

# Open and Distance Education: Reformation and Rehabilitation of Inmates

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**Abstract:** *The most cost-effective form of rehabilitation is education .Today, most inmates are released with little hope for reintegration into the society. They go back to the communities unskilled and uneducated to compete in an ever advanced technological society, for this reason, many prisoners at discharge are soon re-convicted and brought back because they have not been successful at finding gainful employment nor with picking up with their interrupted social lives. Due to the flexible nature of open Distance learning it has the potential to enhance both employment opportunities and inmates' ability to function socially in the society. It is against this background that this study was embarked upon to establish the rationale for rehabilitating prison inmates through Open and Distance learning and how best this can be done to enable them acquire skills and lifelong learning thereby becoming good citizens of benefit to the society. This paper reflects critically on the role of open and distance learning in the rehabilitating process and discusses the benefits inmates can derive from Open and Distance Education .The paper ends with some suggestions on the way forward.*

**Keywords:** Open and Distance Learning, Reformation, Rehabilitation, Inmates, Reintegration, Lifelong Learning.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is the brainchild of national development and no development can take place without first developing the citizens of the country prison inmates inclusive. The Nigerian Prison Ordinance of 1960 followed by the Decree No. 9 of 1972 made policies in favour of reformation and rehabilitation as part of the new philosophy of imprisonment in Nigeria. This is also in line with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Article 26, sub section 1 – 3 of December 10 1948 which emphasized citizen's right to Education. The Daker World Forum on Education (2000) also stressed Education For All (EFA). Education for All is a fundamental right and therefore restriction (imprisonment) of one's freedom does not suspend that right.

Prison institutions are aimed at providing among other things opportunities for prison inmates to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into the society from which they had been convicted. It is expected that the rehabilitation programmes would change the prison inmates into law-abiding citizens and keep them off crimes on discharge. Obviously, this has not worked well because many prisoners at discharge are soon re-convicted and brought back to prison because they lack the educational and social skills necessary to function successfully in the society (Kwachnowski, 2005).

The most cost-effective form of rehabilitation is education – “if you want to keep people out of prison, the best thing you can do is to educate them” (New life, 2009). This is because changes are bound to take place where education spreads its wings. With changes in the objectives of imprisonment from custody to reformation, education has become a major

plank in the correctional system (New Life, 2009). The objective of prison education has come to mean reformation and rehabilitation of the inmates so that they may return to society as normal citizens.

Judging from the above, it becomes obvious that education serves as a process by which the knowledge, character and behaviour of the inmates can be moulded.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Today, most inmates are released with little hope for reintegration into the society hence; they fall back to crime as soon as they are discharged (Harlow, 2003; Erisman and Contrado, 2005). A readily identifiable segment of the under educated population is the nation's inmates who possess minimal literacy and other skills (Cookson and Carman, 1987). As a result of this, many of them are unable to compete in the labour market. Research has shown that most inmates after serving their term are unable to secure employment (Johnson, 2001; Bloom, 2006). Access to education therefore offers the inmates the possibilities of being gainfully employed after their release as well as overcoming the obstacles that may have led to the crimes they committed in the first place.

### **DEFINITION OF REHABILITATION**

This is a process of empowering inmates so that they can become law abiding, productive members of the society. According to Niles and Bernard (2000), rehabilitating process should ensure that offenders become useful citizens in the society and do not return to correctional centres (prisons).

### **Importance of Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation is important because of the following reasons:

- It reduces recidivism (the tendency to fall back into crime inspite of punishment)
- It improves the lives of those who are incarcerated by turning their lives from crime to that of positive future.
- It reduces threat to society by facilitating public safety
- It instills normal societal values in inmates (Ajufo and Oseyemi, 2007:61-75)

### **Rehabilitation through Education**

Education has a key role in rehabilitating and reforming prisoners and helping them to secure employment. With 80% of prisoners functionally illiterates, the best crime prevention programme of all is education (Ajufo and Oseyemi, 2007).

### **Definition of Distance and Open Learning**

Open and Distance Learning is defined by Commonwealth of Learning (COL) as “the physical separation of the learner from the teacher and the use of unconventional teaching methodologies and information al and communications technologies (ICTs) to bridge the separation and provide the education and training” (Philips, 2006). “Open Learning” simply suggests that anyone can enroll, start and finish when they like. Distance education is said to be open because of students’ freedom and programme flexibility. It is flexible and open in terms of its admission requirements, that is, not as rigid as in conventional institutions, freedom in terms of place of study, time, place and composition of study programme, content and dialectic approach. Contact between the students and institutions is provided through interactive and non-interactive media. It may also be provided through some contact at study centre. Unlike the conventional face-to-face instruction, the delivery medium plays a crucial role in minimizing the gap between teaching and learning (Keegan, 1996).

In Nigeria, the National Open University has taken care of marginalized sectors of population like Nigeria Prison by establishing special study centres in a bid to take education

to the inmates. The demand for open and distance learning is increasing due to its flexibility. It is this flexibility that offers opportunities to people with special needs like inmates. Open and distance learning is an effective approach for making prisoners' learning more flexible and individuals oriented. The adoption of specialized programmes for key competences and personal development give prisoners realistic chances for personal change. Changed attitudes of offenders towards themselves and the general society are considered to be the best way of reducing the level of re-offending.

### **Activities of NOUN in providing Life Long Learning**

In National Open University of Nigeria, there are five schools in operation and a centre which caters for the continuous educational development of the less privileged literate and semi-literate citizens. They are as follows:

- School of Arts and Social Sciences
- School of Business and Human Resource Management
- School of Education
- School of Science and Technology
- Centre for Continuing Education and Workplace Training

Although there are opportunities for inmates who would want to pursue degree programmes which are carried out in the five schools, there are also opportunities for those who are only qualified to pursue proficiency certificate and diploma programmes in the centre for continuing education and Workplace Training. This centre tends to cater for the educational needs of most inmates because of their level of education. The emphasis of the centre is lifelong learning. The courses available in the centre; such as cellphone repair, poultry farming like snail and mushroom farming, hair dressing, etc, would go a long way in empowering the inmates with the needed life skills for self-sustenance and also help them to turn their backs on crime and delinquencies.

The National Open University of Nigeria takes care of a range of needs of the inmates as it is indicated in its vision and mission statements respectively. The vision of NOUN talks about providing highly accessible and enhanced quality education anchored in social justice, equity, equality and national cohesion through a comprehensive reach that transcends all barriers. The mission statement also emphasizes providing functional cost-effective, flexible learning, which adds lifelong value to quality education for all who seek knowledge. Moreover, in NOUN, no entry matriculation examinations are conducted. Everybody who is interested in education is given the opportunity regardless of the distance, location, background or economic status (Ogidan, 2008). The centre for continuing education and workplace training of NOUN also offers Access courses for candidates who have deficiency in admission requirement.

### **Benefits of Education through Open and Distance Learning**

The utilization of Open and Distance Learning as a delivery system in prison has a lot of advantages.

- Studies have shown that education improves behavior during incarceration and decreases recidivism rates of ex-prisoners (Chappell, 2006) journal (Flinchum *et al*, 2006).
- Access to education through ODL helps inmates to increase their job marketability (Case and Fesenfest, 2004).
- Education through ODL would aid inmates re-entry into society by providing them with enhanced work skills (Eristman and Contrardo, 2005)
- Distance learning offers inmates a more flexible and individual oriented learning. The ability to log on anytime, day or night from practically anywhere makes ODL attractive (Alsaif, 2007).

- Rehabilitation through ODL would help to ensure that inmates are socially well adjusted, change some vital aspects of their personality as well as increase their confidence level (self esteem) on release (opp.cit).
- Access to education through ODL works successfully to rehabilitate inmates and also offers them the opportunity to upgrade and stay relevant to the changing society outside the prison walls.
- ODL as a form of rehabilitation for inmates leads inmates to use their time in constructive and positive ways, rather than engaging in violent or destructive behavior or focusing on their resentment and anger over their incarceration. With school or education as a focus, inmates can think about their future and be motivated to stay out of trouble until their release.
- Rehabilitation through ODL gives inmates opportunity to increase their content knowledge base especially in the use of computer and internet
- According to Koski (1998), the real function of prison is to help develop better citizens, not just better inmates or institutional citizens. Educational opportunities will therefore encourage human development as well as help create more efficient, effective ad functional people upon release.
- ODL is a cheaper alternative to pursuing a course through conventional mode.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Inmates should have direct access to a well –stocked library.
- Study or learning centres should be established in every major prison in the country.
- More programmes should be mounted within the context of lifelong learning that are pragmatic in approach and also in high demand such as computer skills, carpentry, plumbing, fashion designing in ODL institutions.
- Measures should be in place to enable inmates to continue their education after release.
- Apart from equipping the inmates with quality education and training that would provide them with opportunities for lifelong learning, the government should also provide them with materials and financial assistance to enable them start their own business.
- Counseling services through the learners support department should be given priority in the prison. Counseling programmes given to inmates should provide guidance; and life coping skills should be an integral part of the programme.
- A commission should be set up to liaise with prison authorities in order to link ex-prisoners to available jobs following release from prison.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The main priority of Open and Distance Learning is to ensure the right to education for all. ODL is therefore a veritable tool in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals by providing access to education to those who are disadvantaged through the conventional educational system like the prison inmates. Educational programmes through ODL are crucial if men and women in prison are to be helped to become responsible and productive citizens of the society instead of returning to a life behind the bars. Rehabilitating prison inmates through education is beneficial not only just to the prisoners themselves but also to the society in general by preserving the public's safety. It also helps to save money that would have been spent on the re-incarceration. Furthermore rehabilitation through education leads to transformation. ODL has the potential to achieve this by making the prison a place of continuous and informal learning instead of a school crime.

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