



Individual Skills as a Means of Economic Solidness

A Study in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract

Individual personal skills are among the vital and important matters that have positive effects on individuals, especially on women in particular, as women's acquisition of some skills, especially in societies that are built on the basis of gender roles, or patriarchal authority, helps enhance their personal empowerment, which subsequently leads them to achieving their economic independence and even strengthening their social position. In her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte Brontë (1816 – 1855), the English novelist and poet, promotes amongst her other themes, the theme of individual skills as a means of economic solidness through an exploration of the life journey of an orphan girl, Jane, whose individual skills have helped her to overcome life's difficulties, withstand the hardships, and eventually bring her somewhat to safety. Ultimately, the novelist aims to show how the issue of an individual's possession of skills is related to success in life, especially for women.

Keywords: Charlotte Brontë, Individual Skills, *Jane Eyre*, Women's Economic Solidness, Women's Empowerment

Introduction

Individual skills, which are a category within soft skills, are non-technical abilities that enable individuals to adapt to all circumstances on a personal level, and on the other hand, these contribute to the development of society. At the personal level, individual skills contribute somewhat to securing and supporting the material side, and also improving the moral side of an individual and strengthening the connection with his or her surroundings.

In its document which promotes the need for acquiring life skills, the World Health Organization has defined 'life skills' as "abilities for



adaptive and positive [behaviour] that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (WHO, 1993, p. 3). In doing so, it calls to improve psychosocial competence, encourage healthy habits, and support mental well-being, especially in young people. In fact, the essence of this definition has been expressed practically, albeit indirectly, many years ago before the definition of the organization mentioned above. In her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), which was published under the pseudonym Currer Bell, Charlotte Brontë, practically embodied the importance of women’s personal skills, and proved their significance in honing women’s personalities.

Being a self-made woman and a sister to self-made women, Charlotte was well aware of the importance of personal skills in one’s life, especially in women’s life for these skills play an important role in helping them think creatively, make decisions, solve problems, and manage their financial affairs and emotional relationships. Since childhood, Charlotte, her brother Branwell, and her younger sisters Emily and Anne enjoyed literary talents. In 1826 Charlotte and her three siblings “began to write in great detail about an imaginary world which they called Angria” (Cody, n.d., para. 3). In 1832 “she left school to teach her sisters at home” (para. 4). At the age of 17 years old, Charlotte wrote her first piece of writing, a novella under the title *The Green Dwarf* (1833). Then, she worked as a teacher when she was only 19 years old. After that she worked as a governess to some families, to end up as a novelist and poet. So, as Miriam Allott states:

Charlotte had only just reached her teens when she shouldered family responsibilities. ..., it was she who planned for her herself and her sisters, trying to get them adequately equipped to earn their living by teaching, and later spurring them on to make something of their unique creative gifts by seeking a publisher for their various literary enterprises. (1973, pp. 14 – 15)

In fact what enable Charlotte to live and move on in life was her education, as well as her skills, which she implanted in one of her characters, which is almost an image of her, as Charlotte's character is very similar to the female character of one of her novels, precisely the character of Jane in *Jane Eyre* in terms of struggling to live, and of proving her strong independent personality. In her article "individual Worlds – Emily Brontë (1818 – 1848) – *Wuthering Heights*", Elizabeth Drew asserts that: [t]he value of a novel rests ultimately on the quality of the personality behind it, or more exactly, on the skill with which that personality can use form and language to communicate his vision and knowledge. Ways of looking at life are as varied as novelists themselves, but we can easily distinguish certain large types of literary personality which recur in every age. (1963, p. 173)

Likewise, the essence of the novel *Jane Eyre* rests on the personality and skills of its author to communicate her vision on the subject of women's economic solidness, as she herself grew up in a strict Victorian society. Hence, Sally Shuttleworth sees that "[i]n *Jane Eyre* Brontë extends her analysis of the ways in which ideological pressures of class, gender and economics are played out in the domain of subjectivity" (2007, p. 7). On her part Farhana Haque observes that Charlotte stories show "character in action, character, that is, as it appears in contact with the world of external event and personality. Only the relation of Charlotte Brontë's imagination to this world is different from that of most novelist[s]" (2017, p. 2). For these reasons, the publication of the novel at 1847, according to a critical opinion "was a relevant publication at the time because the book dealt with many worrying issues facing Victorians at the time, such as gender inequality, classism, abuse and trauma ... Though it is a fictional narrative, the story focuses on themes affecting real-life Victorians" (My Literary art, "The impact of trauma on...", n.d., para. 1); for his part, Robert Barnard observes that "[i]t was with the success of Charlotte



Bronte's (1816–1855) with *Jane Eyre* in 1847 that established the family with the public" (1984, p. 111); hence, according to him, "it remained throughout the century the most popular Brontë novel" (p. 111). Similarly, in her "introduction" to the Everyman's Library edition of *Jane Eyre*, Margaret Lane praises the novel and emphasizes the intense, personal, and partly autobiographical nature of its author; seeing it as 'a meteor' that descended "in 1847, and in more than a hundred years its glow has not faded. It is still as bright, and even steadier than it was; a book that has been loved by generations" (1966, p. v). Comparably, the Scottish novelist Margaret Oliphant (1828 – 1897) eulogizes the novel for its groundbreaking influence on literature; and describes it as the "impetuous little spirit [that] dashed into [their] well-ordered world, broke its boundaries, and defied its principles" (1855, pp. 557–558). On her part, Virginia Woolf specifically highlights the emotional intensity of the novel, noting that "at the end we are steeped through and through with the genius, the vehemence, the indignation of Charlotte Brontë" (1925, pp. 219–227).

The General Objective

This research paper aims to clarify how Charlotte Brontë promotes an important theme, namely the acquisition of individual skills, especially for women, due to its importance in enhancing self-confidence, improving the ability to make decisions at home, providing sustainable income, and challenging traditional gender roles that limit women's role in domestic work.

Research Question

What do various skill acquisitions, particularly those pertaining to reading; language learning; translation; and artistic/musical training have on women's financial security, capacity to generate money, and flexibility in the workplace?

Methodology

The study has taken from Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* a sample to collect and analyze textual data to examine the importance of one of the serious themes that related to women which is the theme of self-reliance and economic empowerment of women. The researcher has adopted a



descriptive-analytical, qualitative research method to examine the experiences of a female orphan whose personal skills have helped her to persevere through hardships, move towards achieving her goals in life, and secure her economic situation.

Literature Review

The literary world is filled by literary works that call for, or hint to the importance of women's economic empowerment, especially works by female novelists. Yet the tools for achieving this goal is almost never mentioned or neglected. In fact most of these works focus on education as a primary step; given that we know that this right has become a privilege in some societies and not a right for all individuals, especially women. Appealingly, in *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte Brontë highlighted a topic that shows the importance of possessing personal skills at the individual level; and shows how these skills are important for improving a person's moral and material status, by enabling her protagonist, Jane, to acquire some artistic skills which helped her overcome difficulties and gain the independence she was looking for. For this reason, the novelist, through her heroine, was keen throughout the novel to send messages about the importance of women practicing their practical abilities through skills, whether these are manual artistic such as – (drawing, knitting, sewing, embroidery...etc.), or cognitive, such as – (reading, writing, translation...etc.). For instance in an occasion, Jane expounds that “[w]omen are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do” (Brontë, [1847] 1986, Chapter 12, p. 101). Hence, she recommends learning more skills, especially for women. Thus, according to her “[i]t is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex” (JE, Chapter 12, p. 101). So, and as Jane remarks: “[i]t is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it” (JE, Chapter 12, p. 101).

Individual Independent Skills that are integrated into the Novel

In the novel, Jane Eyre narrates her own story, the story of a girl who struggles among severe relatives and who strives to gain independence; thereby, she depends on herself to earn her living. Born as an orphan who lost her parents from a very young age, Jane grew up under unjust treatment by her aunt Mrs. Sarah Reed (the wife of Jane's maternal uncle), and was subjected to a number of derogatory labels by her cousin John Reed, 14 years old, such as – a 'rat' and a 'dependent'. Even the servants in the house, like for example Miss Abigail Abbot (Mrs. Reed's maid) looked at her as an inferior; or rather "less than a servant" (*JE*, Chapter 2, p. 6); and as "an underhand little thing" (*JE*, Chapter 2, p. 6) who "[does] nothing for [her] keep" (*JE*, Chapter 2, p. 6); whose "place to be humble, and to try to make [herself] agreeable to them" (*JE*, Chapter 2, p. 7), i.e., to her benefactors. This humiliating treatment even made Jane evaluate her position in the family to the extent that she began to look at herself as 'a discord'; 'a thing ... a heterogeneous thing ... a useless thing ... a noxious thing' (*JE*, Chapter 2, p. 9), or 'an interloper' (*JE*, Chapter 2, p. 10). Hence, she decided to revolt against such injustice, and get rid of "[a]ll John Reed's violent tyrannies, all his sisters' proud indifference, all his mother's aversion, all the servants' partiality" (*JE*, Chapter 2, p. 8) by searching for a way to support her "forced by the agonising stimulus into precocious though transitory power" (*JE*, Chapter 2, p. 9). A power which is hinted at in the ballad of Bessie, the kind nursemaid, which emphasizes the necessity of having a supportive force for people, especially those weak, to support and strengthen themselves. The fifth stanza of the ballad goes:

There is a thought that for strength should avail me,

Though both of shelter and kindred despoiled;

Heaven is a home, and a rest will not fail me;

God is a friend to the poor orphan child. (*JE*, Chapter 3, p. 15)

As a consequence, Jane found her outlet in some of the life skills which in turn helped her at first cope with the harsh conditions of her life. Among the basic life skills that helped her adapt to all the circumstances surrounding her and qualified her to emerge from her isolation, integrate

with her surroundings, and develop herself are the skills of – reading, drawing, language learning and translation that almost most of which are required, important, and helpful for anyone in the labor market. Through the course of the novel, Charlotte Brontë shows her readers the various skills that her heroine acquired through the different stages of her life that in turn helped her in her professional and practical life:

1. The Skill of Reading

The reading ability is the capacity to read, comprehend, and interpret textual content. Thus, it is a skill that individuals need in order to function and succeed in life. According to a study, the researcher states that “[r]eading is not only the skills that support success in schools but also the skills that need to be owned by every individual in the life of society” (Bartleby research, n.d., para. 1). In another study, the writer stresses the importance of the reading skill and has shown “that children who are avid readers and who know the purpose of reading are more likely to have successful careers and a healthy lifestyle” (EuroSchool, 2023, para. 1); seeing in it a skill that matters and lists its many advantages, as for examples, according to the study, it improves communication skills, as it improves the reader’s vocabulary and grammar, which can enhance his ability to communicate effectively, and also help create better relationships (para 2).

On account of the importance of the reading skill, the English novelist and poet Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) had shed light in his novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) on the importance of reading as it opens up horizons for the reader and helps him or her understand the secrets of life and learn about the experiences of others, and thus taking benefit from those experiences. According to a study around this point, the researcher has noted that through a conversation between the protagonist, Tess, and her mother, “Tess cried making her first radical call for another type of education – a more liberal education which enables her to cope with the outside world” (Mahmoud, 2013, p. 6), saying:

How could I be expected to know? I was a child
when I left this house four
months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-
folk? Why didn't
you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against,
because they read novels
that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o'
learning in that way,
and you did not help me! (Hardy, [1891] 1960, p. 106)

As for Charlotte Brontë, she shows how the reading skill was an aid to the little protagonist of her novel. From a very young age, at ten years old, little Jane developed a reading skill, which in turn paved the way for acquiring other skills that expanded her awareness of the world around her, as she started to draw parallels comparing herself or those around her to some of those characters or heroes drawn in the miscellaneous books she had read, like – Goldsmith's *History of Rome*; Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*; Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*; *The Bible*; some Arabian tales; etc. In fact, through reading Jane found an outlet to vent her sadness and the bad treatment she was receiving at the hands of her cousin John, so she would climb the window and hide from sight to practice her favorite hobby. Besides, this skill helped her in becoming more mature mentally and psychologically, as it contributed to the maturity of her way in addressing those around her, so that Bessie was amazed at the "quite a new way of talking" (*JE*, Chapter 4, p. 33) that Jane used, to the extent that she asked her of "[w]hat makes [her] so venturesome and hardy?" (*JE*, Chapter 4, p. 33) Also, was amazed at the vocabulary that Jane used during their conversation like – "Just now! and rather" (*JE*, Chapter 4, p. 33), to the degree that Bessie again wondered of "[h]ow coolly [her] little lady says it!" (*JE*, Chapter 4, p. 33) In addition, her readings helped accelerate the maturation of her personality, a matter that in turn helped her defend herself against Mrs. Reed's accusations of being 'deceitful' in front of Mr. Brocklehurst, a hypocritical clergyman and the treasurer of Lowood School. Thereby, this skill, which opened Jane's imagination to external worlds and refined her tongue and way of

speaking, formed the ‘strength’ with which she managed “to dart retaliation at [her] antagonist” (*JE*, Chapter 4, p. 29); and formed somewhat a response to her question about “what [she] could do to remedy the injury” (*JE*, Chapter 4, p. 27) her relatives had caused her.

2. The Skill of Language Learning

In another phase of her experiences in life, at Lowood School, a charity institution, which was an exile at the request of Mrs. Reed, Jane met a girl who had the same passion for reading, Helen Burns, who becomes her spiritual friend at Lowood, and whose role comes to convince Jane that “the sovereign hand that created [her] frame, and put life into it, has provided [her] with other resources than [her] feeble self” (*JE*, Chapter 8, p. 62); and who at the moment of dying revealed to Jane that “[she] had not qualities or talents to make [her] way very well in the world” (*JE*, Chapter 9, p. 74), as she thought. However, at Lowood Jane developed another types of skills; as in addition to taking lessons in geography, history, grammar, mathematics, music lessons, she learnt sewing and the French language.

In fact learning foreign languages is not only interesting, but is also important, as it may bring some additional benefits, like getting a job. According to Jennifer Smith “being fluent in a second language offers numerous benefits and opportunities. Learning a second language is exciting and beneficial at all ages. [and it] offers practical, intellectual and many aspirational benefits” (n.d., para. 1). On his part, Yaser A. Jasim sees that “[l]earning a second language evaluates people by their education, skills, experience, and knowledge” (2021, p. 2). In the novel, the novelist reflects how Jane was fascinated by the way Miss Maria Temple, the compassionate superintendent at Lowood, and Helen Burns converse with each other, a way that reflected their knowledge and their skill in certain languages, by saying:

they seemed so familiar with French names and French authors: but
my amazement
reached its climax when Miss Temple asked Helen if she sometimes
snatched

a moment to recall the Latin her father had taught her, and taking a book from

a shelf, bade her read and construe a page of Virgil; and Helen obeyed, my organ

of veneration expanding at every sounding line. (*JE*, Chapter 8, p. 66)

So, after some trouble caused by Mr. Brocklehurst, accusing her of being “a little castaway ... an interloper and an alien ... [and] a liar” (*JE*, Chapter 7, p. 59); and after Miss Temple restored Jane’s consideration against such accusations, Jane set out to resume learning and acquiring other skills, so that “in less than two months [she] was allowed to commence French and drawing” (*JE*, Chapter 8, p. 67). In fact, these skills were the life’s “gleams of sunshine” (*JE*, Chapter 4, p. 33) to this wretched, orphan child, to the extent that “[she] would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries” (*JE*, Chapter 8, p. 67), and to the degree that the novelist did not neglect to draw the harmony of her heroine’s new condition with the arrival of spring and its atmosphere, about which Jane says:

Spring drew on—she was indeed already come; the frosts of winter had ceased;

its snows were melted, its cutting winds ameliorated. My wretched feet, flayed

and swollen to lameness by the sharp air of January, began to heal and subside

under the gentler breathings of April.... and a greenness grew over those brown

beds, which, freshening daily, suggested the thought that Hope traversed them at

night, and left each morning brighter traces of her steps. Flowers peeped out amongst

the leaves (*JE*, Chapter 9, pp. 67–68)

After several years at Lowood, “for eight years—six as pupil, and two as teacher” (*JE*, Chapter 10, pp. 75–76), Jane had been through a variety of experiences. After the departure of Miss Temple, who “stood [Jane] in the stead of mother, governess, and ... companion” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p

76), for the latter was moved after her marriage, Jane analyzed her new situation, realizing her need to emerge from her cocoon into a wider world, stating:

My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 77)

Hence, she realizes her need “for liberty” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 77) which requires the availability of some forms of its tools, represented by its means or resources; noting that a person like her who has no friends, who like “many others who have no friends, who must look about for themselves and be their own helpers” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 78); asking at the same time about “what is their resource?” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 78) In the end, she came up with a way: advertising, to declare her desire to work as a teacher, listing her educational talents and skills so that “[s]he is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Drawing, and Music” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 79), a matter that resulted in a positive response from the addressees. After obtaining the approvals, Jane, backed by her skills and aided by “a testimonial of character and capacity” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 81), set off “to go where there was life and movement” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 80); where she can get “a new situation where the salary would be double what [she] now received” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 81).

To shed more light on the importance of skills in human life, the novelist did not forget to remind the readers, through Bessie, that her heroine was not beautiful, but she was beautiful with the skills she possessed. By having Bessie visited Jane before she left Lowood School, the novelist once again emphasized the skills that Jane possessed. When Bessie asks her whether she can play the piano, and then in listening to

her playing “she was charmed” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 83), commenting: “[the] Miss Reeds could not play as well!” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 83), and adding ‘exultingly’ “I always said you could surpass them in learning” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 83); and when asking Jane whether she has “learnt French?” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 84), Jane replies that ‘yes’ she “can both read it and speak it” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 84), and when asked if she “can work on muslin and canvas?” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 84), Jane affirms that she can, the matter that impressed Bessie who, in turn, began to see her as “quite a lady” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 84); which, in Bessie’s opinion, distinguished her from her beautiful cousins, who now, to use Bessie’s expression, “lead a cat and dog life together” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 83); realizing that Jane “will get on whether [her] relations notice [her] or not” (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 84).

As “[a new] chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play” (*JE*, Chapter 11, p. 85), as Jane says, Jane moved to another chapter of her life with its new scene; the scene with which “a fairer era of life was beginning for [her], one that was to have its flowers and pleasures, as well as its thorns and toils” (*JE*, Chapter 11, p. 90); the scene that by its change, her ‘faculties’ roused, for, as she declares, “the new field offered to hope, seemed all astir” (*JE*, Chapter 11, p. 90).

In her third phase of experiences in life, Jane was given a job of a governess to a little French girl, Adèle Varens, the daughter of a French opera dancer (Céline Varens who was a previous mistress to Mr. Rochester, the owner of Thornfield), as she has to communicate with the little pupil through the French language, for the latter could speak only a little English. In this respect, Jane expressed how she was in the fortunate position to learn this skill; expressing that “[f]ortunately [she] had had the advantage of being taught French by a French lady” (*JE*, Chapter 11, p. 93); and explaining to the readers her way and steps to learn this language:

... and had besides, during the last seven years, learnt a portion of French by heart daily—applying myself to take pains with my accent, and imitating as closely as

possible the pronunciation of my teacher, I had acquired a certain degree of readiness and correctness in the language, and was not likely to be much at a loss with

Mademoiselle Adela. (*JE*, Chapter 11, p. 93)

So, her mastery of this skill helped her get the job and even gain the satisfaction and approval of her student, so much that the little girl felt comfortable with her, to the extent that she “commenced chattering fluently” (*JE*, Chapter 11, p. 93), and amazed that her new governess can “speak [her] language as well as Mr. Rochester does”; adding that even Sophie, her nurse, “will be glad: [as] nobody here understands her” (*JE*, Chapter 11, p. 93). In addition, this skill helped Jane to succeed in her mission so that even Mr. Rochester noticed the positive change on Adèle. He admits to Jane that he has taken notice of the little girl, and finds that Jane “[has] taken great pains with her: she is not bright, she has no talents; yet in a short time she has made much improvement” (*JE*, Chapter 13, p. 112).

3. The Skill of Drawing

The drawing skill “is a visual depiction of a real or fictitious object or objects made using tools such as a pen or pencil” (Fiore, Section: ‘What is a drawing in art?’, 2023, para. 1), or according to another definition it is “the ability to express [oneself] through illustration” (Indeed, Section: ‘What are drawing skills?’, 2024, para. 1). In *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist was endowed with this skill that helped open her “eye for natural beauties” (*JE*, Chapter 23, p. 236). Besides, it helped her communicate and express her creative vision to others in a meaningful way. In fact her readings inspire her skill in drawing. In her article “*JANE EYRE* and the Arts”, Lauren Nichols observes that:

[a]rt has the strongest ties to Jane in the novel: Jane herself is an artist of some skill, who prefers rather bleak landscapes and somewhat macabre subjects. As a child she is drawn to the paintings of birds in their native habitat found in a book of naturalism in her uncle’s library. (2016, para. 3)



As Jane's skill of drawing progressed throughout her life, her drawings were able to attract everyone's attention; thus, this skill earned her the beauty of appreciation and a look of respect for her person. When Bessie visited Jane before her leaving Lowood towards Thornfield, Bessie praised Jane's paintings, as in seeing one of Jane's sketches, Bessie remarks that "[i]t is as fine a picture as any Miss Reed's drawing-master could paint, let alone the young ladies themselves, who could not come near it" (*JE*, Chapter 10, p. 84). While being in Thornfield Hall, this skill helped Jane pass her time in a place and among people she was not familiar with, and which, in turn, was met with their approval. Whereby, after she gained the admiration of the residents of Thornfield Hall for her skill and mastery of the French language, this time she gained their admiration for her drawings, as when Mr. Rochester saw some of Jane's sketches that Adèle had shown him and attributed them to her governess, he was amazed to the extent that he wondered "whether they were entirely of [her] doing" (*JE*, Chapter 13, p. 115); thinking that 'a master' might have helped her, and asking Jane about "when did [she] find time to do them? They have taken much time, and some thought" (*JE*, Chapter 13, p. 116). Here, Jane replied that "[she] did them in the last two vacations [she] spent at Lowood, when [she] had no other occupation" (*JE*, Chapter 13, p. 116). And to his question "[w]here did [she gets her] copies?" (*JE*, Chapter 13, p. 116), she replied: "[o]ut of my head" (*JE*, Chapter 13, p. 116); and that "[she] was happy. To paint them, in short, was to enjoy one of the keenest pleasures [she has] ever known" (*JE*, Chapter 13, p. 117). When Jane returned to Gateshead at the request of Mrs. Reed, as the latter was at her deathbed, the skill of drawing was Jane's outlet there. At first, it helped her spend the dull time there, for her two cousins Eliza and Georgiana despise her and do not look at her as their equal. But, after looking at some of her sketches, they were impressed. So, her sketches, which had previously impressed Bessie and Mr. Rochester, this time impressed her cousins and turned them from being arrogant towards her into two friendly girls. When Jane noticed that "[t]hey both seemed surprised at [her] skill" (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 221), she "offered to sketch their portraits; and each, in turn, sat for a pencil



outline” (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 221). And so, when Jane “promised to contribute a water-colour drawing: this put [Georgiana] at once into good humour” (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 221) and led her to go for a walk with Jane and both were engaged in a private discussion, to the extent that “[Georgiana] had favoured [Jane] with a description of the brilliant winter she had spent in London two seasons ago—of the admiration she had there excited—the attention she had received” (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 221). Even Eliza, who was aloof of talking with Jane, “was more disposed to be communicative” (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 222) to the extent that she started to confide to Jane about what worried her about her brother, John, who had caused her the greatest suffering; and about her project after her mother’s death apart from her sister.

Also, in another phase of Jane’s journey in life (her fourth phase of experiences in life), after leaving Thornfield, as she discovers that Mr. Rochester cannot marry her for he is already married to a woman called Bertha, the skill of drawing again won Jane the approval of the residence of Marsh End, the Rivers – John, Mary, and Diana, who at the moment of discovering that she could draw, as Jane explains to the reader,

their pencils and colour-boxes were immediately at my service.
My skill, greater
in this one point than theirs, surprised and charmed them. Mary
would sit and
watch me by the hour together: then she would take lessons; and
a docile, intelligent,
assiduous pupil she made. Thus occupied, and mutually
entertained, days passed
like hours, and weeks like days. (*JE*, Chapter 30, p. 334)

Even Miss Rosamond Oliver, the wealthy, compassionate, attractive, but uncomplicated young lady who supports the small school, where Jane teaches at Morton, was impressed by the character of Jane and the amount of skills she acquires, especially her skill in drawing, as at seeing some of Jane’s sketches, the young lady “was first transfixed with surprise, and then electrified with delight” (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 352), to the degree that she asked Jane, especially after observing “two French books,



a volume of Schiller, a German grammar and dictionary” (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 352) besides her drawings, if she had “done these pictures? ... [and did she] know French and German?” (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 352); commenting in amazement at Jane’s multiple skills saying: “[w]hat a love—what a miracle [Jane] was” (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 352); remarking at the same time that Jane “drew better than her master in the first school in S——” (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 352); and finally asking Jane if she would “sketch a portrait of her, to show to papa?” (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 352) Even her amazement at Jane’s skill in drawing prompted her to make “such a report of [Jane] to her father, that Mr. Oliver himself accompanied her next evening” (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 352). So, being skilled in drawing is a prerequisite for being a governess and teacher, for it aids her in her job. According to a critical opinion “[a]s a governess with a well-rounded education, Jane would be expected to know how to draw. What sets Jane apart from other women, however, is the content of her art” (Study.com, n. d., para. 1). Thereupon, this skill helped her in her career success, and contributed to reflecting her personality and showing her as an accomplished woman.

In addition to aiding her in her career, the skill of drawing helped Jane see and pay attention to the smallest details in the people and things around her. Thereby, it strengthens her intelligence which, in turn, helps her understand the psychology of those around her. Besides, according to academic studies and critical opinions, artistic ability often leads to creativity and problem-solving. According to a critical opinion,

[s]ketching is more than just a form of artistic expression; it can be a powerful tool for unlocking creativity and problem-solving. Whether you’re an artist, designer, engineer, or business professional, the act of putting pen to paper can open up new pathways in your mind and help you communicate and visualize ideas more effectively.(modelo, n. d., 2024, para. 1)

As for creativity, Jane was able to draw three water-colours paintings which were all original and drawn “[o]ut of [her] head ... [as she] saw them with the spiritual eye” (*JE*, Chapter 13, p. 116), and about which Mr. Rochester observes that they “are, for a school-girl, peculiar” (*JE*, Chapter 13, p. 116), to the point that he asked her in surprise:

These eyes in the Evening Star you must have seen in a dream. How could you

make them look so clear, and yet not at all brilliant? for the planet above quells

their rays. And what meaning is that in their solemn depth? And who taught you

to paint wind? There is a high gale in that sky, and on this hill-top. Where did you

see Latmos? For that is Latmos. [*In Greek legend Latmos, is where the goddess*

Selene first saw and fell in love with Endymion]. (*JE*, Chapter 13, pp. 117–118 [The italics of the researcher])

As for problem-solving, the skill of drawing was Jane’s means to escape from her love agonies towards Mr. Rochester, and from her jealousy towards Miss Blanche Ingram (a beautiful socialite whom the majority of Thornfield residents believed to be Mr. Rochester’s future wife), for it helped her come to reason, as when she decided to draw a sketch of Miss Ingram, depending on the housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax’s description of the former, and after completed with it, which was “an ivory miniature of an imaginary Blanche Ingram” (*JE*, Chapter 16, p. 151), Jane remarks that:

[i]t looked a lovely face enough, and when compared with the real head in chalk,

the contrast was as great as self-control could desire. I derived benefit from the task:

it had kept my head and hands employed, and had given force and fixedness to the

new impressions I wished to stamp indelibly on my heart.

(*JE*, Chapter 16, p. 151)

Thereby, according to a critical opinion, Jane “resolves to reject imagination and resign herself to reason; at that point, she decides that she could never be the object of Mr. Rochester’s affections” (Grades Fixer, “The Role of Art in Jane Eyre’s Path”, 2018, para. 3). Also, realizing her social position, Jane confined to her readers her decision:

Ere long, I had reason to congratulate myself on the course of
wholesome
discipline to which I had thus forced my feelings to submit.
Thanks to it, I was
able to meet subsequent occurrences with a decent calm, which,
had they found
me unprepared, I should probably have been unequal to
maintain, even externally. (JE, Chapter 16, p. 151)

All in all, the skill of drawing added a lot to Jane’s personality, as her mastery of this skill not only gave her a positive advantage in her work, but it also earned her the admiration and respect of others, as everyone who saw her drawings began to look at her as an equal, as is the case with Mr. Rochester who no longer looked at her from the perspective of class superiority, but rather looked at her as an equal companion from whom he desires “to have the goodness to talk to [him] ... and divert [his] thoughts” (JE, Chapter 14, p. 124). Also, he invited her to have tea with him and even invited her to accompany his aristocratic guests at the party he held in Thornfield Hall. Thus, for Mr. Rochester, it was not ‘female beauty’ that matter to him as female accomplishments. It was her tough character which was polished by her multiple skills that triumphed at the end over Miss Ingram’s beauty, social status, and financial considerations. Thereby, and as Jane felt,

he had not given [Miss Ingram] his love, and that her qualifications
were ill
adapted to win from him that treasure. This was the point—this was
where
the nerve was touched and teased—this was where the fever was
sustained and fed: she could not charm him” (JE, Chapter 18, p. 175).



4- The Skill of Dealing with People

The skill of dealing with others is known as “[i]nterpersonal skills, also known as people skills or soft skills” (Madan, 2024, para. 3). It is an essential professional skill required to communicate, interact, and cooperate with others. It is essential for job seekers to build a relationship with the interviewer and create a positive first impression. According to Will Kenton “[i]n the workplace, soft skills are considered to be a complement to hard skills, which refer to a person’s knowledge and occupational skills” (2024, para. 1).

In Charlotte Brontë’s novel, when circumstances forced Jane to leave Thornfield (after discovering the issue of Rochester’s marriage and of his lunatic wife, Bertha Mason) and go looking for another place, armed only with her education and skills, here, the new circumstances obliged her to resort to her other interpersonal skills which she acquired through her diverse experiences. When reaching Marsh End, after suffering for several days, Jane reached a small, remote house (Moor House), where the Rivers (Diana, Mary, and their brother, St. John) live with their elderly servant, Hannah. Soon, Jane developed an intellectual affinity with the two sisters, as her education and skills helped her to naturally bond with them. So, the three girls support and complement one another’s abilities; Diana teaches Jane the German language, while Jane teaches Mary to draw; even she succeeded in communicating her thoughts and emotions with Hannah who initially distrusts and scorns Jane, thinking that she is a beggar. However, they later become friends.

It is a common thing in the labor market that the skills possessed by a job applicant are what distinguish one person from another, as employers seek candidates with certain skills and one of these are the interpersonal skills, as these contribute to the efficiency of teamwork. This is what happened with Charlotte Brontë’s heroine, the subject of the study, whose talent and skill to communicate and build relationships with others have convinced St. John to offer her the position of a school teacher in his parish, especially since she had previously asked him to find her a job (as her self-esteem prevented her from living as a burden on others). In fact, Jane’s skill to communicate her thoughts and emotions to others had

previously gained the admiration of her ex-employer, Mr. Rochester who, in one of their conversations, admits to her:

I might have been as good as you—wiser—almost as stainless. I envy you your

peace of mind, your clean conscience, your unpolluted memory.

Little girl, a

memory without blot or contamination must be an exquisite

treasure—an in-

exhaustible source of pure refreshment: is it not? (*JE*, Chapter 14, p. 126)

Likewise, Jane's character and her skill of dealing with others, this time, gained St. John's respect and convinced him that she would be a valuable companion during his intended mission to India; hence, he proposed to her. Thus, again, Jane has won over another woman, as her accomplished character with all these skills won over the beauty of Miss Rosamond Oliver. Moreover, Jane succeeded in her mission of teaching and transforming some of her skills in knitting, sewing, and ciphering to a group of rural female students (at a charity school in Morton), who were at the beginning 'rough', 'unmannered', 'intractable', and 'ignorant', as they started to take "a pleasure in doing their work well, in keeping their persons neat, in learning their tasks regularly, in acquiring quiet and orderly manners" (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 349). In addition, she established friendly relations with them and their families "with whom [she] passed many a pleasant evening hour in their own homes" (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 350). On this point, Jane, though indirectly, reflects the result of this skill that earned her the love of her students and their families as well, saying:

I felt I became a favourite in the neighbourhood. Whenever I went out, I heard on

all sides cordial salutations, and was welcomed with friendly smiles. To live amidst

general regard, though it be but the regard of working people, is like "sitting in sun-

shine, calm and sweet;" serene inward feelings bud and bloom under the ray. At this



period of my life, my heart far oftener swelled with thankfulness than sank with dejection.” (*JE*, Chapter 32, p. 350)

A related point to consider is that one of the faculties for succeeding in dealing with others is the faculty of listening to and engaging with what others have to say, as in the workplace, it is important to listen to others and hear what they are saying. This skill is especially critical in facilitating strong relationships, and that is what Jane was doing with all those she worked with, such as— Mr. Rochester, St. John, and every member of their households.

It may be worth noting that the theme of the importance of having individual skills, especially for women, has been presented in several ways in the novel. Through the dialogue between Jane’s cousins Eliza Reed and her sister Georgiana, after the death of their mother, the novelist reflects the difference between women with skills vs. women without; as the former reproaches her sister for being a “useless thing” (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 223) who “[makes] no use of life” (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 223) and who “[i]nstead of living for, in, and with [herself], as a reasonable being ought [sic], [she seeks] only to fasten [her] feebleness on some other person’s strength” (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 223); directing her question to her sister, Eliza says:

Have you no sense to devise a system which will make you independent of all efforts, and all wills, but your own? Take one day; share it into sections; to each section apportion its task: leave no stray unemployed quarters of an hour, ten minutes, five minutes—include all; do each piece of business in its turn with method, with rigid regularity. The day will close almost before you are aware it has begun; and you are indebted to no one for helping you to get rid of one vacant moment: (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 223)

Concluding her words with a warning tone:

I wash my hands of you: from the day her coffin is carried to the vault in Gates-

head Church, you and I will be as separate as if we had never known each other.

You need not think that because we chanced to be born of the same parents, I

shall suffer you to fasten me down by even the feeblest claim: I can tell you this—

if the whole human race, ourselves excepted, were swept away, and we two stood

alone on the earth, I would leave you in the old world, and betake myself to the new. (*JE*, Chapter 21, p. 223)

Wherefore, Eliza found in Jane the suitable person for looking “after the house, to see callers, and answer notes of condolence” (*JE*, Chapter 22, p. 228) and thanked her for her “valuable services and discreet conduct” (*JE*, Chapter 22, p. 228); stressing to Jane that “[t]here is some difference between living with such an [sic] one as you and with Georgiana: you perform your own part in life and burden no one” (*JE*, Chapter 22, p. 228).

So, by deliberate sketching of such scenes, and by focusing on the last positive image of the heroine, Charlotte Brontë seems earnestly to wave the theme of individual skills as a means of economic solidness among the pages of her novel which is considered, in the views of many scholars and critics, “as one of the greatest feminist novels of the nineteenth century” (Barceló, 2019, p. 1), and especially since it was written “in a time when women had no rights and were considered the property of their male relatives or employers”, to use Lynn Houghton’s expression. (2023, para. 5)

Results and Discussions

In the novel of *Jane Eyre*, despite that the heroine lacks beauty and feminine charm; it was the protagonist’s skills that made her a beautiful and an accomplished woman in the eyes of others. Moreover, these skills are what made her an independent and a woman of her own free will. It



was her package of skills that aided her and helped shape her personality, and contributed somewhat to liberate her from societal restrictions and enable her to freely own her fateful decisions, as happened to her when she refused two marriage proposals, the first from Mr. Rochester for fear of becoming a mere mistress, and the second from St. John for fear of becoming a mere missionary man's wife. Hence, Madison Aboud remarks:

Jane doesn't let a man decide who she is or how she wants to live her life. Even though she is poor, she refuses to live a life where she has to accept charity in order to survive. She will do whatever it takes to make it on her own. Most importantly, Jane respects herself. (2023, para. 17)

Thereby, these were the boat that carried her to safety and secured her psychologically and economically, as these skills secured her livelihood and self-respect. Hence, the novelist seems to call for teaching women some interpersonal skills in order to secure self-sufficiency, especially the poor, or those from poor areas, where opportunities are scarce and poverty is widespread; or those women, who have no chance of education or have little to secure stable employment.

Therefore, given the importance of this issue, certain organizations, as for example, the Youth Action International (YAI) "launched the Center for Women's Empowerment in 2006, and since then, it has transformed the lives of thousands of women, providing them with the skills and support needed to achieve financial independence" (Youth Action International, n.d., para. 1)

Conclusion

Being independent is being able to live your life in a way that is authentically you, make your own decisions, and behave in accordance with your unique ideals. In *Jane Eyre*, the principal female character, Jane, succeeded in achieving her independence, and the merit for this lies primarily in education, as well as in the individual personal skills she acquired from her life experiences, which in turn helped her achieve more success; as these skills are directed to developing her personal life or the



lives of those around her. This is precisely what the novelist seems to be recommending by equipping her protagonist with multiple skills.

Thus, the conclusion drawn from this paper is that women, in addition to the importance of obtaining education as a basic right and need, must learn some basic skills that help them ensure their livelihood and secure themselves against the challenges that may face their existence or their gender, and against difficult life situations, especially when they have no one they can depend on. Thereupon, the study recommends and calls on women to learn and acquire skills that will help them create side projects that will support them financially. It also calls on governments to support educational projects directed specifically at women to provide them with individual and professional skills that enable them to build a support network that enhances their flexibility and opportunities for integration into the labor market while working to finance their projects.

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المهارات الفردية كوسيلة لتحقيق الصلابة الإقتصادية دراسة في رواية شارلوت برونتي جين آير نوال حمدان محمود

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مستخلص البحث:

تُعدّ المهارات الشخصية من أهمّ الأمور التي تُؤثّر إيجاباً على الأفراد، ولا سيما النساء، إذ يُسهم اكتساب المرأة لبعض المهارات، خاصةً في المجتمعات القائمة على الأدوار الجندرية أو السلطة الأبوية، في تعزيز تمكينها الشخصي، ما يُؤدّي بها لاحقاً إلى تحقيق استقلالها الاقتصادي، بل وحتى تعزيز مكانتها الاجتماعية. في روايتها *جين آير* (1847)، تُسلّط الروائية والشاعرة الإنجليزية شارلوت برونتي (1816-1855) الضوء، من بين مواضيع أخرى، على أهمية المهارات الشخصية كوسيلة لتحقيق الاستقرار الاقتصادي، وذلك من خلال استكشاف رحلة حياة فتاة يتيمّة تُدعى جين، والتي ساعدتها مهاراتها الشخصية على التغلّب على صعوبات الحياة، ومواجهة المشاق، والوصول في نهاية المطاف إلى بر الأمان. ومن خلال ذلك، تهدف الروائية إلى إظهار كيف يرتبط امتلاك الفرد للمهارات بنجاحه في الحياة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: شارلوت برونتي ، المهارات الفردية ، *جين آير* ، التماسك الإقتصادي للمرأة، تمكين المرأة