

## **Inclusion of disadvantaged people in National Open University of Nigeria: Correctional Services Inmates' Perspective**

### **Inclusion des personnes défavorisées à l'Université nationale ouverte du Nigeria: le point de vue des détenus des services correctionnels**

**Louis O. Akpan<sup>1\*</sup>, Okeoghene Mayowa-Adebara<sup>2</sup> & Omolara J. Oluwatuyi<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Educational Foundations, National Open University of Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Library Science, National Open University of Nigeria

<sup>3</sup> Department of Social Justice Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

\*Corresponding author: ✉ [lakpan@noun.edu.ng](mailto:lakpan@noun.edu.ng)

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#### **Abstract**

*National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has taken university education to the door-step of Nigeria Correctional Service (NCS). The hitherto marginalised prison inmates have been provided with opportunity to have access to university education within the confine of correctional facilities in the country. The study explores inclusion and impact of Nigerian correctional inmates to university education in Nigeria. The study is located within the pedestal of qualitative method. In line with qualitative approach adopted, interpretive paradigm was employed to make sense of the inmates' narrative. The researcher purposively selected twenty-one inmates for the study. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, all ethical issues were adhered to. Semi-structured interview was developed and administered on the participants. The information gathered were transcribed, coded, categorised and emerging themes analysed using narrative analysis. Findings indicated that inmates perceived university education as human development, and crime prevention and control strategies. Furthermore, the inmates stated that the acquisition of university degree has impacted their self-actualisation and offered them various opportunities for employment after jail term.*

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<sup>1</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-00028885-7425> <sup>2</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3193-5207>



*Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that Federal Government should focus on supporting rehabilitation through provision of secondary and university education in order to reduce recidivism.*

**Keywords:** Inclusion, correctional service inmates, NOUN, university education

### **Résumé**

*La National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) a étendu l'éducation universitaire aux portes du Nigeria Correctional Service (NCS) <<Les Services Correctionnels du Nigeria>>. Les détenus, autrefois marginalisés, ont désormais la possibilité d'accéder à l'enseignement universitaire dans les établissements correctionnels du pays. L'étude explore l'inclusion et l'impact des détenus nigériens sur l'enseignement universitaire au Nigeria. L'étude s'inscrit dans le cadre de la méthode qualitative. Conformément à l'approche qualitative adoptée, un paradigme interprétatif a été utilisé pour donner du sens au récit des détenus. Le chercheur a sélectionné délibérément vingt et un détenus pour l'étude. En raison de la nature sensible de l'étude, toutes les questions éthiques ont été respectées. Un entretien semi-structuré a été élaboré et administré aux participants. Les informations recueillies ont été transcrites, codées, catégorisées et les thèmes émergents ont été analysés à l'aide de l'analyse narrative. Les résultats indiquent que les détenus considèrent l'éducation universitaire comme un développement humain, ainsi que des stratégies de prévention et de contrôle du crime. De plus, les détenus ont déclaré que l'obtention d'un diplôme universitaire a eu un impact sur leur auto-réalisation et leur a offert diverses opportunités d'emploi après leur peine. Sur la base des résultats, il a été recommandé, entre autres, que le Gouvernement Fédéral se concentre sur le soutien à la réhabilitation en fournissant une éducation secondaire et universitaire afin de réduire la récidive.*

**Mots-clés :** Inclusion, Détenus du Service Correctionnel, NOUN, Enseignement Universitaire

### **Introduction**

The issue of provision of formal education to the disadvantaged or less-privileged people such as girl children, nomadic children, Almajiri children and out-of-school children has been canvassed by relevant government agencies in Nigeria. In fact, after Nigerian civil war,

successive governments have tried to provide formal education to this class of people in the country. For instance, General Yakubu Gowon established many Federal Government Girls' Colleges in many parts of Nigeria to cater for girl children education in the country (Clarke, 2021). Equally, General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976 introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) to cater for vulnerable children who could not access formal education due to lack of fund (Odewale, 2019). Similarly, General Ibrahim Babangida introduced nomadic education in 1986 to ensure that the children of the nomadic pastoralists and migrant fishermen are formally integrated into the society through formal education (Akpan, 2015).

In another vein, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in 2012 launched Almajiri education to reduce the illiteracy among Almajiri children (Teke, Katami & Khalid, 2020). Recently, President Muhammadu Buhari through Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) has come up with a proposal to establish the Open School System (OSS) to provide out-of-school-children with basic education which is at staggering 10.2 million (Jegade, 2021). All these measures were aimed at providing formal education to the vulnerable children in the society. From all indications, it would not be out of place to applaud both successive and current administration in Nigeria for ensuring that all Nigerians irrespective of place of birth, state of origin, gender, class, among others are provided with a good platform to access formal education. However, could we comfortably say that the wind of education inclusiveness blowing across the world have been embraced by all manners of people in our society? The answer to this question is on the negative. This negative response is based on the fact that there are still vulnerable people in the country, that the Federal Government of Nigeria have hitherto sidelined in the provision of formal education (Obioha, 2011). In fact, without mincing words, the government seems to have failed her Constitutional responsibility in the provision of formal education to Nigeria Correctional Service (NCS) inmates (Anyanwu, Onyechi, Adikwu, Ezegbe & Otu, 2018). However, the inability of the inmates to be provided with a good platform to access formal education made them susceptible to commit another crime, after they might have been freed from the first offense (Gaes, Bales & Scaggs, 2016). In this study, prison inmates are seen as persons who

are legally confined to a place, usually the prison, against their will by the law court due to crime they have committed.

Since the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), the institution has taken the responsibility of providing university education to the inmates of NCS in Nigeria. However, the NOUN's decision in providing university education to prison inmates in Nigeria remains its greatest commitment towards breaking all barriers to university education. Similarly, it also provides a fertile ground in extending equity and social justice to the prison inmates. A critical review of the literature indicated that studies have been conducted on prison inmates and access to higher education. For instance, Adeyeye (2019) looked at challenges and prospects of e-learning for prison education in Nigeria. Ndunagu and Tanglang (2019) conducted a study on recidivism panacea in Nigerian prisons through digital literacy: National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) initiatives. Outside the shore of Nigeria, Vandala (2019) researched on transformative effect of correctional education. Davis (2021) worked on effectiveness education for prison. Whilst Obrien (2022) looked at education as a practice for freedom, among others. From all indications, there is no study conducted on the above topic, therefore, the gap will be filled by the current study.

### **Purpose of the study**

The principal purpose of the study is to look at the inclusion of disadvantaged people in National Open University of Nigeria with a particular reference to Nigerian correctional services inmates. The specific objectives of the study are; to examine how NCS inmates perceive university education within prison wall. Furthermore, to determine the effect of university education on the NCS inmates. Based on the objectives of the study stated above, the following research questions are formulated to guide the study. How does NCS inmates perceive university education within prison wall? What are the effects of university education on the NCS inmates?

## **Theoretical framework**

In this study, the researcher deployed rehabilitation theory to tease inclusiveness and effect of university education on correctional service inmates in Nigeria. This theory was first developed by Robert Martinson in 1974, to look at several programs that have been developed for individuals or people who have been convicted of an offense. In other words, rehabilitation theory looks at those things are put in place which make criminals to change or refrain from their criminal activities once or upon their return to the society from jail. In fact, these things that actually make them to change from criminality are; receive of psychiatric therapy, counselling, vocational training, higher education, drug-rehabilitation programs (Sherman, 2002), and any other techniques which is based on scientific methods in order to reduce recidivism (Cragg, 1992). From the education point of view, any criminal once convicted and sentence to prison would stop criminality when he/she is able to proper formal education (Ellingston, 1948; Champion & Mays, 1991; Behan, 2014). In another vein, Chappell (2002) asserted that it is always cost effective to expose inmates to formal education while in prison, because they would refrain from committing crime than to spend huge money on punitive methods towards inmates, because it was asserted by Cassidy & Rydberg (2020) that punishment do not cause any positive change in human being instead it worsens. Similarly, Rhode (2004) was of the view that formal education given to the inmates within the prison enable them to leave the prison with more intellectual skills which may be meaningful and ensure long-term employment. In another hands, Ayu (2004) highlighted that prison must be an avenue for information and intellectual impartation, instead of an institution for discipline and punishment of offenders (Sheridan, 1977; Luxon, 2019; Bun, Kelaher, Sarafidis & Weatherburn, 2020). In other words, violent torture, punishment and mutilation of convicts' bodies and cruel executions does not deter criminals from committing similar or another crime. Therefore, it is high time this primitive strategy of crime control should be replaced with the provision of quality university education for inmates (Dostoyevsky, 2017). From the foregoing conversation, it is appropriate to adopt rehabilitation theory to investigate the phenomenon under study.

## **Brief genesis of education in prison**

Scholars such as Foucault (1977), Ignatieff (1978), Morris and Rothman (1998), Seeds (2022) advanced reason for the emergence of the modern prison and its desire to punish, discipline and control. Notwithstanding the desire to reform prisoners by punitive measures, there are those who wanted them to be educated through religious instruction in order to encourage them to mend their immoral ways, leave their sins behind, hence becoming law-abiding citizens. Morris and Rothman (1998) stated that prison inmates should be taught to work hard to promote personal transformation. Aside from that, O'Donnell (2016), Itzik (2023) was of the view that punishment could be transformative in itself, with the experience of detention, Mahlangu and Zivanai (2023) isolation offering an instructive opportunity for reflection. From all indications, formal education in prison is a new phenomenon that was introduced in the twentieth in Europe century (Borch, 2014). In 1787, certain concerned citizens at London Newgate Prison introduced Pennsylvania Prison Society which later metamorphosised to Correctional Education Movement (CEM) where clergyman named Sir William Rogers first offered instruction to inmates. Later on, David Snedden and some prominent reformers who were interested educating prisoners introduced compulsory attendance to majority of the inmates. Soon after, these reformers introduced juvenile correctional education to identify additional models for use in school settings (Zimbardo, Maslach & Haney, 1999; UNESCO, 2021). From there, Alexander Maconochie who was the Governor of Norfolk Island saw that punishment for prisoners was cruel, instituted many progressive programmes for prison inmates. This programme was educational in nature, whereby more marks a prisoner score in the quiz, the shorter the prison sentence. The introduction of education in the four wall of prison necessitated other countries of the world to adopt this progressive penal policy. Currently, prison inmates are doing masters and doctoral in various programmes in either conventional universities in the world or open and distance learning institutions such as NOUN (Adeyeye, 2019).

## Higher Education in the Prison

According to Earle and Mehigan (2019), Open University of United Kingdom (OUUK) has been providing prison inmates with access to tertiary education since the late 1960s. Similarly, there was a strong prison and university partnership which allowed prisoners to study for a degree during their sentence in Poland. It is pertinent to say that most of these inmates use distance learning to overcome structural barriers to university education (Becker-Pestka, 2017). In the same vein, Downes (2014) declared that an institution called Modern Humanitarian Academy (MHA) located in Russia has provided distance education from primary to higher education and postgraduate programmes to prison inmates in the country. In the area of payment of tuition fee, Downes (2014) further stated that prisoners were made to pay reduced fees for courses they offered. In recent times, the provision of university education in prison has expanded. For instance, in the United States of America many universities have been providing prison inmates with university education as part of their community outreach programmes (Zoukis, 2014). According to Martin (2019), prisons and higher education institutions collaborated to create opportunities for more than 40,000 'inside prison' and 'outside prison' learners. University of Cambridge of UK launched a similar initiative in 2015 (Ludlow, Armstrong, & Bartels, 2019). It was argued by Ludlow et al (2019) that the main objective of these learners (inside and outside) to study together is to learn with and from each other through dialogue and the sharing of experiences. The collaborative programme is aimed at challenging perception among different categories of learners hence promoting collaborative engagement and positive dialogue. Within the Nigeria context, the NOUN was the first university to introduced university education for prison inmates (Omazu 2018). Furthermore, Sabiu-Kaduna (2019) reiterated that the institution (NOUN) did not only enroll the inmates, however, it went a step further to pay for tuition fee for 3,000 prison inmates studying both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in 2019 (Ismaila, 2020).

## **Brief genesis of prison inmates in NOUN**

In 2006, NOUN introduced a study centre for the first time at the Maximum-Security Prison in Kirikiri, Lagos for educating prison inmates (Ogidan, 2010). At the formative stage of this study centre, the admission of students (inmates) was based on the procurement of the university's admission form in which most of inmates did not have the fund to purchase it (Omazu, 2018). This was because, the majority of intended applicants were incarcerated, therefore, lacked financial power to purchase the forms. In order to ensure the accessibility of the inmates to university education, the procurement of admission forms was done on behalf of the inmates by private individuals, (Ariyo, 2021) religious organisations, NGOs, and corporate institutions such as banks (Omazu, 2018). With the appointment of new Vice Chancellor in 2016, the entire process of admission was reviewed. The university management ensured that inmates wanting to enroll for university programme are provided with admission form free of charge. Moreover, tuition fees were completely given waiver for all the prison inmates (Otu, 2015). Similarly, the university also provided infrastructures and instructional materials which enable the inmates to study in a conducive environment (Adama & Agbokutaye, 2021). In furtherance to the above, the university assigned dedicated, professional counsellors and psychologists to provide counselling services to the inmates (Omazu, 2018). With initial student population of ten at Kirikiri Maximum Prison in 2006, the university now has increased to twelve Special Study Centres that cater for over three thousand inmate students in 2019 (Saleh, 2019). However, over the years, many inmate students have graduated. Currently, there are about one thousand four hundred and forty inmate students pursuing one degree programme or the other in 2023 academic year (Adesina, 2023).

## **Benefits of formal education to prison inmates**

A lot of benefits of university education to prison inmates and society has been advanced by scholars. For instance, 18-month study conducted by Jenkins, Pendry, and Steurer (1993) using four subgroups (Adult Basic Education, GED, vocational education and postsecondary students) to investigate recidivism. Therefore, findings revealed that



there was a positive and significant benefit of education for prison inmates at all levels when compared to similar inmates who did not receive any educational program while incarcerated. In a similar manner, Harer's (1994) investigation for three years using 1,205 released inmates showed a strong positive relationship between education and reduction in recidivism. In another vein, findings indicated that the more education the released inmates had upon entering the system, the less likely the inmate was to recidivate. Furthermore, Bozick, Steele, Davis, and Turner (2018) acknowledged a total of 57 studies that evaluated recidivism and 21 studies that assessed employment following inmates' participation in education programme in prison. It was also discovered that prison inmates participating in educational programmes were 28 per cent less likely to re-offend than detainees who did not participate in the programme. However, it was further established that this reduction in the rate of recidivism did not always lead to gainful employment after release. Inmates who did not participate in education while in the prison were not likely to obtain post-release employment than those who did (Bozick at al. 2018).

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The aim of the study is to explore the inclusion of prison inmates in higher education by the National Open University of Nigeria, in order to gain insight about their educational pursuit and life aspiration after jail terms. Ordinarily, quantitative methods were supposed to be used if these researchers were investigating the nature of prison inmates participating in university education in Nigeria and collecting numerical data. Since this is not the case, therefore, it is appropriate to employ qualitative approach to unravel undiluted true-life story of the participants. After all, the proponents of qualitative methods such as Umanilo, Hamid, Hamiru, Assagaf, Bula, Nawawi and Bon (2019); Bazen, Barg and Takeshita (2021) have argued that applying qualitative method in a study is to get a better understanding through first-hand experience, truthful reporting and quotations of actual conversations from the participants. In line with qualitative method

adopted, interpretive paradigm is used to understand prison inmates' lived experience as they access university education within the prison premises. The researchers draw from Kivunja (2017) position argued that the adoption of interpretive paradigm is appropriate in qualitative research in order to get into the heads of the participants being studied and to understand and interpret what they think (perceive) or the meaning they are making of the context.

## Population

The official document obtained on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2023 from the National Coordinator, Special Study Centre Office, NOUN indicated that there are twelve (12) Special Study Centres (see table 1), with a population of one thousand four hundred and forty (1440) inmate students as at September, 2023.

**Table. 1: Number of Inmate Students Per Study Centre**

S/N	Correctional study Centre	Undergraduates	PGD/ Masters	Ph.D	Total number of Inmate Students
1	ABEOKUTA	104	3	Nil	107
2	AWKA	26	4	Nil	30
3	ENUGU	247	17	Nil	264
4	ILESHA	23	Nil	Nil	23
5	IKOYI	72	8	Nil	80
6	KADUNA	63	8	Nil	71
7	KEFFI	115	12	1	128
8	KIRIKIRI	299	23	2	324
9	KUJE	224	10	2	236
10	LAFIA	19	Nil	Nil	19
11	PORT HARCOURT	154	37	Nil	191
12	UMUAHAIA	22	Nil	Nil	22
	TOTAL	1320	115	5	1440

**Source:** Adesina, 2023

From the look of things, this population is large, considering the fact that this is qualitative research which the sample size is always small.

According to Boddy (2016), sample size in qualitative research also tends to be small in order to support the depth of case-oriented analysis that is central to this mode of inquiry. Similarly, Mocănașu (2020) argued that small sample size is required in qualitative research because, as the study goes on, acquiring more data does not necessarily lead to more information. Therefore, relying on Boddy (2016) and Mocănașu's (2020) position, the researchers deployed purposive sampling technique in selecting the participants.

### **Sample Size**

Three inmates were purposively selected from each of the seven faculties of the university namely, Faculties of Science, Social Science, Arts, Management Science, Health Science, Education and Law. Out of the twenty-one (21) inmates selected, six were females. Furthermore, the inmate students were selected on the basis of the faculties they belong. There was an intense debate concerning the adoption of small sample size for the study. However, Vasileio, Barnett, Thorpe and Young's (2018) argued that samples in qualitative research usually tend to be small in order to support the depth of case-oriented analysis that is fundamental to this mode of inquiry. Drawing from the Vasileio at al. (2018) position, the researchers selected twenty-one inmates in order to in-depthly understand inmates lived narrative and experience for accessing university education.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used in gathering information was semi-structured interview. The instrument consists of fifteen interview questions which bordered on research topic and research questions developed earlier. For clarity's sake, interview questions between 1 and 8 focused on ways in which inmates perceive university education within prison wall. Whilst, interview questions between 9 and 15 addressed the effect of university education on the NCS inmates. The researchers adopted interview because it allows for collection of detailed information concerning participants' experiences and opinions (Alamri, 2019). On ethical issue, Stuckey (2014) had earlier said that in research work, human protection is paramount and necessary because of privacy and

confidentiality of participants who willingly participates on the study. Drawing from Stuckey's (2014) position, a letter of permission to interview the inmates were written to all the States Controller-General of the NCS to conduct interview with inmate students. For security purpose, the identities of the participants were not used, rather fictitious names were adopted. Furthermore, the consent form was designed and given to all participants to sign indicating their willingness to participate in the study. Additionally, the researchers assured the participants that information they volunteered will be treated for research purposes only. Permission to use an audio-recorder was granted through a signed agreement before individual in-depth interview sessions. During interview, the researchers used audio recorders and field notes to elicit information from the participants. The reason for audio recorders and field notes were to ensure that the information volunteered by the participants were accurately recorded verbatim (Rutakumwa, Mugisha, Bernays, Kabunga, Tumwekwase, Mbonye & Seeley, 2020).

### **Data Analysis**

After three months of data collection, the raw data was transcribed manually without the use of qualitative analysis software called Nvivo. The reason for transcribing the data manually is to ensure that researchers familiarised themselves with the data in order to analyse it appropriately. The transcribed data were subjected to open coding. The reason researchers adopted openly coded was to reduce the data to manageable size, and still capture the main ideas and issues that the inmates narrated. After coding, the data were categorised and the emerging themes were analysed using narrative analysis. The reason for the choice of narrative analysis, according to Barkhuizen and Consoli (2021) is to uncover the underlying ideologies embedded in inmates' stories and experience.

## Findings

**Research question 1.** How does NCS inmates perceive university education within prison wall?

The themes that emerged from the first research question were human development, and crime prevention and control measure.

### Human development

Most participants actually stated that they were surprised when the idea of accessing university education inside the four walls of a prison was first introduced to them. They went on to state that the reason why accessing university education inside Kirikiri correctional facility was a surprise to them is because within the Nigerian context, prison inmates were always subjected to punitive measure instead of corrective measure. Therefore, allowing them to have access to university education inside the prison was not only a thing of joy but very surprising. Nonso was quick to report that when he was invited by the management staff of the NOUN for course registration in the Department of Political Science, he could not believe his ears because it was a completely new innovation. Notwithstanding the view expressed by Nonso, Musa added that the introduction of university education to prison inmates aside from the fact that it enhances his literacy level, it was also seen as a form of human development. Musa was asked to explain how university education enhances human development. In his response, he said:

*I must say that education of any kind generally does not only promote intellectual skills, it also equipped the offenders to deal more effectively with daily problems encountered in the community to avoid returning to prison after their released. In fact, this is part of human development.*

In another vein, Peter explained that he was full of joy for being educated to university level in the prison. He said that the reason he was joyful was because he will be able to develop himself by acquiring master degree (M.Sc.) on Cybercrime and Forensic Studies before the

expiration of his jail term. He added that he cannot go back to crime after his release from prison, because he is armed with M.Sc and would comfortably apply for employment. The researchers interrogated further why he would not go back to crime after his release. Peter declared:

*Studying in NOUN has provided me with the opportunity to see the world differently. Before my imprisonment, I was an unrefined person who disturbed the peace of the community. In fact, this happened because I was not educated. However, my perception towards life have changed as a result of accessing university education. In fact, I have developed physically, socially, mentally and spiritually now, therefore, I cannot go back to crime with degree in my possession.*

In a similar manner, Richard reported that he really appreciative towards NOUN's effort at ensuring that he is educated to the university level during his confinement. He argued that since he registered for first-degree course with NOUN, his life has been changed positively. He claimed that he will be leaving prison yard a better person than when he came in. Furthermore, he mentioned that when he finished his jail term, he would be looking for job employment with his degree acquired from NOUN instead of political thuggery which led to my imprisonment. He concluded that acquisition of university degree is undiluted human development in itself.

### **Crime prevention and control**

Another theme that emerged from the question was that acquisition of university degree was another strategy for crime prevention and control. Udoh who is a final year student in the Faculty of Education in one of the correctional service facilities stated that he saw the introduction of university education for inmates as a measure for curbing crime in the society. He went further to tell researchers that no educated person in his right mind will go into criminality. Udoh, therefore, stated that he went into 'pick-pocket' (petty stealing) at motor parks because he was illiterate looking for a means of survival. Looking remorseful, Udoh clearly sworn that he can never go into

criminality of any kind again. He contained that his first degree will surely provide food to him and his family. In a similar manner, Zainab who was in Faculty of Management Science declared:

*I have to thank the management of NOUN for bring university education to the door-step of the correctional facilities in the country. This is what the Nigerian government should have done to prevent crimes in the society rather punitive measures towards inmates. Tell me how an ex-convict who acquired degree will go back to crime as an educated person, it is not possible. I can comfortably inform you that educating prison inmates is another strategy adopted in controlling crime in our nation.*

Notwithstanding the views expressed by Udoh and Zainab, Okotie's narrative was pathetic and an eye opener to the researchers. Okotie began by saying that some of the social vices such as kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery among others is being perpetuated by young boys who are between the ages of 14 and 35 years who are school dropped out. Citing example to portray his point, he reported that kidnapping and banditry in the Northern part of Nigeria appears to be perpetuated by young boys who are educational disadvantaged and jobless. He, therefore, calls for the introduction of free and compulsory education at all level in Northern Nigeria. Okotie applauded the management of NOUN for bring university education to the inmates as a measure of crime prevention and control.

**Research question 2.** What are the effects of university education on the NCS inmates?

The following themes were elicited from the second research question and they are explained below.

### **Self-actualisation**

Almost all the participants interviewed were of the view that university education for prison inmates offered them a better opportunity to re-discover themselves. Arikawe who is doing Bachelor of Science

(B.Sc.) in Entrepreneurship and Business Management reported that she enrolled for the program because she wanted to fulfill her lifelong aspiration of becoming a university graduate. She maintained that she felt satisfied the day she enrolled for the programme. She went a step further to narrate that she will be a fulfilled girl in life the day she will complete her degree certificate with NOUN. The trio of Aelo, Chibueze and Chinyere who are graduating students in their different fields were interesting. They stated that though they are yet to finish their jail terms, however, the possession of degree certificate is lifelong aspiration and self actualisation. In fact, Chibueze reported that he is so proud and self-fulfilling by being a NOUN student and he promised that when he is out from prison, he will look for white collar job with the degree acquired. Similarly, as evidence of self-actualisation, Aelo declared:

*Imprisonment does not only result in the loss of freedom movement and opportunities, but it also has a serious psychological effect and stigmatisation. I wish to applaud NOUN for introducing another phase in my life through the provision of university education. I will be self-actualised when I am awarded first degree of NOUN.*

### **Opportunity for employment**

It was reported by most of the participants that university education provided by NOUN gives them another opportunity to thrive in life after years of imprisonment. Specifically, Nonso and Peter said that though they were forced to enroll for a degree programme in NOUN, because they were of the view that it was meaningless exercise, until we interacted with our fellow inmates who explained the benefits of degree acquisition, hence their registration for the programme. Nonso particularly maintained that acquisition of degree certificate create opportunity for job engagement and creation. He was very enthusiastic to report that he will be engaged by one of the oil companies which is based in Niger Delta region after his master degree in Geology. He was very scientific when he argued that there is no correlation between job engagement and crime engagement. In a similar circumstance, Ojo reported that university degrees largely keep inmates from returning to



prison, instead it provides job opportunities after serving their jail terms. Zainab frowned at Basic Adult and Vocational Education classes provided by NSC to inmates that it often trains them as carpenters, plumbers, mechanics, tailors, beauticians, among others, instead of provision of formal education for white-collar jobs and self-reliance. She concluded by applauding NOUN's effort at providing inmates with formal education for job employment, security and scholarship in the country.

## **Discussion**

From the findings, it was discovered that prison inmates perceived university education provided by the NOUN management within prison walls as both human development and crime prevention and control measures. Specifically, all the participants interviewed were of the view that the degree obtained within the four walls of the prison was aimed at developing the inmates physically, intellectually, psychologically and emotionally within and outside the prison walls. In fact, inmates' acquisition of degree certificates initiates them into a better and productive citizen, instead of criminality. This finding is in agreement with Vandala's (2019) assertion which says that university education influence positively enhance inmates' capacity development. Moreover, the finding is also in line with rehabilitation theory adopted which says that the purpose of punishment is to apply treatment and training to the offender so that he/she is made capable of returning to society and functioning as a law-abiding member of the community. Though, the NOUN management looked at the provision of university education to prison inmates from the perspective of human capital development for the marginalised or vulnerable in the society, findings further indicated that university education was a strategy for crime prevention and control. In fact, it was shown by the majority of the participants that most crimes in our society today are committed by youths who are educationally-disadvantaged. From the findings, it may be argued that once a young boy is incarcerated, even for a short time, his line to formal education is broken forever, therefore, there is likelihood of committing another crime once released. In other words, it is appropriate to say that there is a strong link between low levels of education and high rates of criminality. The

finding is line with Otodo's (2017) position who stated that university education for the prison inmates reduces recidivism as well as empowers them with the academic knowledge that can make them stay off crime and become law-abiding citizens.

It was established from the findings that degree acquisition significantly impacts self-actualisation. From all indications, it can be contended that the inmate's self-concept is distorted as soon as he/she arrives prison. Therefore, provision of formal education to inmates does not only promote their personality development, personal growth, but it also ensures self-actualisation of inmates. From the look of things, the impact of formal education on youths are deep and significant and can bring change to their life that gives them an opportunity outside of a life of crime, which promotes self-actualisation. Parker (1990), Jovanić (2011), Oluwasanmi, Babatola and Mayowa, (2018) had earlier discovered that there is a positive correlation between the inmates' educational level on one hand and self-esteem and social self-actualisation on the other.

Findings indicated that formal education aside from creating social reintegration of inmates, promote job employment. It may be argued that exposing inmates to quality formal education helps immensely in improving employability which is thought to be the major factor for committing crime. The findings confirmed Hawley, Murphy and Souto-Otero (2013) assertion that university education makes prison inmates to be employable. Therefore, it should be a central part of broader 'package' of support to be offered to the inmates to enable them not to relapse into crime again (Ilechukwu & Ugwuozor, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

Since the establishment of Prison Service in Nigeria, which recently metamorphosised to Nigerian Correctional Service, this institution was known for the adoption of punitive measures in rehabilitation of inmates. Through scholarly experimentation by the NOUN management, though it has now been slowball into lifesaving programme, university education provided for the inmates was aimed at overall transformation of inmates. Aside from the inmates' overall

transformation, the positive impact that university education has for the inmates is enormous. In fact, from the inmates' perspectives, university education as championed by the NOUN was aimed at prevention of crime and inmates' empowerment.

### **Recommendations**

In line with the findings of this study, it is recommended that instead of spending huge sum of money keeping in incarcerating prison inmates, the federal government should focus on supporting the inmates through the provision of formal education in order to be self-reliance which will reduce recidivism. Secondly, the three tiers of government (local, state and federal government) in the country should assist NOUN in the provision of more funds in order to expand this noble project to all the correctional facilities in Nigeria for the benefit of inmates and society at large.

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