

Challenges of Improving Literacy and Numeracy Skills of Prison Inmates in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This paper is designed to explore the challenges confronting the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates as perceived by prison inmates themselves. The study adopted a qualitative approach and used a focus group discussion to obtain data from seven prison inmates who were teachers in the school within the Nigerian prison system. The study identified emotional and behavioral problems associated with incarceration, lack of educational resources and inability to ascertain teachers' educational qualifications as some of the challenges militating against the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates. On the basis of the study it was recommended that the government employ counseling psychologist to help resolve the emotional and behavioral problems of prison inmates as well as specialist adult educators able to take account of the life circumstances of their students. Implementing these recommendations will improve the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates, which will in turn contribute to their effective rehabilitation.

INTRODUCTION

The effective rehabilitation of prison inmates has remained an enormous challenge confronting policy makers and administrators in the most of world nations' penal systems. The effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the rehabilitation processes is evident in an increasing recidivism rate among prison inmates across the nations of the world, according to Louw and Tadi (2013:86). Prison inmates' rehabilitation processes in Nigeria are no less efficient than in other countries of the world, as Stephens (2012) points out. In his view, the increase in the recidivism rate in Nigeria raises questions about the effectiveness of the rehabilitation process of the Nigerian Prison Service.

A number of explanations for the factors that influence the rehabilitation process of prison inmates have been presented. Some of the factors identified were: overcrowding in prisons, lack of basic rehabilitation infrastructure, demotivation of prison staff, emotional conditions and the low or poor literacy and numeracy levels of prison inmates. Literacy, according to UNESCO (2005), is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy is achieved through a continuum of learning that enables an individual to reach his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in wider society.

There is evidence that the majority of prison inmates in various countries around the world have poor literacy skills (Cree et al. 2012). Brown and Rios (2014) report that the majority of prison inmates in Florida lack the literacy and numeracy skills required to be successful in today's work. Gagnon and Barber (2014) found that incarcerated youth experience significant academic difficulty and struggle particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In the United Kingdom, it was reported that twenty-five percent of young offenders had reading skills below those of the average seven-year-old. Some sixty percent of the prison population were said to have difficulty in basic literacy skills (Clark 2008).

James (2010) reported that fifty-two percent of male offenders and seventy-two percent of female offenders in the United Kingdom had no qualifications. Half of the prisoners had literacy skills below level 1 and nearly two-thirds had some difficulty with numeracy skills. In New Zealand, seventy percent of prison inmates are unable to cope with literacy demands of everyday living (Department of Corrections 2013). According to the Scottish Prison Service (2012), "approximately eighty-one percent of prisoners screened were assessed as lacking functional literacy and seventy-one percent as lacking in functional numeracy".

Other studies show that sixty percent of adult prisoners in the United States of America are

rated at below the 4 grade level and eighty-five percent of juvenile inmates are functionally illiterate (United States Department of Education 2006). In Canadian jails and prisons, the level of low literacy is three times higher than the rest of the population, while some sixty-five percent of those entering correctional facilities have less than grade 8 and, 79 out of 100 those entering prisons do not have high school qualifications (Canadian Association of Police Chiefs 2008).

In most African countries, no accurate data is available to ascertain the literacy and numeracy level of prison inmates. However, a literacy assessment conducted in Gulu Prison in Uganda revealed that over fifty percent of prisoners whose record showed that they had studied up to primary 5, could not read or write (Africa Prisons Project 2014). In Nigeria, no official statistics are available indicating the literacy and numeracy level of prison inmates. However, studies by Stephens, (2012), Abriofo et al. (2012) and Tennibiaje (2013), found that most prison inmates in Nigeria are illiterates and can neither read nor write.

The consequences of low literacy and numeracy level for prison inmates are enormous. Low literacy and numeracy levels negatively impact the rehabilitation process. This is corroborated by a study by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (2008), which showed that prison inmates with low literacy level were less likely to use prison services such as the community offices and social welfare services. This meant that they might not benefit from rehabilitation programs such as anger management training and drug rehabilitation, which can involve reading.

According to a senior advisor of training for the Department of Corrections in New Zealand, lack of literacy and numeracy skills dramatically affects the life of the prisoner and is a major barrier to educational achievement and finding sustainable jobs upon release (Department of Corrections 2013). Prison inmates who have low literacy and numeracy levels find it difficult to organize information, follow a line of reasoning and keeping track of set of instructions. In Uganda, prison inmates are not able to join vocational and rehabilitation programs because of their low levels of literacy level.

The consequences for prison inmates who are not able to benefit from the rehabilitation

programs are huge. Cree et al. (2012) conclude that prison inmates who are still illiterate upon release present highly probability of reoffending and that this involves considerable costs to the economy in terms of maintaining prisons, administering the courts and running the justice system.

The importance of literacy and numeracy skills to prison inmates is evident but several factors have been identified as impeding or frustrating implementation of literacy programs in prisons. These factors, according to Natale (2010) include a general lack of incentives that encourage offenders to participate in learning, a lack of ICT and prison policy. In another study, Clark (2008) highlighted a wide range of emotional, learning and/or attention deficit disorders as other factors that hamper literacy and numeracy among prison inmates. In their report on factors frustrating the implementation of the literacy program for youths in conflict with the law in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, Colenutt and Teye (2012) listed factors affecting the implementation of literacy and numeracy programs in prisons to include removal from family, community and school, disruptive institutional routines, inadequate resources, emotional and behavioral disorders, and uncoordinated efforts by multiple agencies.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, little research has been undertaken to identify the problems militating against the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in Nigeria and there appears that no work that considers the situation from the perspective of prison inmates. The purpose of this study is to fill that research gap by exploring the challenges militating against the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills among prison inmates, as perceived by prison inmates in XYZ prison in Nigeria.

The XYZ prison is a maximum-security prison that accommodates offenders from almost all the ethnic groups of Nigeria. The length of stay of the inmates in XYZ prison is usually long with a minimum stay of three years because of the nature of their offences, which in most cases attract capital punishment. The prison appears to be well coordinated in terms of education of prison inmates. The researcher of this paper has been involved over a period of time in assisting in running the school in the prison yard.

Statement of the Problem

Crime levels in Nigeria have reached a crisis point and with that also the rate of recidivism. This has resulted in overcrowding in prisons and a chronic threat to the peace and security of citizens. Studies have shown that one of the factors that predispose people to commit crime is lack of basic education. According to UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report of 2012, 10.5 million children in Nigeria are not attending school. However, the problem of literacy and numeracy in Nigeria is not only a matter of access to education, it is also a matter of the quality of the education available. A large number of young Nigerians are emerging from school with limited literacy and numeracy skills (Pauline 2013). Considering the high percentage of young children not attending school means that there is a likelihood that the crime rate in Nigeria will continue to increase.

The level of literacy and numeracy skills in the Nigerian prisons is a reflection of what is happening in the country in general. Most prison inmates in Nigeria are illiterate (Stephens 2012). It is therefore imperative to understand the challenges militating against improving numeracy and literacy amongst prison inmates and, we would argue, to understand from the perspective of prison inmates, and on that basis to offer suggestions for the improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates. The recommendations that emerge from that would, if implemented, help to improve the level of literacy and numeracy of prison inmates. Helping prison inmate chances to improve their levels of education will enable them to acquire skills that will make them employable. In the long run, this will lead to a reduction in the crime rate in Nigeria.

Education has been found to be an effective tool to reduce reoffending (Ward et al. 2013). It has also been established that most prison inmates lack basic educational skills, such as literacy and numeracy skills. Prison inmates who lack these skills, will find it difficult, if not impossible to participate effectively in any rehabilitation program that involves reading. Few, if any studies have been conducted in Nigeria on the challenges militating against improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates. Prison inmates' own perceptions of their prob-

lems in this regard have not been explored. It is therefore imperative that the perceptions of prison inmates, who are after all, directly concerned, are better understood. This study intends to do both these things.

Relevant research grounded insights into the challenges as perceived by prison inmates will assist in providing solutions that are both relevant and suitable to the challenges militating against the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates. Improving the literacy and numeracy levels of prison inmates will also encourage their enrolment in the schooling available in the XYZ prison in Nigeria.

Research Question

What are the major challenges militating against improving the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in XYZ prison in Nigeria?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to elicit and explore the challenges militating against improving numeracy and literacy skills of prison inmates in XYZ prison in Nigeria, as perceived by prison inmates.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this paper will be of interest to psychologists, who could use the results to design intervention strategies that will help the rehabilitation of prison inmates in Nigeria. Curriculum planners will be able to design curricula specifically for prison inmates, taking into consideration their backgrounds and the prison condition. This study will also be of interest to educators in adult education as most prison inmates are young adults and adults. It will highlight the relevance of education as a rehabilitation and reintegration tool for prison inmates.

International organizations such as UNESCO will find the study useful as a database and reference point for their intervention in prisons in Nigeria. The study will sensitize the federal government of Nigeria, non-governmental agencies and other stakeholders in the education, judicial and rehabilitation sector to the numeracy and literacy needs of prison inmates.

This paper affords prison inmates the opportunity to air their views on the challenges militating against literacy and numeracy skills, in most cases, the voices of prison inmates are not heard. In addition, it aims to create awareness among stakeholders of the importance of using education as an effective rehabilitation and reintegration tool for prison inmates. The findings of this paper will offer suggestions on ways to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates. Improving their literacy and numeracy skills will boost their chances of not reoffending and make them more likely to gain employment after their term in prison.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The philosophical assumption underlying this paper is the constructivist approach, it's associated interpretive and phenomenology practice as a research method. The interpretive paradigm allows the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of the research participants' perception, experience and opinions (Nieuwenhuis 2007:59) and to gain insights into their comprehension of the 'whole story' through a discovery of their meanings.

For the purpose of this paper we have adopted the phenomenological mode of inquiry within the interpretive paradigm. According to Husserl (1962), phenomenology allows the researcher to understand the world as it is lived and described. It proceeds by exploring phenomena as they reveal themselves, rather than by explaining or reasoning about their possible causes. This paper employed a qualitative research design, making use of the focus group interview. The qualitative research design was aimed at gaining an understanding of the experience of prison inmates of their own context, as well as their perceptions and meanings about it. Qualitative research attempts to describe human action from the perspective of the insider to a particular situation, rather than to explain it from an external perspective.

Tonkiss (2004:194, 2006) defines a focus group "as a small group discussion focused on a particular topic and facilitated by a researcher". Its value as a scientific research method is in the opportunities it offers to explore the participants' attitudes, opinions, meanings and def-

initions. As Cronin (2008:234) puts it, focus groups provide an opportunity to gain insight and understanding from representatives of a target population, in these instance prison inmates. Focus groups are often used in market research to determine the need in a particular population for products and service or product because they seek to shed light on group opinion.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), focus group interviews are suitable for social-behavioral research where the purpose is to develop and measure services. In this case, the service to be measured is the prison inmates' ability to meet the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in Nigeria. A focus group should generally consist of six to ten people (Cronin 2008:235). For effective management of the group, Peek and Fothergill (2009:37-8) suggest between three and five participants. In their view, groups of between six and fifteen are difficult to manage.

A focus group interview was conducted that provided the participants an opportunity to share, firsthand, their views on the research topic (Lauer 2006). In this case, the topic is the challenges militating against improving literacy and numeracy of prison inmates in XYZ prison in Nigeria. The researcher for the focus group interview developed an interview guide. The school premises within the prison yard was used for the focus group interview and facilitation of the group members was arranged with the prison authorities before the commencement of the study.

Using the interpretive viewpoint enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of the critical, social and organizational issues relating to challenges militating against the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in XYZ prisons in Nigeria.

Population for the Study

The population for the study comprised of all prison inmates in XYZ prison in Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample is a subset of measurements drawn from the population (McMillan and Schumacher 2006:119). One of the major features of a qualitative study is the use of small samples (Henning et al. 2004). Purposive sampling technique was employed to obtain data: it sought to estab-

lish based purpose rather than statistical probability. A researcher can employ purposive sampling if he has prior knowledge of specific people most likely to produce most valuable data (Oliver 2006). The sample for this study consisted of seven prison inmates. The participants were selected for their ability to provide rich information based on a number of criteria. They were required to be prison inmates, to have been voluntary teachers in the remedial school in the prison yard and to have been doing this for a period of at least three years.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was obtained from the Nigerian Prison Service to conduct the research. The researcher briefed the participants of the purpose of the study, which was primarily for research purposes and to identify challenges militating against the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates as perceived by prison inmates. The verbal consent of the participants was obtained. The researcher assured the participants of the confidentiality of all information that will be provided. To guarantee the confidentiality of information provided by participants, the researcher informed them that he would not identify a given response with any one of them and that the names of participants was not required. For anonymity purposes, each participant was given a pseudonym. Participants were informed that there would be no financial reward and that any of them could withdraw from the study at any stage of the study, because participation was voluntary.

Description of the Study Area (XYZ Prison, Nigeria)

The research took place in July 2014 at the XYZ prison in Nigeria. The prison was a male prison with a lockup capacity of 1,025 inmates. At the time of the study it housed 725 prison inmates. The prison had different categories of inmates, categorized as, Awaiting Trial Male (ATM), Convicted Men (CM) and Condemned Convicts (CC).

The ATMs were prison inmates who had been detained on the order of a court but had not been convicted. CMs were those who have been sentenced by a court of law to a prison term ranging from three years to a maximum of

life imprisonment. Prison inmates who were classified as CCs were those who had been condemned to death by a court of law. They were either awaiting execution by hanging or were on appeal. The offences committed by the inmates of the prison included capital offenses ranging from murder, robbery, armed robbery, murder and treason and financial offences such as fraud and advanced fee fraud, among others.

A focus group interview was used as the means of obtaining data from the participants. The focus group interview took place within the remedial school premises in the XYZ prison yard. The school was a building with six rooms used as classrooms and as a staffroom. The school was supposed to be part of the rehabilitation program of the Nigerian Prison Service, but not much appeared to be being done by the prison authority. Indeed, the school was being managed by an NGO.

The school has four sections: the nursery section used to teach prison inmates who could not read or write, the primary section for those who had some basic knowledge, the junior secondary, and the senior secondary section. At the time this study was undertaken, there were seventy-five students in the school. This represented only about eleven percent of the total prison population of 752.

Data Collection Procedure

To conduct this research, permission was obtained from the Nigeria Prisons Service. A focus group discussion was used to obtain data from participants. The participants were prison inmates who are either ATMs or CMs. Their offences ranged from robbery to advanced fee fraud. They were voluntary teachers, though not trained either as teachers or adult education teachers. The educational qualification of the voluntary teachers could not be ascertained.

In carrying out this study, the researcher developed an interview schedule to guide the discussion. The focus group interview was conducted in the staff room of the school. The staff room was spacious enough to seat at least ten people at a time, so it was convenient and conducive for the focus group discussion. The researcher conducted a facilitation program for the participants before the commencement of the interview. During the facilitation program, participants were informed of the purpose of the

study, which was to explore the challenges militating against the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates, as perceived by prison inmates.

Participants were also encouraged by the researcher to express themselves freely. There were no wrong or right answers. They were asked not to criticize anybody or use foul language, and to ask questions and make comments on other people's opinion objectively. A note-taker was appointed to write down the major themes that emerged from the discussion. He was provided with sheets of paper and a ball-point pen to take notes. The researcher also took notes. At the end of the discussion, the researcher expressed his appreciation to all the participants, as well as the hope that all stakeholders would hear their voice and that improvement to literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates would result. The focus group discussion lasted two and a half hours.

To ensure a true representation of the opinion of participants', the note-taker was asked to read out his notes out loud. Some amendments were made and all participants agreed that the document represented their views. A comparison of the notes taken by the note-taker and that of the researcher was undertaken.

FINDINGS

The following findings were noted.

The first major problem identified was the prison system's inability to ascertain the level of literacy and numeracy of prison inmates.

"We have a situation where people cannot read and write, and they do not want to start from the elementary section, and if they are asked to start from the scratch (elementary school) they stop coming to school."

"Some will tell you they have school certificate and yet they are not able to read or write."

The second major problem was the issue of the teacher's qualification. This is summarized in submission of Participant E,

"Oga (boss), this is prison we know ourselves. Anybody can claim to have one qualification or the other, how do you confirm it? Since there is no opportunity for us to go home and bring our certificates."

Teachers without the prerequisite educational qualification will not be in a position to impart knowledge, let alone to adults. It was observed

that not a single prison official was engaged in teaching prison inmates in the school.

A third major challenge was institutional

"For instance, on Mondays they do inspection and they don't open us until 10 am, at times 11 am. Therefore, most people won't come [to the school]. Also, on Thursdays when the prison officials have lectures, they open for us late."

"At times when the big men (senior prison officials) from Abuja (Federal capital of Nigeria) are coming, they do not open until they have come and gone. Such days there may mean no school".

The focus group discussion revealed that the prison condition impacts negatively on the emotions, psychology and physiology of prison inmates.

Participant A commented:

"Prison is a terrible place; a lot of people here are frustrated, angry, hungry, dejected—that coming to improve their education is the last thing they want to do".

This implies that prison inmates are not psychologically prepared to learn or be taught.

A lack of support from prison officials was another problem identified by participants. On the question of attitude of prison officials' towards prison inmates improving themselves, Participant B said: *"Those ones (referring to prison officials), encouragement? They don't like anything good; they discourage even those that are making efforts."*

Participant A: *"Their comments can be so annoying, but what can we do, since we are criminals."*

Researcher: "What are their comments like?"

Participant C: *"It's bad, can you imagine people that we are helping to do their work (prison warders) making statements like this: 'What will a criminal do with going to school? Do they teach people how to carry guns in the school?'"* *"If you want to know how to read and write, you do that in a school. This is a prison"*.

Clearly, sarcastic comments like this can discourage prison inmates from attempting to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

From the focus group discussion, it was clear that the inmates lacked relevant study materials.

"We don't have relevant textbooks to teach the students, especially for those in the nursery section that are just learning how to write a, b, c (literacy) and 1,2,3 (numeracy)."

The group interview revealed that some prison inmates felt ashamed or would prefer their counterparts not to know that they could neither read nor write. As a result, they would try to avoid doing any task that would reveal their literacy level. Some prison inmates were of the opinion that no other inmate is qualified to teach them since they were all prison inmates. As we have seen, no prison official was involved in teaching at the prison school.

Participants highlighted a lack of coordination between some volunteers and prison officials as another challenge. For instance, some of the NGOs wanted to have direct contact with the teachers and students, by personally handing over whatever materials they might need, such as notebooks and biro pens. However, the prison officials always insisted that it was their responsibility to receive material from volunteers and to disburse it to the prison inmates.

In fact, there was a high degree of mistrust between the prison officials and inmates on the one hand, and between prison officials and volunteers on the other. The prison officials were not handing over materials to the inmates. In other cases, according to participants, NGOs failed to consult them about the needs of the school and brought in materials that are not relevant.

Finally, there was no curriculum.

"We don't have anything to guide us on what to teach, especially for students in the primary school. We just use our own way."

"For the GCE class we have an old syllabus, we don't even know if they have changed it [the syllabus]. Prison shuts you out."

Suggestions by Participants

During the focus group discussion, participants were asked to say what they thought could assist in improving the literacy and numeracy level of prison inmates. Firstly, it was suggested that those among them who were teachers in the prison school should be given training, to enable them to teach their students better. Secondly, the participants proposed that the Nigeria Prison Service should motivate them by paying the teachers a stipend and acknowledging their efforts; if they did not teach in the school, no prison officials would. Thirdly, the participants were of the opinion that NGOs and religious bodies assisting the school in the prison

should relate directly with the teachers because some of the materials donated to them do not reach them. The participants also said that inmates who made efforts to improve their literacy and numeracy skills should be encouraged by arranging sponsors for them to further their education. Some of the inmates complained of a lack of funds that would enable them to further their education. Finally, the participants requested that textbooks, notebooks, pens, pencils and teaching aids be made available to them.

DISCUSSION

This paper was designed to explore the challenges militating against the improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in XYZ prison in Nigeria. One research question was raised and the focus group discussion was employed to obtain data from the participants. The study identified the following as challenges militating against the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in XYZ prison in Nigeria:

- ♦ Difficulty in ascertaining the literacy and numeracy level of prison inmates
- ♦ The lack of teachers' qualification
- ♦ Institutional problems
- ♦ The attitude of prison officials.

Others were the lack of textbooks, prison inmates' ego, the lack of a curriculum and the lack of proper coordination among stakeholders. Firstly, one of the challenges identified by the study is the non-assessment of the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates on admission into the prison yard. From the information gathered from participants and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no program designed for this purpose. This finding is in agreement with the submission of Natale (2010), who suggested the need to have systems for diagnosing individual learning needs of prison inmates.

Secondly, the study revealed that the qualification of teachers in the prison school is inadequate. Most of them were not trained teachers. Also, the genuineness of the teachers' qualification could not be established because they did have their certificates with them in prison and they were not allowed to go home and fetch their certificates. This indicates a lack or shortage of qualified teachers engaged in helping to improve the inmates' numeracy and literacy

skills. This finding is similar to the conclusions of Natale (2010), who reported a loss of 250 prison-teaching jobs as a result of the contracting-out of prisons in the United Kingdom. Thirdly, institutional issues were a factor militating against the improvement literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in XYZ prison. Prisons are highly regimented and regulated institutions and therefore not flexible; prison rules are often strict and limit the options open to prison inmates and stakeholders. These rules affect the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates because security issues override other considerations in the prison environment. This finding mirrors that of Natale (2010) who concluded that prison policy often affected the effectiveness of literacy programs in United Kingdom prisons.

Furthermore, the prison inmates indicated that they suffered from a range of emotional, psychological and behavioral problems. Some of these problems were a result of the prison condition, in particular the slow administration process that places prison inmates behind bars for years without the adjudication of their cases. This finding concurs with that of Clark (2008) who reported emotional problems as one of the problems of literacy programs among prisoners in the United Kingdom. This finding is also in agreement with a study by Colenutt and Toye (2012) who listed emotional and behavioral problems as one of the factors that impede literacy programming among children in conflict with the law in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Another factor highlighted as militating against improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in the XYZ prison was the attitude of prison officials. It was evident that prison officials had a negative attitude to the educational improvement of prison inmates. One of the reasons given was that, some of the prison officials were not well educated themselves and did not have opportunities to develop themselves, so they did not want prison inmates to be better off than them. This finding mirrors the finding of Clark (2008), who argued that the attitude of prison officials had an impact on literacy program in prisons. This suggests that where prison officials' attitudes are positive, prison inmates will be motivated to improve their educational level. Conversely, a negative attitude of prison officials will demotivate prison inmates from studying.

The lack of relevant textbooks and study materials was another challenge the study highlighted. The school in the prison lacked basic textbooks and other study materials such as notebooks and writing equipment. The non-availability of textbooks and other study materials discouraged would-be learners. The situation was not peculiar to XYZ prison. The problem of inadequate resources is mentioned by Colenutt and Toye (2012) as one of the factors frustrating literacy programming among children in conflict with the law in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The issue of the prison inmates' ego was also discussed. Many of the prisoners did not want their counterparts to know that they could neither read nor write, hence their reluctance to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. This finding lends credence to that of Natale (2010), who found that a literacy program among prisoners in the United Kingdom was hampered by the inability of prisoners to overcome what was termed the "shame factor" of not being literate.

The study further revealed that the lack of a curriculum specifically designed to meet the learning needs of prison inmates was a challenge in the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates XYZ prison. Improvements to the literacy and numeracy skills prison inmates require a special curriculum that takes cognizance the peculiar learning needs of adult prisoners. This is in concordance with the submission of Africa Prison Project (2014), which suggested the design and employment of unique and tailored-made curriculum for adult prison inmates.

Finally, the study identified a lack of coordination among stakeholders in the rehabilitation process as another challenge. This could be due to the fact that there was no specific avenue for stakeholders to meet to deliberate on problems concerning prison inmates and the prison administration. This finding reflects that of Colenutt and Toye (2012) who reported that uncoordinated efforts of multiple agencies as factors affected a literacy program of young offenders in Canada.

CONCLUSION

The study was designed to explore the challenges militating against the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in

XYZ prison in Nigeria as perceived by prison inmates themselves. A qualitative research design was employed, using a focus group discussion. The sample consisted of seven purposively selected prison inmates who were teachers in the school in the prison yard. The study revealed some of the challenges the prisoners felt themselves to face. These included the lack of a way to ascertain the literacy and numeracy level of prison inmates, inability to ascertain teacher's qualification, the emotional and behavioral challenges encountered by prison inmates, institutional challenges and the negative attitude of prison officials toward the education of prison inmates, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study is to create awareness of the challenges involved in improving the literacy and numeracy levels of prison inmates in one prison in Nigeria, and to arrive at a set of recommendations for improving them. The researchers believe that these conclusions will be relevant wherever similar conditions prevail.

Specifically, these recommendations are:

The Nigeria Prison Service must make a deliberate effort to establish the literacy and numeracy level of prison inmates at the point of admission into the prison. This is necessary because it will allow for an individualized intervention strategy that is designed to meet each prison inmate's needs and circumstances and account for self-direction of the inmates. The Nigeria Prison Service should employ qualified adult educators as teachers for prison inmates, who are adults. Adult education teaching methods are quite different from those applicable for younger people, and the peculiarities of some of the prison inmates would have to be recognized.

- ♦ Professional counselors should be employed to assist prison inmates by attending to their psychological, emotional, learning and behavioral challenges; individuals with emotional or psychological problems are not in a position to learn effectively.
- ♦ Curriculum planners should develop curriculum and innovative teaching methods to meet the needs of the prison population. Innovative methods could involve music, dance and drama.
- ♦ It is also recommended that there should be cooperation between the Nigeria Prison

Service, the Ministry of Education, NGOs, religious organizations and other stakeholders. A coordinated approach by all stakeholders to improve the literacy and numeracy skills would attract international support from organizations such as UNESCO and other foreign foundations.

- ♦ As a form of motivation, prison inmates involved in improving their literacy and numeracy level should also acquire vocational skills, which will improve their chances of securing employment after their term in the prison. This is a major factor in reducing recidivism.
- ♦ A reorientation program should be conducted for prison officials, especially as regards to their attitude towards prison inmates, and especially the rehabilitation process of prison inmates. If the prison officials do not have confidence in what they are paid to do and in the prison inmates, the rehabilitation process is in jeopardy.

Finally, further studies should be carried out on the use of education as a rehabilitation tool in Nigeria. Studies have shown that education helps build learning and life skills that allow for the reintegration of former prisoners into the community, which helps to prevent recidivism.

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