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A Survey of Correctional Education in Luzira Prison Uganda: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract:

The study aimed at exploring the challenges and opportunities experienced by prisoners on correctional education in Luzira Prison. Specifically it examined challenges experienced by prisoners and the opportunities provided by correctional education. Across sectional survey design and the study was basically qualitative. The population was adult male and female convicted prisoners enrolled on correctional education, prison warders and instructors who were chosen purposively. Focus group discussion, Observation and interviews were used to collect data Permission was sought from all relevant officers and ethical considerations met.

The study found out a number of challenges with regard to proper utilization of education a rehabilitative strategy for prisoners. These range from Stress and depression, infrastructure and other scholastic materials, poorly equipped Library, limited programs/ academic programs offered, transferring a prisoner from one prison to another during the course of study, limited time for revision and congestion. However, the study found a rich opportunity in education as rehabilitative strategy since many prisoners have had a n opportunity for free education, some have acquired several academic qualifications, some have been able to defend themselves in courts of law successfully, while others have continued to support their families through commissions received while still in prison.

Keywords: Correctional education, challenges, opportunities

1. Introduction

Educating prisons dates as far back as the 1700s in Europe as a religious type, where prisoners were provided with Bibles while in solitary confinement (Gehring, 1995). Prison bible reading was introduced on a notion that prisoners had committed crimes and wronged other people, and being alone in confinement with the bible would allow them the opportunity for reflection and introspection (Boyar & Mosley, 2007). Education was provided by clergy men who would educate prisoners how to read the bible. Later prison authorities realized that bibles could only be read by inmates who had literacy skills so they started formal classes.

At the beginning of the 20th century in North America and United Kingdom, prisoners were forced to work long hours in agriculture farms to produce food for penal institutions. This was later transformed to be vocational training around 1950's where prisoners were training to work in mines, quarries and trade to reinforce manual work that prisoners had to do. The move for educating prisoners later spread to Canada because they considered education would prevent crime from happening (Fullan & Langworthy, 2013). Canadians thus introduced penitentiary education which later became secular correctional education where literacy and vocational skills were taught to offenders aimed at securing jobs for prisoners after release. Night schools were also introduced in Canada to ensure that all inmates who worked during the day were allowed time to study in the night. Canada also pushed for a new legislation in prisons where qualified adult prisoners were employed to teach fellow inmates. The Irish government also appreciated the correctional educational discourse, exchange programmes and the whole world became aware of the plight of educating prisoners. It became a global matter and several countries worldwide started debating the issue of educating prisoners at international in conferences.

In Africa, the rights and recourse for prisoners poses a serious challenge due to developing economies. Formal and vocational training among prisoners has been given due concern especially in South Africa, West Africa and East Africa. In South Africa, the plan of action for Africa known as the Ouagadougou Declaration noted top priority areas related to education prisoners to rehabilitate them and prepare them for reintegration into society (Bhosale, 2014). In this declaration, emphasize is put on literacy skills training linked to employment opportunities, development of existing skills, providing civic and social education and psychological support. In Namibia, prison education programmes provide a range of activities including mandatory functional literacy training for all prisoners in the first twelve months, the use accelerated methods of learning approach. This is done to ensure that all prisoners attain literacy skills and to enable them advance to other education levels. Vocational training is also done in horticulture, building and construction, farming and carpentry to prepare for employment opportunities after release.

In West Africa, Nigeria has the biggest population of prisoner (Bhosale, 2014). In their study among six out of five hundred and fifty prisons in Nigeria, Askhia and Agbonluae (2013) found out that educational programmes included adult and remedial programmes and education development projects. Skills acquisition projects, mid range industrial production activities and agricultural skills were part of vocational skills training offered. In Ghana and Sierra Leon, prison education is given top priority to contain the high rates of recidivism (Fullan & Langworthy, 2013). However, education in prison of Ghana has experienced serious setbacks due to inadequate funding. Several non-governmental organizations like the Prison Reform Initiative in Africa, funded by the Dutch government to promote effective and sustainable prison reforms in compliance with international and regional human rights and good governance has prompted provision of vocational skills training in prisons of Ghana. In East Africa, formal and vocational training is offered mainly in Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda (Bhosale, 2014).

In Uganda, education in prisons which entails vocational and academic programmes was introduced in 1995 to enable inmates leave the prison with more skills so as to be in position to find meaningful and long-term employment after serving their sentence (Uganda Prison Act, 2006). However, a study by the Uganda Human Rights Commission (2015) to assess the prisoners' conditions established that an average of 90% of all prisoners in Uganda did not have a high school diploma and 85% have no vocational education. In the same study, recidivism rates of prisoners who do not participate in prison education were between 65-75%. In response to the United Nations standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners, Uganda enacted the Prisons Act 2006 as a step to ensure prisons play a rehabilitative role. This act, recommends academic and vocational training be offered to convicted prisoners to facilitate their rehabilitation and reformation and to prepare for re integration into the local communities. However, for academic and vocational training to register achievements there is need for an understanding of prisoner's challenges so as to be able to explore all available opportunities to derive maximum benefits from education as rehabilitative strategy.

1.1. Problem

Prisoners in Uganda, have the lowest formal and vocational skills compared to the general population despite introduction of prison education in Uganda in 1996 (The Uganda Prison Service Commission, 2015). A survey by Uganda Human Rights Commission (2015) shows that 85% of the prisoners in all the 225 government prisons lack basic education, nor do they have any vocational skill and 80% of prisoners are school drop outs. The survey further revealed that less than a quarter of prisoners in Uganda participate in education and training. Low participation in formal and vocational training among prisoners in Uganda can be associated with challenges and opportunities available. This is central for adequate implementation of academic and vocational education in prisons, otherwise it may lead to wasted Government initiative and commitment on education as a rehabilitation strategy.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges and opportunities experienced by prisoners on correctional education in Luzira Prison.

1.3. Research Questions

- 1) What are the challenges experienced by prisoners on correctional education in Luzira prison
- 2) What are the opportunities provided by correctional education

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and Methods

This study adopted cross sectional survey design because it provides description of trends and attitudes or opinions of a population, allows generalisation from a sample to a population so that inferences can be made about some characteristics, attitude or behaviour of that population (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). A qualitative approach was used to collect data, analyse and present the findings was used because it enhances triangulation, complementarity, validity, interpretation, clarification and illustration.

2.2. Study Population

In this study, the population was adult male and female convicted prisoners enrolled on both formal and vocational training in Luzira prison and, prison warders and instructors who are participating in formal and vocational training.

2.3. Sampling Strategies

The study used purposive sampling to select participants. The criteria for selection was; those who had acquired several educational qualifications while in prison, those who have dropped out, those who excel in exams, and the poor performers, inmates who are at the same time instructors and government posted teachers/instructors.

2.4. Sample Size

To increase chances of participation and bearing in mind that some prisoners may withhold their participation in the study, a total of two Focus group discussions each with 10 participants and 10 interviews were conducted until saturation.

2.5. *Methods of Data Collection*

The following methods were used: In depth interviews with warders, inmate instructors and government posted head teacher; focus group discussion, observation. I spent some time looking at the prison environment and taking note of what was going on and documentary review. The documents reviewed include; Uganda Prison Act, The Uganda Prisons Report to the MoES 2010, Uganda Prisons Services Commission Report 2010, and The Prisons Vocational Education Training Policy Framework (PVET), workshop notes obtained from the Uganda Prisons Service Staff College and Training School and the Uganda Prison service's Strategic Investment Plan (UPS, 2012).

2.6. *Instruments/ Measures*

An interview guide and leading focus group discussion questions on challenges and opportunities in education was used.

2.7. *Procedure*

Permission was sought from the Commissioner General of Prisons in Uganda in charge of training and education. I then proceeded to Luzira main prison which was the centre of data collection. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to all relevant officers and participants and appointment scheduled on how to go about the work. Participants were asked to sign consent forms, data collection started, pseudo names were used and after data collection participants were debriefed. Participation was entirely free and participants were free to withdrawal from the study at any point without reprimand.

2.8. *Data Management and Analysis*

To ensure organisation of data from its thematic analysis was used.

2.9. *Ethical Considerations*

The identities of the respondents were kept confidential throughout using pseudo names, participation was voluntary and withdrawal at any point was accepted without any reprimand.

3. **Presentation and Discussion of Results**

3.1. *Background Information*

3.1.1. What are Formal and Vocational Programs Offered in Luzira Prison Schools?

The following educational programs are offered: Functional Adult Literacy (FAL). This program provides skills in reading, writing, and numeracy, to adults, integrated with practical knowledge and skills. In the prison context, FAL is provided to interested learners who have never been to school or only attended preliminary (infant) schooling. FAL is used to introduce such prisoners into formal or vocational education programs within the prison. FAL concentrates on practical issues such as hygiene and sanitation, rights of children and women, counting, and basic arithmetic, among other topics.

After FAL prisoners are encouraged to join primary education (P.1 to P.7). This leads them to Prison secondary Education at both Ordinary and Advanced (O' and A') Levels. The Uganda Prisons Service report to the MoES (UPS, 2010) indicates that secondary schooling in prisons was only formalized at the Luzira Upper prison in the year 2000. In that year, the prison secondary school at the Luzira Upper prison had their first national O' Level examinations and two years later, in 2002, it had the first sitting of the national A' Level examinations.

The Uganda Prison Services established an Inmates University Study Centre at Luzira Upper prison in 2009. The center came into collaboration with Makerere University Business School (MUBS) to offer a diploma and degree courses in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management. It is an open learning center where all universities are free to conduct various courses that are beneficial to inmates. So far, there have been 7 graduation ceremonies.

Vocational training has been practiced in Luzira prisons for a long time. Through an Interview with the warder in charge of welfare and the Commissioner in Charge of Training and Research at Uganda Prison Services (UPS) headquarters, Luzira prison schools offers training in a variety of vocational enterprises, the most prominent of which being carpentry and joinery; metal welding and fabrication, bricklaying and construction; tailoring; handcraft; shoe making; spinning, weaving, and embroidery; salon training; and, art. The most important reason for the UPS vocational training program is to enable inmates acquire skills that will enable them engage in economic activities for self-sustenance after release. The Prisons Vocational Education Training policy framework (PVET) further states that one of the cardinal objectives of vocational training is to offer employment to long serving prisoners as an opportunity for meaningful use of their time in prison.

Farming is also offered as a vocational skill. The primary activity of prisoners is to provide labor for agriculture and animal husbandry for the production of food for all prisoners. By engaging in the farming activities, prisoners learn that someone can earn a living through farming as an income generating activity. In addition to growing food for prison use, inmates learn relatively modern ways of farming from planting to storage, for example, preparing nursery beds, growing crops in straight lines, horticulture on small pieces of land, poultry management, and zero grazing, among others. One study participant hand this to say

“Many female prisoners have no background whatsoever in farming or using any form of farming tools, which contributes to redundancy and therefore propensity to commit crime. For such prisoners therefore, farming becomes an important rehabilitation

activity, particularly for those with low education and skills for engaging in alternative economically viable activities- Warder in charge of welfare at women's section."

3.1.2. How Many Teachers/Instructors Do You Have?

Through an interview the entire Luzira prisons establishment comprising 30,068 prisoners has 6 lectures, 15 teachers, 10 instructors and 12 artisans. These instructors and artisans are usually prison officers hired in other positions but having prior training and/or experience in the different vocations, and are therefore assigned to work on education programmes as part of their routine duties. They are assisted by inmates identified to have the respective knowledge and skills in the different vocations during the process of assessment and admission of prisoners.

3.1.3. How Is Recruitment of Teachers Done?

The ministry of Education and Sports recruits teaching staff for these schools, who are supplemented by 'inmate teachers', prison staff teachers and others outsourced from the Prison Staff College and Training School. According Uganda prisons services commission report 2010, the outsourced teachers are part-timers while the prison staff teachers also have other duties to attend (UPS, 2010). The Luzira Upper prison also gets regular support from the Franciscan Missionary Sisters who hire teachers from neighboring schools to help complete the syllabi and prepare learners for final national examinations (UPS, 2010).

3.1.4. Are Inmate Teachers Were Remunerated?

One of the inmate prison teachers had this to say

"I feel the unfairness of not being paid. But am hopeful because they have promised to pay. Again, it is better to wake up every morning knowing there is something you are going to do to occupy the day than sitting there idling and doing nothing. At least when i go to sleep at night, I am tired and can fall asleep. Some people cannot fall asleep because they are not tired. Also, it helps to know I am helping others who need to be educated. We are happy to offer the service".

Through an interview with the prison warden he states that "in order to motivate them to work – which is also part of the rehabilitation process – prisoners are entitled to payment and a reduction (remission) of their sentence by a third".

A review of workshop notes obtained from the Uganda Prisons Service Staff College and Training School and the service's Strategic Investment Plan (UPS, 2012) revealed that prisoner payment is guided by an earning scheme in which all convicted prisoners are entitled to participate. The earning scheme is categorized in three grades: Grade C is for unskilled labor. Members in this grade earn Ushs. 100 per day worked. Disciplined and hardworking unskilled workers can be promoted to Grade B, which is specifically for prisoners of good conduct who are semi-skilled. Members in this grade earn a daily wage of Ushs. 250. Grade A is for prisoners of exemplary conduct, who are also hardworking and highly skilled at their trade. They earn a daily wage of Ushs. 500. All workers are entitled to a monthly gratuity of Ushs. 1000. The earning scheme does not remunerate work done on weekends and public holidays, and anyone who appears for work three hours late is considered absent.

Interviews with inmate teachers and instructors for the different programs revealed that although they are aware of the earning scheme, they are not being remunerated for their work immediately. This what the officers had to say.

"We try to fill this gap by granting special privileges such as longer visitation hours and appreciation in kind like soap, sugar, and cooking oil from the store. Officers keep a record of the prisoners' labor and they receive the money due to them on discharge from prison".

- Objective 1. What are the challenges experienced by prisoners on correctional education in Luzira prison?

Limited time for reading and revision.

- "... I would wake up at mid night to revise from the toilet because that is the only place with light at Night"

Social gap. Although I am actively involved in teaching as Geography teacher which helps me to pass time, I miss my family and social networking"

3.2. Low Morale/Lack of Motivation

"Even if I study I may not use that knowledge". He prefers spending his time singing in the prisons choir. I thought it was better for me to be in church and serve God as a choir member so that I prepare to meet my creator"

Congestion in the classrooms and cells which makes learning difficult. Classes in Luzira prison are held in a building in the main prison compound that comprises a laboratory and computer lab therefore two or more classes are conducted in a simultaneously in different sections of the hall.

Transfer of prisoners

Sometimes some prisoners are transferred from one prison to another for one reason or another

Inadequate facilitation

Prisons lack a specific budget to facilitate rehabilitation programmes in all their 244 detention facilities. Due to limited resources, not all prison units in Uganda are equipped to offer formal and vocational education. As such, this type of education is fully functional at Luzira Upper, Luzira Women prisons.

There are limited post-secondary programmes. Most students study either common law or business courses.

- "I study Law because there is no alternative. I would have loved to do something in social sciences or business. However, I appreciate the fact that there is something to study".

One of the challenges raised by all prisoners was poor or complete lack of infrastructure and limited scholastic materials. According to a report by the UPS to the MoES (UPS, 2010), the entire Luzira prison establishment has 4 operational prisons vocational training rooms serving over 3000 inmates. During interviews, I noticed in one of the workshops, there was another lesson for geography senior two going on. The UPS report (2010) noted that the Luzira Upper prison secondary school has 6 classrooms i.e. from S.1 to S.6 serving over 500 inmates, 2 computer laboratories each with about 6 working computers and without internet and 1 science laboratory with very limited equipment. The classrooms, laboratories, and libraries lack sufficient furniture to for learners.

In the females section, I observed that some learners were attending classes under trees, which was attributable to the inadequate state or complete lack of classrooms. It was reported that if there is any free room that can be used for learning, the candidate classes of P.6 and P.7 take priority. In some cases, the inmates revealed that classes are usually mixed, for example a carpentry class together with P.6 and P.7 in one room, facing different directions. During the interview, prisoners mentioned that this happens for two reasons: first, there is a lack of learning space. Second, due to a small number of teachers and inability to complete the syllabus in time for final national examinations, the same teacher takes two classes at a time moving from one to the next within the same lesson period. This is what some interviewees had to say,

- “We study under a tree so we are at the mercy of the weather. When it rains, it becomes a holiday yet we compete with other students who study every day”
- “Sometimes we lack enough teachers. We teach ourselves or some who had prior education before coming here teach us. “And we do not have enough scholastic materials like computers, a well-equipped library and laboratory so we cannot do well science subjects. We would like to use computers and the Internet for research but we do not have that opportunity”.

However during an interview with one of the officers she had this to say.

- “..Due to security concerns the prison is hesitant to introduce inmates to the Internet. The computers are not for inmates. They need the Internet but we cannot monitor their usage. They must use textbooks, although they are not enough.”

On studying under the trees this was mentioned,

- “Prisons are not designated to be schools, therefore there are no classroom. They use what is available”

Through Observation, I found that the libraries were simply shelves in the office. The books, which are mostly supplied by religious institutions and willing individuals through networking with government, lack in variety of subjects that would speak to and interest the wide range of prisoners’ academic and social backgrounds. They are typically religious self-help books, with few recreation books such as novels. Moreover, while newspapers were available, the information therein is censored so that officers remove any information that they deem improper for prisoners’ consumption. Prisoners have no access to television, internet, radio, and video. Most prisoners experience psychological stress and depression especially those who are serving long sentences. When this happens some withdrawal for from educational programs.

Like other students prisoners also have individual intellectual differences. Some learn quickly while others take long.

➤ Objective 2. What are the opportunities provided by correctional education?

Education in prison gives hope to inmates for employment opportunities once released. This is what one interviewee had to say “I have has chosen to learn carpentry. I believe it has high job prospects. I don’t know any carpenter who has no job. If I don’t get employed, I will employ myself”

- “Instead of staying here for many years in idleness, I decided to start senior 1, so that when I finally leave prison, whatever I will have learned will help them start a new life”
- “I am student of common law. I am here in Luzira because I didn’t have knowledge of laws. I come from a poor background and most of us are least educated. I could not afford the costs of a hiring a lawyer
- Improving educational levels
- “While in prison I had an opportunity to go back to school. I took O’Level examinations in 2006 and went on to study a degree in social work and social administration through prisons university program. Being in prison has helped me attain free education.
- “I am here partly because I did not know how to read. Because of this, because of this I signed wrong documents... for this reason I must use the opportunity to study and attain a qualification so that when am set free such a thing doesn’t happen to me again”
- “I have been a prisoner for a long time so I know what it really means. A doctor who was once a patient is the best doctor. That is why I want to help prisoners rotting in jail who cannot afford legal fees.”
- “While in prison, I have he has sailed through a number of education ladders including completion of A’ Level, certificate in business and small scale management, Diploma in theology, diploma in common law and degree in common Law.
- “My sentence was reduced on account of good academic performance and conduct. When I was presented in high court, I presented the education qualifications I acquired in prison as one of mitigation factors. Owing to my outstanding performance and positive response towards rehabilitation programmes initiated by Uganda Prison services, the trial judge deemed it fit to overturn my sentence from murder to manslaughter and reduced from life imprisonment to 16 years”

- “I am serving 100 years sentence. I am an instructor in the tailoring section. Everything I make has a commission which I send home to look after my family. Even if am in prison, I know my children will have a bright future”.
- “My sentence has been a good experience and what I would say is that it has helped me to harmonies my life by reflecting on my past, present and future. Even if i was convicted to spend 15 years in prison, I plan to continue with his education. I have found a new outlook and a determination to further my education.”

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusions

The study found out a number of challenges with regard to proper utilization of education a rehabilitative strategy for prisoners. These range from Stress and depression, infrastructure and other scholastic materials, poorly equipped Library, limited programs/ academic programs offered, transferring a prisoner from one prison to another during the course of study, limited time for revision and congestion. However, the study found a rich opportunity in education as rehabilitative strategy since many prisoners have had a n opportunity for free education, some have acquired several academic qualifications, some have been able to defend themselves in courts of law successfully, while others have continued to support their families through commissions received while still in prison.

4.2. Recommendations

- Educations as a rehabilitation strategy should be extended to all prisons country wide
- Prisoners should be exposed to variety of educational programmes from which choice can be made
- The programme for remission of commission to prisoners to support their families while still in prison should be stream line
- The government should post trained teachers in all the government prisons to teach inmates instead on relying on fellow inmates

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