



Voice and Agency: Evaluating the “Empowering Women for Leadership in Administration Roles” Training Program Held at Yarmouk University

Amneh Khasawneh ^{1*}, Ruba Al Akash ², Amneh Al-Rawashdeh ³, Nowar Al Hamad ⁴,
Tamara Al Yakoub ⁴, Heyam Al Khatib ^{5*}

¹ Department of Educational Administration and Foundations, Faculty of Education, Director of Princess Basma Center for Women's Studies, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

² Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

³ Department of Educational Administration and Foundations, Faculty of Education, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

⁴ Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Science, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

⁵ Princess Basma Center for Women's Studies, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan.

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* Corresponding author:

amena@yu.edu.jo

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Abstract

Objectives: The objective of this qualitative research is to evaluate the effectiveness of a training program directed towards the female administrative staff at Yarmouk University (YU), called "Empowering Women for Leadership Roles". The program ran from 2018 to 2020 at YU and was funded by Global Affairs Canada. Sixty female participants successfully completed ten training modules within the program to enhance their personal and professional capacity.

Methods: The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, and the interview questions were based on Kirkpatrick's training evaluation model.

Results: The main results revealed that the training program facilitated the women's learning, enriched their skills, and helped them cultivate resilience, enabling them to draw upon their personal strengths to overcome adversity and marginalization.

Conclusions: Based on the results, it is concluded that women should receive training in the early stages of their careers, enabling them to deploy their acquired skills to promote career advancement. Additionally, women holding mid and senior positions must receive continuous support through training and development programs to enhance their leadership skills.

Keywords: Agency, voice, gender, training, leadership roles, Yarmouk university, Jordan.

الصوت والوكالة: تقييم البرنامج التدريبي "تمكين المرأة لأدوار القيادة في المواقع الادارية" الذي عقد في جامعة اليرموك

آمنة الخصاونة^{1*}، ربي العكش²، أمينة الرواشدة³، نوار الحمد⁴، تامارا اليعقوب⁴، هيام الخطيب⁵
¹ قسم الإدارة وأصول التربية، كلية التربية، مدير مركز الأميرة بسمة لدراسات المرأة الأردنية، جامعة اليرموك، الأردن
² قسم الأنثروبولوجيا، كلية الآثار والأنثروبولوجيا، جامعة اليرموك، إربد، الأردن
³ قسم الإدارة وأصول التربية، كلية التربية، جامعة اليرموك، إربد، الأردن
⁴ قسم الإدارة العامة، كلية الاقتصاد والعلوم الإدارية، جامعة اليرموك، إربد، الأردن
⁵ مركز الأميرة بسمة لدراسات المرأة الأردنية، جامعة اليرموك، إربد، الأردن

ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت هذه الدراسة النوعية لتقييم فعالية البرنامج التدريبي الموجه للموظفات الإداريات في جامعة اليرموك بعنوان "تمكين المرأة لأدوار القيادة، والذي تم عقده في الفترة ما بين 2018-2020 في رحاب جامعة اليرموك، ويتمويل من الشؤون العالمية الكندية. أتمت ستون مشاركة بنجاح حضور عشر مواضيع تدريبية ضمن البرنامج التدريبي والتي هدفت لتعزيز القدرات الذاتية والمهنية للمشاركات.

المنهجية: قام الباحثون بإجراء مقابلات شبه منظمة مع 15 موظفة من المشاركات. استندت أسئلة المقابلة على نموذج كيركباتريك لتقييم التدريب.

النتائج: أظهرت النتائج الرئيسية أن البرنامج التدريبي قد أسهم بتعزيز قدرات الموظفات الإداريات في جامعة اليرموك وتطوير التعلم لديهن، كما أسهم في اكسابهن المرونة والتمكن من الاستفادة من جوانب التميز في شخصياتهم للتغلب على الشدائد والهميش. التوصيات: بناء على النتائج خلصت الدراسة إلى أهمية أن تتلقى المرأة التدريب في المراحل المبكرة من حياتها المهنية حتى تتمكن من توظيف مهاراتها المكتسبة لتعزيز تقدمها الوظيفي، كما أنه يجب أن تتلقى الموظفات اللاتي يشغلن مناصب في الإدارات المتوسطة والعليا دعماً مستمراً من خلال برامج التدريب والتطوير لتعزيز مهاراتهن القيادية.

الكلمات الدالة: الوكالة، الصوت، النوع الاجتماعي، التدريب، الأدوار القيادية، جامعة اليرموك، الأردن.



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Introduction

Despite the remarkable progress in education and the increasing number of women entering the labor market, women in the MENA region are still experiencing multidimensional challenges in terms of gender inequality in employment opportunities and job advancement. Women continue to be underrepresented in vital areas of the national workforce in both the public and private sectors, such as health and political administration. Women are relatively well-represented in Jordanian educational institutions, but few women hold leadership positions that negatively impact policy and decision-making. In the Jordanian context, many women are also making a difficult transition from a traditional lifestyle to one of greater autonomy and independence. This is in keeping with the fourth and fifth goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs) for 2030 (United Nations, 2020) that prioritize gender equality and education and are considered critical factors of well-being and fundamental mechanisms for sustainable development. The fifth goal focuses on overcoming gender disparities, supporting women's participation in decision-making and empowering women for leadership positions. Other goals call for supporting women's economic participation to end poverty in its all forms (SDG 1), ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all (SDG 4), and promoting sustained and inclusive economic growth (SDG 8). Evidently, gender inequality still exists, despite the tremendous global efforts to eradicate it. There is a gradual advancement regarding leadership positions, but women's participation in the labor market is lacking, and a significant gap needs to be bridged before gender equality efforts can take effect (Crotti et al., 2020).

The MENA region suffers from the long-term difficulties of poverty, weak economic governance, unequal distribution of wealth, and the misalignment of education. Female participation in the labor force stands at 21%, while the global average is 51%. Research indicates that Arab women face many challenges that hinder entering the workforce and occupying leadership positions. Regarding female academic and administrative staff, a study by Al-Qahtani et al. (2021) identifies actual and perceived barriers that hamper women's advancement, such as age, limited education and experience, lack of self-esteem, and professional development opportunities, absence of administrative support, and negative societal attitudes. Others cite the perceived barriers of traditional sexual discrimination against women (McNae and Vali, 2015). In many countries of the MENA region, women's employment outside the home is perceived as inappropriate (World Bank, 2018).

Jordan has an excellent record of females in education which is not reflected in the employment figures. Young Jordanians of both sexes have equal access to education, and the literacy rate is 99.11% among females aged 15-24 (UNESCO, 2019). Women comprise 49.3% of the Jordanian population, yet less than one-fifth of women are employed (USAID, 2020). Jordanian women reportedly face legal, structural, and sociocultural barriers that severely limit their economic opportunities and participation (World Bank, 2018). According to the United National Development Program (UNDP - 2015), employers see women as a risk as they may quit upon marrying, so they prefer to invest in building male employees' capacity as they view their professional development as more long-lasting and sustainable for their organization (UNDP, 2015). Women's limited employment also minimizes their financial resources, diminishing their voice and agency, at home and in wider social spheres. The challenge is to alter Jordanian attitudes towards women's empowerment in the workplace to help them reach their potential and promote the nation's development.

It's believed that the training and development programs that enrich women's skills will enable them to undertake their desired positions and act efficiently. Most crucially, these programs need to be assessed to evaluate whether they achieve their objectives or not. Accordingly, this study aimed to evaluate a funded training program directed to the female administrative employees at YU to empower them for leadership roles.

Overview of the Training Program

The project "Empowering Women for Leadership Roles in the MENA Region" was designed and implemented in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. In Jordan, women received training in leadership skills to increase their self-confidence to assume leadership roles and engage in decision-making and governance processes. Between 2018 and 2020, the Princess Basma Center for Jordanian Women's Studies (PBCJWS) implemented three training courses in leadership and management skills at Yarmouk University (YU), located in Irbid Governorate, northern Jordan. The courses, entitled

“Empowering Women for Leadership Roles”, were run in cooperation with the Forum of Federations (FoF)¹ Mediterranean Region and funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC)², the government department concerned with international development.

Although eighty female YU employees were due to take the course, only sixty completed the course over the two years as the COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation of the fourth phase. The training was divided into two phases per year, with twenty participants in each phase; the training duration was six hours per day, during the participant's official working hours. Participants learned self-management, gender mainstreaming, psychological health and stress management, communication skills, leadership skills, strategic planning, results-based leadership, decision-making, leadership with influence and guidance, and university rules and regulations.

Nine certified trainers were selected from various YU colleges: (Education, Economics and Administrative Sciences, Archeology and Anthropology, Law, and PBCJWS). The selection was based on whether they had relevant previous experience. They underwent appropriate training to ensure they possessed the skills and knowledge to deliver the training, addressing topics such as Women's Participation in Leadership Roles, Inclusive Governance, and Gender Mainstreaming. In addition to the essential techniques, skills, and knowledge, the trainers gained the confidence for effective delivery.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The PBCJWS has noted that few female administrators hold mid and high positions at YU. A survey run by the Center revealed that female employees at YU needed the training to enrich their professional knowledge and skills, empower them in the workplace, and enable them to reach higher leadership positions.

This study evaluates the subsequent in-house training program, investigating how it stimulated women's willingness to change through capacity-building, knowledge transfer, and the exchange of experiences. It also assesses its impact on strengthening the institutionalization of gender equality and increasing gender awareness, especially concerning the role of women in leadership. The authors follow Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent did participants find the training to be beneficial, stimulating, and important to their jobs? (Reaction)
2. Based on their participation in the training program, to what extent did participants gain the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence, and commitment? (Learning)
3. How did the participants apply what they learned during the training program when they returned to work? (Behavior)
4. What is the extent to which the training program resulted in the expected outcomes? (Results)

Study Objectives

The main objective was to investigate the impact of the ‘Empowering Women for Leadership in Administration Roles’ training program, which was designed to equip women to be able to obtain their rights and assume the positions they deserve, participate in decision-making, and change attitudes regarding women's empowerment, through:

- Investigating what trainees applied to what they learned upon returning to their jobs.
- Identifying the knowledge and skills the trainees gained from the training and how they perceived their own change in behavior, confidence, and commitment.
- Identifying the aspects of the course, the trainees found attractive and appropriate for their jobs.

Study Importance

This study contributes to forming a conscious understanding of gender power imbalances. It seeks to raise awareness

¹ For more information about the project, please visit: <https://forumfed.org/>

² For more information about GAC and its support to Jordan MENA and the Maghreb region, please visit: <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/evaluation/2021/empowerment-pouvoir.aspx?lang=eng>

among men and women so they may work actively to promote long-term social change. The empowerment of women working in all workforce sectors must inevitably enhance performance and efficiency. Publicly addressing these issues can also positively change how society perceives women's leadership. The study identifies the current limitations to female workers developing their full potential and aims to ensure that, in the future, they can assume their roles more confidently. By investigating the training program impact, the researchers seek to inform those in charge of women's workplace training at YU, and other concerned stakeholders, of the topics and skills necessary to enhance women's professional performance. The findings can be extended to other Jordanian higher education institutions to improve workers' competencies and performance.

Moreover, we hope to benefit other Jordanian universities and entities by offering an exemplary case study that will enrich the existing literature on women's empowerment in the workplace and contribute to future research. Crucially, this study highlighted the attention toward conducting scientific studies and evaluating the funded projects by local and international agencies, which contributes to evaluating its effectiveness and usefulness and extracting its main pros and cons to serve as a lesson learned for future projects and practices. The program could also be customized to target male staff members and male and female students.

Limitations of the Study

The study results were subject to how objective the participants responded to the interview questions used as the data collection tool. The research was conducted during the lockdown imposed due to COVID-19, which imposed constraints on time and communications, as interviews were carried out virtually.

Research Methodology:

Data Collection:

The research team consisted of six researchers at YU; their academic disciplines ranged from Educational Administration, Public Administration, and Anthropology to Women's studies at Higher Education institutions. The team included a further researcher responsible for the primary data for the training program and two YU graduate students who assisted by conducting the interviews.

Desk Review:

The research team reviewed relevant peer-reviewed literature, focusing on Change Theory, Transformation Theory, the Kirkpatrick Model, the Logic Model, and other evaluations of training programs designed to empower women for leadership. The team identified the informed questions in the conceptual framework and the terms of reference of the training program, further determining the methodology adopted for data analysis and result measurement.

Key Informant Interviews:

Following the desk review process, the research assistants received training in transcribing audio interviews, conducted via the Zoom application due to Corona-virus pandemic restrictions. All responses were recorded in tracking documents and shared with the researchers. The training program director contacted each of the interviewees to clarify that they would be asked to evaluate the training program and that the information would be confidential and only used for research purposes. The participants were informed about the nature of the questions and requested to agree on the interview time frame prior to signing agreements confirming the mode and purpose of the recorded audio interviews. A total of fifteen interviews were carried out via Zoom.

Data Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews. The study tool was developed based on reviewing Kirkpatrick's original and improved training evaluation model, particularly (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick, 2016). The questions were modified to be aligned with the framework of the change theory of gender equity to serve the study objectives. The study tool includes the following: consent statements to participate in the study and recording the interviews, demographic information, and detailed questions to each level of the model: Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, and Results.

The research assistants conducted the interviews virtually, in Arabic. The data collected were then analyzed over three stages, the first being a deep reading of the transcribed material which aimed at establishing codes and followed thematic analysis conventions. The second stage involved additional guided readings, after which the emerging themes were presented to the research team for discussion, which is a critical step in case study research to ensure the credibility of results (Yin, 2003) and to establish relations between themes that emerged during the first stage, then the process of 'organizing themes'. In the third stage, a systematic approach to presenting the main findings in a narrative style was identified. Peer debriefings occurred during the research design and the data analysis phases.

Demographic Profiles of Research Participants

Sixty female YU employees completed the training program in three phases over two years, and fifteen of them took part in the subsequent study. The participants were selected based on the following considerations: six candidates were selected from each phase, the first five were contacted and invited to participate in the study, and the sixth candidates in each group were an alternate if any of the selected candidates were not able to participate. They were also selected to represent various administrative positions and departments, and units. The professional level of the interviewees was taken into consideration to reflect different viewpoints. Eventually, fifteen interviewees ranged between 34 and 52 years of age. Thirteen of them were married, and two were single. Three of them held a post-graduate degree (MA), eleven a bachelor's degree, and one a diploma. The length of employment at YU ranged from 14 – 29 years. These variations between the research participants were essential to the evaluation procedure.

Theoretical Framework

The training promoted women's knowledge production, empowerment, and agency using selected topics that aimed to increase knowledge on the principles of inclusive governance and leadership skills. The environment was designed as a space for knowledge production where the participants were encouraged and supported to analyze, evaluate, and deconstruct sexist cultural, social, and political structures in both social spaces and among the professional workforce (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016). Knowledge sharing led the participants to develop a strategic understanding of power, politics, communication, and tools, which increase women's leadership potential and engender change in numerous spheres (O'Neil et al., 2015). According to Mahmood (2001), when a person becomes aware and conscious of how he/she is being constituted in different subject positions, the subject practices agency. Agency is not limited to actions that challenge social norms; it is also the capacity of action that historically enables and creates specific relations of subordination (Mahmood, 2005). For Mahmood, the norms "are not only consolidated and/or subverted but performed, inhibited, and experienced in a variety of ways" (ibid p. 22), through the multiple ways, a woman inhabits social norms, which are seen as "the necessary ground through which the subject is realized and comes to enact her agency" (El Said et al., 2015 p.77). Agency is thus understood as an individual's consciousness and responsibility to respond to the existing power relationships with "the capacity to realize one's interest against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will or another obstacle (individual or collective)" (Mahmood, 2001, 206). Awareness of one's agency within a given location can generate a collective power. This can offset the adverse effects of sexist discrimination and create dialogue and knowledge-sharing events that can be a catalyst for change. The training of 'gender advocates' that are well-placed in and able to navigate strategically institutional structures is often critical to strengthening women's strategic and tactical understanding of social change while they are learning to build dialogue, trust, and alliances (Domingo et al., 2015).

Literature Review

Empowerment of women in administrative and leadership roles

Recent studies on empowering women for leadership roles in the higher education context have focused on the antecedents and challenges facing academic women leaders, with few studies of those encountered by non-academic females. Most leadership positions in higher education institutions are associated with academic rank, while non-academic

administrative and leadership positions have different requirements. It is likely the challenges facing women's empowerment for administrative staff in higher education institutions are similar to those faced by women in other sectors, as will be illustrated in this section.

Al-Qahtani et al. (2021) aimed to explore different aspects of women's empowerment among academic and administrative staff in fifteen government universities in Saudi Arabia. They concluded that women academics enjoy greater empowerment than administrative staff in Saudi universities because their advanced educational level allows them better access to resources and support. Since Saudi universities practice “segregation between male and female students”, women academics are presumed to take leadership roles (Al-Qahtani et al., 2021), so the study recommends continuing support for the academics, while increased efforts must be exerted to empower female administrative staff (ibid).

Aldaihani (2020) studied 115 administrative employees (36.5% males and 63.5% females) at a Kuwaiti university to reveal the relationship between administrative empowerment and job satisfaction. Although male employees were found to have a higher job satisfaction rate than females, the ‘impact of gender on job satisfaction level when compared with the level of empowerment’ was negligible (ibid, 233).

Yahya and Mutarubukwa (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with women leaders among local and central government authorities in Tanzania to uncover that women adopted a wide range of strategies, including working hard and engaging in continuing education, to overcome the challenges posed by the dominant masculine culture of Tanzania and negative attitudes from both male and female subordinates. The study highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing, the need for coaching and mentoring programs, as well as continuous training opportunities for women to build their management skills.

A Canadian study by McKivor (2016) examined the predictive ability of structural empowerment and decision-making styles in female middle managers in 17 Ontario universities to increase their job satisfaction. The study revealed a high correlation between structural empowerment and job satisfaction, while the correlation between decision-making and job satisfaction was insignificant.

Nakhoda and Rahimian (2015) used semi-structured interviews to study the various factors promoting and inhibiting the empowerment of female librarians in Tehran's public libraries and found that promoting factors included participation and teamwork, role resolution, and access to information, role modeling, motivation, and appreciation. Inhibiting factors were poor organizational communication system, negative attitudes toward staff, and instructional management style.

Farjad (2012) study used Kirkpatrick Model to measure whether training courses offered at the Islamshar University in Iran had achieved their stated goals. A survey based on the Kirkpatrick model was distributed to managers, teachers, and other personnel at the university and subsequently proved the training courses to be below the standard level. The study recommends that the design of future training programs consider the needs assessment stage and that individual needs be considered for an effective outcome to be achieved.

Wallace and Marchant (2011) ran a survey in Australian national universities to assess the challenges of being a female administrative manager. They reported a ‘masculine culture’ where female administrators lacked recognition and opportunity and an inflexibility regarding women's caregiver responsibilities. Some asserted that they adopt a masculine management style to thrive in the male-dominated university culture. The study concluded that there is relatively less gender discrimination in the university context compared to other sectors, but the contributions of female managers still need to be better recognized, and the university should work collaboratively to achieve this.

This study has distinct features to distinguish it from the previous studies. We used the Kirkpatrick Model to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program, and we used the qualitative approach, while most of the previous studies tend to use surveys for its easiness. Further, we evaluated the program from the participants' perspectives, which gave more credibility to the evaluation. Moreover, this is a funded training program, “Empowering Women for Leadership Roles”, and according to our knowledge, few funded projects tend to conduct a thorough, scientific, and deep evaluation of their projects to extract their pros and cons.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Women administrators comprise 43.9% of the total YU workforce. Their active role in the institution's success cannot be underestimated. Effective training programs to increase their job performance, agency and voice, and their ability to acquire advanced leadership roles are crucial. This training program was based on a framework of change theory of gender equity and the premise that women need to be supported and trained to navigate the sexist cultural, social, and political structures of their work environment and empowered if they are to become more 'influential leaders' (O'Neil and Domingo, 2016). It was the first program of its kind offered for female employees at YU since its establishment in 1976. Developing a strategic understanding of power, politics, and communication allows women to better advance individual and group objectives leading to increased interest in leadership and ensuring that women are still present as leaders in the future (O'Neil, Plank, with Domingo, 2015). Breaking down women's isolation in male-dominated spheres and building a sense of common purpose can help women generate collective power to offset the adverse effects of sexist discrimination. In this regard, leadership is seen as "an integration strategy helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives" (Day 2000, 586).

The training program was designed to achieve specific changes to satisfy the training goals of empowering women for leadership roles, and its effectiveness was measured using the Kirkpatrick Model, which has been an essential tool for training evaluation for almost half a century. For example, Jones et al. state that "programs that have successfully implemented the four levels of the Kirkpatrick Model have demonstrated more comprehensive evaluations and subsequently more robust conclusions and recommendations for their training programs" (Jones et al. 2018, 495). The Kirkpatrick Model is flexible in that it can be applied before, during, or after training (Razanaufal and Lantu, 2019; Farjad, 2012).

Kirkpatrick's Four Levels include:

- Level 1 (Reaction): Trainees' satisfaction with the program
- Level 2 (Learning): Achievement of learning objectives
- Level 3 (Behavior): Changes in job performance
- Level 4 (Results): The effect of training on acquiring leadership roles

By adopting these four models and applying descriptive and narrative approaches, this study offers a qualitative evaluation of the training program "Empowering Women for Leadership Roles" by focusing on the participant's perspectives, experiences, and narratives throughout the program. Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore the effectiveness of the training program.

Interview Evaluation:

Level 1: "Reaction"

The first five questions in the questionnaire measure level 1, "Reaction". The team evaluated the level of participants' satisfaction with the program with a set of questions that reflect the Kirkpatrick Model levels. Kirkpatrick (2016) states that "Level 1 Reaction is the level most familiar to learning professionals, and one of the simplest to evaluate".

The participants' responses document their feelings, impressions, and experiences during the training program, which can uncover the participant's impression of the program's organization, quality, venue, presentation, content, and coaching methods. Reaction evaluation is a vital assessment tool "because these reactions are important indicators of trainees' receptivity to attitude changes", (Giangreco et al.; 2010:167).

Kirkpatrick (1998) indicated certain important areas at this level that evaluators should take into consideration: participants' satisfaction and engagement with the training program, general atmosphere of the training, and relevance of the program. Data collected from the interviews showed positive participant reactions towards the training program despite the mixed feelings of some women at the outset of training, which were mainly due to misunderstanding and unfamiliarity with the upcoming program. Some were enthusiastic and others were proud to be part of a training that focused mainly on

the empowerment of women. Eventually, however, all who interviewed were highly satisfied with the training program, stating that they were motivated to learn and felt privileged to take part. One of the participants stated:

“We were very happy during the training period because for the first time at YU or even in the area, attention was being given to women in general” (N.S.)

Another interviewee described the participating women as the “lucky ones”, confirming the effectiveness of the training:

“As women, we need to be aware of our power and educate ourselves because the woman should feel that she is not a minor rib. She must get rid of the inferiority feeling, and she doesn’t need a man to correct her decision. I mean, whether it is at work or among her family, or even in the community, women don’t need to be under a man’s control. We benefited from this course a lot, we took many suitable things. It educated us about many things, (Z.R.)

All interviewees agreed that the time spent on training was definitely time well spent.

“I was so excited to be in such training because women in our patriarchal culture sometimes lack self-confidence and we need training like this, to feel self-confident about our skills and knowledge.” (T.F.)

Another said:

“This training was beneficial as it opened my eyes to the interrelationship between the social and academic aspects of my work. For example, during this training, I became aware of my gender identity and how I should navigate the work environment without stepping outside my comfort zone.” (S.A.)

Yusoff et al. (2016) point to the importance of training settings, both venues and other logistic arrangements. Most of interviewees stated that they deemed the training program professional and highly organized. It was offered in a spacious, well-equipped environment that offered psychological comfort and was suitable to conduct the various related activities. They stated the session breaks were adequate for them to eat, chat and pray and that the content was very effective, useful, and relevant to their job and gender needs.

“Through the training, you feel you are appreciated and valued as active participants and not just a passive recipient of information. I attended this training to learn how to become a woman, a leader, and it reinforced my agency and voice directly and indirectly” (T.G.)

Another participant said:

“Before the training, I didn’t know the difference between a manager and a leader. Now I can distinguish and perform leadership skills with my colleagues and even at home. I now know how to distinguish between my employees and know their weaknesses and strengths, how to influence people, and how to be fair and social just to others or followers.” (R.A.)

Overall, the training topics strengthened women’s desire to be leaders and decision-makers, increased their time-management skills, and enhanced their self-confidence. Some training topics, however, were identified as irrelevant and it was suggested they be replaced.

“The program plan covered many administrative skills needed by women to enable them to take on leadership roles. I would like to mention, for example, effective leadership, decision-making, management and communication skills, as well as life skills, anger management, and other important topics covered by the sessions”. (M.H.)

Each training session applied multiple training methods, including role-play exercises, discussions, group flips, and interactive sessions. The participants deemed the trainers highly qualified, knowledgeable, and used training methods compatible with the training goals.

“All the lectures we took have left a huge influence on us. They were delivered in a nice, professional way, and the trainers gave us a space to speak. Frankly, if I have the chance to attend the trainers’ normal lectures with their students on a regular basis, I would definitely go”. (T.G.)

Each group of participants consisted of employees from different university departments and locations, of different age groups, and different experiences, which induced good collaboration. The sessions encouraged a collective eagerness for learning and self-reflection. The course also enabled women to create new friendships and feel comfortable exchanging opinions to learn from each other.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The program's strengths and weaknesses were discussed in the interviews to understand how the trainees rated the training program and its delivery and how to improve future programs.

Below are some interviewees' opinions about the strengths of the program:

"Regarding the strengths, the first thing was the sessions were interesting and not boring. There was also good interaction with the trainers, and with the program supervisor. We interacted and discussed many aspects of the training content. We eagerly awaited the time of the training, because there were always new things on the table to learn." (N.A.)

"The strengths of the program were that it is all about women's empowerment. This enables us and gives us the strength that stems from knowledge, not from diligence. We learned from sharing the experiences of others, and from research and studies in order to help us do our work and deal with our colleagues." (S.A.)

"The program's strengths are that it has many interesting topics. We could talk about anything; it helped us to express our opinion more through creating room for us. We enjoyed it a lot, and we benefited." (F.Q.)

"The training reinforces my leadership skills and empowers me to speak up and be an advocate for justice in my department. The self-confidence that I gained after the training was influential for other women colleagues." (F.A.)

"One of the strengths in training is that we were free to express our opinions and points of view. There was room not just for the trainer who gave us what he wanted. Sometimes, our experience was reflected in the trainers themselves because we have parallel experiences to them." (N.M.)

"Strength in this program: it was an organized course, and the various topics were very valuable." (T.G.)

"The training hall was well-prepared for trainers and trainees. Training tools were also there. The training needed such a room with data show and air conditioning, and they were successful in choosing the place." (M.H.)

"What I want to tell you about the strengths was the discipline, the organization, the communication during the training." (S.M.)

Weaknesses / Suggestions for improvement

"I felt that the program needs to be reinforced to support what we got, as a woman at work or even in the family. I wished that this training included men as well. For example, if my colleague at work was with me in this program, they would be more aware of women and be convinced that women are equal to men." (S.M.)

"The weakness of this training was long hours, one day per week, which is very short. Moreover, employees still want to continue to attend such sessions, at least on a quarterly basis." (M.H.)

"I wish we had more training about leadership topics and the differences between leadership and management in the workplace." (S.A.)

"I hope if there were more lectures about rules and regulations to learn more about our rights and responsibilities in the university." (A.R.)

"The 10 days of training was insufficient time to cover all the topics. I wished the program expanded more to include other topics." (E.M.)

"I haven't seen any weakness in this program. It was perfect." (A.K.)

This training was also seen to raise the participants' job satisfaction. McKivior (2016) affirmed that there is a highly significant correlation between structural empowerment and job satisfaction. It was essential, therefore, to assess the trainee's satisfaction and the effectiveness of the program in order to analyze its strengths and weaknesses. Such analysis could be incorporated into the planning stages of any future training projects.

The training program was held during 2018-2020, but the study data were not collected until about a year later. The Reaction evaluation results are therefore potentially more reflective and valid as they are assessing a more lasting reaction to the training.

Level 2: "Learning"

Kirkpatrick (1998) links his second level of evaluation, "Learning", to how far participants in the program change their

approaches and boost their knowledge to develop new skills. Hence, learning focuses on what they can do differently, their commitment to that, and whether they are confident and motivated to make changes. To assess the trainees’ level of learning, the research team focused on the following themes extracted from the interviews:

Knowledge	I want to learn.
Skills	I can do what I have learned.
Attitude	What I have learned is valuable and useful to be applied in my job.
Confidence	In my job, I can do what I have learned.
Commitment	In my job, I intend to embrace what I have learned.

Source: (Kirkpatrick, 1998)

The in-depth interviews showed that participants’ knowledge was enhanced, and their learning capacities were increased after the training, and they subsequently employed that knowledge in their professional and personal life.

“I learned many things from the training and applied them during my work. For example, I learnt how to arrange my priorities, how to communicate, how to make right decisions. I also learnt how to care for my mental health and how to manage stressful times.” (A.R.)

“I have benefited from the topics presented. I have three girls and a boy, I transferred the knowledge that I gained from the training to them, especially gender, mental health, and stress management topics. From the training, I have learnt that I must be formal and firm at work, firm and soft at home.” (M.H.)

“I used to be shy and quiet during the meetings, especially as my female colleagues and I were the only women in the department. After the training, I told my friend that we need to speak up, we need to share our knowledge, and try to enhance the department work. As we started to speak up during the meeting, our male colleagues told us that they were so happy that we started to have a voice in the department meetings.” (S.R.)

“I moved between many departments in the university and used to agree with my supervisor whether I liked their decision or not. Now I am not like that anymore. If I think my supervisor's decisions are going to benefit our department or the university, I agree with him, but if not, I will go talk with him and try to advocate for my professional opinion according to my knowledge in a rational way, and surprisingly he listened to me. I discovered that I have the job knowledge, power and, strength to speak.” (A.K.)

“Before this training, I did not attend department meetings, I used to get the minutes and do what was assigned to me, but now I attend all meetings and try to speak up in a professional way and defend my work.” (S.R.)

“I used to be afraid to write any formal email or memos without going back to my supervisor to check if it is acceptable or not. After the training and being around women administrators in the university, I feel that I am now more confident of performing my job. Now I write memos on official paperwork without fear of making mistakes. I feel empowered.” (N.G.)

All participants confirmed that, following the training program, their self-confidence was significantly boosted by what they had learned. One of the “learning” evaluation questions was “How can you apply what you have learned in your job?” S.A. confirmed that the training expanded her information, increased her self-assurance, and helped her overcome many fears when it comes to speaking out and giving her opinion. A.K. said, *“Now I feel that I have become a successful leader, my employees and I are walking on the same line. Although all of my employees know I’m the manager, they also feel that I am not controlling them, as they taught us.” (M.A.)*

Studies of similar training programs are also relevant to this analysis. Yusoff et al. (2016) state that their training program helped employees become more proficient. The trainees in Alsalamah and Callinan’s study (2021) recognized that the training received has improved their knowledge and work-related skills. A third study points to the importance of follow-up interviews to evaluate training programs and ensure their effectiveness (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020, 434). Through follow-up interviews about the training offered at YU, it was found that the participants marked their own improved performance. They were being valued more by their immediate manager, and most of them received a promotion as a result of completing the training. Their productivity also increased, as did their willingness to work. Employees stated they were willing to attend more training sessions relevant to their job and wellbeing.

Pre-and Post-Training Analysis

The training was characterized by the interaction and enthusiasm between the trainees and the trainers, which pleased the trainees, most of whom were undergoing such training for the first time. Toward the close of the training program, it was clear that the training had impacted trainees. They expressed their desire to challenge themselves to compete for and fill leadership/management positions in the future.

As indicated earlier, the training was conducted in three phases over two years. At each phase, the participants in the training program fill out a pre-assessment of their knowledge, and by the end of all the training activities, they submit a post-assessment test. An overview of all the 60 participants' assessment of pre-and post-training knowledge acquisition it shows an apparent increase in the level of the women's knowledge, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Pre-and post-training knowledge acquisition

Questions	Pre Evaluation	Post Evaluation
1-The average level of confidence in ability to take up leadership roles/5	3.46	4.68
2-The average level of knowledge on gender equality /5	3.43	4.4
3-The average level of knowledge on women's leadership /5	3.36	4.7
4-Level of knowledge on women's empowerment /5	3.33	4.8

Generally, the results show that the training raised knowledge levels in all the training modules provided.

Level 3: "Behavior"

Kirkpatrick identifies "Behavior" as the most important of the four levels. Evaluation at this stage assesses the behavioral changes in employees' professional performance as a result of the training program and reflects the effectiveness of the training. Consequently, one can ascertain how to adapt and improve the quality of future training. Inevitably, behavioral changes do not happen immediately and need specific conditions such as individual capacity and the training and working environment applicability.

Behavioral change at work could be experienced by the individual and direct supervisors or other colleagues. The use of the Kirkpatrick Model and semi-structured interviews allowed us to identify improvement in soft skills among most of the participants, such as coping strategies, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and teamwork.

"Before the training, I used to do my job because it is work, but now I became aware and conscious that I have a role in my university. I matter for myself and others." (N.A.)

"Many of my colleagues told me that when you reach your 40s, you will start to lose passion for work, but with this training, I feel I am recharged and energized to work and take care of myself and my job." (A.R.)

"I am happy because I learned how to be influential for and with others and how to solve problems; for example, after the training, there was an ethical dilemma in my department, and my director made up his mind to decide about a case. I did not like the director's decision and felt that it was not fair, so I decided to go and talk with him before making the final decision. I discussed with him the pros and cons of the decision and how it will influence the student negatively. After our discussion, my director changed his mind. Maybe without having this training, I would never have felt brave enough to talk." (S.A.)

Various studies that used Kirkpatrick Model to evaluate training discovered that such training directly affects employee job performance and that participants tend to transfer their knowledge to their colleagues (Brown and MaCracken 2009). Alsalamah and Callinan (2021) noted a positive impact on personal development, such as increased self-confidence and improved communication skills.

The participants of the YU program reported improved motivation for work, were more aware of their role and felt empowered to share their knowledge, not only in small gatherings but also in lectures and conferences. All interviewees stated that this training had helped to increase their confidence, thus boosting productivity levels. Their relationships with

others improved thanks to their newly-acquired professional skills, greater self-belief, and better appreciation of their daily contribution. They felt the training had improved their interaction with others, and they were able to control their reactions, leading to increased success in their work. Many also noted an improvement in their personal lives due to the training.

Level 4: “Results”

Most interviewees had enjoyed the training and felt it had advanced their skills significantly. One of the interviewees described how the training program had impacted her way of thinking and even her personality. The trainees became more confident about decision-making, more passionate about their jobs, and more interactive with others. Their leadership abilities had grown beyond their expectations. Moreover, participants stated that this training made them willing to shoulder greater responsibilities.

“This training has improved the way I do my work and helped to increase my confidence. I started to believe in myself more. My decision-making skills have hugely accelerated, and the program helped me to realize my strengths and weaknesses.” (A.S.)

“Since I took this training, my performance has significantly improved besides a better focus on my interaction with others. Now I feel that I can take on more responsibilities, and most importantly, I can lead a team and coordinate without doubting myself.” (S.H.)

“Since I had the training, I began to appreciate myself more and that I deserve to be where I want to be. Before this training, I did not care a lot about becoming the leader in my department, now, after realizing how much knowledge, skills, and confidence I gained, I think I deserve to dream of being a leader.” (H.K.)

“I used to be happy with my job and my ranking at work, but during the training sessions and being around women colleagues who are in their 20s and 30s and are striving to be a decision-maker and a leader in the university, I feel that they unleash my potential to be a leader.” (N.A.)

“I now appreciate that I know myself better. I know my strengths and weaknesses. I know what I need to do to be a better leader.” (S.R.)

“I am happy because I know what my vision and mission in my work and life is. This training was helpful as it opened new spaces for me and allowed me to reconstruct my context and prioritize what I have to do.” (T.G.)

“Attending the training made me aware of many discourses around me and how they shaped my gender identity. Now I feel that I can speak my mind without impinging on any religious boundaries between men and me. I learned how to act as a professional.” (S.H.)

Overall, the research interviewees described the program’s impact on developing their administrative and leadership skills, as well as their professional competencies.

Discussion

This study utilized Kirkpatrick’s model to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program “Empowering Women for Leadership Roles” by focusing on the participant’s perspectives, experiences, and narratives throughout the program. Level 1 (reaction) measures trainees’ satisfaction with the program; the study uncovered that participants expressed positive reactions toward the training program, especially as most participants felt privileged to be part of this program. On the other hand, some participants described mixed feelings toward the training due to unfamiliarity with the upcoming program. In addition, participants expressed that the training was professional and organized and allowed them to connect despite working in different departments and locations at the university. The training encouraged a collective eagerness for learning, self-reflection, and the ability to exchange opinions.

In level 2, which measures how far the training program aids to change participants’ knowledge to develop new skills, the in-depth interviews revealed participants’ increased knowledge and enhanced learning capacities employed in their professional and personal lives. Participants also reported improvement in their performance as indicated by the promotion they received due to completing the training. Yusoff et al. (2016)’s study also reported that their training program helped

employees become more proficient. The trainees in Alsalamah and Callinan's study (2021) acknowledged that their training improved their knowledge and work-related skills.

In level 3, which assesses the behavioral changes in employees' professional performance due to the training program, the semi-structured interviews uncovered how participants improved soft skills such as coping strategies, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and teamwork. They also reported improved work motivation, more awareness of their role, and feeling empowered to share their knowledge in small gatherings, lectures, and conferences. All interviewees stated that this training helped increase their confidence, thus boosting productivity levels. Their relationships with others improved thanks to their newly acquired professional skills, greater self-belief, and better appreciation of their daily contribution. Many also noted an improvement in their personal lives due to the training. Alsalamah and Callinan (2021) noted a positive impact on personal development, such as increased self-confidence and improved communication skills. These findings support previous studies that used Kirkpatrick Model to evaluate training and discovered that such training directly affects employee job performance and that participants tend to transfer their knowledge to their colleagues (Brown and MaCracken 2009).

In terms of the last level, the interviews revealed that participants enjoyed the training and felt it significantly advanced their skills. The trainees became more confident about decision-making, more passionate about their jobs, and more interactive with others. Their leadership abilities had grown beyond their expectations. Moreover, participants stated that this training made them willing to shoulder greater responsibilities.

The collected data revealed that the training program had helped the women administrators at YU to cultivate resilience and draw on their personal strength to overcome adversity and marginalization. Such resilience was rooted in three interrelated critical threads: 1) they understood their location and the existing power hierarchy; 2) they had built a sense of solidarity through dialogue about their experiences throughout the training which allowed them to generate collective power to offset the negative effects of marginalization, and 3) they practiced their agency as change agents within their social and workspace. Prior to the training, not all participants were aware of being marginalized from decision-making or leadership positions. As they shared experiences and deconstructed their realities, they began to see themselves as being forced to fulfill their roles from the margin and not from the center, both at work and at home, confined there by cultural expectations. After the training, they broke free from the margin and stepped into the center, exhibiting knowledge and power at work and in the social spaces they inhabited.

This newly-discovered awareness empowered the women to resist and change those boundaries that might have previously limited their agency. They now practiced their agency in new subject positions, which enabled them to make the conscious choice of how they position themselves. Agency, according to Mahmood, is not limited to actions that challenge social norms but "the capacity of action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 203). Agency is thus understood as one's conscious decision to endure and persist in power relationships, characterized by "the capacity to realize one's own interest against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will or another obstacle (individual or collective)" (Mahmood, 2001, p.206).

This training brought together women from different academic and administrative departments at the university, serving to break down women's isolation in male-dominated environments, and consequently, they built a sense of solidarity through dialogue, thus generating collective power to offset the adverse effects of sexist discrimination. Supporting women's ability to navigate sexist cultural, social, and political structures empowers them to become more influential leaders (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016). Furthermore, the women developed a strategic understanding of power, politics, and communication, which works to advance individual and group objectives better. When women organize collectively, it promotes leadership and change in social, cultural, and political practices and policy (O'Neil & Plank, with Domingo, 2015). "Organizations, alliances, and collective action matter – precisely because they are marginalized politically, women's collective strength is critical to amplify (elected women's) power." (O'Neil and Domingo, 2016).

Conclusion

Applying Kirkpatrick’s evaluation model revealed the impact of the ‘Empowering Women for Leadership in Administration Roles’ training on the female employees at YU. The training facilitated the women’s learning and enriched their skills. Some drawbacks were identified, particularly the short session time compared to the training content. Some participants also saw some sessions being irrelevant to their needs. Beyond these points, trainees mastered the skills and began to utilize their newly acquired knowledge. Using the Kirkpatrick Model to evaluate the training, we conclude that it was effective at each level, and the overall goals of the training program were met. All interviewees declared the training sessions to be outstanding and that their expectations for new learning were met. They said that further regular training sessions would be welcome. Based on the results, it is recommended that women receive training early so they can deploy their acquired skills to promote their career advancement. Women holding mid and senior positions must receive continuous support through training and development programs to enhance their leadership skills.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this research paper reflect the participants’ opinions in the program “Empowering Women for Leadership in Administration Roles” and not the official views of YU and FoF.

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