EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH A DEGREE PROGRAMME IN PSYCHOSOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT AT THE INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF ESWATINI

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ABSTRACT

In Eswatini country, youth and communities are exposed to various challenges such as poverty, violence, HIV and AIDS to mention but a few. Many frontline practitioners, community based volunteers, caregivers, who are working with children and youth in the communities, lack the necessary capacities and skills to provide economic, psychosocial care, support and protection to youth and communities. It is for this reason; the University of Eswatini with the support of the Government of Eswatini and Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI) introduced a “Certificate in Psychosocial Support” programme in 2010.

Based on the results of two surveys and recognizing the benefits and importance of the Certificate programme, the University of Eswatini (UNESWA) through the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) proposed to introduce a Degree programme in Psychosocial Support to upgrade/up-skill or enhance the knowledge of learners in their relevant field with a flexible system of multiple entry and multiple exit option covering Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor’s Degree programmes in collaboration with REPSSI and SEDCO through Open Distance and eLearning (ODeL) mode.

The main purpose of introducing this Degree programme is two-fold:
(i) to achieve holistic psychosocial development; and
(ii) to ensure employability/business creation.

The proposed programme is the result of two research surveys: (i) conducted by IDE in collaboration with Commonwealth of Learning (COL) during May-June 2019; and (ii) the survey conducted by IDE in collaboration with APSSI/REPSSI during April-May 2019.

Key Words: Psychosocial and Economic Support, Entrepreneurship, Micro, Small and Medium Business Enterprises, Open and Distance and eLearning, Multiple entry and exit option.

INTRODUCTION

In Eswatini country, youth and communities are exposed to various challenges, such as: poverty, violence, HIV and AIDS to mention but a few. Currently these challenges have been aggravated by COVID-19 pandemic. Many frontline practitioners or care givers lack the necessary capacities and skills to provide economic, psychosocial care, support and protection to the youth and communities in Eswatini.

Realizing the needs of the society, the Institute of Distance Education (IDE), University of Eswatini (UNESWA) has introduced a “Certificate in Psychosocial Support” programme in 2010 in collaboration with REPSSI and Government of Eswatini to alleviate the challenges faced by the frontline practitioners working with children and youth in the communities.

For over 10 years UNESWA, through IDE, has been providing education through this certificate programme. Child protection has always been a key priority for the programme. It has changed the mind-set of the children and helped them acquire adequate skills and knowledge to succeed in their lives. Organizations and some government sectors
recognized the certificate in psychosocial support, and have either offered job opportunities to graduates or have promoted the graduates to higher level positions in which they are better effective. (Mr. Mandla Mazibuko in 2019).

**PSYCHOSOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT IN ESWATINI CONTEXT**

The Kingdom of Eswatini is one of the Africa’s smallest countries and has an estimated population is 1.42 million in 2019. The Kingdom of Eswatini is currently facing a serious socio-economic situation characterized by a sluggish economic performance, high levels of poverty and inequality, high HIV/AIDS infection rate, growing unemployment, and challenges in the area of governance. According to an ILO estimate, the Eswatini unemployment rate for 2020 was 23.4%, a 1.2% increase from 2019. High rate of unemployment results in economic and social crisis in any civilized society (ILO, World Bank Data, 2021). The increasing number of unskilled unemployed and underemployed young people becomes a threat to the stability of the country.

**Psychosocial Support**

An effective and sustainable programme to support for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) and Youth at community level is heavily reliant on community volunteers and community-based Government and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) personnel. This large group of humanitarian aid workers includes teachers, community health care workers, youth leaders and law enforcement agents, programme officers, social workers, etc. All of these individuals have an essential and on-going need for relevant, up-to-date skills and knowledge to support and enhance the work they do with children and families every day (Mngomezulu & Bhembe, 2013).

**Economic Support**

According to FinScope Survey 2017, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Sector is estimated to 59,283 business owners and employs approximately 93,000 people. The estimated adult population in Eswatini (18 years and older-working age group) is 600,000. It means only 15.5% people are absorbed by MSME Sector (FinScope Survey, 2017). Further the FinScope survey indicates that the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector in the Kingdom of Eswatini has been recognized as a significant contributor to livelihood, mass employment and economic growth.

It is for this reason and based on the results of two surveys, University of Eswatini (UNESWA) in collaboration with Africa Psychosocial Support Institute (APSSI) & Regional Psychosocial Support Initiatives (REPSSI) and Small Enterprises Development Company (SEDCO), is now upgrading the current “Certificate in Psychosocial Support” programme to a Bachelor’s Degree programme in Psychosocial and Economic Support to upgrade/up-skill or to enhance knowledge of the learners’ in their relevant field with graduate employability skills.

**Graduate Employability**

Employability is the combination of attributes, competencies and skills needed to increase the livelihood of an individual to secure gainful employment (formal employment, self-employed, and/or entrepreneurs) after completing a programme of study or training, retaining that employment, and being able to move to other jobs (COL, 2019). The Commonwealth of Learning (COL, 2019) defines employability as “a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attitudes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”. Empowering young people with necessary employability skills will enable them not only to be employable, but also to acquire skills to become job creators by creating their own business enterprises and employment for others instead of seeking already established jobs.

**PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME**

**Purpose**

The main purpose of introducing this Degree programme is two-fold:

(i) to equip candidates with up-to-date skills, and appropriate attitudes in social work to carry out community-based work with children and youth in the communities in order to achieve holistic psychosocial development; and

(ii) to equip the students with employability skills including entrepreneurship skills either to start income-generating business enterprise or to get employment for their livelihood in order to achieve economic development.
Objectives
The objectives of this programme are:

1. To develop professional up-to-date skills, knowledge and practice of social service workforce promoting the psychosocial well-being of children and youth in the communities.
2. To contribute towards human resource development in the area of working with children and youth.
3. To provide in-depth professional skills in the field of communication, social service and entrepreneurship.
4. To ensure that trainees develop livelihood skills or establish a Micro, Small or Medium Business Enterprise (MSME) for holistic development as well as psychosocial and economic well-being.
5. To provide professional marketing skills for their MSME products.
6. To enable graduates not only to be employable, but also to be job creators and entrepreneurs with the ability to start and grow their own MSMEs.

Thus, the programme aims at equipping candidates with the knowledge of employability skills that enable them to be agents of psychosocial and economic development as well as to alleviate poverty.

METHODOLOGY AND RESPONSE TO THE SURVEY

The proposed programme is the result of the survey conducted: (i) in collaboration with Commonwealth of Learning (COL) during May-June 2019 for entrepreneurship; and (ii) the survey conducted in collaboration with APSSI/REPSSI during April-May 2019 for Psychosocial Support.

Entrepreneurship

The UNESWA, through IDE, in line with its strategic plan and in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), conducted a baseline survey on Entrepreneurship training programme to support disadvantaged young women, men and adults through the Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) delivery mode. Field work for the core survey was undertaken between May and June 2019 and data was collected from 214 start-up and existing Micro, Small and Medium Entrepreneurs (MSMEs) from all four regions (Hhohho, Lubombo, Manzini and Shiselweni) of the country. The fieldwork was conducted by staff from the Institute of Distance Education at the University of Eswatini with the help of 10 enumerators appointed and trained by IDE at the University. The sample size was chosen using multi-stage stratified purposeful random sampling method for selecting regions, cities and entrepreneurs. As such the data analysis was made for all 214 respondents using SPSS. Out of a total number of 214 respondents, 65% were female, while 35% were male. An overall response rate of 100% was achieved.

8.9% of respondents were in the age group of 19-25, 21.5% were in the age group of 26-30, 21% were in the age group of 31 – 35, and 48.6% were in the age group of 36 and above. It means the young people were more interested in doing the business. All these potential and existing entrepreneurs need to upgrade their skills for developing their existing business enterprise.

Response to the Entrepreneurship Survey
The main results of survey are:

(i) About 98% of the MSME entrepreneurs are willing to acquire more skills to develop their businesses as the majority of them indicated that they developed experience on the job with little training;

(ii) The majority of the entrepreneurs (about 60%) prefer short-term training programmes using ODeL as a delivery method;

(iii) About 78% of the sampled entrepreneurs do not understand the accounting & taxation compliance requirements and are unaware of the existence of government development programmes.

(iv) According to information given by the respondents, MSME entrepreneurs are engaged in the following business activities. The main activities of the businesses surveyed were: Food and Confectionary 29%, Tailoring 29% and General Trading 20%. Furniture making and repairing 7%, Foundry and welding works (glass and metal works) 5%, Motor vehicle repair/mechanical work 5%, Plumbing, painting and electrical works 5%.

(v) When asked to describe the general state of their business, 21% reported to be in the start-up (0-2 years) stage (potential entrepreneurs), 28% stated that their enterprises are established and growing (3-5 years), 27.5% described their ventures as established and stable (6-10 years), while 23.5% view their businesses were established but stressed. It means these categories of entrepreneurs are facing
challenges of managing their business enterprises. These entrepreneurs need training to sustain and expand their business.

Further, the respondents were asked to rank the preferred skills for which they seek training. The respondents most preferred skills for their business training in the sequential order are: (i) Communication skills, (ii) Administrative skills, (iii) Financial management, (iv) Supervisory/Leadership, (v) Employee relations, (vi) Health and Safety, (vii) Marketing, (viii) Production process improvement.

Based on the data analysis, two training models were proposed: (i) non-credit system programme and (ii) credit system programme to MSMEs and submitted a research results report to COL in 2019.

For introducing a short-term non-credit system training programme, the IDE, UNESWA has already submitted a project proposal to COL in March 2022 for their support for repurposing entrepreneurship courses developed by VUSSC through COL. Now we are proposing to introduce a credit system degree programme as part of this project which covers all the required areas mentioned above.

Psychosocial Support
During April-May 2019, APSSI/REPSSI conducted a survey and collected data from a range of stakeholders in all 11 countries which had been delivering community-based work with children and youth certificate-level programmes including Eswatini. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the certificate programme and to develop new Course Modules for a Diploma/Degree programme in Psychosocial Support.

In Eswatini, the staff of the IDE, UNESWA has collected the data from all teachers who were teaching Certificate in Psychosocial Support programme during April-May 2019 and sent it to the APSSI/REPSSI for their perusal and necessary arrangement. The data were collected from Lecturers/Mentors who were teaching the Certificate programme. The structured questionnaire was sent by email to all 40 Teachers who were teaching the programme. Out of 40 Lecturers/Mentors, 31 responded and an overall response rate was 77.5%.

The main results of the survey
The survey was on curriculum priorities to develop new modules for Diploma/Degree programme proposed by APSSI/REPSSI. The topics that were given top priority by the respondents were:

(i) Care and support of children at risk 100%
(ii) Child and youth development 97%
(iii) Social services in global setting 90%
(iv) Building psychosocial environment 87%
(v) Communication skills 87%
(vi) Psychosocial and mental health services 81%
(vii) Social business for social development 65%
(viii) Micro entrepreneurship for social development 58%
(ix) Organizational ethics 58%
(x) Basics of accounting and finance skills 52%
(xi) Basics of computer skills 45%
(xii) Basics of business organization and management 39%

The findings of the study assisted APPSI/REPSSI in highlighting the gaps to be addressed. Based on the gaps identified, APSSI/REPSSI reviewed the existing Certificate programme courses and developed some more new course modules to advance the Certificate programme into a Diploma/Degree-level programme. The following are the new course modules developed by APSSI/REPSSI.

1. Communication Skills
2. Entrepreneurship
3. Community-Based Psychosocial Support Intervention Strategies
4. Research Methods
5. Social Service Workforce
ABOUT THE BACHELOR OF ARTS IN PSYCHOSOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Taking the results of the two surveys mentioned above and to meet the needs of the society and the requirements of the country’s local relevant context of working with children and youth, and those relating to the academic credit points for the programme at UNESWA, it is proposed to include some more course modules to offer a proposed Bachelor’s Degree programme in Psychosocial and Economic Support. Broadly the subject areas covered are: psychosocial support and entrepreneurship courses. The basic structure of the proposed programme is given below in Table-1.

Table-1. Basic Structure : Distribution of Courses Semester-wise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>No. of Courses</th>
<th>Total Credits</th>
<th>Total Credits</th>
<th>Cumulative Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester-I</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>36.6 (Certificate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester-II</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester-III</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>112.6 (Diploma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester-IV</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester-V</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester-VI</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester-VII</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>146.6 (Degree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester-VIII</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>146.6</td>
<td>146.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the University of Eswatini Academic Regulations, a student shall only be awarded a qualification after completing a minimum number of credits as mentioned hereunder (UNESWA Calendar 2021/2022).

(i) A minimum of 36 credits required for a Certificate programme.
(ii) A minimum of 108 credits required for a Diploma programme.
(iii) A minimum of 144 credits required for a 4-Year degree programme.

The proposed Bachelor’s Degree in Psychosocial and Economic Support programme will offer courses comprising of psychosocial support and entrepreneurship support with employability skills in both the theoretical foundations and practical applications. Courses include general education and psychosocial support courses. Further, this programme includes areas such as: Entrepreneurship, Accounting, Principles of marketing, Information and Communication Technology and Management of Organizations, etc., to address the youth challenges of skills training and employment opportunities.

On completion of the programme, the trainees will be able to: (i) apply principles of socio-psychology and personal & professional development to protect the children and youth; (ii) apply the principles of communication skills to communicate effectively and efficiently and facilitate care and support for children and youth at risk; (iii) apply computer applications in community-based work with children and youth; (iv) apply entrepreneurial skills to motivate youth to start income-generating activities for their livelihood.

Multiple Entry and Multiple Exit options

The 4-year Degree programme is designed with a flexible system of multiple entry and multiple exit option to award three Qualifications (Certificate, Diploma & Degree). The entry and exit options would be as mentioned hereunder.

- A certificate is awarded after completing 1 Year of Study of a 4 Year Degree programme.
- A diploma is awarded after completing 3 Years of Study of a 4 Year Degree programme.
- A bachelor’s degree is awarded after completion of a 4 Years of Study of a Degree programme.

For the above programme, the entry points are three and the exit options are also three. The entry points are based on entrance requirements, and the exit options are based on the candidate’s convenience/ workload options.
PROPOSED COMPETENCY BASED TEACHING-LEARNING THROUGH MULTI-MODEL CHANNEL

As a national institution of higher learning UNESWA has been playing its rightful role in the development of skills that participate fully in psychosocial and economic development at Certificate level and now the UNESWA through IDE initiates to extend its role to up skill or enhance the knowledge of learners in their relevant field through a Degree programme in Psychosocial and Economic Support targeting to develop employability competencies for (i) Frontline Practitioners (Care Givers) for Psychosocial Development and (ii) Potential and practicing MSME entrepreneurs for socio-economic development as a whole.

The model has four stages: (1) Needs Analysis, (2) Planning, Design & Development, (3) Implementation, and (4) Evaluation. Each stage of the model is based on learning outcomes, which would have been determined after a thorough analysis of the learners’ needs. Formative evaluation will be done after each stage of competence to ensure that the learner objectives are in focus. After the completion of the course, a summative evaluation will be done to determine the overall performance of the implementation process as shown in the Figure-1 below.
COMPETENCY BASED TEACHING-LEARNING THROUGH MULTI-MODEL CHANNEL

1. Identification of Training Needs
2. Curriculum Planning, Design & Development
3. Training Implementation through Multi-Channels
   - (a) Study material
   - (b) Online Learning
   - (c) F2F Sessions
   - (d) Practical Sessions
   - (e) Internship Training
   - (f) Library Facilities
4. Formative Evaluation
   - Psychosocial support competencies
   - Entrepreneurship competencies
   - Work place competencies
   - Problem solving competencies
   - Team work competencies
   - Management competencies

Institutional Network
- 1. SEDCO (Incubation)
- 2. Institutional Support
- 3. Government Support

Learners

Feedback

Business Development/Employment

Graduation / Prospective Entrepreneur

4. Summative Evaluation

Figure 1: Proposed competency-based teaching-learning through multi-model channel.
**Curriculum Planning, Design and Development**

Now we are at the planning stage, which involves making strategies of how to attain the learning objectives established in the Needs Analysis phase. As such now we are in the process of designing and developing a competency-based curriculum courses integrating the employability skills by following employability guidelines, which were developed through COL support (COL Workshop, 2022).

1. The curriculum is designed to promote the development of problem solving skills and creativity required in the world of work
2. Team work to promote work skills
3. Communication skills to master effective communication skills
4. Self-management skills to work autonomously
5. Entrepreneurship skills to promote entrepreneurial thinking and attitudes
6. Technology skills to empower the learners in the world of work
7. Creating networking skills to enhance professional relationships and career opportunities.
8. Integrated career guidance & counseling for career opportunities
9. Graduate attributes in order to profile learners themselves positively to potential employers
10. Internationalization for creating multi-cultural social awareness and inclusivity as core values in students.

These guidelines will help the institution measure progress made in imparting employability competencies and skills to students.

**The implementation stage**

It is the phase in which teaching-learning is delivered through multi-model channel. The objective of this phase is to ensure that the learner is able to apply the skills acquired to their psychosocial and entrepreneurial activity. During the training, a formative evaluation will be carried out to check the learners’ progress of competency. At the end of the training, a summative evaluation is carried out to determine if the learner objectives have been met. The results are used to improve the next cycle of training (See in Figure 1).

The instructional delivery is a collaborative training model. The collaborating institutions are: IDE-UNESWA, REPSSI-APSSI & SEDCO. They provide blended teaching and learning through multi-model channel. A collaborative approach in developing graduate employability is to provide opportunities for students to engage in job-focused, project based experiential learning opportunities and events. The following collaborative framework provides psychosocial and entrepreneurship education and training for students in the programme.

**Collaborative framework for teaching-learning delivery of education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Course development &amp; formal education</th>
<th>Practical training in a specialised field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course materials design and development</td>
<td>IDE-UNESWA, APSSI-REPSSI and SEDCO</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching (F2F &amp; Online) &amp; Library Facilities</td>
<td>IDE-UNESWA and SEDCO</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship/Practics in a Special Field</td>
<td>IDE-UNESWA and SEDCO</td>
<td>SEDCO and other relevant organisations provide facilities for Internship/Practicals in a specialised field with <strong>incubation centres</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After graduation, the students may have the adequate skills and competencies for the labour market, but some may not be aware of the career paths available to them and may not be familiar with the job search and interviewing process. These graduates will be attached to SEDCO for a 3-week “Graduate Enterprise Programme” to start their own business enterprise. During this 3-week programme, SEDCO assists them in all aspects, including identifying sources of finance to start the business enterprise. Therefore, this instructional network teaches business entrepreneurship for clear career path. These are skills that will bolster the entrepreneurship culture and contribute to economic development in the country. However, those graduates who have adequate skills and sufficient finance and ability to start the business, they can start their own business enterprise without seeking the assistance of SEDCO under 3 week “Graduate Enterprise Programme”.
Further UNESWA and SEDCO forge relationship with the key players in the sector like Royal Science and Technology Park, SEDCO, MSME Unit of Ministry Commerce, Trade and Industry, Financial Institutions for enterprise support to provide incubation facilities and mentorship for its graduates in the program. This ecosystem plays a pivotal role in combating poverty through creation of mass employment and contributing to inclusive economic growth and development.

CONCLUSION
In response to two surveys, the UNESWA through IDE is upgrading the current “Certificate in Psychosocial Support” programme to a Bachelor’s Degree programme in Psychosocial and Economic Support to upgrade/up-skill or to enhance knowledge of learners in their relevant field with graduate employability skills. The integration of employability skills including entrepreneurship skills is to organize and present the programme courses in a way that provide for job-ready graduates.

The 4-year Degree programme is designed with a flexible system of multiple entry and multiple exit option to award three Qualifications (Certificate, Diploma & Degree) of a 4 year degree programme as mentioned hereunder.

- A certificate is awarded after completing 1 Year of Study of a 4 Year Degree programme.
- A diploma is awarded after completing 3 Years of Study of a 4 Year Degree programme.
- A bachelor’s degree is awarded after completion of a 4 Years of Study of a Degree programme.

For the above programme, the entry points are three and the exit options are also three. The entry points are based on entrance requirements, and the exit options are based on the candidate’s convenience/ workload options.

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