

The Relevance of Vocational Education for Inmates in Monrovia Central Prison, Liberia

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Abstract

This study determined the relevance of vocational education for inmates in Monrovia Central Prison. The study was guided by the following hypothesis; H1: there is a significant relationship between prison overcrowding and vocational education of inmates in Monrovia Central Prison, Liberia. The study adopted a cross sectional case study design. The study population was 1032 from which a sample size of 279 respondents was used for the study. A self-administered questionnaire was the major instrument used for data collection gathering quantitative information regarding the study variables. Key informant interview guide was designed and administered to key informants to capture qualitative information. The study results revealed that there is a positive and weak relationship between prison overcrowding and vocational education at Monrovia Central Prison, Liberia. The researcher concluded that there is appositive statistical significant but weak relationship between prison overcrowding and Vocational Education in Monrovia Central Prison. The researcher recommended that the government of Liberia should protect prisoners' physical and mental health. That is to say: the time prisoners spend out of their cells may be increased, with maximum possible time spent in the open air. The Inspector General of Prison Service should ensure that the prison conditions are conducive for proper and full implementation of the rehabilitation programmes like vocational education to the inmates, more learning facilities should be provided and even more well-trained professionals to train the inmates.

Key Words

Relevance, Vocational Education, Inmates, Monrovia Central Prison

1. Introduction

Normally, prisons are places where offenders are held so as to undergo reformation and become law abiding citizens. The conditions of overcrowding, cruelty and captivity derails the prisons function of rehabilitation. The rehabilitation of prison inmates should begin from the very day they are admitted into the prison. Rehabilitation allows a person to learn about his or her disabling problems and how to adjust their conduct in order to avoid committing a crime. Incarceration (punishment) keeps the criminal in a cell so that he or she can reflect on the offense they have perpetrated and have a regret and change of action. Overcrowding in prisons is a major contributor to bad jail conditions around the world. It is also arguably that it is the most serious problem confronting prison systems, with effects that can be life-threatening at worst and hinder institutions from performing their functions at best. Congestions in prisons is a result of criminal justice policies rather than rising crime rates, and it jeopardizes prison systems' ability to satisfy basic human necessities including healthcare, food, and housing. It also jeopardizes the availability and efficacy of rehabilitation programs, as well as educational and vocational training, and leisure events or affairs. Inordinate pre-trial confinement, as well as the utilization of custody for trivial, lesser crimes, is major factors in prison population growth. Nevertheless, the introduction of vocational education in prison facilities has received a lot of significance in every nook and cranny of society. These instructional programs allow convicts to partake in productive activities while incarcerated.

2. Review of Related Literature

This section presents important literature drawn from dissertations, books and journals.

Vocational Education for Inmates

The relevance of vocational education on inmates is not only impacted on the offenders alone, but to society as a whole. Gerber and Fritsch (1995) analyzed 42 studies to determine the effect of adult academic and vocational education on post release recidivism employment on inmates and participation in education in the USA. "In sum, his research shows a fair amount of support for the hypotheses that adult academic and vocational correctional education programs lead to fewer disciplinary violations during incarceration, reductions in recidivism, increases in employment opportunities, and increases in participation in education upon release" (Gerber & Fritsch 1995:136). Education and training are importantly prerequisite to a stable, crime free life. An increase in job skills and productivity of offenders also contribute directly to the national economy. Moreover, if an offender is rehabilitated upon release from prison, the process of reintegration becomes easier and fruitful and that the released shall be productive in society. State and federal prisons have long provided programming to inmates during their confinement.

Institutional programming encompasses a broad array of services and interventions, including substance abuse treatment, educational programming, and sex offender treatment. The objective of providing prisoners with programming is to improve their behavior, both before and after release from prison. Indeed, institutional programming is often intended to not only enhance public safety by lowering recidivism, but also to promote greater safety within prisons by reducing misconduct (Lynch & Sabol, 2001). Although U.S. correctional systems typically offer some programming opportunities within prisons, research suggests many prisoners do not participate in programming while incarcerated. Vocational training is one of the most critical educational and rehabilitative programs that prisons can provide. Training gives inmates the skills for a trade or industry and a chance to earn a good wage.

In reviewing the relevance of rehabilitation programming on prison misconduct, the literature has yielded mixed results. In their meta-analysis, French and Gendreau (2006) report that educational or vocational programming was not associated with a

decrease in discipline infractions. Although Steiner and Woolridge (2008) initially reported that participation in education programming actually increased misconduct, they later found that time spent in educational or vocational programming reduced non-violent misconduct (Steiner & Woolridge, 2014).

Most recently, Duwe and colleagues (2015) found out that participation in a prison Bible College significantly reduced misconduct. Meta-analyses of research have shown that prison education reduces recidivism, although the effect sizes are usually modest. Adams and Colleagues' (1994) review of more than 90 studies of prison education programs revealed that prison education reduces the likelihood of recidivism, especially for offenders with the largest education deficits. Wilson, Gallagher, and Mac Kenzie's (2000) meta-analysis of 33 evaluations of prison-based education programs showed modest increases in post-release employment and reductions in recidivism for participants. In particular, they found out that education programs reduced recidivism greatly (Wilson, Gallagher, and Kenzie, 2000). Importantly, inmates who had enrolled in most of educational programme while incarcerated had lower recidivism rates than those who did not attend the programme. Inmates need education programme that will not only teach them to read and write but also provide them with the necessary skills that promote a positive transition to society when they are released.

Aos, Miller, and Drake (2006) established that basic adult education programs in prison lowered recidivism by more than 5 percent, and prison-based vocational programs reduced recidivism by more than 12 percent (based on the results of three studies). In the most recent meta-analysis, Davis and Colleagues (2013) examined the effects of correctional education programming on recidivism and post-release employment. Analyzing previous studies, Davis and Colleagues reported that participation in education programming reduced the odds of recidivism by 43 percent and that participating in secondary degree programs yielded a 30 percent decrease in recidivism. Finally, they found out that participating in education programming increased the odds of post-release employment by 13 percent.

In addition to educational opportunities, job-training programs in prison reduce the re-offending rate and prove to be cost-effective. For example, Minnesota's work-release program, which permits inmates to

work in the community as they approach their release dates, lowers recidivism rates. Minnesota prisoners who participate in work-release programs are almost twice as likely to find work within the first couple years of release than inmates who do not have work experience. Prisoners who participate in work-release programs are 16% less likely to be re-arrested and 17% less likely to be sent back to prison (Duwe, 2015). From 2007 to 2011, Minnesota's work-release program saved the state \$1.25 million due to the decrease in the prison population. In clearer terms, for each inmate who participates in a work-release program, the state saves \$700 on average. Vocational training also allows ex-convicts to give back to society and boost the economy. Minnesota prisoners who received job training paid \$459,819 more in income taxes than those who did not get job training (Ibid, 2017). At the Monrovia Central Prison, the process of rehabilitating inmates seems very relevant as the current facility faces overcrowding due to high crime rate and pretrial detention. A sustained rehabilitation process can help save the society from high crime rate, unemployment, prison violence, prison break and substance abuse in prison.

3. Methods and Sampling Technique

Area of the study

The study was carried-out in Monrovia Central Prison in Montserrado County. Monrovia Central Prison is the biggest modern prison facility or institution in Liberia. Monrovia Central Prison is next to Cape Mesurado and is located in Montserrado County, Monrovia- Liberia. Monrovia Central Prison holds all male and female prisoners serving long sentences of at least seven years and above and remands prisoners on trial for committing capital offences.

Target Population

According to Kothari (2004), a study population is referred to as the total of people or items about which information is required. The Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) reported that the population of the Monrovia Central Prison is 1032 from which a sample size of. The majority of the inmates are males; women and minors comprise small percentage of the population. The research population was composed of individuals elected randomly from the Monrovia Central Prison, and these included officials of the Liberia's Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation (LBCR), authority of

the Monrovia Central Prison, correction officers based at the prison facilities and the inmates. Specifically, those who were interviewed included officers and these;

The LBCR (4), senior staff of Monrovia Central Prison (5), and correction officers at Monrovia

Central Prison (10 officers). Whereas, questionnaires were given to the prison inmates (260).

Sample Size

A sample size of 279 respondents were selected from the population of 1032 people using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling determination table. To determine the sample from the population of 1032 people, the sample size according to the pre-calculated table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) was 279 respondents. Hence, the researcher dealt with 279 respondents to collect data and interviews.

Table 1: Distribution of the sample size

| Grade Ranking | Target Population | Sample Size | Sampling Techniques |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Officials of Liberia's Bureau of | 10 | 4 | Purposive sampling |
| Authority of the Monrovia | 12 | 5 | Purposive sampling |
| Correction officers at | 40 | 10 | Purposive sampling |
| Inmates | 970 | 260 | Simple random sampling |
| Total | 1032 | 279 | |

Source: INCHR, 2021

Sampling Techniques

The researcher employed purposive sampling for the sample size selection. A purposive sampling is a form of sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialists' knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research (Oliver, 2013). The sample size specified in table was selected purposively since it gave limited time scope and busy schedules of the researcher and provides a selection of a given category of participants presumed to have vast knowledge about the study variables.

Simple Random Technique: According to Adam Hayes (2019), simple random sample is a subset of a statistical population in which each member of the subset has an equal probability of being chosen. A simple random sample was meant to be an unbiased representation of a group. This technique was chosen to select the targeting population. This was due to the large population in the selected area of study and because of time constraints and other factors, the researcher opted and employed this technique to enable him give equal opportunity to all eligible respondents participating in the study since it is impossible to serve all of them, and it was in this way that any form of biasness was avoided. The advantage of this technique is the ease of use and its accurate representation of the larger population.

Data Collection Tools

A number of tools were used during collection of data and they included:

Self-Administered Questionnaires

A self-administered questionnaire was the major instrument that was used in data collection. Questionnaires were used to help to gather quantitative information regarding the study variables. The questionnaires comprised both closed and open-ended questions formulated by the researcher. The advantage of using this tool is that it is a cost-efficient and helps to quickly collect massive amount of information from a large number of people in a relatively short period of time.

Interview guide

Key informant interview guide was designed and administered to key informants to capture qualitative information. This was purposely intended to get more information about prison overcrowding and its effects on the rehabilitation of inmates in Monrovia central prison, Liberia. Furthermore, using interview provides advantage for the researcher to investigate issues in an in- depth way and that ambiguities can be clarified and incomplete answers followed up.

Documentary Review

The main sources of secondary data included the following: reports, Internet surfing, reviewing of magazines, newspapers, reports and publications, public records and statistics. Documentary Review was used because the researcher was able to gain permission to access information that would not normally be available due to not being found or

subjects refusing to be interviewed. In addition, using documentary review takes out the personal aspect of the effect a researcher might have on an individual during an interview.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Validity

Validity is the extent to which the instruments were used during the study to measure the issues they are intended to measure (Amin, 2005). To ensure validity of instruments, the instruments were developed under close guidance of the supervisor. Convergent validity was assessed by examining the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each construct, as suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981). To achieve adequate convergent validity, the AVE of each construct should be 50 or more. Following Chin (1998), all the AVE values exhibited high loadings (above 0.50) on their respective constructs, indicating adequate convergent validity.

Table 2: Average Variance Extracted for testing convergent validity of the study instrument

| Constructs | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Overcrowded and unhygienic prison conditions | 0.66 |
| Non-family visits, letters and communication | 0.64 |
| Dirty cells | 0.63 |

Source: Bagozzi (2005)

Reliability

To ensure reliability of the instrument, the researcher used Cronbach’s alpha. The composite reliability took into account that indicators have different loadings and can be interpreted in the same way as Cronbach’s alpha (that is, no matter which particular reliability coefficient is used, an internal consistency reliability value above .70 is regarded as satisfactory, whereas a value below 60 indicates a lack of reliability). Nevertheless, the interpretation of internal consistency reliability using composite reliability coefficient was based on the rule of thumb provided by Bagozzi & Yi (2005) as well as Hair *et al.* (2011), who suggested that the composite reliability coefficient should be at least 70 or more. The following table shows the composite reliability coefficient of the study constructs.

Results of the Composite Reliability Test

| Constructs | Composite reliability |
|--|-----------------------|
| Overcrowded and unhygienic prison conditions | 0.89 |
| Non-family visits, letters and communication | 0.84 |
| Dirty cells, | 0.87 |

Source: Bagozzi & Yi, 2005

As shown in Table 3.4, the composite reliability coefficient of all constructs ranged from 0.79 to 0.96, with each exceeding the minimum acceptable level of .70, suggesting adequate internal consistency reliability of the instrument used in this study (Bagozzi & Yi, 2005).

Sources of Data

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Source

Primary data was collected from respondents through issue of administered questionnaires. Some of the respondents who were unable to interpret and follow the questions in the questionnaires were guided by the researcher and delivered the required information.

Secondary Source

Secondary form of data is that information that has ever been published in previous articles, journals, newspapers or electronic channels. The reason for this was to make comparison of secondary data with primary data in order to come up with meaningful interpretations to strengthen the findings that were got from the primary data.

Data Analysis

Data from questionnaire were edited and coded then entered in a computer and Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) program was used to analyze it. The percentage number of respondents according to variables such as; sex, age, objectives and so on were computed and presented using tables. Prison overcrowding and its effects on the rehabilitation of inmates was established using Pearson Linear Correlations Coefficient Statistical Method. Whereas, qualitative data were organized according to themes that were identified from research questions and analyzed using content analysis.

Ethical Issues

At the onset of data collection, the researcher sought permission from the head of the department to obtain an introductory letter which was used to seek permission in the study area. In addition, each questionnaire contained an opening introductory letter requesting for the respondents' cooperation to provide the required information for the study. The respondents were further assured of confidentiality of the information provided and that the study findings were used for academic purposes only. Respondents were further assured of their personal protection and that they had the authority to refuse or accept to be interviewed.

Limitations of the Study

The problems are both methodological and theoretical. First and foremost, research is known to a number of research fellows as a costly venture, in terms of time, human resources, financial and other logistics. This study also was susceptible to such problems.

Secondly, the study was conducted only in Monrovia Central Prison, Monrovia-Liberia. This implies that the study has geographical limitation. However, time and other logical issues may not be abundantly available to the researcher and the researcher had to find enough time to collect data by timetabling himself properly.

Nonetheless, the researcher used the resources available effectively and efficiently with in the period scheduled to conduct the study. As in any research, the best response to the inevitable obstacle is not to give up but to reflect on what you can do better, make adjustments, and persist. Hence, the researcher was focused and determined to have clear solutions to each of the limitation in order to collect relevant data.

| | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----|
| | | | | |
| There technical training skills they give to | 2.58 | 0.76 | High | 13. |
| Pastoral Bible Studies is the best | 2.55 | 0.77 | High | 14. |
| I am able to support my family with the skills learnt | 2.53 | 0.79 | High | 15. |
| I believe, when I will be out of the prison, I will no longer be | 2.51 | 0.81 | High | 16. |
| If learnt social and economic skills, I wouldn't have been imprisoned in | 2.50 | 0.83 | High | 17. |
| A self-employed skills such as tailoring, carpenter and catering skills help me to | 2.48 | 1.01 | Low | 18. |
| Carpentry, Tailoring, Masonry, Electrical wiring and Welding are taught to prisoners in Monrovia | 2.45 | 1.03 | Low | 19. |
| Overall means | 2.582 | 0.746 | High | |

4. Discussion of the research findings

Results are presented and discussed according to the objective stated as shown below;

The objective of this study was intended to examine the relevance of rehabilitation programs for inmates in Monrovia Central Prison.

Table 74.4 Relevance of rehabilitation programs for inmates in Monrovia Central Prison.

| Descriptive Statistics | Mean | Std. | Interpretatio | Rank |
|------------------------------------|------|------|---------------|------|
| I pass through Formal Education as | 3.82 | 0.65 | Very high | 10. |
| I undergo Vocational | 2.79 | 0.71 | High | 11. |

Source: Survey research, 2021

The findings from the above table indicated that respondents when asked whether they pass through Formal Education as rehabilitation programs in the prison had the first mean value of 3.82 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.65.

The results further showed that inmates undergo Vocational Training as rehabilitation programs in the prison, the average value was 2.79 and its corresponding standard deviation was 0.71. It can also be observed from the table above that this particular question was ranked the 2nd, meaning that most respondents highly answered in favor of this statement.

The average response on whether there is always a team that provide to us Life skills each 40 days in the prison was rated with a mean of 2.75 and with standard deviation of 0.76 and with a rank of being the 3rd. Additionally, employees were asked if there technical training skills they give to prisoners, this statement was rated with a mean of 2.58 and had a stand deviation of 0.76 with a 4th rank. This implies that vocational training play an important role to sensitize inmates to get prepared on their release from the prison.

Considering the statement whether Pastoral Bible Studies is the best rehabilitation project in the prison, this statement was rated with a mean of 2.55 with a standard deviation of 0.79 and ranked 6th. As well, based on the statement that as stated: "I am able to support my family with the skills learnt". This statement was rated with a mean of 2.53 and its standard deviation 0.79, ranked 7th.

I believe, when I will be out of the prison, I will no longer be back on the street, this statement was rated with a mean of 2.51 and a standard deviation of 0.81, ranked 7th. Well, if learnt social and economic skills, I wouldn't have been imprisoned in Monrovia Central Prison and this was summarized with a mean of 2.50, a standard deviation of 0.83, 9th ranked. Moreover, A self-employed skills such as tailoring, carpenter and catering skills help me to become more responsible than before, this had a mean of 2.48, a standard deviation of 1.01 ranked 9th. Based on whether Carpentry, Tailoring, Masonry, Electrical wiring and Welding are taught to prisoners in Monrovia Central Prison was rated with a mean of 2.45 and with a standard deviation of 1.03.

Finally, the overall mean, the above analysis reveals that the relevance of rehabilitation programs for inmates in Monrovia Central Prison had a mean rated 2.582 and standard deviation of 0.746 estimated to 75%. This implies that a rehabilitation program Provision of any form of training or education be it primary, secondary or vocational training is extremely important as majority of convicts will someday exit prison and return to their community as they will be better placed and equipped for all the challenges they might face.

Relevance of rehabilitation programs for inmates in Monrovia Central Prison

Findings revealed that the relevance of rehabilitation programs for inmates in Monrovia Central Prison had a mean rated to 2.582 and standard deviation of 0.746 estimated to 75%. This implies that a rehabilitation program Provision of any form of training or education be it primary, secondary or vocational training is extremely important as majority of convicts will someday exit prison and return to their community as they will be better placed and equipped for all the challenges they might face. This is in agreement with Gerber & Fritsch (1995:136) work that education and training are importantly prerequisite to a stable, crime free life. An increase in job skills and productivity of offenders also contribute directly to the national economy. Moreover, if an offender is rehabilitated upon release from prison, the process of reintegration becomes easier and fruitful and that the released shall be productive in society. State and federal prisons have long provided programming to inmates during their confinements.

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