of a structured life skills and mentorship programme on the educational, psychosocial, and aspirational trajectories of adolescent girls and young women situated within socio-economically low-opportunity environments. The inquiry was positioned at the intersection of social psychology, human development, and gender studies, and was informed by an integrated theoretical architecture drawing from Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997), Sen's Capability Approach (1999), Nussbaum's capabilities framework (2000), and Positive Youth Development principles (Lerner et al., 2005). These frameworks collectively guided the investigation into three interrelated domains of transformation: (1) self-image and confidence, (2) decision-making and critical evaluation, and (3) educational and career aspirations.

The study was grounded in the recognition that adolescent development does not unfold in isolation from structural constraints. Rather, identity formation, confidence building, and future planning are shaped by social expectations, economic limitations, institutional infrastructures, and access to role models. Within low-opportunity contexts—particularly those characterised by financial instability, first-generation learner status, gendered mobility restrictions, and limited guidance ecosystems—adolescent girls often experience what can be described as “constrained developmental bandwidth.” Their

cognitive and emotional capacities may be intact, yet their perceived horizons of possibility remain restricted. It is within this developmental tension that structured life skills and mentorship interventions operate as catalytic supports.

The findings from Research Question One demonstrated that participation in the life skills and mentorship programme produced substantial improvements in girls' psychosocial wellbeing, particularly regarding self-confidence, leadership identity, and positive self-perception. Mentored girls exhibited reduced levels of self-doubt, greater willingness to articulate opinions, and stronger internal motivation to continue education. These outcomes are consistent with global meta-analytic research identifying mentoring relationships as powerful predictors of self-efficacy, emotional resilience, and academic persistence (DuBois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2022).

From a Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) perspective, these findings are theoretically coherent. Bandura (1997) posits that self-efficacy beliefs are constructed through four primary pathways: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological regulation. The life skills and mentorship programme operationalised each of these mechanisms.

Mastery Experiences: Through structured exercises in communication, public speaking, problem-solving, and collaborative tasks, participants engaged in repeated opportunities to practise competence. These experiences served as mastery episodes, enabling girls to reinterpret themselves as capable actors rather than passive recipients of

circumstance. For girls from environments where external validation is limited, structured mastery experiences become especially transformative.

Vicarious Learning: Exposure to mentors—particularly professional women—provided visible counter-narratives to restrictive gender scripts. Observing mentors who had navigated educational and career pathways successfully offered participants symbolic evidence that alternative futures were attainable. Such modelling reduces perceived distance between current identity and aspirational identity.

Social Persuasion: Affirmation and encouragement from mentors functioned as forms of positive social persuasion. Consistent reinforcement of potential and competence helped girls reframe internal narratives shaped by doubt or prior discouragement.

Physiological Regulation: Life skills training also incorporated emotional awareness and stress management techniques, enabling participants to manage anxiety associated with public performance, academic challenges, or family negotiations.

Through these integrated processes, girls were able to reframe limiting beliefs, challenge internalised gender norms, and construct more empowered identities as capable students and future professionals. Importantly, the programme did not merely elevate confidence superficially; it strengthened what might be termed “functional confidence”—confidence grounded in demonstrated competence and supported by relational scaffolding.

The development of leadership identity emerged as an especially noteworthy outcome. Many mentored girls expressed willingness to guide peers, mentor younger students, or assume responsibility within group settings. This shift aligns with Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory, which emphasises the “Five Cs” of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner et al., 2005). As confidence and competence increased, participants also demonstrated heightened prosocial orientation and leadership inclination. This suggests that mentorship not only builds individual capacity but also fosters collective empowerment through peer diffusion effects.

Research Question Two revealed compelling cognitive outcomes. Girls who participated in mentorship demonstrated marked improvements in their ability to assess options, anticipate consequences, and articulate coherent connections between education, skill acquisition, and long-term life trajectories. They displayed enhanced clarity regarding academic pathways, entrance examinations, internship strategies, and professional preparation.

This dimension of transformation aligns closely with the concept of “aspirational capacity” (Appadurai, 2004), which conceptualises aspiration as a navigational map rather than a static desire. Aspirational capacity involves the ability to imagine future states and identify pathways to reach them. In low-income environments, aspiration may be present but structurally thin—lacking informational resources and strategic clarity. Mentorship thickens aspiration by providing information, guidance, and realistic sequencing.

Role model visibility research further supports these findings (Beaman et al., 2012; Jensen, 2012; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). Exposure to successful individuals from relatable backgrounds can significantly shift ambition thresholds and occupational imagination. Mentored girls in this study displayed elevated aspirations in fields traditionally underrepresented by women—particularly STEM disciplines, government services, and professional sectors. Such shifts indicate not only enhanced ambition but expanded cognitive mapping of opportunity.

Importantly, the programme strengthened what may be termed “**cognitive agency.**” Participants reported improved ability to:

- Evaluate trade-offs between short-term employment and long-term education.
- Assess financial implications of career pathways.
- Seek information independently.
- Anticipate structural obstacles.
- Develop contingency plans.

These capacities are central to Sen’s Capability Approach (1999), which defines development as the expansion of real freedoms to achieve valued functionings. The programme enhanced not only internal capabilities but also girls’ ability to convert educational access into strategic action. Decision-making competencies became tools for navigating structural constraints rather than succumbing to them.

The shift in educational and career aspirations represents one of the most transformative outcomes of the programme. Mentored girls demonstrated greater clarity in goal articulation, stronger professional identity formation, and enhanced readiness for academic and vocational transitions. They were more likely to connect current skill development with long-term professional objectives.

This shift disrupts what literature describes as “constrained aspiration structures” (Gutman & Schoon, 2013; Sirin, 2005), commonly observed among first-generation learners and low-income youth. Constrained aspiration does not imply lack of ambition but rather limited exposure to diverse career models and perceived feasibility boundaries.

Mentorship expanded aspirational horizons in three key ways:

1. **Information Access:** Providing concrete knowledge about educational pathways, scholarships, competitive exams, and sector requirements.
2. **Normative Reframing:** Normalising women’s participation in high-growth and male-dominated sectors.
3. **Identity Alignment:** Encouraging girls to view professional ambition as compatible with cultural and familial roles rather than oppositional to them.

The presence of professional female mentors provided both symbolic representation and practical navigation strategies. Girls could envision themselves

occupying roles that previously seemed inaccessible. This aspirational shift has long-term implications for labour market participation and intergenerational mobility.

Beyond individual gains, the programme strengthened relational and social competencies. Participants reported improved communication within families, enhanced conflict resolution skills, greater peer solidarity, and increased willingness to engage in community activities.

These findings align with research demonstrating that life skills interventions enhance emotional regulation, prosocial behaviour, and civic engagement (Patton et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2019). Enhanced communication skills enabled girls to negotiate educational continuation with parents, articulate career intentions more persuasively, and manage disagreements constructively.

In this sense, the programme contributed to the development of **relational capital**—the capacity to maintain supportive networks and navigate social systems effectively. This is particularly significant in socio-economically constrained contexts, where social capital can serve as a compensatory mechanism for financial limitations.

The broader structural context within which participants operate is characterised by economic precarity, gendered mobility restrictions, limited institutional guidance, and uneven digital access. Within such contexts, even modest gains in confidence, decision-making capacity, and aspiration clarity represent substantial developmental shifts.

Research from India and the Global South consistently highlights the transformative potential of structured mentorship and socio-emotional learning

interventions (Pradhan et al., 2021; Bharadwaj et al., 2018; World Bank, 2020; UN Women, 2023). The present study reinforces this body of evidence by demonstrating measurable associations between mentorship exposure and developmental enhancement.

Importantly, the benefits observed extend beyond immediate psychosocial uplift. Participants demonstrated improved readiness for academic progression, competitive examinations, internship participation, and professional networking. These capacities constitute foundational assets for long-term empowerment.

Global youth development research links structured mentorship programmes to improved employment outcomes, educational attainment, and income stability (Kirby, 2011; ILO, 2020). When embedded within structurally constrained environments, such interventions may contribute to interrupting intergenerational disadvantage by:

- Increasing higher education completion rates.
- Expanding occupational diversity among women.
- Strengthening economic contribution.
- Enhancing future parenting and educational investment patterns.

The study affirms its underlying theoretical proposition: that life skills and mentorship programming functions as a multidimensional developmental scaffold. Through Social Cognitive mechanisms, it strengthens self-efficacy. Through Capability expansion, it enlarges real freedoms. Through Positive Youth Development principles, it

nurtures holistic growth. Through aspirational and role model exposure, it reshapes professional imagination.

Importantly, the programme does not operate at a single level. It simultaneously:

- Builds internal competencies.
- Expands informational access.
- Strengthens relational support.
- Reframes normative expectations.
- Aligns skill acquisition with labour market realities.

This integrative approach suggests that mentorship and life skills education should not be conceptualised as supplementary enhancements but as core developmental infrastructure within educational systems serving low-opportunity populations.

The findings provide strong justification for embedding structured mentorship systems and life skills curricula within mainstream educational institutions, particularly in resource-constrained regions. Educational systems that focus exclusively on academic curriculum without addressing psychosocial development risk perpetuating inequity.

Policy implications include:

- Institutionalisation of structured mentorship frameworks.
- Integration of socio-emotional learning modules.
- Investment in digital literacy and career readiness workshops.

- Development of alumni and professional networks accessible to first-generation learners.
- Gender-responsive programme design.

When systematically implemented, such interventions can enhance not only individual empowerment but institutional performance metrics related to retention, progression, and employability.

Overall, the study establishes that mentorship and life skills education are not peripheral interventions but essential developmental supports. They expand opportunities, strengthen agency, and enable adolescent girls to navigate complex educational and socio-economic landscapes with greater clarity and resilience.

In socio-economically low-opportunity contexts, where structural disadvantages often suppress aspiration and confidence, structured mentorship acts as both catalyst and scaffold. It transforms potential into navigable pathways. It converts access into agency. It enables girls not only to dream differently but to plan differently.

By empirically demonstrating these outcomes, the research provides robust justification for systemic integration of life skills and mentorship programming within educational ecosystems committed to gender equity and inclusive development.

6.2 Implications

The findings of this study have wide-ranging implications for theoretical advancement, educational practice, institutional design, policy formulation, and the

broader ecosystem supporting adolescent and young women's empowerment in India and comparable Global South contexts. The evidence generated does not merely confirm the value of mentorship and life skills programming; it compels a rethinking of how developmental support is conceptualised within higher education systems serving low-opportunity populations. The study's results situate mentorship and life skills education not as supplementary enrichment activities but as foundational developmental infrastructure necessary for gender-equitable educational transformation.

This section elaborates these implications across five interconnected domains:

1. Theoretical Contributions
2. Institutional and Pedagogical Implications
3. Mentor Development and Programme Architecture
4. Policy and System-Level Implications
5. Ecosystem and Economic Implications

I. Theoretical Contributions

1. Advancing Self-Efficacy Theory in Constrained Contexts

At a theoretical level, the results reaffirm and extend Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997) in meaningful ways. The evidence demonstrates that girls who participated in the mentorship and life skills programme exhibited increased confidence, strengthened self-belief, improved emotional regulation, and stronger intrinsic motivation to pursue higher education and professional aspirations. These shifts reflect the central

mechanisms Bandura identifies—mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and affective regulation.

However, this study deepens contemporary interpretations of self-efficacy by illustrating how relational support structures can compensate for socio-economic deficits that typically restrict efficacy-building experiences in low-opportunity environments. In resource-constrained contexts, girls often lack exposure to mastery opportunities (e.g., leadership roles, public speaking platforms), visible role models in professional domains, and consistent positive reinforcement. The mentorship structure effectively substitutes for these missing environmental affordances.

The findings suggest that self-efficacy development in socio-economically constrained contexts is not solely a function of individual effort but is heavily mediated by relational scaffolding. This extends SCT by highlighting that efficacy-building environments can be institutionally engineered. Structured mentoring relationships become vehicles for creating mastery loops, normalising ambition, and reframing failure as growth. Thus, the study contributes to a context-sensitive refinement of self-efficacy theory, emphasising the institutionalisation of relational scaffolds in environments where natural scaffolds are absent.

2. Deepening the Capability Approach

The findings significantly enrich the Capability Approach articulated by Sen (1999) and expanded by Nussbaum (2000). The programme demonstrated that psychosocial interventions can expand both internal capabilities (confidence, critical

reasoning, future orientation) and external capabilities (access to networks, professional information, strategic pathways).

Importantly, the results illustrate the conversion function central to Sen's theory: how individuals transform resources into capabilities. Education alone is insufficient if girls lack the psychosocial conditions required to leverage it. This study provides empirical evidence that mentorship and life skills education strengthen conversion factors—cognitive clarity, negotiation skills, aspirational mapping—allowing girls to transform formal educational enrolment into substantive opportunity.

The programme also highlights the relational dimension of capability expansion. While Sen conceptualises freedom as central, the findings show that relational proximity to mentors directly enhances perceived and actual freedom. Girls reported greater confidence in negotiating with parents, greater clarity in articulating career ambitions, and greater willingness to challenge restrictive norms. These relationally mediated freedoms expand the effective capability set.

This empirical contribution aligns with scholarship arguing that empowerment requires cognitive, emotional, and social conditions enabling individuals to translate access into choice (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007). The study thus provides applied validation of the Capability Approach in the specific domain of adolescent girls' educational and aspirational transformation.

3. Extending Positive Youth Development (PYD) to Gendered Indian Contexts

The study strongly supports and extends Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory (Lerner et al., 2005). Participants demonstrated growth across the “Five Cs”:

- **Competence** (improved communication, digital literacy, strategic thinking)
- **Confidence** (strengthened self-belief)
- **Connection** (enhanced peer and mentor relationships)
- **Character** (greater sense of responsibility and self-regulation)
- **Contribution** (willingness to mentor others and engage in community)

Crucially, this study demonstrates that PYD principles are adaptable and effective within gendered and resource-constrained Indian contexts, extending the framework’s applicability beyond Western settings where it is more commonly studied.

The findings also introduce a potential sixth “C” in constrained contexts: **Conversion**—the ability to convert developmental assets into structural mobility. In environments where structural barriers are high, the translation of competence into opportunity becomes the defining marker of developmental success.

II. Contributions to Gendered Agency Literature

The study offers substantial contributions to scholarship on gendered agency. Many participants transitioned from what may be termed “thin agency”—navigating limited choices within tightly constrained environments—to expressing “thick agency,”

characterised by informed decision-making, negotiation capacity, and strategic future planning.

Agency here was not rebellious or oppositional but relational and negotiated.

Girls reported:

- Engaging parents in discussions about educational continuation.
- Strategically delaying early marriage pressure.
- Articulating non-traditional career goals.
- Seeking external skill development opportunities.

These shifts align with feminist scholarship that views agency as layered and socially embedded (Kabeer, 2005; Ahearn, 2001). Mentorship emerges as a structural enabler of agency reconstruction. The presence of a supportive adult provided psychological legitimacy and strategic tools necessary for navigating patriarchal constraints.

Importantly, the study shows that agency development requires external relational reinforcement. Without mentorship, aspirations may remain cognitively formed but behaviourally dormant. Mentorship activates agency through encouragement, modelling, and strategic coaching.

III. Institutional and Pedagogical Implications

1. Reframing Mentorship as Institutional Infrastructure

Traditional higher education structures in India focus primarily on academic instruction. However, academic performance alone does not guarantee educational persistence or professional readiness—particularly for first-generation female students.

The findings indicate that structured mentorship must be institutionalised rather than left to informal faculty goodwill. Institutions should implement:

- Formal mentor-mentee pairing systems
- Peer mentorship networks
- Alumni engagement platforms
- Professional women-in-industry partnerships
- Structured mentorship tracking and feedback systems

Mentorship must be embedded within institutional calendars and accountability frameworks. It should not depend solely on individual enthusiasm.

2. Integrating Life Skills into Core Curriculum

Life skills education should be integrated into formal timetables rather than treated as extracurricular enrichment. Modules should include:

- Communication and public speaking
- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Gender awareness and negotiation skills

- Digital literacy
- Career mapping and professional readiness
- Emotional regulation and resilience training

Such integration aligns with NEP 2020's emphasis on socio-emotional learning and employability skills. The study demonstrates that these modules are not peripheral—they are central to empowerment.

3. Career Readiness as Structured Learning

The study highlights significant information deficits regarding career pathways. Institutions must formalise:

- Career guidance cells
- Exposure visits
- Internship facilitation
- Resume and interview workshops
- Competitive exam preparation awareness
- Digital career navigation platforms

Career readiness must become institutionalised developmental scaffolding.

IV. Mentor Preparation and Programme Fidelity

The findings underscore that mentorship quality matters. Mentors must receive training in:

- Adolescent psychology
- Gender sensitivity
- Reflective dialogue techniques
- Motivational interviewing
- Socio-economic awareness
- Boundary setting and ethical practice

Mentors serve as developmental catalysts. Poorly trained mentors may unintentionally reproduce limiting norms or offer inaccurate guidance.

Programme fidelity requires:

- Clear mentorship goals
- Regular monitoring
- Structured reflection sessions
- Evaluation metrics
- Feedback loops

Mentorship must be systematic rather than episodic.

V. Policy and System-Level Implications

1. Integration into National Frameworks

The findings strongly support integration of mentorship and life skills into:

- NEP 2020
- Samagra Shiksha
- State-level skill missions
- Higher education quality frameworks

Mentorship should be recognised as a core component of SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) strategies.

2. STEM and Professional Sector Inclusion

Mentorship can bridge opportunity gaps in STEM and professional sectors where women remain underrepresented. Targeted mentorship initiatives should focus on:

- STEM exposure
- Government services preparation
- Entrepreneurship
- Digital economy careers

3. Funding and Incentive Structures

Policy must allocate funding for:

- Mentor stipends

- Life skills curriculum development
- Career guidance infrastructure
- Digital resource provision

Institutional incentives should reward mentorship engagement.

VI. Ecosystem-Level Implications

Empowerment cannot be isolated within institutional walls. The study highlights the importance of multi-level ecosystems involving:

- Parents
- Women's groups
- Alumni networks
- NGOs
- Professional associations

Family engagement workshops can align parental expectations with girls' aspirations.

Community-based mentorship hubs can reinforce institutional gains.

VII. Economic and Macroeconomic Implications

Increasing women's labour force participation significantly enhances GDP and economic resilience (World Bank, 2020; IMF, 2018). By strengthening girls' readiness for high-growth sectors, mentorship and life skills interventions contribute to:

- Workforce diversification
- Reduced gender wage gaps
- Higher household incomes
- Improved intergenerational outcomes
- National productivity gains

Thus, these interventions represent strategic economic investments.

VIII. Long-Term Empowerment Architecture

The study demonstrates that life skills and mentorship interventions:

- Expand internal psychological resources.
- Broaden aspirational horizons.
- Increase strategic decision-making.
- Enhance educational persistence.
- Strengthen professional readiness.

These are foundational capacities for long-term empowerment.

Empowerment is not a single outcome but a cumulative process. The programme initiates a developmental cascade: confidence → aspiration clarity → skill acquisition → strategic action → opportunity access.

IX. Conclusion

Taken together, the implications show that mentorship and life skills education can serve as transformative structures within higher education ecosystems. They enable adolescent girls and young women to overcome socio-economic barriers, cultivate empowered identities, and pursue meaningful futures.

The findings call for systemic integration of mentorship within India's educational and policy frameworks. Such integration has the potential to reshape developmental trajectories, strengthen institutional equity, and contribute to more gender-equitable social and economic outcomes.

Mentorship and life skills education are not supplementary add-ons. They are foundational developmental architecture for gender-just futures.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While this study makes a significant contribution to understanding the role of life-skills and mentorship interventions in enhancing the agency, educational continuity, and future readiness of adolescent girls and young women in low-opportunity contexts, it simultaneously reveals the complexity of developmental transformation and underscores the need for sustained scholarly inquiry. The findings illuminate a dynamic developmental process rather than a static outcome, indicating that mentorship-based

empowerment is not a singular event but an evolving trajectory shaped by structural, relational, psychological, and institutional forces. Consequently, future research must move beyond short-term outcome measurement and toward integrative, multi-layered research agendas capable of capturing the temporal, contextual, and systemic dimensions of empowerment.

Longitudinal Developmental Trajectories

One of the most pressing priorities for future investigation lies in the implementation of longitudinal research designs capable of tracing girls' developmental pathways over extended time horizons. The present study demonstrates clear short-term gains in self-confidence, aspiration clarity, decision-making capacity, and psychosocial resilience; however, it does not yet establish whether these proximal indicators translate into durable life outcomes. Longitudinal research that follows participants from late adolescence into early adulthood—and ideally into early career or family-formation stages—would enable scholars to evaluate whether early mentorship exposure produces sustained effects on educational attainment, labour-market participation, leadership engagement, financial autonomy, and delayed marriage.

Such designs would also allow for the examination of developmental inflection points: moments when gains accelerate, plateau, or regress. Identifying these turning points is crucial for understanding when interventions are most impactful and when additional support may be required. Longitudinal evidence could illuminate whether life-skills interventions function primarily as catalytic experiences that permanently alter

trajectories, or whether they operate as developmental scaffolds requiring periodic reinforcement. These insights would be particularly valuable for policymakers seeking to allocate resources efficiently across educational stages.

Furthermore, long-term studies would facilitate examination of intergenerational effects. If early empowerment contributes to improved economic stability, educational continuation, or delayed childbearing, subsequent generations may benefit through improved health, educational opportunity, and social mobility. Demonstrating such intergenerational returns would significantly strengthen the case for public investment in mentorship initiatives by framing them not merely as educational programmes but as structural development interventions with macro-level social returns.

Multi-Regional and Cross-Cultural Replication

Another vital direction for future scholarship involves replicating and adapting the intervention across diverse geographic and socio-cultural settings. India's regional diversity encompasses profound variations in linguistic environment, institutional capacity, gender norms, labour-market structure, and educational infrastructure. As such, findings derived from one regional context cannot be assumed to generalise across the entire national landscape. Multi-site studies spanning states, rural-urban divides, and institutional types would enable researchers to distinguish universal programme mechanisms from context-specific adaptations.

Comparative designs could examine how mentorship operates differently in settings characterised by varying levels of patriarchal rigidity, economic opportunity, or

institutional support. For instance, mentorship in regions with strong female labour-force participation may function primarily as a career-navigation tool, whereas in more restrictive contexts it may serve first as a mechanism for expanding perceived possibility and negotiating social permission. Such comparative insights would contribute to the development of a contextualised theory of adolescent empowerment grounded in the lived realities of the Global South rather than imported models derived primarily from Western educational contexts.

Cross-national South Asian comparisons would further enrich this understanding by revealing how structural similarities and differences across neighbouring countries shape programme effectiveness. These analyses could ultimately support the creation of modular intervention frameworks—core components that remain constant across settings combined with flexible elements tailored to local sociocultural conditions.

Deep Qualitative Exploration of Psychological Mechanisms

Although quantitative indicators provide valuable evidence of outcome shifts, they cannot fully capture the internal developmental processes through which girls interpret, internalise, and enact mentorship experiences. Future research should therefore prioritise intensive qualitative methodologies capable of illuminating these subtle psychological transformations. In-depth interviews, narrative inquiry, life-history approaches, diary methods, and ethnographic observation can reveal how participants reconstruct their sense of self, renegotiate familial expectations, and develop new cognitive schemas about possibility and constraint.

Such approaches would allow researchers to trace identity formation in real time, capturing how exposure to role models, skill-building exercises, and reflective dialogue influences self-concept. They would also enable examination of how girls translate abstract life-skills concepts into concrete everyday decision-making practices—how confidence manifests in classroom participation, how negotiation skills appear in family conversations, and how aspirational clarity informs course selection or job applications.

Moreover, qualitative inquiry can surface dimensions of experience that standardised instruments often miss: emotional ambivalence, fear of social sanction, internal conflict between personal ambition and collective responsibility, or the subtle relational negotiations required to exercise agency within hierarchical family structures. By integrating such nuanced perspectives, future research can produce richer theoretical models that better reflect the complexity of empowerment processes.

Mentor–Mentee Relational Dynamics

The relational architecture of mentorship represents another critical but underexplored domain. Existing literature often treats mentorship as a binary variable—present or absent—without sufficiently analysing how variations in relationship quality influence developmental outcomes. Future research should therefore examine mentorship as a relational system characterised by trust, reciprocity, communication patterns, and socio-emotional attunement.

Scholars could investigate which mentor attributes most strongly predict positive outcomes: empathy, professional expertise, cultural familiarity, gender concordance, or

motivational style. Similarly, research could explore optimal interaction frequency, duration, and modality. It is plausible that intensive short-term mentoring may be highly effective for specific goals, whereas long-term relationships may be necessary for identity transformation and sustained aspiration.

Programme fidelity also warrants systematic investigation. As mentorship initiatives scale, variation in facilitator training, institutional support, and resource availability may influence implementation quality. Studying how closely programmes adhere to their intended design—and how deviations affect outcomes—would generate actionable insights for organisations seeking to expand interventions without diluting effectiveness.

Intersectional Pathways of Impact

Future research must also incorporate intersectional analytic frameworks capable of accounting for the layered realities shaping girls' lives. Gender rarely operates as an isolated determinant; rather, it interacts with caste, class, religion, disability, migration status, regional identity, and other axes of marginalisation. These intersecting identities may influence not only baseline opportunity structures but also responsiveness to mentorship interventions.

An intersectional research agenda would examine differential programme effects across demographic subgroups, identifying who benefits most, under what conditions, and why. Such analysis could reveal whether certain populations require tailored programme components—for example, additional mobility support for girls facing

geographic constraints, or language-adapted curricula for those studying in non-dominant linguistic contexts. By foregrounding diversity within the category of “girls,” scholars can move toward more equitable programme design and avoid one-size-fits-all approaches.

Household and Community Moderators

The role of family and community environments constitutes another fertile area for investigation. Educational persistence and career decision-making are deeply embedded within relational ecosystems shaped by parental expectations, economic necessity, cultural norms, and local opportunity structures. Even the most well-designed mentorship programme may encounter resistance if participants operate within restrictive domestic environments.

Future studies should model how household attitudes toward girls’ education, labour participation, and mobility interact with mentorship experiences. Mixed-methods designs combining surveys, interviews, and family-level case studies could illuminate how supportive versus restrictive contexts influence programme uptake. Researchers might also examine whether involving parents or caregivers as programme stakeholders enhances effectiveness by fostering shared understanding and collective investment in girls’ development.

Digital Integration and Technological Amplification

Rapid technological expansion across India presents new possibilities for scaling mentorship interventions through digital platforms. Future research should investigate

how blended models—combining in-person engagement with online learning environments—affect accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and developmental impact. Digital ecosystems may enable girls to access broader professional networks, participate in virtual mentorship sessions, obtain certifications, and explore career pathways beyond their immediate geographic environment.

Evaluating such models would require attention not only to outcomes but also to digital equity. Access to devices, connectivity, and digital literacy remains uneven, and these disparities may reproduce existing inequalities if not carefully addressed. Research examining the conditions under which digital tools enhance rather than hinder empowerment will be essential for designing inclusive technological interventions.

System-Level Enabling Conditions for Scale

Finally, future scholarship must examine the institutional and policy environments necessary for scaling mentorship programmes across educational systems. Small-scale pilot initiatives often demonstrate strong results, yet translating these successes into system-wide implementation requires alignment across governance structures, funding mechanisms, administrative capacity, and policy priorities.

Organisational case studies, institutional ethnographies, and policy analyses could illuminate how universities, state agencies, and national missions integrate mentorship within broader educational strategies. Such work would help identify enabling conditions—leadership commitment, training infrastructure, monitoring systems, and cross-sector partnerships—that support sustainable implementation. Understanding these

systemic factors is critical for moving beyond isolated interventions toward structural transformation capable of influencing gender equity outcomes at population scale.

6.4 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated—through rigorous empirical analysis and theoretically grounded interpretation—that life skills education and structured mentorship programmes function as transformative developmental mechanisms capable of advancing gender equity, strengthening psychosocial resilience, and expanding future-oriented opportunities for adolescent girls and young women situated within socio-economically low-opportunity contexts. The evidence presented across the preceding chapters confirms that such interventions do not merely generate short-term motivational uplift or temporary confidence gains. Rather, they fundamentally reshape how girls understand themselves, interpret their educational journeys, and envision and pursue their professional trajectories within structurally constrained environments.

Across cognitive, emotional, aspirational, relational, and institutional domains, participation in structured mentorship and life-skills programming yielded measurable and meaningful shifts. Through guided reflection, relational scaffolding, exposure to professional role models, and structured opportunities for practice, participants developed heightened self-efficacy, strengthened decision-making capacity, improved emotional regulation, and greater clarity regarding their academic and professional aspirations. These outcomes are directly aligned with a substantial body of global research linking mentorship to enhanced academic persistence, psychosocial wellbeing, and long-term life outcomes (DuBois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2022).

Yet, beyond confirming established findings, this study contributes deeper insight into how such transformations unfold within resource-constrained Indian contexts shaped by economic precarity, gendered mobility restrictions, limited career exposure, and intergenerational educational disadvantage. It reveals not only that mentorship works—but how and why it works in environments where opportunity structures are thin and developmental scaffolding is often absent.

I. Reframing Self-Perception: The Psychological Foundations of Empowerment

One of the most profound conclusions emerging from this research concerns the centrality of self-perception in shaping developmental trajectories. Girls who engaged with the life-skills and mentorship programme demonstrated increased confidence, reduced self-doubt, and a more coherent sense of identity as capable learners and future professionals. These internal shifts were neither superficial nor isolated; they were cumulative outcomes of structured relational engagement and guided experiential learning.

From a Social Cognitive perspective, these findings affirm that mastery experiences, vicarious modelling, and social persuasion are not abstract constructs but operational mechanisms capable of altering developmental trajectories when systematically embedded within educational ecosystems. Participants reported that opportunities to speak publicly, engage in reflective exercises, interact with mentors, and receive affirmation reshaped their internal narratives about competence and possibility.

For girls in socio-economically constrained contexts, internal narratives are often shaped by subtle yet persistent messages regarding limitation—messages rooted in gender norms, economic hardship, and limited exposure to diverse professional pathways. The programme functioned as a counter-narrative generator. It enabled participants to reinterpret past academic challenges as growth opportunities rather than indicators of incapacity. It reframed ambition as legitimate rather than socially inappropriate. It validated professional aspiration as compatible with cultural identity rather than oppositional to it.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that self-efficacy development is not merely an individual psychological phenomenon but a socially constructed outcome shaped by relational ecology. In low-opportunity settings where affirmation and exposure are scarce, structured mentorship becomes a compensatory mechanism that restores developmental balance. Thus, self-efficacy is not solely cultivated through individual perseverance but through relational environments deliberately designed to reinforce belief.

II. Expanding Real Freedoms: Capability Transformation in Practice

The findings strongly affirm Sen's (1999) and Nussbaum's (2000) assertion that genuine empowerment requires the expansion of real freedoms—the ability not only to access resources but to convert them into meaningful life choices. Education alone does not guarantee empowerment. Without the cognitive clarity, emotional resilience,

informational awareness, and relational support necessary to navigate complex pathways, educational access remains incomplete.

Participants in the programme demonstrated expansion across both internal and external capabilities:

Internal Capabilities:

- Increased confidence in expressing opinions.
- Improved critical thinking and problem evaluation.
- Greater clarity regarding personal strengths and interests.
- Enhanced emotional regulation under stress.
- Strengthened future orientation.

External Capabilities:

- Access to professional mentors.
- Exposure to career pathways.
- Knowledge of skill-building opportunities.
- Awareness of competitive examinations and professional networks.
- Guidance on navigating institutional systems.

The study thus provides empirical illustration of capability conversion in action. Life skills education and mentorship enhanced participants' ability to transform educational enrolment into strategic educational engagement. Girls moved from passive participation in academic systems to active planning of professional futures.

Notably, the programme also disrupted constrained aspiration structures shaped by economic precarity and patriarchal expectations. Participants articulated ambitions in STEM fields, civil services, entrepreneurship, and other high-growth sectors—domains historically underrepresented by women. This shift resonates with global research showing that mentorship increases girls' participation in male-dominated professional pathways (Beaman et al., 2012; Jensen, 2012; World Bank, 2020).

In this sense, the programme did not simply expand options—it expanded imagination. It broadened the boundaries of what participants perceived as realistically attainable.

III. From Thin to Thick Agency: Negotiating Gendered Constraints

A particularly important conclusion emerging from this research is the shift from what may be conceptualised as “thin agency” to “thick agency.” Thin agency refers to decision-making within tightly circumscribed environments where choices are narrow and heavily regulated by structural constraints. Thick agency, by contrast, involves informed, strategic, and negotiated action within and sometimes beyond those constraints.

Girls in the programme demonstrated evidence of thickening agency through:

- Negotiating continued education with family members.
- Articulating long-term academic and professional plans.
- Challenging assumptions about gender-appropriate careers.
- Seeking external training opportunities.
- Planning financially for future transitions.

These behavioural shifts align with feminist scholarship viewing agency as relational and embedded (Kabeer, 2005; Ahearn, 2001). Agency is not rebellion; it is strategic navigation. Mentorship functioned as both psychological reinforcement and tactical guidance. It provided language, validation, and procedural knowledge necessary for girls to exercise agency within culturally sensitive boundaries.

Importantly, this thickening of agency did not require rejection of familial structures. Instead, participants often reframed their aspirations in ways that aligned with family values—emphasising economic contribution, stability, and respectability. Thus, mentorship facilitated negotiation rather than rupture, strengthening intergenerational dialogue.

IV. Relational Ripple Effects: Beyond Individual Transformation

The study reveals that mentorship produces relational ripple effects extending beyond individual participants. Girls reported improved communication within families, stronger peer support dynamics, and increased willingness to assume leadership roles within community spaces.

This finding aligns with Positive Youth Development (Lerner et al., 2005; Benson, 2007), which posits that supportive developmental relationships cultivate competence, confidence, connection, character, and contribution. Participants exhibited early signs of generative leadership—expressing desire to mentor younger girls, participate in civic initiatives, and advocate for continued education among peers.

These ripple effects are particularly significant in communities where restrictive norms often persist through social reproduction. When empowered girls model expanded aspiration and agency, they disrupt collective assumptions regarding what is possible for young women. Thus, mentorship becomes not only an individual intervention but a community-level normative catalyst.

V. Implications for Educational Systems: Mentorship as Core Infrastructure

The findings underscore a critical educational insight: psychosocial interventions are indispensable complements to traditional academic instruction. Academic excellence without confidence, critical thinking, career clarity, and emotional resilience does not ensure educational persistence or professional success.

Despite policy emphasis under NEP 2020 on holistic development, socio-emotional learning, and employability skills, implementation across higher education remains inconsistent. This research provides empirical justification for embedding structured mentorship and life-skills curricula within institutional frameworks.

Mentorship should be recognised not as an extracurricular enrichment but as developmental infrastructure. Colleges serving low-opportunity populations must institutionalise:

- Structured mentor-mentee pairing systems.
- Alumni and professional women networks.
- Peer mentorship cohorts.
- Career-readiness workshops.
- Integrated life-skills modules within timetables.

Without such systemic embedding, mentorship remains episodic and inequitable.

VI. Economic and Macroeconomic Significance

The broader implications of these findings extend to national development strategy. Women’s labour-force participation in India remains among the lowest globally. Evidence suggests that increasing female labour-force engagement significantly enhances GDP growth and economic resilience (IMF, 2018; UN Women, 2023).

The programme enhanced readiness for higher education completion, STEM participation, entrepreneurship, and competitive examination pathways. These shifts are not merely personal achievements—they represent macroeconomic opportunity. Investing in mentorship and life skills is therefore not only a gender equity imperative but an economic strategy.

When adolescent girls gain clarity, resilience, and professional readiness, the returns include:

- Increased educational completion rates.
- Diversified workforce participation.
- Enhanced household incomes.
- Improved intergenerational outcomes.
- Greater national productivity.

Mentorship thus functions as both social justice intervention and economic multiplier.

VII. Mentorship as Structural Compensation

For girls facing intersecting disadvantages based on gender, caste, poverty, and geography, mentorship becomes a form of structural compensation. It provides access to guidance, networks, and informational capital typically available to more privileged peers.

Conventional educational models assume that students possess baseline guidance resources. In low-opportunity contexts, this assumption is flawed. Mentorship fills this gap, offering:

- Procedural knowledge about navigating institutions.
- Exposure to hidden curriculum norms.

- Validation of ambition.
- Emotional containment during stress.

Thus, mentorship addresses capability constraints directly and indirectly, strengthening conversion factors essential for empowerment.

VIII. Redefining Educational Equity

The study compels a redefinition of educational equity. Equity cannot be limited to enrolment parity or infrastructure provision. True equity requires ensuring that girls possess:

- Psychological readiness.
- Informational awareness.
- Professional exposure.
- Relational scaffolding.
- Decision-making autonomy.

Mentorship and life skills education are therefore central to equity realisation.

IX. Toward Systemic Integration

The findings call for systemic integration of mentorship within:

- Higher education institutions.
- State-funded skill missions.

- Community women’s collectives.
- Alumni networks.
- Public-private partnerships.

Mentorship ecosystems must be multi-layered, ensuring continuity beyond single programme cycles.

X. A Transformative Vision

Ultimately, this study affirms a compelling truth: when adolescent girls are provided with mentorship, life-skills training, exposure to professional pathways, and consistent relational support, they do not merely adapt to existing structures—they begin to reshape them.

Their aspirations expand.
 Their sense of agency strengthens.
 Their educational and professional trajectories shift.

Within communities where girls’ voices have historically been constrained, mentorship becomes an amplifier of possibility.

Final Reflection

This research contributes meaningfully to scholarly debates on adolescent development, capability expansion, and gendered agency. It also offers practical and policy-oriented guidance for India and other Global South contexts seeking to invest strategically in young women’s potential.

The conclusion is unequivocal: mentorship and life skills education are not peripheral enhancements. They are foundational pillars of gender-equitable development.

When girls are equipped with confidence, clarity, skill, and support, they do more than succeed individually—they transform families, uplift communities, and reshape societies.

And in doing so, they illuminate a pathway toward a more just, equitable, and empowered future.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY COVER LETTER

To

16.08.2025

The Heads of Departments,

Dear Sir/Madam,

We seek your kind cooperation in administering a survey as part of a research study examining the educational experiences, life-skills development, and mentorship needs of adolescent girls and young women enrolled in government and government-aided colleges. The purpose of this research is to better understand the challenges, aspirations, and support systems that influence students' confidence, decision-making, and future readiness.

Participation in this survey is voluntary, and the questionnaire requires approximately 10–12 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers; students are encouraged to respond honestly based on their experiences.

All responses will be collected digitally by trained enumerators using a secure platform. The data will be encrypted, stored safely, and handled exclusively by the research team. No personal identifying information will be linked to individual responses, and findings will be reported in aggregate form to ensure complete confidentiality. The design and administration of the survey strictly follow ethical guidelines to protect participant privacy.

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation. Students may skip any question they are uncomfortable with or withdraw at any point without consequence.

We kindly request your support in facilitating the survey within your department and encouraging eligible students to participate. Their insights will contribute meaningfully to strengthening institutional support systems, enhancing life-skills training, and informing programmes that empower young women in higher education.

For any clarification or additional information regarding the study, please feel free to contact:

Devi Anindya
Head – Project Outreach
omhsdevi@gmail.com

We sincerely appreciate your cooperation and support.

Warm regards,



Devi Anindya

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

{ Sample Text Sample Text Sample Text Sample Text Sample Text Sample Text
Sample Text }

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

{ Sample Text Sample Text Sample Text Sample Text Sample Text Sample Text
Sample Text }

REFERENCES

- Ahearn, L.M. (2001) 'Language and agency', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30, pp. 109–137.
- Appadurai, A. (2004) 'The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition', in Rao, V. and Walton, M. (eds.) *Culture and public action*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 59–84.
- Arnett, J.J. (2000) 'Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties', *American Psychologist*, 55(5), pp. 469–480.
- ASER Centre. (2023) *Annual Status of Education Report*. New Delhi: ASER.
- Bandura, A. (1986) *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997) *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman.
- Banerjee, P.A. et al. (2019) 'Life skills education programmes and outcomes: A meta-analytic review', *Educational Research Review*.
- Beaman, L., Duflo, E., Pande, R. and Topalova, P. (2012) 'Female leadership raises aspirations and educational attainment for girls: A policy experiment in India', *Science*, 335(6068), pp. 582–586.
- Becker, G.S. (1964) *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Benson, P.L. (2007) 'Developmental assets: An overview', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 585, pp. 13–27.

Bharadwaj, P. et al. (2018) 'The economic benefits of mentorship programmes: Evidence from India', *Journal of Development Economics*.

Chandra-Mouli, V. et al. (2019) 'Investing in adolescent girls' health and development', *BMJ Global Health*.

Chowdhury, A. (2010) 'Aspirations and mobility among youth in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*.

Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark, V.L. (2017) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Dahl, R. (2017) 'Adolescent brain development and decision-making', *Current Opinion in Psychology*.

Dalton, P., Ghosal, S. and Mani, A. (2016) 'Poverty and aspirations failure', *Economic Journal*.

Dasgupta, S. and Gopalan, M. (2019) 'Gender norms and adolescent aspirations in India', *International Journal of Educational Development*.

Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (2012) *Self-determination theory*. New York: Guilford Press.

DuBois, D.L. et al. (2011) 'How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment', *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 12(2), pp. 57–91.

Dweck, C. (2006) *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.

Eccles, J.S. (2009) 'Who am I and what am I going to do with my life?', *Educational Psychologist*, 44(2), pp. 78–89.

- Fishbein, M. and Ajzen, I. (1975) *Belief, attitude, intention, and behavior*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Flanagan, C. and Levine, P. (2010) ‘Civic engagement and the transition to adulthood’, *Future of Children*.
- Flavell, J.H. (1979) ‘Metacognition and cognitive monitoring’, *American Psychologist*, 34(10), pp. 906–911.
- Givaudan, M. and Pick, S. (2013) ‘Life skills education and girls’ empowerment’, *Journal of Adolescent Health*.
- Government of India. (2020) *National Education Policy 2020*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education.
- GSMA. (2021) *The Mobile Gender Gap Report*. London: GSMA.
- Gutman, L. and Schoon, I. (2013) ‘The impact of aspirations on educational trajectories’, *Journal of Adolescence*.
- Harper, C. et al. (2018) *Adolescent girls’ voices*. London: ODI.
- Harrell, F. (2012) *Longitudinal data strategies in education research*. New York: Springer.
- ILO. (2020) *Youth employment and skills*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- IMF. (2018) *Women’s Economic Empowerment in India*. Washington, DC: IMF.
- Ibrahim, S. and Alkire, S. (2007) ‘Agency and empowerment: A survey’, *Oxford Development Studies*.

Jensen, R. (2012) 'Do labour market opportunities affect young women's work and education decisions?', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Jensen, R. and Thornton, R. (2003) 'Early marriage and educational outcomes', *Demography*.

Jejeebhoy, S. and Sathar, Z. (2001) 'Women's autonomy in South Asia', *Population and Development Review*.

Jha, J. and Kelleher, F. (2006) *Girls' education in South Asia*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Kabeer, N. (1999) 'Resources, agency and achievements', *Development and Change*.

Kabeer, N. (2005) 'Gender equality and women's empowerment', *Gender and Development*.

Kabeer, N. (2016) 'Gender inequalities and educational pathways', *Feminist Economics*.

King, E. and Hill, M.A. (1993) *Women's education in developing countries*. Washington DC: World Bank.

Kirby, D. (2011) 'Effective youth development programmes', *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Klocker, N. (2007) 'An example of "thin" agency', *Population, Space and Place*.

Kuhn, D. (2000) 'Metacognitive development', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*.

Lent, R.W., Brown, S.D. and Hackett, G. (1994) 'Social cognitive career theory', *Career Development Quarterly*.

Lerner, R.M. et al. (2005) 'Positive youth development', *Journal of Early Adolescence*.

Lockwood, P. and Kunda, Z. (1997) 'Outstanding role models', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Mackie, G. et al. (2015) *Social norms theory and harmful practices*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti.

Mahmood, S. (2005) *Politics of piety*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mangeli, M. et al. (2017) 'Challenges faced by adolescent girls', *Adolescent Health Journal*.

Marcus, R. and Harper, C. (2014) *Gender justice and social norms*. London: ODI.

Marcus, R. and Page, E. (2014) *Girls' clubs and mentoring programmes*. London: ODI.

Masten, A. (2001) 'Ordinary magic: Resilience in development', *American Psychologist*.

Mezirow, J. (2000) *Transformative learning theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Muralidharan, K. and Prakash, N. (2017) 'Role model effects and girls' education', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*.

Nanda, P. et al. (2013) *Gender norms and adolescent girls in India*. New Delhi: ICRW.

NITI Aayog. (2021) *School Education Quality Index*. New Delhi: Government of India.

Nussbaum, M. (2000) *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

OECD. (2018) *The future of education and skills 2030*. Paris: OECD.

OECD. (2020) *Skills for future workplaces*. Paris: OECD.

Pande, R. and Malhotra, A. (2006) ‘Son preference and gender inequality’, *World Development*.

Patton, G.C. et al. (2016) ‘Adolescence and developmental science’, *The Lancet*, 387, pp. 2423–2435.

Pradhan, M. et al. (2021) ‘Empowering adolescent girls in India’, *World Development*.

Psacharopoulos, G. and Patrinos, H. (2018) *Returns to investment in education*. Washington DC: World Bank.

Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Raj, A. et al. (2019) ‘Gender norms and school dropout’, *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Raposa, E.B. et al. (2019) ‘The effects of youth mentoring’, *American Journal of Community Psychology*.

Ray, D. (2006) ‘Aspirations and inequality’, *Econometrica*.

Rhodes, J. (2005) *A model of youth mentoring*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Robeyns, I. (2005) 'The capability approach in practice', *Journal of Political Philosophy*.
- Ryan, R.M. and Deci, E.L. (2000) 'Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations', *Contemporary Educational Psychology*.
- Schunk, D.H. and Meece, J. (2006) 'Self-efficacy in education', in *Handbook of Educational Psychology*. New York: Routledge.
- Sekhar, C. et al. (2020) 'Social constraints and dropout among adolescent girls', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*.
- Sen, A. (1999) *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sirin, S. (2005) 'Socioeconomic status and academic achievement', *Review of Educational Research*.
- Singh, R. and Mukherjee, A. (2018) 'Barriers to girls' secondary education', *International Journal of Educational Development*.
- Sperling, G. and Winthrop, R. (2016) *What works in girls' education*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Steinberg, L. (2008) 'Risk-taking in adolescence', *Developmental Review*.
- Steinberg, L. (2014) *Age of opportunity*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation. (2023) *Naan Mudhalvan Programme Framework*. Chennai: TNSDC.
- Tilak, J.B.G. (2015) 'Private vs public higher education in India', *Higher Education Review*.

- UNESCO. (2015) *Life skills and global competencies framework*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2017) *Cracking the code: Girls' education in STEM*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2022) *Global Education Monitoring Report*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNICEF. (2012) *Skills for adolescents*. New York: UNICEF.
- UNICEF. (2019) *The State of the World's Children: Education and Skills*. New York: UNICEF.
- UN Women. (2023) *Women's empowerment global progress report*. New York: UN Women.
- World Bank. (2020) *The gendered impacts of limited digital access*. Washington DC: World Bank.

APPENDIX A:

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

12/6/25, 9:35 PM

Creating Evidence of Social Impact

Creating Evidence of Social Impact

Do you give your consent for your responses to be used (anonymously) for research or program planning purposes?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Data collected by

Date of survey

Record your current location

latitude (x,y °)

longitude (x,y °)

altitude (m)

accuracy (m)



Full Name

Age

Name of Institution

Course & Specialization

<https://ee.kobotoolbox.org/x/CXogd60F>

1/5

Year of Study

- ☐ 1st Year
- ☐ 2nd Year
- ☐ 3rd Year
- ☐ Final Year
- ☐ Others

Please explain further

Are you the first girl in your immediate family to pursue college education?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Family Type

- ☐ Nuclear
- ☐ Joint
- ☐ Single Parent

Father's occupation

Mothers's Occupation

Total Monthly Family Income

- ☐ Below INR 10,000
- ☐ INR 10,001 to 25,000
- ☐ INR 25,001 to 50,000
- ☐ Above 50,000

Did you receive any of the following to support your education?

- ☐ Government Scholarship
- ☐ NGO/Private Support
- ☐ Education Loan
- ☐ Family Support
- ☐ Self Funded
- ☐ Others

Please specify

Why did you decide to pursue higher education?

- ☐ Interest in learning
- ☐ Family encouragement
- ☐ To get a good job
- ☐ Inspired by role model
- ☐ First graduate
- ☐ Others

Please specify

Medium of instruction in your school

- ☐ English
- ☐ Local language
- ☐ Bilingual

Medium of instruction in your college

- ☐ English
- ☐ Local language
- ☐ Bilingual

Have you faced any major barriers in continuing your education?

- ☐ Financial problems
- ☐ Lack of guidance
- ☐ Household responsibilities
- ☐ Early marriage pressure
- ☐ Health Issues
- ☐ Travel Safety Issues
- ☐ Others

Please specify

16. Do you feel your college education is enough to get a good job?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not Sure

17. Have you attended any skill development, job readiness, or internship programs outside of your regular syllabus?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Please mention name and duration

How confident are you about appearing for a formal job interview?

- ☐ Very Confident
☐ Somewhat confident
☐ Not confident at all

Which of these skills would you like to improve?

Upto 5 options

- ☐ Spoken English
☐ Resume Writing
☐ Interview Preparation
☐ Computer/Digital Literacy
☐ Problem Solving & Critical thinking
☐ Entrepreneurship
☐ Time Management
☐ Self-Confidence
☐ Team work and Leadership
☐ Financial Literacy
☐ Basic Coding/Technical Skills

Mode of access available for online learning:

- ☐ Personal Phone
☐ Family Phone
☐ Laptop/Computer
☐ No Device

Preferred language of training sessions:

- ☐ English
- ☐ Local language
- ☐ Mix of both

What is your dream career or profession?

Who is your role model and why?

In what ways do you think education and skill training can change your life?

Have you inspired or guided any other girl in your community or family to study further?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not yet, but I want to

Would you like to become a mentor or peer leader in your college/community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

Would you like to enroll in a pilot skilling program specially designed for first-graduate girls?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe, need more details

How many hours a week can you commit to such a program?

- ☐ 1-2 hrs
- ☐ 3-5 hrs
- ☐ More than 5 hrs
- ☐ Not sure

Have you taken mentors support
