

Chapter 10

Prison Education in Botswana Through the Eyes of Ex-Inmates

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on a study completed in 2014. The study sought to find out the nature of education that the Botswana Prison Service dispenses and the utilitarian nature of the said education as regards the reintegration of ex-inmates back into society. The conduct of the study was guided by three research questions and Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning was used as theoretical framework. A qualitative design with a phenomenological paradigm was employed in the conduct of the study and twenty-two (22) ex-inmates of Botswana prisons participated in the study. It was found out that while ex-inmates valued the kindness of their facilitators and rated highly the education they received in prison, they were frustrated by the fact that neither government establishments nor the private sector were ready to employ them upon discharge. It was recommended that a more humane space should be created for the reintegration of ex-inmates who return into society.

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INTRODUCTION

The adage ‘Experience is the best teacher’ does carry more than one meaning. The most popular meaning associated to this adage implies that any person who goes through a particular experience (social, experimental, professional, economic, political or psychological, etc.) would tend to access both greatest amount of knowledge and deepest insight relevant to the said knowledge. While this meaning of the adage holds true in the case of ex-inmates of Botswana prisons, another characteristic that makes these former offenders valuable is that they stand in a good position to pass judgement and recommend relevant and realistic adjustments to Botswana’s prison education programs going forward.

The aim of this chapter is to report on some of the findings from a study completed in 2014 among ex-inmates of Botswana prisons.

BACKGROUND

Botswana, initially referred to as Bechuanaland, attained political independence on 30 September, 1966. At independence, this landlocked country counted among the poorest countries on earth with “six kilometres of tarred roads, three secondary schools, six university graduates and a GDP per capita of US\$70” (The Telegraph Reporter of 30 October, 2013 p.1). However, with the discovery of diamonds, proceeds from which have been judiciously managed, Botswana has become a success story both in Africa and the world.

Over the past half-century, political stability, good governance and prudent economic and natural resource management helped to secure robust economic growth, supported by the discovery of diamonds. Botswana is now an upper-middle income country, after being one of the poorest countries in Africa (The World Bank, 2017 para. 2).

Within the context of prison education, Botswana is a unique country on earth as it is one nation that put in place a prison education structure (albeit a rudimentary one) before it could develop its own first National Policy on Education. Its prison education program was initiated in 1968 (Letsatle, 2011; Ferguson-Brown, 1996) whereas Botswana’s first National Policy on Education was developed in 1977 (Republic of Botswana, 1977). Additionally, instead of following the trend that consists in militarizing the prison environment at the outset, Botswana started off by putting the Botswana Prison Service under the charge of the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs. Even though Botswana was adjudged one of the poorest nations on earth at independence (The World Bank, 2017), it managed to budget

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