

## Perceived Contributions of Vocational Skills Acquisition to Prisons Inmates' Reintegration into the Society

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### Abstract

*The study is a descriptive survey research design which examined the perceived contributions of vocational skills acquisition to prison inmates' reintegration into the society. A simple ballot system was used to select two prisons out of the five prisons in Ogun State of Nigeria. The selected prisons are the Ijebu-Ode prison and Ilaro prison. A total of 200 participants (these consist of prison officers and prison inmates) were randomly selected from these two prisons for the study. Three hypotheses were postulated and tested. The instrument adopted for the study was a self-constructed questionnaire (Prisons' Vocational Materials Inventory, PVMI). The PVMI consists of two sections. Section A consists of personal questions which deal with the profile of the individual while section B consists of 30 questions which were meant to help test and analyse the hypotheses. The instrument was validated using content and construct validity and also the test-re-test reliability. It has 0.70 test-re-test reliability coefficient after a two-week interval. The data collected were analysed using t-test and correlation coefficient (r). The findings revealed that the convicted inmates in the prisons are exposed to vocational skills when compared with their counterparts who are awaiting trial. Since vocational skills acquisition is connected with knowledge that someone needs to have in order to do a particular job, it was therefore suggested that all prison inmates should be exposed to vocational skills regardless of whether they are already convicted or awaiting trial, because some of them that are awaiting trial might be in the prison for years. The vocational training of prison inmates will increase the choice of their employment after completion of their terms of imprisonment which will help them contribute their own quota to national development instead of being a nuisance to the society.*

**Keywords:** Vocational skills acquisition; Awaiting trial inmates; Convicted inmates; Prison inmates.

### Introduction

The United Nations report on the state and conditions of Nigerian prisons as recorded in the Vanguard of Friday, September 1 (2006), observed that; "All the prisons visited had very limited facilities for rehabilitation. Where these exist, they include basic equipments and facilities for such activities as wood work, tailoring/welding, electronics and sewing. Nevertheless, the facilities are extremely limited and in all cases the tools are few and in poor state of repair". According to Orakwe (2011), the figures from the prisons indicate that we have total of 48,408 prisoners in custody nationwide. Out of this number, 33,552 are awaiting trial while only 14,856 are convicts. About 70 percent of these persons awaiting trial are charged for offences ranging from armed robbery to murder, arson, drugs trafficking, pipeline offences, etc.

Orakwe (2011) also observed that as long as what we have in prison continues to be remand homes, the prison cannot but continue to play the role of containment in custody. This kind of prison is not good for the society. It does not process offenders so that the society can be secured; it only keeps them in custody without professional intervention. Each prisoner's sentence is usually a starting point for the type of programme designed for his or her reform and eventual rehabilitation. When you therefore keep persons awaiting trial for a long period, they do not benefit from the institutional treatment because the awaiting trial department of the prison is just a 'warehouse' where inmates are kept in custody until they are needed in court again. When it therefore becomes necessary to imprison offenders to protect the society, the period of imprisonment must be used constructively to ensure, as far as possible, that upon their return to the community they are not only willing but also able to lead a law-abiding life (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, 2012).

Pallas (2010) pointed out that there are many factors that have been explored and documented to explain why people turn to crime. Many of these early criminology theories had at their core, the premise that crime is more prevalent in sectors of society that are deprived and where young people have little education. In prisons, in the developed countries like Nigeria, today, education and the attempt to skills to a previously unskilled and uneducative prison population has proved successful in part. This shows that the purpose of imprisonment should not be punitive measure only, because imprisonment itself is enough punishment for any prison inmate. It is true that most of our prison inmates have erred, but they can still be given one vocation or skills while in prison.

Teaching offenders to read and write could help them get a job and prevent them from returning to crime (Hanson, 2004). Many prisoners have had no vocational skills training or have no occupation to offer in the job market. It is also necessary to note that there are many prisoners who do have self-acquired skills, like carrying out all kinds of construction tasks, operate machinery and do semi-skilled work and would benefit from being able to improve on those abilities, even passing on those skills to others. Pallas (2010) pointed out that the initial induction or admission of prison inmates into a prison is a time when those who are habitual offenders customarily show resistance to what they see as going over the same thing that they have been over maybe, dozen of times. Prisoners should, therefore be exposed to various vocational skills training of which each person will choose the most preferable to him/her. These vocational courses should be designed to give them useful skills with which to make a future for themselves when they are released.

Hanson (2004), citing 19<sup>th</sup> century prison Commissioner, Sir Edward Ducane, mentioned that experience has shown that, literacy education has not had the reformatory influence which is expected from it, and that moral and vocational instruction are the most potent of the educational influences in prisoners' reformation. Hanson (2004) further maintained that vocational training has almost disappeared to be replaced by literacy and mediocre educational training that provides for worthless certificates but more importantly a "burns on seat" approach to prison education that often serves management more than the students. Hanson (2004) also argued that, there are many people in the society who have no problem with reading and writing. Their problem, instead, is that of being unskilled and without trade, they, like countless others, are chasing unskilled positions in a highly competitive market. The world is therefore full of "educated derelicts", there is therefore the need of investing in a wider programme of training to accommodate those who may have other abilities or would like to acquire them.

The effect of lack of employment on the life of employable youths has serious implication on such individuals in particular, and the society in general. Most prison inmates, if not gainfully employed after the expiration of their term of imprisonment will also add to the figure of unemployable citizens, the evil that will cause is better imagined than experienced. Borzycki and Makkai (2007) buttressed this fact by stating that:

*"If an ex-prisoner does not successfully reintegrate into the society, there are direct and indirect costs to the community. If prisoners reoffend after release, community safety is compromised through increased crime. There are the costs associated with policing and adjudicating these new offences plus the costs of administering new sanctions. These are far less easily quantifiable or indirect costs to society, such as those borne by the victims of these crimes, those associated with lost economic and community capacity, or through ex-prisoners relying on social services rather than contributing to society".*

In most cases in Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular, members of the society are even unwilling to associate with these sets of citizens, they are considered as outcasts, unrepented persons who are not worthy to be given another chance. "A systematic and evidence-based process by which actions are taken to work with the offender, in custody and on release, so that communities are better protected from harm and reoffending is significantly reduced. It encompasses the totality of work with the prisoners, their families and significant others in partnership with statutory and voluntary organizations" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, (2012). It is therefore apparent that skill acquisition has a significant role to play in ex-convicts' reintegration into the society.

According to Prison's Standing Orders 382 which states that; "the domestic service of the prison, cleaning etc shall be performed by prisoners under short sentence who do not know and cannot be taught the skilled jobs. In the case of prisons classified for the accommodation of long sentence prisoners only, those who are least suited to skilled trade will be selected for domestic duties. The best industrial work will be reserved for prisoners with long sentences". The implication of this is that only convicted prisoners who already know the expiration of their prison terms will be exposed to vocational skill.

There is no provision for the awaiting trial inmates in the prisons' standing orders, these set of people are already psychologically disorganized and would be thinking about their various cases in court, and these definitely last for years in most cases. Hence, many of them are wasting their productive life behind the bar without learning any skill or vocation. It is in view of all these that the researchers set out to investigate the perceived contributions of vocational skills acquisition to prisons inmates' reintegration into the society.

### **Statement of Problem**

It has been observed that most prisons inmates are not engaged in any vocational skill acquisition, because most of them are awaiting trial inmates, while minorities are convicted inmates. These pose great challenge to prison institutions because vocational skills training is majorly for convicted inmates (as stated in the Prisons Standing Order 382). In addition, there is lack of adequate tools and machinery, inadequate qualified instructors in various skills, inadequate personnel like the counseling psychologists, lack of personal interests by the prison inmates to enroll for vocational skills while in prison. All these problems mentioned above prevent prison inmates to enroll for vocational skills acquisition thus preventing adequate reformation and reintegration of prison inmates into the society.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study is to:

1. identify the reasons why all prison inmates must be trained in one vocational skill or the other while in prison;
2. analyse types of vocational skills acquisition that could be given to the prison inmates and how it could contribute to their reintegration into the society.

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There will be no significant difference between convicted inmates and awaiting trial inmates' exposure to vocational skills acquisition.
2. There will be no significant relationship between prison inmates' reintegration into the society and vocational skill acquisition.
3. There will be no significant difference between the role of counseling psychologists and prison inmates' readiness to engage in vocational skill acquisition programme.

### **Methodology**

The study was carried out in Ogun State, Nigeria. The target population for the study was all the staff and prison inmates of all the five prisons in Ogun State. These prisons are: the Ijebu-Ode prison, Sagamu prison, Abeokuta prison, Ilaro and Oba prisons. A simple ballot system was used to select two prisons out of the five prisons. The prisons selected were the Ijebu-Ode and the Ilaro prisons. A total of 200 participants were randomly selected among prison officers and prison inmates in the two prisons to form the sample for the study. An instrument titled, Prisons' Vocational Materials Inventory (PVMI) was constructed by the two researchers. It has a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.70. The two researchers administered the questionnaires to the 200 participants, which made it easier to collect all the questionnaires, however, 195 out of the 200 instruments were valid. The data collected were analysed using the t-test statistical technique and correlation coefficient.

### **Results**

**Hypothesis I:** There will be no significant difference between convicted inmates and awaiting trial inmates' exposure to vocational skills acquisition.

**Table I: t-test comparison of exposure to vocational skills between convicted inmates and awaiting trial inmates**

Responses	N	X	SD	Df	t <sub>cal</sub>	t <sub>crit</sub>
Convicted inmates' exposure to vocational skills	80	2.31	.878	192	3.735	2.65
Awaiting trial inmates' exposure to vocational skills	113	2.64	.218			

Table I shows that the value of  $t_{\text{calculated}}$  (3.735) is greater than the value of  $t_{\text{critical}}$  (2.65) at 0.05 level of significance given 192 degree of freedom. This indicates that the significance of the  $t_{\text{cal}}$  which suggests the rejection of the null hypothesis while the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which indicates that there is a significant difference between convicted inmates and awaiting trial inmates' exposure to vocational skills acquisition.

**Hypothesis II:** There will be no significant relationship between prison inmates' reintegration into the society and vocational skill acquisition.

**Table II: Correlation coefficient between prison inmates' reintegration and vocational skills acquisition**

	Prison inmates' vocational skills acquisition	Prison inmates' reintegration
Prison inmates' vocational skills acquisition	1	0.543**
Prison inmates' reintegration	0.543**	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

Table II above reveals that there is a strong positive relationship between prison inmates' reintegration into the society and vocational skills acquisition in Nigeria. This is because the  $r_{\text{calculated}}$  0.543 is greater than  $r_{\text{critical}}$  0.01 at 5% alpha level. Thus, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which states that there is a significant relationship between prison inmates' reintegration into the society and vocational skills acquisition.

**Hypothesis III:** There will be no significant difference between the role of counseling psychologists and prison inmates' readiness to engage in vocational skill acquisition programme.

**Table III: Correlation test result for hypothesis III**

	Role of counseling psychologists	Readiness to engage in vocational skills acquisition
Role of counseling psychologists	1	0.218**
Readiness to engage in vocational skills acquisition	0.218**	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

From table III above, it can be deduced that  $r_{\text{calculated}}$  0.218 is greater than  $r_{\text{critical}}$  0.01 at 5% alpha level. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant difference between the role of the counseling psychologists and prison inmates' readiness to engage in vocational skills acquisition programme is therefore accepted.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The result of the study shows that the awaiting trial inmates' are not exposed to vocational skills acquisition when compared with their counterparts who are already convicted. This is not good enough as majority of these awaiting trial inmates stay in custody for years due to delay in the court process, this in essence lead to these inmates wasting their productive years in prison being idle and doing nothing.

Adenowo (2010) buttressed this point when he opined that, to learn a skill, you have to invest effort and energy, and by the time you come out, you become refined ... refined items are better and more expensive than crude items. Vocational skills acquisition programme for the awaiting trial inmates will therefore serve as a source of empowerment, which will later make them not to be idle after serving their jail terms or being exonerated from the offence. It was also discovered from the result that vocational skills acquisition will help in the prison inmates' reintegration into the society. This confirms the words of the 19<sup>th</sup> century prison commissioner, Sir Edward Ducane, cited by Hanson (2004) that, ... moral and vocational instruction are the most potent of the educational influences in prisoners' reformation.

Acquiring vocational skills while in prison will therefore help them when they are back in the society because, if they are not gainfully employed after the expiration of their terms of imprisonment, the evil that will cause is better imagined than experienced since some of them have tendencies to commit crimes. The counseling psychologists also have roles to play, which Omini and Ijeh (2009) also confirms in their findings that with proper counseling, the inmates, especially the awaiting trial inmates who are psychologically down and do not know their fate might finally settle down to learn one skill or the other, which might help them when they are given their freedom.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The government of Nigeria should be more sincere about empowering the prison inmates through vocational skills acquisition while serving their sentences in order to have something to fall back on after their jail term.

This could be done through provision of functional workshops, availability of raw materials and machineries, provision of finance and close monitoring of such financial provision to avoid diversion and corruption. The law and provisions that govern the treatment of offenders should also be reviewed, especially the one that takes care of vocational training of Nigerian prison inmates, which only approve vocational training for convicted inmates and neglecting the awaiting trial inmates. Studies have shown that the number of awaiting trial inmates outnumbered the convicted ones, and the government is spending heavily in feeding and accommodating all the inmates, hence the awaiting trial inmates should be engaged in one vocational training or the other.

There is also the need for professional counseling psychologists to be employed in every prison in the country. These professionals possess the skills to counsel their clients (i.e. the inmates) on how to make alternative choice of vocational skills acquisition to bad attitude and to also adjust behaviourally which will definitely influence the prison inmates positively and the society at large will be better off for it.

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