

A Systematic Literature Review on Youth Empowerment and its Determinants

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Abstract

Despite the fact that many researchers highlighted the concept of youth empowerment and its determinants from different perspectives, absence of well-defined concept and determinants of youth empowerment reflects a general shortfall in available literature. This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) scrutinizes the determinants and the concept of youth empowerment in an attempt to understand it very straightforwardly. On the basis of 38 stringently screened studies of 176 identified articles, as per PRISMA guidelines, the evidence is synthesized in the review on concept and determinants of youth empowerment. As per the findings, several dimensions are found to have a significant role in conceptualizing youth empowerment. It encompasses access to economic resources, decent work, education, autonomy in decision-making, social support, psychological resilience, and overall well-being. This SLR also recognized four broad domains of determinants of youth empowerment. The economic empowerment is the first area and refers to economic resources, financial access, jobs, and the barriers to economic participation. The second domain, capacity enabling, focuses on the significance of education, skills development, access to digital technologies, and decision-making power in enhancing youth capabilities. Socio-economic responsibility encompasses the social network role, institutional support, gender sensitivity, and community environment role in enabling empowerment. Lastly, the wellness sphere encompasses psychological empowerment and overall health and well-being, emphasizing resilience, self-efficacy, and physical and mental health to survive adversity and seek opportunities. SLR thus presents an integrated framework of understanding how combined distinct factors shape and construct youth empowerment.

Keywords: Conceptualization of Youth Empowerment, Determinants of Youth Empowerment, Systematic Literature Review, Youth Empowerment

Introduction

Youth comprise a significant proportion of the population in most countries, and their productive capacity is able to drive economic growth and development (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2014). Youth are also open to innovation and entrepreneurship, which are principal drivers of economic diversification and resilience (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2016). Youth entering the labor market can assist in contributing to productivity and economic growth, particularly if they are well-educated and skilled (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2013, 2019). Youth being involved in meaningful activities and provided an opportunity to participate in civic life can assist in contributing to social stability as well as peace (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2014). Youth are more likely to be open to entrepreneurship and innovation, which are the stimuli of economic diversification and resilience (WEF, 2016). When skilled and educated, they are the leading drivers towards productivity and innovation (ILO, 2013, 2019). Engaging youth in productive economic and civic participation improves social stability and facilitates international goals like the SDGs (UNDP, 2014; United Nations, 2018). Youth are vital to the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) because they bring new vision and energy to address the threat of poverty, inequality, and climate change (United Nations, 2018). Promoting the health and well-being of youth is crucial in building a productive and prosperous community (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014). Investment in skills acquisition and education among the youth is critical to building a well-informed and empowered workforce to drive innovation and economic growth (UNESCO, 2016). The youth are typically at the forefront of climate action, advocating for green practices and policies to preserve the environment for generations to come (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2015). Youth are typically more adept at using digital technologies, which are central in reshaping economies as well as promoting efficiency across various spheres (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2020). By unleashing the capability of youth, countries are able to realize sustainable development that is inclusive, equitable, and resilient. Thus, policymakers, especially from developing countries, have easily accepted that empowering young people is essential. Youth empowerment has been identified through research in developing countries as a key driver of sustainable development and prosperity (Gill et al., 2019).

Youth empowerment contributes significantly to improving economic growth, poverty eradication, and social stability (United Nations, 2019). Youth empowerment also supports human capital empowerment, stimulates innovation, fights unemployment, and enhances entrepreneurship. Furthermore, empowerment of youth is employed to improve health outcomes, reduce gender inequality, and promote long-term economic development (Balasubramanian et al., 2024). The government agendas of these developing countries have ranked empowerment of youth high, based on recommendations rendered by leading organizations engaged in sustainable development. Various programs have been initiated over the past decade to implement it. Organizations such as the World Bank, WTO, ILO, WHO, UNDP, and others have been implementing various support programs in an effort to make this process easier (UNDP Nepal, 2021). Empowerment is being talked about more and more by researchers, professionals, and those who care about economic progress. More and more researchers are trying to implement what empowerment is and how they can use it in their efforts to develop their surroundings and living standards.

Empowerment is a complex process involving individual and collective psychological and social-relational processes (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Christens, 2012). Empowerment is an American community psychology concept that was first described by Rappaport (1987). However, it has its roots much earlier in Marxist sociological theory. Zimmerman (1998, 2000) has been responsible for founding youth empowerment theory, while Ledford et al. (2013) founded youth empowerment solutions, giving a new dimension to this theory and ultimately founding several dimensions. Researchers, organizations, and governments have been using various dimensions, the significance of which may vary and be accorded priority depending upon the corresponding needs and demands in any country. After the SDGs, youth empowerment aspects are typically Economic, Education, Health and Well-being, Political Participation, and Social Inclusion (UNDP, 2020). Youth empowerment has been defined variously by scholars in concord with various socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts (Williams, 2024). Even though numerous studies have explored the overall determinants of youth empowerment, the gap that should be filled is conceptualizing and defining systematically the determinants of youth empowerment. This vagueness in clarity discourages the formulation and implementation of targeted interventions and policies aimed at promoting sustainable economic opportunities for the youth, particularly in areas where youth unemployment and underemployment remain relevant concerns. The current study aims to understand the concept of youth empowerment and determinants by systematic review of literature according to PRISMA-method.

This paper is structured as follows; Section 2 describes the methodology in accordance with PRISMA guideline. Section 3 presents the key findings including determinants of youth empowerment and discussion. Finally, Section 4 concludes the paper summarizing the contribution and indicating implications and future research directions.

Methodology

To identify the major thematic domains for the development of the youth empowerment, this study adopted the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology. The process commenced with the formulation of clearly defined research questions aligned with the study's overarching objective: to define and identify the determinants of youth empowerment. The methodology adheres to the PRISMA guidelines, encompassing five core steps: database selection, keyword strategy, literature screening, quality assessment, and data extraction.

The study initially decided key terms to search including "Empowerment", "Types of Empowerments", "Youth empowerment", "Determinates of Empowerments", "Determinants of youth empowerment", "Dimensions of youth empowerment", "Indicators of youth empowerment", "Measurement of empowerment", "Theories to explain youth empowerment", "Theoretical models of youth empowerment", "Empowerment constructs" "Empowerment scales", "Youth empowerment index", etc. A comprehensive systematic literature review was subsequently conducted, drawing upon electronic academic databases and institutional publications from major international development organizations. The review incorporated a total of 176 peer-reviewed articles, and reports published by international organizations including World Bank, WTO, ILO, WHO, UNDP, and others. No temporal restrictions were applied to the publication dates in order to capture the full trajectory and evolution of youth empowerment literature over time.

The eligibility criteria for this systematic review were established through a set of predefined inclusion and exclusion parameters. The inclusion criteria encompassed articles published in English, peer-reviewed journal articles, editorials, book chapters, and institutional documentation. Studies employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches and those addressing at least one domain of empowerment within a global geographic context were considered eligible. Conversely, exclusion criteria eliminated non-English publications, non-peer-reviewed literature such as theses and reports, and theoretical papers lacking empirical evidence or relevance to empowerment determinants.

To ensure methodological rigor, Boolean operators and controlled vocabulary terms were employed to refine database searches. Additional filters were applied to restrict results to English-language and peer-reviewed sources. The initial database query yielded a wide range of publications, which were first subjected to title and abstract screening to remove clearly irrelevant studies. Subsequently, the remaining articles underwent full-text review, during which the eligibility criteria were systematically applied to finalize the set of included studies. The review process was conducted in four systematic stages: (1) removal of duplicate records across databases, (2) screening of titles and abstracts to evaluate preliminary eligibility, (3) full-text review using the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and (4) final inclusion of studies based on thematic relevance to youth economic empowerment. To ensure consistency and minimize bias, two reviewers independently screened all identified records, with discrepancies resolved through discussion with a third reviewer.

The results of the systematic review are presented in three sub-sections: study selection, characteristics of the included studies, and thematic synthesis of determinants associated with youth economic empowerment. The article selection process is illustrated using a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Figure 1), which outlines the progression from initial retrieval to final inclusion. From a total of 176 initially identified records, 24 duplicates were excluded. Of the remaining 152, title and abstract screening reduced the pool to 102 studies for full-text assessment. Ultimately, 68 studies met all eligibility criteria and were retained for final analysis. Articles excluded at the full-text review stage were predominantly theoretical in nature, lacked empirical data, were non-peer-reviewed, or did not specifically address determinants of economic empowerment.

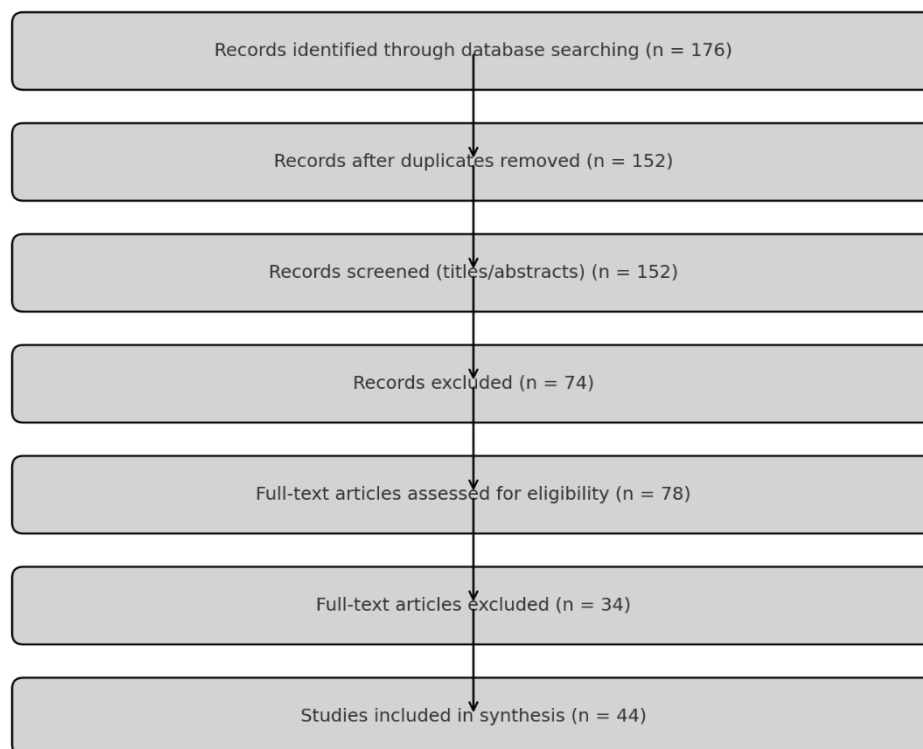


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram representing the systematic review process for selecting articles on youth empowerment.

Results and Discussion

The word ‘empowerment’ comes from the idea of ‘power’ or ‘powerlessness’ (Moscovitch and Drover, 1981). Cochran (1986) believes that individuals understand their own needs better than anyone else, so they should have the power to define and address those needs themselves. Rappaport (1987) states that empowerment means aiming to increase people’s ability to control their own lives. Whitmore (1988) defines empowerment as: “an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and the communities in which they live. (p.13)” When we discuss empowerment, we are essentially discussing gaining, expanding, or strengthening power. Sadan (2004) emphasizes that understanding empowerment necessitates an understanding of power, as empowerment processes are deeply intertwined with power dynamics.

Dynamics, activities, relationships, and structures in each environment may facilitate or hamper empowerment. Research conducted by Doneys et al. (2020) highlights the significant role of environmental and relationship factors in shaping empowerment processes. Cavalieri and Almeida (2020) also asserted that empowerment is an active social process with others, and it varies based on the environment and individuals involved. They added that it is hard to distinguish the individual from the community and the personal from the environmental context. Empowerment is a question of building responsible communities where the individuals have increased control over their lives and participate equally in day-to-day life, being sensitive to the different collective arrangements and their environment (Horochovski, 2006). Empowerment processes are greatly influenced by interpersonal relationships. Power

dynamics in such relationships are crucial in empowerment. The adult-young person relationship, and indeed more so the adults who have a major role to play in their life trajectory, like teachers, is important. Such adults can play a critical role in the empowerment process in that they can provide support, direction, and opportunity for young people to master and build confidence in themselves. Therefore, building successful and motivating youth-to-influence roles and youth-to-people relationships is crucial for successful empowerment (Cahill and Dadvand, 2018; Dushkova and Ivlieva, (2024); Ferreira et al., 2021; Naezer et al., 2017).

Previous studies have also highlighted the distinctions between youth and adult empowerment and emphasized the role of adults in empowering young people (Blanchet-Cohen and Brunson, 2014; Peterson et al., 2011). Salusky et al. (2014) conducted research into the roles adults play in youth empowerment, giving them secondary and adaptive roles. They prescribed some adult functions such as encouraging, supporting, listening, and evaluating. In such a dynamic, teachers operate as collaborators, facilitators, providers of resources, facilitators of process, and creators of supportive environments and conditions but not as authority experts. For Berne et al. (2023), understanding young people's empowerment from the perspective of the teachers should consider two elements. First, empowering situations in which empowerment happens and where young people and teachers interact are important. Second, interventions in instruction in such environments play a role in supporting youth participation. Hence, an ecological approach is appropriate to examine the environments that support youth empowerment processes.

Cavalieri and Almeida (2020) thoroughly reviewed existing literature and developed a more comprehensive conceptualization of empowerment. They delineated empowerment into three primary aspects: process, levels, and categories. The empowerment process is characterized as active, intentional, and continuous, necessitating changes over time. The empowerment categories are conceptualized as formal, interpersonal, instrumental, and substantive. Finally, the levels of empowerment are described as individual, community, and organizational.

Educational components enhance the flow and circulation of relationships between youth and adults, thereby fostering youth empowerment. Consequently, educators bear the responsibility of creating opportunities that facilitate the emotional, educational, and participatory empowerment of young individuals. In analyzing youth empowerment from the perspective of educators, two key points must be considered (Berne et al., 2023). First, it is essential to examine the environments where empowerment occurs and where youth and educators interact. Second, the interventions of educators within the environments where young people engage should be considered (Berne et al., 2023). Therefore, using the ecological perspective to study the environments that help young people become more empowered made sense.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective on human development, which includes environmental, process, and relational aspects, suggests more holistic educational practices across diverse environments that promote the enhancement of human empowerment (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory has five interrelated systems: Micro, Meso, Exo, Macro, and chrono systems. The microsystem encompasses the

relationships, roles, and activities that an individual engages in within specific environments, such as family or school. A mesosystem is a system of microsystems. It is about the interrelationships between microsystems, such as the relationship between a specific family and a school. The exosystem represents the environments that do not directly involve the individual but influence the settings in which the individual is present. It affects the individual's life indirectly, for example, the workplace of the individual's parents. The Macrosystem, as described by Berne et al. (2023), encompasses belief systems, religion, and a given region's political, social, and economic structures. These overarching elements shape the entirety of the microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystems. Finally, the Chronosystem pertains to the individual's specific period in their life. In other words, the impact of environmental events on an individual will vary depending on the particular moment they are experiencing.

However, Bronfenbrenner's theory, created before the digital age, did not account for the influence of growing up with technology. Jessica and Jonathan (2023) explore how Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory can be updated to better accommodate the digital age. Bronfenbrenner's original model, which focuses on the interactions between individuals and their environments, is re-examined in the context of modern technological advancements. The authors argue that while Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory focuses on the interdependence of individuals and their contexts, it has traditionally been represented as a static model of concentric circles. This portrayal overlooks the dynamic and interconnected nature of contemporary digital environments. The article proposes modifications to the original model, introducing the concept of the "techno-subsystem" to account for virtual interactions that occur outside physical settings. Under those key modifications, recognizing two types of microsystems, virtual and physical, acknowledging that individuals can engage in more than one microsystem simultaneously, and defining the opening and closing of virtual microsystems based on the interactions and activities within them are prominent (Jessica & Jonathan 2023).

Youth Empowerment: Youth Empowerment refers to a range of initiatives and strategies aimed at providing young people with the skills, resources, opportunities, and support they need to achieve economic independence and stability. It focuses on enabling youth to actively participate in the economy, secure sustainable livelihoods, and improve their overall quality of life (ILO 2020; OECD. 2021). Hope (2012) conceptualizes youth empowerment as an initiative aimed at enabling young individuals to gain control and influence over their social, economic, and political circumstances. This empowerment allows them to meet their needs and address challenges, ultimately leading to an improved quality of life. Chinedu and Yunusa (2014) define youth economic empowerment as the intentional removal of barriers that hinder young people's full participation in economic activities essential for their livelihood. Postmus, Plummer, McMahon, and Zurlo (2013) describe youth empowerment as a comprehensive attitudinal, structural, and cultural process. This process equips young individuals with the capacity, authority, and agency to make decisions and effect changes in their own lives, as well as in the lives of others, including both youth and adults.

One of the fundamental contributions to empowerment theory conceptualization is that of Kabeer (1999), which locates empowerment as a process characterized by the relationship between resources, agency, and achievements. Resources are the material, human, and social

inputs making up the capacity for the exercise of choice; agency is the capacity to make one's own goals and to pursue them; and achievements are the consequences of exercising that agency which are actually attained. Although initially applied in research on women's empowerment, the tripartite model has been increasingly employed in research on marginalized groups, including youth. Kabeer's emphasis on the effects of structural disadvantage and institution access can be applied to the economic constraints of youth, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. In the context of youth empowerment, her model presents a cogent theoretical understanding of how access to financial instruments, learning opportunities, and places of decision-making all intersect to drive sustainable development outcomes. Kabeer's model has similarly been applied in this research for determining and outlining the most important drivers of youth empowerment.

Global institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA, WHO, UN, and UNDP have extensively researched youth empowerment, focusing on its indispensable contribution to national development. Youth empowerment is significantly responsible for economic development by promoting productivity and innovation (UNDP, 2014). Youth empowerment makes a very significant contribution to poverty reduction by providing skills and opportunities to youngsters to access decent employment and stable incomes (ILO, 2020). Moreover, generating economic opportunities among young people lowers the potential for conflict and social unrest, hence augmenting social stability and peace (World Bank, 2017). Investment in youth economic empowerment also enhances human capital by increasing skill development and education, which is instrumental in economic growth (OECD, 2015). Being able to innovate and adapt to the newest technologies, young people can drive technological growth and diversification of the economy (Schoof, 2006). Along with this, youth empowerment schemes address the levels of youth unemployment, offering sustainable livelihood (ILO, 2020). With entrepreneurship promotion, youth empowerment schemes lead to the start-up of new businesses and job opportunities (World Economic Forum, 2015). Youth economic stability is also associated with the improvement in health, which reduces stress and enables a healthy life (UNFPA, 2014). Moreover, economic empowerment of young women reduces gender inequalities and promotes inclusive growth (UN Women, 2018). Economic empowerment of youths ensures a stable labor force that is needed for sustained long-term economic growth (World Bank, 2017). With youth economic empowerment, the power of the youth in developing nations can be utilized for sustainable development and economic growth (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2020; ILO 2013, 2020; UN 2018; UNDP 2014; WHO 2014; WEF 2016; World Bank 2018).

Literature search was done through a systematic peer-reviewed journal article and institutional report review. The process of exploration here entailed identifying the common dimensions and indicators of youth economic empowerment across different global contexts. Ten foundation dimensions were thus synthesized that each had a set of key items reflecting both structural and individual aspects of empowerment. These dimensions were based on empirical data and theoretical hypotheses from development economics, social psychology, and youth studies. The Table 01, is a summary of these ten dimensions and respective items as well as the supporting citations.

Table 1

Dimensions and Indicators of Youth Empowerment

Dimensions	Indicators	Sources
Economic Resources and Financial Access	Income Levels	Kabeer (1999); Postmus et al. (2013); World Bank (2018); ILO (2013, 2020); GEM (2020); UNDP (2014); UNESCO (2016); YouthPower (USAID); WEF (2016); Zimmerman (1995); Hope (2012); Checkoway & Aldana (2013); UNDP (2014); Chinedu & Yunusa (2014); Bandura (1997); UN Women (2018); GSMA (2021); UNICEF (2020 a); WHO (2014); UN (2018); ILO (2020); World Bank (2019)
	Savings	
	Credit access	
	Asset Ownership	
	Financial Inclusion	
Employment and Economic Activities	Employment Status	
	Job Security	
	Entrepreneurship	
	Quality of Work	
	Skill Utilization	
Education and Skill Development	Educational Attainment	
	Access to Training	
	Relevance of Skills	
	Digital Literacy	
Agency and Decision-Making	Control over Finances	
	Economic Decision-Making Power	
	Career Choices	
Social and Institutional Support	Social Networks	
	Institutional Support	
	Access to Markets	
Psychological Empowerment	Self-Efficacy	
	Future Orientation	
	Resilience	
Gender and Social Inclusion	Gender-Specific Barriers	
	Inclusive Opportunities	
Health and Wellbeing	Physical Health	
	Mental Health	
	Work-Life Balance	
Community and Environmental Context	Community Resources	
	Safety and Security	
	Economic Opportunities in Community	
Barriers to Economic Empowerment	Discrimination	
	Legal and Regulatory Challenges	
	Cultural Norms	

The reviewed research studies provided a comprehensive foundation for the identification of a group of varied determinants to empowerment of young people. By an orderly consolidation of findings, these determinants were empirically grouped into four thematic areas in recognition of the multi-dimensionality of empowerment. Table 02 outlines the orderly synopsis of these areas, the concerned determinants, and the respective indicators, therefore offering a common framework for the ensuing construction of the Youth Economic Empowerment Scale.

Empowerment of young people is shaped by a multilateral interplay of determinants in economic, social, technological, and personal settings. Economically, access to finances

through income, saving, credit, and assets is critical to financial independence and inclusion (World Bank, 2015). Of importance also are employment opportunities and economic opportunities such as stable employment, entrepreneurship, use of skills, and decent work, which are the pathways to sustainable livelihoods (ILO, 2020). However, systemic barriers such as discrimination, regulatory hurdles, and entrenched cultural norms can significantly impede economic participation (UNDP, 2016). Capacity building, particularly through education and skills training, is central to empowerment, as educational attainment and access to relevant training enhance labor market readiness (OECD, 2015). The growing significance of digital access and virtual skill-building encompassing internet connectivity, digital literacy, and engagement with online platforms has become vital for youth to thrive in modern economies (UNESCO, 2022). Autonomy in decision-making, financial management, and political or civic participation further reflects empowered agency (UN Women, 2018). Eco-social responsibility, through robust social networks, institutional support, inclusive opportunities, and safe community environments, promotes sustainable empowerment and access to economic markets (World Bank, 2017). Lastly, physical and mental wellness highlighted by self-efficacy, resilience, and overall health—is essential to ensuring youth are psychologically equipped to pursue opportunities (UNFPA, 2014). Together, these determinants form an integrated framework necessary for fostering holistic youth empowerment.

Table 2

Thematic Domains, Key Determinants and Indicators of Youth Empowerment

Domain	Determinants	Indicators	References
Economic Empowerment	Economic Resources and Financial Access,	Income Levels	Postmus et al. (2013); Dushkova & Ivlieva (2024); Mambosho, et. al. (2024); GEM (2019)
		Savings	
		Credit access	
		Asset Ownership	
		Financial Inclusion	
	Employment and Economic Activities,	Employment Status	Rugut & Mungai (2024); Dushkova & Ivlieva (2024); GEM (2019, 2020);
		Job Security	
		Entrepreneurship	
		Quality of Work	
		Skill Utilization	
	Barriers to Economic Empowerment	Discrimination	Dushkova & Ivlieva (2024); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2014, 2016, 2018, 2020)
		Legal and Regulatory Challenges	
		Cultural Norms	
Capacity Enabling	Education and Skill Development,	Educational Attainment	Salusky et al. (2014); Dushkova & Ivlieva (2024); Razak, et al. (2024); UNESCO (2020)
		Access to Training	
		Relevance of Skills	
	Digital access and virtual skill-building	Device Accessibility and Internet Connectivity	Jessica & Jonathan (2023); Hinduja & Lalani (2025); Levine, & Viano, (2025); UNESCO (2022); OECD (2017); ITU (2020); UNICEF & ITU. (2020); European
		Digital Inclusion	
		Platform Accessibility	
		Digital Literacy	
		Information Literacy	

		Entrepreneurial Skills in Digital Environments	Commission (2013); GEM (2020 a, 2020 b)
		Collaborative and Communication Tools	
		Advanced ICT Skills	
		Online Learning Engagement	
	Decision-Making	Personal Autonomy	Dushkova & Ivlieva (2024); Hope (2012); Chinedu & Yunusa (2014); Jessica & Jonathan (2023); UNICEF (2020 b)
		Financial Decision-Making	
		Civic and Community Participation	
		Political/Institutional Engagement	
Socio-economic Accountability	Social and Institutional Support	Social Networks	Stanton-Salazar (2011); Varga & Zaff (2018); Danns & Danns (2022); OECD (2015)
		Institutional Support	
		Access to Markets	
	Gender and Social Inclusion	Gender-Specific Barriers	Barrantes & Cretney (2024); Lovell (2021); UNDP (2018); United Nations (2018)
		Inclusive Opportunities	
	Community and Environmental Context	Community Resources	Wali et al. (2017); Dushkova & Ivlieva (2024); United Nations (2018)
		Safety and Security	
		Economic Opportunities in Community	
Wellness	Psychological Empowerment,	Self-Efficacy	Bandura (1997); Zayed (2024); Zimmerman (2000); Sagone & De Caroli (2016); UNICEF (2021)
		Future Orientation	
		Resilience	
	Health and Wellbeing	Physical Health	Gragnano, Simbula & Miglioretti (2020); Borowiec & Drygas (2022); UNICEF (2021)
		Mental Health	
		Work-Life Balance	

Discussion

The findings of this systematic review identify many facets of youth empowerment. Such complex nature are those larger economic, social, educational, environmental, and health-related aspects. This broader perspective basically agrees with theoretical frameworks such as Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and it was expanded to encompass virtual microsystems relevant to the age of the digital age. Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory is a theoretical model for describing how individuals, particularly youth, gain control over their lives and develop the capacity to construct their social worlds. It is based on the concept of psychological empowerment, which has three components: intrapersonal (perception of capability), interactional (awareness of socio-political realities), and behavioral (participation). Under youth empowerment, Zimmerman's model will be directly related to determinants such as decision-making independence, confidence, and leadership. These are critical determinants for youth empowerment in terms

of developing and achieving change in their lives, especially financial independence, career dreams, and entrepreneurial entrepreneurship.

Operationally, the application aligns Zimmerman's theory with empowerment by aligning the creation of environments that foster youth agency and encourage active engagement in personal, economic, and community decision-making. This focus necessitates the addition of variables such that they are focused on perceived control of money, availability of income-generating assets, and participation in family or community financial decisions. Such variables are not merely measures of objective conditions but are also measures of the way youth subjectively perceive their capacity to exercise a critical understanding for responsive intervention and program development. Underlying Zimmerman's theory is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory that emphasizes the importance of context in shaping individual development. In this model, adolescent development is shaped by a number of nested systems, such as the microsystem (family, peers, school), mesosystem (microsystem transactions), exosystem (environments external to the youth domain, yet influencing youth indirectly), and macrosystem (greater cultural values, policies, and social norms). For example, a youth's economic capability may be influenced not just by their individual capabilities (microsystem), but also by how their school integrates financial literacy (mesosystem), if their parents' employment affects their exposure to opportunities (exosystem), and the cultural frame for entrepreneurship among youths (macrosystem). Most importantly, Bronfenbrenner's framework allows researchers and practitioners to pinpoint the origins of empowerment or disempowerment in structural and relational contexts, particularly well-suited to the complex socio-economic conditions found in developing countries. It highlights the need for designing youth economic empowerment initiatives that not only target the individual but also the system, with a consideration of support networks at the community level, access to institutions, and national development policy.

Together, Zimmerman's and Bronfenbrenner's theories support an ecologic, multi-domain conception of youth economic empowerment measurement. As Zimmerman deals with internalization of power and individual control, Bronfenbrenner addresses the interactive and system levels that facilitate or inhibit such control. Integrating the two theories in scale development ensures the generated measure accounts for both individual capacities and the facilitation or disabling environments in which young people are embedded.

With shifting technology and virtual environments, the ecological model has recently been expanded to include the "techno-subsystem" or virtual microsystem, Jessica and Jonathan (2023) another level for representing the digital interactions that increasingly shape young people's behavior and empowerment. This subsystem values the all-pervasive presence of virtual spaces and digital technologies in shaping adolescents' development like virtual peer networks, electronic financial institutions, online learning environments, and social media websites that is distinct from the traditional microsystems. Young people now learn economic data, build entrepreneurial firms, and obtain microloans or mentorship through the internet. Jessica and Jonathan (2023) argue that these online environments not only co-exist with the physical world but also frame and in some cases reframe how youth interact with each other, institutions, and economic possibilities. Current measurement of youth empowerment needs to take account of digital inclusion, freedom in using decision-making capacities on the net, and the effect of virtual communities on youth agency. Therefore, incorporating indicators

related to digital access, virtual skill building, and online entrepreneurial behavior in youth empowerment is not only suitable but also indispensable in a bid to capture the contemporary context of youth empowerment.

The economic empowerment of young people has been emphatically argued by both theoretical and empirical research. Hope (2012) conceptualizes youth empowerment as a transformation process by which youths can exert control over their social and economic conditions. This definition aligns with Chinedu and Yunusa's (2014) view of economic empowerment as the intentional elimination of structural barriers that prevent young people from fully engaging in productive economic activities. These concepts emphasize that empowerment is not merely access to resources or skills but involves system change that makes it possible for young people to shape their own economic future. Similarly, Postmus et al. (2013) reiterate that economic empowerment needs to include access to financial literacy, decision-making control, and the psychological empowerment to assert one's rights elements that are required for sustainability and resilience. These articles collectively argue that empowerment is both a structurally produced outcome and an internalized capability, underlining further the necessity for the measuring tools to reflect such dualism.

Key international development institutions once more reiterate the urgency of youth economic empowerment as an international policy objective. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2020) and International Labour Organization (ILO, 2013, 2020) reports pinpoint that enabling youth entrepreneurship and employability can maintain innovation, fight unemployment, and achieve inclusive growth. The United Nations (2018) and the UNDP (2014) have further linked youth empowerment to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), that is, poverty reduction, gender equality, and ensuring decent work. In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) focuses on the interplay between economic stability and youth mental health, advocating for integrated solutions that consider both financial and psychosocial well-being. The World Bank (2018) and World Economic Forum (WEF, 2016) emphasize that countries investing in youth entrepreneurship and skill building reaps long-term economic benefits from greater productivity and innovation. The international points support the multidisciplinary framework applied in this study and validate the domains identified to be included in the Youth Economic Empowerment Scale.

Conclusions

This PRISMA-based systematic review outlined and organized an extensive range of determinants of central significance to youth empowerment and incorporated them into the four primary themes of economic empowerment, capacity enabling, socio-economic accountability, and wellness. It is influenced by a number of interconnected determinants across economic, social, technological, and individual contexts. In an economic context, access to finance, stable employment, enterprise, and knowledge-based skill application are key to its promotion and facilitation of sustainable livelihood and autonomy. Educational attainment, digital literacy, and capacity-building programs further enhance labor market readiness. Barriers such as discrimination and cultural norms hinder participation while autonomy in decision-making and civic engagement reflect empowered agency. Social and institutional support, alongside safe and inclusive communities, enable greater access to economic opportunities. Physical and mental wellness, supported by resilience and self-

efficacy, equips youth to pursue opportunities. By reviewing a broad range of global, peer-reviewed studies and applying rigorous inclusion criteria, this research provides a theoretically grounded and empirically validated framework for understanding the multidimensional nature of youth empowerment. The inclusion of recent theoretical extensions such as digital and virtual environments ensures that the conceptual structure remains responsive to contemporary socio-economic realities, especially in the post-pandemic and digital-first global context.

This study generates new knowledge by reviewing determinants of youth empowerment that could help to develop a youth empowerment measurement which fills key literature gaps in the literature. The findings form a solid foundation for the operationalization of youth empowerment, and develop accurate measurement for youth empowerment, that can be used by researchers, policymakers, educators, and international development agencies. Youth empowerment measurement is not only expected to serve as a diagnostic and evaluative tool but also as a strategic guide to design and implement empowerment initiatives tailored to diverse youth populations. The youth empowerment measurement will allow stakeholders to monitor progress, compare empowerment outcomes across contexts, and ensure accountability in youth-focused programming. Ultimately, it bridges a critical measurement gap in both academic literature and policy discourse, providing a tool that reflects the complex, systemic, and context-sensitive nature of youth empowerment in the 21st century.

Future work will focus on generating scale items based on these determinants, validating the scale, and testing it across diverse youth populations. A well-constructed and validated youth empowerment scale instrument will serve as a vital tool for monitoring progress, designing youth-targeted policies, and advancing global development goals.

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