

An Exploration of Learning Strategies Employed by Prisoners on Correctional Education in Luzira Prison

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Abstract: *This study aimed at exploring learning strategies employed by prisoners on formal and vocational training in Luzira prisons, Uganda. It adopted across sectional survey design with a mixed methods approach to collect data, analyse and present the findings. The study found out that prisoners use a variety of learning strategies including: Metacognition, Rehearsal, elaboration, peer learning, cognitive learning and self-help learning strategies. From the study, there is need to widely establish the educational needs of prisoners as a special group for effective utilization of education as rehabilitative strategy.*

Keywords: Learning Strategies, Correctional Education

1. Introduction

Educating Prisoners has become a worldwide concern as a measure that can save community costs associated with criminal behavior (Bodmann, Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2008). Reports by European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (2012), the Australian Council for Social Service (2002), the Canadian Government Productivity Commission (2004), the American Correctional Association (1997) and the Uganda Human Rights Commission (2015) suggest that prisoners suffer cumulative social and economic disadvantages, low education levels, higher rates of mental illness and greater rates of unemployment compared to the general population (Fullan & Langworthy, 2013). Education being one of the most significant individual and social change phenomena, it has been adopted as one of the major strategies to rehabilitate prisoners and prepare them for successful integration with their families, communities and employment world (Boyar & Mosley, 2007).

Globally, the history of education in prisons can be traced in the United States in 1789 (Gehring, 1995). The early prison education programmes were often referred to as Sabbath school with a purpose of teaching inmates how to read in order to be able to read the Bible. In Uganda, education in prisons which entails vocational and academic programmes was introduced in 1995 to enable inmates leave the prison with more skills so as to be in position to find meaningful and long-term employment after serving their sentence (Uganda Prison Act, 2006). However, a study by the Uganda Human Rights Commission (2015) to assess the prisoners' conditions established that an average of 90% of all prisoners in Uganda did not have a high school diploma and 85% have no vocational education. In the same study, recidivism rates of prisoners who do not participate in prison education were between 65-75%. For academic and vocational training to register achievements, there is need for an understanding of Ugandan Prisoners Learning Strategies,

Several studies have attempted to define learning strategies with no universal definition. Schumaker and Deshler (2006) define learning strategies as the way a learner engages in a task, including how an individual plans and regulates his/her performance. Richardson, Abraham and Bond (2012) define a learning strategy as a set of one or more procedures that an individual acquires to facilitate the performance on a learning task. In this study, learning strategies are conceptualized as intentional behaviors or thoughts taught or exposed to prisoners to facilitate encoding in such a way that knowledge integration and retrieval of knowledge are enhanced (Ward & Fortune, 2013). Although there has been considerable research on learning strategies there is little attention on how the prison environment affects prisoners' use of learning strategies (Montague & Dietz 2009; Protheroe & Clarke, 2008). Teachers and instructors in prisons need to be aware of the learning strategies adopted by the prisoners which enable teachers to design and implement a learning strategy instruction which eventually determines positive educational outcomes (Messmer, 2007). If this is not done, there is a likelihood of prisoners' continuous failure to progress in both formal and vocational training.

2. Literature Review

Learning Strategies Employed By Prisoners

Available literature shows that there are different learning strategies used by learners, some are used consciously while others are used unconsciously in transferring of new knowledge and skills (Anderson & Ovaery, 2010). However, there is no documented study on particular learning strategies employed by prisoners on formal and vocational training in Uganda. Bouffard and Bergeron (2006) state that learning strategies are broadly classified as cognitive strategies i.e. grouping, summarizing, and asking friends and Meta cognitive strategies e.g. planning and self-monitoring. Several studies conducted on learning strategies are from a teacher's perspective without much emphasis on students' perspective. This study shall evaluate the learners'

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perspective (Broucek, 2005; Meece, Anderman&Anderman, 2006; Adesola&Arowolo, 2014). Once instructors are aware of effective learning strategies, they will be able to teach individual prisoners to use learning strategies appropriately and effectively in addition to recognizing learners' strengths and weaknesses thus adjust instruction accordingly which ultimately leads to academic achievement (Messmer, 2007).

Batiuk and Moke (1996) suggest that some college students use Meta cognitive learning strategies e.g. planning and self-monitoring such learners are likely to be more achievers in the educational setting because they are more satisfied with their academic experience. To provide effective instruction in prison formal and vocational training that is beneficial to a variety of prisoners Instructors need to ensure that prisoners select and apply effective learning strategies (Bond, 2012). Brdar, Rijavec and Loncaric (2006) in a review of cognitive learning strategy instruction as related to mathematical problem solving among college students indicate that, strategic learners use a variety of learning strategies efficiently and effectively. Effective learners have better awareness of strategies of learning that are necessary to help them. This study focused on a very unique learning environment with unique learners i.e. the prison as a learning environment and the prisoner as a learner.

Fullan and Langworthy (2013) identified two different learning strategies; namely deep and surface strategies. In deep approach a learner has a personal commitment to learning relating current studies to previous knowledge and theorizing what is learnt. In the surface approach students want to learn because of external positive or negative consequences resulting in rote memorization. The intention is memorization of tasks. This study shall examined whether prisoners use deep or surface learning strategies.

3. Problem

Prisoners in Uganda, have the lowest formal and vocational skills compared to the general population despite introduction of prison education in Uganda in 1996 (The Uganda Prison Service Commission, 2015). A survey by Uganda Human Rights Commission (2015) shows that 85% of the prisoners in all the 225 government prisons lack basic education, nor do they have any vocational skill and 80% of prisoners are school drop outs. The survey further revealed that less than a quarter of prisoners in Uganda participate in education and training. Low participation in formal and vocational training among prisoners in Uganda can be associated with poor or lack of learning strategies (Fullan& Langworthy, 2013). Lack of knowledge of an appropriate learning strategy or poor use of a learning strategy may lead to failure, poor performance and loss of interest in learning process (Patrick, Ryan & Kaplan, 2007).

Proper use of learning strategies can open up opportunities for increase in participation in formal and vocational training, broaden prisoner's academic horizons and provide a second chance to learn the skills and competences needed in order to reintegrate in society (Deshler & Schumacher, 2006). This is central for adequate implementation of academic and vocational education in prisons, otherwise it

may lead to wasted Government initiative and commitment on education as a rehabilitation strategy for prisoners reflected by low enrollment, high drop outs, overcrowding in prisons and increased expenditure.

4. Methodology

This study adopted across sectional survey design because it provides description of trends and attitudes or opinions of a population, allows generalisation from a sample to a population so that inferences can be made about some characteristics, attitude or behaviour of that population (Tashakkori& Creswell, 2007). The population was adult male and female prisoners enrolled on both formal and vocational training in Luzira prison. The study adopted census sampling strategy in which everyone in the target population participates in the study (Creswell, 2007).

The Tools for data collection comprised of the bio data section, the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) with a Cronbach's alpha $\alpha=.70$ was used to measure learning strategies (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991). A focus group discussion was conducted to further explore preference for certain learning strategies. Clearance was sought from all relevant officers including Mbarara University Research Ethical Review Committee (REC) and from the Dean Faculty of Science MUST who then availed me an introductory letter. Permission was also sought from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology which legitimizes all research projects carried out in the country and the Commissioner General of Prisons in Uganda. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to all relevant officers and participants and appointment scheduled on how to go about the work. Participants were asked to sign consent forms, and after data collection they were debriefed. Participation was purely voluntary and participants were free to withdrawal from the study at any point without reprimand. Data was using analysed Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 20.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Information

| Variable | Category | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 54 |
| | Female | 46 |
| Level of Education | O'level | 20 |
| | A'level | 24 |
| | Certificate | 30 |
| | Diploma | 21 |
| | Degree | 5 |
| Duration In Prison | 0-5 Years | 15.6 |
| | 6-10 Years | 59.2 |
| | 11-15 Years | 15.6 |
| | More Than 16 Years | 4.8 |
| Religion of Respondents | Muslims | 36 |
| | Pentecostals | 31 |
| | Protestants | 15 |
| | Catholics | 13 |
| | Others | 5 |
| Age of Respondents | 18-35 | 51.4 |
| | 36-45 | 41 |
| | 46-55 | 6.8 |
| | 56 And Above | 0.9 |

The Table above shows that: out of eight hundred participants in the study, 54% were males while 46% were females. The study noted that generally countrywide there are few female prisoners compared to males, more so, formal and vocational education is given to only convicted prisoners who are serving long sentences. The majority were enrolled on different certificate programs 30%, followed by A 'Level 24%, Diploma programs 21%, O' Level 20% and the least enrollment was on degree programs 5%. Majority prisoners (59.2%) have spent 6-10 years in prison, followed by 20.4% who have spent 0-5 years, 15.6% have spent 10-15 years and 4.8% have spent more than 15 years in prison. From the study, the majority prisoners were Muslims (36%), followed by Pentecostal (31%), Protestants 15%. Catholics 13% while others at 5%. The majority prisoners were in early adulthood (51.4%) 18-35 years, 41% were in middle adulthood 36-45 years while 6.8% were in late adulthood 46-55 years. 0.9 % of the study participants were in old age i.e. above 55 years.

Table 2: Learning Strategies Employed By Prisoners in Luzira prison

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Rehearsal | 800 | 3.25 | 7 | 5.8228 | 0.68879 |
| Organization | 800 | 2.25 | 7 | 5.7522 | 0.7728 |
| Critical Thinking | 800 | 2 | 7 | 5.195 | 0.86632 |
| Metacognitive self-regulation | 800 | 2.83 | 6.25 | 4.7586 | 0.52684 |
| Effort regulation | 800 | 1.75 | 7 | 4.7369 | 0.90851 |
| Peer learning | 800 | 1.67 | 7 | 5.6175 | 0.96544 |
| Help seeking | 800 | 3.5 | 7 | 5.4678 | 0.72942 |
| Elaboration | 800 | 3.83 | 7 | 6.0483 | 0.51869 |
| Time/Study environment Management | 800 | 2.75 | 5.88 | 4.5159 | 0.48895 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 800 | | | | |

Descriptive statistics i.e. Frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations were computed to explore the learning strategies employed by prisoners in Uganda. The most commonly used learning strategy is elaboration, organisation and rehearsal. Prisoners moderately use peer learning, help seeking and critical thinking while metacognitive self-regulation, effort regulation and time/study environment management were the least used learning strategies.

6. Discussion

The study found out that generally prisoners use a variety of learning strategies. This is in agreement with Brdar, Rijavec and Loncaric (2006) in a review of cognitive learning strategy instruction as related to mathematical problem solving among college students who indicate that, strategic learners use a variety of learning strategies efficiently and effectively. Darnon and Harackiewicz (2007) also suggest that when a learner uses several learning strategies it helps him/her to learn effectively. The study findings indicate that the several learning strategies employed by prisoners shall help prisoners who may be having trouble in learning. The

introduction of formal and non-formal education to prisoners is up held with great importance by prisoners in Uganda. They believe that this will they improve their life style after serving their sentence which is agreement

The study found out that most prisoners on formal and vocational education in Uganda use metacognitive learning strategies. Bouffard and Bergeron (2006) state that learning strategies are broadly classified as cognitive strategies i.e. grouping, summarizing, and asking friends and Meta cognitive strategies e.g. planning and self-monitoring. It was clearly indicated that prisoners prefer metacognitive learning strategies as compared to cognitive strategies due to peer support for better academic performance. This is agreement with Batiuk and Moke (1996) who suggest that when students use Meta cognitive learning strategies e.g. planning and self-monitoring such learners are likely to be more achievers in the educational setting because they are more satisfied with their academic experience.

The study found out that most prisoners use surface approach to learning compared to deep learning strategies. Fullan and Langworthy (2013) suggest that when learners use deep approach a learner there is a personal commitment to learning compare to when a leaner uses surface approach to learning which promotes rote learning because students simply memorization tasks instead of understanding and reproducing.

The study found out that demographic classification doesn't necessary determine preference of a learning strategy. The findings disagree with Case, Fasenfest, Sarri and Philips (2005) who suggest that demographic characteristics such as age and gender influence the use of learning strategy.

Although the prison in a very unique learning environment, prisoners were positive about learning and aware about different strategies to learning. Prisoners mentioned several hindrances to learning such as limited time since they study from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm (when they return to their cells), limited interaction with teachers and other students from neighboring schools for seminars and discussion, a few books in the library and no access to internet. None the less they showed commitment to learning to improve their current education status quo.

7. Conclusions

The introduction of formal and non-formal education to prisoners is up held with great importance by prisoners in Uganda.

Prisoners on formal and informal education in Ugandan prisons should be exposed to cognitive learning strategies which lead to deep learning which helps in critical thinking and creativity.

Although the prison in a very unique learning environment, prisoners were positive about learning and aware about different strategies to learning.

To provide effective instruction in prisons in Uganda, instructors ought to know the learning strategies employed

by learners to ensure that prisoners select and apply effective learning strategies.

8. Future Scope

There should be deliberate seminars/ orientation for instructors/prison education officials on the learning strategies employed by prisoners to ensure that prisoners select and apply effective learning strategies.

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