

## Identification of Dimensions, Components, and Indicators of the Educational-Behavioral Model for Socially Vulnerable Groups

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### Article Info

#### Article type:

*Original Research*

#### How to cite this article:

MasoumBeigi, M. R., Banisi, P., & Jahed, H. (2025). Identification of Dimensions, Components, and Indicators of the Educational-Behavioral Model for Socially Vulnerable Groups. *Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology*, 8(2), 1-9.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijes.8.2.16>



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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This research aims to identify the dimensions, components, and indicators of the educational-behavioral model for socially vulnerable groups.

**Methods and Materials:** The study was applied in terms of its objective and exploratory in nature, following a qualitative approach. The statistical population consisted of academic experts and experienced officials from universities in Tehran, who were selected using a non-random purposive sampling method. The sampling method employed in this research was stratified random sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. For assessing the internal validity of the model, as well as the external validity, a researcher-designed questionnaire derived from the model's components was used. Additionally, the criterion of trustworthiness was applied, and reliability was examined by accurately documenting the research process and ensuring alignment within and between researchers. The data analysis method used was thematic analysis (including basic, organizing, and global themes) with the Maxqda-V2018 software.

**Findings:** The findings indicated that the educational-behavioral dimensions for socially vulnerable groups included: educational (curriculum, teaching methods, educational materials and resources, educational assessment, professional development of teachers, extracurricular activities), psychological (psychological support, psychological empowerment, mental health care, emotional support, family support), social (social support, opportunities for social participation, social awareness, enhancing social skills, promoting social solidarity, social networking), economic (job skills, entrepreneurship, local economic development, financial management education, economic empowerment), and cultural (preservation of cultural identity, cultural education, cultural communication, artistic development, protection of cultural heritage, and cultural promotion).

**Conclusion:** Based on the identified indicators, components, and dimensions, the educational-behavioral model for socially vulnerable groups (working children in Tehran province) was designed. Finally, the internal and external validity of the model was examined, and the findings indicated appropriate validity for the designed model. Overall, the results of this study not only contribute to improving

the behavior of socially vulnerable groups but can also serve as an effective tool for enhancing the quality of behavioral education for working children. This research highlights the importance of addressing the needs and changing circumstances of working children in today's world.

**Keywords:** Behavioral education, socially vulnerable groups, working children, Tehran.

## 1. Introduction

The educational institution, due to its role in creating norms and values and internalizing them, performs the most critical function in shaping norms within society. The importance of behavioral education is so significant that without investing in it, sustainable economic, social, and cultural development will not be achieved in any society (Shwede, 2024). Hanstedt (2024) believes that humanity's greatest social invention is public education at the school level, since it elevates the foundation of continual improvements in living standards and wealth (Hanstedt, 2024). However, the school's educational principles do not hold true for children who are of school age yet do not have an education or a promising future ahead of them. By these children, we mean working children (Adebiyi et al., 2023). They are a group of street children who spend most of their time on the streets without parental supervision, devoting nearly all of their time to earning money. In many cases, these children work most days and sleep on the street at night. It is noteworthy that, due to poor living and working conditions, working children are exposed to multiple social harms (Bayat et al., 2024).

Providing appropriate behavioral education to these children can play a significant role in reducing such harms. The first step in teaching behavior to working children is creating a safe and supportive environment. This environment should make the child feel secure and calm, enabling them to trust adults. Moreover, establishing effective communication with working children is of great importance. Adults must patiently listen to these children and show them a sense of worthiness and respect. On the other hand, teaching life skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, effective communication, and assertiveness to working children can help them cope with social harms (Shafiabadi et al., 2023). Many working children, due to unpleasant experiences they have endured, need counseling and psychological services. Providing these services can help them improve their mental health. Appropriate behavioral education for working children can

considerably reduce multiple social harms, including abuse, delinquency, addiction, and prostitution. Such education helps children learn coping skills for dealing with harm, establish healthy and close relationships, make correct and logical decisions, become aware of their rights and defend them, and hope for a better future (Andalib Kouraim et al., 2023).

Education and the acquisition of skills are indicators of social progress, and this is of great importance for developing countries because equal educational opportunities must be created in society to reduce inequality and establish social justice. Education can play a key role in social development by creating equal opportunities and providing all individuals with access to schooling (Rahmani Khalili et al., 2024). Children are among those whose voices are less heard in mass media and policy-making, and this lack of recognition perpetuates educational processes, traditions, and cultures that do not take into account the needs, life requirements, and developmental demands of children (Detrick, 2023). Sharif (2022) points to the effectiveness of a solution-focused intervention on problem-solving skills, resilience, and peer relationships in socially vulnerable children with emotional-behavioral problems (Sharif, 2022). In another study, Baradaran (2021) noted the effectiveness of solution-focused group therapy on personal growth and psychological security among socially harmed adolescents in the 15–18-year-old working children's center, with results indicating a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in personal growth and psychological security among vulnerable adolescent girls (Baradaran, 2021). Khazaei (2021) also examined the impact of educational inequality on the issue of working children in Iran's provinces and, in this study, demonstrated the relationship between educational inequality and child workers aged 10 to 14 in all provinces of Iran (Khazaei, 2021). Etezadi (2020) referred to the effectiveness of life skills training in enhancing self-esteem and reducing bullying among working children. Numerous studies have addressed social harms, but almost none have focused on behavioral education among working children (Etezadi,

2020). The same holds true for international research. For instance, Primo et al. (2023) investigated the prediction of social skills in socially vulnerable Chinese students through physical education, examining the fulfillment of basic needs in a sample of socially vulnerable high school students based on self-determination (Primo et al., 2023). Likewise, Sovacool (2021) acknowledged the impact of low socioeconomic status on the educational achievements of socially vulnerable children and attributed these children's academic performance to multiple factors, including family, family behavior, socioeconomic status, parental interactions, and so forth (Sovacool, 2021). Cho et al. (2019) also referred to the social and emotional development of socially vulnerable students and its relationship with their academic performance (Cho et al., 2019).

By examining various definitions in the theoretical foundations related to working or street children, and considering criteria such as motive, how children are present on the street, their circumstances, actions, and behaviors on the street, methods of guardianship, and ultimately how they connect with their families, one can provide a comprehensive definition of a working or street child. Working children are part of the urban vulnerable child population and children in difficult situations who spend long hours, either temporarily or permanently, and for an indefinite duration, away from common social and supportive institutions such as family and school, motivated by work and living on the street. Compared to other children, they have less contact with these social and supportive institutions or are cared for in centers other than these conventional institutions. In the absence of such specialized centers, they are at risk of being left on the street, experiencing the negative consequences of street life, violence, exploitation, delinquency, and social deviation (Shafiabadi et al., 2023).

Effective education, designed based on children's needs, talents, and real-life conditions, can dramatically transform their lived experiences and boost the motivation of both children and their families to benefit from education. This kind of education can also empower them to confront high-risk situations. Nonetheless, the current formal education system in the country mostly lacks a connection with the realities of life for impoverished classes, does not adequately address children's developmental and social needs, and fails to provide the necessary motivation for continuing education. In particular, working children, who typically face poverty and multiple challenges, need to find their voice, express their questions and concerns, and be heard.

Hearing these children's voices can lead to increased social awareness, stronger social solidarity, improved governmental educational policy-making, and facilitate planning and goal-setting efforts by non-governmental organizations. Specifically, teachers, counselors, educational policymakers, educational psychologists, social workers, sociologists, parents, and anyone who interacts with children—especially children from low-income communities—can benefit from this research and use it to change their attitudes, actions, and feelings. Therefore, this research endeavors to answer the question: What are the identified dimensions, components, and indicators of the educational-behavioral model for socially vulnerable groups?

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This research is applied in terms of its objective and qualitative in terms of its data type, utilizing a systematic literature review and thematic analysis approach.

The statistical population for the qualitative phase (meta-synthesis) included all articles and scientific works available in domestic and international databases, as well as existing documents and regulations in this field. During this phase, 20 articles were selected through purposive non-random sampling based on the PRISMA guideline for article selection. The inclusion criteria for the meta-synthesis phase encompassed recency, relevance to the research topic, high quality and scientific validity, sources from reputable domestic and international databases, appropriate methodology, and diversity in perspectives.

In the second phase (Delphi technique), the statistical population consisted of experienced officials from universities in Tehran who were proficient in the subject of social harms (working children). The participants were selected based on their practical experience in education, research, evaluation, management, and policymaking for over five years. Considering that the minimum number of experts in a Delphi panel is typically between 10 and 18, this research included 18 experts selected through purposive non-random sampling.

The selection criteria for experts included having at least a PhD degree and teaching experience in fields related to the research topic, expertise in the field, participation in practical projects, relevant research experience, awareness of policies, challenges, and barriers, the ability to provide analytical insights, diversity in viewpoints, commitment to

participation, holding relevant positions, decision-making involvement, and practical experience related to the research topic.

## 2.2. Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool for the qualitative phase (meta-synthesis) was a systematic review of literature and credible scientific sources. This process involved targeted and detailed searches in scientific databases, articles, books, and dissertations related to the research topic.

For content validity in the meta-synthesis phase, it was confirmed that the reviewed content and concepts were comprehensively covered in the existing literature. Articles were selected with high precision, beginning with an initial screening process. A flowchart (depicting the search and selection process) was used to identify suitable articles within the study's scope. Restrictions based on time (domestic and international), geographical location (domestic and international databases), research nature (synthesis, review, qualitative, or quantitative), and topic (keywords for search) were applied, followed by coarse and fine-grained screenings.

Internal validity results showed that findings from the meta-synthesis were not influenced by external factors and were appropriately interpreted. To ensure validity, the PRISMA 27-item checklist, independent analysis by the researcher and a statistics expert, Cohen's kappa coefficient for agreement, standard criteria, reproducibility (transparency in execution), and MAXQDA software for precise tracking of analysis and data coding stages were used. Feedback and adjustments from experts familiar with the subject helped identify inconsistencies. Reliability was ensured through meticulous documentation of the research process, intra-researcher alignment, and inter-researcher consistency, confirming the reliability and validity of the meta-synthesis findings.

In the second qualitative phase (Delphi technique), a Delphi worksheet was used. Experts were asked to rate items and provide feedback or suggest additional indicators they deemed important. For validity, the Delphi worksheet questions were designed to be clear, simple, and relevant. Using straightforward language and easily comprehensible concepts ensured accessibility for experts. Content validity

was assessed using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR), confirming that the worksheet comprehensively covered the intended concepts. Reliability of the Delphi worksheet was calculated using internal and temporal reliability, with findings confirming its validity and reliability.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

In the qualitative phase, the thematic analysis method was employed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2018. Common themes and patterns were identified and analyzed from selected articles and open-ended questions in the Delphi worksheet.

During the Delphi phase, mean and standard deviation were used to evaluate results and determine expert agreement levels. Kendall's coefficient of concordance was employed to assess expert opinions and agreement on priorities for closed-ended questions in the questionnaire using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 16.

## 3. Findings and Results

A total of 203 initial themes were extracted from the systematic literature review, academic sources, and interview texts. After integrating overlapping themes, 161 initial themes were identified. Following the coding of meaning units and achieving saturation (when no new categories or codes emerge from further text or interview analyses), the codes were categorized based on their similarities, resulting in 27 categories derived from the qualitative data. Related initial themes were identified, and after final sorting and clustering, labels were assigned to each organizing theme. At the final stage, each label was named around the main goal of the initial themes, utilizing theoretical foundations, prior research, and interview content.

The content analysis of interview texts began with thematic analysis and the extraction of initial themes. Irrelevant and duplicate themes were removed. After categorizing the initial themes, organizing themes were identified, and finally, the global themes were categorized and named. The table below presents the initial themes, organizing themes, global themes, interviewee codes, frequencies, and related sources.

**Table 1**

*Extracted Themes for Developing a Behavioral Educational Model for Socially Vulnerable Groups*

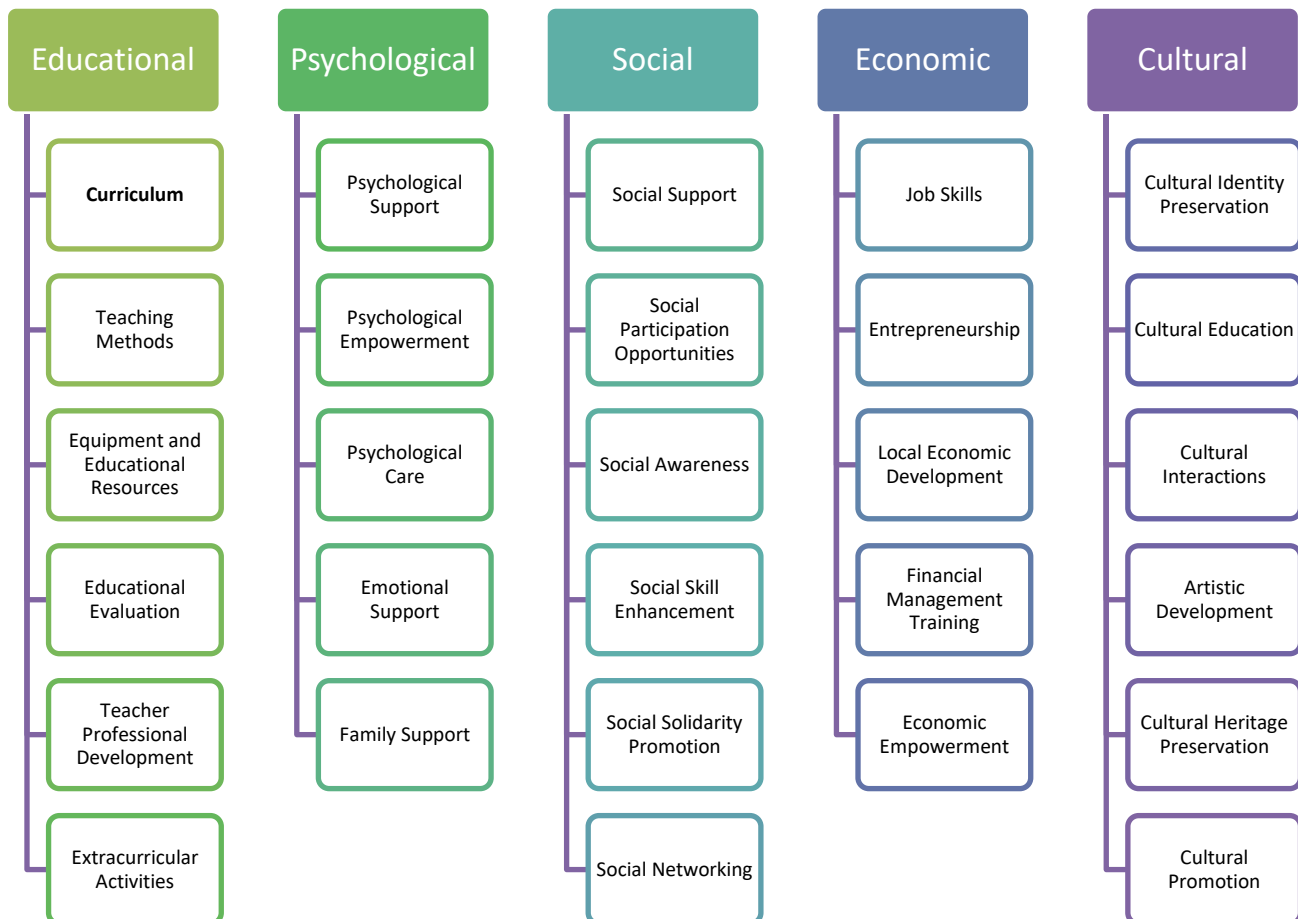
Dimension	Component	Indicator
Educational	Curriculum	Alignment with specific group needs- Diversity in educational content- Flexibility of programs- Up-to-date content- Use of credible resources- Focus on practical skill learning
	Teaching Methods	Use of active and participatory methods- Integration of modern educational technologies- Diversity in teaching methods- Emphasis on interactive learning- Provision of practical learning opportunities- Use of continuous feedback
	Equipment and Educational Resources	Access to books and credible resources- Availability of educational software- Well-equipped and suitable learning environment- Access to internet and online resources- Provision of supplementary resources
	Educational Evaluation	Use of diverse evaluation methods- Continuous and ongoing evaluation- Feedback-based educational improvement- Evaluation of students' practical abilities- Assessment based on defined educational goals- Use of self-assessment and peer-assessment
	Teacher Professional Development	Provision of in-service training courses- Opportunities for experience exchange- Access to specialized consultations
	Extracurricular Activities	Organization of educational camps- Implementation of practical projects- Participation in competitions and festivals- Creation of educational clubs- Organization of skill workshops- Collaboration with other educational institutions
Psychological	Psychological Support	Continuous counseling services- Access to psychologists and specialized counselors- Safe spaces for discussing problems- Organization of group therapy sessions- Provision of psychological resources and materials
	Psychological Empowerment	Confidence-building workshops- Stress management techniques- Training in effective communication skills- Self-awareness sessions- Meditation and relaxation programs
	Psychological Care	Depression prevention programs- Regular psychological status evaluation- Support programs during crises- Follow-up and support for individuals with psychological problems- Training in coping strategies
	Emotional Support	Formation of support groups- Encouragement to express emotions- Provision of emotional support- Organization of group sessions- Strengthening social relationships- Emotional management training- Individual and group counseling sessions- Specialized solutions for psychological issues- Referrals to specialized centers- Psychological follow-up after counseling- Training in coping with psychological problems
	Family Support	Training families on psychological issues- Family counseling services- Parent workshops- Formation of family support groups- Educational resources for families
Social	Social Support	Formation of interpersonal and group support networks- Provision of social services- Opportunities for social participation- Strengthening social relationships
	Social Participation Opportunities	Organization of social events- Encouragement to participate in social activities- Opportunities for volunteering- Interactive sessions- Encouragement of social responsibility
	Social Awareness	Social rights and duties education- Awareness workshops- Educational content on social issues- Encouragement of social discussions- Promotion of social responsibility
	Social Skill Enhancement	Effective communication skills training- Life skills workshops- Strengthening group capabilities- Conflict resolution training- Opportunities for practicing social skills- Continuous feedback in social communication
	Social Solidarity Promotion	Promotion of empathy and cooperation- Group and interactive sessions- Encouragement of collaboration- Opportunities for joint efforts- Strengthening social relationships in diverse environments- Development of social support networks
	Social Networking	Strengthening social relationships- Interaction and networking opportunities- Organization of networking events- Strengthening interpersonal connections- Use of social media for networking
Economic	Job Skills	Job skill training- Organization of practical workshops- Provision of internship opportunities- Career counseling services- Encouragement to pursue practical studies- Strengthening job skills
	Entrepreneurship	Promotion of entrepreneurship- Organization of entrepreneurship courses- Entrepreneurship counseling- Encouragement to start small businesses- Provision of entrepreneurial resources and information- Organization of entrepreneurship competitions and festivals- Provision of low-interest loans- Establishment of support funds- Financial counseling services- Strengthening financial management skills
	Local Economic Development	Support for local businesses- Encouragement to buy local products- Organization of local markets- Development of local business networks- Strengthening local capabilities
	Financial Management Training	Financial management training- Organization of financial management workshops- Financial management counseling- Strengthening financial management capabilities- Provision of financial management resources
	Economic Empowerment	Business skills training- Provision of internship opportunities- Strengthening economic capabilities- Creation of job opportunities- Provision of economic counseling
Cultural	Cultural Identity Preservation	Organization of cultural festivals- Training in local culture- Strengthening cultural awareness- Creation of joint cultural programs- Promotion of local culture- Provision of cultural resources
	Cultural Education	Organization of cultural workshops- Educational content on various cultures and traditions- Promotion of acceptance and respect for cultural diversity- Organization of cultural diversity courses- Use of diverse cultural resources
	Cultural Interactions	Promotion of cultural interactions- Organization of cultural exchange programs- Opportunities to learn about different cultures- Strengthening cultural relationships- Promotion of participation in cultural programs- Creation of joint cultural programs
	Artistic Development	Organization of art workshops- Opportunities to showcase artistic works- Encouragement of artistic activities- Organization of art festivals- Provision of artistic resources and materials- Strengthening artistic capabilities
	Cultural Heritage Preservation	Training in cultural heritage preservation- Organization of workshops on cultural heritage preservation- Organization of visits to cultural sites- Promotion of heritage preservation- Provision of educational resources on cultural heritage- Strengthening public awareness of cultural heritage importance
	Cultural Promotion	Organization of cultural events- Encouragement to participate in cultural activities- Opportunities to showcase cultural works- Strengthening cultural awareness- Provision of cultural resources and materials- Use of cultural media for cultural promotion

After coding the 161 initial themes, 28 organizing themes and 5 global themes were identified. Finally, based on the identified elements derived from research documents and

expert interviews, the conceptual model of the study is presented in the figure below.

**Figure 1**

*Final Research Model*



#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the dimensions, components, and indicators of an educational-behavioral model for socially vulnerable groups, particularly working children in Tehran Province, focusing on educational, psychological, social, economic, and cultural dimensions. The findings revealed that improving the conditions of these children requires consideration of all aspects related to their education and empowerment.

The results addressing the first research question indicated that the educational-behavioral dimensions of socially vulnerable groups included educational (curriculum, teaching methods, educational materials and resources, educational assessment, professional development of teachers, extracurricular activities), psychological (psychological support, psychological empowerment, mental health care, emotional support, family support), social (social support, opportunities for social participation, social awareness, social skills enhancement, promotion of social solidarity, social

networking), economic (job skills, entrepreneurship, local economic development, financial management education, economic empowerment), and cultural (preservation of cultural identity, cultural education, cultural communication, artistic development, cultural heritage protection, and cultural promotion) aspects.

The educational dimensions emphasized the importance of creating a comprehensive educational structure tailored to the needs of working children. For instance, curricula should be designed to address not only academic learning but also life skills and social empowerment. Similarly, teaching methods should be active and experiential to encourage children's participation and interaction.

Psychological support and empowerment were identified as other key dimensions. Due to the harsh conditions and challenges faced by working children, they require emotional and psychological support. Programs that enhance their mental health and sense of security can significantly improve their quality of life and social functioning. These supports may include individual and group counseling, artistic and recreational activities, and educational programs for families.

Another critical focus of this research was the social dimension of education. Social support and opportunities for participation were found to be essential. These aspects facilitate the creation of social networks and promote social solidarity between working children and their communities. Establishing participatory spaces where children can engage in social and cultural activities can strengthen their social skills and increase their social awareness.

Moreover, job skills, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment were identified as vital dimensions. Training in job skills and entrepreneurship can help working children achieve financial independence through small business creation or integration into the labor market. This not only improves their economic conditions but also reduces poverty and social vulnerability.

The cultural dimensions should not be overlooked. Preserving cultural identity and promoting cultural education were identified as significant. By teaching cultural skills and fostering artistic activities, working children's cultural and social identities can be strengthened, fostering a sense of belonging to their communities.

Given the sociological context of this study, which involved stakeholders related to working children in Tehran's municipality, including managers and deputies, the findings can serve as a reliable resource for educational and social planning and decision-making. These individuals,

with their experience and knowledge, can help identify the real needs of working children and design suitable educational programs for them. By utilizing this model, Tehran municipality officials can enhance the quality of life for working children and mitigate related social harms. These findings also provide policymakers with insights to develop more effective educational and support programs.

Considering the complexities of working children's issues, the comprehensive and multidimensional approach presented in this study can serve as a practical framework for designing educational and social programs. Ultimately, this study clarifies various educational and social dimensions, improving the understanding of challenges and opportunities for working children and serving as a foundation for future research in this area.

Overall, the results of this study align with prior research, emphasizing the importance of educational, psychological, social, economic, and cultural dimensions in improving the conditions of working children. This alignment highlights the significance and validity of the educational model proposed in this research, which can be employed as an effective framework for planning and implementing educational programs for socially vulnerable groups. At the same time, some studies (Shwede, 2024) emphasize the need for flexibility in education, warranting further consideration in educational model design.

In this study, an educational-behavioral model for socially vulnerable groups (working children in Tehran Province) was designed and validated. The findings confirmed the existence of diverse educational, psychological, social, economic, and cultural dimensions in the model. Previous studies provide further context. For instance, Andalib et al. (2024) examined the impact of Montessori methods on fostering creativity in working children, showing that practical and tool-based learning enhances creativity, aligning with this study's emphasis on active and experiential teaching methods (Andalib Kouraim et al., 2023). Other studies, such as Sharif (2022), demonstrated the effectiveness of solution-focused interventions in enhancing problem-solving skills and resilience among socially vulnerable children, aligning with this study's emphasis on psychological and social support (Sharif, 2022). Baradaran (2021) examined group therapy's impact on personal growth and psychological security among socially harmed youth, echoing the findings of this research (Baradaran, 2021).

Khazaei (2021) studied educational inequality's impact on working children, showing its negative effects, consistent

with this study's educational dimensions, emphasizing the importance of equitable educational opportunities. Etezadi (2020) highlighted the effectiveness of life skills training in improving self-esteem and reducing bullying among working children, which resonates with this research's educational and psychological dimensions (Etezadi, 2020).

While every study has limitations that form the foundation for future research, this study is no exception. A significant limitation of this research was the use of purposive non-random sampling, which may introduce selection bias, potentially affecting the generalizability of results to a broader population.

It is recommended that policymakers design curricula tailored to the needs and abilities of working children, including life skills, entrepreneurship, and job skills training. Additionally, professional development programs for teachers and trainers should focus on modern teaching methods and techniques for psychological and social support when working with vulnerable children.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

### Acknowledgments

We hereby thank all participants for agreeing to record the interview and participate in the research.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

### Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

### Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and, or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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