

**The effectiveness of a
value-added social curriculum to
empower working mothers
studying at an ODL institution**

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12 May 2022

Introduction

The effectiveness of a value-added social curriculum to empower working mothers studying at an ODL institution.



- Concern regarding the increasing responsibilities that working mothers are experiencing in South Africa and the world.
- Educators and institutions must take the responsibility to assist these students by providing them with life skills that empower them after completing their studies.
- The focus of the dissertation was on answering a multi-dimensional question related to the effectiveness of a value-added social curriculum, the importance of education and support in empowering women and the role of digital and online learning in making the information more accessible.
- **What is a social curriculum?**

The Social Curriculum

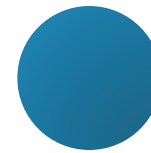
The effectiveness of a value-added social curriculum to empower working mothers studying at an ODL institution.

It is a non-compulsory set of micro-modules that provide students with information and practical applications in six areas of modern life.



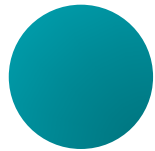
Finances

Financial knowledge and the capacity to make sound financial decisions are imperative. The Finances learning area will introduce students to saving, budgeting, and topics related to financial independence and growth.



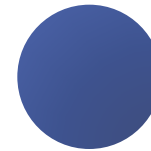
Career

A career is not built overnight; it takes planning and determination to learn how to steer in the competitive labour market. The career learning area will provide students with practical skills, tools and advice on how to start and build a career in a dynamic workplace.



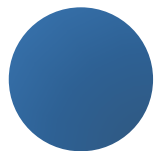
Personal Branding

With the increased popularity of digital and social media, building and maintaining a healthy, realistic online presence and reputation while navigating the digital world is a crucial skill. The Personal Branding learning area teaches students how to manage their personal and professional identity while allowing them to stand out from the crowd.



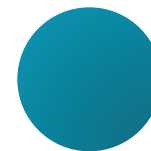
Well-being

Well-being plays a significant role in creating a successful and fulfilling life. It encompasses different areas of life, including mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health. This course area takes a holistic approach to expand engagement, productivity and self-esteem by delving into social wellness, managing work-life pressures, stress management and personal development.



Entrepreneurship

An entrepreneurial spirit is a skill that drives success both in business and in the workplace. Irrespective of students' career ambitions, the characteristics and skills of an entrepreneur can open or create new and exciting opportunities.



Digital Literacy

Entering the 4th Industrial Revolution has made technology the new normal for students to keep up to date. This course area deals with topics related to the internet, Big Data and Artificial Intelligence .



Research Question

The effectiveness of a value-added social curriculum to empower working mothers studying at an ODL institution.

If institutions expose women to relevant and practical information through digitised learning, education becomes more than theoretical knowledge.



How do working mothers, furthering their education, perceive the pressure to work and study like they have no children and raise children like they do not work or study?



How relevant are the modules to working student mothers' educational needs and personal struggles?



To what extent will additional modules on practical aspects of their lives support women in dealing with the challenges they face?



How can a value-added social curriculum empower working student mothers studying at an ODL institution?



Qualitative Research Design

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Critical Research Paradigm

Since the critical paradigm, also known as the transformative paradigm, is concerned with empowerment, the researcher chose a critical conceptual lens to examine this research's methodological facets and define the research methods used to collect and analyse data.



EDQ Research Approach

The study aimed to explore and understand the subjective experiences of the study participants through an exploratory-descriptive qualitative (EDQ) approach.



Case Study Research Type

Case studies are concentrated studies conducted on a particular individual, family, unit, organisation or community and are defined as ideographic methods of research.

Research Methods

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Selection of Participants

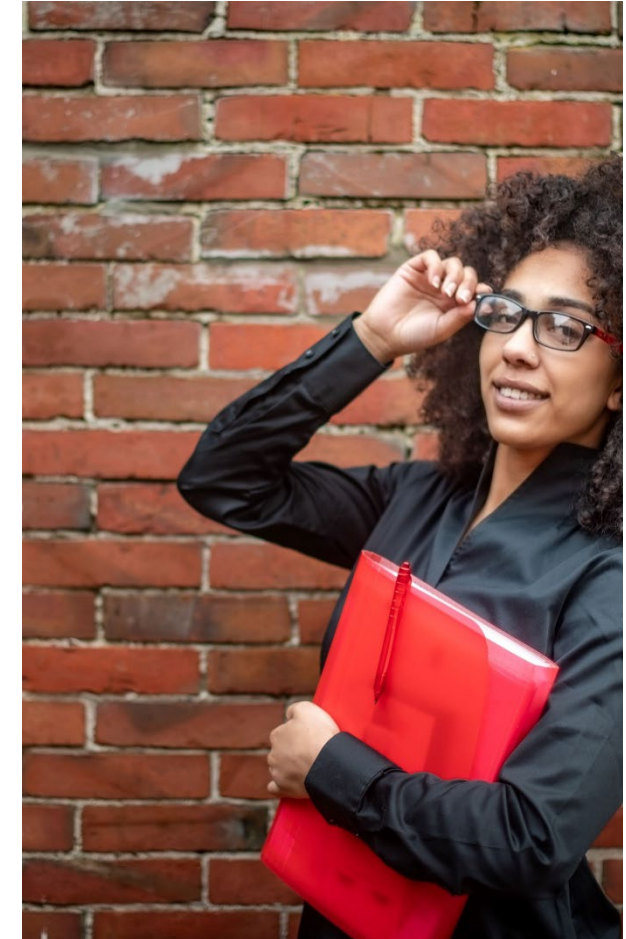
Purposeful random sampling was employed by distributing 325 online questionnaires to students who completed the value-added social curriculum and indicated that the institution might use their information for marketing purposes. Although 27 responses were collected, 13 participants met the research criteria for the study.

Data Collection

The researcher distributed 325 questionnaires with a predicted response rate of 30 participants. Although 27 responses were collected, 13 participants met the research criteria for the study. Telephonic interviews were conducted with six willing participants until data saturation was reached.

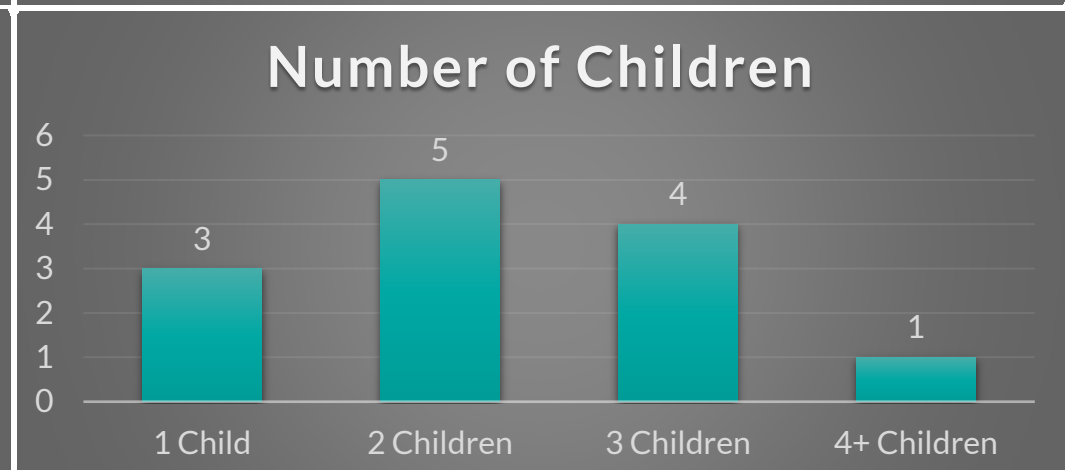
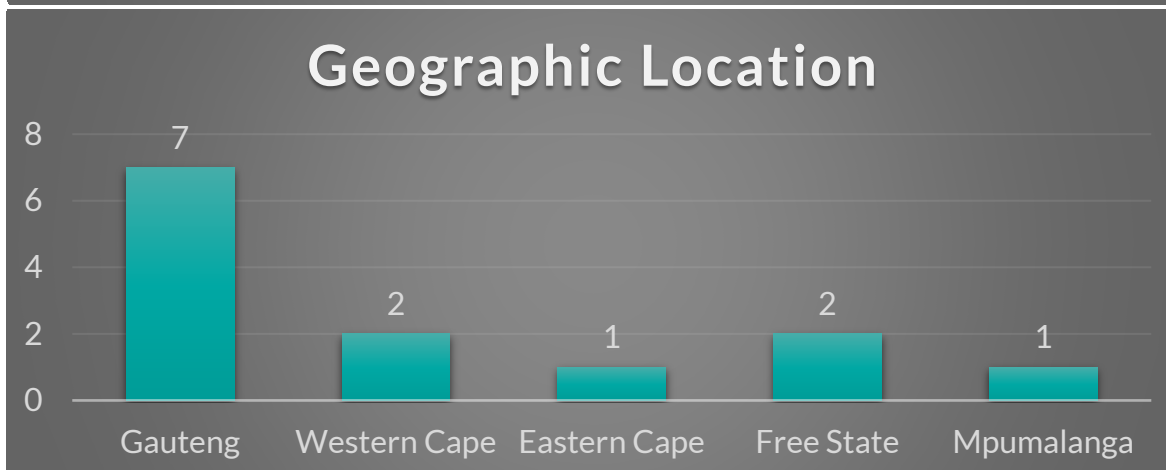
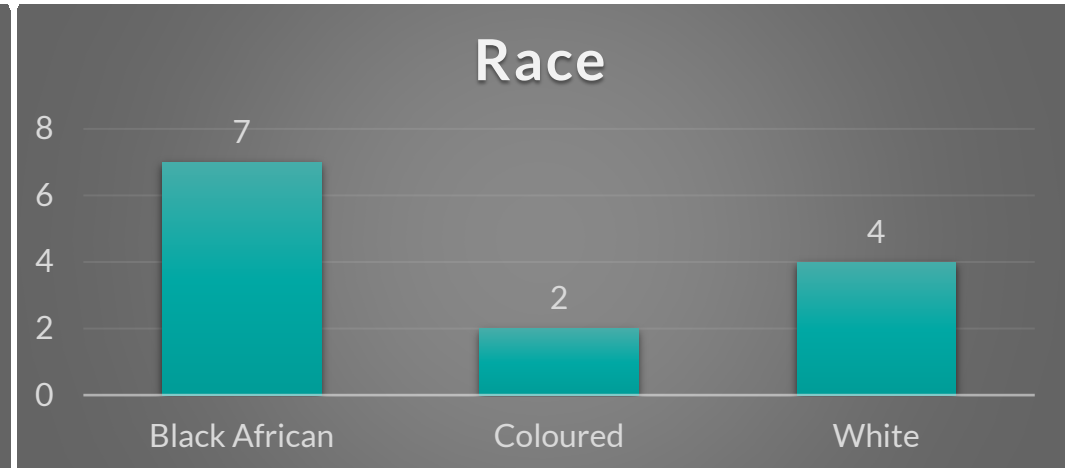
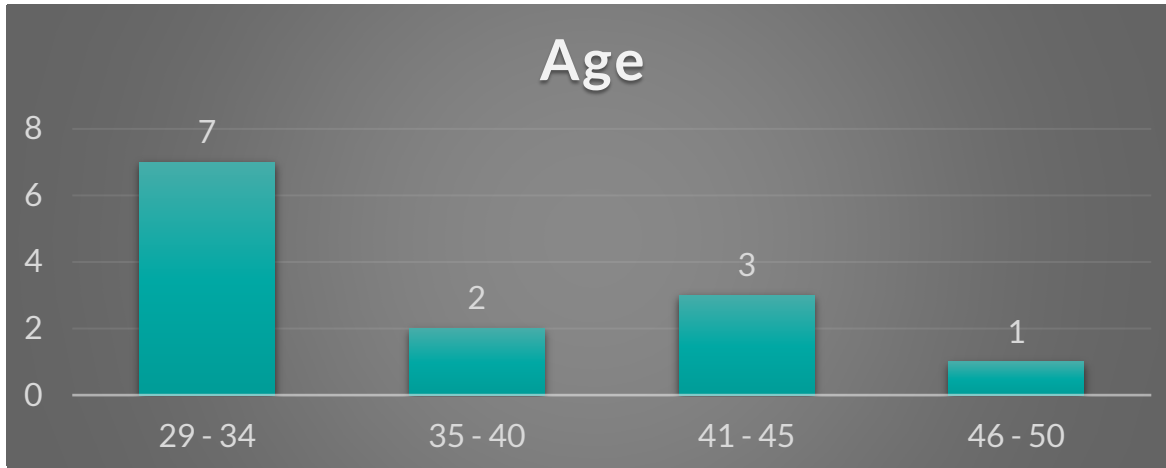
Data Analysis

In EDQ research, thematic analysis is preferred as the data analysis method because EDQ intends to “explore and describe the experiences of participants in relation to phenomena under study” (Hunter et al., 2018:5). Thematic analysis thus identified the core statements from participants, which the researcher used to form generalisations.



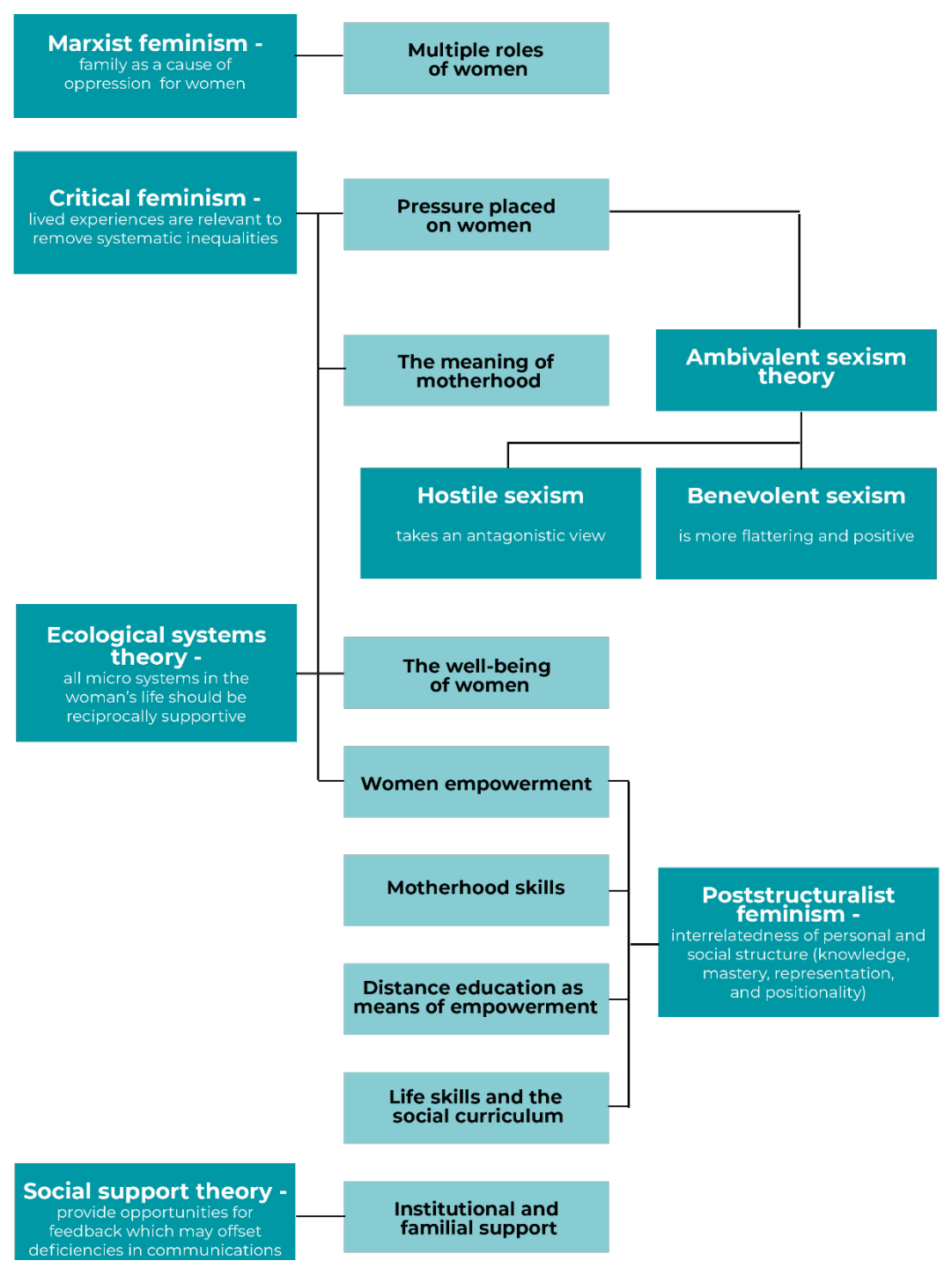
Demographic Information of Sample Population

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Theoretical Framework

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Themes & Sub-themes

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Working mothers, furthering their education, perception on the pressure to work and study like they have no children and raise children like they do not work or study



- 1: Pressure the women experience
- 2: Work-life balance

The relevance of the modules regarding working student mothers' educational needs and personal struggles



- 1: Formal and informal educational needs
- 2: The importance of education for the women

The extent of support the additional modules on practical aspects of life give women in dealing with the challenges they face



- 1: Support required to achieve aspirations
- 2: The importance of support to manage multiple roles

A value-added social curriculum to empower working student mothers studying at an ODL institution



- 1: The effectiveness of life skills gained in a distance setting
- 2: Practical, real-life application of skills gained

Empowerment of Working Mothers

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What does motherhood mean to you?

Par 1 explains that:

Being a mother is the most important role I have ever had in my life. I do everything for my children, and they always come first. Being a mother means that I will always do my best to give them a safe and happy life.

How would you describe your sense of self as a working mother and student? How does this affect your state of mind?

Par 13 said:

Honestly, it is not easy. Most of the time, I must steal family time and work; I cannot remember when last I had "me time" or went out with my husband. My life is all about work, studies, kids and homework. I am always under pressure, so I do not have weekends.

How do you, as a working mother furthering your education, perceive the pressure?

Par 1 maintains that "it is hard to juggle the roles and be good at everything at the same time". Par 3 adds, "I do not know how I manage as I work full-time, study part-time and sell stuff part-time".

What are the societal and cultural views on women studying, working and raising children in your context?

Par 13 states that:

In my culture, this is more like a norm. A woman works ten times harder than a man but is still not being recognised. I am used to it, and I always want to succeed in everything I set my mind on. I want to lead by example for my kids and the society at large.

Would you still be able to find time to engage in the DO LIFE modules if you had limited time available?

Par 10 indicated that the "platform is easy to navigate, which saves one plenty of time" and goes on to say in the interview that:

I think I will still find time to do them even if I do not have time. We are always on our phones, so I do not believe that people do not have any time for anything. You make time for what you think is important, so I would definitely make time. Everybody has time. They choose what they do with it.

As a woman with multiple roles, do these modules help you deal with the high demand on time and resources you face, or did it place a higher demand on you?

Par 4 said, "you battle at first, but somehow you just cope; what helped me was praying and the Lord's help." Par 1 said, "It helped me organise my life better, and I think it is important to make the time to learn, whether it is informal or formal studies. We should never stop learning." Par 5 stated, "They really help as sometimes we do not pause to find answers for what we face daily."

What are the limitations or barriers you face as a mother?

Time and financial resources were the main limitations mentioned by Par 1, Par 4, Par 7, and Par 13. For Par 5, the most significant limitation was the number of roles she has, "you can never plan your time with books; you always have to mix it with one or more things to do." Par 6 identified her most significant limitation as a "lack of knowledge." Par 2 saw her most significant limitation as "I could not give my children a better future to study further because I am a single mother." Finally, for Par 10, it is "self-doubt and mom guilt."

Empowerment of Working Mothers

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Do you think there is a need to provide students with additional units of study related to everyday life?

Par 2 feels that:

It helps me a lot, especially with today's stress in the society that we live in, because everything is a rush. So, it helps me a lot to cope with that mainly. I did all of the modules, and they help you prepare your life better.

Par 3 explained that "there was a lot I learned about my personal branding and credit score which I did not know before." **Par 5 felt that they receive** "advice on daily issues of life."

Par 9 thought:

It is very important because we learn many things in Do Life, especially as mothers. For example, you learn how to manage parenting and education when you are a parent.

Both Par 10 and Par 13 mention the lack of life skills in the basic education curriculum, with Par 10 stating that "the standard basic education curriculum does not offer life-related modules."

Par 12 says in her interview that:

In my opinion, it just makes it much easier to understand what you are doing, whether it is in the workplace or if you are an entrepreneur. For example, looking at what the Do Life programme did for me, it gave me a better view and broader understanding of the workplace itself. We tend to do it because we are supposed to do it but having a broader and in-depth understanding of why it is being done draws you more towards entrepreneurial skills if you want to go on with that in your life. Also, because I come from an entrepreneurial background, I may see things on a deeper level.

Do these modules help you deal with the struggles you face in life?

Par 11 learned "how to use or save money."

Par 13 has engaged in the budgeting module and stated that:

It was straightforward. I managed to create my monthly budget. Unlike the textbook, they show you what to do and how to do it.

Par 3 shared,

My credit score was very low, and I improved so much since doing the course. My score went from 490 to 650 in less than a year.

Par 8 said in the questionnaire that:

I managed to make arrangements for my debt, and I even saved a lot. So now I am starting my own company.

Furthermore, continued during the interview to share that:

When I started doing the Do Life courses, I learned a lot. At first, I was not paying my debts, and I spent my salary within a day. So, when I started doing the Do Life courses, I started budgeting, paying and making arrangements for my debts, settling some other accounts, started my own business and got offices in town. Of course, I have to now buy supplies for the company, but because of the budgeting module, I can buy them as I can and on credit.

For Par 10, the biggest struggle the social curriculum assisted with was "having a proper CV to send off when you are looking for a job. Most of us do not learn that, and it helped a lot if you want to advance in your career or move around in your career."

Par 12 went into detail during the interview on how the emotional intelligence module assisted her,

I found the emotional intelligence module extremely intense because of my character on an emotional level. For me, it goes deep coming from childhood as someone who did not have emotional nurturing growing up, so basically, being an adult and not having emotional strengths because of a lack of exercise in that regard growing up. It makes it very difficult to cope as an adult if you have not had emotional nurturing growing up. When I was exposed to that module, I had to go back and start over because there was information I had to face.

Empowerment of Working Mothers

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What are your future aspirations?

Par 1 said, “I just want to give my children the best life I can, be happy and reduce my financial stresses through gaining a better education and in turn better employment opportunities.”

Par 7 wants “to be great at my job and be a wonderful mother.”

Par 3 stated, “I encourage my children to do better than what I did. So, they can learn from all my mistakes.”

Par 5 said, “I wish to better my children's future.”

Par 9 explained that she wants “to be a good mother to my kids.”

Par 10 wants “to continue learning and developing new skills and use my time to improve my life and those around me constantly.”

Par 11 stated, “belief in yourself, never stop learning and chase your dreams, above all, pass the information to your kids and teach them while they are still young.”

Par 8 explained, “I want to build them a legacy.”

Do the DO LIFE modules and your studies give you a better chance of reaching your future goals?

There was a unanimous yes on this question, with all 13 participants believing that the social curriculum gives them a higher chance of reaching their goals.

Par 10 describes the social curriculum as:

A steppingstone to what I want to do, it is a good start if I want to study even further to work and advance my career and future in most aspects of life.

Does the institution provide you with the necessary support to succeed in your studies?

Par 1 felt that “by giving the extra information on how to navigate life better, they are helping and supporting all the students.” In addition, par 3 said, “there is a lot of communication and resources available.”

Describe the support system you have at home and work?

Although some participants have great support systems in place, others indicated that they did not receive the support they needed from home and the workplace. For example, Par 3, Par 4 and Par 5 indicated that they do not have support, with Par 3 saying, “No support system, but I push through.” Furthermore, Par 4 states, “I do not have any support, my parents and family are not close to me, so I battled, it is not easy but if I can do it so can anyone.”

Empowerment of Working Mothers

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Did you notice any changes in self, motherhood, career and studies after engaging in the social curriculum?

Par 1 mentioned that:

I felt more empowered to make financial and social media decisions and take better care of myself. I also used the information on interviews to get a better job.

Par 2 mentioned that she was promoted to “assistant manager” and explained in the interview that “I can budget better, I was the type of person that would help others and shoot myself in the foot, but now I can manage better.”

Par 3 said, “I started my own part-time business selling goods, and I am doing pretty well thus far”. Par 4 felt that the social curriculum assisted her with stress management because “your mood and health can suffer due to stress levels.”

Par 5 mentioned that “I changed a lot as I was motivated and had the vision and passion for my career and future.” Par 6 made a bold statement, “I am fully developed physically and mentality”.

Par 7 felt like the social curriculum gave her hope because at “times I have lost all hope.”

Par 10 said that “one becomes more open-minded to change and to doing things differently” and continued in the interview:

I started to take my finances very seriously and started with a budget every month. So, I can see a difference, see where my money is going now and make personal changes to my budget. And also, career-wise, research about the career that I am in and how I will grow if I want to grow and it opens your mind up to things you are already doing but are just like doing more research to see what your career is about and what your finances are about not being so ignorant as before.

Would you recommend the DO LIFE modules to other working mothers?

Par 1 stated that “it provides you with valuable information that you can use to better yourself.” Par 2 said yes, “because it teaches you how to deal with stress and everyday coping in life and the rush we live in.” and continued to mention in the interview that:

They would benefit most by completing the well-being modules with the COVID 19 going around because many people are losing their jobs. It is stressful with everything also getting expensive. However, on the other hand, it gives you hope and a better understanding of life. I am very grateful I had the opportunity to complete them and maybe want to see more of it and continue with my formal studies because when I was younger, I did not have the opportunity to study and now that I have the opportunity, I will continue learning where I can.

How effective are the DO LIFE modules in providing you with practical information that you can use?

Par 8 said, “I did not have information before, but now I am knowledgeable I know a lot”, and in the interview, mentioned:

I think they are fine, and I do not feel they should change anything; the short modules give you enough information. For example, I did not know the difference between assets and depreciation and the long-term investment of a house vs a short-term investment like a car.

According to Par 11, “I am currently running my small business with the help of Do Entrepreneurship”, and added in the interview,

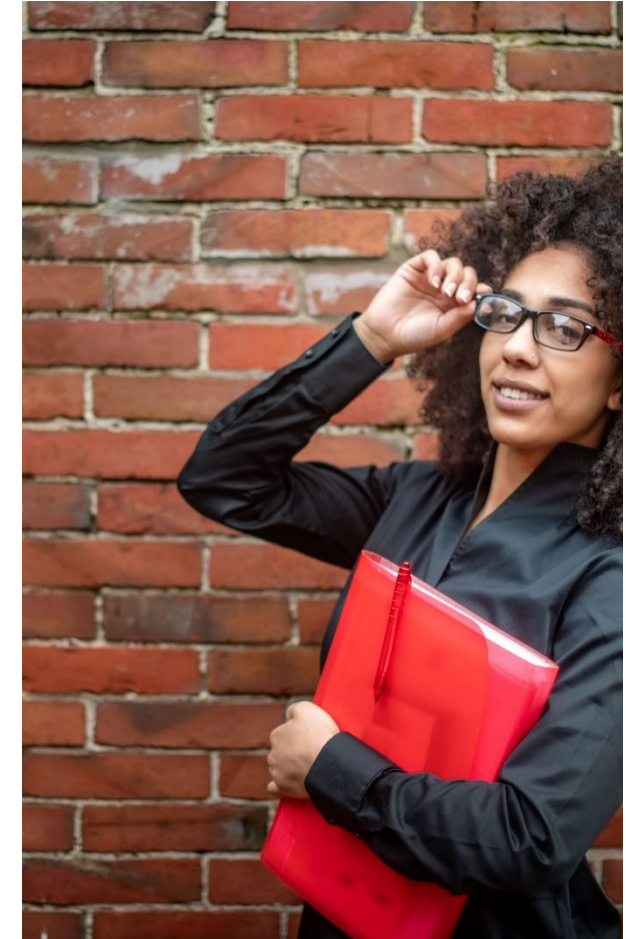
I went through a lot of information and found it valuable for my small business and not just successfully running it.

Par 12 stated that “in many aspects, it is extremely helpful and the personal growth is awesome”, and Par 13 said, “they are very useful, e.g. if I want to start the business they provide you with the steps to take and a list of documents you will need and where to find those documents”.

Further Research & Conclusion

The effectiveness of a value-added social curriculum to empower working mothers studying at an ODL institution.

- Research can be conducted on the specific information needs students studying through an ODL institution have and what additional course areas or modules would empower them in their lives, careers and studies.
- Additional research can also establish the effects of the social curriculum on students prior, during and after completion of the modules to establish the long-term outcome of providing students with practical life skills and determine the differences in finances, career, well-being, entrepreneurship and digital literacy between those who did participate versus students who did not engage in the social curriculum.
- The study revealed that providing working student mothers with additional practical information and modules on everyday life empowers them to face the challenges they experience in managing their roles. The women view such an initiative as additional support from their institution that they can use as a steppingstone in bettering their lives. After engaging in the social curriculum, multiple positive and real-life applications emphasised the need for institutions to provide holistic support to students rather than only providing them with academic support.



Thank You for Listening