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Learning behind bars: Motivations and challenges of learners in a correctional facility in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Literature on correctional education is replete focusing largely on its effectiveness in reducing recidivism and enhancing rehabilitation of offenders. This paper takes a somewhat different look at correctional education with a focus on inmates' motivations for and challenges confronted in participating in a basic education programme. Employing a case study research design, this present study purposively selected 30 young inmates in a Ghanaian correctional facility for focus-group interviews. The study found that the need for better employment, life opportunities and literacy post-release were the main push factors for inmates' participation in the educational programme. With regards challenges, the inmates reported varying experiences from lack of institutional support in learning, lack of teachers coupled with poor teacher attendance, to punishment, which impedes their learning. These findings have significant implications for the design and delivery of future correctional education programmes.

1. Introduction

All societies worldwide have laws and/or norms which guide human behavior. In order to ensure that there are no deviations, societies have put in place systems of punishments as avenues for retribution and a deterrent to members of society. Prisons have emerged as society's response to the increasing rate of crime and lawlessness. Bayliss (2003) argues that:

> The paradox of imprisonment lies in society's expectations of both retribution and rehabilitation. Custody can be used as a deterrent to remove offenders from society in order to protect the public and as a punishment in itself…The more controversial function of prison is to provide opportunities for individuals to reflect on their values and to prepare the 'less adequate' for the world outside (p. 159).

The second expectation resonates with this study on the grounds that, it contends that prisons should seek to rehabilitate offenders and redirect their paths towards social inclusion, productivity, life fulfillment, autonomy, lifelong learning and contributing to the development of their societies. However, according to Rogers, Hurry, Simonot, and Wilson (2014), in many countries those in prison are amongst the lowest skilled and most disadvantaged in the population. Rogers et al. further note that 47 per cent of adult prisoners in England and Wales report that they have no qualifications compared to 15 per cent of the working population. Again, about 70 per cent of state prisoners in the US do not have a high school diploma (Western & Pettit, 2010), while adult offenders in Australia have an average school age of Year 10 or below and their training levels below the national average (Callan & Gardner, 2007). There is no denying that globally the provision of education and training to prisoners is one of the pathways out of re-offending, improving lifelong learning for offenders as well as enhancing their employability upon release (Aos, Miller, & Drake,

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2006; Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013; Rogers et al., 2014; Schuller, 2009; Wilson, Gallagher, & Mackenzie, 2000). In Africa, the Ouagadougou Declaration which formulated some priority areas related to correctional education and its contribution to the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders considers that:

> literacy and skills training should be linked to employment opportunities of offenders in incarceration and after that correctional education should embrace civic and social cohesion; that rehabilitation should provide social and psychological support with adequate professionals including educationists; and innovative strategies for reintegration of offenders into their society and communities should be explored, (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2002 in Johnson & Quan-Baffour, 2016, p. 3).

As a result, Vandala (2019) notes that many countries worldwide including those in Africa give inmates access to a variety of correctional education programmes as a human right and in preparation for reintegration in communities. Citing South Africa as an example, Vandala contends that all incarcerated individuals in the country are given access to education and training programmes as a basic right in compliance with Section 29 (1) of the country's constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The main argument for the drive towards correctional education in many African countries is that society suffers when offenders commit crime, but; this will be worse if they return with no employment skills (Coley & Barton, 2006 in Vandala, p. 2). Again, prison education may also change the inmates' attitudes toward life in general, lead to improved self-esteem, confidence, and self-awareness, and help them find a good job upon release and resist committing further off ;ences (Tootoonchi, 1993 in Diseth, Eikeland, Manger, & Hetland, 2008, p. 201). Michel Foucault (1977) states in his famous book "Discipline and Punish" that prison as an institution has managed to build both itself and its inhabitants to be something outside society. While the manifest function of prisons (punishment) cannot be overlooked, it is this rehabilitative function that has gained currency in the discussions on the role of prisons in national development.

In Ghana, the prison setup was initially conceived as a punitive environment – one that ensured that offenders atoned for their 'sins'. This led to the introduction of stiffer punishments and 'hard labour' for convicted criminals as a retribution for their crimes. However, in line with current trends worldwide the country has shifted its position on incarceration from that of punishment to correction – that undesirable behaviour could be rectified through education and training. The goal ultimately is to make inmates employable – a political concept that is currently used as almost a one-size-fits-all solution to a range of political problems, with particular reference to marginalization, unemployment and social exclusion (McQuaid & Lindsey, 2005). This is considered to be part of a general shift of emphasis towards a 'knowledge-based economy' and to develop strategies to increase the production of workers (Ball, 2013, p. 44 in Mertanen & Brunila (2018, p. 157).

1.1. Purpose

The provision of education and *ipso facto* quality education in Ghana remains one of the main agendas of the government. This is reflected in the drive towards accessible, free, affordable education at various levels which is enshrined in the constitution. For instance, since 2017, the Free Senior High School Policy provides students at the senior high school level with free education irrespective of their personal circumstances. The goal of this policy is to widen access to quality education for all students in senior high school in the country. Free education at all levels is also being provided to inmates in all prisons in the country in an effort to make education accessible to prisoners and also to facilitate their successful re-entry into the society upon release. In spite of this largess, not all prisoners in the country participate in educational programmes. This present study explores the motivations and challenges of inmates in a correctional facility in Ghana. The paper operates from the belief that the interpretations of inmates regarding their experiences of involvement in correctional education programmes would add "greater depth and breadth" (Bayliss, 2003, p. 158) to the discussions on correctional education. The study is premised on two key concepts – motivations and challenges of inmates in the correctional education programmes. Viewing motivation generally as "a powerful force that drives learning" (Collin & O'Brien, 2003, p. 227), this paper sought to explore the push factors that impel the inmates to engage in educational programmes. The challenges (factors that impede learning) faced by inmates in their effort to learn constituted another key objective of this study.

1.2. Correctional education and transformative learning – a theorectical perspective

It is an undeniable fact that every society in the world expects its people to live crime-free lives. However, the harsh reality is that crime is part of the fabric of every society. The need to provide correctional education stems from the desire to provide offenders with desired knowledge, skills and attitudes to enhance their rehabilitation and further reintegration into the society post-release. This positions rehabilitation at the core of any correctional education endeavor. The definition by the Greenwood Dictionary of Education accentuates this point; correctional education is thus defined as an organized programme of learning activities designed to prepare adult offenders in incarceration for lives as responsible community members (Greenwood Dictionary of Education, 2003). To enhance the chances of offenders to become responsible members of the community, correctional education must not only provide them with employable skills, but also seek to help them realign their values, beliefs, assumptions, behavioural patterns with those of their communities.

As has been noted by Panitsides and Moussiou (2019), prison education programmes have been in existence since the 1800s with an initial focus on religious instruction. It was however not until the 1930s that significant gains were made by prison education in playing a pivotal role in the rehabilitative process and to receive wider acceptance for its potential effect on offenders (Gerber & Fritsch, 1995 in Panitsides & Moussiou, 2019). The need to rehabilitate offenders is a growing concern to any society due to the fear of recidivism amongst ex-offenders. Inderbitzin (2012) asserts that:

> Prisons may seem designed to strip inhabitants of their humanity, but some individuals discover new hope and strength during their incarceration. Some manage to find the freedom and will to become the men and women they aspire to be while serving time in state prisons. Education acts as one important lifeline for individuals spending years of their lives in prison (p. 21).

Inderbitzin's view on the provision of education in the prison institution shows the value of education in the process of transforming the lives of offenders. Correctional education has the potential to lead to change in the hitherto undesirable behaviour patterns of offenders. The idea behind this scheme is to promote a paradigm shift in their thought processes, equip them with employable skills to enhance their chances of securing jobs after release from prison. To promote a paradigm shift means that the meaning making processes of the individual should be readjusted to conform to the societal worldview. This is in unison with Jack Mezirow's idea of perspective transformation which occurs through a process of transformative learning – the theoretical basis for this study. Cranton (2006) defines transformative learning as 'a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better justified (p. vi).' This view of transformative learning is more of an epistemological one – '… where we change the very form by which we are making our meaning' (Kegan, 2000, p. 53 in Taylor, 2007, p. 181) which is in contrast to Lange's (2004) view of transformative learning taking on an ontological trajectory. As Lange (2004) notes, transformative learning is not just an epistemological process involving a change in worldview and habits of thought processes, but also an ontological process where individuals experience a change in their being in the world including their forms of relatedness (in Taylor, 2007). As such, individuals' understanding of reality is changed as a result of new information or situations that challenges previously held assumptions. Jack Mezirow first developed the theory of transformative learning, an outcome of his study of the factors which impeded and facilitated women's progress into higher education through re-entry programmes (Mezirow, 2000). The study revealed that the women who participated in the programmes had gone through perspective transformation in their personal development by becoming more critically aware of their beliefs and feelings about themselves and their roles in society (Pike & Hopkins, 2019). A perspective transformation leads to 'a more fully developed (more functional) frame of reference … one that is more (a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience' (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163 in Taylor, 2008). According to Taylor, perspective transformation is the outcome of either a series of cumulative transformed meaning schemes or the result of an acute personal or social crisis, for example, a natural disaster, the death of a significant other, divorce, a debilitating accident, war, job loss, or retirement. In the case of offenders, this acute personal or social crisis could have happened prior to the arrest, during the period of arrest itself, or the time spent in prison. Mezirow refers to such acute personal crisis as 'disorienting dilemma' – the starting point of transformative learning. In order to ensure effective transformative learning among offenders, Mezirow (1996) suggests that critical reflection – a deep consideration of the veracity of our assumptions, beliefs, values based on prior experience – is essential and may be achieved by (a) extending or refining our terms of reference on issues in society; (b) learning new ones; or (c) transforming our existing frames of reference (in Behan, 2014, p. 21). To put it in more accurate terms the 'shared learning expereinces establish a common base from which each learner constructs meaning through personal reflection and group discussion... The meanings that learners attach to their experiences may be subjected to critical scrutiny' (Tennant, 1991, p. 197). Costelloe and Warner (2014) has this to say about the critical reflection by prisoners brought about through a certain type of education:

> … education in prison can only achieve the aim of *bringing prisoners back into society*, if the education provided ensures prisoners come to find societal values meaningful and relevant to them. Without this, they will never become active citizens and indeed why should they? Therefore the type of education provided is the key to the solution. If prisoners are not made to feel a part of society, if they are not encouraged to be active citizens, if they fail to see any benefits accruing from active citizenship, then they will continue to reject society and its values. However, prison education can help counter such rejection by preparing the prisoner for active citizenship (p. 31).

Critical reflection is seen as the conscious and explicit reassessment of the consequence and origin of our meaning structures. It 'is a process by which we attempt to justify our beliefs, either by rationally examining assumptions, often in response to intuitively becoming aware that something is wrong with the result of our thought, or challenging its validity through discourse with others of differing viewpoints and arriving at the best informed judgment' (Mezirow, 1995, p. 46). Here we are able to identify and question our deeply held assumptions on the basis of the new realities confronting us. Mezirow (1991) in Pike and Hopkins (2019) differentiates between instrumental learning and dialogic (or communicative) learning. Instrumental learning, according to Mezirow, refers to task-oriented problem solving for improved performance while dialogic learning involves critically assessing what is being communicated, enabling the learner to recognise unquestioned assumptions and beliefs which they have held since childhood (Pike & Hopkins, 2019). Through a process of self-reflection, the learner would be able to understand why he/she has held such assumptions and beliefs for that long. In turn, this could lead to self-reflective learning, if the learner is able to internalise the reasons for the new perspective. According to Taylor (2007, p. 182), one of the most powerful tools for fostering transformative learning is providing students, and for that matter, the 'prison student' with learning experiences that are direct, personally engaging and stimulate reflection upon experience (Feinstein, 2004; King, 2004; MacLeod, Parkin, Pullon, & Robertson, 2003; Pohland & Bova, 2000, Mallory, 2003). The learning experiences provided to prison students should help them to question their previously held assumptions, beliefs, and values and guide them to develop more informed, reflective and inclusive worldviews. Taylor's (1998) review of transformative learning research studies observed that transformative learning was effective at capturing the meaning making process of adult learners, particularly the learning process of paradigmatic shifts. At the same time, they revealed a learning process that needs to give greater attention to: the role of context, the varying nature of the catalysts of transformative learning, the increased significance of other ways of knowing, the importance of relationships and an overall broadening of the definitional outcome of a

perspective transformation (Taylor, 2007, p. 174).

1.3. Motivations for participation in correctional education

As has been noted by Halimi, Brosens, De Donder and Engels (2017, p. 6) the arguments in favour of correctional education are that it reduces recidivism (Blomberg, Bales, Mann, Piquero, & Berk, 2011; Shover & Thompson, 1992), contributes to the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001), leads to an increased likelihood for employment after release (Davis et al., 2013; Eikeland et al., 2009; Messemer, 2011), promotes higher self-esteem (Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Hawley, Murphy, & Souto-Otero, 2013) and facilitates learning gains (Messemer, 2011; Reed, 2014). Given these benefits, the pressing question at hand is why do some inmates still shun correctional education? Or better still what motivates inmates to participate in correctional education? According to Halimi et al. (2017, p. 6) although different researchers have focused on the motivations of adult learners in the general population, very little research has been conducted on prisoners' motivations to partake in educational courses while in prison. In practice, different motives operate at different times among the same or different individuals, depending on personal traits and the given situation (Smith & Spurling, 2001). Therefore what serves to energize inmates' quests to learn could differ significantly from one individual to the next and also within the same individual different motives could precipitate learning at varying times. However, taking into account the interconnectedness between motivation and learning, motivation is assumed to form the mechanism that determines the specific goals towards which learners strive (Maehr & Meyer, 1997 in Panitsides & Moussiou, 2019).

In line with the views of Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) and Wlodkowski (1999) motivation to learn is considered as the condition that causes individuals to initiate and sustain learning that are of importance to them which determines their level of engagement in all the learning activities. In this process, three different forms of cognitive motivators can be identified: causal attributions, cognised goals and outcome expectancies (Bandura, 1977 in Panitsides & Moussiou, 2019) similar to the typology given by Houle (1961) – learning orientation, goal orientation and activity orientation. Learners with a learning orientation are intrinsically motivated to learn and participate in learning because of the learning activity itself (Houle, 1961; Maggioncalda, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Halimi et al., 2017). Such learners have the desire to know and are generally regarded as learners with an interest in learning for its own sake – that is, to stay mentally alert (Merriam, Cafarrella & Baumgartner, 2007). Activity oriented learners are more inclined to engage in learning for the social aspects (social interactions) of learning as an activity while goal-oriented learners seek learning as a means to reach other goals.

Equally important to Houle's typology is Boshier's (1991) in Merriam et al. (2007, p. 64) study which suggested the following seven factors, each containing six items, as constituting the motives for participation in educational programmes: communication improvement of verbal and written skills, social contact, meaning meeting people and making friends; educational preparation, the remediation of past educational deficiencies; professional advancement, concerned with improving job status or moving to a better one; family togetherness, concerned with bridging generation gaps and improving relationships in families; social stimulation, meaning escaping boredom; and cognitive interest, seeking knowledge for its own sake. In relation to correctional education, Parson and Langenback's (1993) study of the motives behind prisoners' participation in educational programmes is a classic example (in Panitsides & Moussiou, 2019). They identified four underlying factors to prisoners' educational motivation: cognitive control (learning for learning's sake); goal orientation (studying to achieve a specified objective); activity orientation (studying to have something to do or to pass the time) and avoidance posture (studying to avoid doing something even less pleasant).

1.4. Inmates' challenges in correctional education

It has been argued earlier on in this paper that correctional education offers significant benefits to both the individual and the society at large. For the obvious reason, the provision of prison education could assist prison management to address the issue of 'prisonization' – the process whereby prisoners become acculturated to the negative values of the prison sub-culture (Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, Solomon, & Lindahl, 2009 in Farley & Pike, 2016, p. 67). However, correctional education like any other educational offering presents a number of challenges. Farley and Pike state that:

> Though there is an increasing evidence base that suggests that participation in education by prisoners may help reduce security risk, there are a number of factors that exacerbate the education challenges of many prisons. The prison learning environment must balance the competing need for security with that of rehabilitation … Typically, rates of prisoner engagement with education are low, particularly in the first years of a sentence or while awaiting sentencing.

Such low patronage could be the result of three factors as suggested by Gillies et al. (2014) as follows: 1. availability, attitude and perceptions of prison staff (i.e., those in authority); 2. the prison environment itself; and 3. limited programme availability (focusing only on basic literacy and numeracy programmes. The first factor suggested by Gillies et al. is very pertinent to the discussion on low patronage of correctional education programmes. Prison staff have access to inmates on a daily basis, therefore their perceptions and the ensuing attitudinal tendencies regarding inmates' participation in correctional education could affect the latter's motivation to participate in educational programmes. Explaining further, Kjelsberg, Skoglund and Rustad (2007) opine that prison officers are in daily contact with inmates and in this unique situation they have the power to enhance or undermine the primary goals of correctional education. Seeing inmates as people who, irrespective of their crimes, are capable of change is a precursor to prison staff developing positive perceptions and attitudes towards the inmate and correctional education. Secondly, the prison environment itself can foster or impinge upon the effective implementation of correctional education programmes and hence affect patronage levels by

inmates. In their paper titled 'Exploring the Relationship between Prison Social Climate and Reoffending' Auty and Liebling (2020) pose these important questions: Do prisons damage or repair? Under what circumstances, and by what mechanisms? These questions are indicative of the notion that certain characteristics in the prison environment may promote change (positive or negative) in the inmate. Moos (1989) refers to the environment as the 'social climate' – 'the material, social, and emotional conditions of a given unit and the interaction between such factors' (in Auty & Liebling, 2020, p. 359). The prison environment therefore is an aggregate of conditions and treatments within the prison that may 'render a term of imprisonment more or less dehumanizing and/or painful (Liebling & Arnold, 2004, p. 473). The physical, emotional and social features of the prison environment interact to determine its suitability for learning. Auty and Liebling suggest that, the moral and emotional factors in the environment include decency, fairness, humanity, relationships with staff, and the use of authority. These factors are crucial in sustaining a positive environment for correctional education to thrive. Equally important in Gillies et al's suggestion is the issue of limited programme availability for inmates. Prison education may well be the only avenue for some inmates to access education and for that matter making available variety of programme offerings is likely to address the various educational needs of inmates. Therefore, having limited number of educational programmes in prisons is a serious impediment to participation of inmates in such programmes and consequently impinges on the goals of correctional education.

While this present study acknowledges that these factors could hamper participation in correctional education programmes, it holds the belief that the factors that contribute to low participation are much broader in scope and constitute the main challenges facing inmates in their quest to learn. To begin with, in all learning endeavours, learners need to be adequately supported in their entire learning journey and it behooves on the teacher and the school to provide such support. Farley and Pike contend that "lack of learning support and cultural capital exacerbate poor enrolment and retention rates in education. Incarcerated students are very often first-in-family to participate in post-secondary education. They are frequently participating without any support from their families or communities, lacking the cultural capital that would normalize their participation" (p. 67). Evidence from research suggests that often, those in prison have prior negative educational experiences which could adversely affect their participation in educational programmes (Hyman, Cohen, & Mahon, 2003; Sutherland, 2011). In many cases, learning difficulties, poor literacy skills, low IQ, negative relationships with their peers and teachers, behavioral difficulties, etc. (e.g., Brown, Higgins, & Paulsen, 2003; Tarquin & Cook-Cottone, 2008) can contribute to those in prison reporting hostile views towards education and being reluctant to engage in prison education as a result of these views and experiences. Therefore, the correctional centre should be properly equipped with the right calibre of staff and facilities to provide adequate support services to the student. One crucial aspect of learner support is the availability of library services and relevant resource materials to enhance learning. In a study conducted by Barrow, Ambler, Bailey and McKinnon (2019) on the problems incarcerated students have in accessing technology for the purpose of learning, it came to light that numerous students felt that the provision of current, subject-specific reading materials would assist in their study. Some of the comments from the respondents included requests for 'a larger supply of reference books,' 'up to date resources such as books, financial articles, journals,' 'more books related to topics that I study,' 'a library that focuses on study needs,' 'access to online research documents,' and the ability to purchase books or 'have them sent in' (p. 17). These narratives seem to suggest that the inmates lack the relevant materials pertinent for successful learning. The issue of access to online research documents is germane in today's educational trends where technology has permeated teaching and learning to an extent where the teacher's role has been complemented by other educational technologies. As such, the responsibility for learning has been shifted from the teacher to the learner. For inmates to have access to online research documents, they must first have access to computers and other online learning devices. The manifest function of having computers in correctional centres is to stimulate learners' interest in the content, its latent function however is to promote the acquisition of digital literacy in the inmates.

The attitude of prison officials towards the education of inmates is another very important factor that could promote or hamper effective participation. In a study conducted by Adetunji and Nel (2015), the attitude of prison officials constituted a major factor militating against improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of prison inmates in a prison in Nigeria. They further reported that prison officials had a negative attitude to the educational improvement of prison inmates because in response to low levels of education and lack of opportunities to develop themselves, the prison officers did not want the inmates to be better off than them. Colenutt and Toye (2012) note that the problem of inadequate learning materials (textbooks and learning aids) is one of the factors frustrating literacy programming among children in conflict with the law in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (in Adetunji & Nel, 2015). In the same vein, teachers' quality and class attendance in correctional facilities represents another very crucial factor limiting effective correctional education. The qualifications of 'correctional education teachers' are in most cases inadequate to cater for the learning needs of the learners. For instance in Adetunji and Nel's study, it was revealed that the qualification of teachers in the prison school was inadequate. Furtherance to that, most of them were not trained teachers, while the authenticity of their .qualifications could not be established.

Prisons are designed to uphold certain laid down rules and stringent security routines. These routines limit or in actual fact eliminate flexibility in the teaching and learning situation. Prisons are highly regimented and regulated institutions and therefore not flexible; prison rules are often strict and limit the options open to prison inmates and stakeholders (Adetunji & Nel, 2015, p. 73). They further note that, these rules often affect teaching and learning in prisons because security issues override other considerations in the prison environment. Their finding reflects that of Natale (2010) who concluded that prison policy often affected the effectiveness of literacy programmes in United Kingdom prisons (in Adetunji & Nel, 2015).

The preoccupation of this study is twofold. First, in keeping with Halimi et al's (2017) observation regarding the inadequacy of scholarship on prisoners' motivations to partake in educational courses while in prison, this present study seeks to add to the scant literature by exploring the motivations of inmates for participating in educational programmes while in prison. The study's other focus is on the challenges confronted by the inmates in their quest for academic excellence. The need to examine these challenges

stem from the belief that inmates' challenges in learning could affect patronage levels of correctional education programmes (Adetunji & Nel, 2015; Barrow et al., 2019; Farley & Pike, 2016). By identifying these challenges, it is anticipated that they could inform future design and implementation of correctional education programmes.

2. Method

2.1. Research approach and design

This study was approached qualitatively recognising that qualitative research remains a multifaceted field of investigation, marked by different orientations and methodologies (Yin, 2011). Yin contends that the allure of qualitative research lies in its ability among other things to "study a real-world setting, discover how people cope and thrive in that setting – and capture the contextual richness of people's everyday lives" (p. 4). This approach is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. In the words of Merriam (2009) "interpretive research, which is where qualitative research is most often located, assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researchers do not *find* knowledge, they construct it" (p. 8–9). Creswell (2007) notes that in this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work by developing subjective meanings of their experiences. In line with the research approach and the focus of this investigation, this study employed a case study design which according to Yin (2008) investigates an on-going phenomenon within its real-life context.

2.2. Participants

The participants in this study were selected from a correctional facility in Ghana (the name is purposefully withheld). The facility houses 198 inmates who are all males between the ages of 14–20 years old. The inmates are incarcerated for several crimes – defilement, theft, armed robbery, murder, possession of stolen goods and fraud. Out of the 198 inmates, 83 of them were enrolled in the basic education programme - which was the focus of the study. Out of this number, 30 participants were purposively selected for the study. To be included in the study the participants had to meet the following criteria:

1 They had to be 16 years and above. The focus of this study was on young adult inmates.
2 They had to be enrolled on the basic education programme in the facility. Here, inmates who had been in the programme for more than a year were selected because they were deemed to have enough information pertinent to the study.

3 They should be willing to participate in the study. Willingness to participate in the study was also an important criterion for selection of participants for the study. Prior information regarding the study's goals and role of the participants were sent in advance to the inmates to decide whether or not they wanted to participate in the study.

2.3. Data collection

A focus-group interview guide was developed for the purpose of data collection. The items in the guide were designed to reflect two key issues – inmates' motivations for participating in the educational programmes and the various challenges they face in learning. The instrument was designed to allow for follow-up questions on the answers provided. The questions were asked understandably to the learners. In this study, five focus group interviews were conducted. In each of the groups, membership comprised 6 participants. Each focus group interview lasted between 40 − 45 min. The various issues discussed were voice recorded after permission was granted from the participants.

2.4. Analysis

According to Hartley (2004) "data collection and analysis are developed together in an iterative process in a case study (a contrast with experiments and surveys)" (p. 329). As has been noted by Srivastava and Hopwood (2009, p. 76) "the role of iteration in qualitative data analysis, not as a repetitive mechanical task but as a reflexive process, is key to sparking insight and developing meaning". The process of case study data analysis begins with a careful description of the data and the development of categories in which to place behaviours or processes (Hartley, 2004). This was achieved through thematic analysis – one of the most straightforward ways of deducing patterns of meaning (referred to as themes) from qualitative data (Herzog, Handke & Hitters, 2019, 385). Ayres (2008) notes that thematic analysis is a data reduction and analysis strategy which facilitates the segmentation, categorization, summarization, and reconstruction of qualitative data in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set. The process of thematic analysis began with the transcription of the data, followed by thematic coding which ensured the categorization and segmentation of the data. Data were grouped under the themes that emerged from the coding based on relatedness. Verbatim accounts were given to show relationships between the data and the various themes.

3. Results and discussion

The main crux of this present study was to explore the motivations and challenges of inmates pursuing basic education at a

correctional facility in Ghana. In line with the objectives of the study, the results are presented and discussed under two main themes – motivations for participating in the educational programme and challenges confronted by inmates in their learning.

3.1. Motivations for participating in the programme

Motivation to participate in educational programmes is crucial to sustaining interest and engagement in the entire learning process. During the focus-group discussions with the various participants, it became apparent that the need to participate in the education programme was stemmed from three main sub-themes – Need for a better future, need to be literate, need for continuing education.

3.1.1. A better future

Under this sub-theme, the participants expressed the need for a better life in future as a motive behind their participation in the educational programme. One of the key goals of correctional education is to enhance the employability of inmates upon release from prison. Consequently, from the discussions with the participants, the desire for better job prospects was an ever present narrative that emerged from them. For instance one of the participants had this to say:

When I wasn't here (at the centre), I was doing drugs and robbery. I believe that learning will keep me from those things. With the education, I will be able get a job when I leave here.

Another participant expressed the desire to acquire a certificate as a means to securing a job when he completes serving his time is the facility. His words are as follows:

I need a certificate so that I can get a job when I leave here. That's what keeps me going. I have classmates who are on the path to becoming lawyers, doctors, teachers and so on. So getting education will help me to also get to their level in future.

Other participants expressed their motives in the following way:

At home, I was taking my schooling seriously. I thought there was no school at the Correctional Centre. But when I came here and realised a school was here, I was happy and enrolled. It will help me to get a good life in the future.
I need to change my life that's why I enrolled in the programme. When I was at home I wasn't serious with my education because I had a lot of freedom but is not the same here. So I think the school here will help me to be focused and change for the better.

For these inmates, it is evident that participation in the programme was part of a transformative learning process which is consciously or sub-consciously:

> becoming aware through critical reflection of the frame of reference in which one thinks, feels, and acts. It involves becoming aware of its genesis in one's individual history and/or culture, the search for a new more developed frame, and acting on the basis of the new frame of reference (Fleming, 2000, pp. 3–4 in Behan, 2014).

An event (perhaps imprisonment) might have caused a disorienting dilemma in the minds of these inmates which has subsequently caused a sudden reassessment of their frames of reference and habits of mind. They see no future in crime and drugs and hence turning to education as a means to reaching their future goals. The statement from one of the participants is indicative of this notion:

When I was arrested I went through a lot of stress and shame. Many of my friends have never visited me here. Maybe they don't want to be seen as a criminal's friend. I want to change my life for the better that's why I am schooling here.

This participant's confession is evidence of his experience of a disorienting dilemma. The stress and shame associated with his arrest and subsequent incarceration represent an ideal situation for a disorienting dilemma to occur. Consequently, it could be argued that he finds his frames of reference to be problematic in the wake of his prevailing circumstances. In order to transform his taken-for-granted frames of reference, he must engage in a process of critical reflection. The views of the other participants also give credence to the idea that they had engaged in a process of critical reflection to arrive at their current decision – to participate in educational activities as a means to enhancing their future prospects. Prior to this they had self-examined themselves with feelings of guilt or shame (The second phase of Mezirow's transformative learning phases) followed by a critical assessment of their widely held assumptions (third phase) – that 'crime doesn't pay'. They had also come to recognize that their discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change (fourth phase). This is accentuated by the submission by one of the participants regarding occasional invitations giving to some ex-inmates whose lives are exemplary post-release to share their stories to inmates as follows:

We have some former inmates who come in and share their experiences of life after prison with us. All of them schooled while here (in the facility) and things are going well for them outside. So I know I am doing the right thing (by going to school).

Such a revelation espouses the notion that their transformation phase is not perculiar to them and that other inmates had in the past used education as a means to foster effective reentry into society, while enhancing their socio-economic lives. Subsequent to this they had explored the options for new roles, relationships, and actions (Fifth phase) – to contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of their families and societies. They had now reached a stage where they have planned a course of action (sixth phase) hence their participation in the educational programme. The desire to live better lives in future corresponds to learners with goal orientation

(Houle, 1961; Parson & Langenback, 1993).

3.1.2. Need to be literate

Literacy constitutes a serious national agenda in many countries in the world. In Ghana, literacy is seen as a necessary and sufficient condition in the nation's drive towards sustainable socio-economic development. According to UNESCO (2005) one is literate when he or she is able to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy can be achieved through a continuum of learning that enables an individual to reach his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in wider society (UNESCO, 2005). In terms of correctional education, literacy serves many purposes notable among them is to enhance the effectiveness of the rehabilitation of offenders while in the long run, augmenting their chances of securing meaningful employment upon release. In this study, some of the participants indicated the need to read and write as one of the key motives behind their participation in the programme. The following are some of the comments made by the participants:

I was schooling but I dropped out in Grade 5. I was on the streets for some time before I got arrested. I want to be literate in the future that's why I'm learning. So when I came here I continued at Grade 8.
As for me, I don't want anyone to cheat me when I leave here and I'm learning because I will be able to read, write and understand.
I defiled a girl and her family made sure I was arrested … I want to learn reading and writing to help myself in the future.

These views are evidence of the belief that the ability to read and write is a key skill needed for effective realization of the lives they envisage. This is a reflection of Boshier's (1991) study which reported communication improvement of verbal and written skills as one of the key motives behind the learners' participation using his Education Participation Scale. The participants could be likened to Houle's learning oriented learners – learners who are intrinsically motivated to learn and participate in learning because of the learning activity itself.

3.1.3. Lifelong learning (need for further education)

Human beings have a natural desire to learn be it consciously or unconsciously. According to Jarvis (2007):

> Learning is a driving force in human living, it is one of the major means by which we become ourselves, it is a stimulus enriching our lives and making us truly human. In this sense lifelong learning is good. It is impossible to conceptualise a human being who does not learn. (p. 132)

The desire for lifelong learning is also in response to the recurrent theme of globalization and its accompanying demands. West (2008, p. 40) notes that 'whereas in previous agrarian and industrial societies, people lived according to more or less clearly defined social scripts, economic change can mean these may quickly unravel or become redundant'. The world today presents many challenges to individuals which require their ability to apply relevant knowledge and skills. As such the need for lifelong learning is more of a right than a privilege. Some of the participants in this study intimated that their pursuance of the basic education programme in the correctional facility was to equip them with the needed knowledge and skills for the furtherance of their schooling in the foreseeable future. One of the participants made this comment:

My colleagues outside the correctional centre are in SHS.I know for a fact that I will not be able to focus on school if I am with them. But here, I'm focused I don't have any distractions compared to when I was home with my friends and family. So If I'm able to endure and write the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) (the foundation certification for entry into Senior High School in Ghana) I will be able to become more disciplined so I can go to Senior High School (SHS).

The desire to pursue higher education emerged as one of the motives given for the participation in the programme. This is what the participant had to say:

I want to complete university but there are so many distractions. It's not that I have financial issues. My parents can afford. I've gone to school before but I wasn't progressing. I came to realize that this place has a school and I'm very determined to progress and get to the university in the future.

Another participant added that:

Before I was arrested, my mates and I were looking at going to SHS and university. Currently most of them have managed to attain that dream. So I'm determined to brace the challenges here in order to finish so that I can also go to the university in the future. I am focused and determined and that's what keeps me going.

The dynamism of the job market brought about by incessant technological innovations implies the need for individuals to constantly upgrade their knowledge and skills either through formal or non-formal education avenues. With regard to formal education, the completion of basic education is the springboard for pursuing other levels in the education ladder. Therefore, the views of the participants in this study suggest that their realization of the indispensability of basic education towards their pursuance of higher levels in the education setup of the country.

3.2. Inmates' challenges in the programme

The challenges that the inmates face in their pursuit of basic education represented another key interest of this study. Three main

themes emerged from the interactions with the participants – lack of learner support, punishment, and lack of teachers and poor attendance of teachers.

3.2.1. Lack of learner support

Learner support is a very crucial but sometimes overlooked factor in the entire teaching and learning encounter. Learner support encompasses all services rendered to complement the learning endeavours of the learner aside the delivery of content. These services are meant to enhance the learning experiences of the learner. In correctional education, learner support services are essential due to the many distractive forces that militate against learner participation and success. Therefore the role of prison officials in learner support is significant because they have unlimited access to the inmates and can either foster or hamper their learning. According to Bennett (2015) prison officials are central to the progress of inmates engaged in learning activities since they remain in constant contact with these learners. Therefore the lack of learner support services to inmates has the potential to reduce participation rates and also hinder learner success (Farley & Pike, 2016). In this study it was revealed that learner support was not adequately provided to the inmates. The following are some of the comments from the participants:

Oh! I don't receive any clear support. I've been here for 4 months and I have never been to the IT lab or library.
We don't receive any assistance from the officers or extra classes from our teachers.

Another emerging challenge was in relation to lack of learning materials. Learning materials (textbooks) serve a complementary role in the teaching and learning situation in the sense that they enhance understanding of content aside that presented by the teacher. Therefore, their unavailability is a disincentive to the prison student who relies solely on the largess of the prison to provide such materials. In line with the foregoing, Pike (2014) indicates that the unavailability of various learning resources has a retrogressive effect on prison education. The participants in this study gave some responses regarding the lack of or inadequate learning materials in their learning. One of the participants expressed his frustration as follows:

Books to learn is a major problem for us. We only have a small amount of textbooks to use to learn.

In the same vein another inmate supported the claim above:

We don't have enough textbooks. I'm the class prefect sometimes a teacher will tell you to go and bring books from the office. You go there and there are no books to bring. Even we are afraid of going to the office because you might be punished by the officers there.

In this study, it came to light that numerous students felt that the provision of current, subject-specific reading materials would assist in their study. Colenutt and Toye (2012) observe that the problem of inadequate learning materials (textbooks and learning aids) is one of the factors frustrating literacy programming among children in conflict with the law in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (in Adetunji and Nel, 2015). Another important issue that emerged from the discussions with the participants had to do with access to the library facilities. Inmates' access to library facilities is crucial in the quest for prison administrators to ensure student engagement. Therefore, it is worrying that the participants in this study indicated that they had limited access to the library. For instance one participant intimated that:

The officers feel that if we go and read more of the books for example books on juvenile justice in the library we will challenge them if they treat us in a way that contravenes the law.

This presupposes an intentional attempt by the prison officials to limit the exposure of inmates to certain reading materials on self-serving grounds. Aside this, other inmates expressed limited access to the library which affected their progress. The following views give expression to this belief:

When the books are donated. The officials will take the books to the library but they won't let us go to the library too to go and read.
When it suits them (officers), that's when they let us go to the library.
I've also been to the library just twice in my one year seven month stay here.

It can be argued that access to the library and as such relevant reading materials by learners is critical to promoting their meaningful learning. According to Marshall (2011), prisoners are cut-off from the wider society, and meaningful access to information is therefore vital to them. Access to information could also have a positive effect on the process of rehabilitation. Therefore, it becomes highly problematic when prison students have limited or are denied access to the library as is the case in this study.

3.2.2. Punishment

Friedman & Brinker (2001, p. 1) argue that:

> punishment is what most of us do.. . first. It is our teaching legacy passed down from generation to generation. We are virtually surrounded by punishing strategies used to influence our behavior: From overdue library books to dogs without licenses; fines, penalties and reprimands whirl around us like leaves in a storm...

In every society there exists a structure for punishing those individuals who flaunt its laws. It has been earlier noted that prisons emerged as society's response to crime and serves as a venue for institutionalizing punishment. The many routines in prison coupled with the various penalties attached to infringement of prison rules and regulations have an effect on inmates' learning. In this study the inmates reported that punishments in the correctional facility served distractive purposes in their learning. To this end an inmate had this to say:

The punishment is hard. It's true that we have committed crimes but that doesn't mean that they have to treat us badly

Another participant also raised the issue of the effects of such punishment on their ability to learn effectively;

The punishment that we receive here too doesn't help us to concentrate and learn.

These responses reflect the views of Adetunji and Nel (2015, p. 73) when they note that the strict adherence to the various regulations of prisons limit flexibility which further limits options open to inmates which ultimately adversely affects teaching and learning. In the case of this study, the findings seem to suggest an adverse effect of punishment – one of the outcomes of the regulatedness of prisons – on inmates' ability to effectively participate in the teaching and learning activities in the correctional centre.

3.2.3. Lack of teachers and poor teacher attendance

Under this theme, the narratives from participants represented two related issues – lack of teachers and poor teacher attendance. Lack of teachers to teach specific subjects was a major challenge in the participants' quest to learn. It is important to note that teachers of adults need a particular level of skill to effectively teach learners (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) (2009)). In order to effectively transmit content in a particular subject, teachers must have expertise in the subject area. Again, since the students in this study were being taught to write the Basic Education Certificate Examination with all other students nationwide, the lack of teachers presents a serious threat to their success. These are some of the experiences shared by the students:

We only have about 3 teachers for all the subjects. And the officers that assist these teachers are not actual teachers, so they don't have the skills and attitudes that will make them teach well.
We don't have ICT teacher too. Also it's just one teacher handles both math and science. If we get enough teachers it will help us to learn better.

The following comment was made by an inmate on the skills of their teachers and remedying the situation:

We also need qualified teachers. If you ask me I feel the current teachers are unqualified and because they themselves don't even understand what they are teaching, when you go to them to ask for clarification on things that you don't understand it's like you are worrying them. They will even get annoyed.

Having a few teachers to teach all the subjects in the basic education programme in the prison defeats the purpose of the programme because they may not be trained in the subjects they teach. It therefore came as no surprise when one of the participants intimated that some of their teachers were not well versed in the subjects they teach. Again using the prison officials to augment the inadequate number of teachers in the facility is inappropriate due to their lack of training in teaching and learning. These officials would not be able to effectively teach the subjects allocated to them. Another pertinent issue that emanated from the discussions with the inmates related to teacher absenteeism from class. These narratives represent the views of some of the inmates:

The teachers usually don't come to class. As a result it's not everything in the syllabus that we learn. But you will go and write exams and what you've not been taught will be there.
In my class, form one like this, the teacher has come to class just twice. Another thing is that my colleagues disturb me when I want to learn.

Generally, in every learning activity, learners are expected to have an unrestricted access to their teachers however, a confined environment like the correctional facility coupled with absenteeism poses a challenge because inmates/learners do not have access to their tutors (Watts, 2010).

4. In closing

This paper reported the findings of a qualitative research study undertaken to explore inmates' motivations for and challenges in participating in a basic education programme at a correctional facility in Ghana. Relying on Mezirow's (1978) theory of transformative learning, this paper postulates that correctional education has the potential to promote perspective transformation (not only epistemologically but also ontologically) in inmates. The study revealed that the participants had differing motivations for and challenges in their learning. These findings strengthen the argument that inmates have varying motives for engaging in education in prison and also have underlying challenges in their learning (Adetunji & Nel, 2015; Barrow et al., 2019; Parson & Langenback, 1993; Watts, 2010). In terms of learner motivations, the findings – need for literacy, a better future and lifelong learning – align with Houle (1961) and Boshier's (1991) description of learning orientations. Many of the motives reported by the inmates corresponded to Houle's (1961) goal orientation – learners who use education as a means to realizing clear goals. In terms of challenges confronted by the inmates in their learning, their responses centred around three main themes – lack of learner support, punishment, and lack of teachers and poor teacher attendance. These challenges are not peculiar to the inmates in this study as similar challenges were reported by Adetunji and Nel (2015). However, the point of departure from their study is that, in this study the inmates intimated that there was a deliberate attempt by the prison officials to impede their learning as evidenced in their quest to limit access to certain reading materials for self-serving reasons. An essential question at this juncture is; why would prison staff deliberately impede the participants' learning? Answering this question, I resort to Sanford and Foster's (2006) explanation as follows:

In a prison setting, there are a variety of 'checkpoints', or places where a de facto decision could be made to support or impede

class implementation. The support or lack thereof, from any one checkpoint may wane or wax depending on the particular interests of the official at the time … (pp. 604–605)

In this study the perceived interest from the participants' point of view is the desire of the prison officials to impede the curiosity of the participants through the restriction of access to certain important reading materials. Even though this finding is anecdotal (the focus on inmates' version) at best, there appears to be an obvious gap between policy rhetoric and reality in the provision of correctional education. Prison officials' resentment of prison educational programmes and the ensuing attempt to impede the learning of inmates raises concern about the commitment of prison officials to the provision of correctional education despite the commitment of government to ensure access to education for all citizens irrespective of their personal circumstances. Government is making resources progressively available to ensure that quality education is rendered in prison, however, given the various challenges reported by the inmates in this study, it is apparent that this very important agenda might not be realized. Again, from the findings, there seems to be a clash between prison as a place of punishment and rehabilitation, with punishment hindering education. In the eyes of society, prison serves the dual role of punishment (by virtue of imprisonment) and rehabilitation – through the provision of correctional education to enhance the re-entry and employability of inmates post-release. Therefore, any other punishment in the prison establishment which hinders inmates' participation in educational programmes is problematic and defeats the purpose of correctional education. Additionally, the regimented structure of the prison environment – inadequacy of class time, the multiple counts of prisoners and the time for lockdown – does not support learning. Therefore, prison policy should be amended to enhance the prison's outlook as a conducive learning environment. This entails making prison regulations flexible to accommodate inmates' participation in educational programmes. Learner support should be of paramount importance to prison officials because "poor academic performance is believed to be thought with course attrition" (Ryan & Henderson, 2018, p. 882). Delivery of content alone by teachers is not enough to enhance inmates' learning, additional support in the form of extra classes; provision of library services, and counseling should be provided to supplement the efforts of the teachers. Also, prison officials should be adequately empowered to be able to provide effective support services to prison students to enable them achieve their learning goals. There is also a need for a national policy on correctional education to enhance the provision of education in prisons. Such a policy would make the provision of the needed resources for effective correctional education to be at par with those available in the mainstream. Resultantly, adequate and quality teachers would be assigned to correctional facilities to help with the delivery of subject-matter. Again, prisons in the country should have a special regimen for inmates who engage in learning programmes. This is to offset the adverse effects of punishments and the strict regulations associated with incarcerations. More flexibility should be introduced to enable inmates adequately participate in learning programmes.

4.1. Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations to this study. To begin with, the study focused on the Basic Education programme offered in the prison. Information from other students in the other programmes (adult literacy, Senior High School, and Vocational Education) would have enriched the findings. Also, the study relied on inmates' accounts to determine the various challenges confronting them in their quest to participate the programme. The study acknowledges that the voices of prison staff could have added more depth to the study. The use of the qualitative research approach for this study means the findings could not be generalized to the inmates who did not participate in the programme and by extension inmates worldwide. Despite these obvious setbacks, this study expands our understanding of the motivational orientations of prison students as well as their challenges in pursuing education while in incarceration from an African context. More studies employing quantitative tools and focusing on the experiences of both inmates and prison officials could be convened in future scholarship.

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