

ADULT EDUCATION AND PRISON EDUCATION: THE NECESSITY

Kpeno Amon EPHRAIM

Department of Adult Education and Community Development, Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria

kpenoephraim@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Prison education is a vital component of adult education, playing a transformative role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated individuals into society. This paper examined the necessity of adult education in correctional settings, outlining its benefits for personal development, social reintegration, and the reduction of recidivism. Drawing on global and Nigerian contexts, the study highlights the theoretical foundations, best practices, and persistent challenges associated with prison education. The paper sums that an inclusive and well-funded prison education system is not only an educational imperative but also a social justice necessity. Adult education is a multifaceted field concerned with lifelong learning, empowerment, and social transformation. One of its most critical yet underexplored applications is in correctional institutions. This paper examined the necessity of integrating adult education into prison education systems, considering its theoretical foundations, relevance, and impact on rehabilitation, reintegration, and societal well-being. Drawing insights from global practices and the Nigerian context, the paper argues that prison education is not a peripheral concern but a core aspect of adult learning policy and social justice.

Keywords: Adult Education, Prison Education, Necessity, Nigeria.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Ephraim, K. A. (2024). Adult education and prison education: The necessity. *International Journal of Leadership, Quality Education and African Development*, 1(2), 224-230. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18727361>.

Copyright © 2024 IJLQEAD

INTRODUCTION

Adult education is often conceived within the boundaries of lifelong learning, workforce development, and civic engagement. However, a critical yet often overlooked dimension is its role in prison education. As institutions tasked with rehabilitation, correctional facilities should offer more than punitive measures. They must provide educational opportunities that support personal growth and social reintegration. Prison education aligns with broader goals of adult learning by addressing the educational deficits and skill gaps that contribute to criminal behavior (Davis et al., 2013; UNESCO, 2020). In Nigeria, where prison conditions are harsh and literacy levels among inmates are low, prison education has become increasingly necessary (Akinwumi & Onifade, 2020).

Adult education refers to all forms of structured and unstructured learning undertaken by adults to improve their knowledge, skills, values, and quality of life. It spans literacy, vocational training, civic education, continuing professional development, and higher education (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; UNESCO, 2022). Within this broad domain, prison education stands out as a critical but often marginalized subfield, despite its immense potential to transform incarcerated individuals and society at large.

Prisoners, like other adult learners, have accumulated life experiences and face learning needs that are best addressed through adult learning frameworks. Many inmates enter prison with limited education, making prisons fertile grounds for adult education interventions aimed at rehabilitation and empowerment (Akinwumi & Onifade, 2020). This paper explores how adult education serves as the foundation and driver for effective prison education, especially in developing countries like Nigeria.

Prison and adult education are both essential for societal well-being, but prison education is specifically necessary for the rehabilitation and successful reintegration of incarcerated individuals by reducing recidivism and improving post-release outcomes. Adult education more broadly enhances personal, social, and economic well-being for all adults through lifelong learning opportunities, and its principles are critical for designing effective prison education programs that empower inmates.

Necessity of Prison Education

- Reduces recidivism: Education and job skills decrease the likelihood of re-offending by addressing unemployment and providing prisoners with tools for economic independence after release.
- Supports social reintegration: It helps rebuild a prisoner's identity and self-respect, making it easier for them to re-enter society and avoid social exclusion.
- Improves moral and behavioral attitudes: Education can foster positive changes in behavior and outlook, preparing individuals for a crime-free life.
- Provides purpose and positive activity: Learning activities keep inmates engaged, which can reduce boredom and alleviate the negative effects of isolation.

Necessity of adult education (in and out of prison)

- Enhances overall well-being: Adult education benefits individuals by improving personal well-being, health, and social inclusion.
- Supports democratic function: It contributes to a stronger, more informed citizenry and strengthens democratic systems.
- Drives economic growth: Education and skills training for the general adult population support economic development and create opportunities for better employment.
- Empowers a lifelong learning mindset: It promotes the idea that learning is a continuous process, which is vital for individuals to adapt to a changing world.

How the Two Connect

- The principles and practices of adult education are the foundation for creating effective prison education programs.
- By applying adult education principles, correctional facilities can move beyond punishment to provide a robust environment for personal growth and skill development.
- This holistic approach, which is the goal of adult education, helps ensure that prison education programs are more effective in achieving their aim of preparing individuals for a productive and law-abiding life after their release.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The philosophical basis for prison education is rooted in the broader theories of adult learning. Knowles' (2015) andragogy emphasized the need for self-directed and experiential learning, which is particularly relevant in correctional settings where learners bring rich, albeit complex, life experiences. Freire's (2005) theory of critical consciousness is also applicable with expectation that education in prison should foster critical reflection that empowers individuals to challenge oppressive conditions and make constructive life choices. Mezirow's transformative learning theory further underscores how critical reflection can lead to a profound shift in worldview among incarcerated adults (Mezirow, 2000).

Adult Education: Conceptual Foundations

Adult education is not just about learning new skills, it is about transformation. According to Knowles' (2015) theory of andragogy, adults learn best when they are self-directed and can draw on their lived experiences. Freire (2005) added that adult education should be dialogical and liberatory, helping learners develop critical consciousness about their realities. These principles are particularly relevant in correctional settings, where learners may have faced systemic exclusion and trauma. In such contexts, adult education provides a framework for learning that is humane, flexible, and empowering, and it allows for rehabilitation through literacy, critical thinking, emotional growth, and life skills acquisition (Mezirow, 2000).

The Necessity of Prison Education

Reducing Recidivism

Empirical studies demonstrate a strong correlation between prison education and reduced rates of recidivism. Davis et al. (2013), in a comprehensive meta-analysis, found that inmates who participated in educational programs were 43% less likely to return to prison. Education fosters cognitive and behavioral change that can help break cycles of criminality.

Improving Employability

Many incarcerated individuals lack basic education and marketable skills. Literacy, vocational, and post-secondary programs equip inmates with tools for economic reintegration post-release (Gus, 2019). In Nigeria, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has pioneered inmate access to higher education, improving employability upon release (NOUN, 2021).

Promoting Rehabilitation and Self-Esteem

Education enhances inmates' self-worth, motivation, and sense of purpose. It transforms the prison environment from a space of punishment to one of possibility and growth (Wright, 2005). This psychological benefit plays a vital role in the rehabilitation process.

Jail break syndrome

Education can discourage the idea of jail break as the prisoners could consider themselves being cherished and their interests seen considered paramount.

Global and Nigerian Context

In countries like Norway, Canada, and the United Kingdom, prison education is well-integrated into the correctional system, offering academic, vocational, and life skills programs. In contrast, Nigeria faces serious challenges: overcrowded prisons, limited access to educational resources, underqualified instructors, and poor institutional support (Ajagun & Ikonta, 2019). Yet initiatives such as those by NOUN and the Nigerian Correctional Service indicate progress.

THE PLACE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN PRISON EDUCATION

Prison education is not separate from adult education, it is a vital expression of it. Adult education in prisons encompasses programs in basic literacy, numeracy, vocational training, life skills, religious instruction, entrepreneurship, and even higher education. It is designed to support the transformation of incarcerated persons from a state of marginalization to one of potential reintegration and productivity. Prisoners are quintessential adult learners: they are mature, have prior experiences (often adverse), and are typically not engaged in formal schooling.

Thus, adult education theory and practice directly inform the design and implementation of prison education curricula, pedagogies, and assessments (Wright, 2005; Davis et al., 2013). Furthermore, prison education responds to one of the central goals of adult education: social inclusion and democratic participation. By equipping prisoners with knowledge and skills, society affirms their dignity and facilitates their return as contributing members (UNESCO, 2020).

The Necessity of Prison Education

Rehabilitation and Personal Development

Adult education in prison fosters personal growth, emotional resilience, and a sense of purpose. Studies have shown that inmates who participate in education programs gain higher self-esteem and better psychological well-being (Gus, 2019).

Reducing Recidivism

Inmates who receive education are significantly less likely to reoffend. Davis et al. (2013) found that correctional education reduces recidivism by 43%, saving public funds and enhancing public safety.

Skill Development and Employability

Adult education helps inmates develop vocational and entrepreneurial skills, thus easing reintegration into the labor market. In Nigeria, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

has established prison study centers that offer diploma and degree programs, giving inmates formal qualifications (NOUN, 2021).

Challenges in Implementing Prison Education

Despite its benefits, prison education faces significant obstacles. These include:

- **Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Most Nigerian prisons lack libraries, classrooms, and ICT resources.
- **Stigma and Policy Neglect:** Ex-inmates face societal stigma, and prison education receives little policy attention or funding.
- **Security Concerns:** Restrictions on movement and interaction within prisons can limit program delivery.
- **Low Motivation Among Inmates:** Without proper sensitization, many inmates may not see the value of education (Akinwumi & Onifade, 2020).

Suggestions

The following suggestions were proffered:

- **Integrate Adult Education into Correctional Policy:** Education must be viewed as a right for all, including prisoners, and enshrined in correctional reform agendas.
- **Expand Partnerships:** NGOs, universities, religious institutions, and international agencies should partner to deliver quality prison education.
- **Promote ICT and Distance Learning:** E-learning and radio instruction can help overcome infrastructural and mobility barriers.
- **Develop Context-Sensitive Curricula:** Learning programs should reflect inmates' needs, interests, and post-release realities.

Policy Recommendations

To ensure the effectiveness of prison education, the following recommendations are essential:

- **Mainstream Education in Correctional Policy:** Educational programs must be enshrined in prison reform laws and correctional services frameworks.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborations with NGOs, universities, and corporate bodies can bridge funding and infrastructural gaps.
- **Use of ICT and Distance Learning:** Digital platforms and open educational resources (OERs) can extend, reach and flexibility (Tella & Obille, 2022).
- **Inmate-Centered Curriculum Design:** Programs must be tailored to the unique needs and interests of prisoners, involving them in planning and evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The necessity of adult education in prison cannot be overstated. It is not only a tool for personal transformation but also a strategic mechanism for social development and crime reduction.

Looking into the case of countries like Nigeria, prioritizing prison education is both a moral responsibility and a development imperative. A rehabilitative justice system, underpinned by education, offers hope and humanity to those society has marginalized. Adult education offers a transformative path for individuals and societies. Its relevance in prisons is especially urgent as it meets people at the margins and offers them the tools for a new beginning. As a subfield of adult education, prison education is not just a service but a **social necessity and a human right**. It is very important for Nigeria and other developing nations in their peculiar cases to adopt the expansion of prison education within an adult education framework because it will foster the essentiality of sustainable development, crime reduction, and social justice for a better nation.

Suggestions:

To institutionalize prison education as a core aspect of adult education, governments should establish a national framework for correctional education, with specific policy guidelines, implementation strategies, and monitoring mechanisms. This framework should include:

- A dedicated directorate or unit for prison education within the Ministry of Education or relevant adult education agencies.
- Mandatory literacy and vocational training programs in all correctional facilities.
- Certification partnerships with universities and technical colleges for inmates' educational progression.
- Integration of prison education outcomes into national education statistics and development indicators, ensuring visibility and accountability.

This policy-level commitment would elevate prison education from a charitable intervention to a systemic and rights-based educational provision aligned with both national development goals and global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4).

REFERENCES

- Ajagun, G. A., & Ikonta, N. R. (2019). Challenges of prison education in Nigeria: A case study of Lagos state prisons. *African Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(2), 55-65.
- Akinwumi, F. S., & Onifade, C. A. (2020). Prison education and reintegration of inmates in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning*, 20(3), 102-114.
- Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. (2013). *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education: A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults*. Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum.
- Gus, V. (2019). Education behind bars: The impact of prison education on inmate employability. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 70(1), 15-28.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2015). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2014). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*. Jossey-Bass.

- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. Jossey-Bass.
- NOUN. (2021). *NOUN graduates 25 inmates from Nigerian Correctional Service*. National Open University of Nigeria News Bulletin. <https://www.nou.edu.ng>
- Tella, A., & Obille, C. (2022). Open educational resources and incarcerated learners in Africa. *African Journal of Open and Distance Learning*, 12(3), 45-62.
- UNESCO. (2020). *Prison education and the right to education: A global overview*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- UNESCO. (2022). *Global report on adult learning and education (GRALE 5): Citizenship education and participation*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- Wright, R. (2005). In the line of fire: Trauma in the lives of prison educators. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 56(2), 140-153.