

Vocational Skills Training and Rehabilitation of Ex-convict in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between vocational skills training and rehabilitation of ex-convicts in Calabar South Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. The design of the study is the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was staff of correctional centre and secondary sources. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 50 staff from the correctional centre. The instrument was validated by experts in Test and Measurement, and counsellors. The reliability index of the instrument was .62. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The result showed that vocational skills training has significant relationship with rehabilitation of ex-convicts. Based on the finding of the study, it was concluded that the skill acquired enhances the chances of engaging in gainful employment and minimizes the chances of returning back to criminal activities. It was therefore recommended that rehabilitation of ex-convict through vocational skills training will help them to have employable skills which will help them be self-sustainable and employable. Counselling on change of attitude and behaviour could help ex-convicts change their mindset and re-integrate into the society and become better citizens. Successful re-integration of ex-convicts is central to crime reduction.

Keywords: ex-convict, recidivism, vocational, skills, rehabilitation

Introduction

Nigeria has experienced many changes in every facet of life and development. This has impacted on the social life of its citizens positively and negatively. Urbanization (movements of people to the cities looking for greener pastures) and unemployment resulting in increase in crime, displacement of people from their homes as a result of insurgency, trauma, among others, lead to stressful situations, which citizens are exposed to; and these have several consequences. Many people with resilience have been able to manoeuvre through stressful situations while for others, this situations have taken a toll on them, particularly the youths resulting to many engaging in anti-social behaviours which have landed some in correctional centres. Ngwu (2015) observed that there is a strong association between unemployment and crime. The economic situations in the country with its attendant hardship and precarious situation have led to many youths not being meaningfully engaged. The get-rich quick syndrome, resulting to some youth

engaging in unwholesome activities and other reckless behaviours like drug abuse, kidnapping, armed robbery, sexual assault, is also a major problem. The desperation for political power, greed and insensitivity of the political class to the needs of the citizens, have made youths to become ready tools used for political interest, thuggery, perpetration of violence, among others. Government, on its part, seems not to have social incentives as obtained in advanced countries to serve as palliative measures. The youths are ready to do anything to make ends meet. Unfortunately, this has landed many in police net and correctional centres.

Correctional centre is a place of confinement for different categories of persons, with different behavioural patterns; some prisoners pick up some negative behaviours even in correctional centres. Chukwudi (2012) argued that correctional centre is a school of crime and breeding ground for criminal socialization. Apart from those that are convicted for life, depending on the offence, others may be taken on bail, while others are awaiting trial. Whatever, the circumstances that one is acquitted or released from correctional centres, he or she is labeled as an ex-convict. Collins dictionary defined an ex-convict as a person guilty of a crime and sentenced by court of law. A person in correctional centre and released from confinement after serving his sentence is usually given a common label; such person is referred to as ex-convict.

Collais (2019) posits that two third of former inmates in the United States even in Nigeria, return to correctional centres. They are rearrested, reconvicted for repetition of crime; others for probation violations, where no meaningful counselling and rehabilitation structure are put on ground to handle such ex-convicts. To make matter worse, some are stigmatized and find it difficult to integrate in the society, and this actively deter them from becoming productive members of the society. Collais (2019), in his interview with ex-convicts, found out that some carry anger about how they were treated by the system from discrimination, to lack of job opportunities. An ex-convict is considered the usual suspect. This blemish on their person and record of life can obstruct their forward movement even after they have served their debt to the society; most of them are refused jobs because of their criminal records.

National Directorate of Employment (2008) noted that ex-prisoners find it difficult to find employment upon release from prison despite their qualification; this leads to many reverting to crimes (recidivism). Sorochi (2015) estimated that offenders in United Kingdom are rejected for job vacancies with refusing rate up to 90% for serious convictions.

The obstacles that ex-convicts have to face when they return to society are innumerable; from discrimination to unemployment, credit, housing problem to law enforcement profiling which is an uphill battle. Though government have tried to overhaul the criminal justice system trying to make it easier for ex-convicts to re-integrate, ex-convicts struggle to shake off the stigma and access support, this has not yielded the desired results. Stories are told of subtle discrimination from public which they rely on; the moment they come

through the door, ex-convicts are already being judged. According to Borzyeki (2005), imprisonment may have several collateral effects upon many ex-convicts. Such effects include forfeiting their livelihood, personal belongings, accommodation, personal relationship and social network. Some may have experienced psychological abnormalities or acquired self-defeating habits and attitudes. Statistics from Nigeria correctional centres shows that 60% of inmates are recidists, which is an indication, that correctional centres as a reformation and rehabilitation home has failed in correcting anti-social behaviours (Chukwumerije, 2012).

The Decree 9 of 1972 gives Nigerian Prisons responsibility among others to teach, train the prisoners to become useful and law abiding citizens on discharge. This is to be achieved through well-articulated, reformatory and rehabilitative programme aimed at inculcating discipline, respect for law and order and dignity of labour (Igbo, 2017). Furthermore, prison service of Nigeria derives its power from Cap 366 Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1990), to perform the following functions, among others, take into custody those legally convicted and set in motion mechanism for reformation, thus preparing them for return back to the society as normal and law abiding citizens. Rehabilitation implies the reforming of personality and behaviour of convicted offenders through well-designed educational and therapeutic treatment ensuring that offenders are returned back to society as self-supporting and acceptable member of the society (Newton et. al, 2018).

Ostriecher (2003) asserts that preparing prisoners for release is key to ensuring public safety. This can be done by education and vocational skills for ex-offenders to redirect their minds away from crimes. They need transitional services such as life skills, anger management, basic education, job training and placement. Ayuk (2004) asserts that prison must be centre for reformation and not for punishment. The skills they gain enhance chances of engaging in gainful employment and minimize the chance of returning to criminal activities.

Curtis (2005) opines that vocational training and formal education, would provide opportunities for healthy development of positive potentials in the ex-convicts. Research shows that former prisoners who have a stable home on release are 15% less likely to re-offend. Those with job are 15% less likely to commit another crime. The difficulties that former prisoners face are compounded by the shadow of their criminal past. Successful re-integration of ex-offenders is an important aspect of social inclusion.

A study by Ugwoke and Ameh (2014), on rehabilitation of convicts in Nigerian correctional centres, a case study of Federal Prison Kogi State, revealed that out of the 404 respondents, 372 participated in vocational training programme. Out of the 372 that participated, 318 (85.5%) agreed that vocational training programme will be helpful for them after discharge. In other words, those who participated are less likely to become recidivist than those who do not. Arbolede-Florez (2001) opines that punitive approach stigmatizes and belittles the offender but reforming and re-integration of offender should

be the ultimate aim of incarceration. Counselling is necessary to help the prisoners in their educational and psychological potentialities and thereby achieving optimal level of national usefulness. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine vocational productivity of ex-convicts of youths in Calabar South Local Government and the counselling implications.

Statement of the problem

Returning home after being in correctional centres is a very challenging transition for the newly released prisoners as well as their families and society. Recovery from losses and dehumanization while in incarceration, take time and require on-going support. Studies show that without intervention, two thirds of released prisoners go back to correctional centre.

Stigmatization is one of the challenges ex-convicts face as it has negative effect on a person. It could lead to discrimination, which could be obvious or direct, making of negative remarks which may be subtle, such as, avoiding the person because people feel he could be unstable, violent or dangerous. It deprives victims of human dignity and participation in wider society thus undermining social support.

Chemey and Fitzgerald (2014) observed that some ex-convicts may find it difficult finding jobs because employers discriminate against them. This could result to further problems for them making them turn against themselves and lose confidence. An ex-offender's prospect of securing job is further complicated by high national unemployment rate, that is characteristic of the current economic downturn in Nigeria. Others have problems of education and training. This could result to inadequate skills, substance abuse and limited literacy. In Nigeria, the government has done little to help ex-convicts. Some correctional centres' environments are so congested and some may not be trained before release.

Upon released, ex-convicts face challenges mending broken relationship with families and community at large. In some cases, family members reject and ostracized ex-convicts which make it difficult for offenders to readjust after imprisonment. People distance themselves from ex-convicts thinking that they are capable of influencing individual negatively. Ex-convicts are like outcast, rejected in the society; therefore their friends become fellow criminals which perpetrate, rather than prevent crime and lead to recidivism.

Ex-convicts face feeling of failure and hopelessness, feeling of alienation from mainstream institutions; and there is less they can do to change their lives. Offenders who have spent years in correctional centres come out with less education, less skills, negative motive as a result of years spent in correctional centres. Ex-convicts also experience emotional shock because life in correctional centres can be brutal; some are re-introduced to drugs and other anti-social behaviours. Efforts have been made by different bodies such as churches, NGOs, volunteers and even individuals to help in-mates, upon release,

with empowerment programmes, financial support to set up their own business; yet all these have yielded little result. The question therefore is, how can ex-convicts be helped to be included in the mainstream society? Will vocational skills help them to be employable and reduce cases of reoffending after release?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to determine whether vocational skills training has an influence in the rehabilitation of ex-convicts.

Research question

1. To what extent does vocational skill training influence the rehabilitation of ex-convicts in correctional centres in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State?

Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between vocational skills training on rehabilitation of ex-convicts in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Methodology

The research design for this study is survey. The population of the study was from secondary sources and questionnaires given to 50 staff from one correctional centre who gave their opinion on the vocational skills available in correctional centres. The sampling technique used for the study was the purposive sampling technique to select 50 prison staff.

The instrument consisted of ten (10) items to elicit response from the staff on the influence of vocational training on the rehabilitation of prisoners and the proportion of prisoners exposed to this skills in Afokang Correctional Centre. The questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A consisted of biographical information such as gender, age, educational qualifications while Section B consists of Vocational skills prisoners are exposed to in the correctional centres. Simple percentages was used to answer the research question. The four point Likert scale questionnaire was used to elicit information on the relationship between vocational skill training and rehabilitation of ex-convicts. To ensure the face and content validity, experts in Measurement and Evaluation and Guidance and Counselling Department were consulted. The reliability of the instrument was done through trial test on ten respondents who were not part of the sample. The reliability coefficient obtained was .62 which indicated that the instrument was suitable for the study. The analysis was carried using frequency count, percentages and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics.

Presentation of results

This section deals with the analysis of the research data. The results for research question 1 are presented in table 1 using simple percentage. The hypothesis of the study was tested at .05 level of significance.

Research question 1: Does vocational skill training influence the rehabilitation of ex-convicts in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State?

To answer this research question, responses to items 1-10 of the questionnaire were collated and analysed. The result of the analysis is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Response of the respondents on influence of vocational skills on ex-convicts in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State (N=50)

S/N	Vocational skills	Responses				
		A		D		Total (%)
		f	%	F	%	
1	Woodwork.	40	80	10	20	50 (100)
2	Electrical/metal work	35	70	15	30	50 (100)
3	Animal husbandry	5	10	45	90	50 (100)
4	Hair dressing	41	82	9	18	50 (100)
5	Auto mechanic	11	22	39	78	50 (100)
6	Clothing & textile	8	16	42	84	50 (100)
7	Catering	33	66	17	34	50 (100)
8	Waving	45	90	5	10	50 (100)
9	Soap/detergent making	36	72	14	28	50 (100)
10	Photography	4	8	46	92	50 (100)

The result in table 1 shows that 40 (80%) agreed that woodwork is available for training, while 10 (20%) do not. Also, 35 (70%) agreed that electrical/metal work is available for training, while 15 (30%) do not. Also, 5 (10%) agreed that animal husbandry is available for training; while 45(90%) do not. Also, 41 (82%) agreed that hair dressing; while, 9 (18%) do not. Again, 11 (22%) agreed that auto mechanic was available, while 39(78%) do not. Also, 8(16%) agreed that clothing and textile is available for training, while 42 (84%) do not. Also, 33 (66%) agreed that catering is available for training; while 17 (34%) do not. Also, 45 (90%) agreed that weaving is available for training; while, 5(10%) do not. Again, 36 (72%) agreed that soap/detergent making is available for training, while 14

(28%) do not. Finally, 4 (8%) agreed that photography is available for training, while 46 (92%) do not.

The result of the analysis, indicate that the percentage of agreement for 6 of the items are higher than 50. This result therefore signifies that vocational skills training is available for rehabilitation of ex-convicts in correctional centre in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between vocational skills training and rehabilitation of ex-convicts.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is vocational skills training; while the dependent variable is rehabilitation of ex-convicts. To test this hypothesis, vocational skills training and rehabilitation of ex-convicts was correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between vocational skills training and rehabilitation of ex-convicts (N=50)

Variables	\bar{x}	SD	r-value	Sig.
Availability of vocational skills	34.87	3.47	0.480*	.000
Rehabilitation of ex-convicts	36.87	3.58		

* Significant at .05, critical $r=.195$, $df = 48$

The result of the analysis as presented in table 2 revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.480 is significant at .05 level of significance with 48 degree of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence between vocational skills training and rehabilitation of ex-convicts was rejected. This result implied that, vocational skills training have a significant positive relationship with rehabilitation of ex-convicts. The positive r-value implied that the more training on vocational skills, the higher the rehabilitation of ex-convicts tends to be. On the other hand the lower training on vocational skills the lower the rehabilitation of ex-convicts tends to be.

Discussion of the findings

The result of the research question revealed that vocational skills training are available to ex-convicts in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. The responses indicated that the following vocational skills woodwork, electrical, metal work, hair dressing, soap and detergent making were available for the ex-convicts while animal husbandry, auto-mechanic, clothing and textile, catering, and others were unavailable. Others like tailoring, poultry, events management, farming, and video editing though not

indicated were also available. The finding is in line with Ostriecher (2003), who asserts that preparing prisoners for release is key to ensuring public safety. This can be done by education and vocational skills for ex-offenders to redirect their minds away from crimes; they need transitional services such as life skills, anger management, basic education, job training and placement. Furthermore, Ayuk (2004) asserts that prison must be centre for reformation and not for punishment. The skills ex-convicts gain enhance their chances of engaging in gainful employment and minimizes the chance of returning to criminal activities.

The result of the hypothesis revealed that available vocational skills have a significant positive relationship with rehabilitation of ex-convicts in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. The finding is in line with the view of Ugwoke and Ameh (2014) who reported that vocational training programme will be helpful to ex-convict after being discharged.

Those who participated in the skills acquisition are less likely to become recidivists than those who do not. Furthermore, Curtis (2005) opines that vocational training would provide healthy development of positive potentials of ex-convicts. In line with this finding, Ostriecher (2003), asserts that preparing offenders for release through vocational training would re-direct their minds away from crime and help them to be law abiding citizens. However, some responses disclosed that availability of vocational skills has no effect on rehabilitation of ex-convicts. Reasons given for this include individual differences, habitual offenders, lazy ones who despites effort to meaningfully equip them with marketable skills still resort to crime.

Zondi (2012) opines that successful transition from prison and re-integration into the society and reducing cases of recidivism is a major task that all stakeholders must be involved in. To break the cycle, a lot has to be done by families, government, church and NGOs to help ex-convict return to normal life, socially, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, physically and environmentally. Reintegration theory is based on the belief that crime is a product of the society and society is responsible for creating conditions that breeds criminals. As such, society must be part of the solution to help integrate offenders. For example, Open University programme presently afforded in some correctional centres like Lagos, Enugu, should be extended to other correctional centres in Nigeria. Administrators of correctional centres should seek to address problems by offering a range of pre and post release services that is aimed to improve the employability of ex-convicts from correctional centres. These include work readiness, vocational, educational and training for job placement to improve skills.

Conclusion

Relapsing to crime and criminal lifestyle or activities by ex-convicts is a major problem in Nigeria. This study looks at the influence of vocational training skills on rehabilitation of ex-convict. The implication of this study is that prisoners should be exposed to education both for skills development and training of the mind of self-development to

equip them with employable and marketable skills to help them stay out of crime and be law-abiding citizens.

Recommendations

1. Taking advantage of counselling is a step to rehabilitation. The collaboration of relevant agencies, church, community service, NGOs, and all stakeholders have a role to play in the re-integration and resettlement of ex-convict.
2. Counsellors, psychologists, social workers should provide guidance and counselling throughout the duration of sentence. Counselling should cover vocational, academic and personal social counselling to provide new insight into their goals.
3. Counselling on issues like depression, stress or substance abuse will help the ex-convict to re-adjust on release.

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