Strategies Used by Students in Correctional Facility for Accessing Educational Resources: The Case of a Namibian Correctional Facility

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine strategies used by students at a Namibian Correctional Facility in accessing educational resources while studying in prison. The paper's central claim is that, despite their severe living conditions, inmates are motivated to further their studies. This research was carried out in a correctional facility in Namibia. This study was qualitative in nature, using interviews as a means of data collecting while adhering to an interpretive paradigm. A skilled transcriber transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim, and the author was provided with the transcripts for interpretation. The analysis was conducted thematically. With regard to correctional facility services, Namibia's legal system saw significant transformations as it moved from an approach centred on punishment and isolation to one that emphasises rehabilitation and community reintegration.

KEYWORDS

Strategy; data collection; prisoner; student; e-learning.

INTRODUCTION

This study looks into the methods that higher education students in a Namibian correctional facility use in accessing educational resource for research projects in higher education. The goal of the study was to find out how higher education students in a correctional facility in Namibia went about accessing educational resources for their studies while incarcerated. It aimed to provide insight into the ways inmates deal with obstacles in their environment while pursuing academic objectives and conducting research. The paper's main thesis is that deserving higher education students in a Namibian correctional facility can overcome obstacles to education and pursue their academic goals even in the tough correctional facility environment.

The study used a qualitative methodology in line with an interpretive paradigm to investigate the participants' individual experiences and viewpoints. The main technique of gathering data was semi-structured interviews. The interviews were and audio recorded, and to ensure accuracy and faithfulness to the participants' voices, a proficient transcriber painstakingly transcribed the interviews verbatim. The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis as the analytical framework, which made it possible to find recurrent themes, patterns and insights. Using this method, the researcher aimed to identify the tactics that higher education students in correctional facilities use to gather information despite the limitations imposed by their surroundings.

The study places its conclusions in the larger context of Namibia's legal system, emphasising the notable shifts from a punitive to a correctional and community reintegration-focused strategy. Within this framework, correctional education is revealed as an essential component of rehabilitation, providing possibilities and challenges for inmates who wish to pursue higher education. All things considered, the study advances our knowledge of how inmates negotiate the challenges of the correctional facility system in order to pursue their academic interests and conduct research. Through elucidating the tactics used by those behind bars, the study highlights the tenacity and resolve of higher education students in a Namibian correctional facility in surmounting educational barriers and pursuing their academic objectives while incarcerated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review highlights several key trends and gaps in research regarding the strategies used by prisoners in accessing educational resource for their studies within prisons. It begins by addressing the demographic shift observed in industrialised countries, where the number of older individuals within the correctional facility system is increasing. For instance, in Germany, there has been a significant rise in the number of prisoners over the age of 60 from 1993 to 2014 (Verhülsdonk et al., 2024). Despite this demographic change, there is a lack of comprehensive data on the specific strategies employed by prisoners in their educational pursuits. Furthermore, Atuase and Filson (2024) highlight the inadequacy of facilities and information resources available in correctional facility libraries to meet the learning and

research needs of inmates, particularly those enrolled in higher distance learning programmes. They recommend collaborative efforts between academic libraries and correctional facilities to extend resources and services to higher education students in prisons. This emphasises the importance of adequate exposure to relevant information and learning resources for prisoners, as insufficient access may impede the rehabilitation and reformation process and limit opportunities for higher education.

Moreover, the literature suggests that the scarcity of new technologies within the correctional facility system poses challenges and opportunities for incarcerated individuals. Fedorczyk (2024) calls for exploration into the implications of introducing the notion of 'smartness' into correctional environments. This raises questions about how technology can be leveraged to enhance educational opportunities and research capabilities within prisons, potentially revolutionising the way incarcerated individuals access educational resources for their studies. Overall, the literature review underscores the pressing need for research on the strategies employed by prisoners in data collection for their educational endeavours. It highlights gaps in existing knowledge, particularly regarding access to information resources and the integration of technology within correctional facilities. Addressing these gaps is essential for improving educational outcomes and facilitating the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals.

Literature highlights that incarcerated persons need access to educational resources, and for social reintegration opportunities, all of which can be provided by a well-resourced correctional facility library (Opesanwo & Awofẹsọ, 2024). Recognising education as a transformative tool within correctional settings, researchers emphasise the need to explore the specific strategies employed by higher education students in prisons to acquire information. Despite the recognised importance of education, there remains a significant gap in research focusing on the methods through which higher education students in prisons are accessing educational resources within correctional environments. Understanding these strategies is essential not only for enriching educational initiatives but also for promoting the overall wellbeing and rehabilitation of incarcerated populations. Technological access and familial support are necessary factors facilitating information acquisition among prisoners during prerelease of students in correctional facility according to Mu et al. (2024). The literature underscores the importance of technological resources, such as internet access and digital databases, in enabling prisoners to engage in independent research and access a wide range of educational materials. Moreover, familial support plays a crucial role in supplementing students in prisons in their efforts in accessing educational resource. Family members often serve as conduits for external information, providing access to relevant resources and materials that may not be readily available within correctional facilities.

In addition to technological and familial support, institutional resources also play a vital role in facilitating information acquisition by incarcerated individuals. Recent research emphasises the significance of institutional provision, such as study guides and library materials, in supporting prisoners' educational endeavours within correctional settings. These resources

serve as essential tools for prisoners to access information, conduct research and pursue academic goals while incarcerated. Overall, literature underscores the multifaceted nature of information acquisition among prisoners and highlights the importance of understanding the strategies employed by incarcerated individuals in accessing educational resources. By addressing the gaps in research and recognising the significance of technological access, familial support and institutional resources, stakeholders can work towards enhancing educational opportunities and promoting the rehabilitation of incarcerated populations within correctional facilities.

Scholarly literature has widely highlighted the importance of education in correctional facilities (Dixey & Wood, 2021). But there is still a significant vacuum in the literature when it comes to the methods that inmates use to gather information when participating in educational programmes inside of prisons. The significance of enabling inmates to participate in research and contribute to knowledge generation motivates them to pursue lifelong learning. People who are incarcerated see opportunities to improve their employability after being released (Novo-Molinero et al., 2024). Even still, research on the useful strategies that inmates employ to obtain information while confined to carceral settings is still desperately needed. This work seeks to close this gap in the literature and advance knowledge of the relationship between incarceration, research, and education. We can improve educational programmes and research projects in correctional facilities by learning about the data collection tactics used by higher education students in correctional facilities. Furthermore, this research may influence practices and policies that attempt to enhance the educational opportunities and results for those behind bars, thereby facilitating their effective recovery and reintegration into society.

When it comes to the investigation of the tactics that inmates use to gather information in correctional facility environments, documentation analysis is a common and useful technique. In spite of the constraints imposed by the correctional setting, inmates show resourcefulness by making use of accessible materials including library books and, where available, internet databases. Technologies make the interaction between students and educational systems possible. By making use of these tools, inmates were able to carry out studies, collect information and broaden their knowledge while still inside the institution (Mishra, 2024). Additionally, a few higher education students in the correctional facility show initiative by working together with outside academic institutions on joint research initiatives. Inmates have been able to acquire more information and knowledge by forming relationships with universities or research organisations, which have allowed them to ameliorate the physical limitations of correctional facility walls. These cooperative projects not only improve the inmates' research skills but also help them build important relationships with the academic community outside of the institution.

The methods found highlight the ingenuity and tenacity of inmates in overcoming limitations of studying in correctional facility environments. Higher education students in correctional facilities show a dedication to furthering their academic and scientific activities in

spite of various challenges, such as restricted access to resources and institutional restrictions. In addition, higher education students in a correctional facility are able to contribute to the creation of knowledge in their professions in addition to improving their own educational experience by active engagement in data gathering. Through research initiatives, incarcerated people were able to challenge stigmas and preconceptions related to incarceration and make significant contributions to academic study and the larger body of knowledge.

It is crucial to recognise that conducting research in correctional settings continues to present difficulties for incarcerated higher education students. The research process is severely hampered by institutional constraints, restricted information availability and ethical issues with studying groups of people confined. These difficulties demand more investigation and emphasise the necessity of ongoing efforts to satisfy the particular requirements and conditions of prisoners participating in educational and research endeavours. In conclusion, the methods that higher education students in correctional facilities have identified for accessing educational resources in correctional environments demonstrate their inventiveness, resiliency, and dedication to furthering their knowledge. Through overcoming obstacles and actively engaging in research projects, people who are incarcerated improve not just their personal educational experiences but also advance academic scholarship and knowledge creation. Nonetheless, obstacles persist, and additional investigation is required to tackle the intricacies of carrying out study in correctional establishments and to guarantee fair access to educational prospects for detained groups.

Purpose

This study sought to understand the methods that higher education students in a Namibian correctional facility used in accessing educational resource while they were studying through distance e-learning mode.

Objective

To investigate and analyse the strategies used by higher education students in a correctional facility to access educational resource while pursuing higher education studies within a Namibian prison.

Research Question

What strategies do higher education students in a correctional facility employ for accessing educational resource while pursuing higher education studies within a Namibian prison?

This research question explored the specific methods and approaches used by students in a correctional facility in accessing educational resource during their educational pursuits within the confines of a correctional facility in Namibia. By investigating the strategies employed by incarcerated individuals, the study seeks to uncover the resourcefulness and adaptability of higher education students in correctional facility in overcoming the challenges associated with conducting research in a carceral environment. The analysis of these strategies provided valuable insights into the unique context of data collection by higher education students in

correctional facility settings and informed the development of tailored educational and research initiatives for incarcerated higher education students.

METHOD

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with higher education students in prison, providing a flexible yet focused approach to data collection (Phillips, 2024). This allowed participants the freedom to express themselves while ensuring that key topics related to accessing educational resources in the correctional facility environment were addressed. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also enabled the researcher to probe deeper into specific areas of interest, such as the challenges faced, and the resources used by the higher education students in prison. During the interviews, participants were invited to share their experiences and strategies for accessing educational resources while studying in prison. Questions were designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the methods, resources and support networks employed by the participants in their information-seeking endeavours. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences openly, providing rich and nuanced insights into their information collection processes. Following data collection, thematic analysis was employed to systematically analyse the interview transcripts. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative research method that involves identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allowed the researchers to identify recurring themes, ideas and patterns related to accessing educational resources strategies in prison.

The number of higher education students who participated in the study was twelve (n=12). In the analysis of the data only eleven participants' information was used because one audio-recorded interview was inaudible.

All the participants were male. The first participant was a former soldier (61 years of age). The second participant was doing a Bachelor in Logistics and supply chain management at a Business School of Science (35 years old). The third participant had been working for the police as a warrant officer before he was sentenced (40 years old). The fourth participant was a civil servant working as a childcare officer (39 years old). The fifth participant was a farmer before coming to correctional facility (39 years old). The sixth participant was a teacher by profession (63 years old). The seventh participant was a driver holding a certificate in finance (56 years old). The eighth participant was a police officer (34 years old). The ninth participant was unemployed (37 years old). The tenth participant was self-employed working on projects (35 years) and the 11th participant was a 52-year-old who had a Diploma in Mechanical Engineering.

Data analysis

The voice-recorded interviews conducted with higher education students in a correctional facility were sent to a professional transcriber who was proficient in the English language because the interviews were conducted in English. This translator meticulously transcribed the interviews verbatim, ensuring accuracy and preserving the nuances of the participants'

responses. Each interview was transcribed in its entirety, capturing the richness of the participants' narratives and perspectives. Subsequently, the transcribed data underwent thematic analysis, a qualitative research method that involves identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were formulated based on the questions asked during the interviews, as well as recurring patterns, concepts, and ideas that emerged from the participants' responses. Thematic analysis involved several iterative stages. Initially, the researcher familiarised himself with the transcribed data, reading and rereading the transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. Next, initial codes were generated by systematically tagging meaningful segments of text that related to the research questions and objectives. Through a process of coding and recoding, codes were organised into potential themes, grouping together related codes that represented similar concepts or ideas. The researcher then reviewed and refined these themes, ensuring they accurately captured the essence of the data and reflected the breadth and depth of participants' experiences. Finally, the themes were defined and named, providing a clear and coherent framework for understanding the strategies employed by higher education students in a Namibian correctional facility in accessing educational resources. The analysis was conducted iteratively, with the researcher continually revisiting and refining the themes to ensure they remained grounded in the data and aligned with the research objectives.

In summary, the analysis of the voice-recorded interviews involved a rigorous process of transcription, translation, and thematic analysis. Through this methodological approach, the study was able to uncover the diverse strategies used by higher education students in a Namibian correctional facility in accessing educational resources, offering valuable insights into their experiences and perspectives within the prison.

FINDINGS

The data was captured verbatim from the audio-recorded interviews. For security and confidentiality reasons, the information is reported without any identification of the participants. The information used "we" or "I' as reported from the interviews.

Participant 1 said, *"We collect information by the assistance of the officers whenever we ask them, they will not ask you if you would like, they will download some more information."*

Participant 2 said, *"They* [officers] *might take you to school to get the things that you need and then the books, the textbooks."*

Participants 3 said, *"They will take you to the institutions and get whatever you want."*

Participant 4 said, *"How I managed to collect the data is due secondhand information. One is when interact, and second, we had access to the national library, also last, we have a department who they are just assisting inmates, so I just the request via e-mail, maybe once the books they are ready, the officer will then collect the material and bring, then I read and I use the information which I need from there."*

Participant 5 said, *"We are given, we are being assisted with internet, with the facility thereby we are able to download materials because we are given, depending on the reading type of material which you need to download, to gather and then you print that is the way that they assisted us to collect the data."*

Participant 6 said, *"Information, we collect information through internet, through our study guides, we also request books from the institution and libraries, our families also buy study materials for us. That is mostly from the source our information to assist in our studies."*

Participant 7 said, *"When my family comes to visit, I tell them I got this programme, so when you go back home, do this and this and send me this information. When you get this information, you should e-mail it to me, even in hard copies so that the office can receive it from you."*

Participants 8 said, *"I managed to collect data as our application was approved from the University of South Africa then I wrote a letter to the director of the education directorate who approved also my studies then I requested also transport from the commissioner general of the correctional service who offered me to… the first is town because I collected data on six schools, three were in town and three were in rural areas far, I have to travel 40 kms. So, in town the general approved me to use a sedan which I used for three days and when I worked outside for a school in the rural areas, the general also approved a 4x4 vehicle which I used to travel for three days to collect my data, I was assisted by the… in correctional service who collect the data especially by the commissioner general."*

Participant 9 said, *"I was assisted from outside, by a friend, just to give me his modules and textbooks. Through the internet and through my friends who already did the course. Okay, like when I did my honours, it was in IT. So, what I did I set up a website then we ask for permission from the correctional facility if I can send to the people I know and they can start participating, then I write the website and generate data, it was online. Through the help of the facility. Once you phone them what you want to, when are you going to collect the information and from there have to be trusted that you are having the internet, this is the thing that I want to do, you go and do. I don't think those people will have a problem. They will always allow you to get the resources for you or the information."*

Participant 10 said, *"It is a very complex one, because being incarcerated it is not easy. So, it through the grace of God that one is strong, first of all, because you need to be strong. You need to be healthy, and you need to have the support base from your family and those around you, especially from the kids and the family in order to be strong and that is one aspect. The other aspect, the other aspect, the family members normally brought some information and I mean, the relevant information based on the enquiry and on the research that one is doing because I mean currently some of the students are faced with some issues like resources because resources are limited. So basically, it is because of the support that one has managed."*

Participant 11 said, *"I did not yet collect any information because I am still with my research, not research, proposal at Chapter 3. I will apply, NCS has given me permission verbally*

that I can apply, I will make use of questionnaires. Quantitative research and I will also ask my son from outside to assist me to collect the data that I have to do."

DISCUSSIONS

This study shed light on the resources and support networks that higher education students in a Namibian correctional facility have access to by analysing the methods they use to gather material for educational and research purposes.

The participants mentioned using a range of information-gathering techniques. Correctional staff assisted inmates in requesting and gaining access to materials, which was a major contribution from officers. This meant accessing outside resources like the national library, downloading data and buying textbooks. Inmates also depended on their relationships with other inmates to obtain firsthand knowledge, underscoring the significance of peer support in the correctional facility community. Even in correctional facilities, information access is essential for research and education. However, because they have fewer means and less autonomy, people who are incarcerated confront particular difficulties when collecting data. According to recent research, it was found that prisoners have access to education(knowledge) and correctional facility administrations are obligated to provide educational opportunities to young prisoners (Kajawo & Johnson, 2023). Nevertheless, there is a paucity of research that particularly addresses the methods that inmates use to gather information in correctional environments. To improve educational possibilities and research engagement for inmates, it is imperative to understand these tactics.

Current research has demonstrated that institutional support and official aid helps higher education students in prisons to develop skills of assertiveness, flexibility, emotional stability, and helpfulness (Finlay, 2024). Furthermore, research highlights the need to use primary and secondary sources, encompassing contacts with fellow prisoners and availability of outside resources like libraries and educational establishments.

The results highlighted the ingenuity of prisoners in overcoming informational barriers in correctional facilities. Information access for educational and research purposes is greatly aided by officer support and institutional support. Nonetheless, obstacles like scarce resources and administrative roadblocks persist, highlighting the necessity of continuous endeavours to enhance access to information. The individuals involved disclosed diverse approaches to obtaining information. This was made easier for prisoners if resources were offered by the institution, including internet access and downloadable publications. In addition, study materials customised for their academic programmes were provided by the correctional facility and libraries. Another important resource that surfaced was family support, with relatives buying study materials and sending information from outside sources to help their incarcerated relatives with their education.

The results underscore the complex ways in which inmates obtain information from institutional, family and technology sources. Prisoners' participation in education and research

projects requires institutional assistance, which includes access to technology and educational resources. Moreover, the presence of family members is crucial in enhancing the informational resources available to inmates, highlighting the importance of outside support systems in correctional environments. According to Franich and Martinovic, (2024), family support and technology access are crucial for prisoners' ability to obtain knowledge because inmates are faced with isolation and lack of access to digital technology.

According to McKay and Macintosh (2024), digital inequality prevents students in correctional facility from accessing information which is closely tied to economic, cultural, and social disadvantage, predominantly, in situations of incarceration. The research highlights how resilient and determined prisoners are to pursue learning and research opportunities despite the limitations imposed by correctional facility structures and objectives on the education-related activities offered to correctional facility students (Eide & Westrheim, 2023). Nonetheless, there is still a knowledge vacuum on the precise elements that lead to inmates successfully obtaining information. According to Holmes (2024), overcoming obstacles to information access in carceral settings requires a combination of personal fortitude, family support and access to outside resources because incarceration could have devasting effects on prison students, their families, and the communities they come from.

Inmates who possess personal strength are able to endure the harsh conditions of correctional facility and continue to be dedicated to their academic goals. Family support bridges the gap between the carceral setting and the outside world and is an essential source of encouragement and practical aid. Additionally, having access to outside resources broadens the scope of knowledge available to inmates, enhancing their learning opportunities and research projects. According to Trivedi and Ray (2024), higher education students in correctional facilities are resilient and resolute in their pursuit of accessing educational resources even if correctional facility does not provide desired support that meets their specific needs. Furthermore, research indicates that access to outside resources, family support, and personal strength all play a significant role in helping inmates acquire information despite the academic struggles (Trombley, 2024).

Participants emphasised how important family members' assistance was in easing the process of gathering data. Family members frequently filled in the gaps between the correctional facility and the outside world by bringing pertinent material depending on the research questions of the inmates. Participants also talked about how they tended to use outside friends and their children, to assist them in gathering information for quantitative research projects by means of questionnaires. These outside allies are essential in enhancing the knowledge and resources available to inmates, especially in situations where the correctional facility system is lacking in resources.

The results highlight the value of both outside help and family support in removing obstacles to data collecting among those who are incarcerated. Family members act as resources and informational intermediaries, offering inmates' research projects crucial support.

External partners also provide further assistance by using their connections to the outside world to speed up data collection procedures. Incarcerated people can overcome resource constraints and further their research aims in correctional settings by using external resources and their family networks. Ajmal and Arshad (2024) highlighted the importance of both informal and formal supports from family, community, friends, and the state in accessing educational resources. Furthermore, research emphasises how family members and outside allies can help to streamline data collection procedures for higher education students in prisons even if correctional facility as an institution punishes, rehabilitates, oppresses, and protects public safety (Dewey et al., 2024). The precise processes by which family members and outside supporters contribute to higher education students' data collection in correctional settings are still not fully understood, though. According to Rafedzi and Abrizah (2024), family networks and outside resources can be used to obtain information and overcome resource limitations of higher education students in correctional facilities so that access to educational resources must be used as a process of rehabilitation.

CONCLUSION

An essential part of an offender's rehabilitation and reintegration into society is the correctional system. Around the world, education in correctional facilities is acknowledged as a critical instrument for lowering recidivism rates and promoting a smooth transition back into society. Even with the acknowledged significance of education, research by higher education students in correctional facility settings poses special difficulties, especially when it comes to gathering data.

This study provides insights into the strategies employed by prisoners in a Namibian correctional facility to collect information for educational and research purposes. Understanding these strategies is essential for improving educational opportunities and research participation among incarcerated populations. By recognising the resourcefulness of prisoners and enhancing support structures within correctional facilities, access can be promoted to contribute to the rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated individuals. Understanding these strategies is essential for enhancing educational opportunities and promoting the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals. By recognising the significance of institutional, familial, and technological support systems, stakeholders can work towards improving information access and educational outcomes within correctional settings. Furthermore, familial involvement plays a vital role in supplementing prisoners' access to information, demonstrating the significance of external support networks in carceral settings. Also, the study illuminates the complex interplay of personal, familial, and external factors influencing information acquisition among incarcerated individuals. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing effective interventions and support systems to enhance educational opportunities within correctional facilities. By nurturing personal resilience, strengthening familial bonds, and expanding access to external resources, stakeholders can

empower incarcerated individuals to overcome barriers and achieve their educational aspirations. Again, this study sheds light on the vital role of family support and external assistance in data collection efforts among incarcerated individuals. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing targeted interventions and support systems to enhance research opportunities within correctional settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study examining strategies used by higher education students in a Namibian correctional facility in collecting data while studying, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Strengthen institutional support: The study makes clear how important institutional support is to the process of gathering data from prisoners. As a result, it is advised that Namibian prisons improve the resources available to inmates who are involved in academic and research projects. This can entail giving higher education students access to research materials, the internet and research support services. To help inmates successfully navigate the research process, universities should also give top priority to establishing specialised research support units or staff.

- Boost family involvement: The study emphasises the important role that family members play in helping to gather data from those who are incarcerated. Correctional facilities should put in place initiatives that encourage dialogue and cooperation between inmates and their families in order to maximise this assistance. This could entail planning frequent family visits, giving relatives the chance to provide materials for research projects or help with data gathering, and providing advice on how families can best encourage their loved ones' academic and research endeavours while they are incarcerated.

- Increase access to external resources: It is critical to increase higher education students' access to external resources due to the restricted resources found in correctional facilities. This can include forming alliances with educational establishments, libraries, and neighbourhood associations to give inmates access to online resources, research materials and academic support services. Correctional facilities can also investigate cutting edge methods like digital libraries and online learning programs to increase the educational resources available to inmates and improve their research skills. Correctional facilities in Namibia can establish a more accommodating and favourable atmosphere for prisoners to participate in data collection activities while continuing their studies by putting these suggestions into practice. As a result, inmates may benefit from empowerment, rehabilitation, and a smooth transition back into society.

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