

## LITERACY AND LIBERATION: THE EMPOWERING ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR MUSLIM WOMEN IN MALDA

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### **Abstract**

The study, "Literacy and Liberation: The Empowering Role of Education for Muslim Women in Malda," investigates the impact of literacy and education on the empowerment of Muslim women in the Malda region. Utilizing a comprehensive approach, the research explored key dimensions such as access to information, skill development, access to microfinance and funding, leadership skill development, and ongoing personal development. The study employed statistical analyses, including correlation coefficients and model summaries, to discern the relationships between literacy education and various facets of empowerment. Researcher undertook 214 respondents from Malda and adopted descriptive statistics method. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between literacy programs and empowerment dimensions, highlighting the transformative potential of education. Specifically, literacy education was shown to significantly contribute to the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities, leadership skill development, and ongoing personal development among Muslim women in Malda. The results underscored the multifaceted nature of empowerment, encompassing economic independence, decision-making abilities, and social participation. These conclusions have important implications for policymakers and practitioners, suggested the need for holistic educational approaches that extend beyond basic literacy. The study advocated for ongoing support and a sustained commitment to education, emphasizing its enduring impact on the personal and professional development of Muslim women in the Malda region. Overall, the research contributes valuable insights to the discourse on education, empowerment, and social change in diverse and culturally specific contexts.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Education, Empowerment, Muslim Women, Malda, Entrepreneurship, Access to Information, Skill Development, Microfinance.

### 1. **Introduction**

Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way (Bhat, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. In fact, an empowered woman is a nation's strength. It is a process which helps women to change other women's consciousness through creating

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<sup>1</sup> Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life

awareness. (Kalakoti, 2021)<sup>2</sup>. One can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives (Bhat, 2015, Kaur, 2018) by the process. In the intricate tapestry of global societies, the empowerment of women remains an indispensable cornerstone for progress and social transformation. Against the backdrop of diverse cultures and religious traditions, the nexus between literacy and liberation takes on a profound significance. Within this paradigm, the focus turns towards Muslim women, whose journey towards education becomes a transformative force, not only for individual development but also for the broader emancipation of their communities. It embarks on a nuanced exploration of the symbiotic relationship between education and empowerment, shedding light on the unique challenges and triumphs that mark the educational pursuits of Muslim women. This discourse aims to unravel the layers of societal perceptions, cultural norms, and religious dynamics that intersect with the educational journey of Muslim women, ultimately illustrating how education becomes a powerful instrument for breaking the chains of ignorance and prejudice.

As researcher navigate the exploration, it becomes apparent that education transcends the mere acquisition of knowledge; it becomes a catalyst for personal agency and societal change. Muslim women, often contending with stereotypes and misconceptions, find in education a pathway to self-discovery, resilience, and the dismantling of limiting narratives. The empowerment derived from education allows them to challenge preconceived notions, defy expectations, and actively participate in shaping the trajectory of their lives. Thus, this narrative seeks to unravel the multifaceted ways in which education acts as a liberating force, providing Muslim women with the tools to navigate the complexities of modernity while preserving the richness of their cultural and religious identities. In examining the empowering role of education for Muslim women, it is imperative to recognize the interconnectedness of individual empowerment and broader societal progress. Education becomes a catalyst for change, not only fostering personal growth but also contributing to the dismantling of systemic barriers that impede the full participation of women in various spheres. The journey of Muslim women towards literacy becomes emblematic of a collective aspiration for inclusivity, equality, and social justice. By delving into the triumphs of these women, researcher aim to contribute to a broader conversation on the pivotal role of education as a tool for empowerment and societal transformation within the context of Muslim communities.

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

In recent decades, there has been a growing recognition of the transformative power of education, particularly for marginalized and underrepresented groups. One such group that has faced historical challenges in accessing education and empowerment is Muslim women. The intersection of gender and religion often creates unique barriers for these women, limiting their opportunities for education and personal development. Historically, many societies have perpetuated stereotypes and misconceptions about the role of women in Islam, often overlooking the diversity of

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<sup>2</sup> The United Nation's Organization had declared the year 1975 as women's year and the decade 1975-1985 as women's decade on an international level. Various studies were conducted and made a consensus that so long as women remain depressed and exploited, no nation can enjoy freedom and justice.

experiences within Muslim communities (Banday, 2016)<sup>3</sup>. While some Muslim women have had access to education and opportunities for personal and professional growth, others have faced systemic barriers that limit their ability to fully participate in society. The intersectionality of gender and religion compounds the challenges faced by Muslim women, as they navigate societal expectations, cultural norms, and religious traditions that may vary significantly across different communities. As a result, there is a pressing need to explore the relationship between education and empowerment specifically within the context of Muslim women's lives. The study aims to shed light on the empowering role of education for Muslim women, examining how literacy and educational opportunities contribute to their liberation from social, economic, and cultural constraints. By understanding the impact of education on Muslim women, the research seeks to challenge stereotypes, highlight success stories, and identify areas for improvement in educational policies and practices. Additionally, the study acknowledges the diversity within Muslim communities, recognizing that experiences of Muslim women vary based on factors such as geographic location, socio-economic status, and cultural context. By adopting an inclusive and intersectional approach, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between education and empowerment for Muslim women. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on women's rights, gender equality, and the role of education in fostering social change.

### **1.2. The Statement of the Problem**

Muslim women, despite the rich diversity within their communities, have historically encountered multifaceted challenges in accessing education and realizing empowerment. The intersection of gender and religion often imposes unique barriers, limiting opportunities for literacy and educational advancement. While some Muslim women have successfully navigated these challenges, others continue to face systemic constraints that hinder their educational and socio-economic progress. The existing literature provides glimpses into the struggles and successes of Muslim women in education. Many questions persist regarding the effectiveness of literacy programs, the extent to which education opens up entrepreneurial opportunities, the contribution of literacy to leadership development, and the long-term personal development outcomes stemming from a continuous commitment to education. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the relationship between literacy and the empowerment of Muslim women. The research seeks to the effectiveness of current literacy programs, and explore the broader implications of education on entrepreneurial endeavors, leadership roles, and personal development. By doing so, it aims to contribute nuanced insights that inform policies, programs, and interventions to enhance the educational experiences and empowerment of Muslim women. In light of the complex interplay between cultural, religious, and societal factors, understanding the specific challenges faced by Muslim women in their pursuit of education is crucial. This study, therefore, endeavors to unravel the intricacies of these challenges, in turn, contribute to a more

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<sup>3</sup> *The Kashmiri women within and outside their homes, freedom of acquiring education before and after their marriages and challenges faced by women were identified with the help of primary and secondary data.*

inclusive, and informed dialogue surrounding the literacy and liberation of Muslim women. Thus the study entitled as “**Literacy and Liberation: The Empowering Role of Education for Muslim Women in Malda.**”

### **1.3.The Need and Significance of the Study**

The study holds significant importance in the broader context of empowering marginalized communities. By focusing on the empowerment of Muslim women through education, the study highlight on social justice. The findings of the study can inform the development of targeted policies and interventions to enhance literacy and educational opportunities for Muslim women. Policymakers, educators, and community leaders to use this knowledge to create initiatives that address specific challenges faced by this demographic. In the context of global discussions on women's empowerment, the study adds a unique perspective by focusing on the experiences of Muslim women. This contributed to a more inclusive and comprehensive discourse on empowering women worldwide. By exploring how literacy programs open up entrepreneurial opportunities, the study provide insights into how education can contribute to the economic empowerment of Muslim women and their increased participation in various spheres of society. Understanding how a continuous commitment to education enhances the personal development and essential for fostering not only the individual growth of Muslim women but also the development of their communities. This aspect contributed to broader discussions on sustainable and inclusive community development. In summary, the study addresses a critical need by examining the empowering role of education and literacy for Muslim women. Its significance lies in informing targeted interventions, challenging stereotypes, promoting inclusivity, and contributing to global conversations on women's empowerment and social justice.

### **1.4.The Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were delineated below:

1. To analyse the relationship between the effectiveness of literacy programs targeted at and empowerment of target Muslim women.
2. To explore how literacy education opens up entrepreneurial opportunities for Muslim women.
3. To find out how literacy education contributes to the development of leadership skills among Muslim women.
4. To assess how a continuous commitment of education on the ongoing personal development.

### **1.5.The Hypothesis of the Study**

The hypothesis of the study were delineated below:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There were no significant relationship between the effectiveness of literacy programs targeted at Muslim women and their empowerment.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There were no significant association between literacy education and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities for Muslim women.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant impact of literacy education in the development of leadership skills among Muslim women.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There is no significant impact of a continuous commitment of education on the ongoing personal development of Muslim women.

## **2. The Review of Related Literature**

**Reshi, I. A., Sudha, T., & Dar, S. A. (2022).** Women's Access to Education and Its Impact on Their Empowerment: A Comprehensive Review. *MORFAI JOURNAL*, 1(2), 446-450. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the literature on women's access to education and its impact on their empowerment. It examines the various factors that affect women's access to education, including cultural norms, poverty, discrimination, and lack of resources. The paper also highlights the positive impacts of education on women's empowerment, such as improved health outcomes, increased economic opportunities, and greater political participation.

**Kasiviswanathan, K., Alagesan, M., & Banupriya, K. (2022).** Women Empowerment: Role of Education in India. *Dogo Rangsang Research Journal*, 12(5), 46-51. Education is the most powerful instrument for changing women's status in society. It has been a pressing need, as education is the cornerstone of women's empowerment. Education also helps to reduce inequities and serves as a tool of enhancing one's family's status and development. This paper covered by the importance of women empowerment in education, achievement of women in India, Government schemes and obstacles of women education.

**Shetty, S., & Hans, V. (2015).** Role of education in women empowerment and development: Issues and impact. *Role of Education in Women Empowerment and Development: Issues and Impact (September 26, 2015)*. Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom for development. Eileen Malone Beach sees education, health care, and income as a blessed trinity because they are so closely related. This paper discusses the impact of education on empowerment of women as well as the challenges and changes that we must have to deal with during the process. We call for a renewed emphasis on relevant, quality and holistic education to ensure the desired results.

**Gupta, V. (2014).** Women empowerment through education. *International journal of advanced research in management and social sciences*, 3(12), 231-238. Education is a basic human right, and thus girls and boys all around the world should be entitled to this opportunity - consequently enforcing the ideology of gender equality. If a girl is educated statistics suggest that they will marry later and so on. It can therefore be concluded that by empowering women through education is a great advantage both to women and to society as a whole.

### **2.1. Research Gap**

There is a dearth of research related to “**Literacy and Liberation: The Empowering Role of Education for Muslim Women in Malda.**” Therefore, researcher conducted investigation related to such statement of problem.

## **3. The Methodology of Study**

According to Kerlinger (1973) research design consists of a structure of research and research techniques. The method of the research study was based on the objectives and the nature of the data required for the study. Therefore, the investigators adopted the research design of cross-sectional nature. The method was a quantitative one where information will be collected from the respondents to gain insight into the problem.

### 3.1. Flowchart of Study Research

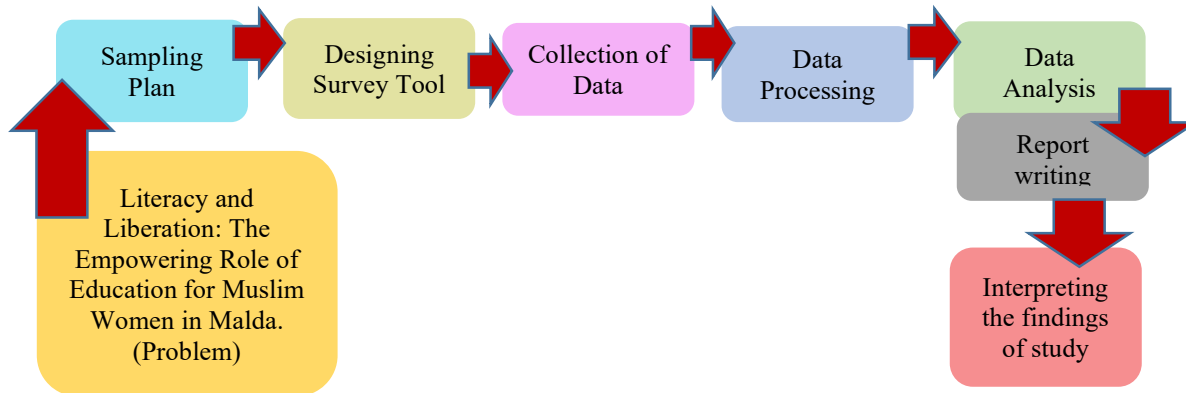


Figure 3.1: Showing the methodology for conducting the survey research

The present study was carried out in different areas of Malda. To conduct the investigation on Muslim women and to capture the unique voices and experiences of Muslim women in Malda, shedding light on the empowering effects of education on their lives. At the execution stage of the survey research, the main activities will be performed by a researcher will be very much concerned with designing selection of representative sample, making use of survey tool, i.e., questionnaire as the most likely preferred tool for collecting, processing, analyzing, data or information for getting genuine answers that is being raised in research problem. So the investigator must frame it with standardization, development and application with task of reporting along with conclusion or findings reached for the very purpose of effective utilization in survey studies.

### 3.2. Area of Study

The study was conducted in the Malda district of West Bengal.

### 3.3. Target Population

The total percentage of Muslim women and their unique voices and experiences of Muslim women in Malda, shedding light on the empowering effects of education on their lives.

### 3.5. Method of Data Collection

The study made use of both primary and secondary data.

Primary data was collected by applying the questionnaire and responses were collected from the respondents through interviews. It refers to that data which is collected for a specific purpose from the field and are original in nature.

Secondary data was collected through various web sources and expert opinion, various text books, websites, journals, dissertations, etc.

### 3.4. Sample of the Study



The states where larger proportions of out-migrants were enumerated are west-Bengal (21.4 per cent)

To estimate the sample size Krejcie and Morgan table were used. For a given population of 480 the collected number of sample for study was 214. To determine the sample size investigator used the Morgan's Table with 5% error of margin at 95% confidence level (Morgan, 1970) to justify the authenticity of selected sample size. The average age group of were 25-45 years.

### 3.5. Sampling Technique

Investigator used purposive sampling techniques for data collection. Data, collected from primary sources, has been compiled from Quantitative analysis. This technique is based on three criteria which are delineated below:

- Firstly, the respondents must belong from the group of female gender.
- Secondly they must belong from Malda district of West Bengal.
- The average age group of were 25-45 years.

### 3.6. Tool used for the study

As research instrument investigator used questionnaire of 30 items of literacy programmes, entrepreneurial opportunities, leadership skill, adaptability and personal development. The reliability was 0.70 and content validity was confirmed through the scrutinization of five experts.

## 4. Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis and interpretation of the study were conducted based on the objectives of the study.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There were no significant relationship between the effectiveness of literacy programs targeted at Muslim women and their empowerment.

To verify the hypothesis, correlation was performed by the investigator which was shown in the following tables

**Table 4.1: The Correlation between the Effectiveness of Literacy Programs targeted at Muslim women and their Empowerment**

		Literacy Programs	Empowerment
Literacy Programs	Pearson Correlation	1	.644
	Sig. Value		.000**
Empowerment	Pearson Correlation	.644	1
	Sig. Value	.000**	

NS - Not Significant, \*p < 0.05 \*\*p < 0.01 \*\*\*p < 0.001

Table 4.1 presented the correlation between the effectiveness of literacy programs targeted at Muslim women and their empowerment. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.644 indicated a strong positive correlation between the two variables. This implied that as the effectiveness of literacy programs increases, there is a corresponding increase in the empowerment of Muslim women. In practical terms, the interpretation suggested that investments and efforts aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of literacy programs for Muslim women were likely to yielded positive

outcomes in terms of their empowerment (Gupta, 2014)<sup>4</sup>. Empowerment, in this context, encompassed various dimensions such as increased economic independence, improved decision-making abilities, and greater participation in social and community activities. Educated women are more aware of their rights and are better equipped to resist discrimination and exploitation. This increased awareness contributed to a sense of empowerment and agency.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There were no significant connection between literacy education and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities for Muslim women.

To verify the hypothesis, multiple correlation was performed by the investigator which was shown in the following tables:

**Table 4.2: The Correlation between the Literacy Education and the Creation of Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Muslim women**

		Literacy Programme	Access to Information and Resources	Skill Development	Access to Microfinance and Funding
Literacy Programme	Pearson Correlation	1	.785	.567	.644
	Sig. Value		.001	.000	.000
Access to Information and Resources	Pearson Correlation	.785	1	.551	.880
	Sig. Value	.000		.000	.000**
Skill Development	Pearson Correlation	.567	.551	1	.763
	Sig. Value	.000	.000**		.000
Access to Microfinance and Funding	Pearson Correlation	.644	.880	.763	1
	Sig. Value	.000	.000	.000	

NS - Not Significant, \*p < 0.05 \*\*p < 0.01 \*\*\*p < 0.001

The table 4.2 provided a correlation analysis between various aspects of literacy education and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities for Muslim women. The correlation coefficient of 0.785 between access to information and resources and entrepreneurial opportunities suggested a strong positive relationship. This implied that as literacy programs enhance access to information and resources, there is a substantial increase in the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities for Muslim women and was significant. The correlation between skill development and entrepreneurial opportunities is also positive, with a coefficient of 0.567. This indicated that as literacy programs focus on skill development, there was a moderate yet significant increase in the creation of

<sup>4</sup> Attainment of universal education is one of the Millennium Development goals of United Nations to be achieved by 2015. Literacy rate and educational development are considered to be key variables affecting demographic indicators



entrepreneurial opportunities for Muslim women. The p-value of 0.000 underlined the statistical significance of this correlation. The correlation coefficient of 0.644 between access to microfinance and funding and entrepreneurial opportunities suggested a strong positive relationship. This indicated that when literacy programs facilitate access to financial resources, there is a notable increase in the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities for Muslim women. The correlation is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.000. As individuals acquire literacy skills, they gain the capacity to read, interpret, and apply information from various sources, including written materials, digital platforms, and community resources. Improved literacy enables women in Muslim communities to navigate and understand information related to business opportunities, market trends, and government programs. Literacy programs extend beyond basic reading and writing skills; they often incorporate skill development components that are directly applicable to entrepreneurship. These programs include vocational training, workshops, and hands-on learning experiences that enhance practical skills such as business management, marketing, and financial literacy. As individuals, particularly women in Muslim communities, develop these skills, they become better prepared to initiate and manage their own businesses (Kumbhar, 2013)<sup>5</sup>. Literacy programs improve access to microfinance and funding by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate financial systems and communicate effectively with financial institutions. Financial literacy components within literacy programs cover topics such as budgeting, financial planning, and understanding credit. As women in Muslim communities enhance their financial literacy through literacy programs, they become more credible and informed when seeking microfinance or funding for entrepreneurial endeavors. Financial institutions may view them as less risky borrowers, leading to improved access to capital for business start-ups or expansions. This, in turn, enables women to invest in their businesses, create employment opportunities, and contribute to economic development within their communities. Skill development through literacy programs not only contributes to the economic empowerment of individuals but also fosters a sense of confidence and self-efficacy.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant impact of literacy education in the development of leadership skills among Muslim women.

To verify the hypothesis, regression analysis was performed by the investigator which was shown in the following tables

**Table 4.3: The Model Summary of the Literacy Education in the Development of Leadership Skills among Muslim Women**

Literacy Education	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta coefficient (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F Change	Result

<sup>5</sup> Therefore, there is a need of continuous attempt to inspire, encourage, motivate and co-operate women entrepreneurs, awareness programs should be conducted on a mass scale with the intention of creating awareness among women about the various areas to conduct business.

	.635	.403	1.156	57.910	.401	193.67	.000
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The table 4.3 presented the model summary of the relationship between literacy education and the development of leadership skills among Muslim women. The correlation coefficient (R) is 0.635. This value indicated a moderate to strong positive correlation between literacy education and the development of leadership skills among Muslim women. The positive sign suggested that as literacy education increases, there is a corresponding increase in the development of leadership skills. 40.3% of the variability in leadership skills among Muslim women is accounted for by variations in literacy education<sup>6</sup>. The unstandardized beta coefficient is 1.156. This coefficient represents the change in the dependent variable (development of leadership skills) for a one-unit change in the independent variable (literacy education). The positive sign indicated a direct relationship, suggested that higher levels of literacy education were associated with an increase in the development of leadership skills. The F Change value is 193.67, and the associated p-value is .000. The F statistic tests the overall significance of the model. In summary, the model summary in Table 4.3 provides evidence of a statistically significant and substantial relationship between literacy education and the development of leadership skills among Muslim women.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There is no significant impact of a continuous commitment of education on the ongoing personal development of Muslim women.

To verify the hypothesis, regression analysis was performed by the investigator, which was shown in the following tables

**Table 4.4: The Model Summary of the Continuous Commitment of Education on the Ongoing Personal Development of Muslim Women**

Continuous Commitment of Education	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta coefficient (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F Change	Result
	.874	.764	1.849	44.211	.763	897.840	.000

Table 4.4 presented the model summary for the relationship between the continuous commitment of education and the ongoing personal development of Muslim women. The correlation coefficient (R) is 0.874, indicated a very strong positive correlation between the continuous commitment of education and ongoing personal development among Muslim women. This suggested that there is a robust relationship between a sustained commitment to education and the ongoing personal development of women in this context. The commitment to education is a powerful predictor, accounting for a significant proportion of the variability in the ongoing personal development of Muslim women. The unstandardized beta coefficient is 1.849. This coefficient represents the

<sup>6</sup> *The Indian women are no longer treated as show pieces to be kept at home. They are also enjoying the impact of globalization and making an influence not only on domestic but also on international sphere. Women are doing a wonderful job striking a balance between their house and career.*

change in the dependent variable (ongoing personal development) for a one-unit change in the independent variable (continuous commitment of education). The positive sign indicates a positive relationship, suggesting that a higher level of continuous commitment to education is associated with an increase in ongoing personal development. The F Change value is 897.840, and the associated p-value is .000. The extremely low p-value suggested that the model is statistically significant. In summary, Table 4.4 demonstrated a very strong and statistically significant relationship between the continuous commitment of education and the ongoing personal development of Muslim women.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study "Literacy and Liberation: The Empowering Role of Education for Muslim Women in Malda" provides compelling evidence that literacy and education are powerful tools for empowerment, entrepreneurship, and personal development among Muslim women in the Malda region. The study's findings advocate for continued investment in education programs that were tailored to the specific needs of this community, recognizing the multifaceted nature of empowerment and the enduring impact of a commitment to education. The positive correlation observed between literacy programs and various dimensions of empowerment, including economic independence, decision-making abilities, and social participation, highlights the effectiveness of literacy programs tailored to the specific needs of Muslim women in Malda. These programs serve as a vehicle for breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for personal and professional growth. The correlations presented demonstrated a strong positive relationship between literacy education and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities for Muslim women. The multifaceted approach, addressing access to information, skill development, and access to finance, suggests that a well-rounded literacy education program has the potential to significantly enhance entrepreneurship within this community. The study indicated a significant relationship between literacy education and the development of leadership skills among Muslim women in Malda. This finding emphasizes the role of literacy in nurturing leadership qualities, potentially leading to increased participation and influence of women in various spheres, including community development and decision-making processes. The compelling results between a robust correlation between the continuous commitment to education and ongoing personal development. This highlighted the enduring impact of a sustained dedication to education on the holistic development of Muslim women in Malda, suggesting that education is not merely a means to an end but an **ongoing catalyst for personal growth.**

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