

Stakeholders' Perspectives on Inmates' Education and Vocational Skill Training at Nsawam Medium Security Prison in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study explored stakeholders' perspectives on inmates' education and vocational skills training in Nsawam Medium Security Prison in Ghana. Grounded in functionalists' strain theory, and the symbolic interactionists' labelling theory, this exploratory study targeted participants from the University of Cape Coast's Distance Education (DE) programme at Nsawam Medium Security Prison, and Prison Officers connected with inmates' education and vocational skills training, representatives from the Plan Volta, a non-governmental organization and the University of Cape Coast (UCC) as its population. The purposive sampling technique was used to select student inmates, 11 prison officers, and a representative each of Plan Volta and UCC. Data collection was facilitated through semi-structured interviews and data analysis was achieved through thematic analysis. The result of the study suggests that participants generally have a positive impression of inmates' education and skills training. They unequivocally demonstrated that inmates' education and skills training play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between societal structures and individual agency and stressed their transformative potential in promoting rehabilitation and reintegration. The study therefore concluded that education and vocational skills have the capacity to redefine inmates' self-perception, foster a sense of purpose, and equip them with employment skills leading to the prospects for successful reintegration into society, thereby addressing recidivism. It is therefore recommended that the Government of Ghana, through the Ministries of Interior, and Education enhance resource allocation to support inmates' education and vocational skills training. Furthermore, the Ghana Prison Service should foster stronger partnerships with institutions such as the University of Cape Coast, the Plan Volta, and other community-based organisations to facilitate resource sharing and coordinated efforts to support inmates' education and skills training for positive rehabilitation outcomes.

Keywords: Inmates Education, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Recidivism, Stakeholders, Vocational Skills Training

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between education and prison is a complicated and frequently ignored topic in the larger conversation about criminal justice and social rehabilitation. Education in this study is used to describe the various programmes that are designed to improve the knowledge, skills, and personal development of imprisoned individuals to enhance rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and facilitate reintegration into society.

Around the world, there is a rising awareness of the many advantages of giving prisoners access to educational opportunities. However, there are several perspectives which invariably affect how prison education is developed and delivered. According to Quan-Baffour and Zawada (2012), these advantages go beyond the person and have impact on recidivism rates, social reintegration, and safer communities. In a recent study conducted by Stickle and Schuster (2023), it was found that prison education decreases recidivism and improves post-release employment and wages, among ex-convicts who engaged in vocational training programmes. This finding confirms an earlier report by Davis et al. (2013) that inmates who participate in educational programmes have a 48-percentage point reduction in recidivism risk as compared to those who do not. Such inmates also have a 13% more chance of securing employment post-release as compared to their counterparts who did not. This indicates that the reformation of the incarcerated must begin with the individual through education and skills training that provide inmates with the opportunity to become socialized with values capable of setting them up for effective reintegration into mainstream society. Through effective reintegration, recidivism becomes largely forestalled because ex-convicts through the knowledge and skills acquired can venture into viable career paths with a new sense of purpose. Thus, inmates' education aids growth and development at both the individual and societal levels.

The other side of the argument has also been expressed in terms of the disadvantages associated with inmates' education. Opponents of prison education argue that it is a waste of money and that prisoners are not deserving of the benefit. They also underscore the fact that correctional education programmes are often hampered by obstacles such as security concerns, frequent disruptions due to prison protocols, and limited access to necessary supplies and technologies. These barriers can impede the delivery of quality education and affect inmate participation and learning outcomes. Again, others argue that prison education initiatives have the ability to be a "reward for offences or hope for a better life," thus emphasizing the possibility of deviant and criminal behavioural occurrences (Johnson & Quan-Baffour, 2015). Public opposition also comes from the perception that offering education to prisoners is unfair when some law-abiding citizens cannot afford similar opportunities. This counter-view of prison education and skill training though may be valid to some extent; the import of the discussion should be premised upon the notion of opting for the lesser evil in this case. Human capital stands to be lost with its adverse impact on the overall well-being of society if inmates are left to "rot in jail." This obviously constitutes more evil than providing them with knowledge and skills. Therefore, the relevance of inmates' education and skills training as conduits for effective reintegration and reduced recidivism is not in doubt. This underlines the need to explore stakeholders' perspectives on this important subject.

1.1 Problem Statement

Globally, education in prison environments is becoming more and more framed around social justice and human rights in recent times. Access to basic education, vocational training, life skills and personal development training, and other rehabilitative programmes is emphasized in the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, sometimes known as the Nelson Mandela Rules (Schoeman, 2010). This trend reflects an increasing realization that education may give prisoners new information, skills, and a sense of purpose in their lives to transform. In addition, numerous research suggest that depriving jailed people access to education jeopardizes not only their personal growth but also the larger social objectives of crime reduction and rehabilitation (Davis et al., 2013; Ellison et al., 2017; Hurry et al., 2010).

This understanding is especially important in the African setting, where prison systems frequently struggle with issues like overcrowding, lack of adequate funding, and a legacy that prioritizes punishment over rehabilitation (Sarkin, 2008). Despite these obstacles, there is a growing African movement that advocates education as the primary component of prison reform. For instance, realizing that education can provide a conduit for addressing the cycle of recidivism and help inmates successfully reintegrate into society, some nations, like South Africa have incorporated the right to education for inmates in their constitutions (Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012). This movement is in line with the larger global trend that acknowledges the intrinsic worth of every person, regardless of their previous crimes, and the significance of offering chances for personal development and reform even to those incarcerated.

In Ghana, the argument for improved educational possibilities in prisons is becoming more pronounced. With studies showing that a significant number of young offenders who are released from prison are likely to re-offend due to issues like labelling, unemployment and lack of opportunities, the need for effective rehabilitation programmes is especially important. The Ghana Prisons Service recognizes rehabilitation and reintegration as essential elements of its mission in its strategic plan (Mensah & Akuoko, 2023). However, converting this mission and vision into concrete results necessitates a deep understanding of the viewpoints of significant stakeholders regarding correctional education. Implementing such programmes effectively depends on the overall acceptance, support and more importantly public opinion on it shown by Omoni (2009). Against the backdrop of the significance of public opinions on the success of social programmes, this study, therefore, explores stakeholders' perspectives regarding prisoners' education in Ghana's Nsawam Medium Security Prison. Specifically, however, it seeks to explore the perspectives of relevant stakeholders about inmates' education, the social implications of inmates' education, and the way forward to make inmate education better. Comprehending the perspectives of significant stakeholders is essential to the creation and execution of effective and efficient programmes for correctional education. This is critical because of its potential to significantly reduce recidivism and promote sustainable reintegration.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study's objectives were to;

- (i) Explore the perspectives of relevant stakeholders about inmates' education
- (ii) Interrogate the social implications of inmates' education from the perspectives of stakeholders
- (iii) Identify ways of approaching inmates' education as an intervention for rehabilitation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 The Functionalists' Strain Theory

The Functionalists' Strain Theory stands as a cornerstone within the field of Sociology, offering a compelling explanation for the occurrence of crime and deviance. This theory diverges from individualistic explanations, which attribute criminal behaviour to personal flaws or psychological predispositions. Instead, it aligns with the principles of sociological positivism, emphasizing the profound influence of societal factors in shaping individual actions and, consequently, deviant behaviour (Merton, 1938). By examining the interplay between social structures, cultural values, and individual opportunities, the functionalists' strain theory provides an understanding of the complex roots of crime within a societal context.

The intellectual lineage of the Functionalist Strain Theory can be traced back to the seminal work of Emile Durkheim, a pioneering figure in sociology. Durkheim introduced the concept of "anomie," a state of normlessness that he argued rises during periods of rapid social change or upheaval in the 1890s. He posited that such societal instability weakens social bonds, diminishes the collective conscience, and creates a breeding ground for deviant behaviour. Merton (1938) expanded upon Durkheim's concept of anomie, developing it into the Functionalists' Strain Theory in its most widely recognized form. Merton diverged from Durkheim's emphasis on the absence of norms, arguing instead that anomie stems from a disconnect between the culturally valued goals of a society and the legitimate means available to achieve those goals. In societies that place a high premium on wealth and status, but simultaneously restrict access to opportunities for upward mobility, individuals experience a profound sense of strain and frustration, potentially leading them down the path of deviance and criminality.

To illustrate how individuals cope with the strain generated by the disparity between societal goals and means, Merton proposed five distinct modes of adaptation. These modes represent different responses to the pressure exerted by social structures and cultural expectations:

Conformity: This mode represents the most prevalent response to societal strain. Conformists accept both the culturally defined goals, such as financial success, and the legitimate means of achieving them, such as education and hard work. They strive for success within the existing social framework, adhering to established norms and expectations.

Innovation: Innovators, while embracing the societal emphasis on achieving success and accumulating wealth, reject the conventional, often limited, means of attaining these goals. They resort to innovative, albeit illegal or deviant, methods, such as theft, fraud, or drug dealing, to circumvent the barriers they perceive in their path to success.

Ritualism: Here, individuals abandon societal success goals but still adhere to established rules and procedures. They focus on following routines without ambition or hope of personal advancement. Even though they do not believe in the societal goal, they continue to perform daily tasks mechanically to maintain a stable society. They obey rules without passion.

Retreatism: Representing a complete withdrawal from societal norms and expectations, retreatists reject both the culturally defined goals and the legitimate means of achieving them. They disengage from society, often seeking solace in substance abuse, isolation, or other forms of escapism, effectively removing themselves from the pressures of societal expectations.

Rebellion: Rebels represent the most active form of adaptation to societal strain. They reject both the existing goals and means, viewing them as unjust or oppressive. Instead of conforming or retreating, rebels actively seek to replace the prevailing social order with a new set of values and structures, often through social movements, revolutions, or other forms of collective action.

The Functionalist Strain Theory has proven to be a valuable analytical tool, providing insights into a wide range of social phenomena. The theory offers a compelling explanation for the higher rates of crime and delinquency observed among individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. These individuals often face limited access to quality education, job opportunities, and other legitimate avenues for achieving success, leading to increased strain and a greater likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour. By highlighting the strain caused by unequal access to opportunities, the theory sheds light on the perpetuation of social inequality. When certain groups are systematically denied access to resources and opportunities, the resulting strain can manifest as crime, deviance, and social unrest, further entrenching existing inequalities. The Functionalists' Strain Theory suggests that social change often arises from the collective experience of strain. When a significant portion of society perceives a disconnect between their aspirations and the opportunities available to them, they may mobilize to challenge the status quo, potentially leading to social movements, reforms, or even revolutions. This theory provides justification for correctional education perceiving the society as creating the conditions predisposing individuals to deviance and criminal behaviours.

2.1.2 Symbolic Interactionists' Labelling Theory

Another theory to guide the study is the Symbolic Interactionist Labelling Theory. The theory asserts that deviant behaviour only exists after being classified as such by members of society. The idea is also an element of the symbolic interactionist paradigm, which contends that social interactions are the only thing that can truly create an individual's sense of self and identity (Akers & Jennings, 2019). It follows that those who are poorly branded would view this label as an integral part of who they are. A person who has been branded will feel ashamed and degraded. These feelings will serve as motivation for those who have experienced stigma to engage in greater wrongdoing. A label's validity is also demonstrated to the recipient when persons who get it accept the indicated characteristics as being a part of their basic identities and act in ways that confirm the stereotypes connected with it.

As a theoretical framework, symbolic interactionism emphasizes the idea that education serves as a medium for communication and a symbol of an individual's identity, affinities, and values in addition to serving as a practical means of individual make-up. Education is especially important in cultural and social symbolism in the Ghanaian environment. This theory directs the investigation into the complex connotations associated with educational choices in Ghana. Understanding how education is linked to criminal symbolism and how these connotations have a significant influence on how people view themselves and other people.

Symbolic interactionism is very useful for understanding the process of stigmatization and labelling. In Ghana, labelling occurs when others perceive someone's lifestyle or behaviour as an indication of criminal activity or as a representation of a deviant subculture. This labelling can have a significant impact on the person's self-perception, as well as how others regard them. Exclusion, prejudice, or animosity are social outcomes of stigmatization that can further shape a person's identity and behaviour. The study aims to shed light on how educational choices are connected to stigmatization and labelling practices, and how this affects people's experiences and behaviours within Ghanaian culture, through the lens of symbolic interactionism.

The selection and application of both theories (Functionalist strain and Symbolic Interactionist) to the study of the impact of inmate education offers a better understanding of the complexity of social issues such as deviance, theft and other non-conformist social behaviours. The theories give insight into why such sociological traits happen despite society's expectations and efforts put in place by society to minimize the manifestations of such undesirable behaviours. It also makes a solid argument in favour of such undesirable behaviours and how societies can manage them. The functionalist strand, for instance, makes the case that despite the expectations of society to have people conform to norms and cultural practices, it is difficult to achieve the same because the goals of achieving the norms and cultural practices are not clearly outlined and fashioned in the interest of the individuals in the community. The individual then becomes conflicted in staying true to the goals of the community to be accepted or becomes delinquent by straying from the standards of the community. In essence, society must not condemn rightly deviant and delinquent behaviours without necessarily understanding how it was occasioned.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Perspectives of Inmate Education

The perspectives of inmates' education vary greatly among people. Researchers have argued that how we perceive inmates' education has a fundamental impact on how it is developed and delivered (Costelloe, 2014). Some people believe that inmate education should be based solely on an adult education approach. Given that many prisoners lack the basic minimum education as compared to the average person in society, those with this perspective hold the view that in-prison education should primarily mirror programmes of education in the wider community outside the prison and that inmates' education must be viewed as part of a social justice framework.

There is a more dominant perspective on inmates' education internationally. That is the view that education should be used as a tool for rehabilitation. Proponents of this view see education in prison not as a right but as a tool through which the goal of rehabilitation can be reached. They therefore promote vocational and skills training designed to prepare prisoners for employment on their release (Bozick et al., 2018). They do so with the belief that once they are prepped for participation in the workforce, they will be encouraged to desist from crime.

There is a third perspective on inmates' education that looks at the relationship between education and personal development. Here, the argument is around rehabilitation and treatment. Advocates of this perspective see inmates' education to aim beyond rehabilitation and recidivism to a transformative process of development. They argue that education in prison is more than just a tool for crime reduction, and believe that it can be an empowering process (Key & May 2019).

Irrespective of the perspective, there is the notion that inmates' education enriches lives. It helps build inclusive communities and create sustainable societies. However, within the context of correctional facilities, achieving educational inclusivity requires addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by incarcerated individuals. These challenges may include low levels of prior education, interrupted learning trajectories, and the

psychological impact of incarceration. Gröning (2014) highlights the complexities of educating foreign inmates in Norwegian prisons, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate educational materials and approaches. This perspective resonates with the challenges faced in Ghana, where linguistic diversity and cultural nuances among the prison population necessitate tailored educational strategies (Addae, 2020).

Despite these challenges, research suggests that providing access to education within prisons can have significant positive impact. Owusu-Ansah (2021), in exploring prison libraries in Ghana, highlights the transformative potential of education in fostering rehabilitation and reducing recidivism. The study emphasizes that access to books, educational materials, and vocational training programmes can empower inmates with knowledge, skills, and a renewed sense of purpose, ultimately facilitating their successful reintegration into society. Ghana, like many countries, faces challenges in providing comprehensive and inclusive education within its prison system. McCann (2021) researched prisoner intervention programmes in Ghana, specifically focusing on Nsawam Medium Security Prison. The findings of the study highlight the lack of resources and support for educational programmes, limiting the availability and effectiveness of such initiatives. The study emphasized the need for partnerships with external institutions to provide inmates with formal educational certification, resources, and supplies, thereby incentivizing participation and fostering a positive attitude towards rehabilitation.

Furthermore, studies by Akyina and Alubokin (2018) on the guidance and counselling needs of inmates in Ghanaian prisons underscored the importance of addressing the psychological and emotional barriers to education. This was premised on the fact that many inmates have experienced trauma, poverty, and social exclusion, which can significantly impact their learning and motivation. Therefore, a holistic approach to inmate education that incorporates counselling, support services, and individualized learning plans is crucial for ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness. The availability of Distance Education (DE) programmes emerges as a potential solution to bridge the gap in access to education within Ghanaian prisons. Aziz et al., (2021), explored the potential of DE in catering for the diverse needs of inmates, offering flexibility and accessibility. However, the study also acknowledged the challenges of implementing such programmes, including the availability of funding, technological infrastructure, trained personnel, and support for both inmates and educators.

The Ghanaian prison system, like many globally, grapples with its dual role: punishment and rehabilitation. Education emerges as a critical bridge between these objectives, offering incarcerated individuals a chance at personal growth, skill development, and ultimately, successful reintegration into society. The good news though is that there is a strong desire among inmates for educational opportunities, driven by a yearning for self-improvement and a recognition of the bleak prospects that await them without employable skills (Addae, 2020). This intrinsic motivation forms the bedrock upon which effective prison education programmes can be built.

However, a closer examination reveals significant barriers that impede the realization of true educational inclusivity within Ghanaian prisons. Addae (2020) pointed to chronically underfunded and understaffed rehabilitation programmes within prison facilities in Ghana. Poor support for rehabilitation programmes manifests itself in overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning materials, and a dearth of qualified educators equipped to handle the unique challenges of this learning environment. The punitive nature of the prison system casts a long shadow over educational endeavours. Addae (2020) highlighted how disciplinary actions, often perceived as arbitrary and disproportionate, disrupt learning and foster a climate of fear and resentment, hindering inmates' ability to thrive academically. Ennin and Mensah (2022) further amplified the problems of having effective rehabilitation programmes within the prison walls pointing to the fact that inmates from disadvantaged backgrounds often arrived with pre-existing educational disadvantages, requiring targeted interventions and support to ensure their meaningful participation.

2.2.2 Social Implications of Inmates' Education

The stark reality of incarceration often overshadows the potential for transformation that lies dormant within prison walls. Yet, within these spaces, education emerges as a powerful tool for rehabilitation, capable of nurturing not only individual growth but also contributing to a more peaceful and just society. By examining the link between inmates' education through the lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, Goal 8, Goal 10, and Goal 16, it could be understood that empowering individuals through education can sow the seeds of peace within the prison walls and beyond.

The act of providing quality education to inmates aligns with the core principles of SDG 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all. The goal of "education for all" emphasizes equitable access to quality education for all learners, irrespective of their background or circumstances, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all including the vulnerable and the marginalised. Inmates, often marginalized and deprived of educational opportunities throughout their lives, are given a chance to engage in meaningful learning experiences that cater to their diverse needs and aspirations (Aziz et al., 2014). This access to education becomes a powerful tool for breaking down inequalities, echoing the aims of SDG 10,

and addressing the root causes of recidivism (Darkwa, 2016). By equipping inmates with knowledge and skills, education empowers them to break free from the cycles of poverty and crime, fostering social inclusion and reducing the likelihood of future criminal behaviour. As highlighted by Aliyu and Mustaffa (2022), rehabilitation programmes, particularly those with an educational focus, are essential for equipping inmates with the tools for successful reintegration into society. Vocational skill training has been part of prison's reformation strategy for many years, yet it has often been received with mixed feelings because of the many challenges surrounding its implementation.

Again, for many inmates, education represents more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it embodies a beacon of hope, a tangible means of reclaiming agency, and a path towards personal transformation and societal reintegration in the face of significant social obstacles (Ewelum et al., 2015). Studies have consistently shown that inmates often view education as a more respectful and humane environment within the prison (Key and May 2019). When inmates participate in programmes that support their educational and career aspirations, it contributes to a more positive and constructive prison culture, potentially reducing tensions and promoting rehabilitation.

2.2.3 Approaches to Inmates' Education as an Intervention for Rehabilitation.

There are several approaches usually employed in correctional education to address the diverse needs of incarcerated individuals. Irrespective of the approach they are all designed to enhance rehabilitation, reduce recidivism and improve post-release outcomes (Davis et al., 2013). The approaches can be categorized into basic, language, academic, vocational, civic, and therapeutic education (Berglund et al., 2021).

- i. *Basic Education.* Many inmates enter prison with low levels of education, often lacking basic reading, writing, and math skills. To address this, the correctional facilities would provide a basic education programme that teaches fundamental literacy and numeracy to enhance the likelihood that their total reintegration into society would improve and the risk of recidivism would reduce. As part of the basic education programme, inmates who have not completed high school can enrol on programmes that prepare them to attain the minimum required qualification in the jurisdiction.
- ii. *Vocational Skills Training.* As a fundamental component of modern-day prison reformation, vocational skills training is used as a viable approach to provide jailed people with the means of achieving a successful reintegration into society after release. Vocational skills training programmes have proven to be one of the most effective strategies for reducing recidivism and promoting the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals because it helps inmates gain practical job skills that can improve their employability after release. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) identified vocational training as a cornerstone for reintegration. These programmes equip participants with practical skills that enhance their employability, a key factor in preventing re-offending. Furthermore, vocational training programmes often incorporate components such as financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and soft skills training. These skills when acquired further empower individuals, and foster a sense of self-worth and confidence among programme participants.
- iii. *Academic Programmes.* Higher education has been associated with a lower rate of recidivism, better employment opportunities, and improved social mobility. Therefore, many correctional facilities partner with Universities and Colleges to offer higher academic education courses
- iv. *Therapeutic programmes.* These are programmes that are designed to meet the psychological and behavioural needs of inmates. It helps inmates change their negative thought patterns and develop a positive mindset for re-entry into society. They could be civic through life-skills training or faith-based through moral and ethical instruction.
- v. *Civic Programmes.* These programmes are designed to assist inmates take responsibility for their actions and inaction and to develop empathy for fellow humans. The aim is to instill in inmates a sense of responsibility and accountability and reduce the likelihood of them re-offending.
- vi. *Language Programmes.* In jurisdictions where there are diverse populations, language training is used to enhance understanding among inmates from different cultural backgrounds, thereby reducing conflicts and encouraging cooperation.

The education programmes at Nsawam Medium Security Prison uses several of the approaches. However, this study looked at the vocational skill training and the Distance Education programme in humanities which is a higher education programmes run by the Ghana Prison Service in partnership with the University of Cape Coast and Plan Volta, an NGO.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed the exploratory research design, aligning with a constructivist research philosophical position. The research aimed to explore stakeholders' perspectives on education (Skinner & Farrington, 2020). The qualitative research paradigm was essential for this study because it aligns with the study's main objective of exploring inmates' correctional education from the perspectives of key stakeholders. Qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate because according to Van Burg et al. (2022), qualitative research allows for a deep exploration of complex phenomena and provides insights into participants' subjective viewpoints.

3.2 Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

Members of deviant or criminal subcultures (inmates), prison officers from the Ghana Prison Service, Officers, representatives of Plan Volta, and UCC, the two partner organisations running the programme in the prison were the participants in the study. These participants possess unique insights into inmates' education. Their experiences and interpretations of inmates' education are essential to uncovering the depth of meaning and the role education plays in the lives of inmates as well as ensuring a balanced perspective. The researchers employed purposive sampling technique to select a total of 26 participants who were inmates enrolled on the DE programme from UCC and 11 Prison Officers connected with inmates' education and skills training at the e Nsawam Medium Security Prison for this study. A representative each from Plan Volta and UCC was also interviewed. Purposive sampling was chosen for this study due to its alignment with the research objectives and the specific expertise required from the participants. According to Saunders and Townsend (2018), purposive sampling allows researchers to intentionally select participants who possess first-hand knowledge and experience related to the research topic. The choice of a sample size of 26 participants (inmates) was influenced by considerations of feasibility based on the Ghanaian context, depth of analysis, and the desire to achieve data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews, indicating that a comprehensive understanding of the research topic has been reached (Fusch & Ness 2015).

3.3 Data Collection Methods and Application

Primary data was utilized in this study. A semi-structured interview guide was used as a data collection tool. Semi-structured interviews, through open-ended questions and active listening, allowed participants to share their insights, experiences, and opinions about education within the prison system. This approach facilitated the exploration of diverse viewpoints while ensuring a focused discussion of the study's objectives. The interviews were conducted in person, and some through phone communication methods using a semi-structured approach, which allowed for flexibility while ensuring key topics were explored consistently across participants. The duration of each interview varied depending on participant availability and the depth of discussion, typically lasting between 30 minutes to an hour. Interviews took place in settings conducive to open and candid conversations, locations chosen to accommodate participants' preferences and ensure privacy. Questions were designed to elicit rich insights into participants' perceptions, experiences, and observations regarding inmates' education in the Ghanaian Prison System. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. These audio recordings were later transcribed into written text for analysis. Detailed notes were taken regarding participants' views, behaviours, and interactions, allowing for comprehensive data.

3.4 Data Processing Technique

Data processing was conducted using NVivo version 14.0. The analysis followed a thematic approach aimed at identifying recurring themes, patterns, and insights within the interview transcripts. To ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, several measures were taken. Member checking, where participants were provided with summaries of their interviews to validate accuracy, was conducted. The study also aimed at saturation, ensuring that data collection continued until new insights ceased to emerge, enhancing the depth and comprehensiveness of the findings. With the help of NVivo recurring patterns and concepts were identified.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Ethical clearance was sought from the UCC and the Ghana Prison Service. Prior to data collection, the researchers obtained informed consent from all participants. The consent was voluntary, specific, and obtained without coercion, bribery, or misinformation of any kind. This process included explaining the research purpose, the nature of the study, and the rights of the participants. Participants were asked to voluntarily agree to participate and sign consent forms.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms and securely storing audio recordings and transcripts.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The first objective of the study was to explore stakeholders' views on the relevance of inmate education and skill training understanding. The result revealed that Plan Volta's approach to inmates' education aligns strongly with the Functionalist Strain Theory, which posits that societal structures can inadvertently contribute to deviant behaviour by limiting access to legitimate means of achieving socially accepted goals (Merton, 1938). As highlighted by the representative from Plan Volta, many inmates are "underprivileged" and in need of "reformation," suggesting a lack of opportunities for success within conventional societal structures.

By providing access to education, Plan Volta attempts to bridge this gap, offering inmates a legitimate pathway to achieve societal goals and reintegrate as productive members of society. The representative comments are captured here.

"Inmate education in Ghana was under some form of constraints. Some inmates were underprivileged and needed reformation. So, some prison officers took it upon themselves. So, the education at Nsawam prisons started from the Junior High School (JHS) and graduated to the Senior High School (SHS). With Plan Volta, ours is to extend education to the underprivileged and teach various courses. So, we realised that we have to extend our facilities to prisoners also. So, I put together a proposal and sent to the then Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast and I was invited to meet the University Council. I made a presentation and the proposal was accepted and this is where we are today. As I am talking to you, eleven (11) people are doing their national service and five (5) have been duly employed by private firms" (Rep. Plan Volta).

This stance of Plan Volta resonates with the functionalist emphasis on restoring equilibrium and reducing strain within the social system, thus fostering effective reintegration and reducing recidivism significantly. The success story shared above, with eleven inmates completing national service and five securing employment, contributing positively to society, provides tangible evidence for the effectiveness of this approach and the need for more resources to be mobilized for inmates' education in the country.

Furthermore, perspectives of the Ghana Prison Service officers on inmates' education were also sought. The officers particularly emphasized the transformative power of education; hence the need for rigorous inmate' education. This resonates well with the Symbolic Interactionism perspective on the role of social interaction through education in shaping an individual's identity, self-formation and behaviour. A Senior Prison Officer interviewed passed the comment below.

"Inmate education is about altering their behaviours and unravelling their good potentials" (Senior Prison Officer).

This statement highlights the symbolic power of education to redefine inmate's self-perception, moving away from the negative label of "criminal" towards a more positive and pro-social identity. This aligns with Goffman's work on stigma, which argues that individuals internalize societal labels, often leading to self-fulfilling prophecies. Education, in this context, becomes a powerful tool for disrupting these negative labels and empowering individuals to embrace new, positive identities.

Another Senior Officer emphasized education's role in enhancing employability post-sentencing. He noted the absence of recidivism among inmates who participated in the vocational skill training, and DE programmes since their inception in the Prison. The Senior Officer attributed this achievement of the inmates' education to the effective and cordial collaboration between the Ghana Prison Service, The University of Cape Coast, and Plan Volta. He cited an impressive record of hundreds of inmates receiving vocational skill training and formal education without any reported recidivism, suggesting that education can facilitate successful reintegration into society by fostering a sense of agency and belonging. The officer, however, suggested that inmates trained in vocational skills should be given certificates and start-up funds to set themselves up when they are out of prison. By providing inmates with employable skills, the programme increases their chances of finding employment upon release, thereby reducing their likelihood of resorting to criminal activities for economic survival. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of social structures and individual agency, acknowledging that successful reintegration requires not only personal transformation but also societal support and opportunities.

The perspectives of the management of the DE programme were also garnered as key stakeholders in the inmates' educational programme. A member of the College's management had this to say about the University's commitment to the inmates' education.

"The University of Cape Coast through its College of Distance Education has for many years been offering DE programmes for inmates and officers at the Nsawam Prison. Our commitment to the

program is unquestionable. The DE programme at the Nsawam Prison is presently being run as a corporate social responsibility of the University taking care of all the fees of students with Plan Volta currently experiencing financial challenges. Despite UCC's commitment however, it is also saddled with financial difficulties, hence the need for support from government, donor agencies, and private entities to make the programme sustainable and where feasible replicate it in other prison facilities" (Member of CoDE management).

Lastly, all the inmates interacted with and also gave insightful perspectives on prison education. All of them aligned with the thought that inmates' education is a good initiative and should be encouraged despite some challenges confronting them. Comments from some of the inmates are presented below.

"Inmates' education is good but not all of us have access to it because we at times suffer some discrimination in the prisons here. Some of us when the officers see us, they think we are stubborn because of our appearance so they try to ignore us. I even like the skilled work than the classroom education because I am a welder by profession. Most of us here like the skills training more than the classroom education. So, for the inmate education is good and I support it" (Inmate).

"I fully support inmate education but our leaders should look at the modalities of rolling out inmate education in the prisons. Some of us we see some of our inmates going to learn but we don't know what's going on so we just watch them. Some of us we also feel that nobody cares about us so we are just here. If I get the chance I will join, but the conditions here are not allowing me to join" (Inmate).

"Inmate education I think is a good thing that our leaders have brought here but I think that certain things must be in place to make it proper. Because we are very hungry here and I can't study with a hungry stomach. So, it is good but I think more should be done by our leaders and the Government so that we all can happily join" (Inmate).

"UCC is doing a great job by bringing inmate education to the prisons but they should help us more so that more inmates can happily join. We are hungry here. I am a chartered accountant and I don't need inmate education for anything. I have more formal education than the education going on here but I still fully support inmates' education, particularly the vocational skills training. I know this is not from UCC, so I commend the bodies behind the vocational skills training programme and would urge them to do more. I also highly commend UCC for their contribution" (Inmate).

Clearly, all the inmates support the correctional education and the DE programme in spite of some challenges confronting them. Some however have stronger preference for the vocational skills training than the DE in humanities. The challenges pointed out by the inmates corroborate with Addae (2020), which revealed significant barriers impeding the realization of true educational inclusivity within Ghanaian prisons. He painted a stark picture of chronically underfunded and understaffed rehabilitation programmes. This lack of institutional support manifests in overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning materials, and a dearth of qualified educators equipped to handle the unique challenges of this learning environment.

The social implications of inmates' education, as revealed through the perspectives of Plan Volta, UCC and Ghana Prison Service, stress the transformative potential of education in promoting rehabilitation and reintegration. One key theme emerging from the data is the transformative potential of education in fostering self-sufficiency and a "decent conscience" among inmates. Plan Volta, UCC and Ghana Prison Service, all believed that educated inmates are enlightened and are likely to strive to redeem their image. This position aligns with the literature emphasizing education's role in fostering a sense of purpose and belonging (Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012). This resonates with the symbolic interactionist perspective, which highlights how individuals construct their identities through social interactions and internalize societal expectations. Education, in this context, becomes a tool for reshaping self-perception and facilitating positive social interaction, contributing to a more peaceful prison and national environment (Addae, 2020).

However, the data also reveals the persistent societal stigma surrounding incarceration, which poses a significant barrier to successful reintegration. While some employers recognize the value of employing former inmates, others harbour reservations due to negative stereotypes. This tension underscores the importance of addressing societal perceptions and promoting a culture of second chances. The successful reintegration of former inmates requires not only individual transformation but also a shift in societal attitudes and the creation of pathways for them to utilize their new-found skills and knowledge (Quan-Baffour & Zawada, 2012). This echoes the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 10, which emphasizes reducing inequalities and promoting social inclusion. The perspectives of prison officers provide further insights into the social implications of inmate education. Their observations highlight the potential of education to contribute to peace within the prison and the wider community. The statement that "a prisoner today is your neighbour tomorrow" underscores the interconnectedness between the prison environment and society, emphasizing the importance of rehabilitation and reintegration (Ansah et al., 2023).

The officers' recognition of inmates' education as a "tool for peace" aligns with the literature emphasizing the role of education in promoting conflict resolution, emotional regulation, and critical thinking. The findings also underscore the systemic challenges that hinder the effective implementation of inmate education programs. Limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified educators are persistent obstacles that need to be addressed to ensure that inmates have access to quality education. The partnership between Plan Volta, Ghana Prison Service, and the University of Cape Coast serves as a model for effective collaboration in promoting inmate education and rehabilitation. As seen from the findings, inmates were of the view that inmate education will help them in various ways when they finish serving their jail term from the prisons. Most alluded to the fact that they will get jobs to do which will help them get a sustainable living after prison life. This corroborates with the assertion of Owusu-Ansah (2012), that the good utilization and exploration of inmate education in Ghana, highlights the transformative potential of education in fostering rehabilitation and reducing recidivism. This finding also confirms the view of McCann (2021) which states that inmates' education takes away stigmatization, and discrimination in all spheres of life even after release from the prisons.

The findings also highlight the perceived importance of inmates' education in promoting peace, both at the individual and societal levels. Education, as presented by participants from Plan Volta, UCC and the Ghana Prison Service officers, provides a pathway to legitimate means. They all emphasize the role of education in enabling entrepreneurship and informal sector employment suggesting that it equips inmates with the skills necessary to achieve economic stability and social reintegration. This is particularly the case with the vocational skills training. This aligns with the functionalist perspective by providing formerly incarcerated individuals with the tools to pursue socially accepted goals through legitimate means, thereby reducing the likelihood of recidivism and contributing to societal peace. A Prison Service Officer echoed this sentiment, highlighting how education "broadens their knowledge and helps them to acquire new skills." This acquisition of skills and knowledge can be interpreted as a means of reducing strain by increasing employability and opportunities for economic advancement which promotes the establishment of peace in society. Inmates shared their honest view that inmate education is a good initiative and a recipe for peace in society but the Government should come more to their aid by making the programme attractive thereby making it inclusive to all who want to join or enrol. This confirms the assertion by Akuamoah (2012), that the implications of inmate education extend far beyond individual rehabilitation by transforming perspectives, cultivating empathy, and nurturing respect for human rights as envisioned by SDG 16.

Symbolic Interactionist Theory, on the other hand, focuses on the role of interaction and shared meanings in shaping individual behaviour. From this perspective, education can be seen as a process of resocialization, where inmates learn new norms, values, and behaviours that are conducive to peaceful coexistence. The Prison Service officers' statements about inmates becoming more decent and refined suggest a transformation in their self-concept and behaviour through the acquisition of education. This transformation is further emphasized by the statement that education helps inmates "know their dos and don'ts" implying the internalization of societal norms and expectations. The symbolic interactionist perspective further buttresses education as facilitating interaction and the development of shared meanings that promote prosocial behaviour and reduce the likelihood of future criminal activity. The emphasis on "reformation and rehabilitation through education", echoed by some Senior Officers further reinforces this interpretation, suggesting a shift in the inmates' self-perception and their role within society. By internalizing these new roles and meanings, inmates are better equipped to navigate social situations and contribute to a peaceful environment.

The suggestions offered by Plan Volta, UCC and the Ghana Prison Service reflect this emphasis. Plan Volta's call for increased support from civil society organizations and other stakeholders in providing facilities and educational materials directly addresses the need for resources to facilitate inmates' education. By expanding access to educational opportunities, inmates are provided with legitimate pathways to achieve economic self-sufficiency and social reintegration, reducing the strain that can lead to criminal behaviour. With the same spirit, the management of UCC calls for more support from government, non-governmental, donor agencies private entities and civil societies to proactively come on board to make inmates' education sustainable and scaled up as a positive intermediary between prison and functional reintegration.

The Prison Service officers appealed for increased government funding and resources to support inmates' education. Increased funding could translate to better facilities, more educational materials, and enhancing vocational training programmes, all of which would contribute to equipping inmates with the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue legitimate employment opportunities upon release. The officers further cried out that the civil society and the general public should come to the aid of the GPS to boost inmates training in vocational skills and even in the humanities depending on their background and interest. The Pentecost Church, however, was singled out for immense commendation from the management of the GPS for their sustained support for vocational training programmes in the Nsawam Prison. The suggestion from the officers to increase the daily allowance for inmates participating in education can also be interpreted through the lens of functionalists' strain theory. By providing a financial incentive,

participation in education is further legitimized and encouraged, potentially attracting more inmates to these programs and contributing to a reduction in recidivism in the long run. When inmates are employed after serving their jail term, they will pay tax to the Government through the jobs they will be doing either private or Government jobs and contribute their quote towards the development of the society.

Some recommendations made by the participants to improve on inmates' education can also be interpreted through the framework of symbolic interactionism. Plan Volta's suggestion to create greater awareness of the education program speaks to the importance of shifting societal perceptions of incarcerated individuals and promoting the value of education in their rehabilitation. By raising awareness, the stigma associated with incarceration can be challenged, and the potential for transformation through education can be emphasized. This can contribute to a more positive and supportive environment for inmates both within the prison and upon re-entry into society. The Prison Service officers' emphasis on the importance of officer welfare also aligns with this perspective. A positive and supportive environment within the prison, fostered by well-supported officers, can contribute to a more conducive learning environment for inmates. This, in turn, can facilitate the internalization of prosocial norms and values, promoting successful reintegration and reducing the likelihood of recidivism. The commendation of the University of Cape Coast for their free sponsorship of the program by one junior officer further reinforces the importance of collaborative efforts and shared responsibility in supporting inmate education. This collaboration signifies a shared belief in the transformative power of education and its potential to contribute to a more peaceful and just society. The findings suggest a shared vision for improving inmate education, centered on increased resource allocation, greater public awareness, and a supportive environment within the prison system.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The exploration of stakeholders' perspectives on inmates' education in Ghana's Nsawam Medium Security Prison yielded critical insights into the transformative potential of education within the Criminal Justice System (CJS). The findings unequivocally demonstrate that inmates' education plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between societal structures and individual agency. The empirical evidence gathered underscores the capacity of education to redefine inmates' self-perception, foster a sense of purpose, and equip them with employable skills. This, in turn, enhances their prospects for successful reintegration into society, thereby reducing recidivism rates. Notably, this study highlights the imperative of addressing systemic challenges, such as resource constraints and stigma, to ensure the effective implementation of inmates' education programmes. The significance of education in promoting peace, rehabilitation, and reintegration is varied. It does not only facilitate individual transformation, but also contributes to the creation of a more harmonious prison environment and, by extension, a more peaceful society. Plan Volta, Ghana Prison Service, the University of Cape Coast, and the Pentecost Church of Ghana serve as an exemplary model for collaborative efforts in promoting inmates' education. By doing so, we can harness the transformative power of education to promote rehabilitation, reintegration, and peace, ultimately contributing to a more just and equitable society.

5.2 Recommendations

To harness the transformative power of education in promoting rehabilitation, reintegration, and peace, the following recommendations are proposed.

The Government of Ghana, through the Ministries of Interior, Education and the Ghana Prison Service, should allocate additional resources to support inmates' vocational skills training and DE programmes, focusing on infrastructure development, and provision of relevant educational materials. Also, to amplify the impact of inmates' education, stakeholder collaboration is essential. The Ghana Prison Service should foster stronger partnerships with forward-looking institutions like the University of Cape Coast, and non-governmental organizations, such as Plan Volta, the Pentecost Church of Ghana to facilitate resource sharing, expertise exchange, and coordinated efforts to support inmates' education and rehabilitation. Moreover, the Ghana Prisons Service, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, should provide capacity-building programmes for prison officers to equip them with the necessary skills to support inmate vocational skills training and general education as important rehabilitation outlets. This training will enable officers to create a conducive learning environment, promote positive interactions with inmates, and reinforce the therapeutic benefits of education. Finally, the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) and the Ministry of Information should launch public awareness campaigns to address the stigma associated with incarceration and promote the value of inmates' education in promoting reintegration and ultimately reducing recidivism.

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