



Perceived Impact of Vocational Skills Acquisition On Reformation and Reduction of Recidivism by Ex-Convicts of Gombe Central Correctional Centre

Inusa, Diana

Department of Educational Foundation, Faculty of Education, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria dianainusatermana@gmail.com +234(80)34031654

Abstract

Reformation of prison inmates is one of the most utmost functions of the Nigerian Correctional Service. The main focus of this study was to assess the perceived impact of vocational skills acquisition on reformation and reduction of recidivism by ex-convicts of Gombe Central Correctional Center, Nigeria. The study used 30 ex-convicts who were jailed between six months and eight years. The instrument used for data collection was structured questionnaire which was validated by specialized in measurement and evaluation, and reliability test conducted in Faculty of Education, University of Maiduguri. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that most of the ex-convicts were male, with informal education and age range of between 21 and 40 years. The respondents engaged more in carpentry (37%) and Welding (33%). The vocational skills acquired by inmates had great and positive impact on their reformation. The study therefore recommends that: there is need for the Nigeria Correctional Service authorities to introduce more vocational skills acquisition programmes in Gombe Central Correctional Centre; Collaborative provision should be made between the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS) and other agencies as well as other Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) centres towards promotion of rehabilitation of prison inmates through vocational skills acquisition programme.

Keywords: ex-convicts, reformation, recidivism, vocational education,

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Introduction

A prison can be described as a place where offenders are kept as punishment for crimes committed. Opara (1998) simply described prison as a place delimited and declared as such by the law of the State and created to ensure restrain and custody of individuals accused or convicted of violating the criminal law of the State. Being kept in prison is to serve as reformation and not for punishment; because what constitutes sufficient punishment is the confinement, which entails deprivation of many things such as privacy, interrupted control of personal belongings and host of other life pleasure.

Prison Service of Nigeria derives its powers from Cap. 366 Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1990) to perform the following functions: taking into custody all those legally detained and, setting in motion for their training and reformation in preparation to return them back to the society as normal law-abiding citizens. The implication is that

reformed inmates are no longer security threats to national peace which is so vital for socio-economic and political development. In other words, the purpose of reform is to train through appropriate conditions, so that convicted inmates become better citizens after being discharged. Reformatory programmes refer to any form of educational activity for inmates designed for correction measures. In other words, it encompasses all forms of training such as carpentry, welding, tailoring, catering, dressing/barbing, plumbing, painting etc. It is the education for inmates aimed at reformation, rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism.

Ogundipe (2010) opined that the system of prison operations in Nigeria as inherited from the British Colonial Administration was characterized by centralized administrative system and with greater emphasis on safe custody and punitive aspect. Since the inmates have offended the State and the State enacts legal sanction on them. It was penal



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bondage that included many things such as deprivation of liberty, social rejection, deprivation of material possession, and deprivation of hetro-sexual relation, deprivation of autonomy and corporal punishment, application of severe physical pains as flogging or hanging.

As a member of the United Nations, Nigeria adopted the provision of the United Nations Minimum Standard rules for treatment of inmates. Nigeria Correctional Centers are now operating in a progressive spirit with a view towards not only inmates' custody but also their ultimate reformation and social rehabilitation through various reformatory programmes. Consequently, various Correctional Commands have works and welfare units that coordinate the programmes such as vocational skills (carpentry, welding, tailoring, catering, hair dressing/barbing, plumbing, painting etc), modern farming, health education, recreational activities, to mention but a few. All these reformatory/reintegration programmes are provided to ensure and enhance complete reformation and rehabilitation of inmates for successful reintegration into the society. According to Olojede (2009) the Nigeria Correctional Services has since 2003 renewed its efforts at providing after-care service for discharged inmates.

The introduction of vocational skills training as part of prisoners' rehabilitation offers opportunities for offenders to reduce recidivism, thereby increasing the likelihood of successful reintegration into the community and reducing the risk of reoffending (Mbatha *et al.*, 2019). According to Ogunjipe (2008), the Nigerian Correctional Services has developed pragmatic educational programmes for reforming inmates. These programmes according to him include: Vocational Skills Development Programmes (VSDP) which aimed at empowering the inmates with the needed skills for self-sustenance and actualization. The programmes enable inmates to learn skills in such vocation as tailoring, plumbing, carpentry, woodwork, barbing, shoe making, and a lot of others. Vocational Education Programmes attempts to provide inmates with the skills for adequate self-employment. Vocational skills assist inmates to earn a living so that they will not be liabilities after discharged, because

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there are many inmates who do not have self-acquired skills and those that have little skill will improve. Adult Remedial Education Programmes (AREP) was designed to help inmates who before they came to the prison, were pursuing one academic programme or the other. Through these educational programmes, various inmates have passed diverse external examinations and obtained various certificates (Ali, 2015; The Nation, 2017).

The Nigeria Prison Service (2016) according to Gombe Central Correctional Center has the following categories of inmates: -

1. **Convicted inmates-** 'A convicted inmate is a person who has been proven guilty of an offense or crime by the verdict of a competent court of law. They are housed in prisons.' This is the category of inmates who are serving sentence for some period of time. The sentence terms varied depending on the gravity of the offence whether short- or long-term sentences. After the expiration of the term of sentence, the offenders are expected to be released and reintegrated into the society.
2. **Lifer-** they are inmates who are serving sentence for life time. In other word, is called life imprisonment.
3. **Awaiting trial-** they are the category of inmates who are not yet proven guilty and convicted by the court of law. They are in the prison waiting for judgments at any moment the court can demand for them either to free, and send them back home or sentence them.
4. **Condemned inmates-** they are category of inmates who are convicted to death sentence. They are in the prison waiting for the day of execution.

Prison is designed and established to serve several purposes among which are: Identifying the reason for inmate's anti-social behavior, train, reform and rehabilitate the offenders for meaningful livelihood after discharge through different forms of reformatory programmes. Despite the money spent on reformatory programmes, both human and material resources that are put in place by government and non-governmental organizations, yet there is high increase in crime and recidivism. In Nigeria, research has established that there is high increase in



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crime rate and male offenders have greater propensity of recidivism (Igbo and Ugwuoke 2003; Soyombo, 2009; Ugwuoke, 2010; Abrifor *et al.*, 2012).

Of the inmates in Gombe Central Correctional Services, between 40 – 50% of the inmates were recidivists (Nigeria Prison Services, 2016). That is why, in recent times, armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, drug trafficking, fraud, traffic offences, murder, internet fraud and theft have become more serious problems in the society. As a result of this, more people are taken to the prison. In the views of Anyanwu *et al.* (2018) “prison is a correctional institution where offenders or crime committers or those awaiting trials, are securely housed and given some sort of training while in confinement to prepare them for reintegration into the larger society on release.” Furthermore, the authors stated that imprisonment is a term of judicial sentence available for a convicted offender of adult age, involving incarceration in prison for either life or a specified period of time (Walsh & Poole, 2007 in Anyanwu *et al.*, 2018). The constitution of Nigeria provides the objectives of the Nigerian prisons, thus:

- i. To keep safe custody of prisoners interned
- ii. To identify the causes of their anti-social behaviour, treat and reform them to become disciplined and law-abiding citizens of a free society;
- iii. To train them towards their eventual reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration to the society after their discharge;
- iv. To generate funds for the government through prison farms and industries.

Today, emphasis is no longer principally on the penance of prisoners but reformation and rehabilitation of offenders (Igbo, 2007). The Nigerian prison service is assigned the responsibility of reforming and rehabilitating prisoners. This arduous obligation is discharged through cautiously strategize and well-articulated execution. The purpose of reformation and rehabilitation programmes is to instill discipline, respect for law and order, and dignity of authentic employment. These programmes include education and vocational training (Anyanwu *et al.*, 2018). Inmates are released after completion of their sentence or jail term. Government invest

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huge sum of money in the educational and vocational training programmes. Yet, there is little or no monitoring of the ex-convicts in the larger society to ensure proper reintegration as well as the practicing of the vocational skills acquired while in prison. As a result, there is dearth of information on the perceived impact of vocational skills acquired by the ex-convicts. Based on the aforementioned backdrop, the study was conducted to assess the perceived impact of vocational skills acquisition on reformation and reduction of recidivism by ex-convicts of Gombe Central Correctional Center. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Determine the demographic information of the ex-convicts of Gombe Central Correctional Center;
2. Identify the vocational skills acquired by the ex-convicts of Gombe Central Correctional Center; and
3. Ascertain the ex-convicts’ perceived impact of vocational skills acquired on reformation and reduction of recidivism in Gombe Central-Correctional center.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population of the study was ex-convicts who served their jail terms for the period of between six months and eight years in Gombe Central Correctional Center and have been released into the general society. Out of the inmates released between 2015 and 2016 only, (30) were located, identified and administered questionnaire. The research focused on inmates released in 2015 and 2016 due to the freshness of their release as at when data was collected, because inmates released before these years were nowhere to be found in the addresses provided. Their addresses were gotten from the Gombe Central Correctional Centre authorities. The instrument used for data collection was a set of structured questionnaire. The instrument was validated by five (5) experts of Measurement and Evaluation from University of Maiduguri. The instrument was pilot tested in University of Maiduguri, the data obtained was analyze using Cronbach method, where the reliability coefficient of 0.77 was found. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages), mean and standard deviation. The



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questionnaire had a four-point response options of strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with a corresponding value of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respective. A mean score of 2.50 was used for decision-making. Any item with a mean rating of 2.50 or above was regarded as accepted.

Results

1. Socio-economics characteristics of the respondents

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Ex-convicts of Gombe Central Correctional Center

Status	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	26	86.7
	Female	4	13.3
Marital status	Single	14	46.7
	Married	10	33.3
	Divorce	4	13.3
	Widowers	2	6.7
Education	Informal	26	86.7
	Primary	4	13.3
Location	Urban	4	13.3
	Rural	26	86.7
Age	21-40	27	90.0
	41-60	3	10.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The result from Table 1 revealed that ex-convicts were mostly single (47%), male (87%) with less educational (87%) levels

located mostly in rural areas (87%) with age range of between 21 and 40 years (90%).

2. Vocational skills acquired by Ex-convicts

Table 2. Vocational Skills Acquired by the Ex-Convicts of Gombe Central Correctional Center

S/N	Vocational Skill	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Hair dressing/Barbing	1	3.3
2.	Carpentry	11	36.7
3.	Welding	10	33.3
4.	Tailoring	6	20
5.	Catering	2	6.7
	Total	30	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The result from Table 2 shows that ex-convicts were exposed to various vocational skills. The result revealed that carpentry and welding were the most trained skills by the ex-convicts as both skills were highlighted by 37% and 33% of the respondents respectively. Tailoring was recorded by 20%

of the respondents while catering was participated by 7% of sample population. The least participated skill was hair dressing/barbing with 3.3%

3. Perceived impacts of Vocational Skills acquired by Ex-convicts

Table 3. Perceived Impact of Vocational Skills Acquired on Reformation and Reduction of Recidivism among ex-convicts of Gombe Central Correctional Centre

S/N	Items Statement	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Became employer/self employed	30	3.13	0.92	Agreed
6	Contribution to Development	30	3.03	0.66	Agreed
2.	Increase in income	30	2.83	1.00	Agreed
3.	Improved livelihood	30	2.70	0.97	Agreed
5	Better your behavior	30	2.56	1.05	Agreed



4	Educational improvement	30	2.20	0.91	Disagreed
7	Better relationship with the society	30	2.20	0.98	Disagreed

Source: Field Survey, 2017; N = sample size

The result in Table 3 indicates that majority of the indicators had mean value of greater than 2.50. The ex-convict becoming employer of labour or self-employed scored a mean value of 3.13. The ex-convicts' contribution to the economic development was rated 3.03 while increase in ex-convict's income scored a mean value of 2.83. Improvement in livelihood and better behaviour scored 2.70 and 2.56 respectively. Ex-convicts' relationship with the society scored a mean value of 2.20 while educational improvement scored 2.20 as well. The standard deviation of the perceived impact of the vocational skills acquired while in prison showed a low deviation from the mean as most values were less than 1, which means that the respondents were not too far from the mean and opinion of one another in the responses.

Discussion of Findings

Inmates who enrolled in vocational educational and training programmes while incarcerated had lower recidivism rates than those who did not attend the programmes. Inmates need education and training programmes that not only teach them to read and write but also provide them with the necessary skills that promote a positive transition to society when they are released (Mbatha *et al.*, 2019). The outcome of the result indicates that the ex-convicts were still young males in their productive periods of life. Hence, their lives could still be useful and meaningful, if they apply the skills learnt judiciously.

The vocational skills acquired while in prison made the ex-convicts employers of labour/self-employed. The ex-convicts' agreement to the perception that vocational skills acquisition has made them employers of labour/self-employed implies that they have become owners of businesses who could reduce the huge unemployment in the Nigerian society. The vocational skills received does not only enhance their contribution to the development of the society, it also makes them agents of change and productive members of the society.

According to Omoni and Ijeh (2009) 'prison education or training has the primary task of increasing the chance of employment for ex-convicts. This will help in reducing crime rates in the country.' The implication of this is that, ex-convicts could become more responsible in their actions, not only to their immediate families but also to the general society, since they have to protect their job and create good personal relationship with diverse individuals.

This study adjudged that the livelihood of the ex-convicts has improved, resulting from their involvement in vocational skills training while in prison. This study also confirmed what Omoni and Ijeh (2009) recommended in their study that inmates should be given qualitative vocational education for rehabilitation and reintegration into the society. The vocational skills can occupy the ex-convicts with diverse economic activities that will be productive to the society and boosting the economy. Hence, they will invariably think less of crime. This is in consensus with Dixon and Cassey (2013) who stated that vocational training has good reformatory effect and high quality on the offenders, by creating employment opportunities resulting from skills acquired. The result on whether the ex-convicts' income has increased revealed in affirmation of the perception. The respondents agreed that their income level has increased since their reintegration into the society stemming from the engagement on the vocational skills acquired. Most times it is unemployment and lack of finances that gives rise to crimes. The essence of a business is to earn profit which translates into higher income and better life.

The study suggests that respondents reasonably accept that reformation and rehabilitation of prison inmates through vocational skills acquired have influenced the changing of their behaviour for better; empowered them to keep away from violence, have a better communal relationship and became self-reliance. This is in agreement with the study of Abba (2016) in his study on rehabilitation of prison inmates through vocational skills acquisition



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programmes in North-West States, Nigeria. The finding showed that the respondents disagreed with the perception that there is educational improvement on the ex-convicts while in incarceration. This is attributable to unavailability or nonfunctional educational program in the Gombe Central Correctional Center. This is a confirmation of the assertion of Curtis in Omoni and Ijeh (2009) who stated that less than a third of prisoners have access to education, and those who do, spend only nine hours a week in formal learning activities. It is believed that many prisons do prepare inmates for life after release for effective integration into the society. Government has been making provision for the education of the prisoners, yet, not much have been done to help the prisoners. In line with Omoni and Ijeh (2009) assumption, “prisoners do not need education” and further stated that where there is educational program in prison, the standard of education in prison is inadequate and unacceptable. All this attributes may have contributed to the educational status or standard of the ex-convicts not to improve.

Conclusion

Vocational skill training is a means used in prison for the rehabilitation of inmates with – concerned on employment, and it is obvious that vocational education is an indisputable means of combating crime and decreasing recidivism in the society. When the inmate acquires the relevant skills, it can go a long way to better their livelihood and improve their income as well as contribute to the development of the country. This training culminated into change in behaviour of the ex-convicts. When ex-convicts’ behaviour is changed positively, there will be reduction in recidivism resulting from abstinence from crimes. The rehabilitation of prison inmates through vocational skills acquisition programmes has enhanced social and economic well-being of the ex-convicts to a high extent in Gombe State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Consequent upon the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Since the result revealed that vocational skills available in Gombe Correctional Center are few and yet it has improved livelihood and income of the ex-convicts,

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there is need for the Nigeria Correctional Service authorities to introduce more vocational skills acquisition programmes that are not in existence in Gombe Central Correctional Centre.

2. Collaborative provision should be made between the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS) and other agencies as well as other Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) centres towards promotion of rehabilitation of prison inmates through vocational skills acquisition programme in the prison.
3. Enlightenment programmes such as conferences, seminars and workshops should be mounted by the Nigerian Correctional Service for the prison officials, private individuals, educationist and Non-Governmental Organizations on the need to embrace and support rehabilitation of prison inmates through vocational skills acquisition programmes in Nigeria considering the tenacity of vocational skills acquisition in creating better relationship between the ex-convicts and the society.

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