

Chapter 87

Prison Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores prison education in Nigeria and examines its history, programs, methods, and challenges. It makes the point that prison services and education are not alien to the Nigerian and African settings. However, whereas traditional African prison education emphasizes restorative justice and learning, modern prison services tend to amplify punishment. While rehabilitation is one goal of incarceration, an all-inclusive prison education in Nigeria is still at a nascent stage. The chapter suggests ways of improving current practices and consolidating gains through specific interventions and researches.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, there are rules which govern the day to day living in different contexts, which when defied, lead the state to respond in various ways, including sending erring individuals to some forms of confinement, and with varying degrees of punishment. The prison is one such confinement which takes away the occupant's rights and privileges. Prisons serve a major purpose of keeping society out of offenders and criminals' reach. While they predominantly serve a punitive role, prisons' reform and restorative roles are gradually becoming a major focus. One example of this restorative focus is education which identifies the needs of prisoners and helps the latter channel their energies toward a productive existence. Educational experiences of prisoners vary from one context to another, just as the penal systems vary across countries.

Writing on the expectation of the United Nations 2015-30 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Penal Reform International (2016) makes reference to the Doha Declaration which had requested a review of national penal policies with a view to ensuring that prisoners not only get fair trial and proper

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treatment, but that their future life beyond the walls is adequately prepared for, through relevant and appropriate educational and rehabilitation programs. Against this background, the aim of this chapter is to examine the Nigerian prison context, and comment on its prison educational system. The chapter relies extensively on documentary evidence and literature review, and draws the strength of its argument from data garnered from these documents.

BACKGROUND

The background information discusses the state of prisons in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Nigeria.

A prison is a place where offenders are kept for the purpose of restraining their freedom in compliance with correctional law or until satisfactory rehabilitation has been achieved. Ayinde and Opeyemi (2011 p.9) indicate that it is as ‘an institution which has been set aside by law for safe custody of people legally confined for anti-social behavior’. They further note that the ultimate goal is to train prisoners to become useful to the society, following incarceration, and to prevent a relapse into further crimes. This is the expectation of various human rights organizations and related bodies interested in the welfare of prisoners. Thus, most prison rehabilitation programs aim to prevent recidivism.

In its report on *Global Trends in Prison*, Penal Reform International (2015), citing the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Jacobson, Heard and Fair (2017:10), has reported that while prison population rates worldwide have remained fairly stable in the last ten years, there has been a decline in all the sub-regions of Africa. Sarkin (2008) has noted that prisons in Africa do not generally meet minimum human rights expectations and that a reform of the prison system in Africa is needed. Among challenges listed by him are those related to lack of resources, inadequate prison governance, overcrowding, poor conditions, and the ‘unfulfilled mandate of rehabilitation’ (p.23). Perhaps the main challenge, historically understood is that Africa’s prison system is ‘a European import designed to isolate and punish potential opponents, exercise racial superiority and administer capital and corporate punishment’ (p.24). He further notes that ‘Africa’s earliest experience with formal prisons was not with an eye toward the rehabilitation or re-integration of criminals’ (p.24). Thus, in his view, prisons in Africa are for this reason unable to ‘pursue rehabilitation’ dreams. Digging further into prison practices, he notes that the average number of prisoners who are awaiting trial in Africa is put at 45 to every 100,000 against a global rate of 44 to 100,000. This waiting period is somehow high in West Africa and also Central Africa. Overcrowding is particularly common in such countries as Zambia, Rwanda, Kenya, Cameroun and Burundi (Sarkin, 2008). This problem is also found in Nigeria where the ‘awaiting trial’ category of prisoners is competing with actual convicts, making rehabilitation something of a nightmare.

A look at the incarceration rate of prisoners in Sub-Saharan Africa reveals that out of every 100,000 inhabitants, Seychelles, South Africa, Gabon and Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Cameroun had an incarceration rate of 799, 292, 193, 128, 121, 120 and 114 respectively (UNDP, 2016). Interestingly, Seychelles has the highest Human Development Index (HDI) ranking in sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP, 2016) and in the world. Somehow, Botswana, Gabon, and South Africa with relatively high HDI rankings in the region also had high incarceration rates. This could perhaps be an indication of the level of intolerance for crimes in the countries with high HDIs.

In spite of all these challenges, Africa is being gradually seen as a continent where various innovative instruments as well as institutions which aim to protect prisoner rights are being developed (Sarkin, 2008).

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