

Use of Technology as Support System for Prison Inmates in the National Open University of Nigeria Study Center, Kirikiri-Lagos

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Abstract, *Total incarceration is a major feature of the prison as a place where people are kept because they have sinned against the society. The reality in the age grade of the prisoners has however shown that most of them are of very active age grade of 20-35 years. This is a period of life when people of this age grade are supposed to be educated and capable of contributing to the economy of the society. Therefore complete incarceration without formal education invariably could constitute a drag in the economy of any society. The National Open University of Nigeria has therefore provided access to learning where the inmates could be assisted to acquire knowledge and skills by creating a Special Study Center in the Kirikiri Maximum security Prison in Lagos, Nigeria. This paper therefore investigates the various support systems that are involved in the task of helping the learners to gain access to learning with the use of technology despite their condition under incarceration. It is hoped that when prison inmates have access to education through the appropriate technological support, they would be able to contribute their quota to the economic development of the society after serving their jail term. Learning would also enhance reformation strategy of the prison authorities. It was suggested that private organizations should collaborate with the National Open University of Nigeria in making the technological support system a permanent strategy to help the inmates learn through a functional open and distance learning that is technology supported.*

Key Words: *Synchronous Learning, Flexibility in Learning, Specialised Training, Learner Support Services, Technology, Instructional Delivery System, On-line Support, Distance Learning, Access to Education, Technical Staff, Student Counselors, Customised Programmes,*

INTRODUCTION

Use of Technology for helping Prison inmates is unique in the history of ODL as strategy for disseminating knowledge in Nigeria. Hitherto, prisoners were denied access to functional learning that can be compared with what is happening in the free world. Incarceration accounts for a major reason why Prison inmates in Nigeria did not have access to learning because of the problem of location and incarceration. In most African countries, much has not been done to help the marginalized population, like the prison inmates, have access to functional education (Ogidan&Atere, 2010). The National Open University of Nigeria as an Open and Distance Learning institution established Special Study Center for such a group of people who are interested in learning within the prison confinements. The objective of this paper was to discuss how the National Open University of Nigeria employs the use of Technological support system in helping the Prison Inmates in the learning process, the different types of technology that are involved and advantages that abound in this practice.

Similarly, the inherent challenges are identified. Possible suggestions are made on how to surmount the challenges so as to be able to improve on the benefits of using technology as support system for learning among the Prison inmates in Nigeria.

The National Open University of Nigeria was established to provide learning opportunities that are characterized by the separation of teacher and learner in time or place, or both time and place (Jegede 2003). This method of disseminating knowledge is simply a transition from the formal classroom situation to a system where the learners pursue their studies independently and in any location of their choice. The idea of establishing Open University system for Nigeria, was reflected in the National Policy on Education (NPE), which stated emphatically and unambiguously that “maximum efforts will be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education (HE) to be given access to it (NPE,1981). Every year since Nigeria got independence, however, the demand for places in the universities had remained unmet. Jegede (2005) in his report raised some questions; how many universities does Nigeria need if the existing universities are unable to provide places for all qualified applicants? How should the issue of access be handled? It had been suggested that to catch up with a country like Japan and meet the existing demand for admission, Nigeria needs to do only two things; either it should multiply the current intake by a factor of 10, or the country should expand the number of existing universities by a factor of 10. According to him, it is obvious that the country would conveniently not be able to do any of the two suggestions stated above.

Jegede (2003) asserted that, with the ever continuing growth in Nigeria’s population, attendant escalating demand for education at all levels, the constraints of resources, the need for flexible tailor – made delivery of instruction with little disruption in National, family and individual circumstances and taking advantages of emerging ICTs in relation to Nigeria’s peculiar situation, the most logical pathway is by Open and Distance Learning. From this, assertion, it is logical to conclude that the most viable alternative to face-to-face classroom system of education in Nigeria is the Open and Distance Education.

The unique features of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria were also enumerated by Jegede (2005) as follows:

Education that is accessible to people who cannot attend regular classes due to social structural or personal situations;

- Flexibility to study at any time and place;
- Specialized training for professional, quick material delivery, efficient academic assessments and tutor interactions;
- Learner centeredness;
- Good quality learning materials that are provided with the interest of the learners as the focus, and giving support to ensure that learners have a good chance of successful completion of their programmes; and
- Provision of learner support services.

According to Pawar (2007), learner Support system is a term used to subsume all interactions between institutional personnel and students (prospective and registered) directed towards assisting learners to achieve their objectives from the point of first inquiry through graduation and often for a life time. The services rendered by the learner support systems are done with consideration for the learners’ interest. Similarly, technology is the devise through which the university provides support to its multitude of learners. Given the circumstance of incarceration among the Prison Inmates, particular attention is paid to the use of different technologies to assist the Prison Inmates. Reaching the prison inmates through the use of

technology is obviously the most acceptable and functional approach that is legal and consistent with circumstance of incarceration among Prison Inmate learners

Purpose for Providing Prison Inmates with Access to Learning

The purpose of this paper therefore was to examine the prospects and challenges of providing access to learning for the Prison Inmates through the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Special study Center in the Kirikiri Maximum Prison in Lagos. To find out how the Prison Inmates have access to education and acquire useful job skills that will enable them to fend for themselves in the society after serving their prison terms. Statistics on prisons in Nigeria shows that there are 124 convict Prisons, 83 satellite prisons, 37 state headquarters, 8 zonal offices, 124 training schools and one staff college. The 124 training schools include 10 farm centers. In all, there are about 47000 prison inmates in Nigeria (Fatinikun, 2008). There was however little or no plans that predates NOUN's efforts in creation of the special study center to help open the windows of contemporary corrections through education as a way of enhancing the opportunity to respond to new challenges of preparing the prison inmates for becoming gainfully employed in the future. The issue of giving the prison inmates the opportunity of having access to learning through Open and Distance Learning is important. According to Ajibola (1990), most inmates were jobless before they got to the prison and may return to a jobless life after serving their term. Crowther (1969), reported that, roughly half of all prisoners in the United States of America were unemployed at the time of their arrest because the average educational level of prison inmate on admission to the prison is the 11th grade. It was however revealed by him that through access to learning, most of them become equipped with one skill or another that make them to be employable before the expiration of their jail term. Hence, such scenario underscores the essence of providing the Prison Inmates with access to learning that will meaningfully turn their lives around after serving their jail term

Statement of the Problem

Access to education for livelihood through the Open and Distance Learning is new in the Nigeria Prison Services. Majority of the Prison Inmates therefore do not have access to education that could prepare them for life after prison. Following this, record has shown that most Prison Inmates after serving their term are unable to have a gainful employment (Fatinikun, 2008). Invariably, they are unable to fend for themselves. This major lapse in the welfare of the prison inmates inevitably explains why most of the discharged prison inmates go back to crime and eventually return to prison, hence constituting serious problems to the society. Similarly, the Prison Inmates constitute population of citizens who are in the active work stage of their life, they therefore cause a drag in the nation's economy. The society is yet to pay attention to how the Prison Inmates can be assisted to have access to education with the prime aim of acquiring useful skills for livelihood particularly through the Open and Distance Learning mode of instruction. The prospects and challenges need to be explored and identified in order to encourage and assist the Prison Inmates to take advantage of the Special Study Center being pioneered by NOUN.

METHODOLOGY

The various learner support systems provided by the National Open University of Nigeria and their effectiveness in reaching the Prison inmates were studied. The main focus was at Kirikiri Maximum security prison where a special Study Centre was established. The number of prison inmates at Kirikiri Maximum Prison, Minna and Ikoyi prisons were recorded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The number of inmate learners in the three prisons of Kirikiri, Minna and Ikoyi are shown in Table 1.

Table1: Distribution of Inmate Learners by Prison location

Prison Location	No of Students		
	Male	Female	Total
Minna	1	-	1
Ikoyi	2	-	2
Kirikiri, Maximum	10	-	10
Total	13	-	13

Source: NOUN Special Study Center (Kirikiri Maximum Security Prisons) Records, 2010

Table 1 above shows the distribution of the inmate learners by their prison location in Nigeria. The record which was obtained from the Special Study Center shows that the Nigerian prisons where inmate learners can be found are, Minna in Niger State, Ikoyi, and Kirikiri Maximum Prisons in Lagos. The number of the inmate learners is, one in Minna, two in Ikoyi and ten in Kirikiri Maximum prison in Lagos. In all there are presently, thirteen inmate learners who have registered and are regular students of the NOUN Special Study Center. In effect, the population is presently not high probably because the Special Study Centers have just been created or awareness on access education through the ODL is still ongoing. It is however certain that it is likely that the population of students will continue to increase with the presence of the study centers, which is about the only option that is open to this incarcerated human population in the country.

Table2: Distribution of Inmate Learners by Academic Programmes

S/N	Programmes	Prison Location			Total
		Minna	Ikoyi	Kirikiri Maximum	
1	B.A.English Language	-	-		1
2	BSc Entrepreneurial & Small Business Management	-	-	3	3
3	BSc. Criminology& Security Studies	-	-	4	4
4	BSc Peace & Conflict Resolution	1	1	-	2
5	BSc Cooperative Management	-	1	-	1
6	PGD Human Resources Management	-	-	1	1
7	Diploma in Financial Management	-	-	1	1
Total		1	2	10	13

Source: NOUN Special Study Center (Kirikiri Maximum Security Prisons) Records, 2010

Table 2 shows the distribution of inmate Learners by Academic Programmes across the prison location which is on record at the Kirikiri Maximum Prison, Lagos. BSc Criminology & Security Studies tops the list with four students followed by BSc Entrepreneurial & Small

Business Management with three students. Incidentally students in these programmes are entirely found in the Kirikiri Maximum prison in Lagos. One student each in Ikoyi and Minna prisons also run their programme in BSc Peace & Conflict Resolution. PGD Human Resources Management has one student just as there is one offering Diploma in Financial Management in the Maximum Prison, Lagos.

Table2: Distribution of Inmate Learners by Academic Programmes

S/N	Programmes	Prison Location			Total
		Minna	Ikoyi	Kirikiri Maximum	
1	B.A.English Language	-	-	1	1
2	BSc. Entrepreneurial & Small Business Managemen	-	-	3	3
3	BSc. Criminology& Security Studies	-	-	4	4
4	BSc Peace & Conflict Resolution	1	1	-	2
5	BSc Cooperative Management	-	1	-	1
6	PGD Human Resources Management	-	-	1	1
7	Diploma in Financial Management	-	-	1	1
Total		1	2	10	13

Source: NOUN Special Study Center (Kirikiri Maximum Security Prisons) Records, 2010

Table 2 also shows that only one student offers BSc Co-operative Management, in Ikoyi Prison. There are however array of 180 different academic programmes in NOUN out of which students could pick from. This also shows that there are opportunities for students who are interested in other programmes apart from the ones that are being offered by the inmates learners now.

Skill Acquisition Training Packages for the Prison Inmates

National Open University of Nigeria also provides acquisition skills and training in Small Business Entrepreneurial Management and Certificate courses in Small Scale Business. The courses are specifically available in poultry, fish farming, hair- dressing, telephone and hand set repairs (Ogidan, 2010). This will assist in the resettlement of prison inmates who have spent a good part of their lives working in an enclosed environment. The training curriculum can however be made to be more comprehensive so that inmate learners can benefit by being able to utilize such training outfit in Open and Distance Learning.

Integrated Learning Management System. (ILMS) Technology

The Integrated Learning Management System (ILMS) is a package of technologies which has just been introduced to the support system of the university. The purpose for introducing this type of technological initiative was to provide comprehensive platform for student and staff to gain access to on-line discussion forum through the internet. According to Ogidan & Atere (2010), it was designed to function as an e-learning administration and record management of student information on the basis of which academic support could be rendered.

The university has entered into collaboration with an organization called Maple Test Assessment (Maple T.A.) in Canada. Initially, the University started with A –Tutor and Moodle which has now resulted to the adoption of the ILMS. Before the introduction of ILMS, A-Tutor was used as an open source content management system. As a facility, it was

used for providing e-learning portal for students i.e. where learners carry out Studies on-line either synchronously or asynchronously. It is the technical staff under the employment of the University that are engaged to manage the facility. The A-Tutor and Moodle also allows students to access learning content on the web particularly while studying a course within a scripted interactive session.

Electronic – Examination.

This is a project and a new technology which is utilized for the management of the university examination system. The university authority has deployed e- examination facilities to the Special Study Center for the Prison Inmates use. This measure is very helpful to the prison authorities who will not like to release inmates for examination outside the prison confine and also to students who will be able to write examination any time they want without necessarily sitting down with none inmate students to write the examination.

Mobile Communication Connectivity

A tele-communication company called Globacom company in Nigeria also provides services to staff for internet connectivity 24 hours per day at a subsidized rate. This affords staff the opportunity to communicate with the students synchronously and asynchronously with minimum charges paid by the staff user. Under a guided circumstance, prison inmates enjoy this facility to interact with instructional facilitators and student counselors for psychological support and academic guidance on issues that concern their studies (Ogidan, 2010).

Techniques for Managing Technological Support Systems

The Special Study Center which is established in Kirikiri Maximum Prisons in Lagos is the center of administration and provision of technological support system for the inmate learners across the country. The University relies on and utilizes the human and material resources in the study center as a guiding force in rendering functional support services to the inmate distance learners. This principle of rendering administrative support provides timely and improved support services to the learners. It is also a practical demonstration of the principle of taking education to student rather than the other way round as the university's philosophy. To accomplish this, NOUN adopts the principle of Keegan (1985) by using computer technology and computer mediated communication strategies. With this approach to teaching, it is possible to bring the classroom to every student's computer and to the chosen place of study which in this circumstance is the prison yard. Ndlovu (1985) lent credence to this by stating that, technology offers just-in-time delivery of complete customized programmes, so that an individual learner has access to learning opportunities anywhere and anytime. The students are both young and adults whose activities are under surveillance and total incarceration by the law of the land and strict supervision by the prisons authority. This makes face to face highly limited and restricted. Uses of technology makes learning easy in the prison since there is no way the learners can either expose themselves or have face-to-face regular contact with their instructors.

Directorate of Learner Support Services of the University

This unit of the institution is one of the important organs which strive to provide Support to learners right from the stage of application for admission to registration. Support to students continues with helping them to be adjusted to the task of learning till they successfully complete their studies and graduate. The directorate is headed by the Director with the assistance of Study Centre Managers, Student Counselors and other support staff. The Directorate performs both administrative and academic functions through the use of mobile phone, internet and fax facilities. The Members of staff in the directorate, monitor, coordinate, supervise and evaluate the performances of students through technological

devices. Through similar media, vital information is disseminated as quickly as possible to the students.

Student Counselors

Through telephone services and internet facilities, Student Counselors provide regular guidance and counselling services to the inmates. Common issues of regular concern which attract guidance and counselling intervention are, questions on enrolment into the university, choice of academic programmes and courses, adjustment to studies within the prison service regulation, adjustment to life of incarceration, issues of possibility of release from prison after completing studies, where to work after completion of study and jail term. Other special academic guidance also take place on-line. Counselling media often employed in helping the inmates include one to one telephone, group guidance on telephone, guidance by letters with counselling services recorded in audio and video cassettes. Similar guidance services are rendered on radio broadcast, compact disc and internet chatting.

Student Counsellors also carry out the function of helping the learners to acquire appropriate study and adjustment skills in their exposure to Open and Distance Learning mode of instructional delivery system. This is in line with the mission of the institution to provide functional, cost-effective and flexible learning which adds life-long value to quality education for all who seek knowledge (Getting to know your University, 2006). In addition, the Counselors keep in touch with the Prison inmate learners regularly by providing warning signals regarding difficulty in studies thereby helping learners to take prompt remedial actions and by so doing, work to meet the expected target in their academic pursuit (Ipaye, 2006). Similarly, the Student Counselors carry out the following functions:

- Communicating with the student inmates through the mobile phone and the internet on regular basis.
- Guide them in the choice and management of peer groups for the purpose of tutorial and instructional Facilitation;
- Devise, develop, manage student database and constantly monitor all counselling needs of students for the purpose of providing effective guidance and counselling services;
- Provide professional consultation to students who may have difficulty with rejoining the academic world;
- Remain in constant touch with the students in order to ensure that he/she does not drop out from his/her academic pursuit;
- Help in providing preventive services by being sensitive to students' needs academically and behaviorally right from the registration stage;
- Provide guidance in the choice of suitable study techniques and encourage development of sustainable study habit;
- Provide guidance services on change of programmes, suspension of studies and deferment of admission;
- Provide guidance services on how to promote, maintain and sustain motivation;
- Help students to learn how to balance prison service demands with the task of pursuing their academic programme.

Instructional and Tutorial Facilitators

Instructional and Tutorial Facilitators are very familiar with the use of the internet technology. Through this device, they conduct meetings and facilitate instruction at a distance and assist the university with organizing professional workshops, course design with course material development. They conduct Tutor Marked Assignments and assist in the conduct of examinations. Other functional support which they give to the students are,

- Assessment of skills in the art of managing essential feedback to ensure effective Open and Distance Learning amongst the students
- Monitoring of distance learners' academic progress and liaising with the external examiners, and assessors.
- Provide on-line learning support for students who have access to and prefer the web-based learning environment.
- Ensure that arrangement is made for inmates science students to have science laboratory experience, work in the language laboratory and utilize library facilities in order to ensure that practical learning activities take place effectively among the inmate learners.

Information and Communication Technology

The Directorate of Computing and Network Services (CNS) use various facilities and strategies to provide support to the prison inmate learners. Such services are rendered through the following arrangements and facilities.

- Equiped the Study Center with Plasma facility for video conferencing and connectivity to the Nigerian Air Space Research Development Agency; and
- Equiped Study Centre with computer laboratory up to 30 – 50 computer units.

It also provides learners with free access to the Instructional Facilitators and other Open and Distance Education providers and support staff through the internet. The ICT staff play crucial role in providing support to the inmates because according to Mealy & Loller (2000) in a research on the use of educational communication and technology reported that it was as a result of rapid technology related developments that courses are being delivered to students in various locations to serve their educational needs. It is therefore through Information and Communication Technology that distance education programs are provided to the learner Prison Inmates in their remote, social and geographic location. This initiative has led to an increasing interactivity between student and other Open and Distance Learning (ODL) personnel.

Through the internet and mobile phones, technology has assisted the learners to enjoy the services of the ICT personnel right from the period they apply for admission to registration. Students are able to communicate with the ICT experts at the headquarters of the University. They also constantly seek clarification on issues bothering on their programme and get reply immediately. The Directorate of Computing and Network Services (CNS) in the university is functionally involved in the planning of the university activities in areas like, admission notification, registration, conduct of examinations and announcement of results.

Library Support Services

The Library Support Services of the university, provides support to the students because such services are regarded as important constituents of a good ODL institution. For an example, the library offers facilities to inmate learners to gain access to the virtual library. In order for the students to be able to gain access to the virtual library, they have to procure the pin code of the university in the Special Study center. With the pin code, learners are able to access any learning material like text books, references, journals, magazines, publications including previous question papers of their choice to compliment the original study material that must have been provided for them in each course for which they have registered.

The Directorate of Instructional Resources Development

This directorate is responsible for ensuring that course materials are delivered in print and on-line. After editing and validating the instructional materials, study materials are then uploaded for the students to download. This is a kind of support service that is provided on

line to supplement the prints since learners can access their studies on the internet any time they choose to do so. Presently, over 950 courses spanning through different programmes have been uploaded to the internet and ready for down load by the learners. Similarly, students enjoy non-web interaction through CD or DVD. These CDs, DVDs and VC Ds are being produced at the Kaduna campus of the university.

Directorate of Media and Information Service

Information and media play a major role in providing the inmate learners with emergency information. The university has in its database every students' e-mail address through which they are promptly contacted. Similarly, the university has a radio station. Operations in the radio station begin at 9am and closes by 4pm every day. Each talk and interaction is embellished with a phone-in question and answer in areas like academic, career guidance, application of computer and network services, operation of students' financial account, sports and talks on national issues. The radio programmes are also recorded on Compact Disc for the use of anybody who wants to have them.

A Television Station has also been ceded to the University particularly to complement instructional facilitation. The station renders additional service of discussing practical lessons in science and professional courses to the benefit of the inmate and other distance learners across the country.

Challenges of providing technology mediated support to the Prison Inmates

The reality with the rules and circumstance surrounding the Prison Inmates poses a great deal of challenges. One of these challenges has to do with gaining access to the learner Prison Inmate learners who live and operate in an environment of tight and restrictive rules. Similarly, statistics show that most of them are uneducated, partially educated while some have education of less functional skills. Yet it is obvious that the age grade of the inmates is within the range of 20-35 years i.e. active period of life. In spite of the remarkable approach and positive impact the university is making to ensure that physical distance with students is reduced while transaction is strengthened with the help of technology, there are still challenges in accomplishing this in areas such as:

- Need for infrastructural facilities like computer sets for the computer laboratory and internet to facilitate learning without falling foul of the laws guiding prison services in Nigeria.
- Reluctance of the prison service authority in granting inmates free access to the outside world to attend to practicals, project work and industrial assignments when they have not finished serving their terms.
- Reluctance of the authorities to grant Instructional Facilitators access to the inmates for facilitation.
- Inmates are being monitored while working on the internet by the authorities
- Need to fill up vacant positions as Center Manager, student Counsellors, account staff and administrative officers. Knowing fully that these offices are crucial to the survival of learning activities at the study center.
- Very high cost of procuring and maintaining telephone services in Nigeria particularly for telephone interactive discussion between the learners and the university staff who are concerned with providing information service,
- High cost of maintaining internet connectivity for the inmates.
- High cost of procuring computer laptop and desktop since prison inmates are not income earning, therefore those who do not have are compelled to share with those who have
- High cost of printing down loaded course materials,

- Most Inmate learners have phobia for the use of computer while some are not computer literate,
- Most learners misconceive facilitation for face-to-face classroom teaching and they are also sceptical on how communication technology can be used for providing support in practical courses,
- Epileptic supply of electricity in Nigeria which often make it difficult for learners to utilize the computers.

Recommendations

Considering the challenges stated above and the peculiar nature of the circumstance where inmate learners live, it is recommended that the following steps be taken:

- Provide audio/video tapes and video compact disc on course materials that are required to the learners regularly;
- There should be regularly organized television and teleconferencing programmes to support the learners within stated time;
- Instructional facilitators need to be constantly trained on the use of technology to help the learners;
- Live teleconferencing facilities must be available in the Special Study Center for the Prison Inmates and must be connected to the headquarters;
- More information and communication technology experts must be employed by the Prison Service to work at the Special Study Center.
- More course materials should be uploaded to the internet for students to download before they are ready in hard copy for distribution.
- More Special Study Centers should be established by NOUN in each prison across the nation so that inmates in other prisons can have access to functional education.
- Government at various levels should pay close attention to prisoners' welfare as a measure of Human Rights enhancement on the continent.
- Families of prison inmates should be incorporated into any programme of reform and reintegration.
- Prison officers should be encouraged on the enforcement of the Penal Code enforcement.
- Government in collaboration with prison authorities should sensitize prisoners to take advantage of the available academic opportunities that are offered by NOUN.
- Collaborative effort should be instituted between the public and private sectors to source and fund the education of prisoners.
- All Open and Distance Learning institutions should further widen their scope to accommodate the peculiar educational needs of prisoners.
- Government should reserve a certain percentage of employment positions for the educated and trained prisoners, while the private sector should also be persuaded to do likewise.
- The University should pursue with aggressiveness the provision of facilitation by videos and other on - line support services for the academic programmes offered by the students.
- Sufficient number of computer sets should be provided to facilitate on-line interactions with facilitators and the support staff. This will also promote easy administration of e-examination which the university has just introduced just as it will help to reduce to the barest minimum the need to have face to face contact with the inmates.
- Stakeholders like Open and Distance Learning institutions, Federal, state and local government, religious bodies, prison inmates' relations and other relevant organizations should rise up in contributing to meeting the financial needs of learner inmates during the course of their studies.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that use of technology for supporting learners is the mainstay of distance education and the hub of the administrative and academic activities in ODL institutions. It is through technology mediated support services that Prison Inmate learners can enjoy support from the distance education providers when they interact amongst themselves without the physical distance posing any barrier. The Social economic activities in the society today portend the need to seek and cater for the wellbeing of everybody. A very important way to rid the society of crime is to provide prison inmates with access to learning particularly through the distance learning mode of instruction. The society cannot ignore this fact because contemporary developments in the world have shown that crime in our time has not only become more complex and global, but the criminals themselves have also become more innovative, unpredictable and sophisticated. There are therefore possibilities that when prison inmates are able to acquire education for livelihood, the rate of crime would reduce and society would be at peace where all would flourish and prosper.

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