

Designing an Empowerment-Based a Social Investment Program in Saudi Arabia: Adapting the US Experience Through Change and Human Capital Theories

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Abstract

Innovative social investments are crucial in addressing societal challenges and fostering sustainable development. Welfare-to-work programs help disadvantaged people increase their opportunities and employability through training. Working a sustainable job helps women get off welfare, improve their standard of living, and reduce their financial dependency. Evaluating the scope of such programs is vital to enhancing their impact, achieving the desired outcomes, and adapting them for other locations. This study adapts the intervention for a location in Saudi Arabia, with the aim of improving communication skills and job training instead of providing financial assistance. A theory of change and human capital theory are used in the program plan's logic model. After the intervention, the participants are expected to find a job and leave welfare. This experimental study employs a mixed-methods design to adapt the program for Saudi Arabia and recruits only those in the welfare group. The program's short-term training impact is expected to be greater than its long-term impact because women sometimes find it challenging to leave welfare, which may affect many other social and economic factors.

Keywords: welfare-to-work programs, job training, Saudi Arabia, evaluation program, human capital.

تصميم برنامج استثمار اجتماعي قائم على التمكين في المملكة العربية السعودية: تكييف الخبرة الأمريكية وفق نظريات التغيير ورأس المال البشري

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مستخلص البحث

تعد الاستثمارات الاجتماعية المبتكرة ركيزة أساسية في مواجهة التحديات المجتمعية وتعزيز التنمية المستدامة. وتهدف برامج التحول من الرعاية إلى التوظيف إلى تمكين الفئات ذوي الدخل المحدود من تحسين فرصهم الوظيفية والخروج من الرعاية إلى التمكين من خلال التدريب. ويُعد الحصول على وظيفة مستقرة عاملاً حاسماً في مساعدة النساء على الخروج من دائرة الإعالة، وتحسين مستوى معيشتهم، وتقليل اعتمادهن المالي. وهدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تكييف برنامج تدريبي قائم في إحدى المناطق الحضرية بالولايات المتحدة الأمريكية ليُطبَّق في مدينة الرياض في المملكة العربية السعودية. ويعتمد البرنامج على تطوير مهارات الاتصال والتدريب المهني بدلاً من تقديم المساعدات المالية، مستنداً إلى نظرية التغيير ورأس المال البشري في نموذج التخطيط المنطقي للبرنامج، ومن المتوقع أن يؤدي التدخل إلى تمكين المشاركات من الحصول على فرص عمل والاستقلال المالي بعد فترة محددة من المتابعة، كما تقترح الدراسة منهجاً تجريبياً وشبه تجريبياً قائماً على أساليب بحثية نوعية وكمية لتكييف البرنامج وفقاً لخصوصية المجتمع السعودي، مستهدفة النساء المستفيدات من بعض البرامج الرعاية. وتأمل الباحثتان من أن يكون لهذا البرنامج أثراً ملموساً، كما تعتقد أن يكون تأثير التدريب على المدى القصير أكثر وضوحاً من تأثيره على المدى الطويل، نظراً للتحديات التي قد تواجه النساء في الخروج من دائرة الإعالة، والتي قد تؤثر على العديد من العوامل الاجتماعية والاقتصادية الأخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: برامج التحول من الرعاية إلى التوظيف، التدريب المهني، المملكة العربية السعودية، تقييم البرامج، رأس المال البشري.

1 .Introduction

Innovative social investments have become increasingly crucial in addressing societal challenges and fostering sustainable development. These investments encompass a broad spectrum of initiatives to create a positive social impact and promote community welfare. The history of innovative social investments is rooted in recognizing the need for novel approaches to address complex social issues, such as poverty, inequality, and access to essential services (Toroyan et al., 2004). The importance of these investments lies in their potential to catalyze positive change, empower marginalized populations, and enhance overall societal well-being.

Project evaluation plays a pivotal role in innovative social investments, as it is a means to assess the effectiveness and impact of various initiatives in addressing social challenges (Taylor-Powell et al., 1996). In the context of welfare, project evaluation is a tool to gauge the efficacy of interventions designed to improve the well-being

of individuals and communities. Evaluations offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of social investments by examining the outcomes and processes of welfare-related projects, thus contributing to evidence-based decision-making (Toroyan et al., 2004). Welfare project evaluation can also identify best practices, optimize resource allocation, and enhance the overall impact of innovative social investments.

Most welfare-to-work programs are implemented by governments and other agencies that set rigorous criteria for researching human subjects (Bamberger et al., 2012). However, government funding or other political influences may lead evaluators to positively modify the results to suit the needs of their stakeholders; therefore, evaluators and staff members in program evaluation should pay attention to avoiding bias or allowing their opinions to affect evaluation outcomes (Morris, 2015). Powerful stakeholders may also attempt to modify evaluation outcomes by

coercing evaluators or creating plans to stipulate specific results. Stakeholders may pressure evaluators to violate confidentiality regarding participant data, which is potentially the most common ethical issue (Morris, 2015). Moreover, implementing all international standards in program evaluation without recourse to national laws may be challenging (Bamberger et al., 2012). In the absence of human subject research guidelines in intervention evaluation, program participants may be harmed instead of respected (Bamberger et al., 2012).

A prevalent ethical issue programs face, particularly during evaluation practices, is when job training programs involve different races and cultures, as well as national government policies. Considering the impact of diverse cultures, privacy policies, rules on gender equality, and the rights of minorities is important when implementing a program. Bamberger et al. (2012) suggested that these factors may present obstacles to program

implementation. They claim that in some cases, implementing a program in a country such as Saudi Arabia may be more suitable in locations with fewer cultural differences and a more homogeneous social context. Nevertheless, a thorough analysis of participant minorities is crucial to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face (Bamberger et al., 2012).

This paper aims to explore the intersection of innovative social investments and welfare project evaluation, focusing on applying such a project in various locations within the broader context of social investment initiatives. This paper seeks to shed light on the significance of rigorous evaluation in maximizing the societal benefits of innovative social investments while considering context, including culture and customs. Analyzing contextual factors in varied locations and adapting identical programs to new locations may help improve results in diverse cultural communities.

2.Literature Review and Rationale for the Project

The economic context of a welfare community in a specific area is crucial when evaluating the effectiveness of job training programs. For example, Saudi Arabia has a high level of unemployment, especially for women. The lack of job opportunities can challenge the effectiveness of this type of job training program in this community, as the problem may not be solely related to job skills. The welfare community must address issues such as providing knowledge and skills to improve employability and helping participants find jobs in high-unemployment areas. For instance, the Center for Employment Training program for disadvantaged people in the United States has had a greater impact than similar programs, especially during its implementation in the stable economic period of the late 1980s, a time of low unemployment (Miller et al., 2005). The unemployment problem is addressed by directly connecting

participants who complete the program to local workplaces with available positions. Then, the program assists the workplaces by paying half the participants' salaries when they find a job in the first three months, motivating employers to offer employment.

Welfare recipients often face judgments based on cultural stereotypes, which affect their ability to find work (Waldron & Lavitta, 2000). Additionally, widows and divorcees may face difficulties because of public disapproval, illustrating the importance of welfare-to-work job training programs. Studies have found that economically disadvantaged people experience psychological distress, depression, and lower confidence levels (Creed et al., 2001). According to Leahey (2001), workplace sex segregation hampers some job training programs, as women who choose integrated gender environments incur additional training costs and possibly face family disapproval. Providing self-confidence and job

skills training is a key factor in determining the success of job training intervention programs for female participants, but such training must be in-depth and requires many hours a week. Incorporating computer skills in the primary education stage is another requirement for the successful rollout of these programs in Saudi Arabia. Gadi (2021) ascertained that improving women's digital skills and competencies enhances their work prospects. Offering an introductory computer training course supports Saudi Arabia's digitization program, as the country is transitioning from an oil-dependent economy to a digital-led economy driven by innovation and digital technologies. Prioritizing computer literacy and digital skills training is essential to preparing women to take advantage of growing job opportunities in the digital technology space, as digital skills are vital when searching for a job in Saudi Arabia (Gadi, 2021).

Another issue related to the target communities' socioeconomic,

institutional, and cultural characteristics is that many developing countries have cultural morals and attitudes that prohibit or limit women's mobility and economic participation. Although Article 149 of the Labor Law allows women to work in any field "suitable to their nature" (Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority, 2006), the mandate does not explicitly define what is suitable and what is not. Consequently, women lose employment opportunities in various fields because of the ambiguity surrounding an occupation's suitability (Human Rights Watch, 2011). This ambiguity floods competitive spaces with men, leaving women out of the labor force. Saudi women also face challenges in commuting to work or keeping their jobs despite being legally allowed to do so (Alfarran et al., 2018). Gender stereotyping and cultural barriers are cited as major reasons for Saudi women's absence from the labor force; extensive research argues that this absence

arises from cultural practices and beliefs that Arab women are active agents in reproduction and family support (Alfarran et al., 2018). Saudi Arabia is a conservative society that believes women should focus on domestic matters, including supporting their family members and caring for children (Sobaih & Elnasr, 2024). Due to these cultural norms, many qualified women do not participate in the labor force.

Analyzing these contextual factors can help explain why two identical programs may have varying results in culturally diverse communities. Economic or social attitudes can affect women's job training in some countries. For example, some training programs in the Middle East may struggle if they fail to account for these cultural differences. Program success depends on observed activities, outcomes, and interactions between mechanisms and contexts, such as the high unemployment rate and the participants' local environment, which affect the more directly observable activities and outcomes.

The Survey of Income and Program Participation 2004 provides evidence that women who need training the most may be unable to access it due to the cultural characteristics of their communities (Jeounghee, 2009). When implementing interventions and evaluations in countries with significant restrictions on women, those undertaking the intervention should be mindful and adapt the program for the new location. Evaluation activities also function best by initiating mechanisms in particular contexts. Most job training for disadvantaged people results in better outcomes for women than for men (Ibarraran & Rosas, 2009), highlighting that the objective of contextual evaluation should be to assess the project's overall environmental readiness.

Economically disadvantaged women require more than classroom training to achieve economic stability. Evidence of the efficacy of work-based learning programs has scarcely been documented (Heckman, 1994). Classroom

training should link trainees to local workplaces in the private sector to develop job skills and reduce time wasted searching for jobs (Heckman, 1994), especially in locations with high unemployment, such as Saudi Arabia. Trainees can be connected to available jobs with financial assistance for employers during the first three months, covering half of the trainees' salaries. This solution can potentially have a significant long-term impact, as Jeounghee (2009) reported that people who had previously been on welfare and then found employment returned to welfare assistance after an average of five months. Additionally, about 35% of people who left welfare returned to welfare within 12 months (Jeounghee, 2009). Linking training to available workplaces can help participants gain work experience. A mix of different types of training (including work experience and education) will increase opportunities for women to retain desirable positions (Leahey, 2001).

Social investment is a key pillar of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, aiming to foster sustainable development by empowering target groups through training and employment programs. According to CEIC (2023), while the overall unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia at the start of 2023 was 5.12%, the unemployment rate was 16.3% for women and 4.56% for men. Unemployment rates are especially high for divorced and widowed women who receive financial payments from welfare (General Authority of Statistics in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2023). Initiatives such as the Hafiz program and employment support programs under the Human Resources Development Fund have contributed significantly to providing job training and employment opportunities. However, these programs still face challenges related to sustainability, alignment between acquired skills and labor market demands, and the extent to which beneficiaries achieve long-term economic independence.

The strengths of Saudi Arabia's social investment initiatives are the provision of financial support and incentives to encourage workforce participation and the integration of modern technology into employment and training platforms. However, some programs exhibit a predominant focus on short-term solutions rather than long-term capacity building and continuous monitoring of program outcomes. Within these programs, emphasizing job training fields that pay a livable wage can increase opportunities to leave welfare. Welfare recipient training should align with market requirements and occupational status (Heckman, 1994); for example, providing computer skills training during the basic education stage can be beneficial. This factor relates to the third component of social investing: creating buffer policies. Most welfare-to-work programs often overlook the importance of such policies, which are intended to maintain buffers through support services. These are essential for

alleviating shocks and stressors that may adversely impact individuals' transition from welfare to work. According to Eichhorst et al. (2022), for these programs to be impactful, their design must be positively perceived through equipping participants with the relevant and requisite skills in demand in the job market. Additionally, to successfully transition to the labor market, program participants should have confidence that the jobs they secure will be able to sustain them and that the benefits of working outweigh those of being on a welfare program. This principle also applies to the underlying assumptions of the next program.

Previous studies have discussed the conflict between human capital theory (implemented in this program) and research findings. Researchers have argued that human capital theory does not function in most job training program cases and that participants do not benefit as intended. Leahey (2001) posited that this outcome may result from a failure in the job training program

itself or in the program's evaluation design. Some job training programs may compound employment problems when they are not conducted appropriately, and the problem may not lie in human capital theory. For example, the failure of a work incentive program in the 1970s worsened the poverty of women instead of enabling them to participate in the labor market (Leahey, 2001). Jeounghee (2009) reported that job training programs, as public assistance, can improve human capital, particularly for women experiencing difficult conditions, empowering them to find independence and personal achievement.

The research gap lies in the need for a more comprehensive and integrated welfare-to-work model that goes beyond financial assistance to focus on developing sustainable professional and life skills. This study aims to assess an existing program implemented in the United States, as seen in "Welfare-to-Work: Assessing Communication Competencies and

Client Outcomes in a Job Training Program in the United States" (Waldron & Lavitta, 2000), and adapt it to the Saudi context, considering the country's unique cultural and economic dynamics.

Stakeholders may seek to learn more specifically about program content and certain program elements, such as activities, resources, and short- and long-term outcomes and impacts. They may also be interested in examining the program's personal ramifications on stakeholders (both participants and funders) and the welfare community (Knowlton & Phillips, 2013). A logic model can help address this issue and identify the relationship between the program elements and the impacts of the program and its evaluation (Knowlton & Phillips, 2013). The logic model describes the program plan in a graphic display—a linear progression with a specific starting point (Knowlton & Phillips, 2013).

The quality of delivery and evidence collected is used to determine the program's achievements (e.g., 45% attendance of 60 participants per session). Short-term outcomes for female program participants include increased knowledge, skills, and self-confidence 12 weeks after the program's end. A relationship between high-quality social support in the program and the program's effectiveness is evident. Sansone (1998) argued that including services such as day care and transportation is essential to improving program effectiveness and encouraging women to participate; these provisions explain the increased self-confidence after only 12 weeks. Women on welfare often need to gain greater self-esteem and self-confidence, which may play a role in social support post-intervention and will likely lead to permanent employment. Meeting psychological needs is essential, and job training should be geared toward meeting participants'

income goals and improving their lives (Creed et al., 2001).

However, these services may be insufficient, and most welfare-to-work programs have overlooked the fundamental role of social support. Most women on welfare come from low-income families with troubled backgrounds, requiring social support from teachers and staff members and personal counseling to help them overcome their challenges. They may also need follow-up assistance upon program completion through personal contact. Providing social support can help achieve program goals and decrease women's dependency on welfare in the long term. For example, appraisal support involves participants being taught about self-confidence (i.e., a positive self-outlook) and receiving support from teachers, including assistance with problems, as well as program staff members being available to provide support. Such support can help improve participants' self-confidence, which aids them in leaving welfare (Sansone, 2015).

The need for an additional support system is exemplified by a study that analyzed welfare-to-work programs carried out in the United States between 1983 and 1998, which experienced a reduction in participation in program service activities (Greenberg & Robins, 2011). The authors found that this net reduction in the receipt of program services stemmed from other factors that caused the program results to remain constant throughout the years. Therefore, if the realized short-term goals are nurtured, the long-term goal of more women leaving welfare and joining the labor force will be realized.

The program's continued provision of support, alongside other affordances, resulted in positive long-term outcomes. Among the 60 female program participants, 80% had adequate, livable jobs five years after the program ended, which improved their quality of life. The literature concurs that women's willingness to participate in the labor market is informed by their perception of the

availability of high-quality social support and appropriate buffers to help them sustain work–life-related shocks in light of their sociocultural context. Samargandi et al. (2019) proposed that for Saudi women to join the labor force, they need to be economically empowered, possess relevant skills, and receive fair compensation and incentives, such as extended and paid maternity leave, flexible working hours to manage domestic responsibilities, access to quality childcare facilities, and positive legal reforms that promote gender equality. According to Strategy& (2021), program developers must adopt a holistic approach to address this issue by looking at the problem from a social system perspective and addressing all pertinent underlying undercurrents to make the program successful. In sum, a welfare-to-work program should be configured such that it includes social investment that encompasses work–balance and buffer provisions.

3. Methodology

Understanding welfare programs' training needs is crucial to ensure the efficient and effective utilization of the significant investments that organizations make in delivering these training programs (Guthrie & Schwoerer, 1994). This research paper focuses on analyzing and applying a social care program in another region while accounting for the conditions of place and culture to develop social care services through descriptive analysis. The study aims to design an evaluation for a welfare-to-work program as described in the article "Welfare-to-Work: Assessing Communication Competencies and Client Outcomes in a Job Training Program" (Waldron & Lavitta, 2000). The program was implemented in a southwestern urban area of the United States, and this study adapts the intervention for a new location in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study is still underway and is expected to last for five to seven years for a comprehensive analysis. The current paper entails an assessment

of the program that was already conducted to provide a baseline and expected results from the logic model of the program plan. This methodology section is divided into two sections: the analysis of the current program using the amassed data and a proposed methodology for the more extensive experimental study.

Using secondary data from government archives and statistical reports, quantitative study methods will be used to measure the impacts and outcomes of the original program in the United States. Most job training programs in post-studies use a random assignment experimental design. However, according to Ibararan and Rosas (2008), evidence regarding European training programs is more ambiguous, partly because of the insufficiency of experimental studies and the difference in evaluation methods, and most studies on training programs in Latin America have used nonexperimental methods.

Comparing the program's effect on the treatment group to the average difference in rates with and without training is insufficient, and the difference may not be entirely attributable to the program itself. Therefore, the best method to determine the effects of training programs or interventions while avoiding selection bias and providing accurate program evaluations to governing bodies and funders is to utilize a randomly assigned true experimental design that implements a pretest/posttest model and includes baseline information. Thus, a true experimental design will be employed, incorporating random assignment of participants into an experimental group (women receiving the program) and a control group (women on welfare who are not enrolled in the program). The study will also use a pretest/posttest model to measure program effectiveness.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a mixed-methods research model will be used. Qualitative data will be

gathered through interviews, focus groups, and other methods. To analyze the data, the researchers will utilize MAXQDA, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, to code and categorize information based on similarities. Microsoft Excel and SPSS will be used for quantitative data analysis. Random assignment will be employed for the control group (comprising nonparticipants) and the experimental group (comprising 60 women on the welfare program [n = 60] but excluding those who do not complete the training). People in the control group can also include women on welfare who are not program participants but may be on the program waiting list. The total sample size is expected to be 120–150 participants (depending on retention rates).

The data collection methods are as follows:

1. Quantitative methods:

- Pretest and posttest surveys to measure participants' knowledge, job skills, confidence, and

employment status before and after the program

- Secondary data analysis utilizing data from Saudi social welfare systems to track economic improvements and welfare dependency reduction

2. Qualitative methods

- Interviews and focus groups conducted with participants to assess perceptions, barriers, and program impacts

- MAXQDA software to analyze qualitative responses by coding themes and identifying trends

- Observational field notes to document participants' engagement and program outcomes.

To maintain participant privacy and ethical considerations, written informed consent will be obtained through a signed letter from each participant. The researchers will provide participants with a hard copy of the evaluation process for reference and offer information on similar studies to clarify the research objectives. Participants will review

their responses, make necessary corrections, and retain a copy of their records. Additionally, they will have the option to contact the researchers for further clarifications, modifications, or verification of findings. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity, and significant quotes will be used to reflect their experiences accurately. A nondirective interview approach will be employed, encouraging participants to elaborate through prompts such as "Can you describe more?" and "What do you mean by that?" Audio recordings will be used with participant consent, and supplementary notes will be reviewed post-interview for comprehensive documentation. Coding techniques will be applied to categorize key themes, and descriptive coding will summarize interview content for further analysis.

The process evaluation method will include pretests and posttests for foundational courses, such as math, computing, reading, and

writing, alongside self-confidence assessments. Role-playing exercises will assess knowledge gained from life skills training, particularly in job interview scenarios. These methods will identify the successful elements of the program and highlight areas for improvement. Qualitative observations will be integrated throughout the evaluation to enhance data validity. Secondary data will be analyzed in later job-seeking phases, and involving multiple researchers in the assessments will help reduce bias. The program will target women on welfare aged 40 to 55, a group that may face challenges in workforce reintegration. Given the social and cultural dynamics in Saudi Arabia, recruiting participants through welfare databases may be difficult. Unlike in the United States, where networking for job searches is more accessible, Saudi women may face restrictions in professional outreach. Therefore, to increase participation, public awareness efforts aligned with Saudi Arabia's evolving social policies will be essential. Surveys

assessing women's openness to the program can help refine engagement strategies, while targeted sensitization campaigns may encourage broader participation.

The program's evaluation will span five to seven years, with data collected at key stages. Short-term impact (after 12 weeks) will assess skills development, self-confidence, and job readiness. Mid-term impact (after one year) will evaluate employment status and income changes. Long-term impact (after five to seven years) will measure career stability, permanent employment rates, and reduced reliance on welfare. As the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development is the most relevant authority for this program, we propose that it take the lead in presenting the program to the relevant entities and overseeing its implementation. This should be accompanied by the adoption of a clear methodology for assessing its impact, incorporating specific performance indicators and periodic monitoring mechanisms. The

objective is to ensure the achievement of the intended goals within a national vision that contributes to sustainable development and enhances the efficiency and quality of the services provided.

The supervision and implementation of the program can involve multiple key entities. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development will take the lead in managing the program and overseeing its implementation. The Technical and Vocational Training Corporation can ensure training quality aligns with labor market needs. Additionally, civil society organizations and nonprofits, particularly those focused on women's empowerment, can provide supplementary support. Private sector partnerships can further enhance the program by offering professional development and employment opportunities for graduates.

3.1 Experimental Design

A true experimental design will be used in this program. Stratified random assignment will be employed for both the control and experimental groups, dividing the population into smaller groups (i.e., strata) based on ethnicity, marriage, children, and health. The researchers will then take random samples from each group (Bamberger et al., 2012). The reason for using a stratified random sample is to avoid overlooking ethnicity, marriage, children, and health differences.

Data on the experimental group should be collected through surveys before training to measure the program participants' demographics, including education level, economic status, income, work status, and welfare dependence. Additionally, secondary data from the participants' files in the Saudi welfare system should be utilized. Testing the participants before the program begins will help the researchers understand their initial level of knowledge. Similarly,

surveys and secondary data on the control group should be collected. To increase the program's effectiveness, the social support factor can be added, as utilized by the Waldron and Lavitta program (2000); however, the quality and level of social support were not clearly identified. Utilizing social support correctly can provide participants with the motivation to complete the program (Sansone, 1998). Including counselors, providing personal meetings during the program, and continuing to meet after program completion for support can be beneficial, although work responsibilities may create barriers. This evaluation suggests measuring informal or formal sources of social support by asking participants about support from teachers, administrative staff members, and counselors in the first three phases. The evaluators can measure success with a questionnaire for participants to complete in the last phase, which will include statements such as "My counselor is friendly," "My

counselor listens to my personal problems carefully," and "I personally meet with or call my counselor regularly." These statements will be rated using a five-point Likert scale, with 0 meaning not at all (e.g., "We do not have any kind of meeting") and 5 meaning very much (e.g., "We meet every month"). As social, cultural, and environmental contextual factors can affect the amount of social support that participants may have, a comparison between the experimental groups during each phase will be used to evaluate the process.

To measure the short-term impact (OT3), which focuses on developing skills and knowledge, a follow-up should be initiated 12 weeks after the program ends in both the control and experimental groups. Other program outcomes, such as attaining livable and permanent jobs and leaving welfare, may take longer. As such, follow-up for these goals will be measured five and seven years after the program ends to determine the long-term impact (OT4, OT5).

Ibarraran and Rosas (2008) reported that the majority of job training program evaluations in developing countries do not differentiate between finding temporary or permanent jobs or identifying livable jobs, which may lead to misleading conclusions regarding training effectiveness. Measuring OT4 and OT5 after five and seven years, respectively, can help determine the true program impact by eliminating participants with temporary jobs. In addition, full- and part-time jobs should be identified, as participants who find full-time jobs are usually more likely to increase their income and leave welfare than those who find part-time jobs.

Surveys and secondary data from Saudi welfare will help measure whether participants have obtained jobs and left financial welfare assistance. One way to measure this aspect of program success is to determine participants' economic situations before and after the training (i.e., the average difference in job and welfare participation with

and without the training). Welfare utilization can be measured by the amount of cash assistance and food stamps participants receive. Using quantitative methods to measure the program's impact can help generalize the results.

A true experimental design will measure the program's impact, which will depend on program funding and the time available to gather data. The evaluators can resolve these problems by using techniques such as quasi-experimental research, which means not using a randomly assigned control group but instead a comparison group. The comparison and experimental groups should be as similar as possible before the training, based on the demographic characteristics of the experimental group, also called group matching (Bamberger et al., 2012; NIOSH, 1999). The short-term impact of the training is expected to be greater than the long-term impact because women sometimes find it difficult to leave welfare, which may affect many other socioeconomic factors.

3.2 Program Context

Bamberger et al. (2012) highlighted key contextual variables influencing implementation and outcomes, including economic, political, organizational, operational, and environmental factors, as well as the socioeconomic and cultural traits of affected populations. They noted that a strong labor market raises employment expectations and that education enhances job prospects; both are linked to socioeconomic and cultural conditions. Political support can boost project success by offering subsidized transportation, venues, or full government funding (Bamberger et al., 2012). Most welfare-to-work programs rely on local government funding, significantly supplementing budgets.

Saudi Arabia has advanced employment expectations through initiatives such as social safety nets, aligning with Saudi Vision 2030 goals. For instance, the government recently established a social safety net to help citizens transition from

welfare to employment, a policy intervention that underscores the essence of adopting an innovative social investment perspective. According to Koettl et al. (2022), the Saudi government conceptualizes this social investment program as an activation policy that makes a certain share of the social assistance benefit conditional on three factors: Participants must be actively looking for work, they must engage in an active labor market program, such as skills training, and they must accept suitable job offers. This policy shift has serious ramifications for the program's configuration and target audience participation, as introducing job search and training conditionality into a social investment initiative will likely increase participation in the labor market or employment among program participants in the long run.

Astbury and Leeuw (2010) explained that people do not respond to programs in the same way that billiard balls are hit and that the success of a program is largely dependent on human activity. A

primary aspect of program success relates to the “human interpretation of social structures and events” (Astbury & Leeuw, 2010, p. 366). In some environments, programs must include subsidies to be successful, such as day care centers and transportation (Bamberger et al., 2012; Sansone, 1998). This factor brings the concept of innovative social investment into perspective, as it encompasses deliberate policies and interventions aimed at strengthening citizens’ skills and abilities to enhance their productive capacities. This approach to welfare-to-work programs involves adopting social policies to improve people’s productive potential by addressing their underlying disadvantaged socioeconomic contexts and equipping them with the requisite tools to improve their social situations. In the 21st-century knowledge economy, these policies must be founded on the concept of innovation to assist participants in adapting to new challenges. The defining attributes of social investment encompass raising the

quality of the stock of human capital through ongoing skills training, streamlining the transition to the labor market, and maintaining program participants’ safety nets for income protection and economic stabilization. Most welfare-to-work programs often overlook the third component of innovative social investment intended to maintain buffers through support services that are essential to alleviating shocks and stressors that may adversely impact individuals’ transition from welfare to work. Thus, for this program to be impactful, the design must be positively perceived through the introduction of safety nets in line with innovative social investment.

Researchers must take into account the different races of participants (Morris, 2015), and outlining an international standard for evaluation staff members regarding ways to handle ethical issues in a program may prove useful. However, describing specific cases may affect research subject confidentiality (Morris, 2015); the use of

pseudonyms may partially address this issue. Based on the guiding principles of the American Evaluation Association, evaluators should prepare to work with culturally different groups. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, evaluators should avoid harming participants by using labels for disadvantaged, divorced, or widowed women, as these groups may be more sensitive to such labels.

Evaluators with a different gender or nationality from that of the participants is a key ethical issue in Saudi Arabia, as an evaluation performed by someone not native to the area may affect the research outcome. To illustrate, if a male evaluator interviews women participants, the findings may be affected because the participants have lived apart from men throughout their lives and will likely be uncomfortable during the interview. Similarly, if the evaluator is not a native Arabic speaker or resident of the program area, the findings may be affected because the participants may not provide all

necessary information or participate comfortably, particularly women from narrow social networks or rural areas.

3.3 Evaluation Design

3.3.1 Logic Model of the Program Plan

In the logic model of this program, the target audience will be clearly defined: women on welfare aged between 40 and 55. Interactions among the activities that contribute to the intended outcomes must also be identified. The program will last 11 months, and the logic model will include the following:

- Resources: The resources vital for program implementation are training staff members, funders (including the government, such as the Department of Social Welfare in Saudi Arabia), the curriculum and materials (e.g., books and reading and writing tools), women participants (the program target), facilities (e.g., day care and transportation), classrooms and locations, phones, and phone books

to seek jobs. According to Heckman (1994), welfare-to-work programs, such as Job Corps in the United States, generally have a positive effect despite being expensive. The author also argued that inexpensive job training programs have not been successful in helping women permanently leave welfare. Programs with only a 10% effect would require trillions of dollars.

•Activities: The activities of this program will cover four phases: (1) a basic education course, (2) a self-confidence course, (3) a life skills and career preparation course, and (4) job seeking.

•Outputs: The expected outputs are (1) three months on the basic education course, which will include reading, math, computing, and writing (e.g., writing a work report) skills and comprise 40 hours per week; (2) two months on the self-confidence course to boost participants' self-esteem in preparation for independent living; (3) three months in the life skills and

career preparation phase, which will encompass financial skills (e.g., budgeting and cost of living) and job skills (e.g., roleplaying exercises and self-assessment activities); and (4) three months in the job-seeking phase, which will include the search and interview process. The program will provide space and resources and teach participants how to use phone books and apply for jobs online. After the participants gain employment, the program will assist the employers by paying half their salary for three months. In addition, meetings with counselors (either social workers or teachers) will be provided during the program courses, and follow-ups will be held upon program completion to offer advice and support.

A formative evaluation involves executing an assessment before and throughout the application to improve the intervention. A formative evaluation of the methods used was implemented by Waldron and Lavitta (2000), with the evaluators conducting one-on-one interviews with the participants at

the start of the program to help them understand the participants' needs and acquire baseline information. By contrast, the new program evaluation will utilize primarily quantitative methods (e.g., testing to determine participants' current educational level and gathering secondary data from Saudi social welfare), as well as a sequential mixed-method design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data for process evaluation. Sequential mixed-method designs involve collecting data using quantitative and qualitative methods in any order, but one should be emphasized more (Bamberger et al., 2012). Formative evaluation data can help evaluators understand the relationships among different process elements and between processes and outcomes, thus improving outcomes by allowing for program component modification during program implementation, which may not be possible later. Therefore, using formative evaluation for this program offers many benefits.

Although formative evaluations are helpful, summative evaluations are essential when the evaluation is ineffective or produces unexpected outcomes. Summative evaluations assist decision-makers and interested public funders in improving the evaluation process for future program implementations (Bamberger et al., 2012). The summative evaluation aspects of this program include identifying the progress made in assisting disadvantaged people, such as in knowledge, skills, welfare, and community development. Additionally, the summative evaluation aims to determine whether the program can help participants find sustainable employment and transition from welfare. Finally, the evaluation seeks to identify potential future changes that evaluators can make to improve program effectiveness.

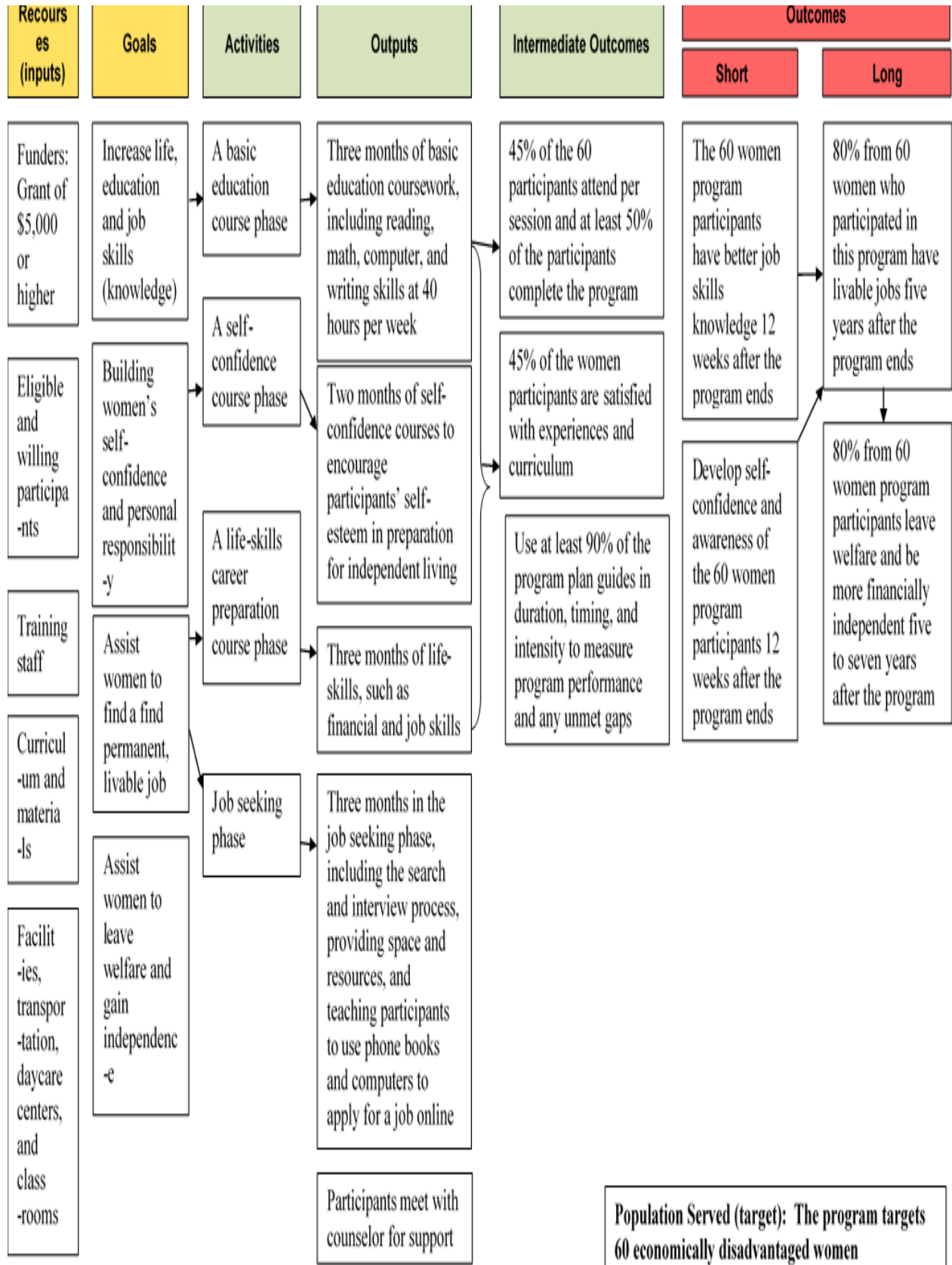
The program will be structured within a comprehensive timeline, beginning with a preparatory phase spanning 11 months. During this period, participants will undergo

training in professional and life skills, including courses on confidence building and workplace communication. They will receive job market preparation through interview training and job application support. An initial evaluation will be conducted after 12 weeks to assess improvements in participants' skills and self-confidence. In Years 2 and 3, the focus shifts toward mid-term evaluation and follow-up. Participants will be monitored post-training to assess their success in securing employment, and advisory support will be provided to facilitate workplace integration and job stability. A mid-term evaluation at the end of Year 2 will measure employment rates and financial stability, and additional training programs will be offered to those who have yet to secure jobs. By Years 4 and 5, the program will move into the final evaluation and sustainability phase. A comprehensive assessment of the long-term impact will be conducted by comparing pre- and post-

participation data. Job retention rates and financial independence outcomes will be analyzed, leading to the development of recommendations aimed at enhancing program effectiveness and expanding scope. A final report will be submitted to the stakeholders, detailing key findings and overall program impact. The program will be implemented through various facilities, including vocational training centers accredited by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, educational institutions (e.g., universities and technical institutes), and e-learning platforms that leverage technological advancements to facilitate remote learning.

Successful execution of the program will require resources such as qualified trainers specializing in professional development and communication, educational tools (e.g., computers, software, and training materials), and support services (e.g., transportation assistance for participants from

remote areas or financial aid to cover commuting expenses). Funding sources will include government allocations from relevant agencies and private sector contributions through corporate social responsibility initiatives. The estimated costs cover operational expenses (e.g., trainers' salaries, training materials, and facility rentals) and logistical support (e.g., transportation, financial incentives for participants, and auxiliary services, such as childcare). Additionally, resources will be allocated for evaluation and monitoring efforts to assess the program's effectiveness and long-term sustainability. To ensure financial transparency and accountability, the program will implement strict financial control measures, with periodic financial reports submitted to funding entities to verify compliance with the outlined objectives and ensure efficient resource management.



3.3.2 Theory

According to Bamberger et al. (2012), a theory of change (TOC) is used in an evaluation to determine a program's mechanisms. TOC visually represents the means of bringing about the necessary results by comprehensively describing the modeling strategies that lead to the desired outcome in a given context (Knowlton & Philips, 2013). Using TOC in this program can help determine the causal mechanism of the intervention that affects training efficiency (NIOSH, 1999). The pathways within a TOC model describe cause-and-effect relationships between the independent (the program) and dependent variables (NIOSH, 1999). Furthermore, keeping the TOC model as simple as possible can help all stakeholders understand the strategies that the program is attempting to implement and the goals it is seeking to achieve (Bamberger et al., 2012). Astbury and Leeuw (2010) argued that by researching how a program works, evaluators may be able to determine

a single or multiple mechanism–context–outcome configuration or the root causality and context surrounding the hypothesized program remedy.

Figure 2. A theory of change for the program, illustrating variables influencing the effectiveness of the training

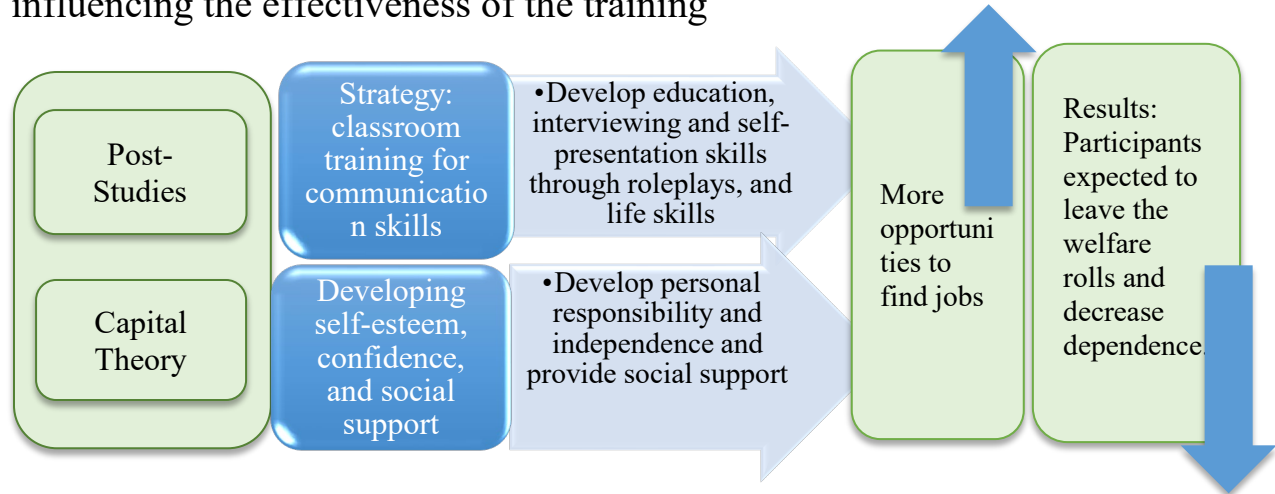


Figure 2 shows the TOC for the program, including the variables influencing the training's effectiveness. Using classroom training can provide many benefits by helping to determine the causal mechanisms of the interventions that affect training efficiency (NIOSH, 1909). Whether the causation behind a mechanism is activated greatly depends on human reasoning and volition, and appropriate environmental and social conditions are vital for program functionality. Most of the literature surrounding job training programs uses human capital theory, either directly or indirectly. For example, the TOC in

the article "Evaluating the impact of job training programs in Latin America: Evidence from IDB funded operations" (Ibarraran & Rosas, 2009) illustrates that increasing the employability of disadvantaged people by supplementing their job skills contributes to their earning capacity by helping them find desirable jobs, in accordance with human capital theory. Human capital theory explains the roles of education, knowledge, and training as the primary causes of increased earnings. Thus, evidence that job training improves participants' employment and earnings

influences many training programs (Ibarraran & Rosas, 2009). Jeounghee (2009) discussed the work-first strategy, which requires welfare recipients to participate in the labor market.

For this intervention, the primary independent variable is the level of training (other independent variables include demographics: age, race, marital status, number of children, and health condition), and the dependent variable is whether the participant obtains a job (including part-time and full-time jobs), leaves welfare, and increases their earnings and self-confidence. Marital status is grouped into three categories: currently married, previously married, and never married. The number of children is classified into three groups: none, one, and two or more. Some post-studies have found that women with several children are less likely to join the labor force than women without many dependents (Leahey, 2001). Health condition measures whether a woman has a mental or physical condition that may limit the

type or amount of work they can take on. Education is also measured at three levels: less than a high school education, high school graduate, and at least some college. Years of unemployment is a binary variable that indicates whether a woman has been unemployed for at least two years.

In addition, researchers should focus on extraneous variables that can change how independent variables influence dependent variables (NIOSH, 1999). Extraneous variables must be controlled to ensure the fidelity of the results. Examples of extraneous variables are trainer variables (e.g., experience, teaching style, and respect for participants [consideration of ethical issues]) and context variables (e.g., class size, classroom environment, and teachers' gender). Macrostructural variables for Saudi Arabia are also included to account for local economic (e.g., monthly rate of unemployment), political (i.e., the legal system and government), cultural conditions, and support

networks (e.g., gender segregation to balance the conservative values of Saudi men) to control potentially extraneous variables. Although some intervening variables cannot be observed, such as the participants' motivation, they can reduce how much the participants' motivation or lack thereof will affect the results. In line with this, the participants will be asked multiple times to attend the program orientation, which will occur one week before the program starts. In addition, the control group can help limit other factors that may influence the program's outcomes.

The program has two basic assumptions: Job training is based on improving knowledge and education, and work experience provides better job skills for women. Job training helps reduce the number of women dependent on welfare (Leahey, 2001) and relates to the social investment concept of lifelong human capital stock, which, according to Eichhorst et al. (2022), concerns investment in quality training to raise and maintain human

resources and capabilities. In social investment programs, upgrading human capital stock leads to higher productivity and improved employability; therefore, trainers should feature computer training to teach digital skills. Castellacci (2023) suggested a link between technological change, employees' skills, and employment, meaning that people must regularly update their technical know-how to remain relevant in the job market. Blending digital skills training is essential to raising the human capital stock relevant to current job demands.

Job training that highlights improving education increases women's participation in the labor force (Jeounghee, 2009; Leahey, 2001). In terms of social investment, this concept aligns with the concept of work-life-balanced flows, which, according to Baines et al. (2019) and Eichhorst et al. (2022), involves facilitating life-course and labor-market transitions to enhance labor utilization. The idea is that employees' empowerment through essential skills development (e.g.,

improving interpersonal engagement skills, communication skills, and confidence) incentivizes them to transition into the labor market.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Adopting the Model in Saudi Arabia: Experimental Study

4.1.1 Validity

Some mistakes in the program model are possible; therefore, several attempts should be made to improve model quality. The logic model must first be tested by introducing it to people with disabilities during implementation. This method can help avoid bias and contribute objective feedback about the weaknesses, ambiguities, and blind spots of the model, including unintentional mistakes or information excluded from thought processes because of mental habits formed due to confidence, experience, myths, and judgment (Knowlton & Phillips, 2013). Knowlton and Phillips (2013) reported that one blind spot in job programs is the inclusion of myths

as objectives of the logic model. For example, a logic model might name “the end of the unemployment community” as its intended impact, which is not a feasible outcome.

The SMART principle can be utilized to improve the quality of the program’s logic model. This principle focuses on the following five objectives:

- Specific: The logic model’s elements must be clearly defined. In this program, the elements are the basic education, self-confidence, job skills, and job-seeking phases.
- Measurable: This program will be evaluated using a mixed-methods design.
- Action-oriented: The content and activities in the program aim to increase educational knowledge, job skills, and life skills.
- Realistic: The content must be reasonable and have real-world applications.
- Timed: The logic model must clearly assign a specified length of

time to each piece of content (Knowlton & Phillips, 2013).

Frequency, intensity, and target should be utilized to improve the quality of the logic model (Knowlton & Phillips, 2013). Frequency illustrates the rate of occurrence of a program. In this case, the program length is 11 months, so the program will reasonably repeat after the end of the previous program. After five years, if the program still has a high participation rate, it will be conducted regularly. Intensity measures the depth or strength of a program. The program will initially start at a rate of eight hours per day, excluding weekends. As the program will continue for 11 months, the course material will be covered in great depth. After five years, participant feedback will be gathered, and the length and depth of the program will be reconsidered. Target means the population that a program seeks to assist. In this case, the program will target women aged between 40 and 55 on welfare in Saudi Arabia. At the end of five

years, if many participants are outside this age range or are not on welfare and wish to participate in the program, these restrictions will be reconsidered.

Despite increased interest in the effectiveness of welfare-to-work training programs, little attention has been paid to process evaluation (Manski, 1990), which focuses on program delivery, such as whether all activities are implemented as planned. Evaluating program outcomes upon completion is insufficient, as much information will be missed. Process evaluation can help determine what initiates program failure and whether program planning is inappropriate (e.g., has poor activities or inadequate implementation). In process evaluation, questions about program delivery should be addressed, such as whether the program is delivered as planned, if it has the right target, whether program delivery encountered any barriers, and whether gaps between program plans and delivery were found, thus affecting the program's

results (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). This program will use a sequential mixed-methods design with a dominant qualitative method in its process evaluations to measure program delivery.

4.1.2 Process Evaluations for the Program

Table 1 describes the tools the evaluators will use to measure the intervention delivery's inputs, activities, and outputs. Including the appropriate target is crucial in ensuring program success.

Documents such as teachers' weekly reports, demographic information (e.g., participants' economic and welfare status at start of the program, background and minority status, homogeneity or heterogeneity, and age) and activity logs will be used to measure participants' attendance and dropout rates in each phase and determine whether the program has reached the right target (Butterfoss, 2006; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008; Hulscher et al., 2003; Toroyan et al., 2004).

Table 1: Program process evaluation

Use existing documents to measure the inputs and overall indicators. Is the participant the right target? What are the participant's characteristics (gender, ethnic distribution, and economic background)? Does the program operate in the right location (Saudi Arabia)?			
Phase	Methods	Recipients	Collected information
Basic education course	Documents such as teachers' weekly reports and demographic information on file		Output indicators <i>Persons reached:</i> number of attending participants, dropout rates, and follow-ups with students who have left the program
			<i>Course utilization:</i> individualized course length
	Questionnaire	Administrative staff members	Input indicators <i>Financial:</i> expenses for participants and supplies
			<i>Personnel:</i> number, gender, and race of teachers and staff members; number of classrooms; teacher qualifications; and flexibility with participants

			<i>Facilities</i> : number of vehicles provided for participants' transportation and number of children and teachers attending day care centers (utilized for all phases)
	Focus group	Teachers and staff members	Activity indicators <i>Population-oriented activity</i> : content and quality of the curriculum, barriers, classroom environment, and social context
	Interview and testing	Participants	<i>Individual-oriented activity</i> : benefits and challenges of participation; participants' satisfaction with the course; flexibility of the program environment; support from teachers, counselors, and administrative staff members; and initial and final scores on tests covering basic education material
Self-confidence course	Documents such as teachers' weekly reports and demographic information on file		Output indicators <i>Persons reached</i> : number of attending participants, dropout rates, and follow-ups with students who have left the program
			<i>Course utilization</i> : individualized course length
	Questionnaire	Administrative staff members	Input indicators <i>Financial</i> : expenses for participants and supplies
			<i>Personnel</i> : number, gender, and race of teachers and teacher qualifications
	Focus group	Teachers	Activity indicators <i>Population-oriented activity</i> : quality of the curriculum and classroom environment and ideas for future program improvement
	Interview and questionnaire	Participants	<i>Individual-oriented activity</i> : participant satisfaction in the course, support from teachers and counselors, and initial and final participant self-confidence questionnaire relating to their opinions on themselves and their likelihood of success
Life skills course	Documents such as teachers' weekly reports and demographic information on file		Output indicators <i>Persons reached</i> : number of attending participants, dropout rates, and follow-ups with students who have left the program
			<i>Course utilization</i> : individualized course length
	Questionnaire	Administrative staff members	Input indicators <i>Financial</i> : expenses for participants and supplies
			<i>Personnel</i> : number, gender, and race of teachers and teacher qualifications
Focus group	Teachers	Activity indicators <i>Population-oriented activity</i> : quality of the curriculum and classroom environment and ideas for future program improvement	

	Interview and skills test	Participants	<i>Individual-oriented activity:</i> participant satisfaction in the course, support from teachers and counselors, and initial and final participant skills test in which life skills are tested by a teacher in an applied setting
Job seeking	Research team observations, questionnaire, and activity logs		Input indicators
			<i>Personnel:</i> staff assistance and low participant-to-teacher ratio
			<i>Resources:</i> updated, quality computers and phones; updated phonebooks; sufficient phones; and books
			<i>Facilities:</i> spacious, quiet environment and questionnaire for participants to complete with the counselor during follow-up (must include emotional and financial aspects)

Furthermore, printed questionnaires will be distributed to all administrative staff members during the first three phases. These will contain open-ended questions covering program financial information, staff and teacher information, and facilities information. Specific questions will be asked, including the cost of each program phase and whether the expenditure has matched the budget, the number and gender of the teachers, the number of available classrooms, the staff members' qualifications and flexibility with female participants, the quantity and availability of provided transportation, and the day care teacher-to-child ratios.

Focus groups and interviews will also be used to collect data during the first three phases and will include staff members currently teaching the same phase. In process evaluation, qualitative methods, such as focus groups and interviews, can help researchers learn about social, contextual, and cultural factors (Bamberger et al., 2012). Focus groups gather data during intensive group interactions on topics chosen by researchers and can provide and enhance information collected from personal interviews. Conducting focus groups with the teachers in each phase can assist in answering questions about the social context of the classroom environment, student-teacher

classroom interactions, educational and emotional support for participants, classroom flexibility, and curriculum quality. Researchers can ask questions regarding the curriculum's weaknesses and strengths, the suitability of the curriculum's content for the participants' level of education, the potential barriers to learning, and the topics that would be most important to add to the curriculum. These questions can help determine the gaps between the program plan and implementation and the external factors that may have influenced program delivery (NIOSH, 1999).

The teachers' focus groups should be small and homogeneous. In this case, all the focus group participants will teach the same subjects, and each focus group will have approximately five teachers (Sintjago & Link, 2012). The focus group leaders must match the focus group members—for example, all should be female—so that both researchers and teachers can act more comfortably (Montell, 1999).

The research team will conduct interviews with the participants during the first three phases to assess the benefits and challenges of participation, the participants' satisfaction with the course, the participants' perception of the program's flexibility, and the support provided by the teachers and leadership staff members. This information can be used to adjust strategy applications to enhance effectiveness. Moreover, the interviews will have open-ended questions to boost participation and program completion, with questions covering demographics and satisfaction (e.g., likes and dislikes), educational aspects (e.g., knowledge gained during the courses), and behavioral aspects (e.g., how the skills learned are applied).

5. Conclusion

Innovative social investment is crucial in addressing various social challenges and fostering sustainable development. Throughout this research, it has become evident that innovative social investment can

potentially drive positive change and have a lasting impact on diverse communities. A deeper understanding of how innovative social investment can contribute to novel solutions and social progress will be gained through this research. The study will assess a welfare-to-work program implemented in the United States, which aimed to provide training and support to its participants to aid them in leaving welfare and finding jobs. In this program, the participants showed increased self-esteem and self-confidence after 12 weeks because of support activities, such as day care and transportation. After five years, most participants had livable jobs because of the program's intervention. These results provide the baseline for a more extensive experimental study with the goal of adapting the welfare-to-work program for women in Saudi Arabia. The hope is that this version will achieve better results because of evaluations conducted and improvements made on the program's quality.

6. Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be mentioned. Typically, most post-evaluation studies of welfare-to-work and job training programs have included more participants. An additional area that merits analysis is that population diversity is not addressed due to the homogeneity of the target population. Implementing this program in a more diverse area might differ significantly, and learning how to employ techniques to account for more diverse populations can make the research more rounded. Additionally, quasi-experimental research designs can be used to investigate how to more effectively graphically represent logic models.

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