AN OVERVIEW OF ADULT EDUCATION CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR NIGERIAN PRISON'S INMATES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Adult education plays an important role in the reintegration, improvement, empowerment and rehabilitation of confined persons. The transformation of the Nigerian Prisons Service into a Correctional Service under its Service Act of 2019 reflects a policy shift from a primarily protective and disciplinary orientation to a correctional approach that emphasises reformation, restoration, and the reintegration of prison inmates. Within this framework, education and vocational training are important tools for preparing inmates to participate productively in society after release. This paper, however, provides an overview of adult education correctional programmes available to inmates in Nigerian correctional centres. The paper examines its relevance to inmates' rehabilitation and social reintegration, identifies major challenges to effective implementation of programme policies, and discusses prospects for improving quality and accessibility. The literature reviewed covers adult basic literacy, secondary education, vocational and technical education, computer and digital literacy, entrepreneurship education, agricultural education, religious and moral education, life-skills education, and counselling-related programmes. Major challenges include inadequate funding, overcrowding, inadequate instructional facilities, a shortage of qualified adult education teachers, security constraints, limited access to digital technology, weak coordination among stakeholders, insufficient needs assessment, irregular programme participation, transfer of inmates, etc. This paper thus maintains that correctional education should be treated not merely as an optional welfare activity but as a central component of evidence-informed rehabilitation and human-capital development in prison services. The paper recommends needs-based educational assessment, increased public funding, stronger partnerships with universities and technical institutions, digital learning, professional

development for correctional educators, recognition of educational qualifications acquired in custody, improved monitoring and evaluation, individualised learning plans and stronger post-release educational and employment support services for sustainable reintegration of Nigerian inmates.

Keywords: Adult education, correctional education, prison inmates, rehabilitation, Correctional Service, vocational education, reintegration.

Introduction

Correctional institutions are traditionally established to maintain the safekeeping of persons imprisoned for offences and awaiting the determination of their cases. Historically, the prison system in many countries, including Nigeria, was strongly associated with punishment, deterrence, guardianship and social control. Contemporary correctional philosophy increasingly recognises that imprisonment should also create opportunities for behavioural change, educational achievement, skills development, rehabilitation services, and eventual reintegration into society. Stamouli (2020), while discussing issues in measuring adult learners' attitudes, emphasised factors that determine the success or failure of correctional education, because this aspect of education is increasingly viewed as an important component of correctional practice rather than merely an optional activity for inmates. The importance of integrating educational practices into the correctional settings is derived partly from the relationship between educational disadvantage, unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and offending behaviour, which are the major features of Nigerian prison inmates. Many of these confined persons enter correctional institutions with limited formal education, inadequate vocational skills, histories of unemployment, and other social disadvantages (Batchelder & Pippert, 2022). Education during imprisonment can help address some of these disadvantages and equip inmates with knowledge and skills that may be useful after their release. Correctional education can therefore serve both an individual developmental function and a broader social function.

The emphasis on correctional education has introduced changes to the prison service in Nigeria. Following the enactment of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act of 2019, the Act transformed the former Nigerian Prisons Service into the Nigerian Correctional Service and explicitly established reformation, rehabilitation, and reintegration as central elements of correctional administration within the system (Feinstein, Hammond, Wood, Preston & Bynner, 2023). However, the official Nigerian Correctional Service identifies educational and vocational skills training among its functions. It describes these programmes as mechanisms to empower inmates

and facilitate their reintegration into society. Section 14 of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019 provides that the Correctional Service shall provide opportunities for education and vocational training, including training in modern farming techniques and animal husbandry. It further provides for industrial centres equipped with modern facilities for vocational skills development and links such activities to rehabilitation and reintegration (Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019). Viewed against international standards, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, commonly known as the Nelson Mandela Rules, recognise education as an important component of prisoner rehabilitation. Rule 104 provides for the education of prisoners who can benefit and calls for particular attention to illiterate and young prisoners. The rule further emphasises integrating prison education with the country's education system so prisoners can continue their education after release.

In this context, it is important to reiterate that adult education in Nigerian correctional centres merits systematic consideration. Correctional education should not be restricted to literacy classes. It rather encompasses a broad range of educational activities, including basic literacy, numeracy, secondary education, vocational and technical training, tertiary education, computer literacy, entrepreneurship, agricultural education, life skills, health education, and other programmes designed to support personal development and social reintegration. As observed by Uche et al. (2023), five broad categories of educational programmes, which include vocational and technical training, adult basic education, secondary school equivalence, tertiary education and computer training, form the curriculum content of correctional Education for prison inmates. Still, concerns remain about programme quality, instructional resources, participation, security, learning environments, and inmates' opportunities to influence the type of education they receive. Adult education has been shown to support prison inmates' welfare in many ways. Ayinde and Opeyemi (2011) identified basic literacy, vocational education, computer education, and religious education as among those programmes available to inmates in Nigerian prisons. Further, they highlighted inadequate instructional materials, insufficient funding, inadequate welfare and vocational resources, and shortages of qualified facilitators as major challenges facing correctional education among inmates in Nigerian prisons. However, the policy and legal environment increasingly recognises education as an important part of correctional practice among prison inmates. Still, a substantial gap remains between the formal objectives of correctional education and its actual implementation. This article therefore provides an objective overview of adult education

correctional programmes for Nigerian prison inmates by examining their relevance, analysing their major implementation challenges, and discussing prospects for strengthening correctional education in Nigeria.

Conceptualising Adult Education, Correctional Education, Rehabilitation Practices and Reintegration

Adult education refers broadly to organised learning opportunities provided for adults outside or alongside conventional initial schooling. It encompasses formal, non-formal, and informal learning designed to address adults' educational, occupational, social, cultural and personal development needs (Darkenwald & Hayes, 2020). Adult education is particularly relevant to correctional settings because many inmates are adults with diverse educational histories and learning needs. Unlike conventional school-age learners, adult learners often bring prior experiences, occupational knowledge, social responsibilities, and personal motivations into the learning environment. Knowles (1984), through the theory of andragogy, emphasised that adult learners are generally self-directed, have substantial life experiences, and are motivated by learning content relevant to their immediate and future needs. In correctional institutions, adult education therefore needs to be practical, flexible, participatory, relevant and responsive to inmates' individual circumstances. For instance, a prison literacy programme should not simply reproduce primary-school teaching methods. It should account for adult learning characteristics, previous experiences, literacy levels, occupational aspirations, sentence length, age, and anticipated post-release circumstances. Correctional education, as defined by Johnson and Quan-Baffour (2022), refers to educational provision for people incarcerated in correctional institutions to promote learning, rehabilitation, personal development, employability, behavioural change, and reintegration into society. Correctional education is broader than conventional classroom education. It includes academic programmes, literacy, vocational training, computer education, life-skills education, counselling, entrepreneurship, health education, agricultural training, and other learning activities as needs arise. Uche et al. (2023) describe correctional education as education that aims to equip incarcerated persons with knowledge and skills to support productive living after their release. They further identified vocational and technical training, adult basic education, secondary school equivalence, tertiary education, and computer training as examples of programmes offered in Nigerian correctional settings.

The concept of rehabilitation emphasises processes that are intended to address factors associated with offending behaviour and support positive behavioural, social, educational, psychological, and occupational development. In correctional education, rehabilitation is pursued by creating opportunities for inmates to acquire knowledge, develop competencies, examine their behaviour, and prepare for responsible participation in society. The Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019, however, explicitly incorporates rehabilitation into the Correctional Service's mandate, requiring it to conduct risk assessments and implement reformation and rehabilitation programmes designed to facilitate reintegration among the prison's inmates (Dambazau, 2020). Reintegration therefore refers to the process through which persons leaving correctional institutions return to and participate constructively in their families, communities, workplaces, and broader society. Education can facilitate reintegration by improving literacy, employability, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, occupational competence and access to further education. Educational achievement alone cannot guarantee successful reintegration; alongside Employment opportunities, family support, housing, community acceptance, mental and physical well-being, and freedom from stigma, reintegration also reflects post-release outcomes.

Considering the theoretical origins of correctional education, Several educational and behavioural theories have provided useful foundations and practices for correctional education. Specifically, Knowles (1984) theory of andragogy is relevant to correctional education because inmates participating in educational programmes are mostly adults. The theory emphasises the importance of adults' previous experiences, readiness to learn, self-concept, problem orientation, and motivation. However, it allows inmates to help determine learning needs, connect lessons to real-life problems, use practical activities, recognise previous experiences, and access opportunities for self-directed learning, as Uche et .al. (2023) earlier pointed out, these practices and principles are particularly important in Nigerian correctional centres. They noted that prison inmates were not always allowed to choose the educational programmes in which they participated; such limitations to learner participation may reduce motivation and programme engagement. Correctional education can therefore give prison inmates opportunities to reflect on past experiences, examine assumptions, develop new perspectives, and construct alternative ways of responding to life challenges. Programmes that involve inmates in literacy education practice, civic education, life skills, counselling, ethics, entrepreneurship, and employability practices can contribute to

transformative learning, because they encourage reflection rather than simply transmitting information.

Types of Adult Education Correctional Programmes in Nigeria

Adult Basic Literacy Education: This is one of the most fundamental correctional education programmes that operate in relevant learning centres for inmates in Nigeria. It is designed primarily to help inmates who cannot adequately read, write, communicate in writing, or perform basic numerical tasks (Farley & Pike, 2020). This Literacy programme has direct implications for the inmates' everyday life dealings. An inmate who can read can better understand instructions, legal documents, health information, educational materials, and employment information. Numeracy similarly supports financial management, measurement, budgeting, and occupational activities among prison inmates. Literacy programmes are especially important to prison inmates because some inmates have never attended school. In contrast, some who attended primary or secondary school but discontinued their education can achieve the educational goals and objectives of these levels.

Secondary Education: Gillies, Carroll, Swabey, Pullen, Fluck, and Yu (2024) viewed Secondary education as providing opportunities for inmates to obtain qualifications equivalent to conventional secondary-school certificates. Correctional education for inmates includes curriculum programmes that prepare them for equivalent examinations to the West African Senior School Certificate Examination and other related examinations that provide recognised qualifications and may further support education and employment opportunities after release. However, expanding secondary education can therefore help inmates overcome previous educational discontinuity and establish pathways toward tertiary education.

Vocational and Technical Education: Vocational and technical education is perhaps one of the most important components of correctional education because of its direct link to employability and self-employment. Some of the common aspects of vocational education exposed to inmates could include: tailoring and garment production, carpentry, welding and metalwork, electrical installation, plumbing, automobile repairs, hairdressing and beauty services, catering, baking, agriculture, animal husbandry, soap production, furniture making, computer-related skills and other locally relevant Nigerian trades (Cropsey, Wexler, Melnick, Taxman & Young, 2022). The Nigerian Correctional Service Act of 2019 specifically provides opportunities for vocational

training and establishes industrial centres with modern facilities for vocational skills development. However, vocational education should be linked to labour-market demand, as training for inmates is meaningful only when it aligns with market needs; otherwise, it may limit the programme's practical value.

Computer and Digital Literacy: As the world becomes increasingly digitalised, Manninen (2020) observed that Digital literacy is increasingly important, as correctional programmes for prison inmates, in that education, employment, banking, communication, commerce, and government services are becoming digitised. Correctional digital-literacy programmes for Nigerian prison inmates could include, among others, basic computer operations, word processing, spreadsheet applications, internet literacy, digital communication, online learning, coding and programming, digital entrepreneurship, graphic design, information management, and digital safety. Computer training may exist in various correctional centres in Nigeria. Still, inmates who participate in the programme can distinguish it from broader Information and Communication Technology education, which may be limited by equipment availability. However, to better achieve educational goals, correctional education requires carefully controlled digital learning environments rather than excluding technology entirely because of security concerns.

Agricultural Education: Agricultural education is particularly relevant to Nigeria because agriculture remains an important component of the national economy and provides opportunities for self-employment. The Nigerian Correctional Service Act of 2019 specifically refers to training in modern farming techniques and animal husbandry. Correctional agricultural programmes may include crop production, poultry, livestock management, fish farming, irrigation, agro-processing, farm management, and agricultural entrepreneurship. Such programmes can be designed not merely as prison labour but as structured educational programmes that build demonstrable competencies and recognised qualifications for inmates.

Entrepreneurship Education: Cropsey, Wexler, Melnick, Taxman and Young (2022) argue that Entrepreneurship education can help inmates develop skills in identifying business opportunities, preparing business plans, managing resources, marketing products, managing finances, and understanding customer needs. This is especially relevant because some released inmates may experience difficulty obtaining formal employment due to stigma, interrupted work histories and limited qualifications. Entrepreneurship training should therefore be accompanied by access to

mentoring, microfinance information, cooperative opportunities, and post-release support. The entrepreneurial skills provided to inmates can also include elements of Life-Skills Education. As reiterated by Halimi, Brosens, De Donder and Engels (2020) and Stephen (2020), Life-skills educational programmes among prison inmates can go a long way in addressing issues relating to communication, interpersonal relationships, decision-making, problem solving, anger management, conflict resolution, emotional regulation, responsible citizenship, personal finance and family relationships. The programmes thus complement both academic and vocational education by addressing the broader competencies necessary for successful social reintegration of prison inmates. Life skills education includes health education content and practices, including personal hygiene, nutrition, disease prevention, reproductive health, substance-abuse prevention, first aid, and general health literacy. Correctional health education is particularly relevant among prison inmates because they live in relatively confined environments where health risks can be intensified by overcrowding and inadequate facilities. It further encompasses the Religious and Moral aspects of Education. Religious and moral education has historically been part of prison programmes in Nigeria. Ayinde and Opeyemi (2011) identified religious education as among the programmes available in the prison education/correctional context. They reiterated that such programmes can support ethical reflection, personal responsibility, hope and social values. However, the existence, practices and participation in correctional prison education should respect all applicable rights and institutional policies. It should not replace the academic or vocational education that is key to the programme.

Importance of Adult Education Correctional Programmes

Human Capital Development: Education builds and develops knowledge, competencies, and productive capacities in every person exposed to its content and practice. Correctional education is not outside these realities, as it can contribute to human-capital development among inmates who may otherwise remain educationally disadvantaged. In terms of employment and opportunities to practice skills for earnings and survival, the Vocational and academic qualifications acquired through correctional education may increase the employability and other opportunities for prison inmates after their release. Education generally can improve basic employability skills such as literacy, communication, numeracy, problem-solving, and occupational competence. Consequently, Social Reintegration is a key element of correctional education; it supports education by providing structured opportunities for inmates to prepare for

life outside custody, in line with the Nelson Mandela Rules, which emphasise educational continuity between prison and the wider education system. Education can also strengthen Personal Development by building self-confidence, motivation, intellectual development, and personal responsibility among prison inmates, which can drastically reduce issues surrounding idleness after release. Structured educational activities can provide constructive use of time and reduce excessive idleness within correctional institutions.

Further examination of the importance of correctional adult educational programmes for prison inmates shows that rehabilitation achievements are major outcomes of Correctional education; it complements psychological, social, vocational, and behavioural interventions by providing opportunities for learning and positive behavioural development. It promotes Social Inclusion among prison inmates by helping them develop qualifications and competencies that support their participation in community and economic life after release. With these advantages, correctional adult education programmes for prison inmates inevitably support intergenerational benefits, as an educated parent or caregiver, as the case may be, is better positioned to support children's education and development after release. Consequently, the benefits of correctional education can extend beyond individual inmates to families and community members who anchor their new lives and support them thereafter.

Challenges Facing Adult Education Correctional Programmes in Nigeria

Funding remains one of the most frequently identified challenges facing correctional education and programmes for prison inmates in Nigeria. Correctional education requires functional classrooms, workshops, libraries, computers, textbooks, tools, equipment, qualified instructors, and fees for conducting examinations, maintenance costs, supervision and monitoring services. However, Ayinde and Opeyemi (2011) have identified inadequate government funding as a major obstacle to adult education programmes in Nigerian prisons. Inadequate Infrastructural facilities for the smooth operation of many correctional programmes in Nigeria are alarming. Most of the facilities were not originally designed as educational institutions. The classrooms, workshops, laboratories, libraries, computer laboratories, and recreational learning spaces are inadequate. Ajah (2018) reported deficiencies in educational facilities in the Nigerian prison service and emphasised that adequate facilities help improve educational provision and rehabilitate inmates. It is pertinent to reiterate here that, without appropriate and adequate instructional materials such as books,

writing materials, vocational tools, computers, practical equipment and other learning resources, the correctional programmes for prison inmates can become predominantly theoretical and fail to provide the practical competencies required for their employment after release (Gumi, 2024). Digital education remains constrained by limited hardware, connectivity, infrastructure, and security concerns, yet completely excluding the inmates from contemporary digital skills creates a significant educational disadvantage.

Correctional education depends on qualified teachers who understand both adult education and correctional environments, as well as approaches to service delivery. The shortage of suitably trained educators can reduce the quality of correctional programmes (Gumi, 2024). Overcrowding usually increases pressure on accommodation, security, sanitation, healthcare, nutrition, and educational facilities. It also makes it harder to organise and run regular classes because, when the number of inmates substantially exceeds available educational resources, only a small proportion of inmates can participate actively in the programme. Consequently, the efficiency of correctional programmes lies in the security of the education; security is a legitimate institutional requirement but needs to be moderately exercised because excessive security restrictions can limit educational opportunities, especially those involving educational experience from computer studies, internet access, workshops, movement between units and external educators or distance learning (Uche et al. 2023). The active participation of inmates in the correctional programme may be affected by court appearances, transfers, institutional schedules, security events, work assignments, illness, sentence status and other administrative factors which include; inmates transfer between correctional facilities, lack of learners choice and permission to determine the type of educational programme in which they participate in, the Nigeria's multilingual environment that creates challenges for instruction, limited private sector participation in their contribution for equipment, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship training, technology, and employment opportunities, weak monitoring and evaluation of enrolment, attendance, completion, examination performance, certification, employment after release, further education as well as learner satisfaction and longer-term reintegration outcomes, this is so because without reliable data, policymakers may find it difficult to determine which programmes should be expanded, modified, or discontinued (Colenutt & Toye, 2022). Lastly, on this note is the problem of stigmatisation and post-release barriers, where despite inmates acquiring qualifications, stigma associated with incarceration can limit access to employment and social acceptance. However, correctional education should not end at

the prison gate; it should promote Post-release educational and employment support, which is necessary to translate educational achievement into meaningful reintegration.

Prospects for Adult Education in Nigerian Correctional Centres

Despite the challenges discussed above, several developments provide substantial opportunities for prison inmates. The Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019 provides a strong statutory foundation for correctional education. It explicitly requires opportunities for education and vocational training and links training to rehabilitation and reintegration, which can support stronger policy implementation, funding, monitoring, and institutional accountability (Jombo 2023, Steven et al. 2020). Regarding partnerships, Knowles (2020) observed that universities, Technical Institutions like Polytechnics, technical colleges, vocational centres, and professional bodies, including Public-Private Partnerships such as companies, can provide accredited training and certification and contribute equipment, training, apprenticeship placements, mentoring, and post-release employment pathways. Universities can provide degree programmes, teacher training programmes, curriculum development, educational research and development, assessment and evaluation practices, other non-teaching staff development programmes, library services, open and distance learning, and certification. Operating Open and Distance Learning programmes can significantly expand access to education for inmates who cannot attend conventional institutions. Appropriate offline digital learning platforms can provide access to lectures, textbooks, assessments, simulations, and other educational resources while reducing some security risks associated with unrestricted internet access (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2021). However, Digital literacy should become a central component of modern correctional education. Secure learning environments can help inmates build relevant digital competencies while maintaining necessary institutional controls.

To further adult education and correctional programmes for inmates, community and non-governmental organisations that operate as civil-society organisations can support literacy, counselling, vocational training, educational materials, and the reintegration of prison initiatives into society (Coley & Barton, 2020). Individualised Educational Planning that happens among the inmates is another prospect for correctional programmes, as every inmate has different educational needs that are determined during the admission process and during educational assessment procedures; this manifests in the course of determining their literacy level, numeracy level,

previous qualifications, vocational skills of interest, digital competence, educational interests, learning difficulties peculiar to individuals, career aspirations and expected release circumstances, respectively. Many inmates recognise prior learning and practical skills acquired before incarceration. Recognising prior learning can help identify existing competencies and determine the additional training required for certification (Chukwumerije 2024). However, post-release support is directly connected to correctional education. It should also include aftercare services for graduating inmates who may need identity documents, transportation assistance, employment referrals, entrepreneurship support, further education opportunities, apprenticeships, counselling, family reintegration, and community support. Thus, the Nigerian Correctional Service Act also links the correctional training and enterprise activities with aftercare and other support services.

Strategies for Improving Correctional Adult Education in Nigeria

Strategies suggested by Desjardins and Schuller (2023) could include establishing a dedicated Correctional Education Framework. The Nigerian Correctional Service should develop a comprehensive national correctional education framework that specifies minimum standards for literacy, secondary education, vocational education, tertiary education, digital learning, libraries, assessment, certification, and programme evaluation.

Educational Needs Assessment should be conducted. Assess inmates' educational needs at the admission stage, as this allows placement based on individual needs rather than placing inmates in whatever programmes happen to be available. Assessing prisoners' educational and training needs upon admission is an important indicator of effective improvement in correctional education (De Maeyer, 2021). Funding is also an important strategy for identifying and protecting correctional education through budgetary allocations. However, Funding should cover instructional materials, infrastructure, teacher remuneration, vocational equipment, ICT, examination fees, libraries, maintenance, monitoring and evaluation.

For recruitment and Training of Correctional Educators, Educators should receive specialised training in adult education, correctional pedagogy, classroom management, counselling, inclusive education, trauma-informed practice, digital education, security procedures, and rehabilitation (Feinstein, 2024).

Modernise Vocational Training and programmes to align with contemporary labour-market needs. Training should move beyond traditional trades where necessary and include digital services, renewable energy, agro-processing, digital marketing, graphic design, modern agriculture, and other emerging opportunities.

Accreditation and Certification should be strengthened; Certificates obtained through correctional education should be recognised by relevant educational and professional authorities, as the value of education is reduced if qualifications obtained in custody have little recognition outside the correctional environment.

Panitsides and Moussiou (2020) emphasised the need to expand library services: Every correctional centre should have an adequately stocked library containing textbooks, reference materials, literacy materials, newspapers, vocational manuals, legal information, and age-appropriate recreational reading materials.

Introduce Secure Digital Learning: Correctional centres should develop secure offline or controlled-access digital learning systems. Such systems could provide educational content without compromising institutional security. Thus, strengthening learner participation is an important strategy for correctional education. Inmates should be consulted regarding their educational interests and career goals, within reasonable institutional constraints. Establishing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems and strengthening Reintegration Partnerships are all strategies that can improve the smooth conduct of correctional education in Nigeria.

Summary and Conclusion

Adult education correctional programmes constitute an important component of contemporary correctional practice in Nigeria. They provide opportunities for literacy development, academic progression, vocational skills, digital competence, entrepreneurship, agricultural training, life skills, and personal development. The Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019 provides a significant legal foundation for these programmes by requiring educational and vocational opportunities and connecting them to rehabilitation and reintegration. The prospects are nevertheless considerable. The legal mandate and university involvement provide a basis for strengthening correctional education. For correctional education to realise its potential, it must move from fragmented, resource-constrained provision to a systematic, learner-centred, needs-based, professionally managed, adequately funded, accredited, technology-supported, and

outcome-oriented system. The ultimate objective should not simply be to keep inmates occupied during incarceration. Rather, correctional education should help individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, qualifications, and social competencies necessary for constructive participation in society. When properly designed and implemented, adult education can become a major instrument for human-capital development, rehabilitation, social inclusion, employability, and sustainable reintegration within Nigeria's correctional system.

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