

# **The Responsiveness of Prison Education to the Needs of Adult Prisoners at Mukobeko Maximum Prison in Zambia**

by

Kasonde Mpundu Mulenga  
*Corrections and Extensions Unit*  
*Zambia Correctional Service*

## **Abstract**

*This study sought to investigate the relevance of Prison education to the needs of Adult Prisoners at Mukobeko Maximum Correctional facility in Kabwe in Zambia's Central Province. The study involved eighteen (18) respondents comprising four (4) instructors, ten (10) prisoners and four (4) administrators. The data was collected using a qualitative study approach. The research reveals that prison education was relevant to the needs of prisoners as it is a source of livelihood for the prisoners once they are discharged due to the positive use of the skills they acquire whilst in prison. The findings further show that the prisoners (learners) were not actively involved when it came to skill and content selection in that skills were assigned and imparted to them without prisoners' involvement in making decisions or evaluating what they learnt.*

**Key Words:** Adult Prisoners, Prison education, Recidivism, Vocational literacy skills

## **1. Introduction**

Most countries, Zambia inclusive, have signed and ratified the international and regional human rights legal instruments which ensure better detention conditions for prisoners. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the African Charter on Human and Populations Rights, the Convention against Torture and other Degrading Treatments, and the Standard Minimum Rules (SMRs) for the Treatment of Prisoners (1955) as observed by the Compendium of United Nations (1992). In contemporary literature education is a human right that must be accessed by all people (UN General Assembly, 1948). According to Munoz (2009), education and training is not only a means of supporting offenders in their transition from prison to the outside world. It is “an imperative in its own right” (Muñoz, 2009) and prisoners should not forfeit this right to access education while in prison.

Thus, prisoners are entitled to the same access to education as other citizens. Education is recognised as a basic human need as well as a human right (UNESCO, 2000; United Nations 2000). Kotchon (2010) argues that education should be provided for everybody, especially for people who are incarcerated. As a signatory to various international laws governing human rights, Zambia is obliged to uphold and ensure that all citizens get access to education, including prisoners. This is because citizens who are incarcerated also have the right to education, commonly called prison education or correctional education (Genet Gelana & Haftu Hindeya, 2013).

Prison education is a broad term that encompasses a number of educational activities occurring inside a prison. These educational activities include vocational literacy skills and general literacy (academic instruction) provided to prisoners while they are incarcerated. The educational programmes offered inside prisons are typically provided and managed by the prison systems in which they reside.

In every nation, Zambia alike, prison services are part of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) mandated among other things, to provide correctional services that contribute to the maintenance

of internal security, law and order in a country. (Auditor General's Report on the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners, Zambia, 2014). Prisons Service also acts as a deterrent measure for would be offenders and is responsible for carrying out rehabilitation of prisoners. Rehabilitation entails changing an offender's behaviour by addressing particular social, psychological, welfare and other factors associated with crime such as anti-social thinking, poor work skills, drug abuse and limited education with a view of preventing prisoners from (recidivism) re-offending. According to the Auditors report of 2014, this process of rehabilitation gives the prisoners a chance to lead a crime free life once released and can have major benefits for the community in reducing crime and its associated costs, Auditors Report, Zambia (2014).

Prison (correctional) education has been provided to prisoners in Zambia since independence. The main objective of providing correctional education both literacy and vocational literacy skills is to prepare inmates for reintegration in society after release and help them to be self-reliant so that they do not reoffend after discharge, (Auditors Report, Zambia 2014). According to the Human Rights and prisons handbook (2015), education in prisons should be aimed at developing the whole person, taking account of prisoners' social, economic, cultural and education background. Kelly (1999) further argues that education should aim at providing an education and learning environment which facilitates the cultivation of each learners' full potential. Education should, therefore, promote the full and well-rounded development of the physical, intellectual, social, affective and moral qualities of all learners so that each can develop into a full person, for his or her own personal fulfilment and good of society (Kelly, 1999). This implies that the education provided in prison should be relevant to the socio-economic needs of prisoners and society. Additionally, Zambia's Ministry of Education (1992) adds that it

is the role of education to prepare the individual to live in society and to develop into the new type of person needed to meet the challenges of life in Zambia. MOE (1992) further emphasizes that education must respond to the needs of both the individual and of society.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

The relevance of prison education has not been fully understood. There seems to be insufficient literature regarding prison education in Zambia. The lack of substantial research output in the form of articles and books on this area is an attestation of a knowledge gap which this paper seeks to rectify. Therefore, the research problem is that it is not known how responsive prison education is to the needs of adult prisoners at Mukobeko maximum prison in Kabwe District of Zambia.

## **3. Study Objectives**

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- To investigate the relevance of prison education to the needs of the adult prisoners
- To investigate prisoners' involvement in the teaching and learning process

## **4. Methods and Materials**

This study was purely qualitative. The study involved the use of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations and document analysis. The interviewer interacted with the participants in order to gain the knowledge and experiences of the respondents. It is important to note that the researcher took the position of subjective reality rather than being objective because there are multiple realities, (Bryman 2012). The qualitative

methods were used because the aim was to get an all-inclusive and wide-ranging understanding of how the respondents viewed the prison education on whether or not it was relevant to the needs of adult prisoners and other issues pertaining to the study. To that effect, administrators, instructors and prisoners were interviewed and they gave different views depending on their respective social situations, beliefs and experiences. The sample for this study was drawn from Mukobeko Maximum Security Prison (Correctional Facility). In my study, purposive and convenient sampling was used to get respondents from the instructors (teachers) and administrators respectively. A total number of 10 prisoners participated in this study of which 6 comprised those that participated in the focus group discussions while 4 participated in the face to face discussion with the researcher. Meanwhile a total of 4 instructors (educators) participated in the one on one interview and 4 administrators were also interviewed on a face to face interview. All the interviews were recorded in order to allow me focus on the respondents and their nonverbal expressions

## **5. Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

This study was guided by two objectives. The data is therefore presented under the two objectives. The presentation of data is done hand in hand with the discussion of findings.

### **5.1 Responsiveness of Prison Education to the Needs of Adult Prisoners**

The first question was based on the question of whether or not prison education was relevant to the needs of adult prisoners. Likewise, to establish the relevance of prison education, the administrators, instructors and prisoners unanimously agreed that the educational program was relevant to the needs of the prisoners

in that it was believed to be a source of livelihood for them (prisoners) once they were released from the prison. For instance, the respondents universally indicated that the acquisition of literacy and vocational literacy skills enabled the prisoners to get employment after discharge and also gave prisoners an avenue of wealth creation for them to become self-reliant. Thus, promoting most prisoners to become self-empowered after discharge. Observe their responses;

An administrator noted the educational program in prison was relevant in that it was helpful in the reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners through acquiring various skills. He indicated that:

most of the prisoners come to prisons without any knowledge of reading, writing or vocational skill, but we ensure that they acquire knowledge through various skills so that they are able to earn income in a positive way after discharge, hence these skills are a life skill for our prisoners (A2, 2016).

To strengthen this, an Instructor added that:

the education program in general is very relevant to their (prisoners) needs because through education they can acquire the necessary skills and be able to get jobs with different organizations and compete favorably with non-prisoners (I2, 2016).

Similarly, another instructor narrated that:

most of the student prisoners feel that education is relevant and important for their future and their families, they feel very proud that after discharge they can go home and help their kids with school

work having acquired the necessary skills, we therefore, encourage and motivate them on the importance of education (I4,2016)

Additionally, a prisoner acting as an instructor narrated that;

most of us prisoners did not have a chance to go to school outside prison, so the education inside the prison is good enough to enable us to get a good job in society so that we may live as responsible members of society, our future depends on education (PI2, 2016).

Furthermore, a prisoner was of the view that the education in prison was very relevant and beneficial in that it teaches and orients a lot of prisoners who outside did not have the chance. He observed that;

it could be that from one of us (prisoners), one may become a president though we had owned a name of being called thieves and all the negative things.....being in prison does not mean we are useless people, we are equally important and we are human beings. (P3, 2016).

This prisoner further gave an example of Nelson Mandela of South Africa who had a record of being in prison for 27 years and yet became president. Another prisoner added that “..... prison education is vital to us (prisoners) because most of us have acquired a career from prison which we did not have before coming here”. (P4, 2016).

From the above narrations, it entails that educational programs in prisons aim to provide prisoners with skills to find

a job and earn a living wage. This data shows that the process of empowerment is experienced as a feeling of personal change and development, which is also manifested in changed behaviour, (Rowlands, 1997). The changes that are linked with personal empowerment include learning literacy and vocational literacy skills which lead to employment after discharge. Thus, most prisoners participate in various skills which they were not able to do before incarceration. The prisoners become empowered in that the education provides a solution to the vulnerability of the prisoners by equipping them with discipline, skills, resuscitating their behaviour and attitude towards the society, enabling them to live as law abiding citizens after discharge.

The findings are also in line with the literature which states that expanding and improving education are key to adapting to change and confronting challenges of unemployment (World Bank, 2011). Relating to this literature, one prisoner further contended that,

...Poverty and Joblessness are not natural. They can be overcome and eliminated if we the prisoners are given the right education, skills and tools to use. When people are educated, empowered and employed, automatically there will be low levels of poverty and the rate of crime is reduced (P1, 2016)

This quote above insinuates that education in prison helps prisoners to lead a successful life style after discharge in that they are able to acquire the relevant skills which will lead to employability, and in the process reducing the crime levels and poverty in society. This finding coincides with what Sleeter (1991) has indicated that people empowered by education are able to understand the social structure

that oppresses them and are able to succeed by reaching their goals. Thus, empowerment is an outgrowth of education which involves action and leads to change. The empowerment process transforms the prisoners so that they develop a sense of hopefulness to play a vital role in achieving a better world after discharge.

Furthermore, the research findings revealed that the education in prisons was relevant because it prevented most prisoners from recidivating (re-offending) after discharge in that they were likely to make positive use of the skills acquired whilst in prison. For instance, an administrator had the following to say;

the rate of recidivism (re-offending) has fallen due to the skills that we are imparting in our prisoners, once they acquire the literacy and vocational literacy skills, they are able to survive on their own and they become independent beings (A3, 2016).

This finding is similar to the literature which says that the acquisition of skills in prison slashes recidivism (Luftig, 1978). This implies that once the prisoners are discharged, they are not likely to commit crimes again as they will be able to engage and make use of the various skills acquired while in prison to better their lives.

Further, the findings also indicated that the education in prison was relevant as it enabled most prisoners to become entrepreneurs' after discharge. Notice the respondents' responses:

A prisoner indicated that;

these various skills are teaching us self-reliance and entrepreneurship skills, hence benefiting us a lot, we can use the knowledge acquired to make our own businesses. P3 (2016).

Furthermore, an administrator argued that prisoners who acquired knowledge whilst in prison could open small businesses of their

own after discharge. He added that;

training is provided to them (prisoners) as a model for corrections and then engage them into entrepreneurial activities (A2, 2016).

Also, a prisoner acting as an instructor expressed joy that the skills were giving him a foundation of what he was going to do in society after discharge. He maintained that;

I am glad I have skills in literacy and vocational literacy skills which will enable me become an entrepreneur. Since I have learnt various skills, I will open my own company and employ others especially for us prisoners whom people may not fully accept back into society... In this company, I will make various products such as school uniforms, clothes, bunk beds.... (PI2, 2016).

From the above quotes, it can be suggested that prisoners are empowered and have visions and ideas of becoming entrepreneurs to sustain themselves. This clearly suggests that involving prisoners in various activities can lead prisoners to experiment with positive roles rather than negative behaviours as observed by Rappaport (1981). Thus, reinforcement for their participation aids prisoners in a positive identity formation (Erikson, 1968) and may lead them to choose more positive roles after discharge in that they will develop the various skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives and increase their own self-reliance and internal strength (Moser as cited in Rowlands, 1997).

Additionally, considering the above responses and the overall socio-economic point of view, education is an investment in creating a competitive labour force that is important in attracting

foreign investment (UNESCO 2005). Thus, it is worth noting that the skills impartation in prisoners is yielding results by helping prisoners break the stigma because there are a lot of programs that are being devised and taken to “shows” for public displays such as the “Zambia National Trade Fair (ZNTF)” and “Zambia Agriculture Commercial Show (ZACS)”. These shows offer a platform for cultural exchanges regionally and international, which is a catalyst for development in a country. This is where the Prison Service exhibit items for sale made by prisoners to the general public which helps to bridge the gap between society and the prisoner thereby killing the stigma associated with prison life. Thus, skill impartation brings honor and the honor kills stigma attached to the prisoners. The acquisition of these vocational literacy skills is an additional value to the prisoners which contributes to reintegration after discharge.

Below are some of the finished products made by prisoners whilst in prison which are later sold to the general public.



*Figure 1: Some sculptures made by prisoners*

Source: Zambia Agriculture and Commercial Show (ZACS) Exhibitions, 2016



*Figure 2: Hats made by prisoners*

Source: Zambia Agriculture and Commercial Show (ZACS) Exhibitions, 2016



*Figure 3: clothes and uniforms tailored by prisoners*

Source: Zambia Agriculture and Commercial Show (ZACS) Exhibitions, 2016



*Figure 4:* Bunk Beds made by prisoners.

Source: Zambia Agriculture and Commercial Show (ZACS) Exhibitions, 2016



*Figure 5:* Sofas made by prisoners.

Source: Zambia Agriculture and Commercial Show (ZACS) Exhibitions, 2016



Figure 6: Table and Chairs made by prisoners.

Source: Zambia Agriculture and Commercial Show (ZACS) Exhibitions, 2016



Figure 7: Lounge Suit made by Prisoners.

Source: Zambia Agriculture and Commercial Show (ZACS) Exhibitions, 2016

The next section will answer the second research question which looks at the extent to which prisoners are involved in the teaching and learning process.

## **5.2 Involvement in the Teaching and Learning Process**

This section will dwell on the second research question which sought to explore the extent to which prisoners were involved in the teaching and learning process. The responses are presented based upon the skill and content selection, and the teaching methods (strategies).

In this study, what I learned from the interviews with the respondents suggests that the prisoners were not actively involved in the skill and content selection process. The study has revealed that the prisoners had no input when it came to decision making, planning and evaluating what they learned, and skills were assigned to them. Their role was to receive and adhere to whatever information was imparted on them. This is reflected in the following responses. One administrator said the following;

the curriculum is set by TEVETA and MOE in all the skills training such as vocational literacy and literacy skills and that's the set curriculum which we follow and hence prisoners cannot have a say as they have handbooks that they follow (A3, 2016).

Another administrator indicated that, “prisoners are not involved in administrative decision making and it is up to us to place them in the skill they best fit in” (A4, 2016).

In addition, an instructor added that;

Prisoners are not involved in the selection of the skill and content, them they only receive what we tell and teach them since they know nothing, so it is up to us to

see which subjects we are supposed to give out to these prisoners (I2, 2016).

Further, this was also testified by three prisoners who had a similar view. They lamented that they did not have much to say in the teaching and learning process as they always waited for instructions from the instructors and administrators (P2 2016, P4 2016 and P6, 2016). Additionally, another prisoner bemoaned that “it is a sad story in the prison service, the types of programs and skills that are being imparted in us (prisoners) are forced skills and we are not given any chance to evaluate what we learn” (P1, 2016).

The above responses mirror oppressive society such as “the teacher knows everything, and the students know nothing; the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; the teachers choose the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it” (Freire 1993:73). In this concept, the learners are banks (blunt slates) whose role is just to receive. In the same vein, this can also be understood with literature which argues that the learner does not define the curriculum and it is not negotiable. The learner merely receives information which others have deemed significant (Coleman and Earley, 2005).

Therefore, analysing the respondents’ responses above, it shows that the education in prison is characterised by Paulo Freire’s banking theory which insinuates that the role of prisoners was just to receive information and whatever they were taught as they were regarded to know nothing. It appears the instructors are regarded as the experts who impart knowledge and skills to the prisoners. This is a clear indication that the concept of the banking theory by Paulo Freire (1993) dominates the education system in the prison. Knowledge is thus bestowed by the teachers (instructors) who consider themselves knowledgeable

upon those whom they consider knowing nothing and hence projecting ignorance onto the prisoners, which is a characteristic of the ideology of oppression. However, this model does not encourage learning in that it encourages a dependence on others to decide what is important rather than develop the ability to learn throughout life as indicated by Coleman and Earley (2005). It can therefore be argued that this model may hamper the creativity of the learners (prisoners) as it appears to serve the control of the oppressors.

Consequently, this finding departs away from Jo Rowlands (1997) definition of empowerment which he describes as bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it. Thus, it is important that prisoners are given an opportunity to choose skills that they see to be appropriate for them since empowerment is synonymous with the freedom to choose as indicated by (Wassermann, 1990 as cited in Rowlands 1997). In this way, when students make choices, they are strengthened both emotionally and cognitively and they are empowered. Moreover, their autonomy and ability to make better choices is increased. On the contrary, it appears the prison set up does not give the prisoners an opportunity to choose what skills may be appropriate for them, neither are they given a chance to evaluate what they learn. Thus, their autonomy and ability to make choices is reduced and this may make them feel less worthy, less lovable, less acceptable as prisoners.

On the contrary, Paulo Freire (1993) advocates for the use of the problem-posing education in which those truly committed to the cause of liberation cannot accept the use of banking methods of domination in the name of liberation. For instance, a prisoner acting as an instructor said the following; “even us as prisoners, I think we are stake holders, so it is important for us to be incorporated in the planning of the curriculum” (PI3, 2016). In

addition to this, a prisoner argued that;

...we are equally in contention for good life endeavors, thus, we should be given an opportunity to contribute and evaluate the education we acquire whilst in prison, we should also be given a chance to evaluate our syllabus. Being a prisoner should not deny us the opportunity and responsibility to participate in making judgments about the learning we are achieving (P4,2016).

This finding is similar to Freire's (1993) argument that, those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety and must adopt the problem posing education theory which allows students to bring in their own views for effective learning to take place, and in the process enhance their knowledge of the various skills.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings have indicated that the education in prison was relevant to the needs of the adult prisoners as it was believed to be a source of livelihood in that they were able to acquire literacy and vocational literacy skills which would enable them get employment after discharge, and hence reduce poverty levels since they would have a living wage for survival. Furthermore, the research findings revealed that the education program was a good venture as it helped most prisoners not to recidivate (re-offend) after discharge in that they were likely to make positive use of the skills acquired whilst in prison. The results have also revealed that the educational training engages prisoners into entrepreneurial activities. Most prisoners develop the ability to work for themselves as entrepreneurs' especially that prisoners

may face difficulties which are far more obvious after discharge. The findings have shown that the prisoners (learners) were not actively involved when it came to skill and content selection in that skills were assigned and imparted to them and they were not given a chance to make decisions and evaluate what they learnt. The study has also revealed that although the curriculum chat and the instructors advocate for the use of various teaching methods/strategies through their responses, the study has revealed a gap between the responses and the real classroom situation. The classroom lesson observations demonstrated instructors' little use and in some instances failure to use the various teaching techniques in their instructional practice.

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