



Access and Inclusion of Inmates to Education through Open and Distance Learning Mode

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ABSTRACT

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The objective of the study was to establish the extent to which inmates in Zimbabwe access education. Zimbabwe is signatory to the United Nations Declaration Charter for human rights which regard education as a basic human right that should be provided to all. Inmates are a special group who has rights to equitable access to all basic benefits that society offers. Our survey revealed that prisoners in Zimbabwe are denied the opportunity to study in conventional institutions during their time of serving. This is because conventional institutions do not have special education facilities to reach out to people behind bars. Through focus group discussions, interviews and literature reviews, the study gathered that inmates in Zimbabwe's major prisons such as Chikurubi and Hwahwa receive primary and secondary education as well as vocational training whilst small prisons like Bindura 'Chawagonahapana' rehabilitate inmates in the form of interpreneural skills development. While this is so, inmates are short changed in pursuing diploma and degree qualifications or vocational trainings that are outside what is offered by the Zimbabwe Prison Services. As part of rehabilitation and empowerment processes, it is recommended that, Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS) and other prison services in Africa initiate collaborative approaches with Open and Distance Learning Institutions (ODLI). Open and Distance Learning mode has the potential of reaching out to inmates.

BACKGROUND

Zimbabwe has been observed to put effort in empowering prisoners in various practical areas but it seems it has not yet realized better processes of enabling prisoners to attain university degrees or qualifications as well as other vocational skills offered outside prison walls. Reaching out to the unreached persons, calls for processes that allow inclusion of people from diverse backgrounds to realise their educational potential. According to the Dakar World Education Forum (2002), the basic principles for the treatment of inmates or prisoners include provision for further education and education of the illiterate so that they can be integrated or seek gainful employment after their release. This means that, in addition to it being a human right, education, if provided to prisoners, can help in the reintegration and rehabilitation process. But it appears for most inmates in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole, a prison sentence means deprivation of the right to adult education. In this competitive market place, nations are striving to maximize the potential contribution of all their members hence the exclusion of a significant number of people in academic pursuance impedes this goal and weakens the overall economic potential of a country. Thus one avenue by which prisoners can effectively be empowered as well as to readily gain employment and compete for positions at higher levels is to compete through academic attainment or through undertaking vocational education and training.

Based on this background, the study sought to find out education provision for inmate in Zimbabwe and the following questions guided the study.

- Are inmates or convicts in Zimbabwe given the opportunity to pursue educational studies?
- Do they make free choice of programmes they intend to study?
- Do inmates have the opportunity to study programmes outside prison?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Standard minimum Rules for treatment of prisoners are some of the agreements ratified by several countries recognizing the need to educate prisoners (Dakar World Education Forum, 2002). According to the UN (2009), the basic principles for the treatment of prisoners include provision for further education for prisoners and education of illiterate prisoners so that they can be integrated into the educational system and become employable after serving sentence.

Two-thirds of released adult male prisoners in England are reconvicted within 2 years (Bynner, 2009; Sculler, 2009). The reason could be that, they may have lacked maximum rehabilitation in terms of behavior change or socio-economic empowerment. Education for

prisoners is important, not only as a basic human right (USIS, 1998) but in order to break the cycle of reoffending by providing qualifications and skills for employment on release (Department of Business, Innovation & Skills [BIS], 2006) and by providing social and human capital (Gerald, 2008; Schuller, 2009; Hughes, 2007). It is time to explore the possibility and effectiveness of alternative and innovative approaches to the educative process, since expanding educational opportunities through conventional means to groups that had hitherto been unreached such as women in purdah, migrant cattle farmers, fishermen, offshore oil workers, prisoners, working women, full time house wives, etc, means putting great strains on the already shrinking education budgets (Schuller 2009). This suggest that, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) can be identified as the panacea to the perennial problems of equitable access to education, equality of opportunities as well as an alternative way to provide a second chance for those who had once been in the system but dropped off due to various reasons which includes imprisonment. More so, the latter scholar seems to suggest that ODL can definitely stand a test of time and can achieve its purposes as long as it is run appropriately. This is in consonance with the opinion already indicated by researchers that the cost structure and pattern of instruction of ODL allows for economies of scale and convenience in learning, thereby making it an attractive model of education for a broad category of learners (Hancock, 2010; UNESCO, 2002).

The above implication is that ODL institution promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfill their potential. According to Hancock (2010) putting this mission into practice has resulted in a strong presence in British prisons where around 1400 offender learners are currently studying approximately 200 courses with the Open University (OU). As the OU increases the number of courses delivered via a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), its ability to provide higher education in prison is threatened as few offender learners have internet access (Hancock, 2010). The Prisoners Education Trust, who provides initial funding for OU offender learners, found that 'Most prisoners have little access to the telephone, no email communication with tutors and no internet access' (Prisoners Education Trust, 2009). Hence, Honey (2009) concluded that finding a safe way for prisoner learners to access the internet is an important priority.

According to Hancock (2010) without internet access the OU's offender learners in the United Kingdom are finding that their course choice is severely limited. The situation is rapidly deteriorating. Over a 6-month period in 2007 the number of OU courses available for study in prison dropped by over 10% mostly due to problems with internet access (Adams and Pike, 2008). If this trend continues the OU will be unable to offer a viable degree path to offender learners and will have failed in its mission

to be open to all. The above literature suggests that finding a safe way for prisoner learners to access education is an important national priority. There is also need to reverse the negative trends identified in the use of internet by finding alternative approaches to those activities that require internet access.

METHODOLOGY

The study was a non-experimental, it lent itself towards qualitative research. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2010), qualitative approach to research is an approach that advocates the study of direct experiences taken at face value. It sees behavior as determined by the phenomena of experiences rather than by external objective and physically described reality. Descriptive survey method was used for this research. Convenient sampling and snow bowling was used to select 20 ex-convicts whom were involved in focus group discussions and interviews and 12 prison officers who were interviewed. Raw data gathered from interviews and focus group discussion was analysed by using descriptive techniques. In order to increase internal validity and reliability of the findings, pictures and direct responses are highlighted in the paper to reflect observations and major views of interviewed individuals. Received findings are summarized and interpreted based on predetermined themes.

Data Capture and Analysis

In-depth interviews and journalizing are the tools that were used to collect evidence on the following variables:

- Educational opportunities of inmates.
- Inmates' access to post secondary education.
- Inmates' freedom of study choice.

Sources of evidence that was documented in this study included tape-recorded interviews and journalizing. Data were collected from a single interview and group type interview. Single interview means an individual interview, whilst a group-type refers to interviewing a group of people with common characteristics, for example, ex-convicts from different prisons in Zimbabwe. The perceptions of these ex-convicts and prison officers were analysed to determine data patterns which became the basis of the conclusions of the research.

The coding system was used. The researcher went through five stages or phases of analysis as indicated in table 1 below and came up with findings as presented in this paper.

The analytic tools used were commensurate with obtained qualitative data as is indicated below;

Table 1: Phases of Analysis

Tool	Description of Use
Stage 1	Researcher met individual ex-inmates and prison officers to find out on their experiences on inmates educational opportunities and challenges.
Stage 2	Group meetings with exinmates to share experiences and discuss emerging themes, opportunities and challenges of inmates' access to education.
Stage 3	Changing of data into text, verbatim, in preparation for coding process.
Stage 4	Coding- Searching for main categories and sub-categories. Data were coded exhaustively capturing the main variables of the study which were educational opportunities, freedom of study and educational challenges.
Stage 5	Presenting Findings- a narrative account was constructed around the main themes of study.

FINDINGS

Demographics Characteristics Of Respondents

The following graph indicates the years of ex-inmates participants

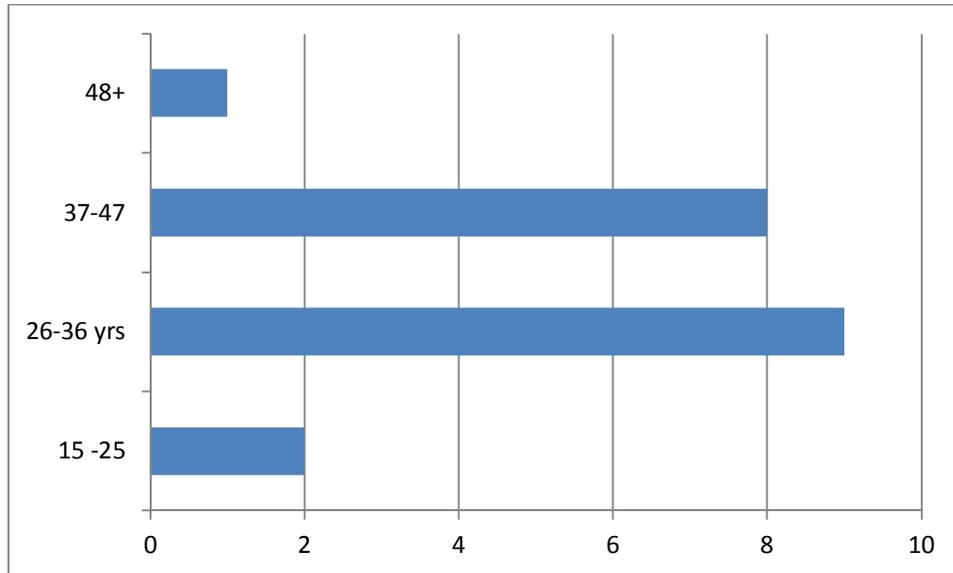


Figure 1: Graph showing former inmates respondents grouped by age N=20

From the graph, it can be depicted that the majority of individuals who participated in the study aged between 26 to 47 years. Though they served their term differently, what can be noted is that they are below and within middle

age period. Twenty-six to forty-seven is a very critical age in terms of production hence such ages need to be empowered educationally. Job retirement age according to the Zimbabwe labour laws is 60years to 65 years.

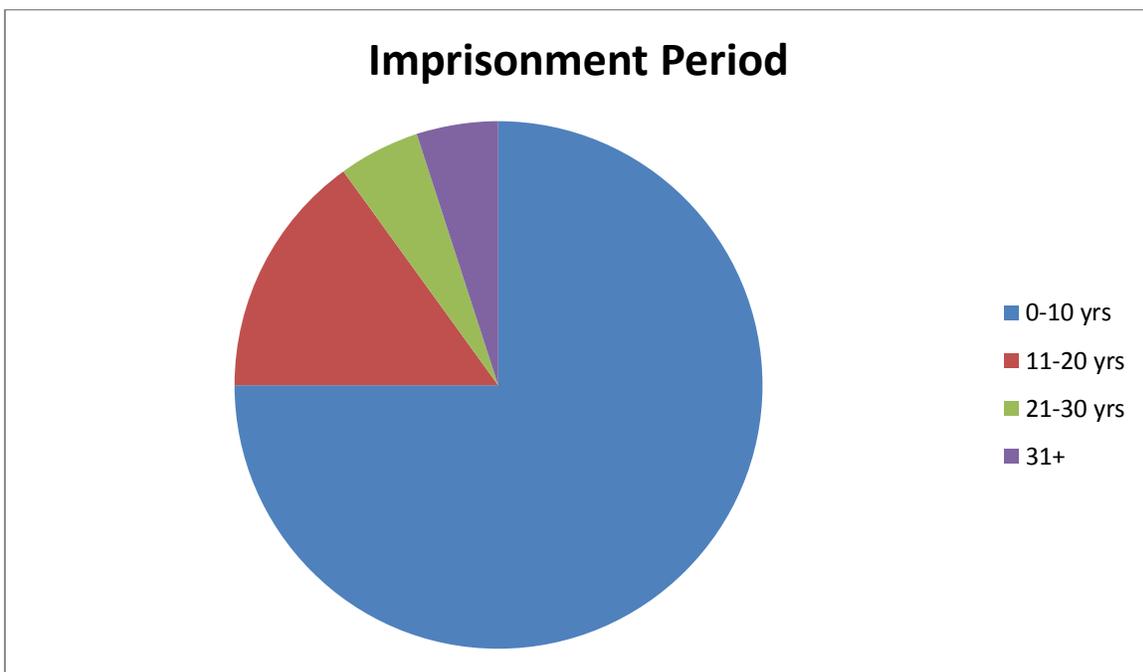


Figure 1: Pie chart of respondents grouped by years of imprisonment N=20

A total of 20 participants of diverse terms of imprisonment as depicted on the chart participated in the study. The majority however served terms that ranged between 0 to 10 years and these can be considered as short term

sentences in comparison to other range of imprisonment sentences. What this suggest is that the majority had the chance to go back into society sooner and continue with their day to day activities.

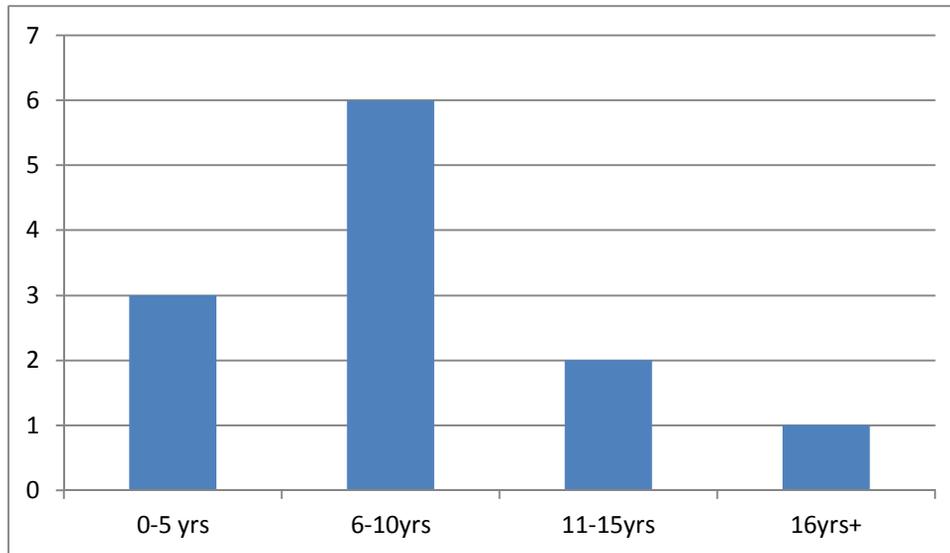


Figure 2: Graph of respondents grouped by period of Job service N= 12

The majority of respondents had worked as prison officers for more than 6 years. This suggest that they have adequate knowledge of the systems, procedures and experiences of prison environment.

Findings: Experiences and perceptions from former inmates

Wide evidence was gathered from former inmates through individual interviews and focus group discussions that there are limitations on the education of inmates. Though the researcher could not access those currently in prison due to Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS) security reasons, valuable information was sourced from inmates who had just left prison. Snowballing technique assisted in reaching out to those who had recently been released from prison hence information on current educational activities was obtained.

a. Inmates educational opportunities

Most data captured revealed that inmates did not have substantial or equal access to adequate educational opportunities. This inadequate access was expressed by a number of respondents. Some of the sentiments are captured below:

- Some of our colleagues were able to write their 'O' level and 'A' whilst serving.
- I did my 'O' level whilst i was in prison.

- It depends with one's background, those with sound financial resources can study. Personally, i couldn't because there was nobody to fund me.
- The environment is not friendly for study even if i would have wanted to.
- The opportunities are there especially for studying upto form 4.

What the above entails is that, in Zimbabwe, there is that allowance for inmates to study. That allowance is however thwarted by many challenges which includes the funding.

b. Inmates' challenges in accessing post secondary studies.

Participant's views on access to post secondary studies were sought. Below are some of their responses:

- Some of us wanted to, but it is not easy to study for a diploma or degree whilst in jail, there are no resources for such.
- The problem is, you need to go to university to study for a degree, there are no university programmes in prisons.
- Even if i wanted to, i did perform poorly at secondary level. I could not be employed due to poor results at school hence i had to self employ myself in the form of house breaking. Kkkkkkkk Sorry about that, i have reformed.

- I hold a form 4 certificate with good passes. My parents passed away a few months after i had written my ordinary level and that was the end of my academic life. I had siblings to feed so one thing led to another and i ended up in jail.
- I had no one to finance my college education and i needed food so the only source of income was my body. I condemn this way of life because it involved me into violent behaviour which saw me getting arrested.

In general, the respondents concurred that whilst they could have loved to pursue their education, circumstances unique to each one prevented them. Whilst a few admitted that they were not academically gifted, the underlying main challenges that were brought out was poverty. The researcher wanted to find out if the participants would have loved to study if they were given the opportunity to study for a diploma or degree. These were some of the responses:

- I could have loved but then my qualifications are below the entry requirements. I have 3 'O' level passes.
- A! Mother, who would want to miss that opportunity.
- Imagine i served 12 years in prison and i came out with nothing gainful. Am not saying prisons are colleges but i feel their rehabilitation programmes should remove that which saw some of us behind bar. Of course i can't rule out agricultural skills but i would have loved to acquire more skills in the form of a degree. I need to be gainfully employed, am sick of prison life.
- Surely i could have accepted there and there.
- That could have been great for me. I was a teacher and i was studying for a degree through ODL but could not continue because i got arrested. Anyway, i intend to continue when i settle.

c. Inmates freedom to choose programmes for study

From discussions and interviews with ex-inmates, it was gathered that most prisons in Zimbabwe do not offer diplomas and degrees to inmates who qualify to do such studies. Some of the sentiments are captured below:

- I think degrees are attained by those housed at bigger prisons such as Hwahwa and Chikurubi.
- No, not at all. But most are taught agriculture, sewing, woodwork, music etcetera. I did agriculture.
- At (name of prison mentioned), we were all made to concentrate on vocational skills courses offered there.
- We concentrated on agriculture and sewing so that we sustained ourselves during our stay there.

- Our main focus was on practical activities such as agriculture, music, carpentry, sewing, cooking to mention some. But we were not given certificates for that, they were meant for sustaining us.
- I think it is not easy for people serving short sentence to study for a diploma or degree even if resources are available because they may leave prison before they are through.

Findings: Experiences and perceptions from Prison Officers

On the issue of access to education by inmates, interviewed prison officers gave their views. Some of the sentiment are captured below:

- Inmates are given access to academic education. Infact, academic education is provided in the form of general education or literacy classes.
- Some inmates leave prison with 5 'O' levels or more while some attain their 'A' level qualifications there.
- O, yes, skills development is part of rehabilitation and correctional services. We offer up to vocational services. We offer education to inmates at whatever level, as long as the inmate's family have the resources.
- Yes, inmates can pursue a diploma or degree but they have to source funds.
- Sure. But I have noted that only those from economically sound backgrounds enjoy this facility. Most convicts as I have observed come from low income backgrounds and cannot afford.

On the issue of funding opportunities, it was noted that no company or donor is interested in funding education of inmates. Below comments suggest the above:

- The funding facility is there but it only comes from the government which is already overburdened by other responsibilities and this affects our coffers. They are in most cases empty.
- Iripo asi yava yezita (literary meaning, the funding facility is there but the coffers are at most times empty),

On access of inmates to academic programmes offered beyond the prison walls, some of the prison officer responses were;

- Yes, 'O' level and 'A' level for example are offered by outside institutions and inmates do the studies through correspondence.
- For 'O' level and 'A' level, yes. But for post secondary qualifications, inmates take up programmes offered by the prison services.

The findings suggested that for post secondary education, inmates are made to make do with vocational services

provided by a particular prison where they will be serving their sentence. Some of the comments which suggest the above are captured below:

- Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS) usually offer practical or vocational services in the likes of agriculture, sewing, woodwork, music to mention a few.
- We offer correctional programmes and those that may enable them to self employ themselves e.g agriculture, woodwork etc.

In a one day focus group discussion with ex-inmates, it was gathered that most inmates have interest in

developing themselves academically or vocationally if given the opportunity. But the challenges that was revealed by most is on access to education facilities. Responses from both ex-convicts and prison officers reflected that whilst education facility for inmates is availed in Zimbabwe, it is mostly in the form of literacy development, secondary education and practical skills. Post secondary education is a challenge to be accessed as it is expensive to most prisoners and more so, it is not easy to access conventional institutions which offer diplomas and degrees. Instead, Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS) has put in place limited post educational programmes that it offers and these are mainly practical subjects such as agriculture, music, wood work, sewing and a few others.



Figure1: Inmates Displaying Their Musical Skills and Agricultural Products to Public

Inmates and Access to Education in Zimbabwe

This research revealed that Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS) is making great efforts in Rehabilitating inmates so that they may be able to fit and be integrated into society after serving sentence. This is through basic literacy whereby illiterate prisoners are taught how to read and write, ordinary and advanced level, vocational training. It was noted that academic education is provided in the form of general education or literacy classes. These enable inmates to learn to read, write and perform basic mathematical computations. This is especially important in correctional setting and for habilitation purposes. As was pointed out by one prison officer, most inmates are

under educated and most come from a culture of poverty and have little or no experience in vocational skills.

More so, rehabilitation and reintegration of most prisons in Zimbabwe is in the form of giving inmates access to primary and secondary education as well as access to vocational trainings in the form of practical programmes. In such instances, inmates are offered courses in agriculture, woodwork, music, peace keeping, non violence and human rights, meant to promote their self esteem, tolerance and conflict management skills. Such educational programs offered inside prisons are typically provided and managed by the prison systems in which they reside. The goal of such activities is to prepare the prisoner for success outside prison and to enhance the rehabilitative aspects of prison. Funding for

the programs is provided through official correctional department budgets and the prisoners or their families. Educational opportunities have been observed to be divided into two general categories, viz, academic

education and vocational training. The whole idea of such programmes is to give prisoners or inmates another chance.



Figure 1: Model Prison Display at Bindura Exhibition

In a discussion with some prison officers at an exhibition show, it was noted that, some prisoners are attached to some agricultural institutions and they receive necessary education and skills in agriculture that help them later on integration. Women prisoners are taught income generating projects such as sewing, bread making etc. There are education officers responsible for these programmes. The methodology used in the prisons involves the use of internal trainers who are part of the prison service staff. Prisoners use the participatory approach whereby they carry out discussions on their own in addition to day to day practical learning and tutorials.

Whilst this is so, it was noted through interviews and focus group discussions that for post secondary education, inmates have no liberty to choose programmes offered outside the prison walls because they are not easy to access. More so, most inmates have limited source of finance. Smaller prisons on the other hand are said to find it difficult to offer educational courses. The reasons are mainly because the prisoners in latter prisons come for short term sentences therefore it is difficult for them to start new programmes as they might not complete them. In addition, some of the prisons do not have required infrastructure for educational purposes. Thus there is limited choice of academic and vocational attainment offered to inmates. Whilst inmates are mostly equipped with skills in practical areas such as music agriculture,

carpentry etc, the argument is, not all prisoners are gifted in those areas.

FINDINGS

- Most inmates in Zimbabwe have the opportunity to do 'O' and 'A' level but face challenges of accessing college or university education.
- Most inmates cannot access post secondary programmes offered outside prison walls.
- Financial constraints affect inmates' endeavor to further studies.
- Inmates mostly make career choices within the range or limit of rehabilitation programmes offered by a particular prison.
- Most prisons emphasise on rehabilitating their inmates through practical programmes such as woodwork, carpentry, building, dress making, food and nutrition, music and agriculture.

Open and Distance Learning Mode and Inmates Access to Education

The findings suggest that, there is need for widening the academic horizon for inmates and this can be through partnership between Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS)

and institutions that offer certificates, diplomas and degrees under Open and Distance Learning such as, Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode can be central in enabling people in special circumstances such as inmates to make academic achievements. In this regard, Open and Distance Learning institutions in Zimbabwe can embark on a university community partnership so that a smooth coordination in the learning of inmates is enhanced. Prisoners cannot attend lectures in conventional universities while serving sentence. Thus Open and Distance Learning can play a critical role in the mobilization of prisoners so that when they are mainstreamed, they can make a meaningful contribution to society.

Prisoners need vocational training and academic education for easier reintegration into society after release. However, skeptics may argue that prison education is most likely to produce nothing more than better educated criminals. But many studies have shown significant decreases in recidivism. An American study for instance found that, one million dollars spent on correctional education prevents about 600 crimes, while that same money invested in incarceration prevents 350 crimes, (Bozos and Hausman, 2004). Such findings suggest that correctional education is almost twice as cost-effective as a crime control policy. Nicaragua and Burkina Faso have been observed to make great strides towards providing prisoners with education whether general education or vocational training courses (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Thus such educational empowering stance should be adopted by Zimbabwe and other developing countries too. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) lament the abuse of prisoners which is still rampant in most countries world over. Such situation has made it very difficult to advocate for the provision of education to this special population.

Such stereotyping tendencies and negative attitude towards inmates has seen their plight rarely noticed by most countries. Yet they include the most downtrodden and vulnerable babies and older children imprisoned with their mothers, the mentally ill as well as the innocent who failed to prove their innocence in courts. The point is, not all inmates in prisons world over committed crime. Even if they did I feel prisons should be places of positive transformation and that entering prison should not mean losing hope. In other words, deprivation of freedom need not mean deprivation of humanity. Thus education as a human right issue should be given priority. It should not be an alternative but governments should put efforts in providing individuals education of their choice. This can be through putting in place loan facilities where inmates who so wish to access advanced programmes can access such loans and study through ODL.

While Zimbabwe, like most African countries is in transition from political and economic challenges, its challenges have been noted to be magnified within its detention systems thus thwarting maximum support to inmates' education. According to ex- inmates, of late, the country has been concentrating on the welfare of inmates

in the form of food provision and medication. Now that the economy has become more stable, crime can be minimized by empowering prisoners through provision of life skills or appropriate education that may enable them to be integrated into formal or informal employment. ODL is the only hope of improving access to education and community reintegration for inmates in Africa. The ODL facility can go a long way in restoring the dignity of inmates since the mode breaks the prison walls.

Reaching Out Through Collaboration And Appropriate Technologies

Open and Distance Institutions can build and refurbish attitudes of societies towards commitment of crime and on issues of criminal justice. This can be through making collaborative awareness among communities of the need to put in place humane conditions and services for inmates that may in turn help them to regain their humanity. On the other hand, ODL can play significant role in offering short courses for prisoners who are on short term sentence. There can also be arrangement between ZPS and ODL institutions to ensure that prisoners continue and complete their courses after release. For inmates on long term sentences, ODL institutions can collaborate with ZPS so that strategies are put in place that enable an effective provision of various education programmes. Through collaborative efforts by ODL institutions and ZPS, free education can be presented to a stipulated number of inmates who show great reform and commitment to studies. This may act as a corrective and rehabilitative measure that other inmates may so wish to emulate for benefits attached. As part of rehabilitation process awareness campaigns to inmates on the value of education can be made so that they see the value of education in empowering them. This is vital in increasing numbers of prisoners undertaking ODL studies for empowerment purposes.

Collaborative education projects between ODL institutions and ZPS can be put in place to promote learning through technology. ODL institutions can liaise with the Ministry of Science and technology as well as the Ministry of Communication and technology so that appropriate software with guaranteed security is installed in prisons for educational use. Solid technology infrastructure is an institutional barrier that needs to be overcome to enable engagement with e-learning in excluded groups. (Egnon and Helsper, 2011). For Zimbabwe, use of e- learning mode for inmates may be feasible as long as resources are made available. The research found out that Prison officers are furthering their studies at local universities and such behavior can cascade to the inmates as the knowledge gained can benefit them. The ODL institutions can employ such as part time tutors and enhance them with basic e-learning skills so that they may in turn assist inmate students studying through ODL. Educators in ODL may also need continuous professional development and support in the use of appropriate teaching and learning technologies. Assumptions however cannot be made

that appropriate technology is always available. As such lack of internet access may inhibit distance learning but should not prohibit it. Traditional channels of communication in distance learning still exist and can also be utilized if required (self study, print and non print materials, group work tutorials) so that inmates access relevant education they may require and of their choice. ODL institutions and ZPS for instance can make arrangements for lecturers to go and provide face to face tutorials to prisoners so that grey areas in their modules are explained and this can be a minimum of three times per semester. If given a chance to enhance themselves academically and vocationally, prisoners may have a greater chance of living healthy and productive lives that benefit them and society after their release.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that most inmates in Zimbabwe face challenges of accessing colleges or university education. Career choices are based on limited programmes offered by particular prisons. Most prisons emphasise on rehabilitating their inmates through practical programmes such as woodwork, carpentry, building, dress making, food and nutrition and other income generating programmes. There is less emphasis on post secondary programmes such as diploma and degree programmes.

End Notes: This research was motivated by an in-law who was imprisoned for 12 years. Whilst he had served his 12 years term, he did not bring with him any additional qualifications that would have enabled him to be integrated in the employment sector. Meanwhile family members have been taking care of his daily needs with the hope that soon he will be self sustained through farming. He was a security guard during the time of conviction and we noted with concern that he had not self improved himself in terms of career development for the past 12 years.

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