



The Contribution of Open and Distance-Learning Methodology on Custodial Rehabilitation of Prison Inmates in Kenya

La contribution de la méthodologie de l'apprentissage ouvert et à distance à la réadaptation des détenus au Kenya

Marygorety Akinyi Otieno

Department of Sociology, Social work and African Women Studies,
University of Nairobi, Kenya.
cmgakinyi@gmail.com

Patrick Lumumba Aghan

Department of Sociology, Social work and African Women Studies
University of Nairobi, Kenya.
aghanpat@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study examined the contribution of open and distance learning methodology on the custodial rehabilitation of prison inmates in Kenya. The researcher hypothesized that open and distance learning methodology practices do not facilitate the rehabilitation of inmates in Kenyan prisons. Despite the provision of educational opportunities for inmates in Kenya, studies show that there are no effective open and distance learning strategies which enhance the rehabilitation of inmates. The study was guided by rehabilitation and lifelong theoretical frameworks (Robinson and Crow, 2009). The study employed internal and external desk research techniques. This comprised of online sources, Government of Kenya prison data and published journals. The researcher reviewed the literature on research findings on the perception and experiences of incarcerated offenders on short sentences in correctional facilities in Kenya. The study established that a significant number of correctional facilities in Kenya have not embraced the use of open and distance learning methodologies. The results further established that there was inadequate infrastructure in Kenyan correctional facilities to support the effective rehabilitation of prison inmates. The study also established that a limited number of prison staff had the requisite technical skills and competencies to supervise inmates who had an interest in participating in open and distance learning programmes. No policy

framework supported the use of open and distance learning methodology in correctional facilities. The study recommends that for inmates to be rehabilitated, there is a need to strengthen the use of open and distance learning methodologies in correctional facilities.

Keywords: Assessment, correctional facility, correctional program evaluation, correctional rehabilitation, criminogenic needs, distance learning, open learning.

Résumé

L'étude a examiné la contribution de la méthodologie de l'apprentissage ouvert et à distance à la réadaptation des détenus dans les prisons du Kenya. Le chercheur a émis l'hypothèse que les pratiques en matière de méthodologie d'apprentissage ouvert et à distance ne facilitent pas la réinsertion des détenus dans les prisons kenyanes. Malgré les possibilités d'éducation offertes aux détenus au Kenya, les études montrent qu'il n'existe pas de stratégies efficaces d'apprentissage ouvert et à distance qui améliorent la réinsertion des détenus. L'étude a été guidée par les cadres théoriques de la réadaptation et de l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie (Robinson et Crow, 2009). L'étude a utilisé des techniques de recherche documentaire internes et externes. Il s'agissait de sources en ligne, de données sur les prisons du gouvernement kenyan et de journaux publiés. Le chercheur a passé en revue la littérature sur les résultats de recherche concernant la perception et les expériences des délinquants incarcérés pour de courtes peines dans les établissements pénitentiaires du Kenya. L'étude a établi qu'un nombre important d'établissements pénitentiaires au Kenya n'ont pas adopté la méthodologie de l'apprentissage ouvert et à distance. Les résultats ont également montré que les infrastructures des établissements pénitentiaires kenyans étaient inadéquates pour permettre une réadaptation efficace des détenus. L'étude a également établi qu'un nombre limité de membres du personnel pénitentiaire possédait les aptitudes techniques et les compétences requises pour superviser les détenus désireux de participer à un programme d'apprentissage ouvert et à distance. Il n'existe pas de cadre politique soutenant l'utilisation de la méthodologie de l'apprentissage ouvert et à distance dans les établissements pénitentiaires. L'étude recommande de renforcer l'utilisation des méthodologies d'apprentissage ouvert et à distance dans les établissements pénitentiaires afin de réhabiliter les détenus.

Mots-clés : Évaluation, établissement correctionnel, évaluation du programme correctionnel, réadaptation correctionnelle, besoins criminogènes, apprentissage à distance, apprentissage ouvert.

Background of the Study

Distance-Learning is regarded as the main pillar of rehabilitating prisoners and hence accessibility to it is critical in meeting the criminogenic needs of offenders. According to Anders and Noblit (2011), access to flexible lifelong education is a critical tool used by criminal justice experts to rehabilitate inmates globally (Moreira et al., 2017; Papaioannou et al., 2018). Distance-learning has been viewed as a moral and fundamental right to all. It is universally accepted that access to educational facilities by vulnerable persons such as prisoners is a fundamental human right which should be respected by all governments globally (Añaños et al., 2019). Specifically, education as a fundamental right is offered to prisoners in order to promote their rehabilitation and reintegration into society (Czerniawski, 2016). Rehabilitation offers prisoners a unique opportunity to acquire technical and vocational skills which is vital for their absorption into the job market and productive livelihood (Meyer et al., 2010). Prisoners who have been successfully rehabilitated are able to desist from a relapse into criminal behaviour and remain out of prison as well as support themselves and their respective families economically.

Research show that use of open-learning has gained popularity in several correctional facilities (Johnson, L. R. 2021, Koome et. Al, 2019). In the contrary, Pike and Adams (2012) and Costelloe (2014) argue that offender participation in educational programs is not an assured means of offender rehabilitation. For example, the above authors consider the fact that offender access and participation in education programming has not significantly contributed to recidivism reduction in the United Kingdom. This is further elucidated by the provision of higher education program offered in many institutions of learning (Kibuku et. Al, 2020). Review of literature show that approximately 1700 students benefit from open-learning across most prisons in the United Kingdom annually (Ludlow et. Al, 2019).

However, in many Western jurisdictions such as Australian and United Kingdom prisoners are not authorized to use open-learning as a result of security limitations regarding the use of internet facilities (Reisdorf and Jewkes, 2016). Despite such restrictions, there is evidence that basic formal education and training is still being offered to prisoners in correctional institutions even though such learning facilities have largely remained rudimentary (Conrad, 2016). However, in the recent times, a limited number of prisons in the United Kingdom have embraced the use of virtual learning which transmits teaching and learning process as well as allows student prisoners to receive rapid feedback from online assessments and participate in the wider learning community (Producers et. al, 2022). Review of literature show that despite the implementation of educational rehabilitation programs, recidivism rates of inmates has remained high in Kenya ranging between 40-60% (Omboto, 2013). In order to mitigate against this unfortunate trend, there is need to re-examine and explore strategies of strengthening educational rehabilitation programming in correctional facilities.

While studies have been conducted on the efficacy of custodial rehabilitation, no empirical studies have examined how open-learning methodology impact offender rehabilitation in Kenya. In view of the foregoing argument, there is need to re-design rehabilitation programs in order to help offenders achieve some aspects of rehabilitation.

Statement of the Problem

Empirical studies show that despite the implementation of numerous educational programs in Kenya's correctional facilities, there is no flexible educational program with a special feature of Open and Distance-Learning modalities (Onyango, 2013; Wafula and Koome, 2018). Despite the provision of different models and methodologies of learning in Kenya's correctional facilities, studies show that there is no education policy and strategy that implements and promotes distance-learning in correctional facilities. This has led to a slow pace towards recidivism reduction and lack of attainment of offender rehabilitation nationwide (James, 2017; Adekanmbi and Ezikpe 2018). The problem has further given rise to increased recidivism rates, overcrowding, poor hygienic conditions and widespread insecurity within Kenya's

correctional facilities. For example, in Kenya correctional facilities currently operates at double capacity with an average offender population of over 54,000 nationwide (Kenya Prison Service, 2016). This translates to an overpopulation of 55% above the official correction institutional capacity (Kenya Prisons Service, 2016). As a result, many inmates end up relapsing into crime hence become victims of re-imprisonment. The problem of lack of a flexible and open education methodology in Kenya has therefore, challenged the practicality and effectiveness of open and distance-learning methodology (Wafula and Koome, 2018).

Review of literature show that Kenyan correctional facilities have persisted with rates of re- arrests and re-imprisonment of offenders rising from 35% to 40% between years 2008 to 2012 (Omboto, 2013). Recently in 2021 the Government of Kenya pardoned and released over 10,000 reformed offenders (Kenya Prisons Service, 2021), yet over a half of them posses inadequate educational skills that would enable them to be productive in the job and labour market. The above scenario is a reflection of the existing problem of lack of access to an appropriate mode of education system that would be effective in the rehabilitation of inmates in Kenya's correctional facilities. The foregoing problem linked to low education achievement level has led to inmates' deficiency in livelihood and technical skills which are vital for their ultimate rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The study is guided by the following questions.

- 1) Are there inmates studying through distance learning methodology in the correctional facilities in Kenya?
- 2) What is the influence of distance-learning methodology on rehabilitation of inmates in the correctional facilities in Kenya?
- 3) What are the challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning methodology in the correctional facilities in Kenya?

Theoretical Framework

The study employed rehabilitation and lifelong learning theories (Drewery, 2017) to guide the study. The study established that the

above theories were relevant in explaining the fact that open and distance learning played a positive role in influencing offenders' attitude and behavioural tendencies towards crime.

Rehabilitation Theory

According to Dent H et. al, (2020), rehabilitation is the process of restoring an individual to his/her former status before delinquency or criminal conduct. It involves ensuring that the individual accesses life skills to enable him/her earn a living. In a correctional facility context, rehabilitation includes transmission of knowledge and skills, which prepare prisoners for reintegration into the community. Rehabilitation includes all prison programmes that are intended to influence inmates' behaviour positively so that they develop the ability to desist from relapse into criminal behaviour. The purpose of rehabilitation is to reduce the exhibition of re-offending behaviour and equip prisoners with skills that can help them positively (Petrich, D.M, 2020).

Lifelong learning Theory

Lifelong theory is a subset of modes of learning transmitted to adults, prisoners and persons who are considered disadvantaged as a result of their socio-economic conditions (Drewery, 2017). Lifelong learning is viewed by scholars as the type of education offered throughout one's life – from the cradle to the grave – regardless of the period of life, space, gender, or status (Formosa M, 2019). Usually it involves the process of acquiring knowledge, skills and vocational competencies which are vital for an individual's productive living. Potentially, it provides a second chance for offenders to access educational opportunities without discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, social class, disability or geographical location (Moore R. L, 2020). Governments often invoke social inclusion as a policy imperative to provide learning opportunities for groups of people previously disenfranchised from mainstream (adult) education provision (Formosa, 2019). Historically, prisoners have undergone such dislocation from conventional education structures (Boakye K.E et, al. 2021).

Methodology

The study employs both internal and external desk research methodology to conduct the study and ascertain its findings (Creswell, 2014). The method was found relevant while examining findings of various empirical studies on the contribution of distance education on rehabilitation of inmates in Kenya. Secondary data was accessed, analysed and reported in a descriptive format (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, Kenya prison's strategic plans, annual reports, statistical data, and journals were used as secondary sources. Online sources were used to obtain data and evaluate the contribution of open education methodology on rehabilitation of inmates in Kenya. The findings have been reported to facilitate decision making and to facilitate policy reforms and formulations in all penal institutions in Kenya.

Findings

The study sought to establish whether there were inmates who studied through distance learning methodology in the correctional facilities in Kenya? It also sought to establish the influence of distance-learning methodology on rehabilitation of inmates in the correctional facilities in Kenya? Lastly, the study examined the challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning methodology in the correctional facilities in Kenya?

In regard to whether there were inmates who studied through distance learning methodology in the correctional facilities in Kenya? The study established that majority of inmates did not have access to open-distance learning facilities in Kenya. Empirical evidence show that due to issues of insecurity, the prison authorities were reluctant to expose inmates to such facilities. The inmates were still largely dependent on rudimentary learning methods which gave no access to open-learning systems. Despite such trends it was established that inmates were exposed to diverse kinds of vocational programs.

Correctional facilities in Kenya had no infrastructure to support the implementation of distance education. Coupled with lack of policy framework to support correctional education reforms majority of inmates did not access distance education facilities. Therefore,

illiteracy levels generally remained high among inmates in Kenyan correctional facilities. Despite this setback it is the argument of the authors that there is need to expose inmates to lifelong education since it is a fundamental human right (Van Hout and Mhlanga-Gunda, 2019).

Studies show that inmates who participated in correctional education programs acquired cognitive skills that enabled them to desist from criminal activities. It is therefore important for correctional institutions to strengthen these forms of education (Msamada, 2020)). Due to the fact that rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates in Kenya was largely dependent on the extent to which they accessed and participated in open and distance learning facilities, educational facilities should be redesigned to promote open learning.

The study also sought to establish the influence of distance-learning methodology on rehabilitation of inmates in the correctional facilities in Kenya? It was established that a significant number of correctional facilities in Kenya have not embraced the use of open and distance learning practices. Due to the foregoing, open learning practices in Kenyan prisons had insignificant influence on custodial rehabilitation of inmates. The study also established that due to the stringent rules governing the use of open-learning practices, inmates hardly accessed and applied the use open-learning strategy. This impeded rehabilitation of inmates hence contributed to their criminal relapse as well as increase in overcrowding in prisons. On the whole the influence of distance education on rehabilitation of inmates was largely established to be insignificant. This is because few inmates had access and use of information technology infrastructure in correctional facilities in Kenya.

However, in the instances where inmates accessed such facilities, the level at which they used the facilities remained minimal. This is because of lack of policy framework that regulated such operations. It was further established that in cases where some limited number of inmates accessed distance education learning facilities, they became more technologically and intellectually skillful. This helped them to be rehabilitated easily following release from prison custody. Therefore,

inmates who had exposure and participated in distance education programs were less likely to relapse into criminal tendencies thus contributes to recidivism reduction.

Lastly, the study examined the challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning methodology in the correctional facilities in Kenya? The major challenges undermining effective use of distance-learning methodology in correctional facilities was identified to include low computer literacy levels of inmates and prison staff. Review of literature show that there was inadequate information technology infrastructure in most correctional institutions in Kenya.

Conclusion

The study established that open and distance learning methodology was not commonly used in correctional facilities in Kenya. Information technology infrastructure was still largely rudimentary and inadequate. An insignificant number of correctional facilities in Kenya neither accessed nor used open and distance-learning methodology in their educational programming. Therefore, this negatively impacted rehabilitation and recidivism reduction efforts within correctional facilities in Kenya.

A limited number of prison staff had the requisite technical skills and competencies to supervise inmates who had interest in participating in open and distance learning program. There was no policy framework that supported the use of open and distance learning methodology in correctional facilities in Kenya. On the whole, the study found that the use of open and distance learning methodology had an insignificant effect on custodial rehabilitation and recidivism of prison inmates in Kenya.

Recommendations

There is need for penal institutions and correctional facilities in Kenya to design and institute the use of information technology in their educational programming so that inmates may be able to access and utilize such facilities as a means of facilitating their rehabilitation and reintegration into society upon release from custody.

Criminal justice system should be encouraged to sensitize and recruit inmates to participate in prison-based open and distance education programs. This is because inmates who participated successfully in such programs are more likely to break away from the habits of relapsing into crime.

The Government of Kenya should introduce prison rehabilitation policy which authorizes access and use of information technology infrastructure as a method of facilitating rehabilitation of inmates.

There is need to build capacity of prison staff so that they may be able to acquire requisite information technology skills and competencies. This would enable them to supervise the use of Information Technology facilities by inmates. In addition, there is need to involve private organizations and stakeholders in the provision of relevant infrastructure for distance learning in correctional facilities in Kenya.

Disclaimer Statement This journal article is part of a study entitled: *The Contribution of Open and Distance-Learning Methodology on Custodial Rehabilitation of Prison Inmates in Kenya* presented at the 6th ACDE Triennial Virtual Conference on 28th & 29th September 2021.

References

- Adekanmbi, G., & Ezikpe, U. (2018). Prison Education in Nigeria. In *Strategic Learning Ideologies in Prison Education Programs* (pp. 197-214). IGI Global.
- Añaños Bedriñana, K. G., Añaños Bedriñana, F. T., & Rodríguez Martín, J. A. (2019). Exercising fundamental rights in punitive conditions: education in Spanish prisons. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 1-15.
- Anders, A. D., & Noblit, G. W. (2011). Understanding effective higher education programs in prisons: Considerations from the incarcerated individual's program in North Carolina. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 77-93.
- Boakye, K. E., & Akoensi, T. D. (2021). Doing time: Young people and the rhetoric of juvenile justice in Ghana. In *The Palgrave International handbook of youth imprisonment* (pp. 77-103). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Conrad, S. (2016). *Prison librarianship policy and practice*. McFarland.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. Sage Publications.
- Czerniawski, G. (2016). A race to the bottom—prison education and the English and Welsh policy context. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(2), 198-212.
- Dent, H., Nielsen, K., & Ward, T. (2020). Correctional rehabilitation and human functioning: An embodied, embedded, and enactive approach. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 51, 101383.

- Drewery, D., Nevison, C., Pretti, T. J., & Pennaforte, A. (2017). Lifelong learning characteristics, adjustment and extra *Education* -role performance in cooperative education. *Journal of and Work*, 30(3), 299-313.
- Formosa, M. (2019). Active ageing through lifelong learning: The University of the Third Age. In *The University of the Third Age and active ageing* (pp. 3-18). Springer, Cham.
- Hughes, E. (2016). *Education in prison: Studying through distance learning*. Routledge.
- James, M. K. (2017). *Influence of Prison Education on Recidivism in Kiambu County, Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, School of Education, Kenyatta University).
- Johnson, L. R. (2021). Online Teaching and Learning in Correctional Facilities: Opportunities and Tensions. *Progressio*, 42, 21-pages.
- Kibuku, R. N., Ochieng, D. O., & Wausi, A. N. (2020). e-Learning Challenges Faced by Universities in Kenya: A Literature Review. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 18(2), pp150-161
- Koome, S. G., Wafula, C. M., & Nyonje, R. O. (2019). Educational Programmes as Key Variable Towards Change of Behavior Among Inmates in Correctional Facilities in Kenya. *system*, 9(11).
- Ludlow, A., Armstrong, R., & Bartels, L. (2019). Learning Together: Localism, Collaboration and Reflexivity in the Development of Prison and University Learning Communities. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, 6(1), 25-45.
- Meyer, S.J., Fredericks, L., Borden, C.M., & Richardson, P.L. (2010). Implementing postsecondary academic programs in state prisons: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 61(2), 148–163.

- Moreira, J. A., Reis-Monteiro, A., & Machado, A. (2017). Higher education distance learning and e-learning in prisons in Portugal. *Comunicar. Media Education Research Journal*, 25(1).
- Moore, R. L. (2020). Developing lifelong learning with heutagogy: contexts, critiques, and challenges. *Distance Education*, 41(3), 381-401.
- Msamada, R. D. (2020). *Female access to diploma education through open and distance learning: a case of the selected adult education centres in Morogoro region* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Dodoma).
- Omboto, J.O. (2013). The Challenges facing rehabilitation of prisoners in Kenya and mitigation strategies. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*: June. Vol. 2, No2 ISSN 2307-227x.
- Onyango, O. J. (2013). The challenges facing rehabilitation of prisoners in Kenya and the mitigation strategies. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 2(2),
- Papaoannou, V., Anagnou, E., & Vergidis, D. (2018). Adult Inmates' Motivation for Participation in Educational Programs in Greece. *International Education Studies*, 11(6), 132-144.
- Petrich, D. M. (2020). A self-determination theory perspective on human agency, desistance from crime, and correctional rehabilitation. *Journal of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology*, 6(3), 353-379.
- Pike, A., & Adams, A. (2012). Digital exclusion or learning exclusion? An ethnographic study of adult male distance learners in English prisons. *Research in Learning Technology*, 20(4), 363-376.

- Prodgers, L., Travis, E., & Pownall, M. (2022). “It’s hard to feel a part of something when you’ve never met people”: defining “learning community” in an online era. *Higher Education*, 1-16.
- Reisdorf BC & Jewkes Y 2016. *(B) locked sites: Cases of internet use in three British prisons. Information, Communication & Society* 19(6): 777–786.
- Robinson, G., & Crow, I. D. (2009). *Offender rehabilitation: Theory, research and practice*. Sage.
- Van Hout, M. C., & Mhlanga-Gunda, R. (2019). Prison health situation and health rights of young people incarcerated in sub-Saharan African prisons and detention centres: a scoping review of extant literature. *BMC international health and human rights*, 19(1), 1-16.
- Wafula, C. M., & Koome, S. G. (2018). Influence of Prison Education Programmes on Performance of Ex-Convict Small Scale Business Ventures in Taita Taveta County, Kenya. *DBA Africa Management Review*, 8(1).