

# QUALITATIVE EDUCATION FOR PRISONERS: A PANACEA TO EFFECTIVE REHABILITATION AND INTEGRATION INTO THE SOCIETY

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## **Abstract**

*Incarceration of offenders has increased dramatically over the years. Nonetheless, more ex-prisoners still go back to the prison. The failure of correctional institutions to reduce crime needs to be addressed. Rehabilitation of prisoners via qualitative and vocational education is necessary. This study investigated the perception of prison staff and the academic staff of College of Education, Agbor on the effect of qualitative education on prisoners as a panacea for their rehabilitation and integration into the society. A 24-item questionnaire was developed and administered to 200 subjects randomly drawn from staff of five prisons in Delta State and the staff of College of Education, Agbor. The result showed that the respondents agreed that qualitative and vocational education for prisoners were inadequate. There was no relationship between prisoners' rehabilitation and formal education. Based on the finding, it was recommended that prisoners should be given qualitative and vocational education for rehabilitation and integration..*

**Keywords:** Prison, Prisoners, Prison Education, Vocational Education, Rehabilitation, Integration, Counselling.

## **Introduction:**

The issue of helping the disadvantaged has been a major concern to educationists. Yet prisoners who belong to this category are not given the attention they deserve in terms of education and counselling, rehabilitation and integration. There is usually a high ovation to the legal institution annually when amnesty is granted to prisoners and offenders remanded in police custody. This magnanimity, however, has not

reduced the high rate of offenders and re-offenders in our prisons. The reason is not farfetched. The issue of education, counselling, rehabilitation and the integration of this group has not been given the necessary attention it deserves. Prisoners' rehabilitation, according to Ostreicher (2003), is a politically unpopular cause. Ex-prisoners have the strong incentive to commit crimes to survive and are threats to the peace of the society. He further asserts that concerned people have ample opportunities to try a variety of rehabilitative strategies, such as counselling, job training and helping ex-prisoners to receive support. The researchers have been involved in prison religious ministry and found the high level of inhumanity of man to man in some of these prisons. It is worthy to note that some of the inmates were innocent of the crime they were accused of. Denying them the opportunity to live a normal life after serving is another level of inhumanity.

With more prisons being renovated and new ones erected to accommodate offenders, the efficacious role of prison education now becomes very imperative. Prison education has the primary task of increasing the chance of employment for ex-convicts. This will help in reducing crime rates in the country. In other words, ex-convicts will continue to re-offend unless they are given more vocational training and formal education (Curtis, 2005). Stories relayed on the popular programme, "Crime Fighters", on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) reveal this fact. Most of the criminals interviewed confessed that they had no educational qualification and no jobs. Many of them exhibited low levels of literacy and numeracy and have been in and out of the prisons severally. There is dearth of training programmes, research and literature in the area of correctional counselling for prisoners. Job training would provide opportunities for the healthy development of the positive potentials in the inmates. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to examine the extent to which prison inmates have been exposed to vocational training, formal education and counselling services. This is with a view to improving their rehabilitation and integration into the society. This introductory part will discuss the following terms more explicitly.

### **The Prison:**

A prison is the building designated by law or used by the sheriff for the confinement or detention of persons who are judicially ordered to be kept in custody. According to Lectric Law Library Lexicon (2003), a prison is a place where persons are confined or restrained from personal liberty. It can also be regarded as a correctional, detention or penal faculty. Hence

the prison is often referred to as a correctional institution where offenders are confined or punished. The prison, like vampires, drains its wards of all that makes for maturity. Osefo (1990) citing Linder (1984) claims that the prison robs inmates of all independence of thought and action and that all vestiges of autism in the individual succumb to the disintegrating process. In other words, there is a gradual decay of those traits in the personality leading to psychological degradation. The researchers are of the view that only proper education and counselling can help rehabilitate the integrity of such persons.

**The Prisoner:**

The prisoner is a person proved guilty of a crime alleged against him/her and legally sentenced to punishment of confinement in a prison. In other words, a prisoner is a person sentenced to penal servitude. The prisoner is confined with a view to correcting him or her. The ex-prisoner is one who has been released from confinement after serving his/her sentence in the prison. Are the corrections there to punish the offenders or to rehabilitate the offenders or both? The assertion of Rubin (1961) that the size of a prison population makes it quite impossible to operate prisons as centres of treatment points to answer the question above.

**Prison Education:**

Prison or correctional education is part of the prison reform movement. It is a window through which one can observe and encourage human progress. Simply put, it is the education given to prisoners to enable them leave the prison with more skills and be in a position to find meaningful and long-term employment (Rhode, 2004). According to Grehring (1972), correctional education movement began in 1789 by William Rogers to prevent a riot at the Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail. The correctional educators operate on the principles that attitude, ideas and behaviour can be corrected and that humans are capable of progressing to higher thresholds of awareness. For ex-offenders to redirect their lives away from crimes, they need one to three years of transitional services such as life skills, anger management, basic education, job training and placement. Ayu (2004) asserts that the prison must be a centre for information and not for punishment. The primary task of prison education is to increase the chances of employment by ex-offenders and hence reduce recidivism. Ostreicher (2003) asserts that people believe that preparing prisoners for release is a key to ensuring public safety. This can be done through education resulting in better communication and vocational qualifications.

**Rehabilitation:**

Rehabilitation is a transitional or after-care service rendered to ex-prisoners to avoid revolving-door re-arrests. According to Osefo (1990), prisons should be run in a progressive and more human spirit that will ensure ultimate reformation, social rehabilitation and conducive psychological climate. Incarcerating criminals is a costly endeavour. Without effective treatment programmed to help and reform prisoners, such an exercise would just be a lot of waste. This study/research attempted to find out if prison education could help in fostering ex-prisoners' rehabilitation into the mainstream of the society.

**Statement of Problem:**

There is a general consensus by well-meaning Nigerians that the prison institution needs overhauling. Today's prison system needs to be in a more progressive and humane manner, to enable inmates have ultimate reformation and vocational skills. This culminates in proper integration into the society. Therefore, the prison staff are the ones in direct contact with the prisoners and know the real state of the affairs in the prison this study attempted to address this question: 'Would qualitative education in the prison help ex-prisoners to be rehabilitated and integrated into the mainstream of society, according to prison staff's point of view?

**Hypotheses:**

The following research hypotheses were adopted to guide the study:

*Ho<sub>1</sub>*: There is no significant relationship between prisoners' rehabilitation and formal and vocational education.

*Ho<sub>2</sub>*: There is no significant difference between prison staff's opinion and those of teachers in terms of the adequacy of educational and vocational programmes rendered to the prisoners.

**Significance of the Study:**

The findings of this study will be of immense benefits to educationists, prison administrators, counsellors, curriculum planners and the government. Specifically, it will help them set out plans on how to educate, rehabilitate and integrate ex-prisoners into the society. It will equally help to improve the lot of the prisoners who will now have positive means of livelihood after serving their jail terms. Lastly, the study will help prison administrators find better ways of correcting

inmates to adjust positively to life without becoming threats to their fellow citizens.

**Methodology:**

**Research Design:**

It is a descriptive study utilizing the survey method to elicit information from the subjects.

**Population of the Study:**

The target population was all the prison staff in the five prisons in Delta State (Agbor, Kwale, Ogwashi-Uku, Sapele and Warri) and all the academic staff of College of Education, Agbor.

**Sample:**

A total of 200 subjects were used – 100 prison staff randomly selected from the five prisons in Delta State and 100 lecturers from College of Education, Agbor. The choice of the two settings was found appropriate for the simple reason that they consist of people from diverse origins and exposure. There is, therefore, a wide variety of opinions. The stratified random sampling technique was used.

**Instrument:**

The questionnaire was constructed by the two researchers based on literature relating to prison education and rehabilitation. It was given to four other lecturers in Counselling Psychology Department of Delta State University for content validation. It was titled “Correctional Institutions and Education Scale” (CIES). The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A requested subjects to give information on biodata. Section B consists of twenty-four items in relation to respondents’ opinions to issues on prison education, vocational training and rehabilitation. A 4-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree was used to score responses of subjects.

**Validity and Reliability of Instrument:**

The instrument was found to have both face and content validity by four lecturers in the field of educational research in the Department of Counselling Psychology of Delta State University, Abraka. It had a reliability coefficient index of 0.87 using the Cronbach Alpha Statistics.

**Method of Data Analysis:**

The data collected was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics for hypothesis 1 while the t-test statistic was used for hypothesis 2.

**Result:**

The results of the data analyses are presented below:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between prisoners' rehabilitation and formal and vocational education.

**Table 1:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient between Prisoners' Rehabilitation and Formal and Vocational Education

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	Calculated 'r' Value	Critical 'r' Value	Decision
Prisoner's Rehabilitation	4.23	4.23	.175	.195	
Formal and Vocational Education	3.09	.35			

\*P < .05

Table 1 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation between prisoners' rehabilitation and formal and vocational education. The calculated "r" value, which is .175, is smaller than the critical 'r' value, which is .195. The null hypothesis is thus retained. There is no significant relation between prisoners' rehabilitation and formal and vocational education.

**Hypothesis 2:**

There is no significant difference between prison staff's opinions and those of teachers in terms of the adequacy of educational and vocational programmes rendered to the prisoners.

**Table 2:** t-test Comparison between Prison Staff and Teacher's Opinion on the adequacy of educational and vocational programmes rendered to prisoners

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	Calculated 't' Value	Critical 't' Value	Decision
(Groups) Teachers	2.15	.21	1.73	.196	Retained
Prison Staff	2.90	.19			

Table 2 shows the t-test procedure between teachers' and prison staff's opinions and the adequacy of educational and vocational programmes for prisoners. The calculated t-value is 1.73 and the critical 't' value is 1.96. The null hypothesis is retained since the critical t-value is greater than the calculated t-value. There is no significant difference between prison staff's and teachers' opinions of the adequacy of educational and vocational programmes rendered to the prisoners.

### **Discussion and Findings:**

It is evident from the findings of this study that human experience reaction to certain phenomenon is a product of certain factorial interplay in their lives. The finding in hypothesis 1 indicates that the subjects believe that prisoners' rehabilitation is not related to formal and vocational education. It is surprising to note that the finding showed that there is no relationship between prisoners' rehabilitation and education. It reveals to the researchers the nonchalant attitude of people towards prisoners' welfare. It also confirms the view of Osefo (1990), who asserts that industrial plan in the prison was always unrealistic and that the supposed rehabilitation was nothing less than debilitation. He further explains that prison facilities were not suitable for rehabilitation. The truth is that people feel that prisoners do not need education. Curtis (2005) reported that less than a third of prisoners have access to education, and those who do, spend only nine hours a week in formal learning activities.

Prisoners' rehabilitation is a politically unpopular cause. Ostreicher (2003) claims that New York State spent only six per cent of its correction budget on education in 2000. He advocates that some of the savings must go to what is called transitional services or aftercare. Many prisons do prepare inmates for life after release. Even though the researchers found out from the prisons that government has been making provision for the education of the prisoners, not much have been done to help the prisoners. The prison staff's assertion that many of the prisoners have written senior school certificate examination and other vocational courses are at variance with their responses to the questionnaire on rehabilitation and prison education. This also indicates that the standard of education in prison is inadequate and unacceptable.

The result of the study also indicates that there is no significant difference in opinion between prison staff and lecturers of College of Education, Agbor on the adequacy of prisoners' vocational and formal education programmes. The findings indicate that the two groups agree

that prisoners need vocational and formal education. According to Ostreicher (2003), New Jerseyans believe that preparing prisoners for release is a key to ensuring public safety. A research poll showed that 90% of the 800 respondents supported that prisons should provide training, education and real job experience as well as drug and alcohol treatment for inmates. He further reports that 75% felt that most former prisoners will continue to need assistance after release in order to lead productive lives. If prisons are to be centres for reformation as asserted by Ayu (2004), then the issue of vocational and formal education cannot be overemphasized.

The result also agrees with the opinion by Osefo (1990) that correctional educators are needed to help identify, clarify and resolve the issues confronting the inmates. He further explains that there was need to build and restore the individual's capacities including his or her vocational ability. Incarcerating criminals is a costly endeavour, without effective treatment programmes to help reform prisoners; such an exercise would just be a mere colossal waste. Rehabilitation programmes cost far less.

#### **Conclusion:**

Prisoners are a group of disadvantaged individuals who have been dehumanized, marginalized and denied of various rights including education, vocational training, rehabilitation and integration. Prison administrators, teachers and the government have paid little or no attention to their readjustment and rehabilitation. Education is said to be the bedrock of any human endeavour in achieving development and productivity. It will help prevent ex-prisoners from finding their way back to the prisons. Remedial counselling, vocational training, formal education and their acquisition of life skills have been recommended. Government and prison administrators should provide an enabling environment for these prisoners. Correction should not be by punishment but by reformation. This is a task for counsellors and educators.

#### **Counselling Implications:**

The situation in Nigerian prisons falls below human standards and is not conducive to rehabilitation and treatment. Education leads to communication and vocational qualifications. Prisoners need to leave the jail with more skills and be in a position to find meaningful and long-term employment. Rehabilitation and integration of prisoners are indispensable. Thus:



1. Prison education could be encouraged.
2. There should be free flow of communication between the prisoners and the staff.
3. Ultimate reformation, social rehabilitation and a more conducive psychological climate should be provided to help heal the already battered prisoners.
4. The federal government should be encouraged to fund the prisons in the area of vocational and formal education. In other words, the education of prisoners should receive closer government's attention financially. Reoffenders are costing the taxpayers more money. Education plays a key role in rehabilitating prisoners and integrating them into the society. Vocational training in prisons that can prepare inmates for real jobs on their release is vital to reduce their reoffending.
5. Education in the prisons should be overhauled to ensure that inmates are offered the same quality and level of education as learners in the community.
6. Prisoners need high-quality teaching that is suited to their individual needs. There must be a department of education and skills in our prisons. Well qualified teachers should be employed.
7. The presence of a counsellor provides a new psychological experience to inmates. It is therefore recommended that correctional institutions should be provided with counsellors to use their organizational and diagnostic skills in helping inmates. Counsellors help inmates to build and restore their self-esteem and vocational abilities.
8. Prison administrators need training and retraining on how to positively influence the inmates to become well adjusted members of the society. They equally need to be trained in the management of material, human and financial resources as it affects the inmates' welfare.
9. Offenders need one to three years' transitional services to successfully redirect their lives away from crime. Thus, it is advocated that life skills, anger management, basic education and job training should be made available to prisoners.

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