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The Effectiveness of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Pakistan: Local Citizen's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) concerning reducing unemployment and poverty by creating employment opportunities for the less educated citizens of Pakistan. Convenience and snowball sampling techniques have been used for data collection. The target population was the less-educated citizens of Pakistan. The results of the study reveal that the development of CPEC is potentially effective for Pakistan, in terms of creating employment opportunities for the less educated citizens, and reducing poverty. However, people living in rural areas are less educated and unskilled. They need to be well trained to avail of particular job opportunities. Hence, the research implies that the Government of Pakistan should introduce skills development and training programs for the less educated community of Pakistan to polish their skills for the particular job opportunities which arise due to different mega projects of national and international nature, such as CPEC. This may lead to the reduction of poverty. Moreover, the study found that CPEC is significantly important for both nations particularly Pakistan as it needs more to overcome social and energy crises as well as for economic development. Therefore, the findings of this research are significantly important for the Government officials, regulators, and policymakers, as it suggests them to consider and invest in the training and development of the less educated community of Pakistan, to attain the maximum from such projects as CPEC.



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Introduction

As a developing nation, Pakistan has numerous obstacles, including economic and non-economic issues, high tax rates, education, low-skilled workforce, technology, infrastructure, and inadequate residential assets (Ahmed, Arshad, Mahmood, & Akhtar, 2017; Kanwal, Pitafi, et al., 2019; Khan, 2007). To overcome these issues, the government of Pakistan is designing multiple development projects that may boost up the economy of Pakistan. One of them is China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Kanwal, Pitafi, et al., 2019; uddin Ahmed, Ali, Kumar, Malik, & Memon, 2019).

Officially, CPEC was inaugurated by the president of China Xi Jinping in April 2015 with a total worth of 46 Billion US dollars (Ahmed, Arshad, Mahmood, & Akhtar; Zhao, 2020). CPEC is a proposed megaproject that will link the Pakistani port of Gwadar to the Chinese city of Kashgar (China). China has been interested in improving the infrastructures between Pakistan and China for decades, thus the proposal of CPEC is not a surprising development (Ali, Mi, Shah, Khan, & Imran, 2017; Asomani-Boateng, Fricano, & Adarkwa, 2015). This is the mega project of whole South Asia that is directly linked with Pakistan and China (Ali, Mi, Shah, Khan, et al., 2017).

This project is enjoying full support from the governments as well as the people of China and Pakistan as it gives benefits to both countries (Ali et al., 2018). China sees this mega project as a historic initiative (Kanwal, Pitafi, et al., 2019; Kanwal, Pitafi, Rasheed, Pitafi, & Iqbal, 2020). China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project and it will help to generate employment opportunities and boost the economy of Pakistan (Hussain, 2017; uddin Ahmed et al., 2019). The current study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in terms of reducing unemployment and poverty by creating employment opportunities and generating income for less educated people of Pakistan. Surely, this mega project is the most important opportunity for Pakistan which will help to reduce poverty and improve the living standards of its population by providing them employment opportunities (Asomani-Boateng et al., 2015; uddin Ahmed et al., 2019; Xiguang & Lizhou, 2015).

The practical implications of this study are to provide insights about the effectiveness of CPEC to policymakers and the government of Pakistan so that they may take initiatives to improve the policy and support this mega project for the welfare of the less educated poor people of Pakistan. This research contributes to the existing literature of CPEC in a way that provides clear insights about how CPEC is working for the welfare of less-educated poor people of Pakistan. Our findings confirm the effectiveness of CPEC in terms of reducing poverty by creating employment opportunities for the less educated poor community of Pakistan. This study is divided into 4 sections. Section 1 and 2 provide an introduction and review of the literature. The 3rd section includes mythology and analysis of the variables used in the study. The 4th and last section give a conclusion with detailed discussion and implications of the study.

Literature Review and hypothesis development

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a mega project is initiating many different small projects including power, infrastructure, and economic zones in Pakistan (Babar & Zeeshan, 2018; Khursheed, Haider, Mustafa, & Akhtar, 2019). This project has not only short term goals of economic growth but also considers long term growth plans for Pakistan. The initial investment of 46 Billion US dollars was used to establish Gwadar-Port, modernize infrastructure, developing the industrial sector and pipelines of Oil and Gas as well as tackling energy crises in Pakistan (Babar & Zeeshan, 2018; Irshad, 2015; Javaid & Rashid, 2016; Khan & Ahmed, 2007; Khursheed et al., 2019; Xiguang & Lizhou, 2015). This may lead to reduce unemployment and improve the overall economy of Pakistan (Joshi, 2018; Tong, 2014; Zia & Waqar, 2018).

Irshad (2015) and Khursheed et al. (2019) in their research concluded that China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will ensure strong political as well as strategic relationships between China and Pakistan. Moreover, the project will help to improve Pakistan's economy by resolving the war-related problems in their border ranges (Hassan, 2018; Hussain, 2017; Saad, Xinping, & Ijaz, 2019) and societal goals of the region including the provision of education and environment protection. It can be seen as the infrastructure development under the agreement of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) may include schools, colleges, universities as well as institutional transport system which may significantly influence the level of education of local citizens of Pakistan (Blanchard, 2018b; Cheng & Chen, 2015; Mattson, 2011; Saad et al., 2019).

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has a direct or indirect linkage with the welfare of the common people of both countries. It will positively influence their economic and social well-being by encouraging industrial growth as well as competitiveness (Bhattacharjee, 2015; Blanchard, 2018b). Under the mega project of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), People living in slum areas will get the opportunity to establish their own business which was impossible for them in past due to the lack of financial resources. (Blanchard, 2018a). CPEC will encourage their entrepreneurial intentions (Nazneen, Xu, & Din, 2019; Sher, Mazhar, Abbas, Iqbal, & Li, 2019). Moreover, tourist's attraction towards CPEC will improve the income level of the common people of Pakistan. Hence, it is concluded that CPEC will create income-generating activities for local citizens of both countries (Asomani-Boateng et al., 2015; Durani & Khan, 2018; Nasir, Shah, & Ahmed, 2016). Based on the discussions given above, the following hypothesis has been developed;

H1 Income generating activities are positively associated with the effectiveness of CPEC

The primary objective of CPEC is to deliver enormous benefits to the local residents of Pakistan and China. Residents' attitudes are favourably correlated with their perceived income (Haq & Farooq, 2016; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996). Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996) determined the positive correlation between a citizen's income and an optimistic outlook. In addition, scholars and CPEC officials reported that the economic stability of the Pakistani local community will increase as a result of the development of CPEC projects (Melecky, Roberts, & Sharma, 2019) because CPEC offers numerous opportunities for the local community to start their own businesses. For instance, the local community can establish small industries, hotels, workshops, and agricultural product suppliers along CPEC routes (Tehsin, Khan, & Sargana, 2017), which may have a direct impact on resident income.

Studies from the past have also demonstrated that infrastructure development projects have a substantial effect on the host community, as they increase income, boost the economy, and eradicate poverty. Infrastructure development under CPEC will lead to the establishment of industrial sectors and many other economic zones which in turn, will create employment opportunities (Ismail & Mahyideen, 2015).

During the period of the initial construction process of CPEC, 38000 jobs were created out of them almost 75% were offered to local citizens of Pakistan. It is expected that this mega project will create a large number of jobs for Pakistan as well as its neighboring countries (Today, 2014). CPEC project will attract tourists from all over the world and this will increase employment opportunities in the region (Sher et al., 2019). Based on the discussions given above, the following hypothesis has been developed;

H2 Employment opportunities are positively associated with the effectiveness of CPEC.

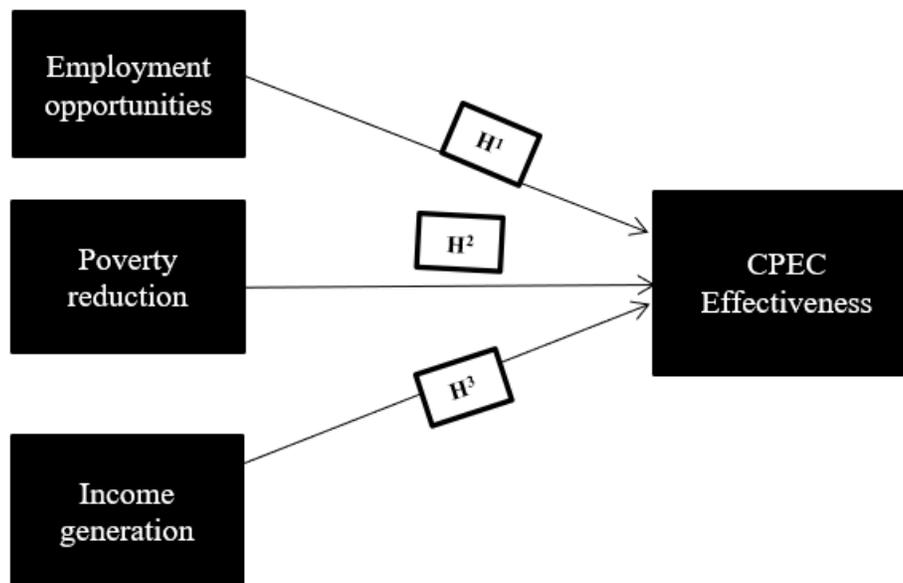


Figure 01: Theoretical model of research

Literature suggests that as people's interests and means of subsistence change, the success of any endeavour including their participation is typically affected. The CPEC is regarded as a win-win strategy not just for nations, but also for regions, because to its economic and strategic potential. According to experts, the CPEC project benefited both Chinese and Pakistani residents (Khwaja, Saeed, & Urooj, 2018; Nasir et al., 2016; Younis et al., 2020). The benefits of this investment would be exclusively appropriated by Pakistani industries as well as households who would no longer face load-shedding. At the same time, Pakistan would record 2 percent annual growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Millions of work opportunities, quality education, economic prospects, and easy access to major cities would raise the level of living of both Pakistan's and China's local populations (Khan & Ahmed, 2007).

Small villages along the CPEC route will be linked to large cities, where local farmers would be able to sell their goods at reasonable prices and quickly increase their household income. In addition, when locals profit economically, educationally, monetarily, and professionally from the development of the CPEC project, they will support it more. This will ultimately lead to a reduction in poverty in Pakistan. CPEC is a megaproject that will involve neighbouring nations in regional industry and commerce. In turn, this will assist to reduce poverty and raise the living conditions of the average Pakistani (Ali, Mi, Shah, Shah, & BiBi, 2017; Roy, 2019). Based on the discussions given above, the following hypothesis has been developed;

H3 Poverty reduction is positively associated with the effectiveness of CPEC.

Methodology

To empirically investigate the effectiveness of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), convenience and snowball sampling techniques were used to collect the data. The target population of this study was less educated citizens of, Pakistan. The data were collected via a structured questionnaire which was written in English as it is an international language and considers a second language in Pakistan. Because the respondents were less educated people, the questionnaire was translated into Urdu for the understanding of those who found difficulty in understanding the questions.

A total of 384 questionnaires were distributed to less-educated citizens of Pakistan including teachers of Primary schools, labor, security guards, clerks of higher secondary schools, self-employed citizens who were having their small businesses like grocery, shoe-market, etc. Because the target population was less educated, they got helped by the authors where they found difficulty in understanding questions. All of the respondents were above the age of 18. Out of 384 questionnaires, 169 questionnaires were found with usable responses which represent the 44.01 percent response rate. However, 18 questionnaires were not filled properly and they were having incomplete information. Due to this reason, they were excluded. Only the questionnaires having complete information were used for further process. The demographics of the sample of our study are shown in table 1.

Table # 01: Demographic information of the sample of a study

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Sr.no	Variables	Sample (n)	Sample (%)
1.	Gender		
	Males	76	45.0
	Females	93	55.0
	Total	169	100.0
2.	Age		
	18-25	111	65.7
	26-33	28	16.6
	34-50	20	11.8
	51-60	7	4.1
	61 and above	3	1.8
Total	169	100.0	
3.	Employment Status		
	Employed	31	18.0
	Self-employed	45	27.0
	Un-employed	93	55.0
Total	169	100.0	
4.	Income Level		
	0-15,000	94	55.6
	16,000-30,000	30	17.8
	31,000-40,000	19	11.2
	41,000-50,000	13	7.7
	51,000 and above	13	7.7
Total	169	100.0	

This study consists of four different variables out of the three are independent i: e Income generation, Poverty reduction, and Employment opportunities, and one dependent variable i: e Effectiveness of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). For data collection, we have adopted the instrument and scale from previous researches. The questions 1-4 were for variable i:e Income generation and were adopted from Ali, Mi, Shah, Shah, et al. (2017); Ali et al. (2018) and Kanwal, Chong, and Pitafi (2019). Questions 5-8 were for variable i:e Poverty reduction and were adopted from Kanwal, Pitafi, et al. (2019); Saad et al. (2019), and Kanwal et al. (2020)... Questions 9-15 were for variable i:e Employment opportunities and were adapted from (Saad et al., 2019). Questions 14-16 were for dependent variable i: e Effectiveness of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and were adopted from (Kanwal, Chong, et al., 2019). All the items have been measured on a five-point Likert scale which indicates strongly agree 1 to strongly disagree 5.

Data Analysis and results

The authors applied many different techniques to confirm the validity and reliability of the instrument used for data collection. The validity and reliability of the used instrument were confirmed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The reliability and validity have proven with the result as Cronbach's alpha was greater than the desired value i.e. .06 suggested by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and (Sekaran, 2003). Factor analysis was performed to check the loadings of items and percentage variance explained. The factor loading of each item was found greater than the desired range i.e. 0.60 suggested by (Merenda, 1997) and (Hinkin, 1998).

Table # 02: Results of factor analysis

Sr.no	Construct	Items	Loading	CA	%VE
Factor # 1	Income generation	4	.823 .860 .818	.839	67.760
	% Variance Explained		.790		
Factor # 2	Poverty reduction	4	.833 .823 .833 .782	.835	66.930
	% Variance Explained				
Factor # 3	Employment opportunities	5	.842 .745 .834 .834 .742	.858	64.124
	% Variance Explained				
Factor # 4	Effectiveness of CPEC	3	.845 .857 .724	.733	65.744
	% Variance Explained				

Where CA = Cronbach's alpha and % VE = Percentage variance explained.

As per the information given above in table # 02, we have the values of Cronbach's alpha and percentage variance explained above the acceptable range. In the case of the first factor i.e. Income generation we have Cronbach's alpha and percentage variance explained .839 and 67.760 respectively. Similarly, in factors 2, 3, and 4 we have acceptable values of Cronbach's alpha and percentage variance explained. The acceptable range of Cronbach's alpha is $\geq .70$ while in the case of percentage variance explained this value should be $\geq 50\%$ (Merenda, 1997) and (Sekaran, 2003).

Table # 3: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test

Sr.no	Construct	KMO	Significance
1	Income generation	.785	.000
2	Poverty reduction	.774	.000
3	Employment opportunities	.834	.000
5	Effectiveness of CPEC	.650	.000

In Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), we measure statistical data and have a minimum acceptable level i.e. 0.50 (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012). All the constructs of our study have KMO greater than the minimum acceptable level. In our 3rd factor i.e. Employment opportunities we have a higher KMO than the minimum level.

Table # 4: Mean, Standard deviation and Correlations of data

	Variables	μ	Σ	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Income generation	2.3905	.73385								
2	Poverty reduction	2.3491	.73710	.689							
3	Employment opportunities	2.3669	.72265	.710	.817						
4	CPEC effectiveness	2.3215	.68031	.447	.681	.677					
5	Gender	NA	NA	.031	-.004	.114	.078	NA			
6	Age	NA	NA	.257	.201	.240	.125	-.351	NA		
7	Employment Status	NA	NA	.087	.200	.107	.207	.080	-.109	NA	
8	Income level	NA	NA	-.082	.016	.009	-.030	-.290	.180	-.137	NA

Where μ and σ are Means and Standard deviations respectively. *Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed), ** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed). The mean values have been accessed based on average factor scores.

Table # 5: Regression results

Sr.no	Construct	β	Sig	R ²	A-R ²	Sig _a
	Constant		.000	.512	.5039	.000
1	Income generation	-.099	.219			
2	Poverty reduction	.416	.000			
3	Employment opportunities	.407	.000			

Dependent variable: Effectiveness of CPEC.

The regression analysis was performed to investigate the effectiveness of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in creating employment opportunities, reducing poverty, and generating income. The result is shown in the table presents the overall significance of the model as the significant values are less than 0.05 which is acceptable for the significance of the regression model (Sekaran, 2003).

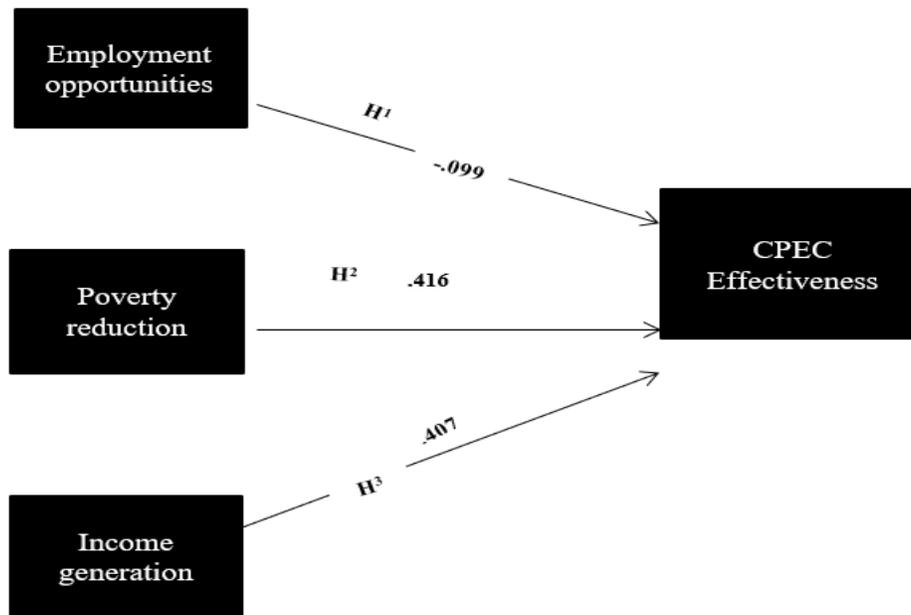


Figure # 2: Results of regression

Discussions

The authors conducted this study to examine the effectiveness of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in generating income, reducing poverty, and creating employment opportunities for less-educated citizens of Pakistan. Here, the effectiveness of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) depends upon whether it has worked to generate income for less-educated citizens, reduce poverty by creating employment opportunities for them. Ahmed et al. (2017) recommended in their study that research on the effectiveness of CPEC could be conducted by targeting the less educated citizens. The authors collected data from the less educated communities of Pakistan and in this way, this research realizes how the less educated community of Pakistan perceives the effectiveness of this mega project. This study is a useful contribution to literature as this is the first study that considered the less educated public of Pakistan to investigate the effectiveness of CPEC. Although previous studies i.e. (Saad et al., 2019) and (Ali et al., 2018), however, none of them used the less educated community of Pakistan for data collection. Hence, this study reveals significant contributions to the literature and has significant implications for policymakers. Our findings confirm that employment opportunities and poverty reduction are positively associated with the effectiveness of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Hence, proved the first and second hypothesizes of our study. On the other hand, income-generating activities are found to be negatively associated with the effectiveness of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Hence, it rejected the third hypothesis of our study. Finally, Pakistani people see the CPEC as an excellent opportunity for raising their living standards. Undoubtedly, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can significantly help Pakistan to build and maintain good relationship with its neighbor countries of the region i.e. Bangladesh, India, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. Moreover, this mega project is considered critical for industrial growth and trade promotion. Overall, the results of this study confirm (Saad et al., 2019) and (Ali et al., 2018) as they concluded that this mega project is a very useful tool for economic growth and development. This project can positively influence the economy of both countries i.e. China and Pakistan by improving the living standards of people and quality of life, poverty reduction, and employment opportunities. They found CPEC as an important indicator of boosting up the economy of both nations. This study is an important contribution in the literature of CPEC as this will leave a path for the government of Pakistan as well as policymakers work on building training centers for less-

educated citizens to avail of the chances of jobs offered by the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Conclusion

Our study investigated the effectiveness of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in terms of generating income, reducing poverty, and providing employment opportunities to less-educated citizens of Pakistan. The findings of the study have confirmed two of our hypothesis and proved that CPEC as a megaproject helps reduce poverty and create employment opportunities for less-educated citizens. Our findings are a useful contribution to the literature as they provide a view of less educated people of Pakistan about CPEC effectiveness. Most importantly, our findings offer suggestions to the government as well as policymakers to establish training institutions to make less educated people skilled labor. This would increase the chances of getting jobs and in turn, may lead to a reduction of poverty in Pakistan. Finally, our study would strongly recommend the government of Pakistan to establish training institutions for less educated people which will enable them to get the benefits of a China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a megaproject. China's investment through CPEC would benefit Pakistan in developing infrastructure and overcome energy shortfall. This, in turn, will improve the living standards of the people of Pakistan. In short, to be successful, this project requires a distinct approach i.e. specific goals and targets, clear delineation of responsibilities, a well-defined set of indicators having both the incentives as well as penalties for performance/non-performance and transparent accountability.

Implications

This study uncovers many significant implications for the government and policymakers of Pakistan. For example; our study reveals how less educated communities of Pakistan particularly of underdeveloped areas see the effectiveness of CPEC for themselves. Most of the people respond in favor of the development of CPEC. However, they do not perceive this project as helpful for creating income-generating opportunities. In this scenario, the policymakers and government should work to improve the CPEC project in a way that it may help to create income-generating activities for less developed areas of Pakistan. In general, Pakistan lacks policies regarding tourism. By promoting tourism and trade activities, CPEC can significantly create income-generating activities. Our government and policymakers need to emphasize this project and make improvements to enhance the opportunities of employment and reduction in poverty as well as the creation of income-generating activities for less-educated communities of Pakistan. The government should provide incentives and special job quotas for less educated people of the underdeveloped area to improve their lifestyles and to get rid of poverty. The government should also build new educational and training institutes in rural areas to make it possible for less educated and poor people to get educated and trained for new employment opportunities.

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