

REVIEW ARTICLE

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG INMATES IN NIGERIAN CORRECTIONAL CENTRES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Education is a key instrument of rehabilitation, human capital development, social reintegration, and crime reduction. In correctional settings, access to quality education can help inmates develop literacy, numeracy, vocational, entrepreneurial, and other competencies necessary for productive participation in society after release. In Nigeria, the transformation from a prison-oriented system to the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCOs) has strengthened the emphasis on reformation, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Nevertheless, educational opportunities available to inmates remain constrained by overcrowding, inadequate learning facilities, a shortage of qualified instructors, limited educational materials, insufficient funding, technological constraints, insecurity, stigma, and weak coordination between correctional institutions and educational agencies. This paper examines educational opportunities and human capital development among inmates in Nigerian correctional centres, focusing on the nature of educational programmes, their contributions to rehabilitation and reintegration, major challenges and prospects for improvement. The study adopts a qualitative research design based primarily on documentary analysis of relevant legislation, policy documents, scholarly literature, institutional reports and publications of national and international organisations. Human Capital Theory provides the theoretical foundation for the study, while the rehabilitative perspective provides an additional conceptual basis for understanding education as an intervention for behavioural transformation. The paper argues that education should not be treated as a peripheral welfare service within correctional institutions but as a strategic component of correctional administration and national human capital development. It recommends increased funding, expansion of literacy and formal education, vocational and digital skills programmes, partnerships with universities and other educational institutions, improved learning infrastructure, teacher development, recognition of inmates' qualifications, post-release educational support and stronger monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The study concludes that a properly designed and adequately funded correctional education system can contribute substantially to reducing recidivism, improving employability, strengthening social integration and promoting safer Nigerian communities.

Keywords: Nigerian Correctional Service, inmates, correctional education, human capital development, rehabilitation, reintegration, recidivism, vocational education, skills acquisition.

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INTRODUCTION

Correctional institutions are traditionally associated with the custody and control of individuals convicted of criminal offences. However, contemporary correctional philosophy increasingly recognises that imprisonment should not be limited to punishment and incapacitation. Correctional institutions are also expected to provide opportunities for behavioral transformation, education, vocational development, psychological support, and preparation for reintegration into society. In Nigeria, this changing philosophy is reflected in the transition from the Nigerian Prisons Service to the Nigerian Correctional Service through the Nigerian Correctional Service Act 2019. The change in nomenclature represents more than an administrative adjustment. It reflects a broader policy orientation toward corrections, rehabilitation, reformation, and reintegration. Education is particularly important within this framework because many individuals entering correctional institutions have experienced educational disadvantages before incarceration. Some may have limited literacy or numeracy skills, while others may have discontinued formal education because of poverty, unemployment, family circumstances, displacement, social exclusion, or other socioeconomic factors. For such individuals, incarceration can become an opportunity to acquire competencies that may improve their prospects after release. The concept of human capital is relevant because education and skills represent forms of productive capacity that can improve individual economic and social opportunities. Becker (1964) argues that education and training constitute investments that increase human productive capacity. Schultz (1961) similarly emphasizes education and skills as investments that contribute to economic development.

Applied to correctional settings, the human capital perspective suggests that investing in inmates' education can yield benefits at both the individual and societal levels. An inmate who acquires literacy, vocational competence, digital skills, or entrepreneurial knowledge may have improved opportunities for legitimate employment and self-employment after release. This can reduce dependence on illegal activities and potentially lower the risk of reoffending. Correctional education can take several forms. These include basic literacy and numeracy, secondary education, adult education, tertiary education, vocational and technical training, agricultural education, entrepreneurship, computer literacy, religious and moral education, and other skills-development programmes. The importance of these programmes is particularly significant in Nigeria because the country faces substantial challenges relating to unemployment, poverty, youth vulnerability, insecurity and social exclusion. If correctional education is effectively designed and linked to la-

bour-market opportunities, it can support both individual rehabilitation and broader socioeconomic development.

However, the availability of education does not necessarily guarantee meaningful educational outcomes. Correctional centres may experience overcrowding, inadequate classrooms, shortages of educational materials, limited access to information and communication technologies, insufficient funding and inadequate numbers of qualified teachers. Some inmates may also face difficulties obtaining certificates that are recognised by educational and employment institutions.

Consequently, there is a need for a systematic examination of the educational opportunities available to inmates, the contribution of these opportunities to human capital development, the constraints affecting their implementation, and the prospects for strengthening correctional education in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine educational opportunities and human capital development among inmates in Nigerian correctional centres, with particular attention to the challenges affecting implementation and the prospects for improvement.

Specific Objectives

The study seeks to:

1. Examine the nature and scope of educational opportunities available to inmates in Nigerian correctional centres;
2. Assess the contribution of correctional education to human capital development among inmates;
3. Examine the role of formal, non-formal, vocational and digital education in inmate rehabilitation;
4. Identify the major challenges affecting educational programmes in Nigerian correctional centres;
5. Examine the relationship between correctional education, employability and reintegration;
6. Assess the potential contribution of education to reducing recidivism among former inmates;
7. Examine the role of government, educational institutions, civil society organisations and private-sector partners in promoting correctional education; and
8. Propose strategies for strengthening educational opportunities and human capital development within the Nigerian Correctional Service.

Conceptual Clarification

Education

Education refers to a structured process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and competencies. In correctional settings, education may include academic, vocational, technical, digital, agricultural, and entrepreneurial and life-skills programmes.

Correctional Education

Correctional education refers to educational programmes provided to persons under correctional supervision. Its purpose may include improving literacy, acquiring vocational competencies, developing employability, encouraging behavioural change and supporting successful reintegration.

Human Capital

Human capital refers to the knowledge, skills, competencies, abilities and other productive characteristics embodied in individuals that can contribute to economic and social development.

Human Capital Development

Human capital development involves deliberate investment in education, training, skills, health and other capacities that increase individual productivity and social participation.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation refers to interventions designed to address factors associated with offending behaviour and help individuals develop the capacities required for lawful and productive living.

Reintegration

Reintegration refers to the process through which persons leaving correctional institutions return to and participate constructively in their families, communities, labour markets and wider society.

Recidivism

Recidivism refers broadly to the return to criminal behaviour or reoffending after a person has been sanctioned or released from correctional supervision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Correctional Education

Correctional education is based on the assumption that learning can contribute to personal transformation. It seeks to provide inmates with opportunities to address educational deficits and acquire competencies useful for life after incarceration. Unlike purely punitive approaches, correctional education views inmates as individuals capable of change. Education can improve literacy, critical thinking, decision-making, communication

and problem-solving abilities. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, commonly known as the Nelson Mandela Rules, recognise the importance of education, vocational training and other rehabilitative activities in correctional settings (United Nations, 2015). The Nigerian Correctional Service Act 2019 similarly provides a legislative framework within which correctional institutions can pursue reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Formal Education among Inmates

Formal education involves structured learning leading to recognised educational qualifications.

Inmates may benefit from:

- Basic literacy;
- Primary education;
- Secondary education;
- Adult education;
- Distance learning;
- Tertiary education; and
- Examination preparation.

Formal education is especially important for inmates who have not completed their basic education. An inmate who obtains recognised educational qualifications may improve his or her opportunities for further study or employment after release.

Adult Literacy Education

Adult literacy is particularly important because correctional populations may include individuals with inadequate literacy skills.

Literacy programmes can improve inmates' ability to:

- Read and write
- Communicate effectively;
- Understand official documents;
- Access information;
- Manage financial transactions;
- Participate in further education;
- Understand legal and administrative procedures; and
- Engage in legitimate employment.

Literacy therefore provides a foundation upon which other forms of human capital development can be built.

Vocational and Technical Education

Vocational education is a major component of correctional rehabilitation because it provides practical skills

that may be directly connected to employment or self-employment.

Possible areas include:

- Tailoring;
- Carpentry;
- Welding;
- Electrical installation;
- Plumbing;
- Automobile repairs;
- Catering;
- Hairdressing and barbing;
- Computer operations;
- Agriculture;
- Poultry production;
- Livestock management;
- Fish farming;
- Soap production;
- Crafts; and
- Entrepreneurship.

Vocational education becomes more effective when it is connected to recognised certification, modern equipment and labour-market demand.

Agricultural Education

Agricultural education has particular relevance to Nigeria because agriculture remains an important component of livelihood and economic activity.

Correctional agricultural programmes can expose inmates to:

- Crop production
- Animal husbandry
- Poultry farming;
- Fishery;
- Irrigation;
- Food processing;
- Agricultural entrepreneurship;
- Farm management; and agribusiness.

Such programmes can contribute to food security, employment and poverty reduction while providing inmates with practical skills for post-release livelihoods.

Digital and Information Technology Education

The contemporary labour market increasingly requires

digital competencies.

Correctional education therefore needs to respond to technological change by providing opportunities for:

- Basic computer literacy
- Digital communication;
- Word processing;
- Spreadsheet applications;
- Online learning;
- Digital entrepreneurship;
- Information management;
- Coding and related technical competencies where feasible.

However, digital education in correctional environments must be carefully designed around institutional security requirements.

Entrepreneurship Education

Educational programmes should not focus exclusively on preparing inmates for wage employment. Entrepreneurship can provide an alternative route to socioeconomic reintegration.

Entrepreneurship education may include:

- Business planning;
- Financial literacy;
- Bookkeeping;
- Marketing;
- Customer relations;
- Cooperative development;
- Business ethics;
- Savings and investment;
- Access to credit; and
- Small-business management.

The effectiveness of entrepreneurship training is enhanced when it is linked to post-release access to finance, mentorship and markets.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Human Capital Theory

This study is primarily anchored in Human Capital Theory, associated with scholars such as Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker. Human Capital Theory holds that education and training are investments in people. These investments increase knowledge, skills, and productivity, thereby potentially improving economic outcomes.

Becker (1964) explains that education and training can increase the productive capacity of individuals. Schultz (1961) similarly considers investment in human capacities a major source of economic development. Applied to inmates, the theory suggests that correctional education can transform underdeveloped human capacities into productive competencies. The theory provides an important framework for understanding why education should be viewed as an investment rather than merely a welfare service.

For example:

Educational investment → knowledge and skills → improved human capital → employability/productivity → socioeconomic reintegration → reduced vulnerability to reoffending.

The theory also suggests that society may benefit from investing in individuals who have previously engaged in criminal behaviour because productive capacities can be developed and redirected towards legitimate activities.

Rehabilitative Theory

The study is also informed by the rehabilitative approach to corrections.

Rehabilitative theory argues that criminal behaviour can be addressed through interventions that help offenders develop skills, change behaviour and address factors associated with offending. Education fits within this framework because it can enhance cognitive abilities, improve decision-making, increase legitimate opportunities and encourage personal responsibility. The combination of Human Capital Theory and rehabilitative theory provides a useful framework for understanding correctional education as both an economic and criminological intervention.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative documentary research design.

The design is appropriate because the research focuses on understanding educational opportunities, institutional challenges, policy frameworks and prospects for human capital development within Nigerian correctional institutions.

Sources of Data

Data are derived from secondary sources, including:

- Nigerian Correctional Service documents;
- Nigerian Correctional Service Act 2019;

- Federal Government policy documents;
- United Nations publications;
- Academic books;
- Peer-reviewed journal articles;
- Reports from relevant agencies;
- Scholarly research on correctional education;
- Publications on human capital development;
- Reports concerning rehabilitation and reintegration; and
- Relevant institutional and development-sector publications.

Method of Data Analysis

The study uses thematic analysis. Information obtained from relevant literature is organised around major themes such as:

1. Educational opportunities;
2. Human capital development;
3. Rehabilitation;
4. Employability;
5. Reintegration;
6. Recidivism;
7. Institutional challenges; and
8. Prospects for improvement.

Ethical Considerations

Because the study relies on documentary materials rather than direct interviews with inmates, issues of informed consent and direct participant exposure are limited. Nevertheless, academic integrity requires accurate representation of sources, proper citation and avoidance of unsupported claims.

Educational Opportunities Available in Nigerian Correctional Centres

Literacy and Basic Education

Basic literacy should remain the foundation of correctional education. Inmates who cannot adequately read and write may face significant barriers to employment, further education and independent living. Literacy programmes can therefore serve as entry points into broader educational development.

Secondary Education

Where opportunities exist, inmates can pursue secondary-level education or prepare for relevant examinations.

This may create pathways to higher education and professional training.

Tertiary Education

Tertiary education provides opportunities for inmates with the required qualifications to pursue advanced academic development. Distance learning and flexible educational arrangements may be particularly useful in correctional environments, subject to institutional security requirements.

Vocational Training

Vocational programmes can equip inmates with practical skills that can be used for employment or entrepreneurship.

Agricultural Training

Agricultural programmes can provide practical skills in farming, livestock, poultry, fisheries and agribusiness.

Entrepreneurship and Financial Education

Entrepreneurial training can prepare inmates for self-employment and business development after release.

Digital Literacy

Digital skills are increasingly essential for participation in modern economies. Controlled and secure digital learning facilities can therefore enhance correctional education.

Life-Skills Education

Education should also address:

- i. Communication;
- ii. Conflict resolution;
- iii. Decision-making;
- iv. Interpersonal relationships;
- v. Financial management;
- vi. Problem-solving;
- vii. Civic responsibility; and responsible citizenship.

These skills complement academic and vocational competencies.

Education and Human Capital Development among Inmates

Education contributes to human capital development through several pathways.

- i. Knowledge Development
- ii. Education increases knowledge and cognitive capacity.
- iii. Skills Acquisition
- iv. Vocational and technical programmes provide prac-

tical competencies.

- v. Employability
- vi. Educational qualifications and practical skills can improve employment prospects.
- vii. Entrepreneurship
- viii. Business education can facilitate self-employment.
- ix. Social Skills
- x. Education can improve communication, cooperation and problem-solving.
- xi. Personal Development Learning may enhance self-confidence, discipline and responsibility.
- xii. Economic Reintegration
- xiii. Education can enable former inmates to participate more effectively in legitimate economic activities.

Thus, correctional education can be conceptualised as an investment in both individual and national human capital.

Education and Rehabilitation

Education can support rehabilitation through several mechanisms.

First, education can improve cognitive skills and decision-making. Second, it can offer inmates constructive activities and reduce idleness. Third, education may strengthen self-esteem and future orientation. Fourth, it can offer legitimate alternatives to criminal livelihoods.

Education is therefore most effective when integrated with other rehabilitation interventions, such as counselling, psychological services, substance use interventions, behavioral programs, and family support.

Education and Recidivism Reduction

One of the major expected benefits of correctional education is its potential contribution to reducing reoffending. A person released from custody without skills, qualifications or employment opportunities may face substantial economic and social pressures. Where such conditions interact with stigma and weak family support, the risk of returning to criminal behaviour may increase.

Education may reduce this vulnerability by improving:

- a) Employability;
- b) Economic independence;
- c) Problem-solving;
- d) Self-confidence;
- e) Social integration;
- f) Legitimate income opportunities; and
- g) Future orientation.

However, education alone cannot eliminate recidivism. Its effectiveness depends on the broader correctional and social environment.

Major Challenges

Inadequate Funding

Insufficient funding can limit the provision of classrooms, books, equipment, computers, workshops and other learning resources.

Overcrowding

Overcrowded correctional centres can make it difficult to organise learning activities effectively.

Inadequate Educational Infrastructure

Some correctional facilities may lack adequate classrooms, libraries, workshops, laboratories and digital-learning facilities.

Shortage of Qualified Teachers

The quality of education depends heavily on qualified and motivated teachers and instructors.

Limited Learning Materials

Textbooks, stationery, instructional materials and other resources may not always be sufficient.

Digital Divide

Limited access to computers, internet-enabled learning and digital resources can leave inmates behind in a technology-driven economy.

Certification Problems

Skills acquired in correctional centres need appropriate certification if they are to have maximum value in the external labour market.

Stigma and Discrimination

Former inmates may experience discrimination even after acquiring educational qualifications and vocational skills.

Weak Post-Release Support

Without employment assistance, mentoring, business support and continuing education, the benefits of correctional education may diminish after release.

Security Constraints

Security requirements may restrict access to certain technologies, equipment, internet services and external educational activities.

Limited Partnerships

Correctional institutions cannot meet all educational needs alone. Weak partnerships with universities, tech-

nical institutions, NGOs and employers may restrict available opportunities.

Inconsistent Monitoring and Evaluations

Without reliable monitoring mechanisms, it becomes difficult to determine which educational interventions produce meaningful rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that education should be considered an integral component of correctional administration rather than an optional service. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, educational investment increases individuals' knowledge and productive capacities. For inmates, this investment may be particularly important because incarceration can provide a controlled environment in which educational deficits are addressed. The rehabilitation perspective further shows that correctional education can help transform behavior and improve future prospects.

However, educational interventions must be designed around the actual needs of inmates and the requirements of the Nigerian labor market. Training individuals in skills with limited economic demand may produce certificates without meaningful employment outcomes. Therefore, labor market assessments are needed before introducing or expanding vocational programs.

Furthermore, correctional education should move beyond the traditional emphasis on manual skills to include digital literacy, entrepreneurship, financial education, and emerging technical competencies. A major issue is the transition from incarceration to freedom. Human capital acquired inside a correctional center must be connected to opportunities outside. A former inmate who has learned tailoring, agriculture, computing, or another skill may require tools, capital, mentoring, and market access to turn the acquired skill into a livelihood.

Consequently, correctional education should be connected to post-release reintegration programs.

Prospects for Improving Correctional Education

- Stronger Government Investment

Government should increase funding for correctional education and treat it as a strategic investment in human capital and crime prevention.

- Partnerships with Educational Institutions

The NCOs should strengthen partnerships with:

- Universities

- polytechnics;
- colleges of education;
- technical and vocational institutions;
- Adult education agencies; examination bodies; and professional organisations.

Expansion of Digital Learning

Secure digital-learning facilities can enable inmates to access broader educational resources while maintaining correctional security.

National Certification Framework

Vocational skills acquired by inmates should lead to recognised qualifications wherever possible.

Teacher Development

Qualified teachers and instructors should receive continuous professional development relevant to correctional education.

Correctional Libraries

Libraries should be strengthened through books, educational materials, and digital resources and structured reading programmes.

Agricultural Education

Correctional farms and agricultural training centres should be strengthened as platforms for agricultural skills, food production and entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship Support

Educational programmes should be connected to microfinance, cooperative development, and mentorship and market opportunities.

Post-Release Education

Former inmates should be connected to continuing education and vocational opportunities after release.

Private-Sector Partnerships

Businesses can assist by providing equipment, apprenticeship opportunities, certification, employment pathways and mentorship.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The NCOs should establish measurable indicators for assessing educational programmes, including:

Number of inmates enrolled;

- Completion rates;
- Certification rates;
- Employment after release;
- Business creation;
- Educational progression;

- Recidivism outcomes; and
- Successful community reintegration.

FINDINGS

Based on the documentary analysis, the study identifies the following major findings:

1. Education is a central component of effective rehabilitation. It can address educational deficits and provide inmates with legitimate pathways to personal development.
2. Human capital development is relevant to correctional policy. Education and skills can improve individual productivity and socioeconomic participation.
3. Vocational education has significant reintegration potential. Practical skills may facilitate employment and self-employment.
4. Digital literacy requires greater attention. Contemporary economic participation increasingly depends on digital competence.
5. Educational programmes face institutional constraints. Funding, infrastructure, staffing, overcrowding and materials remain major concerns.
6. Certification is important. Skills and educational achievements should be formally recognised to increase their value in the labour market.
7. Post-release support is essential. Education acquired during incarceration must be connected to employment, entrepreneurship and continuing education.
8. Education alone cannot guarantee rehabilitation. Successful outcomes require complementary interventions, including counselling, family support, employment assistance and community acceptance.
9. Partnerships are essential. Government alone cannot provide all the educational resources required.
10. Correctional education has broader national-development implications. Investment in inmate education can contribute to human capital development, crime prevention and social stability.

CONCLUSION

Educational opportunities are key to human development and helping prisoners in Nigeria. The prison system aims to reform and reintegrate inmates, making it possible to expand education programs for them. Edu-

cation helps inmates gain reading, writing, qualifications, vocational skills, digital literacy, entrepreneurial know-how, and life skills. These can boost their chances of finding jobs, becoming financially independent, and successfully reintegrating into society.

But, to do this effectively, we need to overcome challenges like poor funding, lack of facilities, too few qualified teachers, overcrowding, limited learning resources, poor internet access, certification issues, social stigma, and little support after release. The study concludes that prison education should be seen as an investment in human potential, rehabilitation, crime prevention, and national growth. Different groups—including the prison service, government, schools, civil society, and private companies—must work together to create a smooth path from education to reintegration.

Finally, inmates who learn and develop skills while in prison should not leave only with a completed sentence. They should also leave with knowledge, recognized skills, confidence, and real chances to participate lawfully in society. This approach can help improve rehabilitation, reduce repeat offenses, and build safer, more productive communities in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

Correctional education should be institutionalised as a core rehabilitation strategy.

The Nigerian Correctional Service should integrate education into individual correctional and rehabilitation plans.

Funding should be increased.

Adequate resources should be provided for classrooms, libraries, workshops, agricultural facilities, computers and educational materials.

Educational assessment should begin upon admission.

Each inmate's educational level, skills, interests and learning needs should be assessed to develop an appropriate individual learning plan.

Formal education should be expanded.

Inmates should have access to literacy, secondary and tertiary education where appropriate.

Vocational education should be labour-market oriented.

Training programmes should reflect current and emer-

ging employment opportunities.

Digital education should be strengthened.

Secure computer laboratories and controlled digital learning systems should be developed in correctional centres.

Certification should be prioritised.

Relevant educational and vocational authorities should support the certification of competencies acquired by inmates.

Correctional agricultural programmes should be expanded.

Agricultural education should cover modern farming, agribusiness, and food processing and agricultural entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship education should be linked to post-release opportunities.

Former inmates should receive assistance with business development, cooperative membership, financing and mentorship.

Partnerships should be strengthened.

The NCOs should develop stronger partnerships with educational institutions, NGOs, development organisations and the private sector.

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- Below is a comprehensive research-paper draft structured for academic use, with emphasis on the Nigerian Correctional Service, inmate education, rehabilitation, human capital development, and reintegration?