

Rehabilitating Ex-Offenders Through Non-Formal Education in Lesotho

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Abstract

This paper reports on the rehabilitation of ex-offenders through non-formal education. It examines how non-formal education has addressed the ex-offenders' adaptive and transformative needs. Using an interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach, individual interviews were conducted with five ex-offenders who were chosen through purposive and snowball sampling. Qualitative data analysis was used to generate the themes from the data. The findings revealed that ex-offenders were taught basic literacy and life skills through non-formal education. Moreover, non-formal education facilitated the ex-offenders' transformed attitudes, including recognizing their identity as a result of transformative non-formal education. Some ex-offenders in Lesotho demonstrated how by tailoring programs and utilizing their own personal knowledge, they were able to share skills in spite of the prison bureaucracy and have consequently established an organization that serves as a link between prison and society. However, there should be a holistic approach to learning, which can target the immediate application of skills once offenders are released from prison. Similarly, offenders need access to educational resources once they leave prison that can build on what they already know/have learned so that they can turn their lives around.

Keywords: rehabilitation; ex-offenders; non-formal education; adaptive; transformative; Lesotho.

Introduction

In most African countries, Lesotho included, offenders' low educational status contributes to their offending and reoffending (Wade, 2007; De Maeyer, 2001; Biswalo, 2011; Setoi, 2012; Mkosi, 2013). Even though rehabilitation programs are provided for offenders in Lesotho, there are challenges facing that section whereby prison sentences do not always match education and training schedules, there are shortages of materials and equipment, inadequate funding, and a lack of further education and training for the training officers (Setoi, 2012; Tsepa, 2014). Furthermore, Setoi (2012) reveals that the content for educational rehabilitation programs offered in most correctional service institutions in Lesotho is inadequate, poorly planned and does not receive enough care for it to flourish. In his report, Setoi indicates that the educational role is mainly to keep offenders busy and to control them rather than a means for human development (Setoi, 2012). Research studies on education in general and rehabilitation programs in particular for offenders in Lesotho are limited, if not lacking, and there seems no obvious policy on offenders' rehabilitation programs (Tsepa, 2014; Setoi, 2012; Mokoteli, 2005). Additionally, what is lacking in the literature (Tsepa, 2014; Setoi, 2012; Mokoteli, 2005) is whether the adaptive and transformative needs of offenders are addressed through rehabilitation programs provided in Lesotho's correctional institutions, using non-formal education.

Several studies have shown that offenders' educational rehabilitation programs facilitates for their behavior change, reintegration into societies and prepare offenders for employment opportunities after release (Biswalo, 2011; Setoi, 2012). According to the United Nations General Secretary, "education is the fundamental right and the basis for progress in every country." (UNESCO, 2014). Education in general and non-formal education in particular caters for all age learners throughout the lifelong phenomenon whereby all individuals' growth and self-improvement are encouraged (Rogers, 2004). This research was done with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding about how non-formal education have addressed the adaptive and transformative needs and interests of certain ex-offenders in Lesotho. In the first section, I review the literature regarding non-formal education. Secondly, I review the meaning and discussion on adaptive and transformative responses. Finally, I show how this type of education is relevant and necessary for ex-offenders in Lesotho.

Literature Review

Non-Formal Education

Literature has significantly shown (UNESCO, 2014; UIS, 2012; Rogers, 2004) the renewal of interest in non-formal education in an effort to meet and reach the targets of the Education for All goal, which is placed at the center stage of global education and development agendas. Non-formal education is manifested in traditional societies by using apprenticeships in specific trades (Peace Corps, 2004). Additionally, on-the-job training is widely conducted through non-formal means of learning. Apart from this, traditional knowledge was passed from generation to generation through one-to-one teaching or group facilitation using various methods of non-formal education. Thus, non-formal education, as opined by Sevdalis and Skoumios (2014) is commonly known to be:

Any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children. (p. 14)

In this definition, the impression is that non-formal education is flexibly organized in order to suit its participants' environment wherever they may be. In the same way, Rogers (2004) states that non-formal education is provided on a continuum: at one point it is closer to formal education and at the other end it is closer to learner ownership. The author stipulates that non-formal education extends opportunities for job creation and development activities for its participants (Rogers, 2004). Thus non-formal education has been regarded as remedial education for people who have missed the opportunity to attend formal education; hence it is regarded as complementing the latter (UNESCO, 2014). In non-formal education, there is no age restriction and most often what is learned is culturally valuable as it addresses the needs and interests of the learners. It is likely that non-formal education is the most appropriate approach to be used with offenders because it is provided outside the formal school system and is nevertheless organized and structured and flexible to fit the correctional environment. The subsequent section discusses the meanings of adaptive and transformative needs of learners.

Non-Formal Education as Adaptive Outcomes

According to UNESCO (2014), non-formal, location precise strategies are suitable for reaching out to different populations for accomplishing the goals of Education For All. In this way, non-formal education responds to adaptive outcomes, as its provision is mainly to rectify the shortfalls felt by its clientele and to assist them to adapt and adjust to their environment and conditions of life. Consequently, non-formal education addresses specific learning needs and interests for the achievement of immediate personal outcomes (UNESCO, 2014). These include education and training, knowledge and skills acquisition, enhancing the quality of life, reducing poverty and improving livelihood initiatives in regard to socio-economic needs. In this manner, the initiatives focus on making up what is missing in terms of modifying behavior, adjusting to an environment and enhancing personal development and other outcomes. These outcomes assist participants in adapting to different situations, hence non-formal education is provided for adaptive responses (UNESCO, 2014). In the same manner, non-formal education also reacts to transformative responses of its learners as in the following section.

Non-Formal Education as Transformative Outcomes

Non-formal education further addresses the immediate-to long- term structural outcomes that entails different peoples' dispositions. This includes but is not limited to: realizing the socio-cultural context and creating awareness thereof, identity recognition, empowerment, increased socio-political participation, breaking the social and economic barriers and other inequalities (UNESCO, 2014). In the same way, UNESCO (2014) identified "experimental and innovative non-formal education, some of which involves greater independence from governments, to respond to emerging learning needs as societies evolve" (p. 6). Some examples include education for peace and democracy, citizenship education and education for sustainable development. Moreover, non-formal education develops human capabilities, improves social cohesion and creates responsible citizens (UNESCO, 2014). This means that transformative, non-formal education develops an individual above mere education and learning initiatives. It can be seen that the focus is mainly to make a difference in individuals and societies in general, thus achieving transformative outcomes. The following section deals with the necessity and relevance of non-formal education within the correctional facilities in Lesotho.

The Necessity and Relevance of Non-Formal Education in the Correctional Facilities

Recent studies by Biswalo (2011) in Swaziland, Setoi (2012) and Tsepa (2014) in Lesotho, Mkosi (2013) and Quan-Baffour and Zawada (2012) in South Africa show that there is a range of formal, non-formal and informal adult educational programs undertaken by inmates. However, the extent to which non-formal education meets and addresses the adaptive and transformative needs of offenders varies from country to country.

According to Biswalo (2011) in the context of Swaziland, the department of Adult Education at the University of Swaziland in consultation with the prison service conducted needs assessment between 1997 and 2009. The needs assessment was done before developing the educational programs to ensure that the felt needs of the inmates were included and addressed by the educational programs offered, followed by monitoring exercises. The needs assessment was conducted with the inmates through individual interviews and group discussions. Thereafter, prioritization of needs took place based on the capability and the potential of the inmates to acquire and secure resources for conducting the programs that can develop into viable businesses after their release from prison. In the whole exercise, activities that required locally available and less expensive resources were given priority over others. Moreover, the department of adult education provided relevant training that strengthened what the inmates acquired within the correctional institutions as best practices. Biswalo further outlined that baseline assessment and placements were also conducted before developing the content to be taught. The inmates' contributions to their programs enhanced their ownership to the latter, which also addressed and met their adaptive and transformative learning needs. Biswalo's, 2011 study stands in contrast with what happens within Lesotho's correctional facilities.

The Lesotho Correctional Service (LCS) provides a variety of programs that are taught by LCS officers, volunteers and the inmates themselves. Normally, prison populations are less well-educated than the general population in Lesotho and in other countries (Setoi, 2012, Biswalo, 2011; Tsepa, 2014). According to Setoi (2012), the Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services in Lesotho offers education and training to the inmates as mechanisms to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into their communities. These education programs are provided as formal literacy and numeracy classes from Standard 1 up to Form E, which is equivalent to grade 1 to 12 in South Africa. These are basic and continuing education classes that are meant to assist the inmates to acquire the qualifications for job opportunities for male inmates in certain correctional centers. The inmates are further provided with skills training such as carpentry and joinery, stone cutting, building, welding, leatherwork, electrical installation, plumbing, plastering and brick-making, upholstery and sewing. However, the methods used to deliver the above trainings are not stated, as well as whether the inmates' needs are met. The next sections discuss the methodology that was used to conduct the study of non-formal education in Lesotho.

Methodology

An interpretive paradigm using a qualitative approach was followed to gain understandings into the subjective beliefs and perceptions of the participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2009). The phenomenon is enlightened by those who live it and construct its meaning (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Patton, 2002). A purposive and snowball sampling was used to select ex-offenders from their homes (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2009), who participated in semi-structured interviews. Five ex-offenders were interviewed who had been previously incarcerated in the Male Correctional Institution in Lesotho. I adhered to the necessary ethical measures - willingness to participate in the investigation and informed consent. Ethical

considerations were carefully attended to, informed consent, confidentiality, obtaining the necessary permission, privacy, anonymity and encouraging participants to speak freely without fear of repercussions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2009).

All the ex-offenders provided their stories and their viewpoints regarding the educational programs they embarked on during their incarceration. Although the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population, the ex-offenders' role within the environment under which they carry out their sentences excludes the wider society, while the shared experiences may be similar for the incarcerated community. Inductive qualitative data analysis was used where themes were developed from the data, categories, insights, and understandings were further formulated. Different theoretical concepts of non-formal education and were mapped across the data as a theoretical lens for discussing the inductively derived themes and for more abstraction.

Findings

Findings are presented according to the themes that emerged from the data provided in the responses from the ex-offenders. The themes were basic literacy education and life skills, transformed attitudes and identity recognition.

Basic Literacy Education and Life Skills

In response to the question of what they learned during the time they were incarcerated, ex-offender E bemoaned:

It was very painful for me to be there as an inmate (shaking his head slowly sideways with his face down). However, I feel happy because I have that experience of being an inmate and it toughened me... (Clears his throat) I learned how to write and read my name and a few sentences. I can even count the numbers, which was not the case before I was incarcerated. The prison has taught me several skills that I was not aware of, such as landscaping, gardening, feeding pigs and cleaning my surroundings (Ex-offender E).

The participant indicated that incarceration has made him become a tough man. He further showed that he learned how to write and read. The findings reveal that some ex-offenders acquired basic literacy and numeracy skills, which they learned during incarceration, thus enabled them to rectify their gap of being illiterate. Additionally, the inmates were assigned work that taught them life skills, such as how to keep their environment clean, including taking care of animals that are kept within the correctional facilities. On the same note, ex-offender A explained:

I approached other inmates about the idea of formal school and I was responsible for seeing that the school was operating. Those who were enlightened and had formal education background taught the others who were illiterate (Ex-offender A).

Ex-offender A pointed out that some offenders would volunteer to teach others who were illiterate so that they could also acquire the basic skills of how to write and read their names. It is noted that the offenders supported each other since they shared the common experience of incarceration. Additionally, the non-formal characteristics of a flexible environment could be seen in the learning environment of the correctional facilities. This means that learning takes place everywhere, in particular, using non-formal education approaches. Of great concern was

the inmates' ability to make decisions regarding whether or not what they learned addressed their needs and interests.

In regard to the life skills that were offered, ex-offender E indicated that the content that was learned did not address his needs because he spent the entire sentence of five years doing gardening, which was not his interest. He emphasized that he was interested in welding and electrical work. He mentioned that he had basic knowledge about welding since he learned while as an apprenticeship with another person from his community. However, he showed that he was comfortable with gardening and landscaping because he realized that there was a shortage of welding equipment. In his words:

Welding is dangerous because it affects a person's eyes. All those who joined that team were having problems with their eyes. It is because there was no proper equipment used to protect people while they did that work. I decided that it was better for me to do gardening and landscaping because there was no harm in performing those tasks.

Ex-offender E was able to settle for the work of landscaping and gardening as a way of avoiding endangering his eyes with the welding work he liked. Moreover, the warders seem to be making the decisions for the offenders in terms of what skills to learn or not. This imposition of skills refutes the non-formal educational feature whereby curriculum or content has to address the learners needs and interests, therefore has to be learner-centered. The data also show that the offenders were never consulted in terms of what they would want to learn as skills for future use. Instead what seemed to matter was whether the sentence to serve as punishment was longer or shorter. This has implications for how the offenders may be transformed with the expectation of being socially reintegrated back into their societies.

Transformed Attitudes

On the other hand, ex-offender B attested that he did woodworking and continued with that work after his release from prison. He reported to be self-employed and to enjoy his work. He said:

I did woodwork while I was there [under custody] and I learned to do built-in shelves, wardrobes, tables and many other things. I now support my family through the income that I generate from my workshop. I am now a new person who has reformed from criminal acts. I have three people who help me then I pay them monthly. In fact, I was never rehabilitated by those officers, I counseled myself and told myself that I needed to change completely (Ex-offender B).

On the question of whether he chose for himself to do woodwork or not, he responded by showing that the work was imposed on him. He alleged:

(Smiling) Fortunately, I took that work seriously and ensured that I learned everything. At first, I wanted to join those who did the bricks and building. The warders refused [when I wanted to join the building team] and they instructed me to join the wood work team. We did not choose for ourselves, they [warders] placed us according to the length of our sentences. The ones who were serving long sentences were not allowed to go out, therefore remained in the workshops. Prison life is tough ... (pause), it needs a person who can accept that instructions had to be followed. But at the same time [one had to] look out for the opportunities and make use of them; that is how I survived for the 12 years that I stayed there (Ex-offender B).

Ex-offender B had a positive story to tell regarding his transformed attitude by learning to do woodwork, which also follows the purpose for non-formal education. It can be observed that ex-offender B used the acquired skills and started his own workshop, where he was able to generate income. It is interesting to see that the participant counseled himself and accepted the instructions that were given. By adapting to prison life, the situation potentially transformed his attitude and life for the better. His knowledge has further become a resource for income-generation, which is economic empowerment. He provided employment for himself and for other people who were able to provide support to their families. Another particular concern is the notion of ex-offenders' identities.

Identity Recognition

The ex-offenders in this study significantly changed their behavior in terms of how they thought as individuals and how they assisted each other including the offenders who are about to complete their sentences. Learning from what they experienced while incarcerated, even when they received no support from their significant ones, they supported each other as demonstrated in the following quote:

We had an informal support group of peers and we thought about starting an association for ourselves. We established this NGO to try and fill that gap for such activities ... we have tried to approach the government to change the way they perceive the ex-prisoners but we have a long way to go. The issue of a link is an important thing that we do, also to link them [released-prisoners] with existing members of this NGO in different districts and their families. Other things do not need money to happen (Ex-offender D).

In the above quote, ex-offender D related a story that while incarcerated, they were able to set up a peer education program with other offenders. They even went further to establish an association, which would serve as a link between the offenders who were released and those under custody. Ex-offender D indicated that with the peer support, they managed to establish Crime Prevention Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners Association (CRROA) in Maseru, Lesotho. Ex-offender D further stated that the association has representatives in all the districts. In other words, ex-offenders have established an association that made it possible for their identities to be recognized. In this way, the link between the incarcerated offenders and their families is served through the ex-offenders. He illustrated that upon his release, he found it very hard and difficult to go to his home alone without anyone accompanying him. In his words:

My family never visited me while I was in custody for eight years. That made me feel less confident when I was about to go there [home] alone, hence I needed someone to accompany me. By the time of my release, the only people that were closer to me were other offenders and the prison warders.

Additionally, he said that his release brought everything to an end between him as an ex-offender and the prison. It can be argued that when ex-offenders experience unfavorable family members' attitudes, packed with labels associated with prison and lawbreaking, it becomes difficult for them to feel and belong as part of their communities. Therefore, the establishment of CRROA may have been propelled by the fact that ex-offenders felt more comfortable with each other rather than with the larger population. It can be noted that the organization promoted a sense of self and belonging for the ex-offenders who support one another. These findings have implications for how policy should address social reintegration and use such links

between released ex-offenders and those under custody as another mechanism for enabling the reformation of ex-offenders and their avoidance of re-offending.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that illiteracy is a concern for offenders in custody who never went to school. It can be argued that to a large extent, their lack of education may have also influenced their engagement in committing crimes as supported by the literature (Biswalo, 2011; Setoi, 2012; Wade, 2007; De Maeyer, 2001). Moreover, the offenders' relationships amongst themselves seemed to have been built upon trust whereby the latter facilitated their learning from each other in a flexible, relaxed environment. The flexibility of environment is one of the powerful characteristics of non-formal education that makes it easy for learning to take place everywhere, hence it can be concluded that it is a suitable approach for use with offenders who are incarcerated under correctional custody. Furthermore, it can be argued that non-formal education responds to the needs and interests of offenders who rectified their shortfall of not knowing how to read and write including counting. Hence the data supports what UNESCO (2014) has shown in terms of non-formal education facilitating the adaptive outcomes of its clientele.

Additionally, it has been disclosed that offenders learned various life skills such as gardening, landscaping, and woodwork among others; however, these were imposed on them. Here the findings reveal that the non-formal characteristics in regard to control and who determines what the learners want to learn is not occurring. The situation with offenders under custody in Lesotho differs from the situation of the inmates incarcerated in other contexts like Swaziland, where the offenders are engaged in a needs assessment and evaluation process, which enhances their motivation to learn and change their lives (Biswalo, 2011). Therefore, the findings reveal that non-formal education characteristics are often realized in theory but not in practice within the Lesotho context.

Furthermore, the data reveal that some offenders managed to transform their attitude by accepting and conforming to the situation in custody. This was expressed by ex-offender B who developed a positive attitude income-generation by starting his workshop from the woodworking skills that he acquired while incarcerated. The data confirmed that non-formal education that was provided within the correctional facilities indeed facilitated the employment opportunities and rehabilitation of offenders as stated by authors like Biswalo (2011), Quan-Baffour and Zawada (2012), Tsepa (2014) and Setoi (2012). Ex-offender B took the woodworking skills seriously and coped with his prison situation thereby transforming his life for economic gain. As a result, non-formal education empowered offenders who acquired skills for the immediate application (Rogers, 2004) as stated by ex-offender B, who used the skills for positive livelihood benefits.

Regardless of the prison bureaucracy and the difficulties that the ex-offenders felt while under custody, they managed to set up an association for themselves. It was found that through modifying their educational programs and through the peer support amongst them, they consequently established an association that identified them as ex-offenders. The association further served as a link between the released offenders and their families and communities. Likewise, non-formal education addressed offenders' transformative outcomes (UNESCO, 2014) by facilitating the establishment of an ex-offenders association, which is a long-term response that served as reintegration for the offenders, promoting their sense of belonging.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is evidence that non-formal education seemed an appropriate approach of rehabilitating offenders who were incarcerated under correctional custody in Lesotho. This was illustrated by ex-offender E who reported to have learned several life skills including literacy and numeracy. Additionally, the findings demonstrated that the adaptive needs of certain ex-offenders were met. Also, the data revealed that through the offenders' trust and support for each other, some (Ex-offender A) volunteered to facilitate the teaching of basic literacy skills for those who lacked such skills. Furthermore, the life skills acquired during incarceration facilitated their economic empowerment, and thus transforming their lives for positive livelihood benefits. This was reflected by ex-offender B's positive story of making use of the woodworking skills he acquired that changed his economic status and improved his life for the better. It was noted that non-formal education facilitated the immediate application of skills for some of the offenders, hence the resulting adaptive outcomes and transformative outcomes.

The findings of this study point to the social identity that ex-offenders share, which also reflects the strong cohesion and sense of belonging among them. The formation of an ex-offenders' association reflects a collective group identity, which is a strength that can be used to motivate offenders to engage in other economic empowerment activities. Similarly, non-formal education resulted in transformative outcomes where an association for ex-offenders was established, which promoted their identity while also serving as a long-term link for other released offenders and their communities. However, it is suggested that non-formal education and learning should be all-inclusive in its provision and further aim to equip offenders with the immediate application of skills once they are released from prison. Furthermore, offenders need access to educational resources once they leave prison that can build on what they already know/have learned so that they can turn their lives around.

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