



POVERTY ALLEVIATION THROUGH INMATES' EDUCATION: A NIGERIAN CORRECTIONAL CENTER IN FOCUS

Adawi Adeola ADELEKE & Mahfuz ALABIDUN

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Lagos State University, Ojo

Abstract

Poverty remains a pressing challenge in developing countries like Nigeria. The country's correctional system, criticized for its punitive focus, can benefit from a shift towards rehabilitation and education. Research suggests that educating and providing skills to inmates can effectively reduce poverty and crime. Many incarcerated youths lack educational and employment opportunities, and this study aims to explore the impact of educational initiatives within the Nigerian correctional center, focusing on socioeconomic empowerment. The Paper seeks to explore the status of inmates' education in Nigeria, the challenges and way forward. The study will contribute to the understanding of correctional education's role in poverty alleviation in the Nigerian context. The findings will identify effective educational programs, highlight implementation challenges, and evaluate education's long-term impact on reducing recidivism and improving inmates' employability.

Keywords: Poverty Alleviation, Inmates' Education, Correctional Center, Rehabilitation, Recidivism, Socioeconomic Empowerment.

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Corresponding Author Email: adawi2308@gmail.com

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Introduction

In Nigeria today, the issue of poverty is a significant challenge that affects various segments of the society. The citizens are faced with high levels of poverty, with a substantial portion of its population living below the poverty line. Poverty has been centrally-defined as a general lack of sufficient material resources, (Goulden, 2013), it is however, relative and dynamic rather than absolute and fixed. Also, it is not the same as social mobility, well-being or inequality. While some writers associate poverty with various social and economic challenges, including limited access to education, unemployment, and criminal behavior (Akoum (2008); Lenagala & Ram (2010) and others simply put it as ‘when a person’s resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)’ (Whright 1996; Smith, 2010). It has also been described as ‘dissatisfaction of individual’s basic needs’ (Smith, 2010). These needs include clean water, nutrition, health care, education and shelter.

Poverty can therefore be described as a multidimensional social phenomenon whose cause is dependent on sex, age, culture, social and economic factors. It is associated only with insufficient income, as the poverty level is determined in accordance with the income. People who live below poverty level or slightly above are considered poor. The concept of poverty is also associated with poorer human health, increased mortality, “corruption” of society, i.e. an increased crime or other factors that are not useful for economic growth and social welfare. However, what is a need for one individual, must not be necessarily relevant to another. Individuals’ personal needs are conditional, based on the socio-economic environment and past experiences. So poverty in the most general sense is the shortage of the first necessity goods. It is a condition, when individual lacks some quantity of money or material goods. The definitions of poverty should therefore be grounded in material conditions and minimum standards.

Meanwhile Crime in a straightforward sense is law-breaking, or more conditionally, violation of the criminal law as agreed within a given jurisdiction at a particular time, although criminal law is usually enduring once established. The reasons certain criminal laws emerge and not others, which laws are enforced, and who is prosecuted are sometimes contested. Although some laws such as those against killing and the use of violence seem universally agreed as based on society’s moral consensus, other laws may codify the interests of the influential, powerful and rich, and therefore are bias against the interests and wishes of the poor, the powerless and those without a voice. As the title of Reiman and Leighton’s (2010) study attests, ‘The Rich Get Richer and The Poor Get Prison’. For example, the prison population contains disproportionate numbers of people who have lived in the most socially deprived areas (Houchin, 2005).

Sakalauskas (1999) opine that Crime is the breach of rules or laws for which the law governing institutions give convictions. Crime is a rational act, since the individual chooses whether or not to carry out the crime. The crime can be defined as illegality and is classified differently in each country. National law defines what is prohibited and how the violators have to be punished (Fadaei-Tehrani & Green (2002); Scerra (2011); D’Amico & Block (2007). Crime is a serious problem, which affects the whole society. It affects the victims and perpetrators, as well as their families.

Theoretical aspects of crime are analyzed through economic, sociological and psychological perspectives. Looking at the economic aspects, the crime firstly is a rational action. In deciding how to use their time, individuals can choose between legal work, illegal work or



not to work in general (Fadaei-Tehrani & Green 2002). Crime poses a threat not only to an individual, but also harms an overall social development of the country, destroy the main communal relations, thus in a democratic country a constant attention should be given to crime prevention and control (Sakalauskas 1999). A part of normal life and job security is public and business safety (Bilevičienė & Kažemikaitienė 2008). Psychological aspects of crime are discussed in psychological theory, but it does tell specifically about the criminalist, as it covers the importance of childhood experiences for future individual development and behavior (Fadaei-Tehrani & Green 2002).

Impact of poverty on crime can be explained by various reasons. Poverty can lead to a greater or lesser stress, which, in turn, may encourage an individual to make a theft, robbery or other violent crime. Criminal action is the way for poorer people to acquire economic goods, which could not be attained legally. They can acquire more material goods by threatening or force, thus leading to brutal and violent crimes. For many people, especially for impoverished ones, goods acquired from crime can outweigh the risks, so it can be suggested that poverty should increase crime rate. Much attention on the problems of poverty and crime was paid by Fadaei-Tehrani (1989). His studies have shown that the official crime rate is almost always higher among the poor. Poor people are often arrested and convicted for committing crimes. In other words, the decision to commit crime is based on the self-centered cost-benefit analysis assessment and psychological elements. People often have to make decisions on which activities (legal or illegal) to do. This issue was analyzed by other authors, but their studies were more specialized - in order to prove that the poorest children living in families are more prone to crime than growing in affluent families (Griggs & Walker 2008). The authors examined the impact of poverty on children's growth and their further development. Relationship between children living in poverty and their subsequent behavior is obvious. Such children are more prone to engage in riskier activities, initiate early smoking, become more aggressive and commit crimes. Thus, as Wong (2007) study results show, crime is influenced by poverty, also - through family dysfunction.

So in general, connection between poverty and crime is undeniable, because those who suffer from poverty, deprivation, can often reject the legal and social norms. However, there should be noted that the poorest countries and poorest people are not prone to crime. Costa Rica, which is the richest country in Central America, And Nicaragua, which is the poorest country in Central America, both lead as the safest countries in the region (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2007). Zhao et al. (2002) presented a mathematics model, which studies the dynamics of poverty and crime. It was found that government intervention and control of criminal activity in poor countries can often reduce crime, and also to mitigate the problem of poverty. To summarize the research on relationship between poverty and crime, it should be stated that the strength of this relationship depends on the nature of crime. Poverty correlates the strongest with property related crimes. In addition, children who grow up in poverty are more likely to commit crimes than the ones that had not experienced poverty. Alongside, it should be stated that poverty and crime interrelations also depend on the particular characteristics of the country in which these relations are analyzed.

The Nigeria Correctional Centers, formerly known as prisons, play a crucial role in the criminal justice system in Nigeria, but they also present an opportunity for addressing poverty and social reintegration. This study aims to explore the potential of inmate education as a means of poverty alleviation within the Nigeria Correctional Centers.

Problem Statement



For underprivileged youth growing up in complex circumstances impacted by poverty, conflict, lack of resources, and limited opportunities to pursue education and subsequent employment opportunities are really challenging. In Nigeria, without education and employment opportunities, many youths turn to other activities that ultimately end in they being incarcerated. However, rather than being rehabilitated while in custody, the Nigerian correctional system has long been criticized for its focus on punishment rather than rehabilitation. Hence this study aims to appraise current educational programmes in Nigeria Prisons (Correctional Centres) with particular focus on Inmates Educational Foundation.

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

- a) To examine the existing educational programs and initiatives implemented within the Nigeria Correctional Centers.
- b) To assess the impact of inmate education on poverty alleviation and social reintegration.

Correctional Education and Rehabilitation

Various scholars have ascribed definitions and clarifications to what correctional education is. Some of these include moral restoration, therapeutic healing, faith-based interventions, career-related pathing, academic growth, and life approach. Correctional education shares a relationship with all of these concepts. Ryan (1987) indicates that correctional education refers to the aspect of the overall corrections practice that involves transforming offender's behaviour by way of carefully designed learning environments and experiences. He concludes that correctional education aims to improve or develop an offender's knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values. Rotman (1990) contends that an individual's transformation needs not rely only on religion. They require assistance in mental aspects too. He infers that correctional education needs to view an inmate holistically to recognize personal needs for transformation, such as achieving rehabilitation via mental, emotional, and religious growth. Clear and Cole (1994) refer to any organized undertaking where inmates are removed from their lockups to carry out any useful tasks as being correctional education. These scholars infer that education is achieved through such activities. They further contend that one of the aims of correctional education is to instill values that fortify the intent to repair morals.

Crayton and Neusteter (2008) state that re-entry programmes are also a part of correctional education. They point out that re-entry programmes are offered to inmates, affording them skill sets to attain jobs on their release. An addition would be to widen or broaden an inmate's outlook on life and to manage a positive self-image. Rivera (2016) maintains that correctional education transpires when academic or vocationally inclined programmes are administered to inmates within correctional centres or community facilities.

Correctional education programs also include strategies and programs to improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of incarcerated individuals. These programs are administered at various levels of instruction and include general and specific topics. The programs can best be categorized as academic or vocational. Levels of academic instruction include basic education, secondary education, and post-secondary education. Vocational programs vary in level of instruction, too, and they range from basic employment skills to advanced, professional certification. Additionally, many correctional education programs have separate or integrated components related to enhancing life skills, cognitive abilities, and other pro-



social behaviors. Recent reports indicate that correctional populations are less educated than the general public and that nearly 40 % of prisoners have earned less than a high school diploma (Harlow, 2003).

Rehabilitation is a much-contested and ambiguous concept within the field of criminology and can be understood as both a process and an outcome (McNeill & Graham, 2020; Vanstone, 2020). Mathiesen (2006) tells us that the word itself is of French and Latin origin, with “the French *re*, which means ‘return’ or ‘repetition’, and the Latin *habilis*, which means ‘competent’”, while Campbell (2010) defines rehabilitation as “the process of helping a person to readapt to society or to restore someone to a former position or rank”. From the offset, both prove problematic if applied to criminal justice. The underlying assumption is that returning to, readapting to, or being restored to a prior social status is something that is both desirable and possible. However, Carlen (2013) maintains that this is often not the case. Imprisonment does not occur in a vacuum and the majority of people in prison come from the most impoverished sections of society (Smith et al., 2007). The experience of imprisonment often co-exists amongst factors such as educational disadvantage, health inequality, unemployment, addiction, family breakdown, and poverty, and people in prison tend to have little to which they can be advantageously rehabilitated (Carlen, 2013; Higgins & Bourke, 2017; IPRT, 2012). It therefore comes as little surprise that, where there are higher levels of income inequality, there are higher rates of imprisonment (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2007). This corresponds to research by O'Donnell et al., (2007) who found that the most deprived areas in Ireland had 149.5 prisoners per 10,000 population in comparison to 6.3 per 10,000 in the least deprived areas. In Ireland, such inequality is a result of the widening income gap between the rich and the poor (Sweeney, 2019). Sweeney (2019) also suggests that higher levels of inequality tend to result in the unequal distribution of economic and social resources resulting in “less socially cohesive societies”.

According to a recent European Commission report (2011), the different approaches to prison education in Europe can be categorized into three broad typologies. 1) Provision that is embedded in a traditional and mainstream secondary school curriculum but oriented towards the interests and needs of adults. 2) Vocational education and training programmes that aim to equip prisoners with the skills and competencies required in particular occupations or on the labour market.

3) Non-formal learning courses such as arts and crafts, or offence-focused programmes such as anger management, thinking skills, pre-release courses, etc. Of course, in reality, combinations of these elements exist, with countries giving different weightings to the different types of provision.

The Nigeria Correctional Centers operate under the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS) are responsible for the custody, rehabilitation, and reformation of individuals convicted of crimes. The centers have traditionally focused on punishment rather than rehabilitation, leading to challenges in inmate reintegration and recidivism rates.

The Nigerian Correctional System and Educational Initiatives

The Nigeria Correctional Service (NCS) formerly known as Nigeria Prison Service (NPS) is a government agency which operates prisons. The law establishing it divides the Correctional Services into two main areas which are: The Custodial Services and Non-Custodial Services. The Custodian Services involve locking up inmates in the prison and legally depriving them of liberty while the Non-Custodial Services have to do with probation not requiring prison



sentence (Andrew, 2021). According to the Ministry of Interior (2018), prison services in Nigeria are expected by law, to:

- Take into custody all those legally interned.
- Produce the suspect before the courts as and when due.
- Identify the causes of anti-social contacts of the convicts.
- Set in motion mechanism for their retraining and reformation preparatory to returning them back to the society as normal law-abiding citizens.
- Generating revenue through the use of prison farms and industries.

According to the Nigeria Prison Service Manual (2013), the realization of one of the major objectives of the prison services which is the reformation and rehabilitation of convicts, are to be done through a complicated set of mechanisms consisting among others; group work, casework session, recreational activities, religious services and adult and remedial education programmes, educational development projects, skills acquisition programmes, mid-range industrial production, agriculture service and after-care service programme.

Education initiatives in the Nigerian Correctional Centers

The Nigerian Correctional Service Standing Orders Custodial (revised edition), 2020 under content 468 **Education and recreation activities** in Custodial centre states the following educational initiatives in Nigerian correctional centers.

- (a) Education and recreational activities shall be provided for convicted Inmates and young persons in custody.
- (b) The education of inmates shall be integrated with the national educational system so as to enable them sit for WAEC/NECO examinations and to also continue their education without difficulty after release from custody.
- (c) Recreational and cultural activities shall be provided in all custodial centres for the benefit of the inmates including towards their physical, mental health and social well-being.
- (d) The Custodial centre with the approval of the Controller of Corrections shall employ qualified Teachers and instructors to teach and educate inmates in collaboration with appropriate educational institutions.
- (e) Educational activities shall be provided for all inmates. The Correctional Service shall employ and deploy qualified teachers and instructors to teach and educate inmates in collaboration with appropriate educational institutions

“Protect the society; reform the Prisoners. If you can’t do the crime do not do the crime.” This is the motto use by the Nigerian Correctional System. However, the slogan is an Understatement when it comes to the actual and physical sense of being a Prisoner in Nigerian Prisons.

Inmates Educational Foundation and Poverty Alleviation

According to Mann (n.d.), education as a great equalizer can only work if the most vulnerable individuals have access to it. While providing opportunities for incarcerated individuals to



earn a high school and eventually a college degree may not fix all the systemic issues seen within the criminal justice system, education seems like a better use of tax money than funding the high recidivism rates that exist across the country. The Inmates Educational Foundation was therefore established with the sole aim of reforming and rehabilitating inmates and juveniles through literacy, adult, digital literacy and advanced education. The organization also liaise with like-minded organizations toward the provision of tutorials, books, audio, and visual learning aids to empower prison inmates with the basic knowledge required to launch them on a path to acquire an advanced diploma or university degree. It is believed that adequate education would contribute to the reduction of stigmatization, victimization, suffering, feeling of hopelessness, segregation, and temptation to revert to crime after release from prison.

So far, the organization has been able to impact over 2,500 inmates and juveniles with education, and this has influenced about 70% having Ordinary certificate, 20% now admitted in the National Open University and about 5% are out of the prison working as top officers in their various workplaces while about another 5% are learning skills. Thus, the Inmates Education Foundation has been able to alleviate poverty through education and empowerment. It has been able to ensure that the inmates have access to basic education, prepare them for a better society and the reduction of recidivism.

Recommendation for Educational Improvement in Nigerian Correctional Centers to Alleviate Poverty

As adopted globally, alleviating poverty through education, as a means of Improvement in Nigerian Correctional Centers can be achieved through the following educational programmes:

1. Academic Programmes – such as Adult basic education and training (ABET), Secondary education, Computer instruction, Advanced education (Open University)
2. Vocational Programmes – such as Auto repairs, Building trades, Carpentry, Computer graphic design, Information systems, Office technology, Drafting, Electronic and electrical repairs, Food service, Horticulture, Machine trades, Masonry, Printing, Radio broadcasting, Sign design, Small business management, Textile/fabrication, Welding, Script written and Film making.
3. Soft Skills Programmes – such as Anger/conflict management, Cognitive education, Community re-integration, Family/parenting education, Gang intervention, Health services, Library services, Pre-vocational preparation, Business Management skills

Strengthening Partnerships and Collaboration:

In order to achieve an effective educational programme which incorporates the 3 skills, there is need for effective partnership between the Ministry of education and Ministry of Interior. The two Ministries should work hand in hand to achieve both academic, vocational and reformation on our correctional centers.

Another major collaboration is when Companies, Private sectors, Business experts, Psychologist and Counselors work hand in hand with the Ministries of Interior and Education to support and empower the inmates/juveniles both financially, materially and morally. This can go a long way to reform inmates and juveniles for a prosperous future ahead and a better society.

**Conclusion:**

A functional Inmates' education is a catalyst for reducing the high rate of poverty alleviation in the Nigerian Correctional centers. Although, the educational system in the correctional centers is still inefficient due to many factors, its functionality will bring about accelerated growth in the economy. When an educated ex-convict of the country can independently practice skills they learnt in school without waiting for office or government jobs, more jobs will be created and income enhanced. The technological revivals that will follow will also positively lead to industrial revolution which will lead to more job opportunities.

Recommendations:

However, the above could be made possible if the following recommendations are put into effect.

- Government, at all levels, should show its commitment and political-will to ensuring functional education in the Correctional centers through its funding, policy making, supervision and monitoring of educational projects and programmes.
- A law should be enacted that will mandate the Federal and State governments to adhere strictly to the UNESCO's recommendation as Enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and at the heart of UNESCO's mission - the right to education, which implies a right to lifelong learning. In the prison context, this right includes ensuring that inmates are provided with continuous access to quality education, from the first day of their incarceration through to and beyond the day of their release.
- The various supervisory agencies of the educational institutions, Ministry of education and the Ministry of Interior, should be more committed to playing their role as a watch dog in ensuring that all educational institutions from primary to tertiary, operate within and abide by laid down standard.
- There should be an ethical reorientation that aims at raising the consciousness of the citizenry and politicians in particular to see the importance of education in our correctional centers than the stigmatization and isolation attempts on the people in the prison.
- There is also the need for government's commitment to enact a policy on Digital literacy skills as technical education in Nigerian correctional centers. This should start from juveniles and Inmates with Secondary education.



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