

Exploring the Influence of Correctional Education on Prisoners' Attitudes toward Crime and Career Aspirations: A Phenomenological Study of Nsawam Medium Security Prison in Ghana

Nana Kofi Antwi II

Department of Education, Valley View University, Kumasi Campus, Ghana.

Ophelia Affreh

Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA), University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.

Francis Owusu Mensah

Department of Educational Foundations (DEF), University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.

Stephen Baafi-Frimpong,

Dean, Faculty of Education, West End University College, P. O. Box AN 15402, Accra, Ghana.

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Abstract: *This study explores the influence of correctional education on inmates' attitudes toward crime and career aspirations at Nsawam Medium Security Prison in Ghana. Grounded in Transformative Learning Theory, the research examined how educational experiences within a correctional context affect inmates' cognitive, behavioural, and vocational orientations. A qualitative phenomenological case study design was employed to capture the lived experiences of incarcerated learners. Using purposive sampling technique, fifteen participants—including current and former students of senior high school and ICT programs—were selected from the Reformers Educational Centre within the prison. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, then analyzed thematically using MaxQDA software. Findings revealed that correctional education significantly contributed to positive behavioural change and redefined career aspirations. Inmates reported a shift away from criminal behaviour, increased motivation for law-abiding living, and aspirations toward continued education, entrepreneurship, and civic responsibility. Educational engagement was perceived as both rehabilitative and transformative, fostering self-reflection, psychological empowerment, and identity reconstruction. However, challenges such as institutional stigma and limited access to formal learning structures persisted. The study underscores the potential of correctional education*

as a catalyst for desistance from crime and as a tool for rehabilitation and reintegration. It recommends the institutionalization of prison education, integration of psychosocial support, and multi-stakeholder partnerships to enhance program delivery and post-release outcomes. These findings contribute to global discourses on prison reform by reinforcing the role of correctional education in promoting sustainable behavioural change and social reintegration among incarcerated population.

Keywords: attitude, career aspirations, correctional education, crime, medium security prison, prisoners

INTRODUCTION

Correctional education has increasingly gained recognition as a pivotal component of the rehabilitation and reintegration process within modern correctional systems (Maposa & Motilal, 2025). As prison populations continue to rise globally, there is growing concern over the persistent cycles of recidivism and social exclusion faced by formerly incarcerated individuals. Numerous studies affirm that access to structured educational programmes while incarcerated contributes meaningfully to inmates' transformation, reduces the likelihood of reoffending, and facilitates successful reintegration into society (Galeshi & Bolin, 2022; Vandala, 2019). Education, within the prison context, serves not only as a tool for skill acquisition but also as a catalyst for attitudinal change, fostering self-awareness, moral reasoning, and long-term behavioural reform.

Existing literature supports the view that correctional education impacts inmates' cognitive, emotional, and social development. Research by Kakupa and Mulenga (2021) in Zambia revealed that participation in prison education influences how inmates perceive crime and their roles in society post-incarceration. Similarly, da Silva Sousa et al. (2020) found that prison education enhances inmates' sense of dignity, identity, and hope for the future. Education shifts inmates' focus from survivalist or deviant tendencies to more prosocial values and lawful aspirations. This transformative potential is not limited to moral reformation but extends to practical life planning, as seen in inmates' renewed interest in lawful employment, entrepreneurship, and skill development (Mukeredzi, 2021; Boateng et al., 2025a).

Despite the evidence, the intersection between correctional education and inmates' attitudes toward crime and their career trajectories remains underexplored in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Ghana. While prior studies have examined structural issues in prison education or recidivism reduction (Boateng et al., 2025b), fewer have critically investigated how educational experiences directly shape inmates' perceptions of crime and influence their post-incarceration aspirations (Bergstrom, 2019). The focus on attitudinal and aspirational outcomes is particularly relevant for understanding the holistic impact of education within the rehabilitative framework of

Ghanaian correctional institutions. This research, therefore, fills an important gap by examining the psychosocial and future-oriented outcomes of education among incarcerated individuals.

Nsawam Medium Security Prison, the second largest prison in Ghana, has served as a key site for various educational and vocational interventions aimed at prisoner rehabilitation and reformation. The Reformers Educational Centre within the prison offers both formal academic education and vocational training to inmates, reflecting a deliberate shift from punitive to reformatory correctional practices. Given the scale and diversity of its programmes, Nsawam presents a suitable context to investigate how correctional education shapes inmates' views on crime and influences their professional ambitions. Exploring this in a focused case study enables a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of incarcerated learners and the long-term social value of correctional education in Ghana.

This study, therefore, explores the influence of correctional education on prisoners' attitudes toward crime and their career aspirations, using the Nsawam Medium Security Prison as a case study. Through a qualitative lens, the research critically assesses how participation in correctional educational programmes contributes to cognitive transformation and vocational orientation. By capturing the voices of inmate-students and former participants, this study provides empirical evidence to inform policies and practices aimed at enhancing the rehabilitative function of correctional education in Ghana and across similar socio-carceral settings in Africa.

Theoretical framework

This study is underpinned by Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1991), which provides a robust framework for understanding how adult learners experience deep, structural shifts in thought, feeling, and behaviour through education. Transformative Learning Theory posits that adults undergo learning when they are confronted with disorienting dilemmas—events or circumstances that challenge their existing worldviews—and subsequently engage in critical reflection to reassess their beliefs, assumptions, and behaviours (Mezirow, 2018). The result is a transformation in their frame of reference, leading to more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspectives.

The prison environment itself presents a disorienting context, as incarceration often forces individuals to confront the consequences of their past actions and consider alternative life pathways (Stacer et al., 2019). Within this context, correctional education serves as a critical mechanism for facilitating reflection and personal transformation (Keen & Woods, 2016; Pike, 2015). Educational programs offered in prison settings can provoke inmates to critically analyse the motivations, choices, and behaviours that led to their incarceration, while simultaneously equipping them with new knowledge and skills that can support prosocial behaviour and future reintegration into society (Montoya, 2024).

This theory aligns strongly with the purpose of the study, which seeks to explore the influence of correctional education on prisoners' attitudes toward crime and their career aspirations at Nsawam Medium Security Prison. It provides a theoretical lens through which to interpret how education fosters self-awareness, reshapes values, and encourages goal-setting among incarcerated individuals (Lerman & Sadin, 2023). Specifically, the theory explains the process by which inmates may come to reject criminal behaviours and embrace constructive, lawful identities through participation in structured learning experiences (Vandala, 2019).

Moreover, Transformative Learning Theory supports the study's emphasis on the prisoners' lived experiences and perceptions. It foregrounds the importance of voice, agency, and critical reflection, which are central to understanding how prisoners interpret and respond to the educational opportunities available to them. As such, the theory not only contextualizes the expected attitudinal and aspirational changes but also reinforces the significance of correctional education as a rehabilitative and reformative tool within the Ghanaian penal system.

In essence, Transformative Learning Theory provides a coherent and applicable framework for analysing how correctional education may alter prisoners' self-concepts, encourage desistance from crime, and foster the development of future-oriented career goals. It supports the study's aim of contributing evidence to inform policies and practices that position education as a central component of effective rehabilitation and reintegration strategies in Ghana's correctional institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarly interest in correctional education has explored its potential to foster rehabilitation and reduce recidivism among incarcerated individuals. Bozick et al. (2018), through a meta-analysis of studies spanning nearly four decades, established that inmates who participated in educational programs during incarceration were significantly less likely to reoffend upon release compared to those who did not engage in such programs. While the study revealed a 28 percent reduction in recidivism among participants of correctional education, it did not find a statistically significant difference in post-release employment between those who received education and those who did not. This suggests that while educational programs may alter behavioral tendencies related to crime, they may not be sufficient on their own to improve employment outcomes unless complemented by other forms of support.

Expanding on the subjective experiences of incarcerated individuals, Kakupa and Mulenga (2021) examined the perceptions of prisoners in Zambia and emphasized that while correctional education is seen as vital for preparing inmates for life after release, its current implementation often fails to meet the broader rehabilitative needs of prisoners. Participants in their study associated educational programs with personal transformation and the development of a law-abiding disposition. However, systemic issues such as coercive practices, limited autonomy in educational choices, and

the assignment of inmates as instructors hindered the full realization of empowerment and transformation. These structural limitations undermined the rehabilitative potential of correctional education, especially when programs failed to cater to the diverse learning needs and personal goals of prisoners. It is further noted that, the Ghanaian chief Justice Paul Baffoe-Bonnie stressed that, 'no matter how reformatory that the Ghana Prison Service undertakes, if prisoners sentences are too high, it turns out to be counterproductive. Hence, excessive jail terms undermine inmate reformation' (Koomson, 2026,p.16).

Further insights from Ricciardelli et al. (2023) and the broader discussions anchored in empowerment theory underscore that correctional education must go beyond vocational training to foster genuine transformation. Inmates often derive a sense of purpose and identity through education, which counters societal stigma and helps them reintegrate into society. When education is participatory and responsive to inmates' voices, it cultivates self-worth and fosters pro-social behavior. However, the authoritarian nature of many correctional institutions prevents such participation, treating inmates as passive recipients rather than active learners. This contradicts principles of adult learning, which emphasize self-direction and autonomy (Knowles et al., 2015). Studies like Han et al. (2021) highlight the empowering effects of programs that allow inmates a degree of control, suggesting that participatory approaches may be more effective in achieving rehabilitation goals.

In the Ghanaian context, recent studies have begun to examine correctional education through both institutional and individual lenses. Boateng et al. (2025a) explored stakeholder perspectives at the Nsawam Medium Security Prison, revealing strong institutional support for educational programs but also uncovering challenges such as inadequate instructional resources and a lack of qualified facilitators. Their study emphasized the role of institutional commitment in shaping the success of correctional education. In a related study, Boateng et al. (2025b) examined the impact of vocational training on reducing recidivism and found that skill acquisition improved inmates' employability and confidence. However, the findings indicated that vocational training alone was insufficient to influence attitudes toward crime unless paired with psychosocial interventions. Similarly, Bergstrom (2019), using narrative inquiry, demonstrated that educational experiences within prison could reshape inmates' vocational goals and instill a renewed sense of purpose, though the long-term sustainability of such transformations depended on the environment and support systems post-release.

Collectively, these studies illuminate both the promises and limitations of correctional education. While the benefits of such programs in reducing recidivism and fostering self-improvement are well documented, several gaps remain. Notably, many studies emphasize either quantitative outcomes such as recidivism or subjective perceptions of educational experiences, but rarely do they examine the nuanced interplay between education and inmates' evolving attitudes toward crime and career development. Furthermore, most existing studies have been conducted outside of

Ghana or in broader African contexts, leaving a paucity of empirical evidence on how correctional education shapes both attitudes and aspirations within Ghanaian prisons. The coercive delivery of education, lack of learner autonomy, and underutilization of rehabilitative content that speaks to inmates' intrinsic motivations also signal the need for more targeted research.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on Nsawam Medium Security Prison in Ghana and seeks to fill the gap by assessing how correctional education influences inmates' attitudes toward crime and their career aspirations. By appraising the rehabilitative impact of education on behavioral change and vocational outlook, this study responds to the call for context-specific evidence that bridges the gap between program provision and actual transformation. It also seeks to provide insights into how correctional education can be tailored to better support inmates' reintegration journeys in a Ghanaian correctional setting.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to explore the influence of correctional education on prisoners' attitudes towards crime and career aspirations at Nsawam Medium Security Prison. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Appraise the influence of correctional education on prisoners' attitude towards crime at Nsawam Medium Security Prison.
2. Investigate the influence of correctional education on inmates' career aspirations at Nsawam Medium Security Prison.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. How does correctional education influence prisoners' attitude towards crime at Nsawam Medium Security Prison?
2. In what ways does correctional education impact inmates' career aspirations at Nsawam Medium Security Prison?

METHODS

Research Approach and Design

This study adopted a qualitative methodology to delve into the perspectives and lived experiences of incarcerated individuals regarding correctional education in Ghana. A phenomenological design was considered suitable as it enabled a deep exploration of inmates' individual encounters with the educational initiatives within the prison context (Pham, 2022). While other qualitative

frameworks were considered during the planning phase, the case study design was ultimately chosen. This approach allowed for a thorough and contextual investigation of the dual research objectives underpinning the inquiry.

Population

The study population included incarcerated learners—both current and former students—enrolled at the Reformers Educational Centre, located within the Nsawam Medium Security Prison. The research targeted individuals currently pursuing senior high school and information and communication technology (ICT) programmes, as well as those who had already completed these courses. The accessible population consisted of 40 participants: 10 final-year students from the senior high school programme, 15 final-year ICT students, and 15 past learners, which included both individuals who had been released and those still incarcerated. These participants had direct exposure to the correctional education programme and were therefore well-positioned to share insights into its effects on their personal development and rehabilitation.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

A total of 15 participants were selected for the study using a multi-method sampling strategy that combined quota sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling. Quota sampling was employed to ensure representation across relevant participant categories. Snowball sampling was particularly effective in identifying additional participants through peer referrals. Meanwhile, purposive sampling enabled the selection of individuals who had substantial experience with the correctional education system, thus enriching the dataset with diverse and meaningful narratives.

Study Instrument

Data were collected through two primary researcher-developed instruments: the Inmate-Students Interview Guide (ISIG), designed for semi-structured individual interviews, and the Inmate-Students Discussion Guide (ISDIG), developed for facilitating focus group discussions. These instruments were structured around core themes derived from the research questions and were tailored to elicit detailed reflections on inmates' perceptions, experiences, and recommendations concerning the correctional education programme.

Procedure for Data Collection

The data collection process involved conducting both semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions within the correctional facility. One-on-one interviews allowed participants to articulate their personal experiences in depth, while focus group sessions encouraged dynamic dialogue and the exchange of ideas among inmate-students. Both methods complemented each other in yielding a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. All engagements took

place in accordance with ethical research protocols, ensuring participant comfort, voluntary participation, and confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data followed a thematic approach, involving the identification, categorization, and interpretation of significant statements to uncover recurring themes. The coding process facilitated comparisons and alignment with existing scholarly literature (Saldaña, 2021). Data management and analysis were supported by MaxQDA software, a robust tool for handling qualitative and mixed-methods data (Guetterman & James, 2023). MaxQDA's advanced features enabled efficient organization, thematic development, and interpretation of textual materials (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research, ethical standards were rigorously maintained. Authorization for conducting the study was obtained from the relevant educational and prison authorities prior to data collection. All participants provided informed consent, affirming their voluntary involvement in the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly upheld to protect the identities of participants. Furthermore, the research ensured the physical and psychological safety of respondents by avoiding any form of coercion or risk and by securely storing all data for academic use only.

FINDINGS

Profile of participants

The participants in this study comprised 15 inmate-students at Nsawam Medium Security Prison, whose demographic information reflected a range of criminal offenses, sentences, ages, and educational backgrounds. The offenses committed by the participants included robbery (8), defilement (4), stealing (1), narcotics (1), and murder (1), with sentences ranging from 7 years to life imprisonment. Their ages varied from 27 to 63 years, with the youngest being 27 and the oldest 63. To protect their identities, pseudonyms such as Specs, Leader, JK, Benbella, The Right Thing (TRT), and others were used. Most participants had committed robbery-related crimes, and only one participant, Pizzaro, was serving a life sentence for murder. In terms of educational attainment, the majority (60%) had completed the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), while 26.7% had attained O'Level qualifications. Only one participant (6.7%) had a Junior High School (JHS) qualification, and another (6.7%) held a Higher National Diploma (HND). This demographic composition indicates a relatively educated sample, with diverse criminal backgrounds and substantial sentencing terms, making them well-suited to provide nuanced perspectives on the influence of correctional education.

Influence of higher correctional education on prisoners' attitude towards crime

This section presents the qualitative findings related to the influence of higher correctional education on prisoners' attitudes toward crime. The analysis revealed how education, skill acquisition, and counselling services collectively contributed to behavioral change and a reformation mindset among inmates at the Nsawam Medium Security Prison. The findings have been analysed under the following themes:

Change in Behavior through Skill Acquisition and Knowledge

Participants shared that the knowledge and skills acquired through higher correctional education played a crucial role in reshaping their outlook on life and deterring them from future criminal activity. Many inmates viewed education as a gateway to a more stable and law-abiding future. The motivation to avoid crime was largely tied to the hope of securing employment after release and regaining social acceptance. For instance, Professor, a Level 400 ICT student and inmate teacher, highlighted that:

the skills gained from correctional education would enable him to provide for his family and maintain personal dignity. He stated that education had restored his confidence and prepared him to face life's challenges beyond incarceration.

Similarly, Pizaro, a former SHS Business student, remarked that

the educational opportunity had not only ignited his desire to pursue higher learning but also transformed his moral outlook. He indicated a conscious decision to avoid returning to past criminal behaviors, affirming that correctional education had instilled in him a new sense of purpose and responsibility.

Role of Counselling in Shaping Attitudes

Participants also reflected on the impact of counselling sessions organized by prison authorities. These sessions, offered both individually and in groups, were scheduled weekly and were intended to promote positive behavioral change and deter recidivism. Specs, a Level 300 ICT student, acknowledged the significance of these counselling interactions, noting that:

the guidance provided helped inmates understand the societal consequences of crime and encouraged them to adopt law-abiding lifestyles.

Despite the availability of counselling services, some inmates expressed concern about their effectiveness and coverage. Captain, another Level 300 ICT student, suggested that

counselling should be made compulsory and extended directly to various prison blocks.

He emphasized that

diverse influences—tribal, religious, gang-related, and cultural—shaped inmates’ behaviors, thus requiring more targeted and inclusive counselling approaches.

Overall, the findings indicate that correctional education had a positive influence on inmates’ attitudes towards crime. Participants acknowledged that access to educational programs had shifted their thinking, with many expressing a determination to abandon criminal behavior. For some, education offered a renewed sense of identity and societal purpose. Professor summarized this sentiment by asserting that correctional education is an effective tool for reform, metaphorically stating that “the devil gives work to the empty hand.”

Furthermore, the analysis suggests that a majority of participants (73%) had committed offenses such as robbery and theft due to unemployment. The educational programs not only addressed their academic and vocational deficiencies but also helped them build psychological resilience through counselling support. According to the inmates, graduates of the SHS and ICT programs had not been readmitted to prison. Reports from tutors, philanthropists, and family members indicated that many former inmates had either secured employment, started their own businesses, or continued their education after release. These accounts reinforce the belief that correctional education contributes meaningfully to rehabilitation and social reintegration.

Influence of correctional education on inmates’ career aspirations at Nsawam Medium Security Prison

This section explores how participation in correctional education programs has shaped the career aspirations of inmates at Nsawam Medium Security Prison. The following themes emerged from the information gathered.

Employment Interests and Relevance of Correctional Education to Future Plan

It emerged from the responses that participants had diverse employment interest at the time of enrolling for the correctional educational programme. The responses indicated that while some participants wanted to set up their own businesses, other inmates wanted to secure employment while others wanted to pursue further education, given the knowledge they have acquired through the correctional education. Again, participants were unanimous in their opinion that the correctional education programme was relevant to their future plans upon discharge. Some of the responses were:

I want to be a businessman (Leader, SHS 3 Business student)

I want to become a Reverend Minister for Prison Ministry (Benbella, SHS, General Arts student)

I want to become a financial accountant (Lawfia, SHS Business student)

I will re-apply for my former job or I will look for another job based on the skills and knowledge I have acquired (Joe, ICT Level 300 student)

My desire is to attain university degree in Economics (Mandela, SHS General Arts student)

I want to set up an ICT school in my community (Professor, Level 400 ICT student).

. For example, as a follow up to the previous research, student-inmates who participated in Higher Education at University of Cape Coast through Distance Education Mode in Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Commerce programmes from 2019-2055, 77 graduated with three of them having graduated with first class certificates. One of those who had first is on discharge and the remaining two nicknamed Akilo and Blessing who are still serving their jail terms remarked the following responses when the researcher interviewed them separately:

Akilo as a nickname, What programme did you study?

I studied Bachelor of Education with specialization in English and Social Studies.

How long have you been in prison custody?

7 years. I am serving 20 years for the offence of robbery.

How did you manage to achieve first class honours amongst your colleagues?

I will say it is determination. I was part of those weaving smock before the University of Cape Coast introduced the degree programmes through its distance education centre. S when the programme was introduced, I joined and told myself that I am going to achieve first class. When I started schooling, I noticed that when I learn in the morning, I understand the content of whatever I learn and it sticks in my mind as well. So I devoted more time in the morning for my studies. I always read my course manual before classes begin and where I think that I do not understand ,then I asked the lecturer for explanation.

What will you do with the degree?

I want to be a teacher after I am discharged from prison. Because I have identified that I have the potentials and skills in teaching. I have also acquired a lot of experience that I want to share with others. I a currently supporting in teaching other inmates of the Reformers Educational Centre.

Blessing, when did you start the UCC programme at Nsawam Medium Security Prison?

November, 2019.

Blessing, what will you do with the degree?

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK

After the first degree, I had been awarded scholarship to pursue Masters programme by the University of Cape Coast. After completing the programme, I want to go into lecturing so that my colleague prisoners can benefit from my teaching career in prison.

What programmes are offered by University of Cape Coast Distance Education Centre?

These are Bachelor of Commerce with specialization in management and Accounting option. Bachelor of Junior High Education with specialization in English and Studies option as well as Bachelor of Junior High Education with specialization in Maths and Science Education option.

How many inmates started the programme prison custody?

Fifty inmates started the programme as first batch in November,2019. The second batch was also fifty-eight/58 inmate-students. The two cohorts or batches graduated together on 27th March,2025.

How many of them graduated?

Seventy-two/72 please. Thirty-three/33 from the first batch and thirty nine/39 from the second batch.

Apart from three inmates who had first, what did the rest have?

Majority of my colleagues had second class (upper & lower) whilst few had third class. The records indicate that, no one had pass. The others dropped out of after discharge or leaving the prison

Now that they have completed the course and they are still in prison,what will they be doing in prison?

Processes have commenced for them to do National Service while in prison. They are part of the 2025 National Service Registration initiated by the Ghana Prisons Service Administration and supported by the Director of the Ghana National Secretariat.

Do you believe that higher correctional education has the potential to contribute meaningfully to rehabilitation and social reintegration?

Higher correctional education may significantly contribute to positive behavioral change and redefined career aspirations of inmates.

Financing Learning Materials and Examination Fees

According to the participants, the teaching and learning materials they used were available for free. They are provided by organisations such as the UNDP, philanthropists and in some instances their families. This is made to known to them during presentation of such gifts. In the end, participants said, they did not pay for the materials they used to learn. One participant commented that:

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK

I didn't pay anything. It was free of charge. It is being donated by GIFEC, UNDP and other organisations (Specs, Level 400 ICT student)

Another participant said;

I get financial help from my family to be able to purchase learning materials that I need (Captain, Level 300 ICT student)

With respect to the sources of finance for examination fees, Captain further stated that:

The examination fees are normally paid by donors, private organizations and philanthropists (Captain, Level 300 ICT student).

Another participant said:

With the ICT, it is the Coordinator who goes around to solicit for funds to pay for the examination fees (Professor, Level 400 ICT student & inmate teacher).

Correctional Education and Reducing or Curbing Recidivism in Prison

With respect to the degree to which correctional education contributes to reduction in recidivism, majority of the participants cited a changed attitude towards crime, pursuing education and preparation for employment among past students. In expressing their views, one participant commented that:

Almost all students who passed through the programme got employment when they were discharged. Those who haven't got employment in the private sector have established their own businesses (Professor, Level 400 ICT student & inmate teacher).

Jaypron, a former SHS student still serving his sentence in prison said:

Once the inmate has acquired a certificate, he will want to seek for a job and turn away from crime.

Lawfia, a discharged SHS Business student added that;

correctional education helps people to discover their potentials so that when they are discharged, they can pursue further studies or establish small business to reduce crime.

Advice Participants Had for Inmates

It appeared from the responses that, inmate students had a lot to tell their colleagues who were reluctant to join the correctional education programme. One participant said;

What is taught in public schools is the same being taught at the prison school. We all write the same WASSCE examinations. Here to, students do not pay anything including examination fees. They have to take advantage of that and participate in the school (Lawfia, a discharged SHS Business student and now pursuing B Com (Finance) at University of Cape Coast).

Another participant had this to say;

Inmates must participate in the educational programme so that they may secure jobs in the future (Jaypron, a former SHS student).

Professor, Level 400 ICT student and inmate teacher cautioned:

Time and tide waits for no man and procrastination is thief of time. Some people say ibi prison you dey come learn. My advice to them is that learning has no boundary and so long as they have free education in prison, they should take advantage of it and learn in order to earn a decent life in future.

DISCUSSION

Correctional Education and Change in Prisoners' Behaviour towards Crime at Nsawam Medium Security Prison

The findings of this study revealed that correctional education plays a significant role in transforming inmates' attitudes toward crime. A majority of the participants indicated that their involvement in formal education and vocational training had positively influenced their decision to desist from criminal activities. For many of the inmates, access to education served as a turning point in their lives, giving them a renewed sense of direction and purpose. Participants reported that after engaging in educational programs, particularly the SHS and ICT tracks, they were more focused on life after prison and were motivated to become law-abiding citizens.

The data further showed that 73 percent of participants had committed crimes such as robbery and theft primarily due to the lack of decent employment opportunities. Consequently, they viewed correctional education not just as a tool for academic or vocational advancement, but as a critical intervention that prepares them for gainful employment upon release. The inmates reported that the guidance and counselling services provided at the Diagnostic Centre were instrumental in shaping their psychological readiness for reintegration into society. These services supported emotional healing, promoted self-reflection, and encouraged a mindset of transformation.

Additionally, participants shared that peers who had completed the correctional education programs were not only successfully reintegrated into society but were also employed in the private sector, engaged in self-employment, or pursuing further studies. This feedback, often communicated through weekly visits by tutors, philanthropists, and relatives, reinforced their belief in the transformative power of education. Many participants also emphasized that correctional education provided them with valuable social and career skills while keeping them engaged in purposeful activities. This aligns with the findings of Kakupa and Mulenga (2021), who argued that correctional education fosters individual empowerment by equipping inmates with essential life skills and instilling discipline. Participants in the present study advocated for counselling services to be made compulsory across all prison blocks, citing the influence of tribal, religious, and gang-related factors that sometimes hinder the rehabilitation process. They also highlighted the importance of religious-based instruction and psychological counselling in supporting behavioral change.

These findings are consistent with prior research. For instance, Bozick et al. (2018) established through a meta-analysis that inmates who participated in correctional education were 28 percent less likely to reoffend. Similarly, Wilson et al. (2000) observed that participation in education and work programs contributes to reduced problem behaviors within correctional environments by providing constructive activities that promote positive change. O'Neill et al. (2007) further supported this view, stating that correctional education enhances cognitive development and offers a structured environment that makes prison life more tolerable and meaningful for offenders. An evidence from the United Kingdom by Taylor (2014) also underscores the rehabilitative value of education. In a national survey, 81 percent of prisoners reported studying to occupy time and avoid monotony, while 69 percent claimed that education helped them cope with prison life, and 40 percent said it assisted in their adjustment to life post-incarceration. These findings are particularly relevant for inmates serving long-term sentences or those with limited education prior to imprisonment.

The current study's findings also echo the conclusions of Ricciardelli et al. (2023), who highlighted the importance of psychological empowerment in the correctional context. According to them, meaningful involvement in learning activities allows inmates to build competence, develop a sense of identity, and prepare for societal reintegration. However, this transformation is most effective when prisoners are active participants in their learning journey, as noted by Han et al. (2021), who emphasized the role of autonomy and choice in educational programming. Furthermore, the present study affirms Ripley's (1993) assertion that inmates who are actively engaged in educational programs are less likely to exhibit disruptive behaviors such as rioting or attempting escape. Education keeps inmates cognitively and psychologically engaged, contributing to a more stable and manageable correctional environment. Wilson and Mackenzie

(2005) also supported this view, noting that education improves prisoners' cognitive skills and enhances their chances of lawful reintegration into society.

Overall, the study provides compelling evidence that correctional education is a vital component in reforming inmate behaviour. The programs not only serve as tools for knowledge acquisition and skill development but also act as pathways for psychological healing and identity reconstruction. The experiences of participants at Nsawam Medium Security Prison demonstrate that education, when combined with counselling and psychosocial support, can significantly reduce recidivism and foster behavioral change. This supports the broader literature advocating for correctional education as a cornerstone of effective prison rehabilitation strategies.

Correctional Education's Influence on Inmates' Career Aspirations at Nsawam Medium Security Prison

The findings of this study revealed that correctional education had a profound influence on the career aspirations of inmates at Nsawam Medium Security Prison. Inmates who engaged in educational programmes reported significant shifts in how they perceived themselves and their future roles in society. This aligns with Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Theory, which posits that adult learners, when exposed to critical reflection and meaningful learning experiences, can undergo deep-seated changes in their worldviews, beliefs, and behaviors.

Participants expressed aspirations such as pursuing further education, becoming entrepreneurs, resuming former professions, or serving in religious capacities. These statements suggest that through education, inmates were not only acquiring skills but also reconstructing their identities and reimagining their roles in society—a core tenet of transformative learning. The learning experience in prison created a space for critical self-reflection, where inmates questioned previous assumptions and adopted new perspectives on life, work, and rehabilitation. Although participation was limited, those enrolled benefited from support structures like free tuition, textbooks, escorted movement to classes, library access, and sponsorship by the UNDP and other organizations. These supportive elements created an enabling environment for transformative learning, helping inmates engage more deeply with the content and their own internal transformation.

This is consistent with Osberg and Fraley (1993), who found that voluntary engagement in prison education fosters intrinsic motivation, a critical factor in transformative learning. When inmates made the decision to learn on their own, they were more likely to reflect on their past actions and future goals, initiating what Mezirow (1991) calls a disorienting dilemma—a triggering event that prompts learners to critically reassess their perspectives and begin the process of transformation. Similarly, participants' emphasis on education as a pathway to responsible citizenship and career development echoes the findings of Shertzer and Stone (1976), who argued that schooling significantly shapes career identity and decision-making. Santrock (1998) and Vondracek et al.

(1986) also affirm that education enhances self-efficacy and supports self-development—both essential elements in the transformative process.

Furthermore, the notion that inmates could “learn irrespective of their situation” underscores the resilience and adaptive meaning-making process described in transformative learning theory. Inmates were able to detach from past identities associated with criminality and envision new futures rooted in personal growth, economic productivity, and social reintegration. The relevance of supportive relationships—as highlighted by participants who cited encouragement from educators, family, and faith-based mentors—also speaks to relational and social dimensions of transformative learning, where dialogue and reflection with others facilitate deeper insight and commitment to change.

Barriers such as stigma from peers and correctional officers were acknowledged, yet the motivation to persist highlighted the learners’ ability to challenge external constraints and remain engaged—hallmarks of empowered, transformative learners. This aligns with Parkinson and Steurer’s (2004) findings that recognition events like graduation ceremonies serve as powerful extrinsic motivators that reinforce learners’ new self-concepts and commitments. The desire to “become someone better” resonated throughout participants’ narratives and reflected a shift from passive imprisonment to active reconstruction of self—the essence of transformation.

Finally, from a broader societal lens, correctional education as described by Burton (1993) and supported by Murnola’s (as cited in Steurer & Smith, 2003) cost-benefit analysis, underscores that the economic and rehabilitative value of such programmes is not only instrumental but transformational. When inmates become lifelong learners and future contributors to society, the cycle of incarceration can be broken. The findings reflect the central principles of Transformative Learning Theory: inmates underwent disorienting dilemmas, critically reflected on past beliefs, engaged in rational discourse, and ultimately reconstructed their identities and career aspirations. Correctional education, therefore, served not merely as a rehabilitative tool, but as a catalyst for personal transformation and social reintegration.

Contributions to Knowledge and Practice

The findings of this study carry some important lessons for social welfare officers, prison counsellors, prison authorities and policy makers. We need correctional education leadership in the country’s correctional institution to enhance education in the prison facilities. Knowledge in the form of trade, skills acquisition, career awareness and competencies is needed as evidence based for prisons and institutions that are interested in competency-based training, learning and development.

In practical terms, this study is an attempt to facilitate awareness, knowledge and skills needed to reform inmates for them to become responsible citizens. The study contributes to practical

understanding of exploring the influence of correctional education on prisoners' attitudes toward crime and career aspirations that can inform policy makers, legislative instrumentation, educators and more importantly correctional or prison service best practices.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of correctional education on inmates' career aspirations at Nsawam Medium Security Prison, with a focus on how educational experiences shaped inmates' future occupational goals and self-concept. Drawing on the lens of Transformative Learning Theory, the findings revealed that correctional education fostered significant attitudinal and cognitive shifts among participating inmates. Specifically, education served as a catalyst for self-reflection, personal growth, and the reconstruction of career identities. Participants reported increased aspirations for post-release employment, entrepreneurship, continued formal education, and service to society. These aspirations were not only indicative of a change in mindset but also of a redefinition of the self as capable, purposeful, and rehabilitated. However, despite these transformative outcomes, systemic and interpersonal barriers—such as stigmatization by peers and limited access to structured learning pathways—persisted, potentially constraining the full realization of these aspirations. Nevertheless, the study underscores the pivotal role of education in rehabilitation and reentry planning, demonstrating its capacity to reorient inmates' life trajectories toward socially constructive goals.

Recommendations

1. **Institutionalization and Expansion of Correctional Education:** Correctional education should be formally institutionalized and scaled up across prison facilities, with structured curricula that integrate academic, vocational, and life skills components tailored to inmates' diverse career interests.
2. **Strengthening Psychosocial Support Systems:** Educational interventions should be complemented with counselling services, mentorship programmes, and motivational workshops to enhance inmates' psychological readiness for reintegration and career planning.
3. **Combating Stigmatization within Correctional Settings:** Sensitization campaigns targeting both inmates and prison staff should be implemented to reduce negative perceptions surrounding participation in correctional education and foster a culture of learning and personal development.
4. **Partnerships with External Educational Bodies and Employers:** The Ghana Prisons Service should collaborate with tertiary institutions, NGOs, and industry partners to provide certification, skill accreditation, and pathways for employment or further study upon release.

5. **Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks:** A robust monitoring and evaluation system should be developed to track the long-term impact of correctional education on recidivism rates, employment outcomes, and post-release social reintegration.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

The study's scope was limited to one correctional facility—Nsawam Medium Security Prison—which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other prison settings in Ghana or beyond. Additionally, the study relied on qualitative self-reports from a small number of participants, which may be subject to social desirability bias or recall limitations. Future research could address these limitations by employing mixed-method or longitudinal designs to track the career outcomes of inmates post-release. Comparative studies across multiple prisons with diverse demographic profiles would also enhance the external validity of the findings. Moreover, future studies could explore the perspectives of prison officers, educators, and policy makers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the institutional dynamics that support or hinder correctional education initiatives. Research into the integration of digital learning technologies in correctional settings, especially in the post-COVID era, also presents a promising avenue for expanding access and engagement.

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